

Ruptured Spaces and Effective Histories: The Unveiling of the Bábí Poetess Qurrat al-‘Ayn— Ṭáhirih in the Gardens of Badasht

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But if Goethe was right to assert that when we cultivate our virtues, we at the same time cultivate our faults, and if, as everyone knows, a hypertrophied virtue—such as the historical sense of our age appears to be—can ruin a nation just as effectively as a hypertrophied vice: then there can be no harm in indulging me for this once.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Uses and the Disadvantages of History for Life*,
Foreword.

The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past.

—Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, XIV, in *Illuminations*, ed.
Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn, p. 261.

The Bábí movement, established in 1844 in Persia by Siyyid ‘Alí Muḥammad, entitled the Báb (the Gate), is known in *contemporary historiography* as a messianic movement aimed at the transformation of a society conditioned by Twelver Shi‘ism and a land governed by the corrupt despotic rule of the Qájár dynasty.¹ Persisting a mere decade, owing in part to an extensive and comprehensive persecution of its membership by the Shí‘ah clergy and the Qájár despot’s representatives, the movement affected a variety of sectors in Persian society. In contemporary historiography, the Bábí movement is, however, chiefly renowned for its egalitarianism and particularly for its impact on the status of women in Iran. This is perhaps because of the public visibility of one of the Bábí movement’s female leaders, the poetess Qurrat al-‘Ayn—Ṭáhirih.

The vast majority of the Báb’s early followers, including Qurrat al-‘Ayn, were learned scholars in Shí‘ah Islamic jurisprudence and the Islamic traditions. The Báb’s followers, each in their own particular way, accepted his social and religious teachings and acknowledged his ultimate claim to be the return of the twelfth Imam—a figure important to the constitution of Twelver Shi‘ism in Islam. After the Báb’s cruel murder, most of the Bábís who survived the ensuing fierce attacks by the clergy and the government forces, acknowledged the claims of the prophet-founder of the Bahá’í Faith—Bahá’u’lláh and recognized him as the successor of the Báb.²

The manner in which the term “Bábí” gained currency as a way to denote a peculiar kind of modernity in *common parlance* in late nineteenth century to early twentieth century Iran is no less worthy of note. For as derogatory as its resonances were, they seem to be imbedded, more often than not, within a context of sartorial

innovation. The term “Bábí”, was used as a stereotypic attachment to any gesture of resistance to traditional Shí’ah Islamic values. It was a simplification, of course, and like most stereotypes, an arrested and fixed type of representation that masqueraded in an untold carnival of images of foreignness, of modernist innovation, of nihilism and of irreligiosity.³ As such this stereotype was a memory in miniature constructed on the basis of events that took place at a specific time in Persian history in which the Bábí movement emerged, while simultaneously detached, reformulated, and recovered to illuminate other times and places. One may, along with historian Huchang Chehabi, speculate on the role played by the Bábí poetess Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s public unveiling at the Bábí conference in Badasht in the association between sartorial innovation and heresy.⁴

The Bábí conference in Badasht was held in the summer of 1848. Although significant in history as a moment that designates Babism’s complete break with Islam, it has received little focused attention in contemporary Iranian historiography. This is perhaps due to the lack of consistent information on the specifics of the gathering.

One can relate this paucity of detail in the early renditions of the Badasht conference to the way in which some of the particulars of the proceedings were perceived by the conference participants. Significantly, to be sure, is the occasion of Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s unveiled appearance recorded in *Nabil’s Narrative* as recollected by Shaykh Abú Turáb. Female unveiling in the public sphere before the turn of the century in Iran was not only rare, but for a Shí’ah populace such as that assembled in Badasht, it was a gesture of relentless revolt. For that reason alone, perhaps, the act was perceived as unseemly for a comely woman who was venerated as an emblem of purity and infallibility among the followers of the Báb.

In this paper I will attempt to unpack the function of revolutions as forces that introduce discontinuity in history, problematizing thereby the writing of a comprehensive and continuous history. More specifically, I address the ways in which the Bábí revolt in Badasht introduced a rupture in Islamic history. Pried open by the unveiled appearance of Qurrat al-‘Ayn in the public and male domain of the Badasht gardens, I will argue, the historical discourses on Islamic space are reconfigured and disarticulated, affecting the very heart of Islamic notions of selfhood and identity. By positioning the reading of this moment of unveiling on the problematic figure of Shaykh Abú Turáb in *Nabil’s Narrative*, I will discuss how the necessary configuration of human agency in an effective history reintroduces continuity into the historicity of revolt. In doing so, human agency problematizes the relation between the discontinuous character of revolutions and the “patient and continuous” development of history.

Foucault, genealogy and effective history

Writing in 1971, Michel Foucault elaborated his position on traditional historiographic practices in an homage to his mentor Jean Hyppolite in an essay called “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”. In formulating his thoughts about the direction of

his own historiographic practice, Foucault refers to Nietzsche's conception of genealogy as an effective history. Drawing on Nietzsche's uses of the notion of origin, Foucault maintains that the foundation of any event depends not on a single originary gesture, but on a discontinuous multitude of events and attitudes for its emergence. History writing therefore must take a second look at the bedrock for its claims. For if events are not formed on the basis of continuous progress and development, historiography can in no way support its current practice which purports to be a dry affirmation of facts and figures, which merely recognize specific originary moments and mirror them so to enable mankind's rediscovery of a lost and uniform self.

The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. Necessarily, we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. Knowledge even under the banner of history, does not depend on "rediscovery", and it emphatically excludes the "rediscovery of ourselves". History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. Effective history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.⁵

The writing of history, then, must take on new forms. Forms that question in their very conception, notions of the unitary subject, that interrogate the affirmations of stability at the base of nature and culture, and that disrupt practices preoccupied with the tracing of uninterrupted progress in human history. An effective history must therefore question the unity of authorship and authority behind the formulation of cultural life, because it recognizes chance as the originator of intent. Effective history thereby cuts any notion of continuity at the heart of tradition.

Shaykh Abú Turáb's recollections of the unveiled Bábí poetess Qurrat al-'Ayn's appearance in a garden in Badašht emerge as significant when measured in the balance of this historical force field. For in their very formulation, these recollections introduce a rupture within the traditional historical Islamic discourses on space—spatial discourses which purport to be the very foundation for Islamic notions of selfhood and identity.

It is precisely on the basis of Abú Turáb's recollections that we can argue that the Bábí revolt at the Badašht Conference constituted an event which in Foucault's own formulations was neither "a decision", "a treaty", "a reign", or "a battle", but "the reversal of forces", "the usurpation of power", "the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who once used it" and ironically, "the entry of a masked 'other'", into the realm of traditional history.⁶

The Bábí Revolt in Badasht

The Bábí Conference in Badasht was held for three weeks between June and July of 1848. Quddús, one of the first people to join the Bábí movement and his companions (who were among the Conference's participants) had intended on raising the Black Standard in Mashhad.⁷ They were, however, forced out of the city of Mashhad due to heightened anti-Bábí fervor and were wandering on horseback in the north eastern corner of Iran. Qurrat al-‘Ayn and her companions, traveling from Tehran, were on their way to the region of Khurasan to join Quddús' forces and to ride under the Black Standard. They met the group of wandering Bábís en route on the Mazandaran-Khurasan road and from all accounts decided to change their destination. Despite the turn of events, the two groups joined and decided to rent three gardens in which they could contemplate their fate and review a range of questions regarding the identity of the movement and its future strategy.

The group's charismatic leader Siyyid ‘Alí Muḥammad—surnamed the Báb—had claimed (in 1844) to be “the Gate” to the Qá'im who would usher forth a new era in religious history. Due to his claim, which traditionally would imply the imminent relinquishment of power by both the Shí'ah clergy and the Qájár dynasty, the Báb was imprisoned by the authorities in a remote castle-prison in Azerbaijan. The prime agenda of this group of eighty-one Bábís, therefore, was the plight of the Báb. They were anxious to find a way to rescue him. Any effort in this direction, however, was contingent on a plan of future action. “Moderation and prudence in the face of mounting hostility, radical Bábís argued, could lead only to further suffering. Yet the final Insurrection against the forces of oppression would materialize only if the Qá'im made his advent unequivocally apparent.”⁸ This raised the question of the Báb's precise claim and the nature of his mission. Who was the Báb? Was he the Qá'im—the Messiah who they had been expecting for hundreds of years? Was his message a rejuvenation of the Islamic truth? Or did he intend to establish a new and independent religion? These pressing questions, unrelated to the question of loyalty to the Founder, were meant to establish the status of the movement and the identity of its participants.

Of the three gardens, one was assigned to the famous poetess and Bábí leader Qurrat al-‘Ayn—surnamed Ṭáhirih (the Pure One) at the Conference. The second was assigned to Quddús. A man later known by the title Bahá', who had rented the properties, reserved a third garden for himself.⁹ The rest of the participants camped on the grounds surrounding these Bábí leaders.

The narratives and histories of the events differ slightly concerning the manner in which the events took place. Most agree on the following points: 1) that the poet/leader Qurrat al-‘Ayn appeared unveiled before the conference participants;¹⁰ 2) that she argued for a definite break with the tradition of Islam; 3) that confusion and contention followed, leading to the denial of Faith on the part of several of the participants; and 4) that the gathering influenced the further development of the movement and led to a radical change in the rituals and actions undertaken by its participants.

Qurrat al-‘Ayn, the poetess, took on the leading role at the conference, arguing for a definitive break with the old Islamic traditions. Some sources maintain that Quddús rejected her as a radical and “the author of heresy”. She, on the other hand, questioned Quddús’ claims to leadership, having failed to raise the banner of Bábí revolt in Mashhad.¹¹ This radical split between the two leaders is claimed by most parties to have determined the dynamics of the Badasht Conference.

Shaykh Abú Turáb recollects: Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s unveiling

Shaykh Abú-Turáb, who the Bábí historian Nabil introduces as the “best-informed as to the nature of the developments in Badasht”, is reported to have related the following incidents:

Illness, one day confined Bahá’u’lláh to His bed. Quddús, as soon as he heard of His indisposition, hastened to visit Him The rest of the companions were gradually admitted to His presence and grouped themselves around Him. No sooner had they assembled than ... the messenger of [Qurrat al-‘Ayn] ... suddenly came in and conveyed to Quddús a pressing invitation from [Qurrat al-‘Ayn] to visit her in her own garden. “I have severed myself entirely from her,” he boldly and decisively replied. “I refuse to meet her.” ...

... [S]uddenly the figure of [Qurrat al-‘Ayn], adorned and unveiled appeared before the eyes of the assembled companions. Consternation immediately seized the entire gathering. All stood aghast before this sudden and most unexpected apparition. To behold her face unveiled was to them inconceivable. Even to gaze at her shadow was a thing which they deemed improper, inasmuch as they regarded her as the incarnation of Fátimih, the noblest emblem of chastity in their eyes.

... That sudden revelation seemed to have stunned their faculties. [One of the participants] was so gravely shaken that he cut his throat with his own hands. Covered with blood and shrieking with excitement, he fled away from the face of [Qurrat al-‘Ayn]. A few, following his example, abandoned their companions and forsook their Faith.¹²

Historians fascinated by the sight of Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s unveiled appearance have either applauded this gesture as the ordinary moment of women’s liberation in Iran or, in absolute disgust for this act of heresy, claimed this gesture to be the foundation for, as well as the fundamental proof of, the deserved ill repute and false motives of the Bábí movement. Seldom have they stayed in the garden to witness what Shaykh Abú Turáb claims to have followed. Nabil’s informant goes on to report that Qurrat al-‘Ayn who had seated herself next to Quddús:

... rose from her seat and, undeterred by the tumult that she had raised in the hearts of her companions, began to address the remnant of the assembly. Without the least premeditation, and in language that bore striking resemblance to that of the Qur’án, she delivered her appeal with matchless eloquence and profound fervor. She concluded her address with this verse from the Qur’án: “Verily, amid gardens and rivers shall the pious dwell, in the seat of truth, in the presence of the potent king.”¹³ Immediately after, she declared: “I am the Word which the Qá’im is to utter, the Word which shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth.”^{14, 15}

The Shaykh's lucid recollection of the moment of Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s usurpation of power is unequaled in the annals of early Bábí historiography. Yet, before I go on to discuss the specific ways in which I think this recollection of the events at Badasht “cuts” (to paraphrase Foucault) our knowledge of Islamic history and disarms its notion of a unified subjectivity as well as its sense of historical continuity, I would like to briefly discuss the Islamic discourses on space and their effects on the historiography of the Islamic garden. For it is against these practices, I will argue, that Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s radical critique is aimed.

Islam and spatiality

It is said that in the early days of the religion of Islam the Prophet Muḥammad used space and orientation as a way to establish the fundamental nature of Islam. He did this first to distinguish his new born revelation from paganisms by aligning the new religion with other extant monotheistic religions. Every day he would turn in prayer towards Jerusalem—the Qibla of Judaism and Christianity. For the followers of the new religion, this corporal gesture became a sign of difference from the surrounding religious practices—affiliating, through the orientation of the body in space, the religion of Islam with the other two monotheistic religions. Then one day, it is said, his followers realized that he no longer was turning in that direction, but that he now was turning towards Mecca, changing the direction of his prayer in order to establish the unique and independent nature of Islam within the context of monotheism.¹⁶ Spatiality thus gained relevance for the identity of the pious Muslim through these doctrinal and ritual practices of the body.

Spatial practices in most Islamic countries today function similarly to constitute a national and a personal identity. They are enforced as doctrines or laws to distinguish the realm of the public from the private. Spatial discourses directly superimpose the differential place of women and men upon this private/public split. These practices are significantly and hermeneutically linked to Qur’án 33:53 on the issue of the *ḥijáb*, which in Arabic literally means to hide something from sight, to separate or establish a threshold or to forbid.¹⁷ Thus linked, the verse of the *ḥijáb* is construed as a prohibition that concerns space, and is more commonly associated with the practice of veiling.

Verse 53 of sura 33 of the Qur’an reads as follows:

O ye who believe! Enter not the dwelling of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal is ended, then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! that would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah is not shy of the truth. And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.¹⁸

Traditionally, when the question of the relevance of a certain verse arises, Islamic scholars turn towards memory or recollection.¹⁹ The ḥadīth have constituted this memory for posterity through the (re)collection of the various stories told by the associates and the family of the Prophet. Among the thousands of these ḥadīth there is

one significant story that relates to the Qur'anic verse on the question of veiling and which, according to the Moroccan feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi, gets lost in the shuffle. This misplacement, which should more relevantly be called “dissimulation” (because of the word’s close association with the act of veiling), has instituted a rather skewed impression of the context of the verse, and suggested that the Prophet ordered the separation of the sexes with it.²⁰ The political and cultural context for the descent of the verse on the *ḥijāb* as constituted by al-Bukhārī’s version of Anas’ recollections of this incident would prove such a view far from the mark.

The Prophet’s wedding night: the institution of the veil

In his collection of *aḥādīth*, the historian al-Bukhārī writes that on the night when the Prophet Muḥammad celebrated his marriage to Zaynab, he became frustrated with his guests. The whole city of Medina had been invited to the celebrations and despite the show of impatience on the part of the Prophet, the guests would not leave. Finally, standing on the threshold of the wedding chamber, he recited the verse of the *ḥijāb* (quoted above), while drawing a curtain between himself and his companion, Anas.²¹ In effect this act of drawing the curtain not only separated the space between the sublime and the profane (the space between the Prophet and his disciples), but also the space *between two men*. This act and the verse of the *ḥijāb*, situated above all the identity of the two men as separate and established a hierarchical division of power between the two through a spatial division.

In the period that followed, the verse revealed on the Prophet’s wedding night became a handy tool for a confused community in civil war in Medina. The wedding of Zaynab and the Prophet took place during a period of instability in which the Prophet attempted to gain a foothold in Medina. The Muslims were constantly under attack by the surrounding community and it was obvious that one of the most powerful ways to weaken an already unsettled community was through attacking the Muslim women. The verse of the *ḥijāb* gave the Muslim community a solution to a whole network of problems.²² The act of veiling was introduced into the Muslim community as a way to distinguish between the wives of the Prophet (to whom the Medinese were forced to show respect) and the female slaves.²³ Veiling, then, derived from the act of drawing the curtain *between two men*, was introduced into the Muslim community in Medina as a sign of hierarchical differentiation, *now between women*. In the midst of civil war, the wives of the Prophet adopted the veil to protect themselves from molestation and the community from vigilant attacks.

During this war, the streets of Medina, i.e. public space, became male space, and if women of higher status wanted to enter into this space, they were to do this on the condition that they pull a piece of clothing over their heads and bodies.²⁴

Mernissi argues that the institution of this act in the Medinese period marked the beginning of women’s repression in Islam—a religion which from its inception was an egalitarian community.²⁵ To agree with her on this point, one would have to disregard the more recent history of Muslim women, who in the struggle for independence in the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) and in the struggle against imperialism in

Iran during the Islamic Revolution (1978–79) chose to don the veil as a gesture of difference from the West. In other words, they chose to veil as a gesture that would position them against the perceived “repression” of colonial and imperialist power.²⁶

So, rather than argue that the veil is essentially repressive on the one hand or essentially liberating on other hand, I would suggest based on this reading of history, that the verse of the *hijáb* revealed on the Prophet’s wedding night entered into an apparatus of power and knowledge. It did so as a point of communal identity at a restless moment in Islamic history. The female body was construed as the focal-point of this identity. As such, it was given the task of protecting the Muslim communal identity by protecting its own. Islamic identity was thus constituted on a problematic rupture divided on this body’s gendered split between nature and culture—and again on its historically hierarchized social divide—a body culturally constituted as vulnerable and perceived as naturally harmful.²⁷ Having entered into the apparatus of power and knowledge at this level, the verse of the *hijáb* marked a problem for closure within Islamic discourses on space. Its fluctuations within the contending recollections/knowledges that surrounded it and the political discourses that activated it, further problematized the constitution of a unified and continuous Islamic identity, despite all efforts to construe it as otherwise. The veil as a representation of this fragmented identity came to function both positively and negatively within the dynamics of power. As a point of identity, it became an arena of constant struggle and domination for the future Muslim communities. It functioned therefore as a screen behind which the mysterious, the feared and the stereotypical and sexually potent Muslim female figure could lay dormant, always ready to erupt into the uncertain domain of the public.

Space and its gendered partitioning, as we have already observed, is fundamental in several ways to both the doctrine and the practice of Islam. Before we return to the discussion of its disarticulation in the gardens of *Badasht*, I would like to move our attention to a consideration of a particularly potent public space, which has for centuries fired the imagination of indigenous Muslim poets and geographers alike. This is the space of the garden.

The Islamic garden

We can imagine that in the context of the ecological conditions of the area “conquered” by Islamic thought, the garden could be seen as a way to ameliorate the often life-denying, arid and monotonous conditions of the land. People of high and low economic status incorporated a life-sustaining oasis into their own properties, carefully sheltered away with a wall in order to (one can only assume) shut out the hustle-bustle and odors of the city. This is clearly depicted, even if we only cast a passing glance on the various collections of images that have been handed down through Mogul arts, and ancient Persian miniatures and carpets. It would seem, from a cursory study of the vegetal imagery introduced into the carpet tradition during the Abbasid period in Iran, that the garden was so greatly valued that it was important to construct a never-fading image of it onto a transportable medium such as the carpet. This would introduce the garden’s verdant quality to interior spaces.

A brief study the life style and practices of the Iranian nobility, as depicted especially by the grand narratives of royal history and Iranian (mystical) poetry, may allow us to reach similar conclusions. We learn that gardens were always incorporated into the structures of dynastic residences for the pleasure and traditional rituals of the ruling class. These tales situate the royal garden as a site of romance and hedonistic pleasure, and as spaces where the king would hold court and celebrate his weddings. In allegories of the garden, the space of the garden represents and activates the dynast's dreams, desires and nightmares. The garden not only enables his daily and ritual activities, it is an integral part of his physical and phantasmagoric realities.²⁸

Traditional historiographic practice claims the garden's main function to be the spatial reflection of the Paradise of the Qur'an. Its structure in the form of the Persian chahár bagh, for example, is said to directly represent the Garden of paradise described by the Prophet Muḥammad himself in this following verse:

And besides these shall be two gardens— (62)
green, green pastures— (64)
therein two fountains of gushing water— (66)
therein fruits, and palm-trees, and pomegranates— (68)
therein maidens good and comely— (70)
houris, cloistered in cool pavilions— (72)²⁹

This description of Paradise is followed by the refrain:

O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?

thereby giving room for detailed attempts to figure out a geography of Paradise in the form of two times two gardens, a quadrangular layout of many royal Persian gardens called the chahár bāgh—"four gardens".

Echoing theocratic narratives, historians of the garden return to similar Qur'anic verses about Paradise as a source that unquestionably situates the origin and the homogenous nature of the Islamic garden for all time. Historians of the Islamic garden place the garden in the grand narrative of Muslim life and attribute its very structure and continuity to the authority of the Prophet.

What is sorely missing from these historical accounts is a sense of discontinuity and change that leaves open to further research the construal of a variety of other influences in the making of the material paradise on earth: considerations for irrigation and traditional horticultural practices are examples of these. Other considerations for instance for the ease of hunting, for aesthetics and architecture may also be the reasons behind the garden's present form. What is denied in the traditional historical analyses of the Islamic garden, then, is an analytics of the social and historical contexts which may signal various sources of authorship and historical influence, not to mention deeply embedded pre-Islamic associations with the garden and its beauties, as external conditions for the emergence of such a discourse.³⁰

The Prophet's wedding chamber and the gardens of Badasht

It is precisely against this kind of historiography that assumes a “suprahistorical” perspective and discourse that I have launched Shaykh Abú Turáb's memory of the revolt in Badasht.³¹ The event, or rather, the critical practice I attribute to it, presupposes four methodological principles identified by Michel Foucault in his 1970 inaugural lecture, “The Order of Discourse”, at the Collège de France: the principle of reversal, wherein the origin, tradition and authority of the Islamic discourse on space is put into question; the principle of discontinuity, which recognizes the discontinuity of discursive practices on space, their crossing, juxtaposition and exclusion; the principle of specificity which recognizes the violence of discourse done on things—here Islamic space; and finally, the principle of exteriority, which identifies the external conditions of possibility for such a discourse.

In my reading, Shaykh Abú Turáb's recollections of the proceedings of the Badasht Conference are remarkable, because they situate, for the first time in close to twelve centuries, a female unveiled in Islamic public space. Beyond this, they are remarkable, because of the place that they claim that such an event took place, and finally because of the striking rhetoric that is associated with this provocative gesture in a garden.

Although twelve centuries apart, (al-Bukhári's version of) Anas' recollections of the event of the descent of the verse of the *hijáb* on the threshold of the Prophet's wedding chamber and Shaykh Abú Turáb's recollections of the moment of Qurrat al-‘Ayn's unveiling in the gardens of Badasht have similar although inverse effects in their appropriation by traditional historical practice. Whereas in the case of the Prophet Muḥammad, the rhetoric, that is the Qur'anic verse, is preserved in historical memory over and above the act of drawing a curtain between two men; in the case of Badasht, the act of a female's unveiled appearance, rather than Qurrat al-‘Ayn's powerful address, is remembered.

In the case of one, the preservation of the word enabled the opportunity for men to regain control over the liberated woman folk of Mecca and Medina, while in the case of the other, the act of unveiling was seized as a figurative construct that would reinforce the Bábí discourse on equality.³² Both of these historiographic practices, though dealing with events that are separated by many centuries, are examples of the ways in which discourse is a violence done to things. A critical stance against this kind of discursive violence is evident in Qurrat al-‘Ayn's own rhetorical practices as recollected by Shaykh Abú Turáb.

The order of discourse

If we consider the gestures and rhetorics that are said to have occurred at Badasht together as a co-determining whole, we are struck by the recognition and the awareness Qurrat al-‘Ayn herself professed of the place in which she spoke, not only as a public space that is exclusively reserved as a male domain, but also as the space of the garden which for centuries had been associated with the space of the Islamic

paradise. In sustaining this recognition, I will propose that the gesture of unveiling by Qurrat al-‘Ayn signaled a critical analytics on two fronts and an acknowledgment of a violence done to space by discourse on two levels.

On the one hand we see that in the simple act of appropriating the Qur’anic verse, “... among gardens and rivers”,³³ Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s speech acknowledged the structural imposition of the discourse of the Qur’anic Paradise on the space of the garden. On the other, her appearance unveiled in a traditional public domain questioned the imposition of Islamic territorial partitioning upon an otherwise undifferentiated public space. In both cases she questioned the structural imposition of a so-called Islamic discourse on space. Her use of Qur’anic language at once supported the authority of the Qur’an while simultaneously undoing its *meaning* through a specifically gendered mode of enunciation in the public sphere. She thus appropriated a vocabulary and “... turned it against those who had once used it”³⁴ In this act of appropriation Qurrat al-‘Ayn effectively resituated paradise and hell on earth. She did so by suggesting that those sitting in the garden in that very tent, *were* the pious assembled before the potent king. Thus in her speech and action, Qurrat al-‘Ayn reintroduced the human agency within the context of history, and positioned authority and change within the realm of human activity. She questioned thereby the contiguous character of historical unfolding prefigured and guided by a Divine hand.

Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s address at Badasht questioned the homogenous unity established as the source of authorship of the Islamic garden and of the social division of space. In other words, her speech and her act of unveiling in the public domain reconfigured the disjunction between the doer and the deed—a disjunction which ironically presupposes a continuity between the Author of Islam and “his” work/people on earth. Put differently, whereas before it had been a given that it was Allah’s will that Islamic space was to be divided by the believers into two territories, and that the garden should be divided into four, to reflect Qur’anic Paradise, Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s action and speech now clearly posited *human activity* as the external condition of possibility for spatial discourse in Islam. Human activity was the only party responsible for this determination.

Because of the imbrication of spatiality and veiling in Islam, one can additionally say that if she could unveil despite the so-called injunction to veil (exemplified by the appropriation of the Qur’anic verse), then others could appropriate the veil without that injunction in mind. Human activity alone could therefore be held responsible for the construal of a gendered space and the constitution and the authorship of the garden as the Qur’anic paradise.

Her act and her speech introduced a disjunction between the Islamic discourses on space, “cutting” them off from their assumed Qur’anic injunctions. Qurrat al-‘Ayn thus situated the deed and doer within the same discursive matrix. In effect, her gesture and speech proposed the possibility of a reversal in the meaning of that space through the force of rhetorical and practical juxtaposition. The garden previously regarded as the space of paradisaical and poetical musings, was thus redressed as a space of activity and resistance.

Her appearance unveiled in the public and gendered space of the garden also questioned the hierarchical structure imposed on the space of the garden as space of piety, as well as that of nobility. In questioning this hierarchical structure, Qurrat al-‘Ayn claimed that her presence in the garden as the word spoken by the Qá’im would put to flight “the chiefs and nobles of the earth”.³⁵ Although physically unveiled, her speech re-veiled her (so to speak) as the Word spoken by the Qá’im himself, the charismatic leader who according to Shi’ite tradition was to abrogate the Islamic Sharí’a (law) and establish the reign of a new era in religious and political history. Her gesture thus introduced a “foreign other” into the realm dominated by the rhetorics of authority and power formerly attributed to her sexual counterpart. As such she launched a frontal attack on (Islamic) hierarchical and other-worldly discourse, introducing human activity as the only basis for social progress.

In the days that followed this historical speech each of the participants at the conference took on a new name, thereby signaling their rebirth into a new era in time. Then, as if to acknowledge Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s gesture, the participants discarded their prayer rugs, which by its design orients the pietistic body towards Mecca, and broke their prayer seals, equating them to idols in a gesture not unlike Muḥammad’s when he, in the Holy City, tried to convey the definite break with an era of paganistic devotion by destroying the objects of idol worship. The space of Islam was confronted by a discourse of antagonism at the Badasht Conference, thereby creating the conditions for a new discourse on space and a new era in (religious) history.³⁶

Shaykh Abú Turáb’s recollections

By positioning my own historiographic intervention (in the Islamic discourses on space) on Shaykh Abú Turáb’s recollections of the events that took place at the Badasht Conference, I have been able to reconstruct a consistent, continuous, and antagonistic portrait of a revolutionary movement that through the gestures and words of one of its renowned female representatives “introduced discontinuity into the life of the Islamic mind”. In appropriating these recollections, I have been able to argue that the Bábí movement (read through the moment of its self-recognition in Badasht) was a revolutionary movement, that “cut” our knowledge of Islamic history, disarmed its notion of a unified subjectivity and questioned its sense of historical continuity in the figure of the authorial Word of its Prophet. Ironically, this claim was only possible by the appropriation of an undivided subjectivity informed by Shaykh Abú Turáb’s recollections of Qurrat al-‘Ayn.

For if we look at other accounts of Qurrat al-‘Ayn, there is reason to believe that matters are not as straight forward as they seem. The British Orientalist Edward Browne’s collections of various historical materials suggest that in one of his conversations with a well-known Bábí it was remarked that Qurrat al-‘Ayn never intentionally took off the veil.³⁷ Browne comments that *if he can remember* the conversation correctly, this Bábí responded to the question of Qurrat al-‘Ayn’s discarding of the veil in the following words:

It is not true that she laid aside the veil. Sometimes when carried away by her

eloquence, she allowed it to slip down off her face, but she would always replace it after a few moments.³⁸

Nabíl's Narrative, agency and effective history

The positioning of my historiography of the Bábí revolt in *Badasht* on the recollections of Abú Turáb is rather precarious in the context of Bábí history, since no one seems to elaborate on who Abú Turáb is. Browne suggests that Abú Turáb was one of the earliest disciples of the Báb and that he was married to one of Qurrat al-'Ayn's female students, a woman of "extraordinary virtue and piety".³⁹ Nabíl, on the other hand, introduces Abú Turáb as a Shaykhí who never really acknowledged the Báb's claims until much later in the Báb's career.⁴⁰ According to Nabíl, he apparently died in the Tehran prison where he was held captive with some well known Bábí leaders including Bahá'u'lláh.⁴¹ There appears to be no other reference to Turáb anywhere else.

To add more complexity to the matter, Abú Turáb seemingly plays *the* most insignificant role in the grand and at times grotesque history of the Bábí movement as presented in *Nabíl's Narrative*. He appears only four times in the more than seventy years of history narrated by Nabíl. Once as the chronicler of the *Badasht* conference,⁴² a second time as Qurrat al-'Ayn's body guard after the Conference,⁴³ a third time as the harbinger of glad-tidings at Shaykh Ṭabarsí,⁴⁴ and finally as a character witness against Hájí Mirzá Karím Khán Kirmání in his recollections of Siyyid Kázim.⁴⁵

It is this latter moment that I would like to pause and reflect on since here, once again, Abú Turáb's unflinching recollections are drawn upon to elucidate a critical situation.⁴⁶ In Nabíl's historiography, Abú Turáb's recollection of Karím Khán is brought into the picture only paragraphs before Siyyid Kázim Rashtí's death is characterized. This is obviously a moment that if not negotiated carefully would create a potential crisis for Babism's legitimacy as a religious movement.

Siyyid Kázim was known as the religious leader of the Shaykhí school, a heterodoxy of Shí'ah Islam situated in Karbala (Iraq). According to most accounts, the Báb's initial claim of Mahdihood were directed at Siyyid Kázim's students, many of whom accepted it after the teacher's death and became active participants in the movement.⁴⁷ Shaykh Abú Turáb is claimed to be one of Siyyid Kázim's prominent students who late in the Báb's career accepted the latter's claim to Mahdihood. Qurrat al-'Ayn and Quddús were among other students who accepted this claim.

Siyyid Kázim had for years, according to most sources, taught the Return of the Twelfth Imam and prepared his students to investigate this claim were it to occur in their life time. In 1844, when the Báb proclaimed his mission a great many of Siyyid Kázim's students recognized this claim. In effect the Báb took on "the successorship" of the Shaykhí school after the teacher's death.

The positioning of Abú Turáb's recollection in the context of Nabíl's historiography becomes clear, if we consider the role played by the third party (Hájí Mirzá Karím Khán Kirmání) of this recollection in relation to the development of the

Bábí movement. Karím Khán, another prominent student of Siyyid Kázim, left the Shaykhí school some years before the death of its leader (Siyyid Kázim) and established himself in Kirman where he started his own branch of the school (called the Kirmaní school). Although familiar with the Báb's claims, Kirmaní wholeheartedly rejected the Báb and was for years involved in the agitation of the remainder of Siyyid Kázim's students against the Báb and his followers.

Abú Turáb's recollections, situated (in textual terms) only moments before Siyyid Kázim's death in *Nabíl's Narrative* give his words a highly charged task: to recall a moment in which Siyyid Kázim rejects his own student, Karím Khán. In Abú Turáb's recollection of this conversation Siyyid Kázim is said to have referred to Karím Khán as one "accursed", whose doctrines are "heretical" and "atheistic" and "who has grievously erred in his judgment".⁴⁸ Abú Turáb's recollection of this conversation with his own teacher can be read as a self-serving character assassination. But its strategic positioning at a crisis point in Nabíl's historiography, clearly situates its contents in a historiographic place that rids the reader of any doubt as to the successorship of Siyyid Kázim before the historical crisis even occurs (in historiographic terms). For Nabíl, Abú Turáb's recollections situate the necessary continuity of his narrative of the Bábí movement's revolutionary history and its legitimacy.

But why is this important? What relevance does this textual positioning have for a revolutionary history that relentlessly posits human agency as the driving force of social progress, and that uses strategy in the face of chance to disrupt the foundations of Islamic thought through introducing discontinuity in history?

Abú Turáb's character role, although infinitesimal in Nabíl's narration of Babism revolutionary history, is played on a measured field of continuity and discontinuity. Abú Turáb's recollections of Badašht in the *Narrative* launch an account of the movement's discontinuity with Islamic traditions and values, forcing a break between Islam and Babism in the figure of the Conference. Turáb's recollections of Qurrat al-'Ayn's actions and words in Badašht, much like his portrayed role as her body guard after the Conference suture the necessary subjectivity that would then posit human agency and action up against the "scrambled" identity of Islam. His recollection thus situates a continuous subjectivity against the decrepit identity that is Islam's. (The Conference participant's collective appropriation of new names, we should note, is important in the configuration of this identity.) For Nabíl, this still leaves the question of the movement's legitimacy unanswered.

In drawing on Abú Turáb's recollections, Nabíl situates the Bábí movement's legitimacy in Siyyid Kázim's rejection of his pupil Karím Khán. He does this more importantly before the teacher's death. Indeed, through this rejection (and almost fortuitously) he posits the Báb as the legitimate claimant to Siyyid Kázim's successorship. Thus he creates through Abú Turáb's memory, a continuity between the two schools of thought. Legitimacy is thus established in the face of every claim directed at the movement from its opponents.

The figure of Abú Turáb must be seen as a problematic one then. Divided on the juncture between insignificance and infinite signification; split on the critical line dividing continuity and change; and called upon to bear witness to the movement's legitimacy and Qurrat al-'Ayn's illegitimate gesture, Abú Turáb represents the figure of the Bábí movement as such. The Bábí movement as a revolutionary movement, as Fischer and Abedi remark, was a "mixture of progressive ideas and initiatives and reactionary theocratic ones",⁴⁹ often encountered on a rhetorical level (at least) within the body of Islamic and especially Shí'ah heterodoxies.

If we are to rely to some extent on the implicit mirror that I have placed between the early days of the Islamic religion and the events at Badasht, it is clear that the historicity of revolt is not only in its innovations or, in Foucault's phraseology, in the introduction of "discontinuity" or "interruptions" in history. Revolts are, to a limited extent, moments that harken back, not only to establish their legitimacy, or to construe a unified subjectivity in the face of danger, but to animate the moments of the present with the life force of a distant and desirable past. As such, they constitute and activate moments of the past within the present moment of the everyday. This is an instance of Walter Benjamin's notion of *der Jugste Tag*—where the chronicler's most recent day is also and inevitably the messianic Day of Judgment.⁵⁰

In this light, Edward Browne is not far from the mark when he notes that the Bábí movement was essentially Shí'ah in its *weltanschauung* ("world view") and that Bábí history was a re-enactment of the idealized Shí'ah past.⁵¹ Nonetheless, we can see within the fruit of this memory of an idealized past, the seed of "a dynamic future". Qurrat al-'Ayn's constitution of individual agency and human responsibility as the force that must by necessity be materialized into action can only be seen in this light in the context of religious history.

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Notes

Many thanks to the *UCLA Journal of History* readers of the first draft (published in volume 17 [1997], pp. 59–81), whose extensive comments helped in the formulation of this version of the essay.

- 1 Twelver Shi'ism is a derivation of Islam which distinguishes itself in the belief in the familial succession of the Prophet Muḥammad by Twelve Imams. The last of these successors is Abu'l-Qāsim Muḥammad who according to the traditions went into Occultation in AD 874 due to the hostility of the enemies of the Imam. The Hidden Imam has many titles including Mahdí, Šāhib az-Zamán, Qá'im. His return is believed to mark the end of time and the reign of peace on earth.
- 2 For a detailed account of the life and writings of Bahá'u'lláh consult H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*. Oxford: Geroge Ronald, 1980.
- 3 The British Orientalist E. G. Browne's reflections on the clothes he had acquired for his travels from Yazd to Kírmán in his travelogue dated 1887–1888 may suggest the possible relation and confusion of the 'Bábi' term's stereotypic connotations. This anecdote relates a scene in which an abridged memory connected to the term 'Bábi' is recalled, illuminating the present moment of Browne's vogue:

I had arrayed myself in a new suit of clothes made by a Yezdi tailor, of white shawl-stuff, on the pattern of an English suit. These were cool, comfortable, and neat; and though they would probably have been regarded as somewhat eccentric in England, I reflected that no

one at Yezd or Kirmán would doubt that they were the ordinary summer attire of an English gentleman. Hájí Šafar [Browne's young Persian assistant], indeed, laughingly remarked that people would say I had turned Báb' (I suppose because early Báb's were wont to wear white raiment), but otherwise expressed the fullest approval. (Browne, *A Year Amongst Persians*, p. 452)

The term 'Bábi' in this anecdote is not only addressed to the eccentricity of the foreign other, but to the wearing of an extraordinary configuration of clothing, the color of which may connote an act of dissent. The anecdote represents not only what Browne as a British Orientalist associates with his suit, but fortuitously reveals an assumption about the Yazdi and Kirmáni mind. Although Browne was extremely interested and driven to understand the Persians and moreover the Bábís, he failed to grasp the historical connection (made by his travel companion) between what he was wearing and the perceived role of the Bábi in innovating fashions in Iranian culture.

The unveiled Qájár princess, Táj al Šaltanih's memoirs (1884–1914) situate the connotative values of the term 'Bábi' quite illustratively within the context of modern education, naturalism and irreligiosity. Speaking of the effects of her education on the development of her mature identity she writes:

Right up to my eighteenth year, I had held beliefs taught to me by my nanny that the heavens were pulled by a chain in an angel's hand, or that when God's wrath was incurred, the sound of thunder came As I progressed in my studies day by day, my irreligiosity grew until I was a complete naturalist myself. Since these ideas were new to me, I was eager to impart them to my mother, my relatives, and my children. As I would begin to talk, however, my mother would curse at me, 'You have turned Bábi!' My relatives would invoke God's forgiveness and keep their distance, refusing to listen. (Táj al-Saltanah, *Crowning Anguish*, p. 309)

Táj's memoir as a whole constructs clear connections between her modern education, her unveiling, women's liberation, and her desire and respect for European ideals as encountered by her in various French literatures and philosophies. Yet in this brief anecdote set in the chamber of familiarity the term 'Bábi', and not 'Imperialism', arises to suture the connection between her modern subjectivities and her alleged naturalism and irreligiosity.

Another literary reference to the derogatory term 'Bábi' is found in a short story by Rasul Parvizi which humorously relates the effects of the panoptic enforcement of modern clothing policies under the Reza Shah (1925–41) in the young man's home town of Shiraz. As is well known the Pahlavi monarch Reza Shah's legacy in Iranian history falls within the realm of modernization in his enforcement of European clothing and the forced injunction to the unveiling of Iranian women in the late nineteen thirties and early forties. Houchang Chehabi sketches this "progressive move" from the institution of the Pahlavi hat (similar to the French kepi) as the official hat for all Iranian men in 1927 to the decree in 1935 that established the chapeaux in an effort to construe an Iranian Westernization. (Chehabi 212, 215) Chehabi notes the violent reproach by the general populace towards these new policies which reluctantly moved them from a complex diversity of cultural practices in clothing towards the mobilization of a national front through the forced uniformity of dress. This done, the institution of new policies in the 1930's, and especially the injunction to unveil, introduced 'the people' into an international system of clothing and etiquettes that would ultimately distinguish them from others in bordering countries.

The panoptic enforcement of the rules of clothing through the active engagement of the police force, the school system, the traffic comptrollers, and even undercover agents in

bathhouses to monitor compliance, especially with respect to the rule to appear unveiled in public places, strikes one as almost surreal.

The general reaction towards this totalized foreign mimicry enforced by the disciplinary institutions resonates in the young Shirazi's chant, in Rasoul Parvizi's story, as he walks around town knocking off people's Pahlavi hats and ripping them to pieces:

We don't want a blue hanky,
We don't want a Babi guv' nor,
We don't want a foreign hat.

(Chehabi, "New Clothes", p. 230)

The survival of the stereotype 'Bábi' in this piece of prose, three quarters of a century after the collapse of the Bábi movement is remarkably linked not only to the enforced introduction of foreign values and internationalism, but to a variety of associations with a change of clothing.

The stereotypical denotation 'Bábi' as a memory in miniature in these brief anecdotes ambivalently joins the two poles of outside appearance and personal identity—the traditional realms of the zaher and the baten in the ordinary and everyday speech of the Iranian people: "You have turned Bábi!" Remarkably, it conflicts with the official attempts to dissociate the two realms during the reign of Reza Shah whose counter-imposition of the veil on prostitutes was meant to prevent "the association of unveiling with unwholesome mores." Chehabi remarks that despite the efforts to elucidate the intentions of the policy, "traditional Iranians saw it as an attempt to turn a virtue into a vice." (Chehabi, "New Clothes", p. 219)

4 Houchang Chehabi. "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress codes and Nation Building under Reza Shah". *Iranian Studies* 26 (Fall 1993) p. 210.

5 Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", *Foucault Reader*. ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 88.

6 ibid.

7 In July 1848 the Bábi leader of this upspring, Mullá Ḥusayn Bushrú'í the first disciple of the Báb, raised the Black Standard in Mashhad and set off westward. The implications of this gesture for the government and the religious hierarchy alike were obvious. In Shí'ih Islam, there is a well known Tradition attributed to the Prophet that suggests, that should one see the Black Standard coming from Khurasan then one should go to it. The Mahdí, the religious leader who went into hiding in the early days of Islam, according to this Tradition, will be there.

More importantly, however, the raising of the Black Standard in Khurasan was an act imbued with historical and contra-dynastic significance. The raising of the Black Standard is historically known as the gesture which inaugurated the final overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty by the Abbasids. This symbolic act not only signaled an impending attack on the existing religious order by the coming of the Mahdí, but posed a definitive threat for the existing dynasty. Although, ironically, the importance of this challenge got buried under the confusion of the government over the death of Muḥammad Sháh, the populace in Barfurush en route confronted the Bábis traveling under Mullá Ḥusayn's banner, forcing them to take up positions around the Shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí. The conflict between the two groups lasted from mid-October 1848 to early May 1849.

8 Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bábi Movement in Iran 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989), p. 325.

9 Bahá or Bahá'u'lláh would in 1863 establish the Bahá'í Faith.

- 10 Some of these sources use very vague language that could allow for an interpretation of her action as the gesture of physical unveiling or of the unveiling the truth of a matter or of the unveiling one's true intentions or opinions, thus making the issue somewhat more ambiguous.
- 11 Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 326.
- 12 Nabil-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*; tr. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932) pp. 294–95.
- 13 Qur'án 54:54–5 (Rodwell). “The object of the conference was to correct a widespread misunderstanding. There were many who thought that the new leader came, in the most literal sense to fulfill the Islamic Law ... [Qurrat al-'Ayn] had her own characteristic solution to the problem It is said ... that [Qurrat al-'Ayn] herself attended the conference with a veil on. If so, she lost no time in discarding it, and broke out into the fervid exclamation, ‘I am the blast of the trumpet, I am the call of the bugle,’ i.e. ‘Like Gabriel, I would awaken sleeping souls.’ It is said, too, that this short speech of the brave woman was followed by the recitation by Bahá'u'lláh of the Surih of the Resurrection. Such recitations often have an overpowering effect. The inner meaning of this was that mankind was about to pass into a new cosmic cycle, for which a new set of laws and customs would be indispensable.” (T. K. Cheyne, *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions*, p. 103)
- 14 See *God Passes By*, pp. 32–3 and *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 15, 295–6.
- 15 Nabil's *Narrative*, pp. 295–6.
- 16 Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. tr. Mary Jo Lakeland. (New York: Addison Wesley, 1987), pp. 65–70.
- 17 *ibid*, p. 93.
- 18 Qur'án 53:33 (Pickthall).
- 19 This practices situates a significant difference between Western perceptions of stories and memories, where often times the latter are considered mere fables and thus disabling in an effort to constitute Truth and Knowledge.
- 20 For other references to hadiths related to this verse consult Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992 (chapter 3).
- 21 Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p. 100.
- 22 *ibid*. 92.
- 23 Ahmed suggests other circumstances for the institution of the veil, drawing from Ibn Sa'd's (re)collections. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 54.
- 24 In this particular context I am referring to the Prophet's wives, since his wives were the only ones that came along on the expedition.
- 25 Fatima Mernissi suggests this event as a symbolic expression of “regression on sexual equality” commingled with a “regression in social equality”, but the coincidental imagery of the descent of the *hijáb* over all women for the “fifteen centuries that followed” in this paragraph and her subsequent discussions strongly suggests the above reading (pp. 178–79).
- 26 See Fanon's discussion of the veil: “Algeria Unveiled” in *A Dying Colonialism* and Faegheh Shirazi-Mahajan's discussion of the role of the veil in the Iranian Islamic revolution in *Critique* (Spring 1993).
- 27 We have come to learn that sexuality, in the context of Islam, is territorial (Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 81). Sexuality is mapped, as it were, unto the specific topology of the

public and the private. In this context, female veiling is formulated as a way to ensure the purity of the public sphere, generally designated as male, and the protection of the female, in the same context, through a gesture of dissimulation. As such, this construction permits the definition of female identity, in this context, as split. On the one hand, in the context of the perception of her natural constitution, the female is seen as a distraction, an invasion or intervention to the male's formulation of his identity as pious or divine. Her presence as a "natural"/sexual being in the public sphere, in other words, interferes with the Muslim man's relation with his God. On the other hand, in the context of her cultural status in Muslim history and as the embodiment of the community's identity as such, the female is seen as weak, indeed in need of protection in the male domain. The veil thus covers over her constitutional split, creating a unified or whole subject that is both dangerous by nature and incapable to defend herself or the Muslim community's identity within the social domain. Without the veil this dual and dangerous quality is thought to come to the fore, unveiling a "scrambled" identity, dangerous and mutilated.

28 This reading stems from Nezami's *Haft Paikar* (Seven Beauties); tr. C. E. Wilson. But also see Julie Scott Meisami's essay: "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian poetic tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez".

29 Qur'an 55:62–72 (A. J. Arberry)

30 As noted by G. Marçias in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, "Persian horticulture flourished long before the birth of Islam and was associated with princely life." from BUSTAN: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, London (1960).

31 Friedrich Nietzsche in his *Untimely Meditations* uses the term "suprahistorical" to reject an history that perceives the present as the end of time and the events of the past as a history which has completed its development. This traditional conception of history is supported by the idea of an external controlling force, of an eternal truth, of a continuous and uniform identity which is always conscious of and identical to itself.

32 This forgetting on the part of Báb' historiography constituted the foundation for the appropriation of that discourse for future feminist purposes. Consult for example the section on Tāhīrih Qurrat al-'Ayn in Farzaneh Milani's *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* where Qurrat al-'Ayn is placed as the first in the line of liberated/liberating women's voices in Iran. Also see Abbas Amanat *Crowning Anguish*, p. 59, where he places her within a similar trajectory. Amanat also rejects these views in an earlier book: *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 330. (It is interesting to note how, in an effort to remain objective, historians often forget what they have already said differently.) Also for a delightfully utopic and early account of the coincidence between Qurrat al-'Ayn's 'originary' gestures and the concomitant development of the women's movement in the West see Martha Root's *Tāhīrih the Pure*, 2nd edn. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1981.

33 "Lo! the righteous will dwell among gardens and rivers," Qur'an 54:54 (Pickthall)

34 Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in *Foucault Reader*, p. 88.

35 See *God Passes By*, pp. 32–3 and *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 15, 295–6.

36 Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 327.

37 This statement may of course be understood in terms of the way in which the notion of female unveiling is conceptualized in Islamic ideology. Unveiling has at different times and spaces been understood as gesture of female nudity. Its citation therefore is incriminating to the woman and to the pious in Islam. According to Amanat's assertions, many sources claim that Qurrat al-'Ayn did indeed unveil in public. Most say, however, that she only did so in the gathering of "believers". And while most sources agree that she never unveiled publicly before the Badash̄t Conference, others even doubt that she did so on that occasion.

- (Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 295–316). A double disavowal takes place in the reconfiguration of these various narratives, wherein firstly none but the “believers” are incriminated by this public violation and secondly, no one is whatsoever.
- 38 Browne, Edward G. in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *A Traveller’s Narrative: Written to illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Philo Press 1975), p. 314.
- 39 *ibid.*, p. 247.
- 40 A Shaykhí is a student of the Shaykhí school, heresy of Shí’ih Islam established in the middle of the 19th century in Karbala, Iraq. This is a school from which the Báb drew many of his early adherents.
- 41 Nabil-i-A‘zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 30.
- 42 *ibid.*, p. 211.
- 43 *ibid.*, p. 216.
- 44 *ibid.*, pp. 29–31. For a discussion of the Shaykh Ṭabarsí upsprings also known as the Mazandaran upheavals see Moojan Momen “The Social Basis of the Bábí Upheavals in Iran: a preliminary analysis” in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 15 (1983) pp. 157–183.
- 45 *ibid.*, pp. 29–31.
- 46 *ibid.*
- 47 For a more detailed account of the movement and its history see Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qájár Iran*, Syracuse UP, 1982.
- 48 Nabil-i-A‘zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 29.
- 49 Fischer and Abedi, *Debating Muslims*, pp. 230–1.
- 50 der Jugste Tag (youngest day). For an excellent discussion of Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* (“time” or “here-and-now”) see Ian Balfour’s “Reversal Quotation (Benjamin’s History)”, *MLN*, vol. 106 (1991), pp. 622–45. 1991.
- 51 Browne, Edward G. *The Literary History of Persia*, vol. 4 (Cambridge and London 1902–1904), p. 197.