

Becoming, being and kaleidoscopic configurations: Laura Dreyfus-Barney, the Bahá'í Faith and educative work for peace

Werden, Sein und kaleidoskopische Einstellungen: Laura Dreyfus-Barney, das Bahaitum und die erzieherische Arbeit zum Frieden

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This article explores entanglements of religion, peace, internationalism and empire in some of the educational activities of Laura Dreyfus-Barney (1897-1974), a wealthy American domiciled in Paris from a liberal artistic family. Dreyfus-Barney was an expert member of the League of Nations Sub-committee of Experts to Make the League known to Young People (established 1926), which reported to the League's International Committee of Intellectual Co-operation. She was the International Council of Women's (ICW) liaison officer with the League's Paris Institute for Intellectual Co-operation (IIC, established 1925). She also convened the ICW's Cinema Committee (established 1925) and from 1930 became the ICW's liaison officer at the League's Rome International Institute of Educational Cinematography (IIEC, established 1928). She linked with the League secretariat as vice-convenor (1925-35) and then convenor (1935-37) of the ICW's Peace Committee and after the Second World War, she acted as the ICW's liaison officer with the United Nations (UN) (1947-70) (Goodman 2016). Dreyfus-Barney was also a prominent follower of the Bahá'í faith. By the time of her last major journey in 1922 as a Bahá'í emissary, she had visited Palestine, Persia, the Caucasus, Russian Turkestan, Egypt, Turkey, China, Indochina, Burma, Korea, and India. She also supported Bahá'í communities in Europe and America and facilitated the journeys in Europe and the United States of the Bahá'í leader, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Khademi 2013). During the First World War she served in France in the American Ambulance Corps (1914-15) and the American Red Cross (1916-18) and helped establish the first children's hospital in Avignon. She was named *chevalier* (1925) and *officer* (1937) of the French *Légion d'Honneur* (Rassekh 1995).

The article is prompted by a comment in a letter from Dreyfus-Barney to Bahá'í colleague, Edna True, where Dreyfus-Barney refers to her work with the UN as “my non-Bahá'í occupation if you can call it so” (Dreyfus-Barney 1948). Abigail Green (2016) argues that religion was an integral and even constitutive part of the emergence and history of internationalism, “shaping its evolution and shaped by it in turn” (17). Green argues that many of the leading figures associated with internationalism were spurred on by their religious commitments and that belief in another world continued to motivate this-worldly action. Dreyfus-Barney's reference to her work with the UN as “my non-Bahá'í occupation if you can call it so” suggests that for Dreyfus-Barney, her activities in the pursuit of peace through the ICW, the League of Nations and the UN were so closely entangled with her Bahá'í faith that she found it difficult to separate the two. Rather than seeing religious commitment as a spur (defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as an impetus, prod, prompt, incitement, or goad) to internationalism, I underpin the article with Karen Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action, which Barad introduces to denote that distinct agencies do not precede, but emerge (materialize) through the intra-action (the mutual constitution) of entangled agencies (128).

In exploring intra-actions of Bahá'í belief and internationalism for Dreyfus-Barney I also draw on Thomas Hippler and Milōs Vec's (2015) call for a re-writing of concepts of peace through their connections to other European key concepts like sovereignty, empire, security, humanity, civilization, barbarism and

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colonialism. Hippler and Vec argue that peace history has tended to de-historicize its object, with the result that peace history is the history of the various struggles in different historical contexts in which the contexts change but peace does not. As they note, the result is that peace history is a history of these contexts and not of peace as such (Howlett, cit. in: Hippler/Vec 2015, 7). In contrast, Hippler and Vec maintain that peace is a contested and polemical concept whose meaning shifts in different contexts as specific groups and actors with specific interests bring forward and defend particular visions of politics and legitimacy. Rather than seeing peace as an independent value, Hippler and Vec argue that peace is a qualified value, which they maintain always means “a certain form of peace, implying a certain domestic and international order” and that the two are intimately linked (*ibid.*, 8f.).

To focus on peace as a qualified value in Dreyfus-Barney’s activities, I draw on sources in the Bahá’í’s archive in Wilmette (Illinois) and secondary literature on Bahá’í beliefs. I situate Dreyfus-Barney as a Bahá’í in relation to the development of the Bahá’í movement and I outline connections between Bahá’í visions of peace and Bahá’í notions of civilization, humanity, unity, diversity, and internationalism. I also discuss the importance Bahá’ís attribute to education in fostering the personal and societal transformations that the Bahá’í vision of peace entails. I then use sources from the League of Nations archive in Geneva and the ICW archive in Brussels to look at the entanglement in two of Dreyfus-Barney’s organizational commitments of the Bahá’í belief in developing consensus as a way of operating in the world. I also unpack her approach to the reform of cinematography (the art and science of motion-picture photography) through the Bahá’í notion of unity in diversity. I argue that Dreyfus-Barney’s approach to cinematography resulted in a “certain form of peace” configured in ways that both connected *and* disrupted Bahá’í belief through threads running through 1930s colonialism and imperialism. To end I use the example of these entanglements to comment on questions of becoming and being when researching subjectivities and when approaching configurations that both connect *and* disrupt.

Bahá’í teachings: peace as a qualified variable

The millenarian Bahá’í faith originated from Iran in the 1840s (Mottahedeh 2013, 4f.). Sayyid ‘Ali Muhammad Shirzi (1819-1850), who became known as the Bab, predicted that after him another greater figure would arise. Negar Mottahedeh (2013) and Juin Cole (1998) trace how the Bab’s imprisonment and eventual execution in 1850 paved the way for a successor religion the Bahá’í faith, founded in 1863 by Mirza Husain ‘Ali Nuri (1817-1892), known as Bahá’u’lláh, who claimed to be the latest messenger sent by God, which separated Bahá’ís from their Islamic background (Maneck 1994, 211). Exiled for unorthodox belief from Iran to Ottoman Baghdad in 1853, to Edirne (former Adrianople) near Bulgaria between 1863 and 1868, and thereafter to ‘Akka (today’s Acre), the Ottoman prison city on the coast of Syria, where he died in 1892, Bahá’u’lláh made a public declaration as the promised one of the Bab and the inaugurator of a new age in world history, the major theme of which would be the gradual establishment of a global world civilization animated by his teaching (Cole 1998, 57; Mottahedeh 2013, 2). On Bahá’u’lláh’s death leadership of the Bahá’í community passed to his eldest son Abbas Effendi, known as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1841-1921) and on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s death to his grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957) (Maneck 1994, 221). Both had lived in ‘Akka as part of Bahá’u’lláh’s household until the “Young Turk” revolution of 1908 led to the release of Ottoman political and religious prisoners (Stockman 1995, 15ff.; Mottahedeh 2013, 1; Smith 1996, 307ff.).

In the early 1900s Dreyfus-Barney came into contact with Bahá’í believers in Paris, one of the centers of Bahá’í faith. She made a number of extended visits to ‘Akka at a time when conditions in ‘Akka were sparse and to be a Bahá’í was dangerous. Residing in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s household for two years from 1904, Dreyfus-Barney studied the principles of the Bahá’í faith, taught English to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s four daughters and his wife Munihri Nahri (1847-1938), and collected material for what would become *Some Answered*

Questions, published in 1908 (Afroukhteh 2003; Smith 1996; Rassekh 1995). This was a compilation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings published in English (Barney 1908), French and Persian that 'Abdu'l-Bahá authorized and which Dreyfus-Barney put together from question and answer sessions with him at the dinner table. Originally working through a translator, she gained a working knowledge of Persian, deepened her understanding of Bahá'í concepts, and was recognized by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as Amatu'l-Bahá, the Handmaiden of Bahá (Afroukhteh 2003). Because few works about the philosophy or theology of Bahá'ism had been translated into any European languages *Some Answered Questions* became the key English language text for the Bahá'í community for many years (Afroukhteh 2003, 197, 314, 478).

The Bahá'í teachings that Dreyfus-Barney embraced were based in canonical texts mostly by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. These texts promote a pluralistic theology of revelation that connect notions of peace, civilization, humanity, unity, diversity, democracy, equality and internationalism. For Bahá'ís, Bahá'u'lláh was the latest in a succession of divine teachers who revealed God's will to humankind and founded the world's great religions (Smith 1996, 111ff., 131ff.). Bahá'u'lláh presented differences between Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam as different forms of the same underlying phenomenon and situated Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad as contributors to a single process of progressive revelation. This enabled Bahá'u'lláh to call for a new universal religion to encompass the globe without declaring the falsity of previous religions, which he regarded as suited to the ages in which they developed (Cole 1998, 150). Peter Smith notes that Bahá'u'lláh restated "timeless truths" embodied in "past religions" which he coupled with calls for the reformation of religious law and ideals designed to lead humanity ever forward towards a future kingdom of God on earth that he termed the "Most Great Peace" (Smith 1996, 111ff.).

For Bahá'u'lláh this "greater peace" represented a new world order that would result from a spiritualization of the world that connected peace and notions of a global civilization (Stockman 2013, 61). Central to the "greater peace" is the principle of the oneness of mankind, which promotes a vision of unity in diversity rooted in the Bahá'í pluralist theology of revelation (Smith 1996, 5920ff.; Stockman 2013, 10). The "greater peace" situates all human societies, all cultures and all nations in a state of interdependence and part of a global common system (Saiedi 2013, 68). Within Bahá'í canonical texts unity through diversity is illustrated through a number of organic metaphors that include the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch; the human race as a flower garden, made beautiful by its diversity of color and form; and society as one human body (Cole 1998, 148; Smith 1996, 2930ff.; Saiedi 2013, 68). In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writing, unity in diversity is connected with a familial model of humanity that views history as the integration of a series of ever larger stages as the family is replaced successively by "the tribe, the city-state and the nation" until it culminates in "the unification of the whole world" (Stockman 2013, 61). These models of global civilization and familial humanity situate human beings as members of one race and the earth as one household and the land of all humanity (Saiedi 2013, 69). All human beings are called to a loyalty to the planet earth and to the generality of humankind (Cole 1998, 146). This connects with a rejection of partisan politics and national, ethnic or racial identities that overrides loyal to humanity (Stockman, 2013). In Washington in 1910, for example, monthly joint meetings of "white and colored Bahá'ís" were established following a directive from 'Abdu'l-Bahá that they should meet in the house of a white Bahá'í member to demonstrate the Bahá'í movement's commitment to removing "existing prejudices between the races" (Bahá'í News 1910, 18f.).

To prevent wars and to put an end to imperialism Bahá'í teachings call all human beings to work to promote security and peace among the peoples of the world (Cole 1998, 129; Smith 1996, 9669ff.). But Bahá'u'lláh termed peace through collective security the "lesser peace", which he regarded as merely a step towards the "greater peace" and "the establishment of the unity of mankind in a single global society" (Cole 1998, 131; Stockman 2013, 620; Maneck 1994, 211). The "greater peace" contains notions of social

justice that Bahá'u'lláh saw emerging only with the elimination of all forms of prejudice (Mottahedeh 2013, 10). Written in 'Akka, where French ideas around the Rights of Man circulated in periodicals and among political prisoners, Bahá'u'lláh's texts call for freedom of conscience and religious liberty, constitutional democracy, equality under the law, and the attainment of equality for women and men (Cole 1998, 36f., 86; Maneck 1994, 211).

This vision of the “greater peace” places great stress on self-transformation and on education as the means of actualizing the inherent potential in human beings in order to create a world culture based on a set of connected values in which prejudices will be eliminated so that human potential can be fully expressed (Smith 1996, 4266073; Cole 1998, 132; Stockman 2013, 64, 67). Stockman notes that for Bahá'ís personal transformation to facilitate the development of self and self-knowledge includes both an internal aspect to increase the inner vision and an external aspect related to relationships with others. The external aspect comprises a vertical relationship with the divine and a horizontal relationship with other human beings (Stockman 2013, 44). Dreyfus-Barney identifies three elements in 'Abdul'Bahá's view of education: a material aspect concerned with “the progress and development of the body”; a human aspect around “civilization and progress” that covers “government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, science's great inventions and discoveries of physical laws”; and a spiritual aspect oriented towards acquiring “divine perfections”, which she terms “true education” (Barney 1908a, 9). For Bahá'ís an education comprising both divine and secular aspects requires literacy in order to be able to read the word of God and to acquire knowledge of the sciences and arts as well as cultural knowledge (Smith 1996, 4236ff.).

'Abdu'l-Bahá regarded teaching children as the “most noble profession, industry and occupation” and a spiritual duty (Shahvar 2009, 17). He stressed that human dignity is only possible as a result of a moral education that begins in infancy. He highlighted the importance of the role of the mother as the child's first educator followed by schooling to train children in the principles of religion but without making them fanatical or bigoted. He regarded the conformity of religion with science and reason as a basic Bahá'í principle and the diligent acquisition of scientific knowledge as a form of worship. Bahá'í teachings encourage scientific study and investigation, especially when it leads to human advancement, when knowledge is for the benefit of others, and when it promotes the establishment of peace (Smith 1996, 6994ff.). Bahá'u'lláh emphasized that children should learn arts and sciences “conducive to human progress” (ibid., 4236ff.) and that they should also learn a universal language alongside their vernacular language to facilitate scientific exchange and to contribute to world peace (Cole 1998, 158). 'Abdu'l-Bahá decreed that in addition to the various branches of learning children are to receive training for a profession or trade in addition to learning music and about cleanliness and health education, kindness to animals, and courtesy (Smith 1996, 4250ff.).

The Bahá'í rejection of partisan politics meant that like Dreyfus-Barney many Bahá'ís have supported educational initiatives and civil society organizations in order to engender the “greater peace”. This educative orientation is exemplified in Dreyfus-Barney's work for peace both within the ICW and in her League of Nations related activities. The following section identifies Dreyfus-Barney's engagement with co-ordinating bodies as a strategy for building consensus in line with Bahá'í practice. It also looks how her cinematographic initiatives with the ICW and the League pursued “a certain form of peace” that was configured in ways that both connected *and* disrupted Bahá'í belief.

Working for “the greater peace”: The ICW and the League of Nations

Stockman notes that the Bahá'í notion of unity as a principle does not imply that humans are naturally united or that efforts to destroy unity will not exist or can be ignored. Instead it implies the need for mechanisms to build and maintain unity. He points to consultation as a key Bahá'í principle in fostering

group consensus as a means to reduce partisanship, although as he notes, it cannot prevent it (Stockman 2013, 29). Dreyfus-Barney's involvement as ICW representative in a number of structures that coordinated international organizations in the pursuit of peace illustrates a commitment to co-operative methods of working geared to bringing about change in a consensual way. She was vice chair of the Peace and Disarmament Committee of the Women's International Organizations (PDC-WIO), founded by the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations to coordinate the campaign for an international petition to be presented to the League of Nations Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments (hereafter Disarmament Conference). The work of this coordinating committee resulted in women representatives from fifty-six petitioning nations (with over nine million petitions worldwide) formally presenting petitions to the Disarmament Conference. Karen Garner (2016) portrays the spectacle of the presentations, when Dreyfus-Barney and the other officers of the PDC-WIO filed into the conference at the head of the women representatives with bundles of petitions in their arms. The PDC-WIO also hosted several study conferences in Geneva and called for educational initiatives and cultural exchanges beyond the point when the Disarmament Conference itself had ceased to meet. Garner argues that while the PDC-WIO failed to meet its disarmament objectives for reasons similar to those that caused the failure of the Disarmament Conference and of the League itself, the importance of the PDC-WIO lay in its constant circulation of information about disarmament which was published in periodicals all over the world, and which positioned the PDC-WIO as the League's public relations arm. Garner concludes that as a coordinating body and a vocal advocate for collective security (in Bahá'í terms the "lesser peace") the PDC-WIO played a significant role during the inter-war years in influencing the scope and development of national and intergovernmental politics and that it expanded women's participation and the participation of non-governmental organizations in the realm of international politics.

As Dreyfus-Barney confirmed to Marie Butts (general secretary of the International Bureau of Education at Geneva), she had earlier suggested that the League itself should form a liaison committee of international organizations (Dreyfus-Barney 1934a). At the end of 1923 and during the early months of 1924, she discussed with Inazō Nitobé (League undersecretary for intellectual co-operation and international bureaux), Sorin Oprescu (member of the League's intellectual cooperation and international bureaux section), Princess Radziwill (senior assistant in the League's information section and liaison officer with women's international organizations), Julien Luchaire (member of the League's committee of intellectual co-operation and future director of the IIIC), and Lady Aberdeen (ICW president), the advantages of the major international associations studying questions aimed at fostering global agreement among the younger generation. It was decided with Luchaire that Dreyfus-Barney would send a letter in the name of the ICW inviting certain organizations to meet to study the means by which the new committee would be formed. The Liaison Committee was incorporated into League structures of intellectual co-operation with the aim of providing a point of contact for international organizations interested in the education of children and young people in international understanding and world friendship (League of Nations 1929). Dreyfus-Barney's role in the foundation of the League's Liaison Committee positioned the ICW as a key institution in discussions among organizations concerned with the education of youth in the spirit of peace, as well as with the organization of peace itself (ICW 1966, 64; Dreyfus-Barney 1934a).

Dreyfus-Barney spoke publicly and also wrote about intellectual co-operation along League of Nations lines. Writing in the ICW *Bulletin* on peace through intellectual cooperation she noted that the aim of intellectual co-operation was "to free the mind from prejudice, hostility and ignorance, and to fortify it through co-operation and wider knowledge of human relationships" (Dreyfus-Barney 1933, 5f.). The organization of intellectual co-operation, she continued, tried "not only to abolish antagonistic feeling, but also to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding by safeguarding the school, the book, the press, the

radio, the cinematograph and all public platforms from pernicious influences working against Peace” (ibid.) She proposed a resolution to the ICW’s 1927 conference that had been drawn up by the League’s Liaison Committee. This resolution included the widespread spatial internationalist model that resonated with Bahá’í configurations of familial humanity and global civilization in moving from the family, through the village and the nation to an international sphere: “To enable the child to strike root in its natural setting of family and homeland remains today, as in the past, the first principle of all sound education ... the child, who is the citizen of tomorrow, should be brought to the idea of duty and should learn that it will have to fulfil actively all its obligations to its family, to its companions, to its village, town or city and to its country. At the same time, the instruction given to children should not stop there. They should be taught that this essential solidarity neither can, nor should, be confined within national boundaries; for there exists between peoples as between the various members of any one society a community of rights and duties as well as an actual and every-increasing interdependence ... Children should learn especially that civilization is the common world of all people, including those who in the course of centuries have been the most bitter enemies; and that notwithstanding inevitable differences it is out of the fact of this common heritage and the desire to preserve and to develop it, that the League of Nations was born” (ICW 1927, 15). The spirit of this resolution was intended to imbue formal school subjects at all ages and levels and a full range of informal means was to put young people of each country into contact. These informal means were to include travel, periods of study in foreign lands, athletic gatherings, and international correspondence among school children (including the exchange of letters, drawings and handicraft). The ICW resolution noted that these activities would “have the effect of leading young people into habits of intellectual cooperation and thus supporting the League of Nations” in the organization of peace (ibid.).

At the same conference, Dreyfus-Barney put forward some of the resolutions adopted at the International Motion Picture Conference held in Paris in 1926. As I discuss elsewhere (Goodman 2018) both the ICW and the League of Nations saw cinematography as a means to foster peace by working to eliminate inaccurate portrayals of nations and peoples that (in a negative sense) could lead to misunderstandings, undermine cooperation and friendly relations, and harm the cause of peace. Cinematography was also to foster a spirit of international understanding (in a positive sense) through accurate portrayals of nations and peoples that would bring them into closer harmony and support the League’s work for peace. These negative and positive understandings framed much discussion of cinematography’s potential contribution to world peace and ran as threads through Dreyfus-Barney’s cinematographic proposals. Her ICW resolutions asked the organization’s national councils to interest authors, producers, publishers and individuals engaged in artistic and industrial aspects of film production to avoid “scenarios likely to arouse a spirit of animosity between nations and tending to perpetuate the idea of war” and to avoid “presenting foreign nations or races in a degrading light on the screen” (ICW 1927, 16ff.). Aligning the ICW’s work more closely with intellectual co-operation broadened the ICW’s cinematography initiatives beyond questions of censorship and health that had formed the ICW’s initial focus (Goodman 2016).

Dreyfus-Barney presented the ICW’s work to reform cinematography to a wider international audience through the pages of the *International Review of Educational Cinematography* (IREC). IREC published papers from the 1931 cinematography conference that Dreyfus-Barney organized at the IIEC on behalf of the ICW (Goodman 2016). Dreyfus-Barney’s paper entitled *The Film and International Propaganda For a Mutual Understanding and Comprehension Among Nations* (Dreyfus-Barney 1934a), presented to the IIEC’s major cinematography congress in 1934, was published in IREC under the title of *Cinema and Peace* (Dreyfus-Barney 1934b). *Cinema and Peace* sets the scene for its discussion by noting that “different as may be the temples of Kyoto, Benares and Karnac, the cathedrals of Westminster and St Peter’s in Rome, or the Mosque of Omar at Jerusalem, all are places for prayer and worship” (ibid., 252). *Cinema and Peace* includes

a notion of film as both a universal and a multiversal medium through which “peoples who had no knowledge of one another in the past can know each other today and realize the truism that on general lines humanity is much the same the world over. If the ideas and the customs of people differ, this is a lesson to be learnt from this too” (ibid., 252). As well as expressing concern about depictions of war, *Cinema and Peace* warns against films “tending to diminish the prestige of a state” or “disturb[ing] relations with a foreign power”. It also warns against “films likely to offend national susceptibilities” and films “tinged with a definite prejudice” (ibid., 253). It urges the greatest care in the choice of films for export, given the “different effects which the cinema can have on peoples of different races living in different latitudes”, and because “bad pictures” can have a prejudicial effect on natives” (ibid., 254). It also notes that particular care is needed when considering “the mental characteristics of Oriental¹ peoples and peoples of the Far East, who have a lively imaginations and great sensibility” (ibid., 255).

Dreyfus-Barney repeats a number of these points in a commissioned *IREC* article entitled *Cinéma d'occident et peuples d'orient* (Dreyfus-Barney 1935). This positions cinema as a particularly important contribution for peoples “at a distance from western civilization.” Pointing to a range of countries like Egypt and Syria, which she signals were already developing film industries and producing historical, ethnological and “Arab films”, Dreyfus-Barney highlights the “rich history, thought, art treasures and poetry of the Orient”. She calls for the Orient to take its place in “the seventh art” (ibid., 55) and includes a plea for “the strictly educative film” (which she refers to as documentary or instructive film) to be included in each cinema show. Although not elaborating further she describes film as a “real problem when one turns to the colored races” (ibid., 56). As in *Cinema and Peace* she stresses the cinema’s “remarkable and positive potential”, drawing on the views of correspondents within her ICW circles. She notes that her correspondent from “the Far East” (most likely Suzanne Karpelès, see Goodman 2016) had been able “thanks to the screen and having prepared the public by a talk, to capture the interest of the public for the classes and nationalities far from her sympathy.” She cites a second correspondent, who sees cinema as “the best and most effective means of tearing Indians away from drink”; and a third, who had told her of “the remarkable effect of hygiene films on simple populations, more struck by images than words or writing” (ibid.). Referencing her own experience during her “long voyages of study prior to 1922”, she notes, “It was already possible to see the prodigious effect of the cinema on the population and I began to worry that the white race in its role as forerunner were letting there many hazardous, disconcerting and destructive things” (ibid.).

Reading Dreyfus-Barney’s writings on cinematography for “mutual understanding and comprehension among nations” within her agenda for peace brings to mind Liz Stanley’s deployment of the metaphor of the kaleidoscope: “each time you look you see something rather different, composed certainly of the same elements but with a new configuration” (Stanley 1995, 158). One configuration of peace as a qualified value in Dreyfus-Barney’s cinematographic activities emerges through a connection to Bahá’í understandings of a progressive theology of revelation. This configuration inflects Dreyfus-Barney’s reference to the temples of Kyoto, Benares and Karnac and the cathedrals of Westminster and St Peter and the Mosque of Omar being different but all being places for prayer and worship. Similarly references to the rich history of the Orient, to the “lively imaginations” and “great sensibility of people of the Far East”, and to capturing the interest of the public for “nationalities” far from one’s “sympathy” connects to the metaphor of the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch, and to the metaphor of the human race as a flower garden, made beautiful by its diversity of color and form. The notion of the “white race as forerunner” may also connect (uncomfortably) within this configuration, for as the Washington example

¹ Following Panivong Norindr (1996) terms like Orient, Far East and the West are understood as physiognomic political geographies.

illustrates, white members of the Bahá'í community were called to play their part in breaking down societal prejudices around “race”.

These same notions of difference emerge through a configuration of peace as a qualified value that connects to “race” and imperialism. In the context of Italy, where Dreyfus-Barney’s two articles were published, a notion of the “white race as forerunner” connects to racialized configurations circulating around colonial and imperial power and forms of fascist internationalism (Goodman 2016). Similarly Dreyfus-Barney’s reference to film as a “real problem when one turns to the colored races” and her comment on the “effect of cinema on natives” (which positions indigenous as well as “simple” peoples as lacking in agency) (Goodman 2018) connect with a long history of racialized views to which scholarship on colonial and imperial history alerts (Kallaway/Swartz 2016). References to “the mental characteristics” of “Oriental peoples” and “peoples of the Far East”, to their “lively imaginations” and “great sensibility” and to capturing the interest of the public for “nationalities far from [one’s] sympathy” connect to views of difference that underpinned how 1930s empires (and particularly the French) incorporated diverse peoples into the polity by viewing them as “different” and encouraging colonized peoples to be productive associates without seeking to adopt citizenship (ibid).

The concluding Afterword returns to the challenge posed by “kaleidoscopic” configurations. It begins with the question of subjectivities raised by Dreyfus-Barney’s comment about her “non-Bahá'í occupation if you can call it so” (Dreyfus-Barney 1948).

Afterword: becoming and being

In seeking to move beyond the notion of religion as a motivating factor that prods, promotes, or incites to set thought or action in motion, I follow Iris van der Tuin (2014) in seeing both Dreyfus-Barney’s subjectivity and her activities coming into being from a perspective of intra-action with or in (with/in) diffraction (the process of elements bending and spreading when they encounter an obstruction). Intra-action with/in diffraction is analogous to Henri Bergson’s description of the “disturb[ance of] my whole consciousness like a stone which falls into the water of a pond”, which generates a sudden interference pattern on the pond’s surface (Bergson, cit. in: Tuin 2014, 10). In similar vein but related to the generation of thought, Sehgal (2014) highlights Alfred North Whitehead’s use of the metaphor of the stone thrown into the pond and disturbing the “whole surface of our being” (Whitehead 1929/1985, 50), which Sehgal deploys to discuss the functioning of propositions (roughly translated as theory) in Whitehead’s technical vocabulary. Barad refers to the disturbances created with/in diffraction combining in a process of superposition when new patterns are created from the combination of disturbances (Barad 2007, 76, 139). As an alternative to notions of “motivation” intra-action with/in diffraction situates diffraction as both process and the result of process. Following Sehgal (2014, 189) this points to the importance of focusing on both becoming and being in exploring “how” Dreyfus-Barney’s life and work, her public persona, and her publications “became” as well as “what” they became; and in exploring how “diffraction’s unique material historicities ... come to matter” (Barad 2014, 172) in “the thick web of specificities” (Haraway 1993/1997, 300). For Haraway (ibid., 273) diffraction’s interference patterns record the history of both reinforcement and difference. Similarly for Sehgal (2014, 191) diffraction accounts for convergences and differences. For Barad, diffraction requires researchers to understand the coming together of opposite qualities, “not as a flattening out or erasure of difference, but as a relation of difference within ... constituted in their inseparability (entanglement)” (Barad 2014, 172, 175). Sehgal (2014) points to the friction that bringing together heterogeneous elements generates. This comes into view in Dreyfus-Barney’s “certain form of peace” (Hippler/Vec 2015, 8f.) where friction is generated through “kaleidoscopic” configurations of peace that both connect *and* disrupt Bahá'í belief in unity in diversity.

Tuin's linkage of the Bergsonian stone falling into the pond with a human consciousness that "must always be ever in motion" (Tuin 2014, 10) frames subjectivities as mobile, fluid, dynamic and in flux within what Cresswell terms a nomadic metaphysics (Cresswell 2006, 26). Cresswell connects a nomadic metaphysics with a positive valuation of mobility as progress, freedom and change (ibid., 43) that he argues brings more sharply into view constructed and disputed historicities, sites of displacement, interference and interaction, velocities and vectors (ibid., 47). But, as Cresswell argues, the ability to mobilize metaphors of mobility is rooted in power and is always embodied. This is the case with Dreyfus-Barney, whose wealth funded her travels to 'Akka that made possible specific elements of Bahá'í belief in intra-actions with/in her subjectivity and with/in her peace activism. Elements of power connected with wealth were also embedded in the circulations of knowledge that locates Dreyfus-Barney as a transnational connector in the two-way move of ideas between 'Akka and the "West". But elements of power (over and to) with/in intra-actions were also located in the specificities of a faith that was (and continues to be) persecuted in a number of countries and which brought personal ridicule for Dreyfus-Barney from the American press (Kling 1994, 169). The activities around cinematography that emerged in her work for peace through the ICW and the League were also inflected with/in relations of power that were framed through gendered understandings of international relations and international politics (Whitworth 1994, xiii).

Attending to both becoming and being in "diffraction's unique material historicalities and to how they come to matter" (Barad 2014, 172) within a thick web of specificities inflected by power relations also requires an understanding of how flux and permanence work together. Maria Tamboukou outlines how Alfred North Whitehead holds together notions of flux and permanence through his notion of concrescence (the fluency of becoming a particular existent) and his notion of transition (whereby an entity that has already become enters a process of new becomings). Tamboukou concludes that Whitehead theorizes, "on the one hand ... the problem of following the process wherein each individual unity of experience is realized and on the other ... the recognition that there is some actual world out there, already constituted 'the stubborn fact' which at once limits and provides" (Tamboukou 2016, 139). Tamboukou notes that this coexistence of permanence and flux creates conditions of possibility for the future, which is anchored in the present but has not yet been actualized. When exploring intra-actions with/in diffraction, accounting for becoming and being, flux and permanence, suggests a "double method" of genealogy and geology to facilitate attention to how the position of thought and the field with or in which position is given fold into one another (Colebrook 1999, 138f). Tracing the convergences and divergences of intra-actions with/in diffraction and the frictions of the "kaleidoscopic" configurations in Dreyfus-Barney's "certain form of peace" suggests the "double method" may accommodate the unexpected connections that emerge as threads knot and re-knot in the entangled lines of meshwork (Ingold 2015).

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