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Native Conversion, Native Identity: An Oral History of the Bahá'í Faith among First Nations People in the Southern Central Yukon Territory, Canada

by

Carolyn Patterson Sawin

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Native Conversion, Native Identity: An Oral History of the Bahá'í Faith among First Nations People in the Southern Central Yukon Territory, Canada

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This dissertation examines the factors influencing religious conversion and retention among Yukon First Nations people in the Bahá'í Faith. Research based on personal interviews, archival sources, and personal observations suggest that social factors, in addition to cognitive or "doctrinal" factors, play a significant role both in influencing conversion and in retaining new converts in their chosen faith. Specifically, where converts have a network of close social relationships with others in their faith, and feel they receive adequate social support from their religious community, they will tend to remain committed to their new religion, and to participate actively in the religious community.

This dissertation also looks at the correlation between First Nations commitment and participation in the Bahá'í community, and the degree to which Bahá'ís are able to express their cultural identity within their faith. My research suggests that where First Nations Bahá'ís are encouraged to express and embrace their cultural identity by other, non-Native Bahá'ís, they tend to be active participants in the Bahá'í community. By contrast, where they perceive a conflict between their Native and Bahá'í identities, they will tend to draw away from active Bahá'í participation. In the Yukon, it appears that the latter situation has predominated in the Bahá'í community since the 1970s, resulting in the gradual decline in the number of First Nations Bahá'ís, and in First Nations participation in the Bahá'í community. Those Yukon First Nations Bahá'ís who have remained the most committed to their faith over time are those who have been able to integrate their Native and Bahá'í identities. They have done so by deliberately linking aspects of their indigenous culture—most often, oral narratives—to legitimize their identity as Bahá'ís, and to validate, in the eyes of non-Native Bahá'ís their identity as First Nations people.

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Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the Canadian Studies Graduate Student Fellowship Program, for funding the bulk of my research in the Yukon.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of:
Dora Wedge, a good friend and loving "grandmother"
Pete Sidney (who finally got to share his fish!)
Joanie Anderson
and
Shirley Lindstrom

Chapter I
Introduction

This dissertation provides an ethnographic and historical account of the Bahá'í Faith[1] among the First Nations[2] people of the southern Yukon Territory, Canada, since its introduction to the Yukon in 1953. In particular, the dissertation will examine the factors influencing First Nations conversion and commitment to the Bahá'í Faith, and the ways in which First Nations and Bahá'í identities have influenced and shaped one other.

My discussion of these issues is based not only upon social science theory and my fieldwork as an anthropologist, but also upon my experience as a member of the Bahá'í Faith. It is important for the reader to be aware of my identity as a Bahá'í, for while I have made every attempt to present a realistic picture of the First Nations Bahá'í experience in the Yukon, I may have at times inadvertently allowed my own biases to color my understanding, and thereby my discussion, of these issues.

A. Overview

The Bahá'í Faith began in 19th century Persia as an obscure offshoot of Shiite Islam.[3] While this new religion spread quickly throughout the middle East, it reached North America only in 1893, and the number of Bahá'í s worldwide remained quite small during the first one hundred years of the Faith. The early 1960s, however, witnessed the beginning of dramatic growth for the international Bahá'í community. The Bahá'í International Community estimates that there were about 400,000 Bahá'í s worldwide in 1963; by 1985, that number had grown to approximately 3.5 million and to 5 million by 1998[4] (BIC 1992: 14, 1998).

Many of these new adherents have been indigenous peoples. According to one source (Lucas 1998), for example, the number of indigenous Bahá'ís outnumber non-indigenous believers 3 to 1 in the Western Hemisphere. While the majority of these indigenous Bahá'ís reside in Latin America (Lucas 1998), they also represent a sizeable portion of the Bahá'í population in Canada. For example, in the mid-1960s, First Nations people represented about a third of the Canadian Bahá'í population (about 500 out of 1,500) and perhaps a majority of Bahá'ís in the Yukon (*CBN*, special Jubilee edition, 4/63; *CBN* # 166, 11/63). They currently represent about 13% of the current total Canadian Bahá'í population of 17,534, and 35.8% of the Yukon Bahá'í population of 279, out of a total Yukon population of approximately 33,000[5] (Clark 1999; PR Services 1997: pullout section).

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[1] I use the terms "Bahá'í Faith," "Bahá'í religion," and "the Faith" interchangeably throughout this dissertation. While some may object to the use of "Faith" in capitals, particularly when used alone in the text, it should be noted that this is generally the way Bahá'ís—at least in North America—refer to their religion, both in writing and in conversation; thus, I have chosen to employ this spelling in my discussion.

[2] "First Nations" is the term that is currently used in public discourse to refer to the indigenous people of Canada. In personal and private conversation, however, individuals continue to self-identify as "Native" or "Indian." For this reason, while I use "First Nations" to refer to indigenous groups (except where it is too awkward to do so), I have chosen to use "Native" or "Indian" to refer to individuals.

[3] For a detailed outline of the Bahá'í Faith, its teachings, origins, and growth, see Chapter III.

[4] Barrett and Johnson (2000: 292) provide a much larger estimate for 1999: nearly 7 million.

What factors contributed to the dramatic growth of the international Bahá'í community, particularly among indigenous people, beginning in the early 1960s? How did this new religion spread and what made it appealing to indigenous people, who often entered the Faith from very "traditional" cultural and spiritual backgrounds? What impact did becoming Bahá'í have on these new converts, and were their experiences in their new religion different from those of other indigenous people who converted to Christianity or other world religions? In the years since their conversions, what factors have influenced whether or not they remain committed to their new faith?

It is doubtful these questions can be ever be answered for indigenous Bahá'ís as a whole. Through ethnographic study, however, it is possible to draw some conclusions about these issues as they pertain to individuals within a particular indigenous group. In this instance, my discussion of these issues will draw upon my research among and interviews with First Nations Bahá'ís in the southern Yukon Territory, the majority of whom belong to the Carcross-Tagish First Nations.[6]

This dissertation provides an historical and ethnographic analysis of the factors influencing First Nations conversion and commitment to the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon. In particular, I will argue that the factors that have had the greatest influence on the conversion of First Nations people to the Bahá'í Faith, and on their continued commitment to the Faith, are 1) the existence of strong interpersonal ties between members of the Bahá'í community and new converts; 2) the perceived religious and cultural continuities between past and present; 3) the degree to which individual Bahá'ís incorporated the Bahá'í teachings into their lives; and 4) the way in which they have integrated their Native and Bahá'í identities.

The rest of this chapter outlines the relevant theoretical issues as they pertain to my research in the Yukon. My own story, about how I came to work in the Yukon and how I conducted my research, comprises Chapter II. Chapter III provides an overview of the Bahá'í Faith, including its doctrines, history, demographics, and methods of expansion, while Chapter IV describes the ethnographic and historical context within which the Bahá'í Faith was first introduced to the First Nations people of the Yukon, and focuses particularly on the Tagish people, with whom I did most of my research. The following chapter provides an ethnographic account of the Yukon Bahá'í community as it was in 1996 and 1997, when I conducted my research, while Chapter VI details the history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon, from its earliest days to the more recent past, with a focus on the experiences of those First Nations Bahá'ís whom I interviewed. Chapters VII and VIII address the conversion stories of individual First Nations Bahá'ís, and their experiences in and perceptions of the Faith as Native people. Chapter IX concludes with an analysis of the import of this research for Bahá'ís in the Yukon, the greater Bahá'í community, and for anthropologists and other social scientists studying religious conversion, commitment, and identity.

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[5] These figures pertain to Bahá'ís with known addresses only; when those without known addresses are included, the proportion of Yukon First Nations believers relative to the rest of the Yukon Bahá'í population drops to slightly less than 30 percent.

[6] See Chapter II for an account of how I came to work in the Yukon, how I met the individuals whom I interviewed, and my research methodology.

B. Theoretical Issues

When I began my research, I had two separate goals in mind; the first was to record individuals' stories about how they had become Bahá'í, the other was to record a history of the Bahá'í Faith in the southern Yukon. As it happened, the two were intertwined: the history I recorded during my interviews with twenty-odd people was essentially the story of how First Nations people, both individually and collectively, came to adopt the Bahá'í Faith. Their stories highlighted, in a very personal way, the factors—both positive and negative—that have influenced both the development of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon and the continued participation of First Nations people in the Bahá'í community. Through recording and analyzing these stories, however, I also became aware of a third element that needed to be addressed: the issue of Native Bahá'í identity. Thus, this section will examine the theoretical literature pertaining to all three of these issues: oral history, conversion, and identity.

1. Issues of Oral History

Reconstructing the history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon proved to be a challenge for a number of reasons. For one thing, there are very few written records available for the Yukon Bahá'í community, aside from an unpublished manuscript written by the earliest Bahá'í "pioneers"—i.e., missionaries—to the Yukon. This manuscript provides a very useful background of the early history of the Faith in the Yukon, identifying the major characters and events through the early 1970s; however, it does not cover much ground beyond the early 1970s. Unfortunately, it appears that these "pioneers" were the only Bahá'ís to keep any systematic records of the Faith in the Yukon; I have been unable to locate more than a few written records for the period after 1973, when these individuals left the Yukon.

This lack of information may be due in part to the nature of the Bahá'í community and administration; as outlined in Chapter III, there is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, and there are no paid administrative positions.[7] Moreover, these positions are often held by different people from year to year, since the administrative order must be newly elected each year at the local and national levels. Thus, there is generally little systematization of community records, either from one community to another, or from one year to another within the same community; some communities or secretaries may keep detailed records and archives, while others may even dispose of their records after a few years.

The lack of systematic record keeping among and between Bahá'í communities contrasts sharply with that of other religious organizations, and has important consequences for research. First, it makes it difficult to gain an accurate picture of the size and functioning of a Bahá'í community, be it at the local, national or international level. This, in turn, makes it extremely difficult either to compare individual Bahá'í communities, or to compare the Bahá'í international community with other world religions. Thus, while I will attempt to make comparisons between the growth of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon and the growth of other religions in the Yukon and elsewhere, the reader should keep in mind that, in some instances, such comparisons may not be accurate.

Given the lack of written records for the Yukon Bahá'í community, the history presented in Chapter VI is based largely on oral accounts I collected during and after my field research in the Yukon. My interviews with over twenty First Nations Bahá'ís, combined with the unpublished manuscript mentioned above, produced a rich account of the first twenty years of the Faith in the Yukon, through the early 1970s. These same oral accounts often proved problematic, however. For example, like the written record, these accounts were often quite sketchy or non-existent with respect to details concerning the years since the early 1970s, or did not appear to follow any kind of chronological order. How was I to reconstruct a history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon without a clear chronology of "events"? What accounted for individuals' apparent lapses of memory regarding the more recent past, when their earlier memories were so clear? In addition, some of these accounts included references to traditional stories that at first glance appeared to have no connection to the topic at hand. How was I to make sense of these?

A brief review of the oral history literature suggests that these issues are not unusual for researchers collecting oral histories. For example, both Portelli (1991) and Allen (1984) note than chronological accuracy does not appear to be particularly relevant for those whom they interview about the past. Moreover, what may be viewed as an historical "event" by some may be viewed as a "non-event" by others, and what "standard chronology" might deem as two or more discrete, if related events, some individuals may perceive as "one protracted event," or vice versa (Portelli 1991: 25).

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[7] This restriction refers only to elected administrative positions; at the national and international levels, there are a variety of paid full-time administrative support positions.

What is relevant for the individual, however, is not chronology or "objective" historical "fact," but meaning; in particular, events are remembered not because they are inherently important but because they are made meaningful within the context of individual lives. That context might be political (Passerini 1992; Portelli 1991), economic (Thompson 1994), cultural (Cruikshank 1998, 1988), social (Allen 1984), or any combination thereof. For example, in her work with individuals in rural Kentucky, Allen (1984: 6) found that narrators tended to group their stories about the past "according to the association [they] made among the events they were recounting, the individuals involved in those events, and the relations that bound those individuals to each other and to others in the community."

Such associations are certainly apparent in the context of my own research and those whom I interviewed in the Yukon. Conversion, in particular, does not take place in a vacuum, and the fact that I was conducting an oral history of a *community* meant that individuals inevitably linked their own experiences within that community to their relationship with those around them. No less important, however, were the traditional narratives that several Bahá'ís chose to share with me as part of *their* history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon (see Chapter VIII). While it took some time for me to recognize the relevance of these narratives to the interview topic, for these individuals the connection was clear, and they felt it was important for me to record them.[8]

The question remains, however, is how to address those events that are not remembered? Cruikshank (1998: 4) reminds us that events "are always made into a story by suppressing some aspects and highlighting others, so it should not be surprising that both written and oral histories are based on a selective reading of the past...." At the individual level, those memories which are most readily accessible are those which have been "rehearsed...and selected for preservation over a lifetime...They are memories which define the self and constitute the persona which one retains, the sense of identity over time" (Hoffman and Hoffman 1994: 124-125). This would certainly apply to the traditional narratives and conversion stories I heard during my interviews in the Yukon; these stories have been told over and over again, and help to define both the individual and his or her cultural identity.

While it is important to identify what is a meaningful event to these individuals, the fact that some events are *not* remembered does not mean they are necessarily irrelevant. As Passerini (1992) discovered in her work with victims of totalitarian regimes, silence about the past can be indicative of past injuries or trauma; in particular, she notes that the degree to which there is a contradiction or cohesion between the public and private experience shapes how private and collective memories may be remembered or lost. For example, whereas the contradiction between the public and private experience in Fascist Italy led to memory repression, the

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[8] Julie Cruikshank, who also worked with First Nations people in the Yukon, had a similar experience in recording oral history with those whom she interviewed (see Cruikshank 1998, Cruikshank et. al. 1990).

"absolutely vivid" memories of the Spanish Civil War recounted in Ronald Fraser's *Blood of Spain* corresponded with a "time of close cohesion between public and private experience" (Passerini 1992: 13). I would suggest that such a contradiction, between the public and private experience, held for the Yukon Bahá'í community from the mid-to-late-1970s until fairly recently—at least for many First Nations Bahá'ís whom I interviewed—and that it is this contradiction which may account for their lack of clear memories concerning these years. This contradiction—namely, a disjunction between the ideal Bahá'í community and the reality that existed within the Yukon Bahá'í community at the time—will be discussed in Chapters V and VI.

2. *Issues of Conversion*

In order to make sense of First Nations conversions to the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon, I must first address a number of questions: 1) what is the nature of religious conversion? 2) what factors contribute to or enable the conversion process? 3) what makes some religions more appealing than others for particular converts? and 4) what factors influence whether or not converts will remain committed to their new faith?

The term "conversion" is problematic for many Bahá'ís; while the word is frequently used in the Bahá'í writings, most Bahá'ís in North America seem to actively avoid it in their own stories about how they became Bahá'í. Their reason for doing so, I believe, lies in the difference between how religious conversion is defined by academics and the larger society, and how it is experienced by most converts to the Bahá'í Faith.

In the social science literature, religious conversion is generally understood to be a highly rationalized, step-by-step process in which an individual chooses to accept a new concept of reality, or world view, that is often radically different from that which he or she held previously (Bankston, et. al. 1981). According to this model, the conversion process begins when an individual perceives a conflict between his/her received religious beliefs and reality as he/she experiences it, or feels that his/her initial beliefs are inadequate to explain or address life's exigencies—what Weber (in Geertz 1993) refers to as a "problem of meaning." If this "problem of meaning" remains unresolved, the individual may actively seek out a new system of belief that would make better sense of his/her life experience (Bankston et. al. 1981; Heirich 1977).

This model of conversion has been applied not only to individuals but to whole societies as well. For instance, in his discussion of revitalization movements,[9] Wallace (1956) suggests that such movements, including those of a religious nature, arise when the accepted image of a society or culture held by every individual within that society—i.e., the "mazeway"—breaks down as a result of increasing stress on the individuals in society. This stress may be in the form of devastating disease, cultural conflict or other unsettling forces. Where the existing cultural mazeway cannot be reconciled with these new conditions, the members of a society will strive to create a new mazeway, or belief system, more congruent with reality (Wallace 1956: 266-267).

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[9] Wallace (1956: 265) defines a revitalization movement as "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."

Within this model, conversion is explained as a reaction or response to some kind of perceived deprivation, be it psychological, ethical, socio-cultural, political, economic, or even biological in nature (see, for example, Jorgenson 1972; Baer 1978; 284,293). Such a view is popular not only among some psychologists, who may explain conversion as a "fantasy solution to stress," but among social scientists in general (Heirich 1977: 656; see also Ullman 1979; Rambo 1993; Tapp 1989). For example, in the anthropological literature on Native North America, both conversion to Christianity and the rise of prophetic movements are often attributed to various forms of deprivation brought on either directly or indirectly by contact with European-Americans (Wallace 1956; see also Mooney 1972 [1896]; Miller 1985; Aberle 1959; Hunn et al. 1990).

The rationalist/deprivation model outlined above is problematic in several ways. First, one cannot assume that the "mere existence of relative deprivation" will result in religious conversion, since some individuals join new religious groups while others who experience similar deprivation do not (Baer 1978: 279; see also Heirich 1977). Moreover, while the rationalist model assumes that potential converts *consciously* seek out a new set of beliefs to address their problems, Stark (n.d.: 180) points out that, in fact, "converts very seldom are religious seekers and conversion seldom is the culmination of a conscious search—most converts do not find a new faith so much as the new faith finds them." Finally—and perhaps most importantly, within the context of this dissertation—while the rationalist model often implies a radical change in belief, both the ethnographic literature and my own research suggest a more syncretic approach. For example, there often exist strong continuities between old and new beliefs and cultural practices, although such continuities are not always recognized as such (see, for example, Amoss 1978). Among the First Nations Bahá'ís whom I interviewed in the Yukon, however, individuals were often quick to point out the similarities and connection between their past religion and/or culture, and their current faith.

This is not to suggest that the rationalist/deprivation approach is not helpful in understanding why *some* individuals—or societies—seek out new religions. For example, First Nations people in the Yukon faced both increasing social, cultural, and economic stress, and racism from the White community in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, which may have influenced to some degree individual conversions. Certainly the apparent lack of race prejudice among the early White Bahá'ís towards First Nations people, and the Faith's explicit ideology concerning the oneness of mankind, had a positive influence on conversion. Nevertheless, one cannot assume that this was the only reason for Bahá'í conversion; to do so ignores other, equally important factors. Here I will address two additional factors that appear to have influenced conversion among First Nations Bahá'ís in the Yukon: 1) the syncretic nature of both the Bahá'í Faith and the traditional Tagish culture and religion (since the majority of those whom I interviewed were from the Carcross-Tagish First Nation), and 2) the importance of interpersonal ties between new or potential converts, and members of the Yukon Bahá'í community.

In his discussion of Yoruba Christianity, Peel (1968: 127-128) has suggested that there are two approaches to missionizing: "The first emphasizes the discontinuity involved in adopting a new religion...The other attitude emphasizes the continuity between the old and the new...Those who adopt this [latter] approach tend to see the two religions as bodies of belief and practice with similar boundaries, purposes and objects—it is just that the content of their assertions is different and that one is more effective than the other." Peel (1968) notes that, under ordinary circumstances, the latter approach is more successful in attracting new converts to a religion. Which approach a missionary decides to take, however, depends largely upon the nature of the religion, or religious denomination, itself. For example, the first approach assumes a rejection of the past as an element of conversion, and "seems to predominate among Protestants who draw on the evangelical ideal of total regeneration" (Peel 1968: 127). The latter approach, by contrast, allows for a blending of old and new religious elements—at least those older elements which are perceived as still "useful" or not in conflict with the new—and is often common among indigenous clergy or missionaries (see, for example, Peel 1968; Schieffelin 1981; Garlington 1998).

This syncretic approach most closely resembles that which Bahá'ís take in presenting their faith to others. A missionizing approach which draws upon the similarities between the new religion and that of the potential convert is particularly appropriate within the context of the Bahá'í Faith. For example, one of the principle teachings of the Bahá'í Faith is that all religions come from the same source (God) and promulgate the same basic spiritual truths. The differences lie in the fact that each one was revealed in a different culture at a different time; thus, while their spiritual teachings remained the same, their social laws were specific to the needs of the culture and age in which they were revealed. As mankind has become more spiritually mature, however, and as its needs have changed, these religions have been continually renewed by the appearance of a new prophet of God, who in this day, Bahá'ís believe, is Bahá'u'lláh.[10] Since Bahá'ís believe both that all religions are one, and that Bahá'u'lláh's revelation has fulfilled the promises of each of these earlier religions, it is only natural that, in teaching their faith, Bahá'ís should emphasize the continuities between a potential convert's religion and their own, and to point out the greater effectiveness of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings in addressing the needs and concerns of mankind.[11]

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[10] Bahá'ís use the term "progressive revelation" to refer to this concept of spiritual or religious evolution (Momen 1989: 186-187).

In determining the factors that influence conversion, however, it is important to consider not only the new doctrine itself and the way in which it is presented, but also the nature of the existing indigenous social order and traditional beliefs and practices. For example, among the Northeast Algonkian in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Jesuit missionaries were able to attract converts to the Church and to engender cultural change, not so much because the Native people understood and accepted church doctrines, but because the missionaries had gained a legitimate claim to leadership *within the traditional Algonkian social and religious system* (Conkling 1974). In a society where access to spiritual power and, thus, political leadership was proven—at least in part—through one's efficacy in curing, the Jesuits were able to gain legitimacy as spiritual and political leaders by successfully competing against the traditional shaman-*sagamores* in healing the sick (Conkling 1974).

Among the Yup'ik of St. Lawrence Island, legitimacy was also an important issue in conversion to Christianity; in this case, however, it was the conversion of several key older men, in a male-dominated culture, that proved "critical to the conversion of others in the early days of Christianity" (Jolles 1990: 202). Moreover, the fact that their conversions "assumed a form which is paralleled structurally in the older tradition" appears to have validated their experiences for themselves and the rest of the community (Jolles 1990: 202). Similarly, in the Yukon, the conversion of several respected elders in the Native community to the Bahá'í Faith, including a former lay minister for the Anglican Church, led others who had not already done so to seriously examine the Faith and to become Bahá'í.

The way in which traditional indigenous spirit power is conceived also has an influence on the degree to which new religious ideas are accepted. For example, the Yoruba of Western Nigeria view "the sources of spiritual power [as] manifold;" as long as they are effective in attaining one's goals, none need be rejected (Peel 1968: 129). Given this perspective, it is not surprising that many Yoruba continue to participate in their traditional rituals even after they have become Christian or Muslim; each religion is believed to be effective in addressing the concerns of the individual's different needs and concerns. (Peel 1968). This pragmatic approach is similar to that which McClellan (1956: 130) observes among the Athapaskan peoples of the southern Yukon, who display "a characteristic willingness to entertain and even to search for new ideas," although "only those concepts that help practically in the business of living are permanently incorporated." This openness to new ideas led many traditional shamans, in the early to mid-twentieth century, to incorporate Christian elements into their rituals; since these elements were viewed by Whites as "good and powerful," it was only logical for shamans to make use of them (McClellan 1956: 137).

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[11] This has been done to a great degree in India (see, for example, Garlington 1998).

It is important to note, however, that while these shamans held "prayer meetings" on Sundays, sang "hymns," and gained authority for their work from meetings they claimed to have had with Jesus, all of these "Christian" elements were actually located within the context of an older tradition. For example, the prayer meetings were used to heal the sick and to locate game, and the hymns were akin to older *yek*, or spirit power, songs which were used to activate the shaman's powers; even their claims to have met Jesus followed the traditional pattern of visits to the spirit world to gain new knowledge (1956: 135). Thus, McClellan suggests that there was actually little syncretism of old and new religious beliefs; while most southern Yukon Indians were at least nominally Christian by the mid-20th century, traditional practices continued virtually unchanged.

Religious syncretism occurs, Peel (1968: 129, italics in original) suggests, where an individual "sees some good...in his traditional religious practices and beliefs, *identified* as such, and attempts to synthesize them with new beliefs in a harmonious religious system." Such syncretism, however, is possible only in situations where the convert's previous beliefs can be readily incorporated into his or her new religion, or vice versa. For example, Jolles (1990: 214) notes that it was the convergence "of certain conceptual notions from each tradition" that enabled "the eventual embedding of the new tradition within the various facets of Yup'ik culture." In the southern Yukon, by contrast, there was little convergence between Christian and indigenous traditions, other than on a superficial level. Thus, whereas the traditional Yup'ik religion and Christianity were integrated into a unified whole, so that it became a "distinctly Yup'ik Christianity" (Jolles 1990), they were never as fully integrated in the southern Yukon.

In contrast to some forms of Christianity, the Bahá'í Faith (at least theoretically) allows for a greater integration of traditional beliefs and practices *within* the new religion. This is due to the fact that the Bahá'í Faith acknowledges the validity of indigenous religions, and often serves even to encourage individuals to retain or to regain their traditional cultural values, religion, and identity. For example, Weixelman (1985) suggests that the Navajo Bahá'ís whom he interviewed became Bahá'í because their new Faith *made them better Navajos*. In particular, he notes that these individuals came to better understand and appreciate their *traditional* culture and spiritual beliefs *because of* the Bahá'í teachings (Weixelman 1985). Unlike some other prophetic religions, the Bahá'í Faith allowed them to simultaneously participate in a universal religion with non-Navajos and continue to live as traditional Navajos; in essence, to develop a "distinctly Navajo" version of Bahá'í Faith, one that was accepted by the larger Bahá'í community.

I found a similar perspective in my own research in the Yukon; some of those whom I interviewed were attracted to the Bahá'í Faith because, in their minds, it seemed to fulfill their earlier religious beliefs, or to enhance their understanding of these beliefs. Thus, the dissertation will consider the perceived connections between the Bahá'í Faith and indigenous (or Christian) beliefs that may have influenced First Nations conversion or commitment to the Bahá'í Faith (see Chapters VII and VIII).

The foregoing examples suggest cognitive and cultural factors as the principal motivation for conversion to a particular religion; however, social ties also appear to have a significant influence on an individual's decision to convert. For example, in his discussion of Catholic Pentecostal conversion, Heirich (1977: 673) notes the importance of "available social networks" in attracting new converts to a religious movement. Potential converts who have friends or family they trust that are members of the movement are far more likely to join than those who do not (Heirich 1977: 673). Stark (n.d.: 176) expands on this theme, to suggest that conversion occurs *only* when an individual's existing social attachments to members of the new religion *are greater than or outweigh his or her attachments to non-members.* This is due to the fact that people tend to "base their religious choices on the preferences of those to whom they are attached," and will generally prefer to remain in their original religion than to risk losing these relationships by failing to conform to the religious or social behavior of those they care about (Stark n.d.: 177).

In my own research in the Yukon, it appears that, in addition to other factors, individual relationships played a significant role in the conversion of many indigenous Bahá'ís in the Yukon, as well as in their continued commitment to the Faith. For example, many of those whom I interviewed indicated that they first learned of the Bahá'í Faith through other family members who had recently joined. Indeed, it appears that the majority of First Nations people who became Bahá'í in the early 1960s were either closely related, or had some other connection (i.e., cultural, linguistic, friendship), to those who taught them the Faith. It also appears that those with the closest ties to other Bahá'ís, whether through family or friendship, were the most likely to remain in the Faith over the long term. For example, of the 100 First Nations people currently listed on the Yukon Bahá'í membership roles, more than half are related, with the majority belonging to the same extended family (Clarke 1999; personal communication).

While it is important to understand *why* First Nations Bahá'ís chose to join the Faith, it is also important to understand *how* these individuals have incorporated their new beliefs into their world view and internalized Bahá'í standards of moral behavior into their daily life. Hefner (1993), Barker (1993), and Stromberg (1993) have each suggested that the process of conversion does not end with an individual's decision to convert; rather, it involves an on-going self-transformation within the individual. Barker (1993) refers to these two aspects of conversion as external and internal conversion: whereas external conversion indicates a change in one's religious affiliation and outward identity in relation to the larger community, internal conversion involves changes in one's inner attitudes and assumptions about the world and how to relate to others.

Such a view of conversion is congruent with that held by many Bahá'ís. From a Bahá'í perspective, *deciding* to become Bahá'í is merely the first step in one's spiritual journey:

> Becoming a true Bahá'í is a process of spiritual transformation. It means doing our best every day to live up to the divine standards raised by Bahá'u'lláh. It means trying to make everything about ourselves...reflect our values and our purpose in life. It means becoming so selflessly devoted to God that at every moment we seek only to do what He wants us to do...(NSA-US 1995: 38).

According to Stromberg (1993:3), the conversion narrative itself is an integral part of this transformative process: "The conversion narrative [offers converts] an opportunity to celebrate and reaffirm the dual effect of the conversion, the strengthening of their faith and the transformation of their lives." Moreover, with respect to evangelical Christians, he suggests that "the conversion narrative is a practice through which believers seek to establish some connection between the language of Evangelical Christianity and their own immediate situations" (Stromberg 1993: 11).

From my own research, it appears that the conversion narratives of individual Bahá'ís serve the same functions as those of evangelical Christians. In particular, they both reinforce the believer's commitment to the Bahá'í Faith, and demonstrate—to the individual believer and to others—the efficacy of the Bahá'í message in making sense of one's own experience. The narratives themselves, however, also *reflect* the narrator's current level of religious commitment. For example, it appears that those who remain strongly committed to the Bahá'í Faith tend to provide much greater detail in their conversion narratives than those who are not strongly committed. Those who had become disillusioned with the Faith, or who had little more than superficial knowledge of it, could recall little or nothing about their conversion experience.

My research suggests that the degree to which First Nations Bahá'í converts internalize their new religious beliefs appears to influence whether or not they remain committed to the Faith. Maust (1992) has argued that, among converts to Protestant evangelism in Latin America, those who are not well educated in the Christian scriptures tend to fall away from the Church, especially when they encounter resistance from others to their new faith. The fact that many First Nations converts to the Bahá'í Faith no longer participate in Bahá'í activities, or have left the Faith entirely suggests that Maust's argument applies to Bahá'í converts in the Yukon, as well. For example, new Bahá'ís in the 1960s and 70s often encountered resistance and hostility to their conversion from non-Native missionaries and from some of the Native Christians; those converts who were least familiar with the Bahá'í teachings and who had not yet "internalized" their new beliefs, or who had few Bahá'í friends or family members were the most likely to leave the Faith or become inactive when they encountered this kind of opposition.

3. *Issues of Identity*

Given that the majority of the Bahá'ís with whom I worked in my research were First Nations people, it is perhaps not surprising that the issue of identity—specifically, the intersection of First Nations and Bahá'í identities—became an important one for discussion. I mentioned earlier that quite a number of the personal accounts I recorded during my fieldwork included references to traditional narratives that appeared to have no connection to the topics of Bahá'í history and conversion. While I was initially puzzled by the meaning and purpose of these narratives, I eventually realized that they were, in fact, an important key to understanding what the Bahá'í Faith meant to these individuals *as First Nations people*. Through these narratives, these individuals sought to simultaneously assert their identity as First Nations people and legitimize, within a traditional First Nations framework, their identity as Bahá'ís.

In discussing identity, I draw primarily on the anthropological literature on ethnicity and ethnic identity. For my purposes, I will take as a starting point Levine's (1999: 166, 168) rather minimalist view of ethnicity as "a particular method of categorizing people in the context of complex social situations" that "uses origin...as its primary reference." As Levine conceives it, ethnicity is essentially a socially constructed category; while individuals may *perceive* the similarities or differences by which they categorize themselves and others as inherent and "natural," there are, in fact, "no completely objective differences between people that give rise to ethnicity" (Levine 1999: 178). Rather, ethnicity arises out of the interaction that occurs between individuals and groups in society, and may "differ in references to varying social contexts as well as different levels of social organization" (Svensson 1985: 32; see also Meintel 1993; Roosens 1989). As these social contexts change, so may the boundaries, and even the "essential" characteristics, of ethnicity change (see, for example, Roosens 1989, Pflüg 1998).

From the individual perspective, however, it is not social context, but the sense of belonging to a group "to which their 'real or symbolic' ancestors belonged," and with whom they share common cultural patterns, social networks, interests, and goals, that is relevant to ethnic identity (Meintel 1993: 5; see also Svensson 1985). In asserting ethnic identity, individuals within a group will tend to highlight precisely those aspects of their culture and their past, whether real or imagined, that legitimize their perception of themselves (and thus identify those who do *not* belong as well as those who do), and their goals vis-à-vis other groups in society (see, for example, Roosens 1989; Svensson 1985; Pflüg 1998). While both those cultural behaviors and values that are defined as "ethnic" and those historical elements that legitimize and shape these elements are continually re-invented or modified according to social context, this does not imply that they are thereby meaningless for analysis (see, for example, Roosens 1989). As Hanson (1989, in Levine 1999: 176-177) argues, "the analytic task is not to strip away the invented portions of culture as unauthentic, but to understand the process by which they acquire authenticity."

In my own research, I found that First Nations Bahá'ís used interpretations of the past, whether of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon or of their own First Nation (most often, that of the Carcross-Tagish First Nation), to assert their identity both as Bahá'ís and as First Nations people. While these two groups have, at times, shared some values, interests, or goals in common, they have, at other times, been in competition with each other. Thus, although one's Bahá'í and First Nations identities may overlap to some degree—and in some individuals more than others—they are, obviously, two quite different things; certainly, a Bahá'í identity is *not* something that is shared by the majority of First Nations people in the Yukon. Moreover, until 1985, perhaps the majority of First Nations Bahá'ís did not have legal Indian status or band membership.[12] Thus, it is not surprising that many First Nations Bahá'ís have sought to legitimize their First Nations and Bahá'í identities vis-à-vis other First Nations people in terms of their traditional First Nations history—in this instance, through the use of traditional oral narrative and cultural precedent.

As members of an ethnic minority within a world religion, in which White Canadians often unconsciously assume their own cultural interpretation of the Bahá'í Faith to be the only valid one, many First Nations Bahá'ís have also found a need to authenticate, or legitimize their ethnic identity vis-à-vis other Bahá'ís. It is through telling their history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon, and through re-interpreting their traditional oral narratives and cultural traditions from a Bahá'í perspective, as a First Nations "Old Testament," that First Nations Bahá'ís are able to assert their identity as Bahá'ís. Based on my observations, I would suggest that the degree to which First Nations Bahá'ís have integrated their two identities—First Nations and Bahá'í—has significantly influenced their continued participation in the Bahá'í community.[13]

C. Conclusions

Given the many factors that have influenced both external *and* internal Bahá'í conversion among First Nations people of the Yukon, how successful has this process been? What does "success" entail? If by success is meant that the majority of those who joined the Faith remain dedicated Bahá'ís, or that the Bahá'í Faith has attracted more First Nations adherents than its religious competitors, then it would appear that Bahá'í conversion has not been successful in the Yukon. Only a fraction of the First Nations population of the Yukon ever joined the Bahá'í Faith, and many of these individuals have since left. At the individual level, however, I would suggest that Bahá'í conversion has been quite successful, as there are many First Nations people who continue to identify themselves as Bahá'í and who have tried to integrate the teachings of their faith into their daily lives. While the degree to which these individuals may have incorporated the Bahá'í teachings into their everyday lives, and the degree to which they participate in Bahá'í community activities certainly varies, this does not imply that those who do not *visibly* participate in the Bahá'í community are any less dedicated to their faith than those who participate regularly. This point shall be addressed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

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[12] Under the Indian Act, First Nations women lost their Indian status and band membership if they married non-Indian men, as did their children. In addition, First Nations people who became voluntarily enfranchised (or sometimes involuntarily; see, for example, Roosens 1989) gave up their legal Indian status in the process.

[13] It may also have an impact on their acceptance within the First Nations community, as well; this issue, however, was not an element of my research.

Chapter II

My Story: "Coming into the Country"

A. Introduction

Flying into the Yukon for the first time that summer day in August, 1995, I gazed in wonder at the landscape below: craggy mountaintops, deep blue lakes, the sparkle of the Yukon River as it wound its way north from Marsh Lake to Whitehorse, pencil thin spruce standing like sentinels in the evening sun, which cast long shadows on the hillsides and caught the fire of the red metal roofs and log walls of the occasional cabin here and there in the woods.

Coming to the Yukon was like coming home, although I did not know at that time how true that would become. In the intervening years, the southern Yukon has come to mean more to me than just a beautiful place and the people more than just friends whom I worked with; they have each become an integral part of who I am. The irony is that, six months earlier, I scarcely knew where the Yukon was and knew little about the people who lived there; had it not been for a chance encounter with anthropologist Julie Cruikshank in February of 1995, things would undoubtedly have remained that way.

In this chapter, I will outline how and why I came to do research in the Yukon and explain the methodology with which I carried out my work. While my story is not unusual with respect to how an anthropologist arrives at the decision to study a certain culture or people and how she integrates herself into the local community, it is a uniquely personal account of how doing fieldwork became, for me, not merely an academic adventure but a spiritual journey, as well.

Ever since I became a Bahá'í in 1989, I have been fascinated by people's stories of how they found the Bahá'í Faith. Each person's story is unique, and yet, over time, I began to see similarities between different people's experiences. What intrigued me the most, however, was hearing the stories of First Nations believers. While most White Bahá'ís I knew spoke about the basic principles and teachings of the Faith as key to their acceptance of it, it seemed that, for these First Nations Bahá'ís, it was their dreams and traditional prophecies that most influenced them in their decision to join this new religion. I was curious to learn more about their stories and hoped that one day I might be able to record them.

My understanding of anthropology as the study of "other" cultures, however, made me feel that it was somehow inappropriate for me to study my own religion. So for several years I focused on First Nations education. By the time I completed my master's degree, however, I was convinced that there was nothing new I could contribute to that field, so when my graduate committee chairman, a specialist in the history of First Nations education, left for another university, I decided it was time to find something else to focus on for my dissertation research.

As First Nations religion and history were both interests of mine, I considered doing an oral history of the Indian Shaker Church...but I didn't know any Shakers!

When I confronted my new chairman with my dilemma, he posed an interesting question, "Are there First Nations people in the Bahá'í Faith?"

"Of course," I responded.

"Well, then, why don't you do something with them for your dissertation research?" he suggested.

"I can do that?" I was incredulous. I hadn't even considered the possibility that I might be allowed to do such a thing—study what I'd wanted to do for years anyway? What an idea! The next question was where I would do this research. While I knew a few First Nations Bahá'ís in the Seattle area, I felt that it would not be the best choice to do research in my own local community.

It was at that time, in February of 1995, that I attended a talk given by Dr. Julie Cruikshank of the University of British Columbia. I was eager to speak with her because one of her co-authors for the book *Life Lived Like a Story*, Angela Sidney, was a Bahá'í and had talked about the Faith in her life history. I thought excitedly, perhaps I could interview Mrs. Sidney!

Alas, Dr. Cruikshank informed me, Mrs. Sidney had died several years earlier. I asked her if there were any other First Nations Bahá'ís that she knew of in the Yukon, and told her of my interest in recording stories about First Nations conversions to the Bahá'í Faith.

"Oh, you have to go to the Yukon!" Dr. Cruikshank urged me, and she told me about how some of the First Nations Bahá'ís she knew up there had asked her to do just such a project with them. As she was not a Bahá'í, however, she did not feel comfortable doing this. So Dr. Cruikshank gave me the names of three First Nations women to contact in the Yukon Territory: Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, Ida Calmegane and Clara Schinkel.

As she suggested, I wrote to each one of these women about my interest in doing a research project with the First Nations Bahá'ís in the Yukon. When I had still not received a reply three months later, I concluded that perhaps they were not interested in my doing a project after all. Thus, when I finally did get in touch with Louise Profeit-LeBlanc—the only one for whom I had a telephone number--I was surprised when she said immediately, "I was wondering when you were going to call!" She had been very excited to hear that someone at last wanted to talk with the First Nations Bahá'ís; her letter inviting me to come up to the Yukon had apparently been lost in the mail.

So, less than three weeks later, I was en route to the Yukon Territory, to begin my anthropological adventure. Knowing little about the Yukon except for what I had been able to read in anthropological articles and the book *Coming into the Country* (McPhee 1991 (c1977))—which I later realized was about Alaska, not the Yukon Territory—I was surprised by my first introduction to the area. Fully expecting to fly in on a six-seater prop plane, I suddenly found myself on a jam-packed jet, whisking off to Whitehorse, just a two-and-a-half-hour flight from Vancouver. Far from the small, provincial town I was prepared to see, Whitehorse impressed me with its cosmopolitan sophistication. While the capital "city" of the Yukon boasts no major architectural attractions, it is home to a thriving and diverse cultural community of some 23,000, with people from all walks of life: First Nations people from far-flung rural communities and government officials from Ottawa; artists and health food nuts; miners and college students; tourists and immigrants from Ontario, Newfoundland, Asia and Europe...a veritable melting pot. Having had my expectations immediately blown away, I settled down to discovering my place in the community, especially among the Bahá'ís of Whitehorse, who numbered some 120.

While I had been invited to the Yukon by some of the First Nations Bahá'ís, I was still nervous about whether or not I would be accepted as part of their local community. How would I introduce myself to them? Would they allow me to interview them? The fact that I was a Bahá'í did not necessarily guarantee my acceptance; in the Seattle Bahá'í community, for example, there are many First Nations Bahá'ís who have been greatly hurt by some of the White Bahá'ís, and they are thus very wary of White Bahá'ís in general. Although the Bahá'í Faith teaches that all people are equal in the eyes of God and that we should treat everyone with kindness and love, we, who are all too human, bring our emotional and cultural prejudices with us when we become Bahá'í. Thus, the ideal is seldom reality. As I was to discover later, some of the same problems that First Nations Bahá'ís had noted in the Seattle community, between First Nations and non-Native believers, were also evident in the Yukon Bahá'í community, particularly in the Whitehorse area. The quality of the relationship between the First Nations and non-Native believers among the Yukon Bahá'ís proved to be, in fact, one of the most important factors in shaping the development, growth, and history of the Faith in the southern central Yukon.

Luckily, I was able to overcome some of the social and cultural barriers that existed between many of the First Nations Bahá'ís and others in the Bahá'í community, to make friends with a number of First Nations Bahá'ís, and to enlist their aid in my fieldwork. This is not to suggest, however, that I did not encounter difficulties in my research. For example, while my unique position as a Bahá'í conducting anthropological research within a Bahá'í community was generally an advantage, it also presented a number of dilemmas for me as a researcher. In addition, my identity as a Bahá'í led me to ignore, at least initially, certain types of information that later proved significant, and to make a number of incorrect assumptions about the beliefs and religious practices of some of the First Nations Bahá'ís in the Yukon. In the remainder of this chapter, I will address both the advantages and disadvantages of my Bahá'í identity, and the methodology I used in conducting my research in the Yukon.

B. A Unique Perspective

Being a Bahá'í was, in many ways, a great advantage for me as a researcher working within the Bahá'í community; it is perhaps for this reason that Julie Cruikshank had suggested that I (as opposed to she) take on such a project. One crucial advantage I had as a Bahá'í was my access to certain events that non-Bahá'ís are not normally invited to attend, such as Nineteen Day Feast celebrations and administrative elections. In each Bahá'í community, individuals gather once every nineteen days to read the sacred writings, consult about community and administrative matters, and enjoy each other's fellowship; these meetings are intended for Bahá'ís only. Being able to attend these events was vital, not simply to me as a Bahá'í, but also to my research, for there were some people that I was able to get to know only through Nineteen-Day Feasts. These events were also important in that they enabled me to observe interactions between First Nations and non-Native Bahá'ís who, in some instances, rarely met at all outside of Feast or Holy Day celebrations. Thus, my identity as a Bahá'í was a significant factor in contributing to my understanding of the social and spiritual workings of the Bahá'í community in Whitehorse, where most of the Yukon Bahá'ís reside.

My familiarity with basic Bahá'í beliefs, ceremonies and institutions was an advantage in my research, in that I was aware of the various kinds of issues that the community was addressing, I spoke the same religious "language" as my fellow Bahá'ís, and I already knew what went on at Bahá'í Nineteen-Day Feasts and Holy Day celebrations. Thus, I did not need detailed explanations or interpretations to understand what was happening at those events, or their significance to the community. Similarly, I did not need long explanations from those I interviewed about the background or basic tenets of their religion to understand their experiences.

Ironically, however, my very familiarity with the Bahá'í Faith was also a disadvantage for me in my research. As a Bahá'í, I brought to the Yukon a number of biases about the Faith and about the Bahá'í community that influenced the way I conducted my research and my interpretation of certain events or data.

For example, having become Bahá'í as an adult, I believe that the Bahá'í teachings are "true," at least for myself; thus, I did not always probe deeply into the reasons why some people chose to become Bahá'í. For this reason, I found it surprising, at least at first, that many First Nations people appear to have become Bahá'í without a clear conception of what the Bahá'í beliefs are. Along the same lines, I assumed that most people who are Bahá'í share the same knowledge and understanding I do about the Faith, the significance of Feast and Holy Days, the nature and importance of the Bahá'í administrative order, and the station of the twin prophets, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. As I quickly learned, however, this was not necessarily the case; there were many First Nations Bahá'ís I met, particularly in the more remote villages, who really did not know anything about the Faith and who, in fact, continued to identify themselves more with non-Bahá'ís than with other Bahá'ís. For example, in many of the Bahá'í homes I have been to in the lower forty-eight, one can see ample evidence of the household's religious persuasion: pictures of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í holy shrines in Israel, Bahá'í prayer books and writings, a calligraphy of the "Greatest Name" over the mantle. This picture contrasts greatly with what I saw in the homes of the First Nations Bahá'ís whom I visited in one of the rural communities of the Yukon; here I saw pictures of Christ on the cross, crucifixes and Christian prayers, but no Bahá'í memorabilia. The absence of these items in themselves does not necessarily indicate an individual's ignorance about the Faith. However, these individuals were also unaware of either the significance of the April 21st celebration of Ridvan, where they were to elect their Local Spiritual Assembly each year, or of why they should have a Local Spiritual Assembly at all, and they did not know any Bahá'í prayers; these combined factors led me to conclude that these First Nations Bahá'ís, at least, had little knowledge of the religion to which they were supposed to belong.

My familiarity with Bahá'í events and lingo was also a disadvantage to me in my research in that, initially, I did not question how other Bahá'ís understood the Faith, nor did I consciously observe people's interactions at Feasts and Holy Day celebrations. For example, it was only after several interviews, in which individuals repeatedly mentioned problems between First Nations and non-Native Bahá'ís in the community, that I began to notice who attended Feasts (mostly non-Native believers), how Feasts were organized (people seemed very time conscious), and how non-Native believers talked with or about First Nations Bahá'ís, and vice-versa.

There were a number of instances in which being a Bahá'í posed an interesting dilemma for me as an anthropologist. One issue that came up quite frequently, for example, was the appropriateness of asking for details about people's negative experiences with other Bahá'ís. In virtually every instance, the First Nations Bahá'ís I interviewed commented on the disunity they had felt in the community since the last of the early White Bahá'ís left the community (the Andersons[1] and Reg Wilson, in particular), and on the prejudice they had felt from some of the non-Native Bahá'ís since then. In only a few instances, however, did individuals volunteer specific examples of this negativity. As a researcher, I felt that it was important to get more details about their experiences to see, for example, if they were all remembering the same events and generalizing about them for a whole period of time, or if they each had had different negative experiences. As a Bahá'í, however, I take very seriously the proscription against backbiting, or speaking negatively of others. Thus, I felt it was inappropriate to push people into giving me more information, particularly where they would have had to talk about specific individuals whom I might have known. In fact, I believe that those I interviewed did not share specific negative information for the very reason that backbiting is denounced in the Bahá'í Faith.

Perhaps the biggest dilemma I faced as a Bahá'í doing anthropological research was deciding what to do after I received a letter from one of the Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies of the Yukon telling me that they did not wish me to interview people in their community. Because one of the main jobs of Bahá'ís is to share their Faith with others, and because I knew from Julie Cruikshank that at least some of the Bahá'ís in the Yukon had wanted someone to record their stories for years, I had assumed that other Bahá'ís would be enthusiastic about my research. Indeed, this was the response I got from most of the individuals I approached to interview or to ask for assistance. As a result, when I phoned a Bahá'í in Kluane Landing[2] to ask if she could introduce me to some First Nations believers and she suggested that I write to her Local Spiritual Assembly about what I wanted to do, I had every expectation that they would support my research. I was angry and disappointed, then, when the Assembly denied me permission to interview First Nations Bahá'ís, arguing that my conducting research would actually be detrimental to the local Bahá'í community.

On hearing of this decision, several of my Bahá'í friends in Whitehorse suggested that I just go ahead and call the contacts in Kluane Landing whose names I already had, and interview them. On the one hand, this choice of action did not appear unreasonable; after all, I would not be involving the Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA). On the other hand, however, I felt compelled, as a Bahá'í, to respect the decision of the LSA that I not work in the Kluane Landing community, even though I disagreed with this decision. In the Bahá'í Faith, obedience to the administrative institutions—in particular, the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice—is of paramount importance in maintaining the unity of the believers. While these institutional bodies do make mistakes, it is better for a Bahá'í to respectfully abide by an unpopular decision until the mistake is corrected than to create disharmony in the community by backbiting about or flagrantly ignoring an Assembly's decision. In the long run, while I still was disappointed with the Kluane Landing Assembly's decision, I came to understand and appreciate this perspective.

C. **Methodology**

Before approaching individuals to interview, I had to develop a working relationship with people in the Bahá'í community. In some ways, it was extremely easy for me to fit into the life of the community; by attending every Bahá'í event in Whitehorse and at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute, I got to know many people in the community very quickly. From there, I made a particular effort to spend time with the First Nations believers I met, inviting them to my apartment for meals, calling them on the phone, and visiting them at their homes. In this way, I got to be good friends with a

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[1] See Chapter VI.

[2] A fictitious name.

number of individuals; while I was eventually able to interview virtually all of these people, I rarely asked to interview any of them until we had been acquainted for quite some time, usually a month or more.

This roundabout approach to finding people to interview was frustrating at first. In particular, because I planned to be in the Yukon for only five months, I thought that I had to begin interviewing people very quickly in order to get all the information I needed to write my dissertation; thus I felt that I was accomplishing nothing in the first month-and-a-half I was in Canada. After all, in the three brief weeks I spent in the Yukon in August, 1995, I had been able to interview six people and read an entire manuscript on the history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon! It wasn't until some months into my research that I came to appreciate the fact that I had made such an effort to really get to know people before I interviewed them. In particular, as I already knew their relationships to other Bahá'ís in the community, their degree of participation in local Bahá'í activities, and their personal strengths and interests, I then was able to ask more specific questions and to learn much more from them in their interviews than I would have had I interviewed them early on in our relationship.

In addition to meeting First Nations Bahá'ís through Bahá'í-sponsored events, I was also directed by my First Nations Bahá'í friends to other First Nations believers whom I might interview; in this case, I often asked my friend to introduce me directly to the other person. Not surprisingly, I generally had more success, both in setting up interviews and in getting useful information during interviews, when I was personally introduced to a potential interviewee, than when my first contact was by phone.

At the outset of my research, I had intended to interview a broad range of individuals from throughout the Yukon, focusing particularly on those who had converted to the Bahá'í Faith as youths or adults. A number of factors precluded me from conducting my research as I had initially planned: 1) the enormous distances between communities in the Yukon Territory; 2) the fact that the majority of early Bahá'í converts were deceased; 3) the fact that many of the First Nations people listed on the Yukon Bahá'í roles were untraceable (i.e., they had no current address or telephone number); 4) the fact that the majority of the Bahá'ís whom I met were female and belonged to the same extended family; and 5) the fact that in one town, at least, the local Bahá'í administrative order did not wish me to conduct research in their community.

Even after my first trip to the Yukon, I was only vaguely aware of the vast size of the Territory, and thus had the grandiose idea of interviewing individuals from all different parts of the Yukon: Old Crow, Dawson City, Pelly and Stewart Crossings, Faro and Mayo, Carmacks, Haines Junction, Whitehorse, Tagish and Carcross, Teslin and Watson Lake (see Figure 1). It was only after I drove from Seattle to Whitehorse, in March of 1996, that I realized how great, in fact, the distances were between these various communities, and how difficult it might be for me to spend any significant amount of time with people in the communities more than two or three hours from Whitehorse, where I had rented an apartment for the duration of my stay. The Yukon Territory is roughly one-third the size of Alaska (536,324 sq. km or 207,076 sq. mi), with a population of approximately 33,000, the majority living in the southern Yukon, around Whitehorse.

My initial aim in going to the Yukon was to record the experiences of those First Nations people who had converted to the Bahá'í Faith as youths or adults, as opposed to those who had been raised as Bahá'ís. I was particularly interested in discovering 1) why they had decided to convert in the first place; 2) if they were still Bahá'í, what had enabled them to remain committed to the Faith; and 3) if they were no longer Bahá'ís, why they had left. My research aims, as invariably happens during fieldwork, subsequently changed to focus on recording the oral history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon Territory and the experiences of the First Nations believers in general in the southern central Yukon Bahá'í community. Why this shift in focus?

During my first visit to the Yukon, I spent a number of days reading an unpublished manuscript written by Joan and Ted Anderson, the first Bahá'ís to have settled in the Yukon, about the early history of the Faith in the Territory. According to them, there had been literally hundreds declarations in the 1960s and early 1970s. From their records, it appeared that the majority of these converts had been First Nations or of First Nations descent; thus, I assumed I would have little difficulty in finding First Nations Bahá'í converts to interview, who were still alive and active in the Faith. Of those who had left the Faith, I expected that a good number were still in contact with individuals in the Bahá'í community, and that I might be able to interview some of them, as well. Both my assumptions turned out to be incorrect. In the first instance, it turned out that the majority of First Nations converts to the Faith, at least in the 1960s, had been elders when they became Bahá'ís; by 1996, most of these individuals had long since died. Of those younger people who joined the Faith in the 1960s, the majority of them belonged to the same extended Tagish-Tlingit family. As I will discuss elsewhere, this fact appears to have influenced both which individuals and groups decided to convert to the Faith and, ultimately, who remained Bahá'í and who did not.

With respect to those who had left the Faith, I had some difficulty locating individuals to interview. In some cases, this was because the Bahá'ís were no longer in contact with or did not keep records on those who had left, so no one knew whom I should speak with; in other cases, this was because the ex-converts themselves wanted nothing to do with the Bahá'í community and declined to speak with me. In my efforts to interview former Bahá'ís, however, I discovered that, in many instances, converts had not so much consciously decided to leave the Faith, as they had never really been incorporated into the greater Bahá'í community, and had thus simply "slipped through the cracks." For example, one elderly woman I spoke with from the village of Old Crow told me that she had become a Bahá'í (most likely in the early 1970s), but that the

Bahá'ís "never came back" to teach the new converts more about the Faith. Because she wanted to belong to a spiritual community, she eventually returned to her old faith, the Anglican Church, in which she is now a lay minister. Apparently, this kind of pattern, of brief visits by Bahá'ís to isolated communities where large numbers of First Nations people converted and then were left alone for years afterwards, was fairly common in Bahá'í teaching and mass conversions in Alaska and the Yukon in the 1970s (personal conversations with Bahá'ís in Alaska and Yukon Territory).

I had great difficulty in speaking with individuals who had consciously decided to leave the Faith and join another church; the majority of these people had apparently become Pentecostals and actively avoided contact with the remaining Bahá'ís. I was, in fact, able to speak with only one of these people personally, and she claimed to have no knowledge of anything to do with the Faith, even though a number of Bahá'ís remembered a time when she, her husband, and her husband's parents were frequent visitors to the Bahá'í summer schools at Jackson Lake in the 1960s. Why did this woman and others like her become Pentecostal? According to some Bahá'ís, it may have been because the Pentecostal Churches "always had something going on" for people to go to, just as the early Bahá'í community always had a constant calendar of social activities, firesides, prayer meetings, and summer and winter schools for people to attend. Interestingly, the attraction of many First Nations Bahá'ís to the Pentecostal Churches appears to have started around the time that Ted and Joan Anderson and the Reg Wilsons left the Yukon. After these two families left, many First Nations Bahá'ís informed me, a lot of the activities that used to attract many of the First Nations people, such as the schools and workshops at Jackson Lake, stopped or were moved from individual homes into more impersonal, public places, such as rented meeting halls. This change was disturbing even to those who remained in the Faith, so it may also have had an impact on others in their decision to leave the Bahá'í Faith.

Given these obstacles, and the fact that many First Nations people currently in the Yukon Bahá'í community had been raised in the Faith, rather than converted, I decided to include their perspectives and experiences in my research, in addition to those of their parents and grandparents who had converted. Not surprisingly, I believe that by interviewing individuals in both of these groups, I was able to develop a much deeper understanding of how First Nations Bahá'ís in the southern central Yukon experience their faith and how they perceive their roles, both in the Bahá'í community (vis-à-vis White Bahá'ís) and in the greater First Nations and Yukon communities (vis-à-vis non-Bahá'ís, both First Nations and White).

In the end, my interview sample (those with whom I had formal interviews, either tape-recorded or not) was divided roughly in half between those people who had converted to the Bahá'í Faith and those who had been raised in the Faith, and included mostly women and mostly young-to-middle-aged adults. The majority of individuals interviewed were from the Whitehorse, Carcross and Tagish areas and were members of the Johns family, the large extended family mentioned above.

These formal interviews were open-ended in nature, in that I had a number of topics I wanted to discuss with each individual, but I did not have any standardized questions that I asked of each person I interviewed. At the outset of my research, I did plan to ask each individual about a number of topics in addition to their experiences in the Bahá'í Faith: for example, his or her educational background, occupation, age, and marital status. I intended to use this kind of information to analyze my research findings, to see, for example, if people of similar backgrounds corresponded in how or why they became Bahá'í, or with why they remained in or left the Faith. As it happened, however, I chose not to ask these kinds of questions, primarily because one of my interviewees told me early on that these questions were not appropriate or important to the First Nations people she knew in the Yukon. Instead, I often began an interview by asking the individual to tell me something about his or her background which he or she felt was important for me to know; many people responded by telling me their ethnic background (for example, Tagish or Northern Tutchone) or their clan association (for example, Dakl'aweidi or Deisheetaan). Naturally, of those who had converted to the Faith, I asked how and from whom they had originally heard of the Bahá'í Faith and why they had decided to become Bahá'ís. Of both this group and those raised in the Faith, I also asked each person I interviewed to talk about what being a Bahá'í meant to them, how the Faith had affected their lives, and to share some of their memories of events in their lives as Bahá'ís and in the Yukon Bahá'í community in general. Other topics included the relationship between First Nations cultures and the Faith, racism in the Yukon and within the Bahá'í community, and anything else that the individual being interviewed felt was important to discuss.

In all, I recorded interviews with 21 First Nations people, sometimes more than once, for a total of approximately 31 tape hours, and personally transcribed all but two of these tapes in their entirety. Of the two remaining tapes, one was of an individual who had great difficulty speaking clearly due to an illness, and I transcribed as much of this tape as possible; the other tape was of an individual who spent the majority of the interview talking about something completely unrelated to religion or the Bahá'í Faith, and I transcribed only those segments of the tape which related directly or indirectly to the topic. While I edited certain linguistic elements out of each transcript (for example, uh's, um's, and false starts), I retained the essential text, allowing each individual whom I interviewed the opportunity to edit his or her own transcript(s) as he or she chose. Some individuals gave permission for me to use the transcript as-is, while others made minor corrections or additions to their transcripts, and still others requested more substantial revisions; for the most part, these changes were grammatical in nature.

In compiling information for this dissertation, I consulted several types of sources in addition to interviews with First Nations Bahá'ís. Foremost were my personal observations and participation in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community. In addition, I did archival research at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute, located on Lake LaBerge, north of Whitehorse; at the Yukon Archives in Whitehorse; and at the home of the Andersons (the first Bahá'ís in the Yukon) in Red Deer, Alberta, where I found a number of tape recordings of some of the early First Nations Bahá'ís who are now deceased. Issues of the *Whitehorse Star*, other Yukon newspapers, and the *Canadian Bahá'í News* from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s provided me with both an overview of the political, economic and social climate of the Yukon, and the Canadian Bahá'í community during the time when the Faith first took hold in the Yukon, and with historical information about the Faith itself in the Yukon: the foundation of the first Local Spiritual Assemblies, announcements of important Bahá'í visitors to the Yukon and of Bahá'í weddings, funerals, etc.. Anglican Church records, at the Yukon Archives, also provided a glimpse into the attitudes of Yukon Christians towards the development of the Faith in the Territory (the Anglican Church being dominant in the Yukon and having the best records). Personal records, such as excerpts from Joan Anderson's diary (included in the unpublished manuscript *Yukon Golden Hearts Discovered*) and official Bahá'í records, such as LSA minutes and annual reports, rounded out the archival materials used in my research. Subsequently, in writing the dissertation, I found it expedient to interview some key non-Native Bahá'ís about the history of the Faith in the Yukon; the information from these interviews, however, represents only a very small portion of the interview material used in this dissertation, and thus is not counted as part of the overall interview sample above.

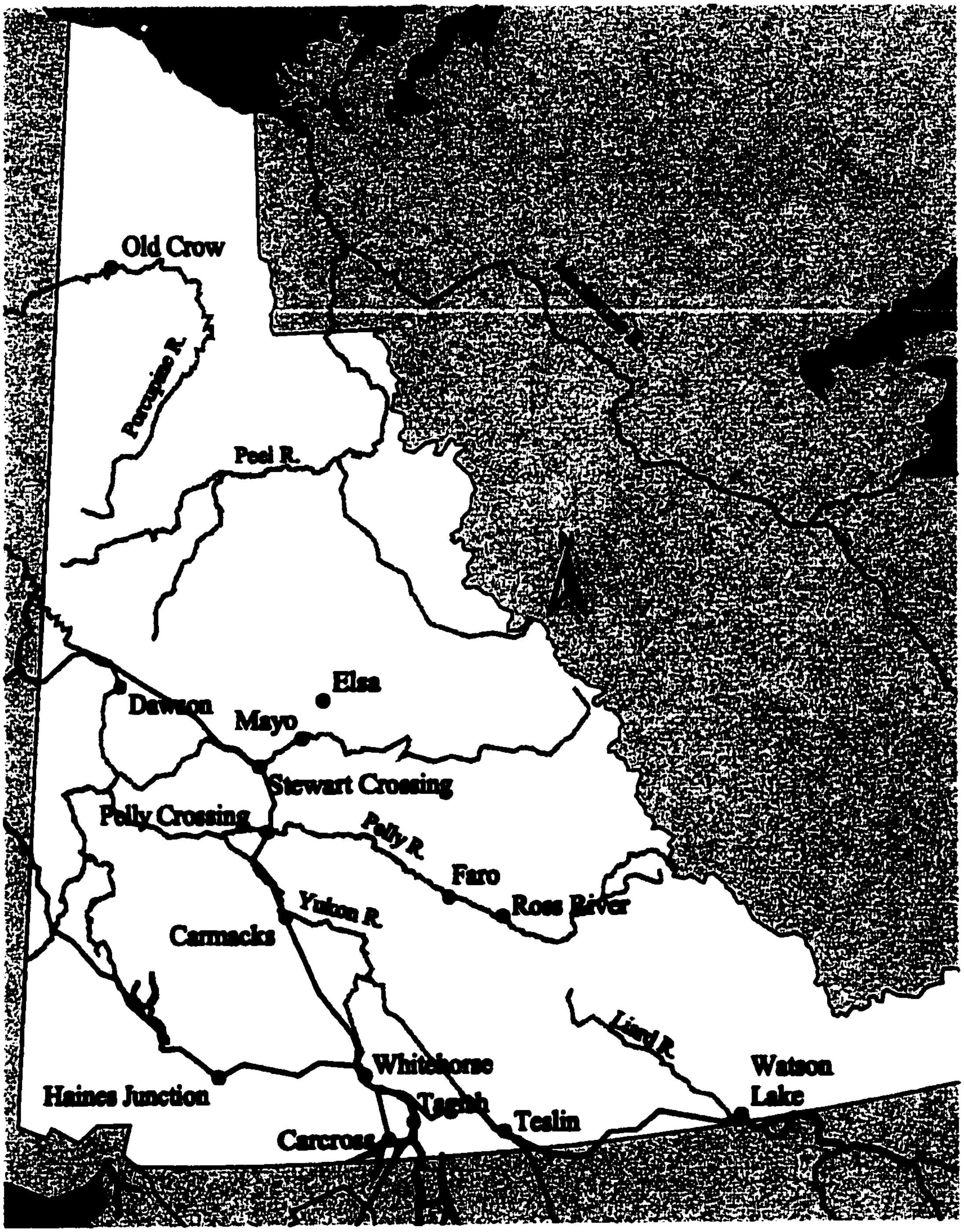
Old Crow
Porcupine R.
Peel R.
Elsa
Dawson
Mayo
Stewart Crossing
Pelly Crossing
Pelly R.
Faro
Ross River
Yukon R.
Carmacks
Liard R.
Watson Lake
Whitehorse
Haines Junction
Tagish
Teslin
Carcross

Figure 1. Map of the Yukon Territory

Map based on data from *Digital Chart of the World*

(Environmental Systems Research Institute 1992)

Chapter III

An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith

This chapter provides an overview of the Bahá'í Faith, in order give the reader a better understanding of this religion and why it has appealed to indigenous people, particularly those with whom I worked. The three topics to be considered here are 1) the origins of the Bahá'í religion, its basic teachings, rituals, and administrative structure; 2) how Bahá'ís share their religion with others, and statistics concerning the growth of the religion among indigenous people in particular; and 3) the significance of the Bahá'í message for indigenous people.

The Bahá'í Faith had its origins only a little more than 150 years ago, yet today it is considered one of the world's major independent religions (Cole 1998a: 14). For example, the Bahá'í religion is second only to Christianity in its geographical distribution, having established communities in 221 sovereign countries and dependent territories, and boasts a current membership of more than 5 million[1] worldwide (BIC 1998; see also Barrett and Johnson 2000: 292; MacEoin 1994: xv).

Despite its widespread distribution, however, and the tremendous number of new adherents it has gained in the last forty years, the Bahá'í Faith has received little scholarly attention. One individual (MacEoin 1994: 2) has suggested that the lack of scholarly interest in this field stems from the "distancing of Baha'ism from its Islamic origins and the missionary zeal with which it has been presented in the West" since the early 20th century. Much of the scholarly work currently available about the Bahá'í Faith has been written by members of that religious community and has focused on issues of little relevance to this dissertation, or has been directed towards a Bahá'í audience. In recent years, however, a handful of scholars have given serious study to this field, focusing particularly on the early development of the Bahá'í Faith and its 19th century antecedent, the Bábi movement (see, for example, Cole 1998a; MacEoin 1994; van den Hoonaard 1996). To the extent possible, I have tried to draw on these sources in my discussion of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as on the more readily available Bahá'í literature.

A. Bahá'í Origins, Teachings, and Administration

One of the principle teachings of the Bahá'í Faith is that there is only one God and that all of the world's religions come from God. These include not only the major religions, such as Christianity and Islám, but also the religious traditions of indigenous people throughout the world. Throughout the ages, God has sent divine messengers, or "Manifestations" to educate and guide mankind. While each Manifestation[2] reveals social laws and teachings according to the time and place in which He (or She) lives, their essential message, Bahá'ís believe, remains the same: that of promoting harmony between people and of cultivating mankind's spiritual nature. From a Bahá'í perspective, God's purpose in revealing Himself to humanity, through His Manifestations, has been to "prepare the way for a single, global and ever-advancing civilization" (IBC 1992: 33). God's messenger for this day, Bahá'ís believe, is Bahá'u'lláh, who lived and died a little over a century ago.

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[1] The only source of Bahá'í statistics that I could find that were not self-generated were those of the *Britannica Book of the Year* (see Barrett and Johnson 2000: 292), which estimated the 1999 international Bahá'í population at almost 7 million. I have chosen to use the more conservative figure here.

The Bahá'í Faith, which has been described as both a millenarian and a rational-legalistic movement, had its origins in the Bábi movement of 19th century Persia (see, for example, Cole 1998a: 194; MacEoin 1994: xv). The Bábi movement began in 1844 when a young merchant by the name of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, better known as the Báb (meaning "the Gate" of God), declared himself to be the Twelfth Imám, whose return had been eagerly awaited by Shi'ite Muslims since His disappearance in the 9th century (Smith 1998; see also Cole 1998a: 26). The Báb preached social and religious reform, regaling against the unrestricted power of the clergy and the economic oppression of the merchant and artisan classes (Cole 1998a: 26). In his holy book, the Bayán, the Báb envisioned a new society that would stress "a high moral standard" and that would allow greater freedom for women; his principle teaching, however, was that he had come to prepare the way for an even greater prophet, *Man yuzhiruhu Alláh* ("He whom God shall make manifest"), who would "usher in the age of universal peace promised in every world religion" (NSA-USA 1997: 16; see also Cole 1998a: 26).

The Báb attracted a great many followers throughout Persia during his six-year ministry (see, for example, Smith 1998). Both his popularity and his teachings, however, were perceived by religious and government leaders as a serious threat to their own power and prestige (NSA-USA 1997: 16). In an effort to quell the growing Bábi movement, the Muslim clergy, with the backing of the government, initiated a veritable reign of terror against the Báb and his followers; over twenty thousand of them were martyred—often in gruesome ways—and the Báb himself was executed in 1850 (Cole 1998a: 28; see also Gouvion and Jouvion 1993: 44).

Among the Báb's most prominent supporters, and one of the first to embrace his teachings, was a Persian nobleman named Mirzá Husayn-'Ali, better known in the Bahá'í world as Bahá'u'lláh (meaning "the Glory of God"). Born in 1817, Bahá'u'lláh was known from childhood as a kind and generous person who demonstrated an "extraordinary knowledge and wisdom," despite his lack of formal schooling (NSA-USA 1995: 17; see also Gouvion and Jouvion 1993: 45). As an adult, he renounced a future in politics to dedicate his energy and money to helping others, earning him the name "Father of the Poor" (IBC 1992: 18).

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[2] "Manifestation" is a term commonly used by Bahá'ís to refer to the prophets or messengers of God.

Bahá'u'lláh's life of privilege ended when he joined the new Bábi movement, however. While authorities were prevented from executing him because of his noble status and outstanding personal reputation among members of the royal court, he was stripped of his possessions and privileges. In 1852, following a bungled attempt on the part of some misguided Bábis to assassinate the Sháh, Bahá'u'lláh, along with many other Bábis, was arrested and imprisoned for four months in the infamous "Black Pit" of Teheran, a filthy, windowless dungeon (Gouvion and Jouvion 1993: 50). It was during this time that he received a revelation and became aware of his identity as the promised one whom the Báb had foretold (see Cole 1998a: 26-29).

Upon his release from prison in 1853, Bahá'u'lláh, his family and many of his closest associates were exiled from Persia, to Baghdád in the Ottoman Empire. Authorities hoped that by removing Bahá'u'lláh from Persia, they would be able to dispel any further interest in the Bábi movement or in the growing popularity of Bahá'u'lláh; at this point, while he had not yet revealed his identity as a prophet, Bahá'u'lláh was already viewed by many of the remaining Bábis as the next leader of their movement (Faizi 1989: 10-11; see also Gouvion and Jouvion 1993: 51). Contrary to expectations, however, Bahá'u'lláh soon gained a devoted following among the people of Baghdád, and the Bábi movement continued to attract new adherents in Iran, much to the chagrin of the Muslim and Persian authorities (Cole 1998a: 28; Gouvion and Jouvion 1993: 53, 61). Thus, at the urging of the Persian government, the Ottoman Sultán decided to banish Bahá'u'lláh still further, to Constantinople (now Istanbul). It was in the days preceding his departure from Baghdád that Bahá'u'lláh announced to his closest followers that he was the Manifestation whose advent they had anticipated.

Bahá'u'lláh was permitted to stay in Constantinople for only a few months, however, before he and his companions were again removed to Adrianople, where they remained for almost five years. It was here that Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be *Man yuzhiruhu Alláh*, and an independent prophet, became known to the greater Bábi community (Cole 1998a: 29). Bahá'u'lláh's announcement greatly angered his half-brother, Subh-i-Azal, who felt himself to be the rightful leader of the Bábi community, and who tried to have Bahá'u'lláh assassinated (Cole 1998a: 29). Perhaps in part because of Bahá'u'lláh's greater charisma and respect in the Bábi community, however, and because they were expecting the appearance of *Man yuzhiruhu Alláh*, the majority of Iranian Bábis accepted as legitimate Bahá'u'lláh's leadership and his claim to a new revelation, leaving Subh-i-Azal with only a handful of followers (Smith 1998; see also Cole 1998a: 29).

By 1868, Bahá'u'lláh's increasing influence and popularity among the Iranian Bábis—who, as followers of Bahá, had begun to call themselves Bahá'ís—had become of great concern to the Persian and local Muslim authorities. At their urging, the Sultán once more banished Bahá'u'lláh, this time to Akka, a prison-city in Palestine, while Subh-i-Azal and his followers were exiled to Cyprus (Cole 1998a: 29). Of this "Most Great Prison," as Akka is called by Bahá'ís, it has been said that the air was "so foul that overflying birds would fall dead out of the sky" (IBC 1992: 23). It was assumed that Bahá'u'lláh and, thus, his fledgling religion, would die here, as few survived in such a miserable place. Yet it was at this very place that Bahá'u'lláh wrote his most important works, outlining the laws and principles of the new Bahá'í religion and laying the groundwork for future Bahá'í administration.

Despite the animosity of the Muslim clergy and others towards his teachings, Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual leadership continued to attract respect and admiration even from those in authority; eventually, because of his esteemed reputation, he and his followers were allowed to take up residence outside the prison walls of Akka, in an abandoned mansion (Gouvion and Jouvion 1993: 63-64). It is here that Bahá'u'lláh died, after more than forty years of exile and imprisonment, in 1892.

Thus ended the revelatory age of the Bahá'í Faith. As Berger (in Smith 1998) has suggested, however, the period of charismatic leadership for this new religion continued with the appointment of Bahá'u'lláh's son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as his successor. To avoid divisions among his followers, Bahá'u'lláh had instructed the Bahá'ís to turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for spiritual leadership after his death, and to rely on him as the sole interpreter of his father's teachings and innumerable writings. From Berger's (in Smith 1988) perspective, however, it was not 'Abdu'l-Bahá's official appointment as Bahá'u'lláh's successor that made him an effective leader of the Bahá'í community, but his personal charisma. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's designation by Bahá'u'lláh as the "perfect exemplar" of his father's teachings gave him an authority that appeared, while not quite divine, divinely inspired. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's charisma—most evident through his loving personality—and his support of various progressive ideals no doubt helped to make Bahá'u'lláh's message attractive to Westerners (Stockman 1995). Under his guidance, for example, the Bahá'í religion was finally able to spread beyond the middle east, particularly to Europe and North America; his 1912 visit to Canada and the United States, for example, attracted much public attention and "greatly stimulated the spread of the Bahá'í Faith in those two countries" (IBC 1992: 52).

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued the charismatic nature of leadership of the Bahá'í community, he also began a process of routinization through his clarification and codification of many of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, who distilled Bahá'u'lláh's essential teachings into what Bahá'ís today refer to as the "twelve principles" of the Faith (van den Hoonaard 1996: 11). These principles include: the recognition of the oneness of mankind; the need for individual investigation of truth (since the Bahá'í Faith has no clergy); the essential harmony between science and religion; the equality of men and women; the elimination of all forms of prejudice; universal compulsory education; the elimination of extreme wealth and poverty; the development of a universal auxiliary language; and the promulgation of world peace upheld by an international democratically elected government. As noted above, these principles appealed greatly to liberal North Americans at the turn of the century, particularly those involved in progressive philosophical movements, such as the New Thought, Theosophist, and Unitarian movements (van den Hoonaard 1996; Stockman 1995; for a personal account of one Unitarian minister's acceptance of the Bahá'í message, see Ives 1967). 'Abdu'l-Bahá also introduced, through a series of letters addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America, a plan for the systematic propagation and expansion of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world[3] (Smith 2000: 331-332).

At his death, 'Abdu'l-Bahá named his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as his successor and "Guardian" of the Faith. In this capacity, Shoghi Effendi served as the authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í writings, many of which he translated into English. Although his leadership retained some elements of charisma, this was apparently more a function of his unique office than of personal charisma (Berger, in Smith 1998). In general, under Shoghi Effendi's guidance, the Baha'i Faith became a much more rationalized and legalistic system than it had been under 'Abdu'l-Bahá, concerned with a deliberate plan of global expansion, the codification of laws, and the development of an integrated and organized administrative structure (Smith 1998). For example, it was the Guardian who expanded upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Plan" system, designating specific goals for growth and development to be achieved within a certain time frame (for an in-depth look at the Bahá'í "Plan" system, see Thomas 1999). The Ten Year Crusade, inaugurated in 1953, was perhaps the most historically significant of these Plans, in that it prompted the first great wave of Bahá'í lay missionaries—called "pioneers"—from North America to settle and teach Bahá'u'lláh's message in some of the most remote places on earth.[4] It was during this time period that the Bahá'í Faith became truly global in nature.[5]

Shoghi Effendi also developed guidelines for the systematic formation and functioning of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, which—along with the as-yet unformed Universal House of Justice—was to provide the administrative foundation for the eventual establishment of Bahá'u'lláh's "New World Order" (see, for example, Smith 1998). To assist him in developing this new administrative order, the Guardian appointed a number of prominent and well-respected Bahá'ís to the position of "Hands of the Cause of God," whose role was to serve, protect, and teach the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world. Following Shoghi Effendi's death in 1957, it was these individuals who guided the Bahá'í community until the election in 1963 of the first Universal

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[3] These letters were later gathered in a compilation called the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* ('Abdu'l-Bahá c. 1977).

[4] Two of these missionaries, Ted and Joan Anderson, were to settle in the Yukon Territory, Canada.

[5] Global in geographical distribution if not in number.

House of Justice, which today provides spiritual leadership to the Bahá'í community at the international level.

The Universal House of Justice, located at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, consists of nine members elected every five years by the membership of each country's[6] Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly (NSA). These NSA's, in turn, are nine-member bodies elected at an annual national convention by delegates who are, themselves, elected each year by Bahá'ís at local conventions around the country. Finally, at the local level, a nine-member Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) is elected each year in any town or region where there are nine or more adult Bahá'ís. Bahá'í elections at all levels are conducted without nominations or campaigning of any kind; rather, individuals are encouraged to pray for guidance in selecting those candidates who best exemplify Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. This method is intended to avoid the divisiveness that partisan politics might bring to the Bahá'í community.[7]

Like the Universal House of Justice, both individual LSA's and NSA's are intended to provide spiritual and administrative guidance to Bahá'ís within their jurisdiction. The LSA also supervises a variety of activities in Bahá'í community life, from marriage, divorce, and funeral services, to the observance of holy days and the administration of the Nineteen-Day Feast, which is the foundation of Bahá'í community life. While these Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice themselves are considered divine institutions by Bahá'ís, however, those serving on them do not have any special rank or authority as individuals, and there is no concept of an educated clergy in the Bahá'í Faith.

Given that the concept of "unity" is promoted as an important Bahá'í principle, it is not surprising to find that Assemblies are exhorted to make decisions and act upon them in unanimity.[8] This does not mean that differing views are not allowed; indeed, Assembly members are encouraged to freely share their ideas with the group while they are consulting on a matter, and to listen without prejudice to the ideas of others, in the belief that through such consultation, the "right" way may be made known. It is considered inappropriate, however, for individuals to "insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Effendi 1968: 22-23). Thus, once a decision is made, whether by unanimous or majority vote, Bahá'ís on both the Assembly and in the larger community are expected to support the Assembly's decision, whether they agree with it or not.

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[6] For practical purposes some geographically isolated Bahá'í communities, although non independent countries, elect their own "National" Spiritual Assemblies (Alaska is one such example).

[7] Not all agree with the official view that such election methods necessarily promote "democratic" and non-partisan behavior; for a different perspective, see Cole 1998b (Cole is a former Bahá'í).

[8] It is, in fact, this principle of unity that is supposed to guide all Bahá'ís in their interactions with others. From a Bahá'í perspective, this concept implies, first, that recognition and respect be shown to *all* individuals

This does not imply that the Assembly is infallible, nor that individual Bahá'ís have no recourse; if a decision is felt to be unjust, it may be appealed to the next administrative level. For example, if the decision was made by the LSA, it may be appealed to the NSA. Bahá'ís are strongly discouraged, however, from *publicly* criticizing an Assembly's decision, for to do so, it is believed, would undermine both the authority of the Assembly and the unity of the Bahá'í community.[9] If an Assembly has made a poor decision, Shoghi Effendi (in NSA-US 1989: section 4.8) has asserted, this fact will eventually become evident to the Assembly; such a decision, it is believed, can be much more easily corrected than disunity brought on by negative criticism.

Having, thus, addressed the history, administration, and some of the basic teachings of the Faith, what can be said about day-to-day Bahá'í life? According to MacEoin (1994: 68), the Bahá'í religion possesses "a high ritual content, almost all of it of a prescriptive nature," yet compared to other world religions, the Bahá'í religion—at least as it is practiced in the West—appears almost devoid of ceremony.[10] There are, however, some clearly identifiable practices that are observed both by the community as a whole and by individual Bahá'ís, some of which have already been noted. For the purposes of this discussion, however, I will address only those that are directly relevant to my dissertation analysis.

As previously mentioned, the foundation of Bahá'í community life is the Nineteen-Day Feast, which one might equate with Christian Sunday worship services. In the Bahá'í calendar, the year is divided into nineteen months of nineteen days each, with an "extra" four or five day period (called "Ayyam-i-ha") devoted to hospitality, charitable works, and gift-giving. At the beginning of each month—every nineteen days—Bahá'ís come together as a community to observe the Nineteen-Day Feast. The purpose of the Nineteen-Day Feast is thus: "so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love...The object is concord, that through

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and, second, that individuals should refrain from divisive and contentious behavior, such as backbiting or quarrelling, which might undermine good will and affection between people, be they Bahá'í or not.

[9] As I shall address in Chapter IV, complying with one Assembly's decision became an issue for me (as a Bahá'í) during my research. While this was not the case for me, one of the negative effects of criticizing or disobeying the Bahá'í administrative order is the removal of one's administrative rights. Such action bars an individual from participating in Bahá'í-only activities, such as Feasts and elections, and from the right to have a Bahá'í wedding or funeral. These rights may be reinstated once an individual is willing to comply with Bahá'í law or to desist from criticizing the administrative order. A more extreme punishment, for those who publicly deny the authority of any branch of the Bahá'í administrative order, is to be declared a covenant breaker. In such a situation, to allow such individuals to remain within the Bahá'í community would seriously undermine the unity and strength of the Faith in that area, as has happened in the past. Thus, such individuals are shunned by the Bahá'í community, because they have violated Bahá'u'lláh's covenant by disobeying His appointed or elected successors (which include both the Universal House of Justice and the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies).

[10] As MacEoin (1994) has pointed out, Western Bahá'ís tend to be unaware of the rich potential for ritual that lies within their religion, since the much of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings remain untranslated from the original Persian and Arabic. Iranian Bahá'ís, on the other hand, are more aware of these rituals than their Western counterparts.

this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established" ('Abdu'l-Bahá in NSA-Canada 1984: 42). While there is no particular ceremonial elaboration associated with Feast, every Feast follows the same basic organizational structure, in which members of the community read and discuss the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (as well as the Bible, the Qur'an, and other holy books), consult about administrative and community matters, and socialize with each other.[11]

The Nineteen-Day Feast is not the only communal ritual performance in the Bahá'í Faith, however. There are also a number of Holy Days celebrated throughout the year, including *Naw Ruz* (the Bahá'í New Year, which is observed on March 21st), the festival of *Ridvan*, the anniversaries of the births and deaths of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the "declaration" of the Báb (i.e., when he announced his station as a prophet of God). The most significant of these is the twelve-day festival of Ridvan, the first day of which both commemorates the "declaration" of Bahá'u'lláh, and marks the annual elections for the Local Spiritual Assembly. Although many Bahá'í communities like to read certain passages from the Bahá'í writings about the event or individual's life that is being commemorated, as with the Nineteen-Day Feast, the Holy Day celebrations do not involve any set ceremony. As long as the celebrations are conducted without excessive ritualism, and with reverence and dignity, they may be observed as each community wishes.[12]

In addition to community performance of ritual, there are also a number of private ritual observances which are required of individual Bahá'ís. The most important of these are: daily prayer, reading and meditation on the Bahá'í writings, known as "deepening,"[13] observing the fast (between sunrise and sunset) during the month preceding *Naw Ruz*, and making a pilgrimage, which today is taken to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel. Through these personal rituals, it is believed, the individual Bahá'í may become better able to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to his or her own life, and to attract others to the Faith.

These two goals are rather closely linked, given that there are no trained clergy or paid missionaries in the Bahá'í religion. Thus, the degree to which individual Bahá'ís apply Baha'u'llah's teachings to their lives—for example, in their willingness to recognize and overcome personal prejudices—can greatly affect both the spiritual health of the Bahá'í community and the growth of the Faith. In the southern Yukon, for example, numerous people commented that it was in part the lack of prejudice of the early White Bahá'ís towards First Nations people that attracted them to the Faith. By contrast, when Bahá'ís do not "walk their talk," their behavior can have serious negative consequences, not only for their success in attracting converts, but also for the Bahá'í community. In the Yukon, for example, some individuals have attributed the current lack of participation by some First Nations believers in Bahá'í community activities to the prejudicial or insensitive behavior of a number of White Bahá'ís in the 1970s and 1980s. It is on this note that I shall turn to the next section, which addresses the ways in which Bahá'ís share their religion with others, and how others—particularly indigenous people—have responded to these efforts.

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[11] For a more detailed description of the Nineteen-Day Feast, see Chapter V.

[12] As noted in Chapter VI, however, Bahá'ís from different cultures may have conflicting views on what constitutes a "dignified" and "reverent" celebration.

[13] A more detailed definition of "deepening" would be the process of educating oneself in the history, laws, and administration of the Faith, as well as in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Momen 1989: 68). That this process necessarily implies the ability to read has definite implications for Bahá'ís in non-literate societies, as I shall discuss to some degree in Chapter VI.

B. Teaching the Bahá'í Faith: Methods and Results

As suggested above, one of the most important means of attracting new believers to the Bahá'í Faith is the ability to put ones beliefs into practice—what Bahá'ís sometimes call "living the life." Practically speaking, however, there are about as many ways to teach the Faith as there are Bahá'ís: through newspaper articles and advertisements; radio and television programs; art, music, drama and dance performances; or spontaneous conversations with friends and strangers. Perhaps the most commonly used means by which Bahá'ís share their Faith, however, is through informational meetings called "firesides." These fireside meetings are generally informal social gatherings in Bahá'í homes where "seekers"—i.e., those investigating the Faith—can learn about the religion and ask questions about matters of interest to them. While there is no set form a fireside must take, each one offers the seeker the chance to get to know Bahá'ís individually as friends; it is perhaps this social contact that is most effective about firesides in spreading Bahá'u'lláh's message, because, as with all religions, few conversions occur in social isolation (Stark n.d.).

While Bahá'ís are exhorted to teach their religion, the Bahá'í writings stress some differences between how members of other faiths have tended to spread their religions, and how Bahá'ís should spread theirs. For instance, Bahá'ís are forbidden to impose their religion on others, either through violence or through any other coercive means (see, for example, Hornby 1994: 593). Proselytizing, in that it is viewed as applying psychological pressure or material benefits to induce conversion, is also prohibited (NSA-USA 1989: section 7.7). Bahá'ís are prohibited from arguing with anyone about religion; rather, they are encouraged to "[c]onsort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, c 1952: 95; 279).

As with the followers of other religions, Bahá'ís have often served as missionaries—called "pioneers"—to other countries, settling in regions where there are few or no Bahá'ís living, in an effort to share their religion with others. In this way, the Bahá'í Faith has spread to all corners of the globe, from remote villages in the Arctic and Papua New Guinea to large cities in the Americas, Africa and Asia. Unlike many Christian missionaries, however, Bahá'í "pioneers" receive no financial support for their work; rather, they must find employment to support themselves in their new country. Ideally, these Bahá'í missionaries strive to learn the local language and to respect the culture of those whom they hope to teach, rather than to impose their own culture, language and customs on others.[14] Additionally, as with all other Bahá'ís, "pioneers" must obey the laws of the country in which they live; for some, this means that they are forbidden even to speak about their religion, to participate in Bahá'í administration, or to observe the Bahá'í calendar. In such instances, "living the life" becomes the *only* means by which Bahá'ís may teach.

Despite such restrictions, the Bahá'í Faith seems to have experienced remarkable success in attracting new believers worldwide. For example, since 1963, the Bahá'í Faith has grown from about 400,000 believers to an estimated 5 million worldwide in 1998, a 1,250% increase in 35 years[15] (BIC 1992: 7 and 57; BIC 1998). Likewise, the number of countries or territories which have had National Spiritual Assemblies rose from 12 in 1953, to 56 at the time of the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, to 130 in 1979, 165 in 1992, and 179 as of April 1998; the Faith has also established significant communities in at least 40 additional countries (UHJ1981: 70; BIC 1992: 7; UHJ 1998: 4).

Much of this expansion has occurred in third-world countries such as India (see, for example, Garlington 1998; Cole 1998b: 236). For example, according to Barrett and Johnson (2000), the majority of Bahá'ís (about 70%) now live in Africa and Asia. The Bahá'í communities of Canada and the United States, however, have also experienced considerable growth over the last thirty-five years, albeit to a lesser degree. For example, in 1963 the Bahá'í community numbered approximately 1,500 in Canada and 10,000 in the U.S.[16] (*CBN* #166: 11/63). Today, the Canadian Bahá'í community claims approximately 17,500 members, and the U.S. community more than 141,000[17] (Clarke 1999; Hartman 1999). A good portion of these new adherents, particularly in Canada, have been First Nations people; in 1963, for example, about one-third of those listed on the Canadian Bahá'í membership roles were First Nations (*CBN*, Special Jubilee Edition, 4/63). In the Yukon Territory, where I conducted my research, the ratio of First Nations to non-Native Bahá'ís was even higher; it appears that at least 50 percent of new converts in the early 1960s were First Nations. Even today, this ratio remains higher in the Yukon than elsewhere in Canada (Clarke 1999).

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[14] As I shall discuss elsewhere (in Chapter VI), however, such ideals are not always realized.

[15] The Mormon Church, by comparison, grew from nearly 1.7 million worldwide in 1960 to approximately 4.6 million in 1980, an increase of 274% over two decades (in Stark 1984: 22).

[16] This figure includes only Bahá'ís in the lower forty-eight states; Alaska and Hawaii are considered separate administrative regions.

[17] Barrett and Johnson (2000: 293) estimates the number of Bahá'ís in the U.S. at 682,000.

It is important to recognize, however, that these figures are almost entirely self-generated by the Bahá'í community; it is difficult to find statistics on the Bahá'í Faith other than those produced by Bahá'ís themselves.[18] Moreover, since both the Canadian and U.S. Bahá'í communities include on their membership lists anyone who has ever registered as a Bahá'í and who has not *formally* withdrawn from the Faith (or died),[19] these statistics do not present an accurate view of the current makeup of either community. Nevertheless, because these statistics are based on the number of people who signed Bahá'í declaration cards at one time or another, they *do* give a fairly realistic picture of the number of people who—theoretically, at least—converted to Bahá'í Faith over the years.

The issue of whether or not these converts remained Bahá'ís is an important one and, indeed, it is an issue I shall address later in this dissertation. In the following section, however, what I would like to discuss is what appeal—however lasting or transitory—the Bahá'í Faith has had for converts, and for First Nations converts in particular. What attracts them to this new religion, and what are they invited to endorse by becoming Bahá'í?

C. Bahá'í Appeal and Significance

There are undoubtedly a number of factors that influence whether or not an individual, whether First Nations or not, decides to join a new religion. Some of these have been discussed in Chapter I. In the case of the people with whom I worked, however, I would suggest the following factors are particularly relevant: 1) the degree to which non-Native Bahá'ís live according to the Bahá'í teachings, particularly those relating to the eradication of race prejudice; 2) the fact that the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the validity of other religions, including traditional indigenous religions, as originating from the same source; and 3) the fact that in the Yukon, at least, traditional First Nations worldview and oral tradition, as well as a strong sense of individualism, have always allowed for the incorporation of new ideas, religious or otherwise.

I have already discussed the first factor to some extent, and will go into more depth on it in a subsequent chapter. The other two factors are somewhat intertwined, as illustrated below. As pointed out in Chapter I, the traditional view of religious conversion—which generally holds true for religions such as Christianity and Islám—assumes that the individual must give up his or her original religious beliefs in exchange for another set of beliefs (see for example, Bankston, et.

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[18] Two notable exceptions are the *Britannica Book of the Year* (see Barrett and Johnson 2000) and the *World Christian Encyclopedia* ([1982] in BIC 1992). I do not know, however, the source for their statistics.

[19] In order for an individual to be formally removed from the Bahá'í membership list, he/she must personally notify the Bahá'í community that he/she no longer wishes to be a Bahá'í. Doubtless, many do not bother with this formality.

al. 1981). The Bahá'í teachings challenge that assumption, in that, for most people, becoming Bahá'í does not entail a rejection of one's previous religious beliefs; rather, it reaffirms and builds upon them (see, for example, Stiles 1984; Garlington 1998). While becoming Bahá'í requires the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh as God's messenger for *this* day, it also entails accepting the divine station of earlier prophets and the validity of their teachings and prophecies; thus, one might view the Bahá'í Faith as a "New Testament" predicated on a multiplicity of "Old Testaments" (an analogy I will return to in a subsequent chapter).

This perspective applies not only to major prophets who founded world religions, but to prophets of traditional indigenous societies, as well. For example, among the Athapaskan and Tlingit of the Yukon Territory there was a tradition of shaman-prophets, who would die for a time, travel to the spirit world (or worlds), return with instructions on how to lead a better life, and prophesy about the future. Christian missionaries deemed such prophets charlatans, out to gain power or riches for themselves at the expense of their followers (Cruikshank 1994: 151). From a Bahá'í perspective, however, these individuals might be viewed as serving the same function as the prophets of the Bible, who periodically arose to remind their people of God's social and moral teachings; both are seen as receiving their inspiration from the same source, however differently conceived.

Such functional parallels, between the Bahá'í Faith and existing indigenous cultural or religious concepts, have often been used by Bahá'í missionaries—not unlike their earlier Jesuit counterparts—to present their religion to potential converts (see, for example, Shapiro 1987; Conkling 1974). This teaching tactic has sometimes proved quite successful. For example, in the early 1960s, the Bahá'ís began a teaching project among the scheduled castes of central India, which deliberately drew on "certain Hindu symbols and concepts as means for both delivering and developing their message," with spectacular results (Garlington 1998). Prior to this point, Bahá'í teaching efforts had failed to attract more than a few converts to the Faith; after nearly 100 years, there were still less than 1,000 Bahá'ís in India (Garlington 1998). Within a few short years after this project was begun, however, the number of Bahá'ís in India had grown to over 100,000,[20] the vast majority of whom belonged to these scheduled castes (Garlington 1998).

It appears that one of the most effective means of presenting the Bahá'í teachings in India was through the use of the *bhajan*, a form of devotional song which has traditionally been used in "recounting the glorious deeds of numerous gods, saints and heroes" (Garlington 1998). The Hindu symbol found most often in Bahá'í *bhajans* is that of the *avatar*, which refers to the incarnations of the God Vishnu, including those of Krishna and Buddha (Garlington 1998). In these *bhajans*, "the avatar concept/symbol becomes the Hindu equivalent of the Bahá'í concept/symbol of prophet...and is used interchangeably with them" (Garlington 1998). Since the Bahá'í Faith recognizes Krishna and Buddha as prophets of God, Garlington (1998) asserts, it "should not be surprising, therefore, that their legitimization is continually reaffirmed in the *bhajans*." From a different perspective, however, one might say that these *bhajans* serve not so much to legitimize these earlier prophets, as to legitimize Bahá'u'lláh, in the eyes of new converts, as the most recent *avatar*.

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[20] As with the U.S. and Canadian statistics, there is no way to confirm these numbers; it appears, however, that the Indian National Spiritual Assembly may have had better luck retaining its converts Bahá'ís than has either of the other two National Spiritual Assemblies.

I would suggest that a similar cultural phenomenon holds true for First Nations Bahá'ís of the Yukon. For example, while the perceived parallel between biblical and traditional First Nations prophets may not necessarily be the *reason* for First Nations conversions to the Bahá'í Faith, stories of such prophets have certainly been used by some First Nations Bahá'ís to *validate* their faith, or their understanding of Bahá'í teachings (see, for example, Chapter VII).

This pragmatic use of prophecy narrative is not uncommon among the First Nations people of the Yukon; as Cruikshank (1994: 150, 163) points out, Yukon storytellers often employ such narratives to make sense of contemporary events and experiences. This use of narrative holds true not only for prophecy narratives, but for other, more "secular" narratives, as well; for example, in her life history, Tagish elder Angela Sidney (in Cruikshank et. al. 1990) makes use of innumerable traditional stories to structure and talk about her life experiences. In my own fieldwork, I heard individual First Nations people use other traditional narratives to talk about their understanding of the Bahá'í Faith, which I shall discuss further in Chapter VIII.

That Yukon First Nations people should employ oral narratives in such a manner should not be surprising, considering the adaptive nature of traditional Athapaskan cultures (see, for example, VanStone 1974). In particular, it is the openness of these cultures to new ideas, and their ability to reinterpret these new ideas in light of the old, and the old in light of the new, that has enabled these cultures to survive to the present day (see for example McClellan 1963; VanStone 1974). Thus, it is hardly surprising to find that First Nations Bahá'ís would use oral narratives to justify conversion to their new religion, or to reinterpret these narratives to fit with their new religion. In essence, they are simply continuing an age-old cultural tradition of grafting a new set of ideas onto the old, an approach which, in this case, greatly complements the Bahá'í Faith's view of itself.

Chapter IV

An Ethnographic and Historical Background of the First Nations People of the Southern Yukon

A. Introduction

The Yukon today has a population of roughly 33,000, of which approximately one-quarter are First Nations (PR Services 1997: pullout section; "Umbrella Final Agreement" in DINA 1995: Appendix). Some 100 Yukon First Nations people are Bahá'í,[1] most of whom, it appears, are of Tagish or mixed Tagish heritage (Clarke 1999). The Tagish—more formally known as the Carcross-Tagish First Nation—are one of 14 recognized "bands" or First Nations in the Yukon. In 1997, they numbered more than 600 members; most reside in Whitehorse and the nearby communities of Carcross and Tagish (personal communication, member of Carcross-Tagish First Nation). Because the majority of First Nations Bahá'ís identify themselves as Tagish, I have chosen to focus my ethnographic discussion on the history and culture of this people, so as to provide an overview of the socio-economic and cultural context in which these people converted to the Bahá'í Faith. Because much of the following historical information applies to Yukon First Nations in general, I will not make a distinction between Tagish and other First Nations unless the source cited refers specifically to the Tagish people.

B. Self-Identity

As more than one anthropologist—myself included—has discovered, Yukon First Nations people defy stereotyping and do not fit easily into distinct cultural categories. For example, McClellan (1975: 13-15) noted in her seminal work, *My Old People Say*, that the First Nations people of the southern Yukon did not tend to differentiate themselves along linguistic lines, although there were two distinct language families, Tlingit and Athapaskan, and at least two Athapaskan languages, Tagish and Tutchone, spoken among the various southern groups. This lack of differentiation stems in part from extensive intermarriage and trade between these groups, at least since the mid-19th century. As a result, most First Nations people were multi-lingual by the early part of this century.

As a result, the three southern Yukon groups McClellan discusses—Southern Tutchone, Tagish and Inland Tlingit—share many of the same or similar cultural features such as subsistence traditions, political and social organization, religious beliefs and practices, and stories about people, animals and the land. For instance, among all three groups, there are stories about how Crow[2] created the world, or at least put it in its present-day order (McClellan 1975: 72). Similarly, the Tagish and Inland Tlingit and, to a lesser extent, the Southern Tutchone, share elements of Coastal Tlingit social structure, organized around the clan-sib system. This merging of cultures is especially evident in the fact that the Athapaskan derived Tagish language was essentially replaced in the mid-to-late-19th century by Tlingit as the language of choice for most Tagish. McClellan (1975: 52) hypothesizes that the Inland Tlingit may also, in fact, have once been Athapaskan speakers but adopted Tlingit as their language through intermarriage with their Coastal trading partners; according to the Inland Tlingit, however, they have always spoken Tlingit.

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[1] This number includes only those for whom there are known addresses; the National Bahá'í Centre of Canada counts 80 additional Native members in the Yukon, for whom they do not have addresses.

McClellan (1975:16) also found that the Natives of the southern Yukon tended to identify themselves most often by their sib, clan, or moiety affiliation rather than by the language they spoke, where they were born, or where they lived (see also Cruikshank 1991: 62). Today it is more common for younger individuals, especially, to identify themselves first as Tagish[3] when talking to an outsider, and then as Crow or Wolf, Deisheetaan (Beaver clan) or Dakl'aweidi (Killer Whale clan). Even so, family—to whom one is related and who one's parents are—remains an important means of self-identification among the older Tagish people I worked with.

During one of my first interviews, when I asked the individual about her age, education, and marital status—something I thought would be helpful in analyzing my final research data—she reproached me, telling me that these kinds of questions were of no concern to most First Nations people and that I should be more concerned with who their family and parents are. I came to learn that many Tagish—at least those whom I came to know well—continue to place great emphasis on the traditional relationship between the Wolf and Crow moieties and membership in either the Deisheetaan or Dakl'aweidi clans. This current situation will be discussed in more detail later.

C. Ethnographic Overview

In many respects, the First Nations people of the Yukon today live drastically different lives from those of their ancestors a hundred or more years ago. Yet for many Yukon First Nations people, including many of those with whom I worked on my research, there is a continuity as well, between the economic, political, social and religious beliefs, values and practices of their grandparents and great-grandparents, and their own. This section will discuss the "traditional"

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[2] Crow among interior groups corresponds to Raven among the Coastal groups. Similarly, the moiety designation of Wolf and Crow among interior groups corresponds to the Wolf or Eagle and Raven moieties among the Coastal Tlingit.

[3] Curiously, many of the older Tagish whom I interviewed, as well as their parents, at one time referred to themselves as "Tlingit." This previous self-identification appears to be due to the fact that many were

(i.e., precontact) economy, political and social organization, and religious beliefs and practices of the Tagish, in particular, and how these cultural elements have changed or continued over the years since White contact. As will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, some of these cultural similarities and differences both influenced and were influenced by the development of the Bahá'í Faith among the Tagish, as well as by their particular historical experiences.

The Tagish people originally spoke an Athapaskan language, Tagish, and probably followed social, political and religious customs and beliefs similar to other Athapaskan groups. What this earlier culture might have been like, however, can only be hypothesized, since by the time White observers began to record their encounters with the Tagish in the late 1800s, this group had already adopted the language and many of the political, social and religious customs of their Coastal Tlingit trading partners. By the mid-1940s, when the first ethnographer arrived to work among the Tagish people, even many of these Tlingitized traditions were no longer practiced: "Only the more important values and aspects of the older Yukon cultures" remained alive in the minds of individual elders (McClellan 1975: 8-9). Thus, what will be described as "traditional" precontact Tagish culture here is simply the most recent adaptation of these people to the environment in which they lived before Whites came on the scene. Much of the ethnographic information included here is drawn from Catherine McClellan's research with the Tagish and other southern Yukon groups during the 1940s and 1950s.

Before going further, it is important to note that while the Tagish adopted Tlingit cultural traditions in place of their earlier customs, this does not imply that the Tagish do not have their "own" culture, or that their "original" culture was somehow "weak" and was thus easily replaced by another. Rather, it suggests that the Tagish people, like other Athapaskan groups in North America, have been able to survive under changing and often difficult circumstances by incorporating new ideas, practices and material items that fit their needs and by abandoning ones that no longer seem useful. This ability to adapt is a strength in any culture.

1. *Population, Subsistence and Economy*

While the Tagish, like other indigenous groups throughout North America, suffered a depletion of their numbers through disease epidemics introduced by Europeans,[4] their numbers have probably never been very large, although they are growing (McClellan 1981b: 483). In 1883 a visiting US Army officer estimated the population to be about 50 Tagish, while a geologist

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matrilineal descendants of a Coast Tlingit chief from Angoon (see, for example, Sidney in Cruikshank 1992: 37).

[4] One such epidemic introduced smallpox to the area sometime in the mid-19th century, although the exact date is unknown, possibly 1838 or 1862 (McClellan 1975: 24).

estimated there to be about 15 families in 1887, comprised of about 70 to 80 people[5] (McClellan 1975: 38-39). In 1950 the total population of Carcross (where the majority of Tagish lived) was 112, including Whites, "status"[6] and "non-status" Indians (McClellan 1975: 36). The Department of Indian Affairs reported 111 Tagish in the Carcross band in 1978, although this number did not include the many non-status Tagish living in Carcross, nearby Whitehorse, and elsewhere (McClellan 1981b: 483). By 1986, the number of status Indians in the Carcross-Tagish band had increased to 175, and jumped to 445 by 1994, due in part to the reinstatement of 242 individuals to Indian status under Bill C-31[7] (DINA 1987: 183, and DINA 1995: 13). There are no figures for the current number of non-status Tagish.

One reason for the small number of Tagish in precontact times may have been the constraints of the subarctic climate in which they lived. The area traditionally exploited by the Tagish (see Figure 2), approximately 4,000 square miles, stretches from Marsh Lake and the Teslin River drainage in the north to White Pass and northern Lake Atlin in the south, and includes several large lakes, glacier-fed rivers and mountains (McClellan 1981b: 481). Temperatures range from 60 below Farenheit in the winter to 90 above in the summer, and there is little rain or snowfall in this region (McClellan 1981b: 481). Given the short growing season, plant food was not a large part of the Native diet, although blueberries, cranberries and other such fruits were harvested in the summer and early fall. The bulk of the Native diet was made up of freshwater fish, small game and larger game such as caribou and moose, whose numbers varied from year to year.

By the 1940s, Tagish elders remembered their subsistence only as it existed since the introduction of trapping to their economy in the 19th century. In addition to trapping, their subsistence cycle included seasonal rounds of gathering, hunting, and fishing at different sites around Marsh, Tagish, Bennett, and Nares Lakes and the surrounding mountains. In the early summer, families would gather together along the lakes and rivers to fish, and catch small game and waterfowl; during this time, they often met to trade with Coastal Tlingit who were "eager to exchange Euro-American goods for the winter fur catch" (McClellan 1981b: 483). In late summer, families would break up into smaller groups to gather wild berries and to hunt groundhogs, caribou, moose and sheep in the mountains; the dried meat would then be cached and retrieved later in the winter (McClellan 1981b: 483-484). By December, most families returned to Tagish "where they lived in the two large lineage houses[8] or smaller shelters nearby," but they usually split up once again in mid-winter to get more food and to trap for furs (McClellan 1981b: 483).

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[5] Coates' (1991: 13) projection of a 2:3 mortality ratio for the Yukon Native population encountering virgin-soil epidemics, would put the estimated number of Tagish at pre-contact somewhere between 150 and 240 (based on McClellan's 1883 and 1887 figures).

[6] "Status" refers to those Native people who are legally recognized as such; in the past, they included only those individuals whose fathers were legally Native. Those who had married White men, or who had been born of such a union, or who had become legally "enfranchised" were not counted as Native, and received none of the benefits which status Indians were provided by the government.

[7] It is unlikely that these individuals were all readmitted as members in 1994; one individual, for example, informed me that a substantial number of people, including many members of her own family, were reinstated in 1985. This leads me to conclude that the figure for 1986 may be inaccurate, or may not have included those who had been reinstated in 1985. A good number of those who were reinstated in 1985 were Bahá'í; many of these individuals had earlier lost their Indian status when they married White men, or had become enfranchised and, thus, would have been eligible for reinstatement. I have no figures, however,

This seasonal pattern continued as the primary Native economy into the 1920s; since the 1930s, however, very few have been able to spend a whole winter on the trapline, due to a number of factors, not the least of which was the collapse of the fur market in the 1930s (McClellan 1981b: 484). In addition, as the century progressed, an increasing number of families chose to spend all or part of the year in Carcross so that their children could attend the mission school and still live at home; this limited the amount of time that a family could spend in the yearly round of subsistence activities. The availability of jobs for men to work on the nearby White Pass railway also made a sedentary lifestyle more appealing, or at least more economical, for some families.

In today's context, traditional subsistence activities do continue, but they are on a much smaller scale and are generally scheduled around school or job commitments. In more recent years, educational and employment opportunities have drawn many of the younger people to Whitehorse or "outside" to other parts of Canada. Tagish people today work in a variety of settings, including health and social services, and positions within the band and territorial administrations. Some status members continue to receive assistance from the Carcross-Tagish First Nation office in the form of heating fuel for elders, in-home adult care and other services, and the band also provides housing for many of its members living in Carcross (DINA1995: 14).

2. *Society and Politics*

As with other Athapaskan groups in the Cordillera,[9] it is difficult for anthropologists to reconstruct the social and political patterns of the 19th century Tagish because of the cultural changes that had occurred through their prolonged interaction with the Coastal Tlingit and through White contact (McClellan and Denniston 1981: 383-384). Even so, it is possible to identify a number of salient social and political features that the Tagish shared with other subartic Cordilleran groups.

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regarding exactly how many of those reinstated were Bahá'í, nor if all were reinstated in 1985, or if some were readmitted at a later date.

[8] A Tlingit adoption. Each lineage or clan owned its own "house," in Tagish there was one such house for each of the two lineages, the Dakl'aweidi and the Deisheetaan.

One important feature, also common to Indians of the coast, was the prevalence of matrilineal clans and moieties. Within each of these indigenous groups, one half of its members belonged to one moiety, the Crow (or Raven on the coast) and the other half to its opposite moiety, the Wolf (or Eagle); one's moiety affiliation was inherited through one's mother, as was one's clan and lineage affiliation. Each half had social, economic and religious obligations towards the other. For example, the men of one group always married the women of the other; Crow married Wolf and Wolf married Crow. When a young woman reached puberty, her father's sisters—as members of the opposite moiety—would take care of her during her period of seclusion, and instruct her in her social responsibilities as a woman (McClellan et. al. 1987: 199). At death, the body of the deceased was prepared for burial by members of his or her father's moiety; the following year, members of the deceased person's moiety would then give a potlatch to honor the deceased and to pay the opposite moiety for having fulfilled their obligations to him or her (McClellan et. al. 1987: 213, 215).

Flexibility of the household group was another feature of Yukon Athapaskan social organization. While the nuclear family was significant, a household was generally comprised of an extended family related by blood, as in the case of two adult siblings and their families living together, or by marriage or classificatory kin, as in the case of hunting partners and their families living together (McClellan and Denniston 1981: 384). These individual household groups might split up or come together with other groups depending on people's needs, the time of year, or personal preference. For instance, a number of families might come together to fish in the early summer and break up into smaller groups again to gather berries in late summer. Given the relative scarcity of natural resources in the sub-arctic, such flexibility of household composition was an important means of survival for Native groups. While individual families or clans controlled certain areas or natural resources, however, the concept that land or property might be personally owned was apparently unknown until its introduction by Whites; in general, McClellan (1975: 483) suggests, their attitude towards the land was more one of stewardship than of ownership. Nowhere did there exist "large social units predicated on formal territorial claims" (McClellan and Denniston 1981: 384).

Given the extreme fluidity of Native society, precontact Athapaskan groups did not have a highly formalized system of political leadership and were essentially egalitarian in nature. Leadership was determined primarily by an individual's charisma, oratorical skills, and hunting or shamanistic prowess; when a leader's power declined, so did the number of his followers (McClellan and Denniston 1981: 384-385). Although formal leaders were inevitably men, older women "had a real influence in the traditional culture. They expressed their views both at home

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[9] McClellan (1981b) defines the Cordillera as a "vast mountain-plateau area" running from central British Columbia through southwest Northwest Territories, the interior of the Yukon Territory and into north-central

and in the council meetings, and the headmen listened to their advice" (McClellan et. al. 1987: 226).

The social and political organization of the Tagish and, to a lesser extent, the Southern Tutchone, became somewhat more elaborate than their northern Athapaskan neighbors as a result of Tlingit influence. For instance, the Tagish adopted Tlingit names for their clans and moieties, Tlingit clan crests and houses, and Tlingit ideas of social ranking, which influenced both Tagish political organization and the importance and purposes of the potlatch, among other things.

Among the Tagish, there are two main clans, the Dakl'aweidi (Killer Whale clan) of the Wolf moiety, and the Deisheetaan (Beaver clan) of the Crow moiety. In traditional Coastal Tlingit culture, individual lineages or clans within each moiety were ranked relative to others. The ranking of each lineage or clan depended in part on the ability of its members to accurately recount the stories owned by the lineage or clan—most importantly, those associated with lineage or clan crests—and by validating their ownership of these stories and crests through gift-giving at potlatches (see, for example, Drucker 1965: 56-57). While the Tagish apparently did not rank their clans, it was still considered important for each clan to be able to recount clan and lineage songs and stories, and to validate their ownership of these songs and stories, of the crests related to them, and of various natural resources, through gift-giving and the recitation of clan history.[10]

Under the Tlingit system of ranking, individuals within each clan were ranked according to age, wealth and social status. Each clan had its own leader, generally the eldest ranking man, and chieftainship became inheritable through the matrilineal line (McClellan 1975: 492-493; McClellan et. al. 1987: 180). One's rank and, thus, one's ascendancy to chieftainship, did not depend on birth alone, however. The ritual distribution of wealth through potlatching served to validate and ensure one's rank in the eyes of others and, at least in the case of females, could enable one of lower rank to achieve a higher status[11] (see, for example, McClellan 1975: 495-496 and 1981a: 392; De Laguna 1954: 173). The more one was able to give away, the higher his or her rank in the eyes of others. The amount the host gave to an individual at a potlatch was also a reflection of the recipient's rank; those with higher rank accorded more valuable gifts. As previously noted, among the Tagish, the accumulation of wealth through their participation in the fur trade made the adoption of Tlingit social ranking feasible.

Alaska. "Cordilleran" refers to the culture and peoples that are indigenous to this region.

[10] See Cruikshank et. al. (1990: 136) for an account of one instance in which clan history was important in validating the individual's right to tell a certain story.

[11] Validating or raising one's rank was not the only purpose of potlatching, of course. As suggested above, potlatches also served to commemorate the dead and to strengthen social ties through the reciprocation of gifts to members of the opposite moiety.

Despite the more hierarchical nature of Tlingitized Tagish political leadership, the art of persuasion remained the clan leader's most effective tool in convincing his followers to support a decision or course of action; even here, a chief was never given "clearly defined judicial or punitive power" over others (McClellan 1975: 481). Rather, the job of enforcing proper standards of social and ethical behavior fell not to a chief per se, but to one's clan or moiety members (McClellan 1975: 491). As noted above, leaders were ordinarily men. Even so, at least among the Tlingitized groups of the Southern Yukon, it was not unheard of for a woman to temporarily act as chief of her clan; for example, if there was no sister's son to take over when a chief died, the next oldest sister would take charge "'until her son [was] old enough to take over'" (McClellan 1975: 493).

Native concepts of family, society and politics were disrupted by the introduction of Canadian values through the mission school system and government regulations. For example, there were traditionally strict taboos against speaking directly to any adult clan member—or even moiety member—of the opposite sex, and marriage between members of the same clan or moiety, no matter how physically remote or distantly related, was forbidden (see for example, McClellan et. al. 1987: 203). This system began to break down as more and more Native children enrolled in mission and territorial schools. Forced to speak to each other by their teachers and removed from the social guidance of their families, many Native people wound up marrying against their traditions; Crow married Crow and Wolf married Wolf (personal conversations).

The marriage of many Native women to White men also served to undermine Native society, in that under the Indian Act, such a woman was stripped of her Indian status, as were any subsequent children she might have. This policy, stemming from the Canadian emphasis on patrilineal inheritance, was in direct conflict with traditional Native society, in which inheritance and family identity were passed down from mother to child and from mother's brother to sister's son. In addition, this policy often had an economically deleterious effect on non-status Indians, who simultaneously faced discrimination in mainstream White society and the work place and were denied many of the economic, educational and health benefits afforded status Indians (McClellan et. al. 1987: 103; *WH Star* 6/30/60; see also King 1982 [1967]). It was not until 1985 that the practice of stripping a Native woman of her status upon marriage to a non-Indian was eradicated, and that non-status Indians began to be reinstated as band members (McClellan et. al. 1987: 87; personal communications).

Another example of the way in which Canadian values undermined the traditional Native social order was through the implementation of trap-line regulations in 1950. As noted above, prior to contact, there was no concept of individual ownership of land; resources were communally owned and used by clan members. Under the new trap-line regulations, however, the government required the lines to be registered by individuals. This insistence on private ownership resulted in quarrels between clan and lineage members over who had access to use the trap-line, particularly where the registered trap-line owner did not try to validate his or her claim through traditional gift-giving (McClellan 1975: 485).

European and Canadian concepts of leadership also affected Native political organization. First of all, the idea that leadership of a whole society could be invested in one individual, and that that person could be the spokesperson for everyone, was alien to the Native groups of the Yukon. Nevertheless, it was upon this principle that fur traders, and subsequent missionaries and government agents, acted in their dealings with these groups. More significantly, when it began to consolidate various Native bands onto "reserves" in the early to mid-20th century, Indian Affairs sought to impose Canadian-style government on the bands, with the election or appointment of band councils and chiefs (King 1982 [1967]: 29; Coates 1991: 233-234). Because of their non-indigenous origins, their lack of cultural and social cohesion—given that council members were often members of different cultural groups that had been artificially lumped together as a "band"—and their lack of authority over other band members, these councils were not particularly effective in changing or improving Native social or economic conditions in the Yukon until the 1960s, when they began to organize on a territory-wide scale (Coates 1991: 237; see also King 1982 [1967]). Today, band councils have achieved greater success in securing benefits for their members and have enabled women to become more involved in formal leadership roles, but even so, band politics and the band councils themselves continue to be a source of contention for some Yukon First Nations communities (personal conversations).

As a result of White contact—particularly with Christian missionaries in the residential schools—the use of Native language and the observance of cultural practices such as the potlatch, story-telling, singing, and dancing greatly declined during the period from the early 1950s until the mid-to-late-1970s. Prior to the late 1940s or early 1950s, Coates (1991:227) observes, most Yukon Native children had been raised by their parents or grandparents "and learned, from birth, both their aboriginal language and customs." As the number of children in residential and territorial schools increased in the 1950s, however, "this experience of childhood was lost. Native children learned to speak English in school, and were often punished for speaking their own language [and] Native culture was deprecated" (Coates 1991: 227). Thus, by the 1970s, few young people could speak their language, or had any familiarity with their cultural or spiritual heritage (Coates 1991: 228).

This situation began to change in the mid-1970s, however, as Native organizations such as the Yukon Native Brotherhood and the Council for Yukon Indians began to lobby for land claims and for better social and economic programs for Native people. As public attitudes changed, and as Native groups gained funding to establish educational and cultural programs, Native languages, spiritual views, and cultural practices could then, finally, be expressed more openly. Today, while older people remain the most knowledgeable about traditional story-telling, singing, and dancing, younger people are now encouraged to learn these skills. Among the Tagish, for example, traditional songs and dances are now performed all over North America by the Tagish Nation Dancers, many of whom are young adults.[12] While this group sings most of its songs in Tlingit, however, only a few Tagish elders continue to speak this language.

Although somewhat eroded because of intermarriage with non-Natives, the matrilineal clan and moiety system, and the social obligations that go with it, retains some of its importance in First Nations communities in the Yukon today, though more so for elders than for young people. For example, clan history, or *shagóon*, continues to be an important means of self-identification for the older generation of Tagish people. Older Deisheetaan members, for instance, will proudly recount their lineage history back to its origins in the Tlingit village of Angoon, Alaska (personal conversations; Cruikshank et. al. 1990: 37). Clan and moiety membership also continues to be a vital element of the potlatch, as was made evident to me at the various potlatches I attended in Carcross in September of 1997 and 1998. There, members of each moiety sat in a different place and had different responsibilities from those of the opposite moiety; individuals also displayed clan and moiety crests on their clothing, and at both potlatches host moiety members performed clan songs and dances for their guests.

With respect to the potlatch, I have thus far touched mainly on its social and political aspects, merely alluding to its religious or spiritual importance. In the following section, I will address both this topic and the traditional religious beliefs and practices of southern Yukon people in general. Looking at the Tagish in particular, I will discuss how these beliefs and practices may have been influenced over the years by those of the Tlingit, and by non-Native religions and government policies.

3. Religious Beliefs and Practices

In this discussion, I will define religion minimally as a system of beliefs and practices relating to one's moral or ethical behavior towards others, in both the human and non-human worlds, and mortuary practices, particularly those associated with the potlatch (for a more in-depth definition of religion, see Geertz 1993). According to McClellan and Denniston (1981: 385), neither the 19th century Tagish nor other Cordilleran groups had a dogmatized system of belief, and the way in which an individual chose to act on his or her beliefs was often highly individualized. Nevertheless, these cultural groups shared a number of commonalities in their worldviews and in their religious practices.

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[12] The majority, if not all, of the Tagish Nation Dancers—whether young or old—are Bahá'í.

According to McClellan (1981a: 396), the most basic religious concern of Yukon Natives was maintaining a "proper relationship between human beings and nonhuman spirits," including those which controlled game animals, fish, and the weather. From the Tagish and Inland Tlingit perspective, which was quite similar to that of the Coastal Tlingit, the universe was filled with supernatural power, or *yek*, that was both dangerous to humans and the chief source of help for humans to survive in the natural world (McClellan 1975: 69). *Yek* was at once impersonal and personal, in that individuals could enlist the aid of one or more spirits in their endeavors. Shamans, in particular, relied on their *yek*, or spirit helpers to heal the sick, attract game, or control the weather; a successful shaman ideally had at least eight spirit helpers (McClellan 1975: 69 and 1981b: 490).

Among the three groups of the southern Yukon, the Tagish, Inland Tlingit and Southern Tutchone, the cooperation of such spirits was achieved not only through ritual supplication to a particular spirit but also through the strict observance of various taboos. Oral literature provided an important means for teaching these rituals and taboos, and for illustrating appropriate moral behavior. Both the Tagish and other groups in the Southern Yukon identified two kinds of stories: "old time stories," which refer to events that happened some time in the past, when animals were often indistinguishable from humans, and "true stories," which are about people who are still alive or who died within the more recent past. Both kinds of stories, however, were believed to be "true" and all stories were considered "valid guides to reality" (McClellan 1975: 67).

The Tagish and the Inland Tlingit share with the Coastal Tlingit (see, for example, Swanton 1909: 365-367) the story of *Tl'anaxéedákw*, or Wealth Woman, who will grant wealth and riches to anyone who catches her and seizes her baby; to win her assistance, however, the pursuer must follow a prescribed ritual, or will receive nothing. According to McClellan (1975: 572-573), this ritual includes stripping oneself naked and throwing urine at the woman to seize her child; then one should not relinquish the child until its mother either scratches the seeker's back with her fingernails, or defecates four gold balls. Once the seeker receives his or her scratches or gold balls, he or she must then fast and bathe for eight[13] days in eight ritually prepared pools; if these rituals are followed properly, the scabs from the scratches, or the gold balls, will bring wealth and good luck to the individual and his relatives as long as the lucky items are in their possession.[14] One man of Tagish and Tlingit descent told me that, in the version of the story with which he was familiar, *Tl'anaxéedákw* insults the individual, as well, by naming all of his or her faults; it is listening to these insults and trying to change those negative things about oneself, he says, that also helps one find luck (personal conversation). This story, which will be considered in greater detail in Chapter VIII, is one that some Tagish Bahá'ís continue to find significant, and that personally affected the life of at least one Tagish Bahá'í, Johnny Johns, who, it is said, managed to overtake *Tl'anaxéedákw* as a young man; it is this encounter that some credit for his success as a big-game outfitter (Sidney, in Cruikshank et. al. 1990: 63).

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[13] Or four days (see McClellan 1963)

The story of Skookum Jim's frog helper is also a significant one in Tagish oral literature. According to this story, Skookum Jim once saved a frog that was trapped in a hole, and was later helped by this same frog, first when it healed him of an injury, and then when it directed him towards his source of wealth downstream (personal conversations; Cruikshank 1991: 127). This story is told by many to help explain Skookum Jim's luck in discovering gold, yet it also illustrates how humans should behave towards other creatures, and how people can be rewarded if they are kind to others. Moreover, it has become an important story for some Tagish Bahá'ís, who view it as foreshadowing the later acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith by many of Skookum Jim's relatives and their descendants in Carcross (Johnson et. al., 1998; see Chapter VIII).

Tagish oral literature also contains lessons about what happens when one offends a spirit or violates a taboo. For example, the story "Moldy Head" (or "The Boy Who Stayed With Fish"), another narrative shared with the Coastal Tlingit (Sidney in Cruikshank et. al. 1990: 75-78), tells of a human boy who insulted the fish spirits by complaining about the moldy taste of the dried fish his mother gave him. As a consequence of this behavior, he is taken to live with the fish for a year, during which time he learns about their ways; it is only after he returns with the other fish to his parents' fishing camp and is caught that he is able to return to his human form, being transformed by the rituals of the Indian doctor (shaman).[15] There are other stories in Tagish oral literature such as this one, where an individual offends an animal spirit, is brought to live in the animal spirit world, and returns to the human world only after he or she learns of the proper way to treat "both the living animal species and their corpses so as to please the spirit owners of the animals" (McClellan 1981b: 490).

Just as humans were able to visit the world of the animal spirits, they were also able to visit the world of human spirits; both such visits might occur through "dreaming" or through near-death experiences, which were generally associated with shaman. The individual shaman would "die" for a few hours, days or weeks, during which time he[16] would visit "an upper world, returning with new songs and new amulets and instructions for his clients" (McClellan 1975: 556-557). Many stories also told of how the shaman returned with predictions about future developments, such as airplanes and submarines, or catastrophic events, such as the world

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[14] The ritual aspects are downplayed in Swanton's (1909) Coast Tlingit version of this story.

[15] Swanton (1909:301-320) recorded two similar versions of this story among the Coastal Tlingit; in both these versions, however, the boy himself becomes a powerful shaman, through the knowledge and assistance he gains from the salmon people and other animal helpers whom he encountered during his capture.

wars. One such story, told by a number of Tagish Bahá'ís, is about a shaman named Magy or Major, who is said to have foretold—depending on who is speaking—the coming of Christianity and/or the Bahá'í Faith[17] (McClellan 1975: 560; Cruikshank et. al. 1990: 154-155; personal conversations). While some of these stories included Christian-like elements, McClellan (1975: 556-557) suggests that the theme of travel to various spirit worlds is "part of an old and very important pattern of Yukon shamanistic behavior, well rooted in precontact times." This theme is also shared by the Coastal Tlingit, and has been noted elsewhere in North America (see, for example, DeLaguna 1954: 188-190; Hunn et. al. 1990; Lewis 1988).

The similarities between Tagish "traditional" beliefs, stories, and religious practices, and those of the Southern Tutchone, Inland Tlingit, and Coastal Tlingit, indicate that there was substantial interchange of ideas between these various groups over time. McClellan (1975: 65) notes that the tendency for First Nations groups to incorporate new ideas was fairly common, at least in the southern Yukon, and was probably "related to the high value which all southern Yukon Indians place on individualism." The concept of reincarnation, the practice of cremation, and some form of memorial feast, for example, were common to both the various Yukon groups and the Coastal Tlingit; cremation, in particular, seems likely to have derived from the Coastal Tlingit (McClellan and Denniston 1981: 385; De Laguna 1954: 181-184, 189). Although this practice appears to have been fairly common throughout the Yukon, some informants told McClellan (et. al. 1987: 214-215) "that only the people who had a lot of contact with the Coast Tlingit used to cremate the dead in the old days;" elsewhere the dead might be put on a platform or tree, or wrapped in skins on the ground and covered with logs[18] (see also McClellan and Denniston 1981: 385).

McClellan and Denniston (1981: 385) state that, traditionally, some form of memorial feast or potlatch was observed throughout the Yukon. These gatherings, which featured oratory, singing and dancing, the display of crests, ceremonial dress, feasting, and the distribution of wealth, served a number of functions for the Native community: economic, social, political, and religious. Whites, however, have tended to focus particularly on the economic aspects of the potlatch. Missionaries and Indian agents, for example, viewed the potlatch as a waste of

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[16] Most shaman were men, although it was not uncommon for a woman to become a shaman after going through menopause (McClellan 1975: 531; see also VanStone 1974).

[17] In particular, these Tagish Bahá'ís cited Magy's prediction of a "nine-legged creature" that would feed the people in the future, as pertaining to the establishment of Bahá'í Faith, which is organized administratively around nine member elected bodies. Curiously, other versions of this story make no mention of this nine-legged creature (see, for example, McClellan et. al. 1987: 269-271). This story has also been viewed as predicting the arrival of Christianity, as well.

[18] It is interesting to note that at least one Tagish story refers to the use of both logs and cremation in the treatment of the deceased. In this instance, a man "died" (this was a story about a shaman who traveled to the spirit world) in the autumn away from his camp; since his relatives were unable to transport his body

resources which served little purpose other than to bankrupt individuals, hence their attempt do away with such observances through the passage of the Indian Act in the 1880s[19] (Drucker 1965: 66). From a First Nations perspective, however, the most important purposes of the potlatch were to formally end the period of mourning for the dead and to reaffirm and strengthen kinship and community ties (Pelton and DeGennaro 1992: 50; Cruikshank et. al. 1990: 32). Based on my observations of three potlatches held in Carcross in September of 1997 and 1998, I would argue that these two purposes continue to be central to the memorial potlatch today.

According to Dauenhauer (in Pelton and DeGennaro 1992: 50), in traditional Tlingit belief, "prolonged grieving is physically and spiritually unhealthy for the community and the individual;" thus, the purpose of the potlatch is to end their time of grief, preferably after no more than one year. In fact, once the mourning section of the ceremony has finished, mourners are exhorted to be joyous and to join the potlatch to celebrate those who died, through singing and dancing, feasting and gift-giving. I witnessed such a transformation myself at the potlatches I attended in Carcross. For example, at the Wolf potlatch, the celebration was preceded by a graveside ceremony, where the deceased's matrilineal Wolf relatives said prayers over the grave and one or two Crow laid the headstone on the grave. After the last prayer was said, the Wolf family members invited their guests to spend as much time as they needed to say goodbye to the departed, but to leave their grief behind when they came to the "party." Many stayed to cry, to place flowers on the graves, or to say their own prayers; once at the "party," however, the mood was upbeat and social, and the guests—myself included—enjoyed the food, the dancing and singing, and the gifts they received.

While the potlatch ended the period of mourning, the deceased were not forgotten at the "party." For example, before the guests were served, the Wolf hosts made up a plate of food for each of the departed, which they placed outside by the ceremonial fire,[20] so that the dead, too, might eat with their friends and relatives. Individual guests were given gifts of tobacco to put in the ceremonial fire with their prayers for the deceased, and gifts that would remind them of the departed—such as boxes of macaroni and cheese, the favorite meal of one of those who had died. Finally, there were songs and dances performed to honor the deceased.

I believe that the potlatch traditionally served the socio-religious purpose of ensuring social solidarity in the Native community, both between and within each moiety, and that this was one of the outcomes of the potlatch I attended, as well (see Pelton and DiGennaro 1992: 18; also Durkheim 1965 [1915]). For example, by serving food and giving gifts to members of its opposite

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home at that time, they covered him temporarily with logs, planning to return once the snow had fallen to retrieve his body for cremation (personal conversation).

[19] This legislation, however, was not "implemented in the Yukon in any strict sense the way it was in British Columbia" since its main focus was on the coast (Cruikshank, personal communication).

[20] This was a ritual traditionally practiced as part of the funeral potlatch (see McClellan 1975: 76).

moiety at the potlatch, the Wolf moiety both thanked members of the Crow moiety for their assistance with the deceased and reaffirmed the validity of each moiety's social obligations towards the other. Traditionally, it was the members of the opposite moiety of the dead who prepared the corpse for burial or cremation, fed the mourners (those of the deceased person's moiety) immediately after the death, and built or put up the grave house or, later, the gravestone and fence (McClellan et. al. 1987: 213-214). While the dead person's matrilineal relatives held a feast right after the funeral for those in the opposite moiety, they generally waited one year before holding the potlatch itself, during which time members of the deceased person's moiety collected the items to be given away[21] (McClellan et. al. 1987: 215, 219).

The potlatch also served to strengthen kinship ties within each moiety in a number of ways. Both traditionally and for the potlatches I attended, adult members of the host moiety were expected to help make and gather gifts, food, or money to give away, and to serve their opposite moiety at the potlatch. For children, especially, this was a way for them to learn who were their "mother's people" and who their "father's people." Traditionally, older members of the host moiety would perform the stories, songs and dances of their particular lineage, clan or moiety for their guests, although only a handful of people did so at each potlatch I attended. These activities served both to legitimize the hosting moiety's claim to certain rights and responsibilities, and to teach younger members of the hosting clans about their family history (*shagóon*, in Tlingit). Finally, an important aspect of the potlatch was the naming of individuals of the hosting clan or clans; these names were always "owned" by, or associated with, the hosting moiety, and were passed down from generation to generation (De Laguna 1954: 184-185). Traditionally, an individual might receive several potlatch names during the course of his or her lifetime, indicating his or her increasing importance or rank as he or she grew older. These names were significant, also, in that they helped to identify each individual's responsibilities and place in the community, according to his or her kinship ties.

Many of these potlatch practices continue today, and continue to serve some of the same functions that they did previously. This does not, however, imply a seamless continuity between the present and the past. From the early-to-mid-20th century until the late 1970s, it was difficult for First Nations people to observe the potlatch as they had in the past, due in part to the social, economic, and cultural discrimination they experienced from the Indian agents and other Whites (Coates 1991). This prejudice made it difficult to observe the potlatch openly, or in anywhere near the manner it had been observed earlier. Additionally, the removal of First Nations children to residential school, where they were isolated from their families and learned to reject their traditional cultural practices, resulted in a loss of cultural knowledge—about the moiety system, traditional language, songs, stories and dances—that was important to the potlatch (personal communications).

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[21] The practice of waiting a year for the potlatch and of collecting give-away goods during that time appears to hold true today, as well, although it is not always possible to hold the potlatch as soon as one year later (personal conversations).

While this situation is now greatly improved, thanks in large part to federal funding for cultural retention projects and language training, the legacy of White repression has resulted in the loss of the original complexity and/or meaning from some of the potlatch practices I observed. For example, some of the adults at the potlatches I attended did not seem to know to which moiety they belonged, or what their responsibilities were. This was no doubt a result of having been raised away from the First Nations community, and not having the same opportunity to learn about these things as their elders did. Thus, the potlatch today must serve to educate not only the children and youth, but also some of their parents and grandparents, about their social ties and responsibilities in the First Nations community.

Another area in which the potlatch appears to have lost some complexity and meaning is in the sharing of stories, songs, and dances. In particular, while these activities continue, they now appear to serve primarily as entertainment for potlatch guests, rather than as a vehicle for strengthening socio-political claims or for educating children about their clan history. Moreover, with respect to the practice of naming, while this also continues today, individuals no longer receive as many names as they once did because, over time, many names were forgotten—thanks in large part to the efforts of the missionaries and the Indian agents to replace First Nations with White names in school and on band membership lists (see for example, King 1982 [1967]). Whereas at one time individuals received the potlatch name of a deceased person, individuals might now receive their name from someone still living. For instance, at one of the potlatches I attended, one elder had to give at least two of her own potlatch names to others, because there were, apparently, not enough names to go around.

Despite these changes, the potlatch continues to play an important role in the First Nations community, in commemorating the dead, and in strengthening social ties. In addition, it appears to have taken on new meaning, as well. In particular, it has become a means by which Tagish, and other First Nations people in the Yukon, can identify themselves as distinct from non-Natives, and can reaffirm the validity of their cultural traditions, regardless of their religious affiliation. Certainly, the potlatch continues to evolve as a First Nations institution.[22]

Today, the majority of Tagish are Christian, belonging to both mainstream and evangelical churches, although there are quite a number of Bahá'ís as well, most of whom converted to the Faith in the 1960s or were raised Bahá'í. Additionally, an indeterminate number observe "traditional" Indian spirituality, involving such pan-Indian practices as smudging (personal conversation). For many, these religious categories are not mutually exclusive; as in the past, individuals have tended to integrate ideas and practices from more than one religion or worldview (see McClellan 1956; McClellan 1975: 65; personal conversations). Such integration was certainly true for many of the early First Nations converts to the Bahá'í Faith, and continues to be true to some degree for many of the Bahá'ís I interviewed; this topic, as it pertains to Bahá'ís, will be addressed further in Chapter VIII. At any rate, it appears that while most Tagish people have adopted western religious beliefs and practices as their own, they continue to observe a number of their earlier indigenous practices, at least in some form.

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[22] It is interesting and perhaps ironic to note that this "evolution" often involves the help of ethnographic descriptions of earlier potlatches (personal observations).

D. Historical overview[23]

A decade or so ago, it appeared that the Tagish language was essentially a dead language; only a very few elders spoke it, the last of whom died in 1991.[24] Today the Tagish language is making a comeback, thanks to the efforts of the Yukon Native Language Centre to preserve it and other Native languages, and to encourage their inclusion in school curriculums. Historically speaking, however, the Athapaskan Tagish language had long ago been replaced by Tlingit as the chosen language of the Tagish people. This linguistic shift from Tagish to Tlingit, and the adoption of many other Coastal Tlingit cultural practices by the Tagish people, occurred sometime in the mid-to-late-19th century, as the international fur trade prompted increasingly intense trade between the Coastal Tlingit and their Athapaskan trading partners in the interior. Prior to this time, Tagish culture probably more closely resembled that of other Athapaskan groups in the Cordillera; these groups, notes McClellan (1975: 14), "shared roughly the same patterns of subsistence and technology. Cohesive political units did not exist—just widely scattered clusters of living groups whose composition and size changed throughout the year."

Even before Whites entered the area, there had been trade between First Nations of the interior and on the coast; relationships between trading partners were usually established and maintained "as a kind of reciprocity system between real or fictive kin [and] was facilitated by the existence of matrilineal clans...among the northern coast Indians and most of the adjacent Cordillerans" (McClellan 1981a: 388). These trading relationships were probably fairly equal in that each side possessed valuable resources that the other needed and could acquire only by trading with each other, and trading partners were committed to protecting each other even if their individual communities were in conflict (Cruikshank 1991: 78-79). Once Whites had arrived along the coast in present-day British Columbia and Alaska and introduced European goods into the equation, however, the balance of power shifted in favor of the Coastal Tlingit. By denying groups from the interior access to the coast through the Chilkat and Chilkoot passes—the only accessible routes from the interior—the Coastal Tlingit were able to maintain a monopoly over trade well up until the end of the 19th century. While this monopoly caused friction between the Tlingit and their interior trading partners, it also allowed the Tagish and, to a lesser extent the Southern Tutchone, to become middlemen in their own right, between their Tlingit partners and other groups further into the interior. This position of middleman had a significant impact on the Tagish, in particular.

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[23] While this section focuses initially on the Tagish people, among whom I did most of my research, the remainder of the discussion addresses more general events and issues which have affected First Nations people throughout the Yukon, including but not limited to people of Tagish descent.

[24] This individual was Angela Sidney.

Around the beginning of the 19th century, the sea otter population became depleted as a result of a vigorous fur trade and over-hunting; thus, European traders began to look to land mammals to fulfill their fur trade needs. Because the Tlingit controlled all access to the interior, however, these White traders had to rely on the Tlingit to acquire these furs for them from the interior Cordilleran peoples (McClellan 1981a: 388). The fur trade, more than any other previous trade, affected First Nations culture in a number of ways. For one thing, it introduced diseases that had devastating effects on the First Nations populations. Perhaps one of the first epidemics to affect the interior was smallpox; Coates (1991: 10) points to the smallpox epidemic of 1835-1839, which decimated the interior and Lynn Canal regions of Alaska, as a likely source for this disease. Two other epidemics, one an apparent outbreak of mumps, and one of scarlet fever, also struck the Yukon in 1851 and 1865, respectively, although the impact of these illnesses were observed first-hand only in the northern reaches of the territory, along the YUkon RiveB (CoateC 1991: 11). Secondly, iD encouBaged inteBior grou@s to hunt and trap for fuBs ratheB than for meat and iD took away increasing amounts of time from the yearly subsistence rounds (CoateC 1985* 51, 53). MoreoveB, iD encouBaged the increasing reliance of indigenouC grou@s on EEBopean technology, such aS meDal traps, kniFeC and axeC and, laDeB, guhs, which, ih tuBn, made contihued paBtici@ation in the fuB trade a neceCsiDy to acqEiBe theCe iDemC (McClellan 1981a: 389-390; CoaDeC 1985" 52-53). Finally, and most importantly with respect to this discussion, it placed the Tlingit at the top of the economic ladder, since these people had direct access to European goods, thus putting interior groups at a distinct disadvantage in their relationships with their traditional trading partners. The result of this imbalance intensified the potential hostilities between these coastal and interior groups, thus necessitating stronger relationships between interior and coastal trading partners. Hence, it was during this time, around the mid-to-late-19th century, that marriages between Coastal Tlingit and Tagish or, to a lesser extent, Southern Tutchone trading partners became fairly common.[25]

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[25] According to oral history, one such union was between the Deisheetaan daughter of a Tlingit chief from Angoon, Alaska, and a Tagish Dakl'aweidi man sometime in the 1800s (see Cruikshank et. al. 1990: 37; also, Johnson, et. al. 1998:9).

Significant Dates in Yukon First Nations/Tagish History

pre-1800s	Pre-contact Tagish population estimated at between 150-240. Total Yukon indigenous population estimated at 7,000-9,000.
early-to-mid-1800s	Beginning of fur trade between interior and coastal Native groups.
	Beginning of extensive intermarriage between Coast Tlingit and Athapaskan groups of the interior, and adoption of Tlingit language and customs by interior groups, especially Tagish.
	Marriage of four Coastal Tlingit women into the interior, including one Deisheetaan woman to a Dakl'aweidi Tagish man.
1835-1839	Probable smallpox epidemic introduced via southeast Alaska.
1851	Mumps outbreak (observed in northern Yukon).
1860s	Arrival of Anglicans and Roman Catholics in the Yukon.
1865	Scarlet fever epidemic (observed in northern Yukon).
1883	First known White contact with Tagish: U.S. army officer estimates Tagish population at 50.
1887	Tagish population estimated at 70-80.
1896	Discovery of gold near Dawson.
1898	Klondike gold rush brings nearly 60,000 to Yukon.
1900	Construction of White Pass and Yukon Route from Skagway to Whitehorse.
1911	Anglican residential school established at Carcross.
1930s	Collapse of fur market.
1942	Construction of Alaska Highway brings 34,600 men to Yukon.
	Native death rate reaches twenty year high with incidents of measles, mumps, dysentery, whooping cough, etc..
1940s	Arrival of Baptists in the Yukon.
1944-45	Introduction of Family Allowance Act to provide benefits to Indian families with children.
1946	Baptists establish boarding school for Native children in Whitehorse.
1949	Roman Catholics open boarding school for Native children at Lower Post, BC.
mid-20th century	Government begins to consolidate various Native "bands" into reserves.
	Establishment of Canadian-style band governments with elected or appointed (by Indian Affairs) band councils and chiefs.
1950s/1960s	Arrival of evangelical, Pentecostal, and other alternative Christian movements in the Yukon.

1950	Implementation of trap-line regulations.
1951	Enactment of revised Indian Act denies legal Indian status to all but those whose legitimate fathers are legal Indians.
1952	Introduction of Revised Act to Provide Old Age Assistance, to benefit Indian families with those over 70.
1953	First Bahá'í "pioneers" arrive in the Yukon.
1956	Establishment of Yukon Indian Advancement Association.
1960	Status Indians granted the right to vote in federal elections.
1961	Status Indians granted the right to vote in territorial elections.
1962	Establishment of Skookum Jim Hall (later Skookum Jim Friendship Centre) in Whitehorse.
1966	First major meeting between Native representatives from northern BC and the Yukon, resulting in formation of Klondike Indian Association.
1968	Yukon Native Brotherhood (YNB) organized with Elijah Smith as first elected chief.
Late 1960s	Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians (YANSI) founded.
1973	Council for Yukon Indians (CYI) established, coordinating efforts of YANSI and YNB.
	CYI publishes *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow.*
1978	111 Tagish in Carcross-Tagish band (status only).
1980	YNB, YANSI, and CYI merge into one organization, retaining the name Council for Yukon Indians.
	CYI reaches Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) with federal and territorial governments over land claims, but fail to ratify.
1985	Federal government ends practice of stripping Native women of Indian status upon marriage to White men.
1989	CYI reaches new AIP with federal and territorial governments.
1991	Umbrella Final Agreement ratified in principle by the Yukon First Nations.
1994	445 members in Carcross-Tagish band (242 reinstated under Bill C-31).
1995	CYI reorganized as Council of Yukon First Nations.
	First four Final Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements go into effect.
1997	Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation and Selkirk First Nation sign Final Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements.
1998	Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation signs Agreement.

It appears to be around this time period that the Tlingit language and culture began to replace the Tagish language and the more Athapaskan features (whatever they might have been) of Tagish culture. It is unclear whether the Tagish adoption of Tlingit as a language and Tlingit sib names, sib houses, potlatch practices and other Tlingit cultural features was because of a desire to emulate those whom they perceived to be more economically powerful, or because it was more practical in light of their fictive and real kinship with their Tlingit trading partners, or both. McClellan (1975: 7), however, suggests that it was through their strong middleman position that "sufficient worldly goods accrued to the Tagish to enable them to imitate the coastal Tlingit." Whatever the reason, of all the interior Athapaskan groups, the Tagish had the strongest trading position vis-a-vis the Tlingit, the closest kinship ties to the Coastal and Inland Tlingit, and were the most assimilated to Tlingit culture by the end of the 19th century (McClellan 1975: 40, 42).

This cultural transition was already in progress by the time Whites first encountered the Tagish people in the late 1800s. For example, the geologist Dawson, who traveled through the region in 1887, observed two houses at Tagish which resembled those of the coastal groups (most likely sib or clan houses), and recorded bilingual place names in both Tlingit and Tagish, many of which have virtually the same meaning (McClellan 1975: 38-39). Aside from adopting the Tlingit language and imitating Tlingit material culture, such as the use of Tlingit clan or sib crests and elaborate potlatching, the Tagish also adopted more abstract ideas from the Tlingit. For example, McClellan (1975: 65) notes that "Those cosmological ideas which seem to be the most highly organized and structured are the ones which the Tagish...share with the coastal Tlingit."

Even as the Tagish were adopting the Tlingit language, ideas, and material culture as their own, Whites and White culture were beginning to have an impact on Native culture and livelihood as well. For instance, by the time the first Whites reached the interior from the Chilkat pass in 1891, "some of the natives...already acquired white men's clothes and had begun to build crude log houses, even though most of them had never before seen white men" (McClellan 1975: 23). While this quote refers to the Southern Tutchone, there is no doubt that the Tagish had, at the very least, acquired White clothing as well as earlier White trade items, such as iron pots, steel knives and metal traps (one Tagish elder (IC 11/14/96) puts it at the mid-1840s when they acquired their first iron pots). The gold rush of 1898 was to drastically change life for all Yukon First Nations people; no group in the southern Yukon, however, was more affected by the gold rush and the massive influx of White prospectors than the Tagish.

In the summer of 1896 two Tagish men, Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie, and a White man, George Carmack, discovered gold in Bonanza Creek, near Dawson. This discovery set off the gold rush of 1898 which attracted nearly 60,000 White prospectors to Dyea and Skagway on the coast, the first stop on the arduous journey to the gold fields (McClellan 1975: 7). En route, most prospectors had to cross the Chilkoot Pass on foot, and later by rail over White Pass, to the interior, where they wintered at Bennett and Nares Lakes before traveling downstream by steamboat to Dawson in the spring.

This flood of outsiders poured right through the Tagish traditional lands and influenced these people in a number of ways. First of all, the Tlingit no longer controlled the routes to the interior and thus lost their trade monopoly over the inland groups, including the Tagish (Coates 1985: 84). In addition, because of their prime location at the foot of the Chilkoot Pass, many Tagish become packers and guides for the prospectors (see for example, Coates 1985: 83). Some Tagish, such as Skookum Jim, even became successful prospectors themselves. The close contact of Tagish people with Whites and other non-Tagish groups during this time, and the fact that the vast majority of the prospectors were men (generally single), led to a number of mixed marriages between Tagish women and White men. The trend towards White "admixture" has been relatively heavy among the Tagish people ever since, and McClellan (1975: 36-37) comments that the Tagish appear to be the most mixed of the three groups in the southern Yukon. Finally, the demand for a more accessible route to the interior from the coast led to the construction of the White Pass and Yukon Route in 1900, which began at Skagway on the coast and passed through Carcross in the Tagish territory en route to Whitehorse. Prior to this, the majority of Tagish people lived near the old site of Tagish, on the Tagish River between Marsh and Tagish Lakes, but after 1900, the railway and the new Anglican mission and school lured many to Carcross, which eventually became the permanent headquarters for the Carcross-Tagish band (McClellan 1975: 40).

The gold rush did not last long and within a few years the majority of White prospectors had given up their claims and returned south. Through the first half of the 20th century, the population of the territory remained relatively small and stable, between 4,000-5,000, the majority of whom were First Nations (Cruikshank 1985: 174). A few Whites—namely, missionaries, police officers, traders and trappers—lived among the First Nations people in isolated communities. Most, however, tended to settle in Whitehorse, Dawson City and the Keno-Mayo mining area, and to segregate themselves from the First Nations populations, whose access to the towns was strictly regulated (Coates 1985: 117). First Nations people were discouraged from living in the towns or interacting with Whites, not only by the White residents themselves, but also by the Anglican missionaries and the Indian Agents, who sought to "protect" the Natives from the "debauchery" of the Whites living in the towns (Coates 1991: 93). In Whitehorse, for example, the desire to keep First Nations and Whites segregated led to the forced removal of Native "squatters" from their existing camp along the river to another location, some two miles north of town; such forced relocation apparently occurred elsewhere, as well (Cruikshank 1997: 62-63; see also Coates 1991: 94).

First Nations people also experienced discrimination in health care and education. For instance, First Nations patients in Whitehorse were treated in a small building separate from the main hospital, and were subject to disdain by the physicians who treated them (Coates 1991: 95-96). With respect to education, the "number of Natives and mixed-bloods residing near each town...[made] integration with the territorial public school system...desirable;" however, this approach was strongly opposed not only by White parents but also by the Anglican clergy, who established separate hostels and residential schools to accommodate First Nations children (Coates 1991:95). As a result, even as late as 1949 there was only one integrated school in the Yukon (Coates 1991: 95).

Until the construction of the Alaska Highway in the early 1940s, however, most First Nations people in the Yukon lived well away from the White population centers and thus remained unaffected by such segregationist policies. While some Native men found seasonal employment on riverboats, "at wood camps, with game guides, and on the White Pass railroad," hunting and trapping remained the staple economy for most Yukon First Nations people through the 1930s (Cruikshank 1985: 174). For the most part, subsistence hunting allowed Native families to make a good living, and to retain their basic social organization and traditional lifestyle (Cruikshank 1985: 174; Coates 1991: 69).

This is not to suggest, however, that First Nations people did not experience economic or social change during this time period. Certainly, as indicated previously, wage employment had already became a significant source of income for some segments of the Native population before 1942. Moreover, an increasing number of children were attending residential schools, which no doubt had at least some influence on the annual subsistence cycle (Cruikshank 1985: 174). Mixed marriages between Native women and White men, generally trappers or traders, also influenced social change to some extent; for example, Native women lost their Indian status by marrying White men, as did any of their subsequent children. Such marriages also made it difficult for some Native men to find suitable spouses "until they were comparatively old" (Coates 1991: 90). Nevertheless, such marriages did not necessarily undermine traditional Native culture. Since one's identity was traditionally reckoned matrilineally, both these women and their children continued to have a place within the Native social structure, and both they and their White husbands, for the most part, continued to live in their Native community.

Another source of social change during the first few decades of the 20th century was the Christian missionaries, mainly Anglican, who settled in many of the First Nations communities throughout the Yukon. The Anglicans actually arrived quite a bit earlier in the region, having maintained a "continuous presence in the Yukon River basin" since the 1860s (Coates 1991: 115). The Roman Catholics had also made some inroads into the southern and eastern parts of the Yukon beginning in the 1860s, but "they did not offer a sustained missionary effort until the

1930s" (Coates 1991: 115). Until 1900, however, when Bishop William Bompas moved his diocesan headquarters to Carcross (then Caribou Crossing), Anglican influence was restricted primarily to the northern and central regions of the Yukon, where they operated a number of missions among the Native people. Because of their limited number, and in an effort to enhance "the appeal of Christianity to the aboriginal population [and] to undermine the authority of local shamans," the Anglican missionaries also recruited First Nations catechists to work in the Native communities (Coates 1991: 121).

In some respects, the Anglicans seem to have been quite successful in converting the First Nations people. By the early 1900s, for example, the majority of First Nations people in the southern Yukon had become at least nominally Christian. Most of these were Anglican, given the near-monopoly that the church had over the region. While participation in Christian ritual practices—such as marriage, burial, baptism, church services, prayers, and hymns—steadily increased over the years, however, Coates (1991: 123) suggests that "such outward manifestations...do not prove inner conversion and there is little evidence to suggest that the Natives, *en masse*, experienced spiritual change." Given that First Nations catechists tended to be poorly trained and to have little knowledge of Christian doctrine, it is unlikely that they would have been able to impart to their fellow Natives more than the most basic religious concepts and rituals.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Christianity did not replace indigenous spiritual beliefs; the two continued to exist side by side, even into the 1950s (Coates 1991; McClellan 1956). For example, many professed Christians continued to consult shamans for cures and for spiritual and practical guidance. While some of these shamans asserted the Christian nature of their practices through references to Jesus and to Christian symbols such as the cross, the way in which they used or talked about these symbols was wholly indigenous (McClellan 1956). McClellan (1956: 130) suggests that the acceptance of Christianity by southern Yukon Indians was due more to their "characteristic willingness to entertain and even to search for new ideas" than to their understanding of Christian doctrine; as a result, "since only those concepts that help practically in the business of living are permanently incorporated, aboriginal traditions may remain virtually unchanged."

For the most part, Christianity appears to have had little impact on the day-to-day life of most First Nations until the 1940s, when increased competition between Anglicans and Catholics, and then Baptists prompted each of these denominations to turn to education in the fight over Native souls (Coates 1991). With the establishment of residential schools, which removed First Nations children from their homes, often for months at a time, Christianity came to have a more direct influence over Native life, contributing greatly to the breakdown of Native culture, family life, and spiritual beliefs.

The construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942 also had a dramatic impact on the socioeconomic life of the First Nations people. The road's construction triggered a new "rush" on the Yukon, the consequences of which, Cruikshank (1985: 174) suggests, "were substantially more disruptive than those of the first rush, testing native adaptability to the limits." As with the gold rush, the construction of the highway brought with it huge numbers of Whites into the Yukon in a very short span of time: over 34,600 men in a year and a half (Cruikshank 1985: 175). Their presence, the road itself, and the development of governmental infrastructure that accompanied the highway construction, all contributed to a gradual breakdown of traditional Native values and social order.

Perhaps one of the most immediate effects of the road construction was the introduction of contagious diseases, which further reduced the numbers of the remaining Native population in the Yukon; Coates (1991: 102), for example, notes that the Native death rate reached a twenty year high in 1942. Illness was most prevalent in those First Nations settlements closest to the highway; for example, during the winter of 1942-1943 the Native population at Teslin suffered from one disease after the other: measles, dysentery, whooping cough, mumps, tonsillitis and meningitis (Cruikshank 1985: 182). The Native settlement at Telegraph Creek, en route to Watson Lake where some of the soldiers and construction workers for the highway were headquartered, reportedly lost most of its older population to such illnesses (Cruikshank 1985: 182). One elderly woman I spoke with, also from near Watson Lake, lost both her parents in one of these epidemics, and recalls seven people from her Native community dying in one day alone.

The highway also had a major and immediate influence on the Native economy and lifestyle. Many Native families, for example, moved closer to the highway, or to towns such as Whitehorse, to find employment associated with the road construction. At least initially, the highway project provided jobs for some men, who found employment as guides or laborers, while Native women earned an income doing laundry, cleaning maintenance camps, or selling Native clothing and crafts to White soldiers and construction workers (Cruikshank 1985: 179). Once construction was complete, however, few jobs remained, other than seasonal work, especially for Native men; women, on the other hand, were able to continue working in the cafes, hotels, and laundries that sprung up in Whitehorse and the smaller settlements along the highway (McClellan et. al. 1987: 174; Cruikshank 1985: 180). The fact that Native men were unable to earn a regular income to support their families, combined with increased government restrictions on fishing and trapping, and falling fur prices, made life a real struggle for Native families in the southern Yukon, many of whom came to depend upon government subsidies for their support (McClellan et. al. 1987: 94, 174; Cruikshank 1985: 178, 180).

The construction of the highway, along with a series of airfields stretching from northern British Columbia to Whitehorse, also provided the communication necessary for the development of a stronger government infrastructure and presence in the Yukon. With this development came increasing governmental control over the lives of the Native people. As indicated above, the government took over the regulation of Native subsistence, by limiting or eliminating their right to hunt or trap in areas where they had formerly done so, and by requiring the individual registration of traplines, a practice that undermined the traditional matrilineal system of ownership in Native communities (Cruikshank 1985: 177-178). To offset some of the negative impact of such regulations, and the lack of wage employment for most First Nations people, the government provided increasing social and economic assistance to the Native population. The 1944-45 Family Allowance Act, for example, provided benefits to Indian families with children, although monies were not given to them directly, and the 1952 Revised Act to Provide Old Age Assistance provided assistance to Indian families with members over the age of seventy (Cruikshank 1985: 180). These benefits, however, came with a price; for instance, as Cruikshank (1985: 180) notes, relations between old and young often became strained as a result of government assistance to the elderly, in that younger unemployed family members "began to exploit the old as an easy source of cash."

The family assistance program also had an impact on Native family life, in that it was used as "a direct inducement to register children in schools" (Cruikshank 1985: 180). Parents had the choice of sending their children to residential schools, or of enrolling them in day schools that were located in the settlements along the highway. Those who chose the latter had to move to these settlements if they wanted their children to live at home, thus effectively ending the possibility of a traditional subsistence lifestyle for many Native families (Cruikshank 1985: 180). Moreover, the role of the government in providing "economic support, social control, health care, and education" to the First Nations people in these settlements effectively served to weaken the traditional Native social structure, by "usurping the former functions of kin groups" (Cruikshank 1985: 181; see also King 1982 [1967]: 53-54). A Native woman with children, for example, no longer had to rely on a husband to support her, and could live independently if she chose; this development no doubt served to undermine not only the self confidence and self-worth of many Native men, but also the institution of marriage itself in the Native community (Cruikshank 1985: 181; see also King 1982 [1967]: 23, 72).

The choice to send First Nations children to residential school—and this was often more out of necessity than choice—also had a negative impact on Native society, which was particularly devastating for those who attended these schools (McClellan 1981a: 396; King 1982 [1967]; also, personal communications). For example, the policy of isolating First Nations children from their families, often for years at a time, combined with the prejudice most First Nations people encountered from Whites in the towns, made it difficult for many residential school graduates to fit into either the Native communities they had left behind or the mainstream White society (Coates 1991). The fact that these schools taught First Nations children to reject their "traditional" lifestyle and belief system also made it difficult for them to relate to their elders, thus undermining the traditional close relationship between the young and the old (personal communications). The psychological and physical abuse that many of these First Nations students suffered at these institutions merely served to compound these problems (personal communications; see also King 1982 [1967]: 36). As shall be discussed in another chapter, the conversion experience of many middle-aged First Nations Bahá'ís I interviewed contrasted sharply with those of their parents and other older converts, in part because of the impact that residential schooling had on their religious beliefs and social attitudes.

Native social problems seem only to have increased in the period between 1950 and 1973. For example, First Nations people were increasingly "pushed off their land and into a sedentary life on small residential reserves," even as their numbers grew steadily, from 1,533 status Indians in 1951 to more than 3,000 by 1973 (Coates 1991: 189-190). The living conditions on these "reserves" tended to be poor, contributing to a multitude of health and social problems. For example, government-built houses tended to be small and not well insulated, and the "reserves" themselves were often located on land of the poorest quality, such as the Native village near Whitehorse's industrial sector, which was on "the most unattractive piece of land in town" (Coates 1991: 212).

Moreover, despite the economic assistance and other social benefits provided by the government to the Native population, the economic outlook remained grim for many First Nations people in the southern Yukon. This was due in part to the prejudice of most Whites towards the First Nations people, an attitude that continued well into the 1960s and even the 1970s. For example, many Whites would hire Native laborers only when they could not hire other Whites, and the few jobs that were available to First Nations people were generally poorly paid and seasonal in nature. One Whitehorse Native, for example, complained of the low wages and poor treatment that he and his fellow Indians received on a job at Watson Lake, commenting that the "white man treats his dog beter (sic.) than we were treated this year...We hope next year that we will be treated like humans" (*WH Star* 3/23/61; see also 12/14/61). Given these conditions, welfare was often the only option, although there were some notable exceptions[26] (McClellan 1981a: 400). Ironically, the situation was often worse for non-status Indians, who were denied most of the government benefits available to status Indians.

The practice of discrimination extended to education, as well. For example, even after the Territorial government made it legal for First Nations children to attend public schools, they were apparently still being excluded from some local schools. Most First Nations students from

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[26] One such exception was Johnny Johns, an enfranchised Tagish Indian, who ran a highly successful big game outfit in the early to mid-20th century.

Carmacks, for instance, were forced to attend school in Whitehorse, while their White counterparts—who were by far in the minority in Carmacks—attended the local school (*WH Star* 10/20/60 and 5/18/61). At Selkirk, White parents complained about the high number of First Nations students in their local school, arguing that it operated "to the detriment of the white pupils," and recommended that Native enrollment be limited to no more than fifty percent in any one grade (*WH Star* 11/17/60).

Such discrimination was not limited to individual employers, schools, or White parents, however. As late as 1961, federal officials found that the territorial government had "denied Yukon Indians supplementary payments for old age, blind, and disabled pensions" because it viewed them as the responsibility of the federal government and because "the Natives did not contribute enough taxes to justify such expenditure" (Coates 1991: 210). Moreover, the incidence of child welfare interventions was much greater for First Nations than for non-Natives: in 1965, nearly half of all such interventions in the Yukon involved Native cases, although First Nations people made up only about one-fifth of the entire population (Coates 1991: 217). In one such instance, a Native mother lost custody of two of her children after a social worker convinced her to send them to residential school (personal conversation).

First Nations people and non-Natives seldom mixed socially, and even the Christian churches were often segregated into Native and non-Native congregations (Coates 1991: 222; personal conversations). Additionally, many businesses discriminated against First Nations people; for instance, one woman I interviewed recalls going to the theater in Whitehorse and having to sit upstairs,

> ...where they had a place for the Indians and Negroes to sit...And all of us that were dating White guys, they had to go up there with us, cause we weren't allowed to sit out in front, where the White people were sitting (IC 6/26/96).

One excuse for this segregation was alcohol abuse on the part of First Nations people. For most Whites in the territory, public drunkenness "symbolized Native behavior;" this attitude extended even to Commissioner F.H. Collins, regarded by many as a friend to the First Nations people, who once commented that the First Nations people "'brood, breed and drink, mostly'" and that they would have to "refrain from drinking if they hoped for acceptance by the non-Natives" (Coates 1991: 223).

Alcohol abuse, however, was not so much the source of the problem for First Nations people as a symptom of it. There appear to be a number of reasons why alcohol became such a focus in Native communities. For example, the racial discrimination most First Nations people faced, combined with the disparaging attitudes of White school teachers and government officials toward indigenous customs, beliefs and languages, undoubtedly made it difficult for First Nations people to feel good about themselves. Moreover, the replacement of the Native economy of hunting and trapping by government welfare had a particularly negative affect on men, who found themselves obsolete. Native women, even those with children, no longer looked to men for financial support, thus depriving men of their "primary function" and contributing to a breakdown in traditional family patterns (Coates 1991: 227; see also Cruikshank 1985: 181). Within the context of these cultural crises, Coates (1991: 228-229) argues, the alcohol abuse "became a key ingredient in aboriginal protest, serving as either an assertion of Indianness or a self-induced fog that repeatedly blurred the oppressive reality of aboriginal life in the Yukon Territory."

While the 1950s and 1960s were difficult times for First Nations people in the Yukon, the late 1950s nevertheless marked the beginnings of change in the general attitudes of non-Natives towards Natives, from one of hostility or apathy to one of compassion and concern. While Coates (1991: 225) comments on the often paternalistic approach of most non-Natives towards "helping" First Nations people, he acknowledges the usefulness of organizations such as the Yukon Indian Advancement Association, established in 1956, in raising public awareness of Native issues in Whitehorse. In addition, by enabling First Nations people to participate in and later to assume leadership over the Yukon Indian Advancement Association, this organization was particularly significant in paving the way for subsequent Indian-controlled political associations, such as the Yukon Native Brotherhood and the Council for Yukon Indians (now the Council of Yukon First Nations). Another important development, brought about in part by the efforts of Yukon Member of Parliament Erik Nielson, was the extension of the vote to status Indians in 1960 for federal elections and for territorial elections the following year (Coates 1991: 225-226).

The 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s also witnessed the introduction of new religious movements to the Yukon that offered alternatives to the more mainline Protestant and Catholic churches: Bahá'í, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal, and other evangelical movements. These movements experienced tremendous growth during this period, not only in the Yukon but elsewhere in Canada, as well. The Pentecostal church, for example, was the fastest growing denomination in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s (IC 1973: 189; Mori 1987:13). These movements appear to have attracted a number of First Nations people,[27] perhaps because they were not "tainted" by an association with residential schools, or because they provided a more charismatic approach than the more mainline denominations, or because they offered smaller and more personal congregations than these other churches.[28] At least some of these groups were integrated, and were involved in efforts to break down social barriers between First Nations people and Whites in the Yukon.

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[27] Other than for Bahá'í, I do not know what methods of recruitment these religious movements used, or whether they focused exclusively on First Nations people.

[28] These mainline Protestant denominations were also experiencing a decline in percentage of Canadian adherents during these same years (Mori 1987: 13).

The most important factor in changing the general public's attitude towards First Nations people, however, was the First Nations people themselves, particularly with the release of their land claims statement, *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*, in 1973. Prior to the late 1960s, First Nations people were given few opportunities to shape their own future in the Yukon; for example, when a meeting was called between government and religious leaders to discuss the welfare of Yukon Indians in December 1958, not "a single Native person from the Yukon was invited" (Coates 1991: 234). Similarly, not one Native person was included in the initial Board of Trustees proposed for the Skookum Jim Memorial Hall in 1962, even though both Skookum Jim's estate and the Hall itself were intended to benefit the First Nations people of the Yukon (*WH Star* 2/1/62). This oversight, however, was eventually corrected with the election of two First Nations members of the Yukon Indian Advancement Association to the Board (*WH Star* 2/1/62). Even though most First Nations groups had elected band councils and chiefs by this time, these leaders had no real authority but were rather "intermediaries" between the Department of Indian Affairs and those whom they represented (Coates 1991: 233).

During this same period, in the two decades following World War II, First Nations people found their traditional use of and access to the land increasingly threatened by Canadian concepts land ownership. By imposing license requirements for big-game hunting, trap-line registration and private property laws, the non-Native government "created circumstances by which Natives could be separated from their lands" (Coates 1991: 232). Finally, the discovery of oil in Alaska and the Canadian north in the early 1970s threatened not only to further undermine First Nations claims to the land and its resources, but also to destroy the natural environment itself.

In an effort both to secure their permanent rights to the land and its resources, and to redress their social, political and economic grievances against non-Natives in the Yukon, First Nations leaders began to organize across the territory in the mid-1960s. The first major meeting between First Nations representatives from the Yukon and northern British Columbia took place in January of 1966, followed by a second meeting in June of that year (Coates 1991: 237). Out of these meetings was born the Klondike Indian Association, which had a number of objectives, including the settlement of land claims in the Yukon, increased attention to Native economic development, culture and education, and "the election of an Indian to the Yukon Territorial Council" (Coates 1991: 237). The Yukon Native Brotherhood (YNB; initially the Yukon Indian Brotherhood) branched off from this first organization in 1968, with Elijah Smith as its first elected chief. The YNB, which represented the interests of all status Indians in the Yukon, was soon joined by the Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians (YANSI), organized to "represent the interests of the 'forgotten people,' the nearly 3,000 Yukon Indians not registered in Ottawa's records" (McClellan et. al. 1987: 103). In 1973, the Council for Yukon Indians (CYI) was founded to coordinate efforts between the YNB and YANSI, enabling status and non-status Indians to work together to settle the Yukon land claims and to improve their lives. It was through this collaboration that the land claims statement, *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*, was produced.

This statement touched off a strongly negative reaction on the part of many Whites, who feared that First Nations demands would spell the territory's economic ruin (Coates 1991: 231). Nevertheless, it forced the non-Native government and general population of the Yukon to listen to First Nations people and to take their concerns seriously. For example, the federal and territorial governments began providing support for the establishment of cultural programs, such as language training, story-telling, and a Native-run radio and television company, and for better housing, education and job training (Coates 1991: 239, 241). While job training, better education and housing, and money for cultural programs assisted in improving the lives of many First Nations people and in reviving indigenous languages and cultural practices, reaching an acceptable land-claims settlement that would provide a sufficient guarantee for self-government proved to be a more difficult and time-consuming process.

In 1980, the YNB, YANSI, and CYI merged, retaining the name Council for Yukon Indians,[29] and that same year reached an Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) with federal and territorial negotiators regarding land claims. While this AIP was ratified by the federal and territorial governments in 1984, it was rejected by the CYI, primarily for its insufficient "land quantum, the requirement for extinguishment of aboriginal title, and the absence of provisions respecting self-government" (DINA 1995: 109). The CYI and the governments of Canada and the Yukon were able to reach a new Agreement-in-Principle in 1989, which included provisions for over $240 million in compensation, 16,000 square miles of land "over which aboriginal title is retained," the negotiation of individual self-government agreements for each of the Yukon First Nations, and "the negotiation of an Umbrella Final Agreement or UFA to include provisions common to all Yukon First Nations" (DINA 1995: 109). The UFA, ratified in principle by the Yukon First Nations in 1991, "provides a common framework for the negotiation of separate land claim and self-government agreements with each of the 14 Yukon First Nations" (DINA 1995: 110).

The first of these Final Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements, between the governments of Canada, the Yukon Territory, and four Yukon First Nations—Vuntut Gwitchin Tribal Council, Na-Cho Ny'A'K Dun First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nation, and Teslin Tlingit Council—was reached in 1992, and ratified by all parties in 1993 (DINA 1995: 110). With the passage of Bills C-33 (Yukon First Nations Land Claims Settlement Act), C-34 (Yukon First

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[29] In 1995, the CYI was reorganized under a new constitution and renamed the Council of Yukon First Nations. It continues to assist in the process of land claims for the remaining 10 First Nations which have

Nations Self-Government Act), and C-55 (Yukon Surface Rights Board Act), in February 1995, these first agreements went into effect (DINA 1995: 110, Appendix). As of January 2000, three more Yukon First Nations have signed "Final and Corresponding Self-Government Agreements," and the remaining four, including the Carcross-Tagish First Nation, are "in various stages of active negotiations" (INAC 2000).

It seems likely that these remaining First Nations will eventually reach an agreement, bringing closure to a nearly three decade-old issue. In the interim, the First Nations people of the Yukon have become much more vocal in asserting their rights to self-determination. In addition, no doubt through their experience participating in the Council for Yukon Indians (now the Council of Yukon First Nations) and in land claims negotiations, First Nations people have become more fully integrated into the political system, and some have become members of the territorial government and bureaucracy (Coates 1991: 241). Moreover, while unofficial racism "remains an integral part of the experience of Native people" (Coates 1991: 240) in the Yukon, there is nevertheless an attitude of much greater openness and tolerance on the part of non-Natives towards the First Nations people. With the resolution of the final land claims, it is hoped that there will continue to be greater communication and cooperation between all people in the Yukon, both First Nations and non-Native.

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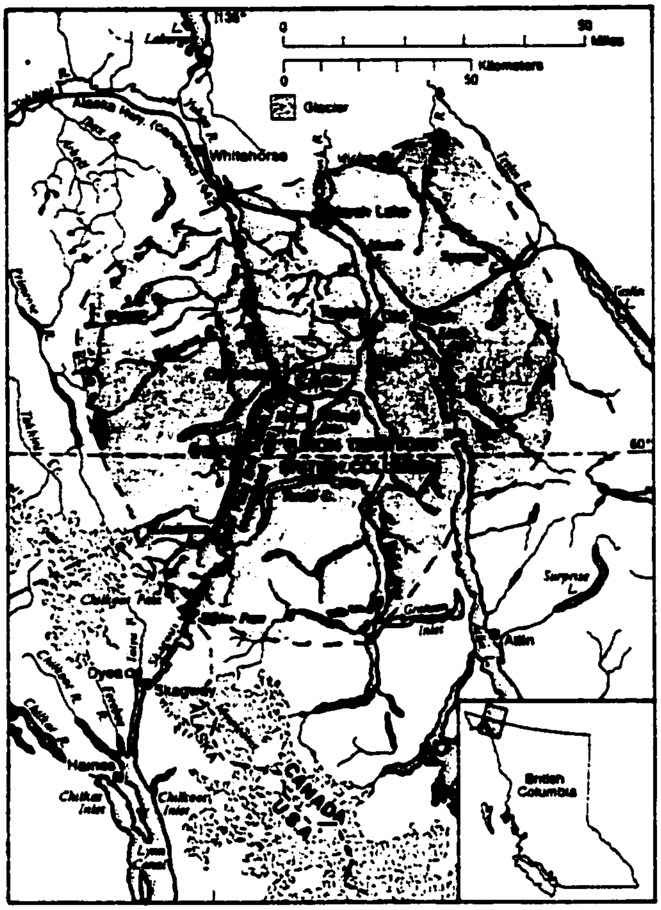
not signed an agreement, and to provide "advisory and advocacy services to First Nations" (DINA 1995: 108).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Chilkoot Pass
Chilkat Inlet
Chilkoot Inlet
Lynn Canal
CANADA
U.S.A.
British Columbia

Figure 2. 19th Century Tagish Territory

(from McClellan 1981b: 482)

Chapter V

Witehorse and Southern Central Yukon Bahá'í Communities

Before delving into the specific issues of conversion and First Nations Bahá'í identity, it is important to provide an ethnographic and historical overview of the Bahá'í community in which I did my research, for it is the community itself that has both informed and been shaped by these issues over the years. In this chapter I will focus on a description and ethnographic analysis of the Bahá'í community as it existed during the time when I was doing research in the Yukon. The following chapter will address historical aspects of the community, and how the community came to be as it is now.

The first question to be addressed is how to define "community" in this context? In a general sense, a community is a collection of individuals who share common bonds that tie them together as a social group. These bonds may be religious, ethnic or linguistic in nature, or may include shared interests, values or goals, or may be based on a shared location of work or residence, or any combination thereof. To be a viable social entity, however, it is not enough that a community share common interests, beliefs, or cultural practices; face-to-face social interaction between its members is also necessary, and the more interaction there is between community members, the more cohesive the community will be (see, for example, Schultz 1999: 221).

In this dissertation, I use the word "community" particularly with reference to a religious community, where the overarching commonality linking individuals and families together is a shared religious belief, that of the Bahá'í Faith. What defines the Bahá'í community, however, is not simply a common belief in Bahá'u'lláh and a commitment to Bahá'í principles, but a shared administrative order, which itself is centered around different levels of community in the Bahá'í Faith: local, regional, national and international. At the most fundamental level is the immediate, local community, identified as all those Bahá'í living within a specific locality, such as a village or city. For example, the majority of my participant-observational research in the Yukon occurred within the Whitehorse Bahá'í community, which encompassed all those Bahá'ís—myself included—living within the borders of the city of Whitehorse. Within this local community, members meet face-to-face on a regular basis to observe the Nineteen-Day Feasts and to celebrate Holy Days, and on a more informal basis for "deepenings," educational workshops, and "firesides." Each local community of nine or more members also comes together once a year to elect their Local Spiritual Assembly; as outlined in Chapter II, this body is responsible for the administration and spiritual guidance of the local community.

Members of each local Bahá'í community are also members of a larger, more regional Bahá'í community, which, in this instance, incorporates all the local Bahá'í communities of the

Yukon Territory, as well as individual "isolated" believers, who live outside one of these established local communities. In the Yukon, this larger, regional community has been defined not only by its electoral function—it is at this level that delegates are elected to represent the Bahá'í community at the annual national convention—but also by the participation of individuals from the various local communities in regional Bahá'í schools, and in teaching and socioeconomic development efforts.

It is these opportunities for face-to-face social interaction that gives individual Bahá'ís a sense of belonging within this larger, regional Bahá'í community; thus, it is interesting to note that, although the regional Bahá'í community theoretically includes the entire Yukon Bahá'í population, the participation of Bahá'ís in the regional activities I attended was limited primarily to Bahá'ís from the southern and central parts of the Yukon. This, I believe, is due in part to the fact that it is in these areas—particularly in Whitehorse and the outlying villages of Carcross and Tagish—that the majority of Yukon Bahá'ís live, and in part to the fact that there are great distances between the local Bahá'í communities of the Yukon, and that travel between these communities, particularly from the northern regions of the Yukon, is often quite difficult. In addition, many in these more remote communities are First Nations Bahá'ís, whose ties to their own indigenous communities may be stronger than to the greater Bahá'í community; thus, they do not necessarily have a strong motivation to attend Bahá'í events outside of their local communities. Thus, for the purpose of this chapter, when discussing the Yukon Bahá'í community, I refer, in fact, primarily to the Bahá'ís of the southern central Yukon, rather than of the Yukon Territory as a whole.

At the national level, the Bahá'í community incorporates every local and regional Bahá'í community throughout Canada, and is represented administratively by the National Spiritual Assembly. Finally, there is the International Bahá'í community, which is represented at the highest administrative level by the Universal House of Justice. These two levels of community involve very little face-to-face social interaction between members as a whole. While there are opportunities for social interaction through activities and events such as the annual Bahá'í National Convention in Toronto, the Bahá'í World Congress held in 1992 in New York City, and the various national and international conferences held each year, these are attended by a relatively small number of Bahá'ís.

Even so, there exists in each local and national community some sense of belonging to a larger group, thanks in part to the reports brought home by those attending these Bahá'í events—many whom I knew in the Yukon had attended such events in the past—and in part to the Feast letters, "Plans," and yearly Ridvan messages sent by each administrative body—the National Spiritual Assembly and the International House of Justice—to Bahá'í communities throughout Canada and worldwide. These missives, directed on the national level to each and every local Bahá'í community in Canada, and on the international level, to every national Bahá'í community, serve as a focal point for action in each local and national Bahá'í community, and help to link all sub-communities within the national or international community to each other, in that these communities are working towards common goals. In the Yukon, the fact that there was a Whitehorse Bahá'í serving on the National Spiritual Assembly during the time I was there, provided those of us living in the local community with an added sense of belonging to a national community, particularly when she was able to share with us first-hand about NSA decisions and goals for the Canadian Bahá'í community.

I would suggest that, as perhaps with all religious communities, there is an ideal of what a Bahá'í community should be like, at least in North America. For example, in the ideal local Bahá'í community, every member attends the Nineteen-Day Feasts and Holy Day celebrations on a regular basis, participates in the annual election of their Local Spiritual Assembly and their delegate for National Convention, and teaches others about the Faith. In this same idealized community, a diversity of people co-exist peacefully without conflict or misunderstandings; there is complete unity in the community. In reality, however, there is invariably a discrepancy between this ideal Bahá'í community and the community as it actually exists. This is particularly apparent at the more local and regional levels of the Faith, since it is at these levels, rather than at the national or international levels, that the everyday reality of Bahá'í community life is played out, and it is here that the level of cohesion and unity within the community is most relevant and evident for anthropological investigation. Hence, in this discussion, I will focus on an ethnographic description of the Bahá'í community at the local level, in Whitehorse, and to a lesser extent, at the regional, southern central Yukon, level.

One of the easiest ways to learn about any Bahá'í community—if not about the religion itself—is to observe what goes on during Bahá'í events, both those officially sponsored by the Local Spiritual Assembly (such as Nineteen-Day Feasts and Holy Day celebrations) and those hosted by individual Bahá'ís in their homes or elsewhere. During my sojourn in the Yukon, I had the opportunity to attend many Bahá'í gatherings, both officially sponsored and less official ones. Through my observation of and participation in these activities, and through my interviews and informal conversations with other Bahá'ís, I gained a good understanding of how the Whitehorse Bahá'í community, especially, functioned on an everyday basis. In particular, I became aware of a number of issues facing the Bahá'í community, not all of which were necessarily recognized or acknowledged by every member of the Bahá'í community. It is these issues that I found especially interesting for analysis.

At least on paper, the Whitehorse Bahá'í community, like the greater Whitehorse community from which it draws, is fairly diverse culturally; approximately 50% of the 146 Bahá'ís in

1996 were First Nations, 45% White, and 5% Persian.[1] Of these, 101 were adults, and 46 were youth and children under age 21, representing a variety of socioeconomic and education backgrounds. These figures, however, say little about how these people actually participate in the religious community and interact with others in their faith.

The Bahá'í community of Whitehorse is much like other Bahá'í communities in North America, in that only a fraction of its members participate on a regular basis in the Nineteen-Day Feasts and Holy Day celebrations sponsored by the Local Spiritual Assembly. For example, although the number of registered Bahá'ís in Whitehorse was over 145, throughout my stay in the Yukon, the average attendance at these gatherings seldom exceeded 40, and generally hovered around 30 to 35; of these individuals, perhaps 42-46% were White, 23-31% Persian, and 23-35% First Nations. The majority of those in attendance were young to middle-aged adults and their children or grandchildren. The interaction of these three cultures—especially those of the White and First Nations Bahá'ís—provided for an interesting and often challenging mixture for the Whitehorse community. For the most part, it was always the same people who came to these activities, although there were occasionally out-of-town visitors or non-Bahá'í friends in attendance (the latter were invited only to Holy Day celebrations). Once in a while, someone who had not come to meetings in a long time showed up, as well. Such a pattern of low attendance is generally viewed as problematic by those who are most "active" in the Bahá'í community, whether in Whitehorse or elsewhere in North America. Indeed, the question of how to increase attendance has been a matter of on-going debate in virtually every Bahá'í community I have lived in or visited since becoming a Bahá'í.[2]

During the time I lived in Whitehorse, Nineteen-Day Feasts and Holy Days were held regularly at a meeting hall above the Alpine Bakery in downtown Whitehorse. In some respects, the way in which Feasts, in particular, were observed in this community was identical to the way in which they are observed elsewhere throughout the Bahá'í world. This is due to the fact that the Bahá'í writings specifically outline not only the three elements that must be included in all Bahá'í

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[1] While the numbers of adults, youth, and children are official statistics based on the Whitehorse Local Spiritual Assembly's 1996 Bahá'í membership roles, the figures relating to ethnic distribution is based on the estimates of two individuals, one of whom was a LSA member, who are long-time members of the Whitehorse community. These kind of statistics (regarding ethnicity) are not normally kept by local Bahá'í communities. Also note that these individuals were unable to give me the ratio of men to women in the community.

[2] Part of the debate lies in the fact that there is no real consensus about how one should define an "active"" versus "inactive" Bahá'í. In his discussion of Seminole Baptist Churches in Oklahoma, Schultz (1999: 167) identifies "active" members as "those whose names are registered on the church membership books and who were usually in attendance at...social occasions" such as regularly scheduled services and prayer meetings. From the point of view of many Bahá'ís who participate regularly in Bahá'í *community* activities, this would probably be an acceptable definition of an "active" Bahá'í, as well. This definition, however, excludes those who, while actively living their beliefs, do not, for one reason or another, participate in these community activities. Since there appears to be no clear and acceptable definition of "activeness" in the

Feasts, but also the order in which they must be carried out. These three elements, and the order in which they occur, are as follows: first is the devotional portion, in which members of the community read from the Bahá'í writings or chant prayers that have been selected by the Local Spiritual Assembly or by the individuals hosting the Feast; next comes the administrative portion of the Feast, where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports on its activities and decisions to the Bahá'í community and opens the floor for consultation about key issues in the community; finally, the Feast ends with a social portion, in which refreshments are served and individuals are able to visit and talk more informally with one another.

Beyond this basic framework, however, much of the content and social organization of Feast is left for the individual or individuals hosting the event to determine. For example, the choice of devotional readings, or of whether or not to include music or other art forms as part of the Feast, and the manner in which they are read or performed vary from week to week, and from community to community, depending on who plans or hosts the event. Over time, I was able to recognize at least two of these subtle variations in the way in which Bahá'í Feast was conducted in Whitehorse; I believe both patterns are culturally based. The first of these patterns pertained to the spatial arrangement of the room in which these meetings were held. Since there is no standard protocol for arranging Bahá'í meeting spaces, it is generally up to the individual hosting the Feast to organize the room where Feast is held, just as he or she selects the writings to be read. In Whitehorse, there appear to have been two ways in which the room was organized for Feast, depending on who was hosting it. The first of these arranged the chairs in a rather linear, front to back fashion, in which everyone sat facing forward towards an "altar" of some kind, usually a table with a nice covering, flowers, and a picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The second approach organized the chairs in a circle, so that all participants could see each other. These two approaches, I believe, reflect the cultural background of the individual or individuals hosting each Feast. For the most part, it was White Bahá'ís who chose the first spatial arrangement, and First Nations Bahá'ís who chose the second (this preference is also noted among other Native groups; see, for example, Philips 1982).[3]

Another cultural pattern that I noticed concerning the Nineteen-Day Feast was the way in which the administrative or consultative portion was conducted. In particular, while there seems to have been a relative balance in the seating arrangements between White and Native preferences, the administrative portion of the Feasts almost invariably followed the dominant Euro-Canadian

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Bahá'í Faith, I will use the words "active" and "inactive" in quotes, to indicate that these are terms that are used, but that are not clearly defined by those who use them.

[3] Whether or not Persian Bahá'ís chose the former or the latter spatial arrangement in organizing Feast is a relevant question, but it is one I am unable to address. Since the focus of my research was the First Nations Bahá'ís, I did not initially make a distinction between the behavior of White and Persian Bahá'ís, and was thus, not particularly attentive to any differences between these two latter groups.

cultural pattern. Consultation tended to be a free-for-all, with individuals often interrupting each other, and with a few people dominating the discussion. Moreover, at the meetings I attended, there was always an agenda to get through in a specific amount of time, and people became impatient—looking at their watches, whispering, or shifting restlessly in their seats—if the consultation, or one individual in particular, went on too long. The social portion, likewise, seemed to be on a time clock; people seldom lingered to talk with others for more than half an hour after consultation ended. This kind of communicative behavior has been noted elsewhere among White North Americans (see, for example, Philips 1982).

Unlike the Nineteen-Day Feasts, the way in which Holy Days are celebrated does not always follow specific organizational or administrative guidelines, and consultation is not necessarily a part of these observances, although they might occasionally accompany them. Nevertheless, perhaps the most significant Holy Day celebration—that of the First Day of Ridvan, observed on the 21st of April and commemorating the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this day—does include specific guidelines, at least with regard to the community's annual meeting, and the election of the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly. At the two First Day of Ridvan celebrations I attended in Whitehorse, these administrative aspects were conducted much like consultation at Feasts, with an agenda to go through and a specific time frame in which to accomplish it. The level of community participation in these meeting was also fairly low; for example, at the Ridvan elections I attended in April 1997, only 31 out of approximately 150 Bahá'ís in Whitehorse voted (personal observation).[4]

The manner in which Feasts and Holy Day celebrations were observed proved an interesting contrast to the less formal gatherings that took place in various Bahá'í homes throughout Whitehorse. For example, at the many "deepenings,"[5] "firesides," and social gatherings I attended, time constraint was rarely a concern; people often remained for hours after a talk or consultation had ended, to visit with each other and to share the Faith with non-Bahá'ís. These more informal gatherings also differed from Feast and, to a lesser extent, Holy Day celebrations, in terms of the way in which members of the community consulted together. Particularly with respect to the Native Bahá'í gatherings I attended, the preferred manner of consultation at these informal events was the "talking circle," in which each individual was able to speak in turn, without interruption, as they were passed the "talking stick" or feather. While this method could prove somewhat tedious when there were large numbers of people present, it encouraged greater participation than the jump-in-and-talk attitude prevalent during Feast consultation. Such non-controlling, non-competitive form of communication has been observed among other Native groups, as well (see, for example, Philips 1982)

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[4] The percentage of individuals participating in these elections has increased in recent years; according to one Local Spiritual Assembly member, 48% of the adult Bahá'í population voted—either in person or by absentee ballot—in the most recent (2000) Ridvan election.

[5] For an in-depth discussion of "deepening," see Chapters VI and VII. "Deepenings" are public meetings in which the Bahá'í writings or messages from the various Bahá'í administrative institutions (such as the Universal House of Justice) are read and discussed.

Another contrast I noticed between these more informal gatherings and Feasts and Holy Day celebrations was that there was a greater feeling of intimacy between participants at the former than at the latter. I believe one reason for this difference is the fact that the latter were held in a rather impersonal, public space, while the former were generally held in individual homes, where people felt more welcome and comfortable. A number of people I interviewed also commented on this distinction, particularly with reference to how much better things were in the "old days;" I gather that there did not always exist such a distinction between formal and informal gatherings in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community. In the early days of the Faith in the Yukon, for example, Bahá'í activities were invariably held in people's homes—particularly in the home of "pioneers" Joan and Ted Anderson—or at the Bahá'í cabins at Jackson Lake. These venues, my friends felt, provided a homey place for the Bahá'ís to gather and encouraged a deep personal connection between Bahá'ís in the community. As the community grew, however, and as more and more people moved into the Whitehorse Bahá'í community from "outside," many of the events that used to be held in local homes, as well as the annual summer, spring and fall schools that were held at Jackson Lake, were moved to larger, more impersonal public meeting halls downtown. Many of those I interviewed felt that this shift took away some of the closeness and intimacy between members of the Bahá'í community. Sandra Johnson (8/24/95), for example comments that with the arrival of some of the newer pioneers from southern Canada,

> ...that...laid-back, relaxed way—it just wasn't there anymore...you could really feel the difference. Like for instance the summer schools that happened every year at Jackson Lake, that stopped. Because there were some Bahá'ís that came and...I guess they became part of the Local Spiritual Assembly...and so were able to make decisions and said, "Oh, we shouldn't go there anymore, it's too cold, or too many mosquitoes, or...." Well, these are people who never went camping anyway, probably. Like I said, they came from the big cities, not realizing that this was the one time out of the year where especially the Native Bahá'ís really looked forward to it because they saw their old friends from Alaska, people who...meant something to them....Well, that stopped, and...they started having [events]...in some of the buildings... downtown...and course they wouldn't have the attendance that they did before. And it just...started to change...

During the time I lived in Whitehorse, I myself noticed that there appeared to be little closeness and intimacy, in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community as a whole, although there were certainly close friendships between individual Bahá'ís in the community. For example, at one meeting of the Marion Jack Institute[6] at the home of one of the Whitehorse Bahá'ís, one woman commented that while she knew a lot of people by name in the Whitehorse community, she knew few people very well; several other women nodded in agreement as she said this (journal notes 7/18/96). Curiously, I believe I got to know more people in the Bahá'í community through my research than many others in the community knew, even those who had been Bahá'í and who had lived in Whitehorse for years. Certainly, had I relied on getting to know people simply through my interactions with them at Bahá'í events, I would not have gotten to know them as well as I did, or have met as many people as I did, given that only a small percentage of Bahá'ís in the community attended these events on a regular basis.

Ironically, while the apparent inactivity of the majority of Whitehorse Bahá'ís was a major source of concern for those who did regularly attend Bahá'í events, few individuals in the community actually seemed to reach out to these less "active" Bahá'ís. For example, at least two Bahá'ís I interviewed said that they felt they'd been forgotten by the Bahá'í community, most of whose members seldom, if ever, came to visit or called them, even though they themselves were generally unable to go to Bahá'í events. I heard of at least one or two others who were unable to attend Feasts and Holy Day celebrations, as well, for health reasons or lack of transportation, yet as far as I know, no means had been discussed to address their concerns. Others with whom I spoke said that they no longer went to most Bahá'í events because they, or members of their family, felt uncomfortable or unwelcome there.

An apparent lack of concern or social support for those who are either unable or unwilling to attend Bahá'í events is not unique to the Whitehorse Bahá'í community; in fact, it is fairly common to North American Bahá'í communities. In Whitehorse, however, this personal disassociation seems to have occurred more often along cultural or ethnic lines. In general, those I spoke with who felt most isolated or alienated from the Whitehorse Bahá'í community were Native, rather than White or Persian, Bahá'ís. At least two people I interviewed, one a Native Bahá'í, one a White Bahá'í, suggest that some of this alienation stems from a perception on the part of these First Nations Bahá'ís that they or their culture are somehow a source of contention within the community. For example, as Native Bahá'í Doris McLean (8/27/95) suggests, when First Nations people feel that they themselves are the source of a problem, "They pull themselves away, like you know they say, 'If I'm the cause of disunity, I'll move.' So that's exactly what they do, we just don't [see] them anymore...." Some individuals have also felt alienated because of personal experiences they have had with racism in the Bahá'í community. As Doris McLean (8/27/95) comments, "a lot of the aboriginal people got hurt, you know, in the sense of...not feeling that love, I guess, and faced downright-out prejudice. I mean, might as well be honest about it, you know?...even though this was coming from Bahá'ís."

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[6] This "deepening" institute, named after a well-known Bahá'í who had visited the Yukon in the early 1900s, was formed some years earlier by Bahá'í women. At its meetings, individuals met to read and discuss the

This is not to say that all First Nations Bahá'ís in Whitehorse felt alienated from the community while I was there. Certainly, as indicated above, there were quite a number of them who attended Bahá'í functions on a regular basis. Moreover, even the fact that many others did not attend these activities regularly did not mean that they felt alienated; at least three or four of those I interviewed, for example, were simply too busy with their families or their jobs to go to meetings. To say that these individuals were "inactive," however, would be in error. While they may not have been visibly "active" to others in the Bahá'í community, they continued to live their faith in their own quiet way, and often had a very positive and decisive impact on those around them, unbeknownst to the rest of the Bahá'í community. Ronald Bill is one such individual. Although I never saw him at any Bahá'í function while I was in the Yukon, he was constantly "deepening" himself in his faith and practicing his Bahá'í beliefs through his involvement in improving First Nations education, and eradicating drug and alcohol abuse in his Kwanlin Dun First Nations community. His efforts had, apparently, attracted some individuals closer to the Faith, and had earned him the respect of the greater First Nations community (RB 6/20/96).

The fact remains, however, that the apparent inactivity of many of the First Nations people in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community was problematic for those who were "active" in the community, particularly for White Bahá'ís. I find this concern for Native "inactivity" rather ironic, given that—as was recently pointed out to me by a member of the Whitehorse Local Spiritual Assembly (personal communication)—many of those who have withdrawn from regular participation in the Bahá'í community are White, rather than First Nations people. Nevertheless, part of the difficulty in addressing this issue, I believe, stems from a tendency on the part of both First Nations and non-Native Bahá'ís to turn it into an "us" versus "them" problem.

For example, one Native Bahá'í told me that at one point a few years ago, the Local Spiritual Assembly asked her and a number of other First Nations Bahá'ís who had not been attending Feasts on a regular basis to meet with them, during which time the Assembly questioned them about why "the Native Bahá'ís" no longer came to meetings. She was hurt by the Assembly's action, both in that it put her on the spot—assuming she was somehow a spokesman for other First Nations Bahá'ís and not only for herself—and that it implied that she and other Native Bahá'ís were a problem to be solved, instead of individuals to be loved and nurtured. Another Native Bahá'í commented that some of the White Bahá'ís felt the First Nations people "had it easy" because they received economic benefits from the government, and that the First Nations people complained too much. This thought was echoed by one of the White Bahá'ís I

Bahá'í writings as they pertained to women, with the aim of supporting and encouraging young Bahá'í women, in particular, in their personal and spiritual goals.

knew, who said that some of the White Bahá'ís in the community felt that the Native Bahá'ís were always "whining" about something.

One reason for this perception is the fact that many White Bahá'ís—just as in the general White population—seemed to know very little about the lives of First Nations people in Whitehorse or the rest of the Yukon, even of those who belonged to their religious community. Many White Bahá'ís who moved to the Yukon from elsewhere, for example, were unaware of the prejudice that First Nations people had encountered in the past, or of the long-term negative impact of mission schooling on Native social life, such as dysfunctional families and high rates of drug and alcohol abuse. Their ignorance, combined with a lack of understanding of First Nations culture, occasionally made White Bahá'ís appear rather insensitive to their Native co-religionists. For example, at one Feast, I observed many of the White Bahá'ís in attendance grow increasingly impatient with one elderly Native Bahá'í who spoke during consultation, and whom they finally interrupted to move on to the next item on the agenda. This particular individual, moreover, commented that he had often been told by other Bahá'ís that he talked too much (PS 8/29/95). While this interruption may have been considered appropriate by some White Bahá'ís in order to keep to a schedule, it visibly upset the elder in question, and would have been considered rude in many First Nations communities, elders are traditionally valued for their wisdom and experience, and where to interrupt shows a grievous lack of respect (see, for example, Philips 1982).

Not surprisingly, it appears that White Bahá'ís were rarely cognizant of the negative impact that their ignorance of and insensitivity towards First Nations people had on the Bahá'í community, or, if they were, chose not to acknowledge it. It was, however, readily apparent to the First Nations believers whom I met. This situation is not unique to the Whitehorse Bahá'í community; I know of First Nations Bahá'ís elsewhere who have experienced similar difficulties in their Bahá'í communities. Interestingly enough, it appears that, in Whitehorse, the Persian Bahá'ís often showed more sensitivity towards First Nations Bahá'ís than some of their White counterparts. This, I would suggest, is due in part to their own experience of religious persecution in Iran before they immigrated to Canada, and in part to the fact that they were also not part of the dominant Euro-Canadian culture, and were thus more attuned to First Nations cultural values and concerns.[7] In addition, since they had only recently come to the Yukon, these Persian Bahá'ís were themselves fairly marginal to the "mainstream" Whitehorse Bahá'í community; thus, they were perhaps in similar social position to that of First Nations Bahá'ís, and could relate to them better than some of the White Bahá'ís.

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[7] As far as I know, these Persian Bahá'ís were some of the few Persians in the Yukon. They had moved there only recently, since the 1980s, after the Iranian Revolution. I do not know whether these individuals chose to come to the Yukon, for religious or business purposes, or whether they were sent there by Canadian immigration.

Some of the difficulties in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community, I believe, stem from the fact that—from what I observed—there seemed to be little social interaction between many of the First Nations Bahá'ís whom I knew and other non-Native Bahá'ís, especially Whites. In fact, as alluded to earlier, outside of official Bahá'í gatherings, there appeared to be little social interaction between members of the religious community in general, other than a dozen and a half or so individuals, both Native, White and Persian, who regularly attended local "firesides," "deepenings," and spring school at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute. In general, my sense was that the Whitehorse Bahá'í community was not a closely-knit one, although it is apparent from my research that it had been very close in the past.

This is not to imply, however, that I did not observe some very positive things in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community. For example, while there was not a great deal of social interaction between members of the community as a whole, there were certainly friendships that existed between individuals in the community, whether between White, or Native, or Persian Bahá'ís. Some of these friendships, such as between those middle-aged women participating in the Marion Jack Institute (see footnote 6), stem from an earlier period in the Bahá'í community; others, from prolonged contact, as in the case of one Persian family who lived for a number of years in the First Nations community of Carcross, during which time they became very close to members of the Johns family, a large extended Native Bahá'í family. Additionally, many of the marriages I observed in the Bahá'í community were between individuals of different cultural backgrounds, particularly between Native Bahá'í women and White men, the majority of whom were also Bahá'í. This included not only women who were raised Bahá'í, but also those who had become Bahá'í as adults, and who married after becoming Bahá'í.[8] The tendency for Native women to marry White men is not unique to the Bahá'í community, however; it is a pattern repeated throughout the southern Yukon, especially, and long predates the Bahá'í Faith in the Territory.

The issue of gender is also relevant with respect to who participates in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community. In general, I observed a fairly equal balance between the number of men and women who were regularly involved in community activities. What is quite interesting to note, however, is that the male-female ratio varied significantly between cultural groups; for example, whereas this ratio was one-to-one among the Persian Bahá'ís, among White Bahá'ís, there was a preponderance of men, while among First Nations Bahá'ís, this trend was reversed. In fact, I met very few Native Bahá'í men living in Whitehorse, and only one of them, to my knowledge, ever came to Feast or Holy Day celebrations on a regular basis (and even then, only towards the end of my stay in Whitehorse). I would suggest that marriage patterns would provide a reasonable explanation for the marked differences in the ratio of men to women in these three cultural groups. For instance, of those Persians in the community who were married—all but one individual, I believe—none had married outside their cultural group; the same was true for White females, all of whom had married White men.[9] White men, on the other hand, tended to marry White and Native Bahá'í women with equal frequency. With respect to First Nations people, the dearth of men makes it difficult to assess their position in the Bahá'í community; of the Native women who regularly attended Whitehorse Bahá'í events, however, all were married to White, rather than to Native men. This trend is probably due not only to historical precedent, but also to the fact that, as Bahá'ís, these women were more open to the idea of cross-cultural marriage than their non-Bahá'í counterparts.[10]

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[8] On the flip side, I knew of only two marriages in the Yukon between a Native Bahá'í man and a White woman. In one of these instances, the husband's father was also White. The dichotomy between Native male-White female and Native female-White male relationships is apparently nothing new; according to King (1982 [1967]), while relationships between the latter were fairly common, those between the former were, at least in the early 1960s, virtually non-existent.

These First Nations women, it appears, tended to have a greater share of leadership, proportionally, in the Bahá'í community, than their White counterparts. For example, while five out of the seven White members of the Local Spiritual Assembly in 1996 and 1997 were men, both of the two First Nations members were women; none of the Assembly members were Persian. Another Native woman, Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, served as the chair of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada. Both she and yet another Native Bahá'í woman, Maria Benoit, served in positions of leadership within the greater First Nations community, as well: Louise as the Native Heritage Advisor for the Heritage branch of the Department of Tourism, and Maria as Executive Director of the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre. The prevalence of First Nations Bahá'í women in leadership roles may be due in part to the traditional leadership role of women in First Nations cultures of the Yukon; while men tended to hold formal positions of leadership, older women, especially, had a significant influence of community decision-making (see McClellan 1987: 226; for an additional view on female leadership roles—in this case, in residential schools—see King 1982 [1967]). Moreover, as one Native Bahá'í commented, the fact that the Bahá'í writings promote the concept of the equality of men and women may have encouraged younger women to become leaders in their communities, as well [personal communication). With respect to First Nations women in Bahá'í leadership roles, however, I would suggest that the two women serving on the 1996 and 1997 Local Spiritual Assemblies were probably elected, not so much because they were women, but because they were both respected members of the Bahá'í community and members of a minority group, since the Bahá'í writings urge that minorities be given preference in positions of Bahá'í leadership (see, for example, Effendi 1990: 35-36).

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[9] I do know of one White woman in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community who married a First Nations man, but as she did not ever attend any Bahá'í events while I was in the Yukon, I have not included her here.

[10] In addition, at least one of these women was half White herself and thus more inclined to marry a White.

Up to this point, I have discussed the demography and dynamics of the Whitehorse Bahá'í community as if it existed in isolation from other communities, yet of course it does not. It is important to note that while individuals in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community belonged to a religious community, they were simultaneously members of other social groups or communities, as well. For example, First Nations Bahá'ís in Whitehorse were members not only of the Whitehorse Bahá'í community, but also of the greater Whitehorse community, the greater First Nations community in Whitehorse, and their own First Nations band community, which was often located elsewhere. Membership in one of these communities did not necessarily conflict with membership in the Bahá'í community. In some instances, there was quite a bit of overlap between the goals and interests of the Bahá'í community and that of another community, like that associated with the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, which promotes cooperation and unity between First Nations and other people in the Yukon. Nevertheless, because each of these communities demanded a commitment of time and energy from its members, involvement in one community necessarily took away time from involvement in others. Thus, those Bahá'ís who belonged to multiple communities often had to choose between "active" participation in Bahá'í community activities and participation in these other communities, which might be equally important to them. Even within the Bahá'í community itself, individual commitment might vary from one level of community (i.e., the local) to another (i.e., the regional or national level); this I shall discuss below.

While the Whitehorse Bahá'í community is, historically, the source of most Bahá'í activity, and the home of most Bahá'ís, in the Yukon, it is only a part of a larger Bahá'í community, which extends not only to other parts of the Yukon, but to the rest of Canada and to other countries, as well. The relationships between these communities is influenced and maintained through a continual flow of information from the top down, and through the participation of local Bahá'ís in more regional, national, and international Bahá'í activities and events.

Administratively speaking, the regional Bahá'í community consists of all the communities and isolated believers in the Yukon Territory. Unlike the local Whitehorse Bahá'í community, the majority of Bahá'í communities in the rest of Yukon—at least during the time I conducted my research—were small, numbering no more than ten or twelve people, if that.[11] According to the Canadian Bahá'í National Centre's Department of Records (Clark 1999), seven[12] of these communities had Local Spiritual Assemblies in 1996, but only two of these, Whitehorse and

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[11] The Bahá'í community of Carcross seems to have been the second largest in the Yukon after Whitehorse, at least until recently; one individual recalled that there were at least 38 members of that community in the 1980s. Many of these members have since died, however; at present, there are only 12 (various personal communications).

[12] Curiously, one of the communities for which there was an Assembly for at least part of 1996 is not included on this list.

Carcross, were incorporated and "fully functioning" with regular meetings. Outside of Whitehorse, the majority of believers in these communities, to my knowledge, were First Nations people, mostly of Tagish and Tlingit, and, to a lesser extent, Tutchone heritage. While, again, there did not appear to be much interaction between these different communities as a whole, there was some degree of interaction between individual Bahá'ís in these communities. Such interaction was encouraged through the organization of various "schools," workshops, and gatherings at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute and elsewhere in the region, including southeast Alaska, that were open to all Bahá'ís. For example, the 1996 spring school at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute attracted Bahá'ís of all backgrounds to a weekend of classes, singing, and socializing from communities throughout the Yukon and from Alaska. The First Nations Bahá'í gatherings I attended in August 1996 in Haines, Alaska, and at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute in November 1996 also brought together First Nations Bahá'ís and their guests from all over the Yukon, Alaska, and the rest of Canada.

While not all communities or individual Bahá'ís participated in these regional gatherings, for those who did come, these gatherings provided a means to meet other Bahá'ís whom they ordinarily did not see in their local communities, to share their religion with others, and to be a part of a more global, diverse community than that in which they lived. For each local community whose members participated, these gatherings also provided a renewed sense of enthusiasm and purpose regarding how to live the Bahá'í teachings and to share the message with others, thus propelling the community as a whole towards new and, hopefully, better goals.

What is most interesting to note, however, about the regional Bahá'í community in the southern central Yukon is that many of those Bahá'ís who were less "active" in their own local communities were participants in some of these regional community activities. For example, many of the same First Nations people who seldom, if ever, participated in local community events were enthusiastic participants at the two Native Bahá'í gatherings I attended. Perhaps one reason for this was the fact that these gatherings were organized by First Nations Bahá'ís for First Nations Bahá'ís; these individuals might have felt more comfortable at these events than at those organized by a predominately White Local Spiritual Assembly. Nevertheless, it is an indication that regional activities such as these serve to strengthen ties between individual Bahá'ís and between their local communities, to create a sense of belonging to a religious community larger than one's immediate experience.

In conclusion, what can be said about the nature of community as it pertains to the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon, in particular? With respect to the Whitehorse Bahá'í community, I would suggest that, like many other religious communities, it falls short of its ideal of "unity in diversity." Moreover, it is apparent that the Whitehorse Bahá'í community is not necessarily the dominant or primary community with which all Bahá'ís identify or in which they participate. This appears particularly true for many First Nations Bahá'ís, who, due to the many competing communities to which they belong, or to the lack of cultural and social unity in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community, do not participate regularly in Bahá'í community activities.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, there are a number of reasons, historical and cultural, for the difficulties the Whitehorse Bahá'í community faces today. And yet, there are also some promising signs within the community, as well, that suggests that these issues, while not yet resolved, are in the process of being resolved. For example, even while I was in the Yukon, both the Whitehorse Local Spiritual Assembly and individuals within the community were beginning to focus more on encouraging fellowship, love and forgiveness between Bahá'ís, than on the negative experiences of the past. Both the Whitehorse Bahá'í community and the greater Yukon Bahá'í community still face challenges in their future, particularly in encouraging First Nations Bahá'ís—and others—to feel more welcome in the Bahá'í community, and in attracting new believers to the Faith. Even so, I anticipate that these issues can be resolved in time.

Chapter VI

A History of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon Territory

This chapter will provide an in-depth historical analysis of the Bahá'í Faith from its initial establishment in the Territory to the present. In particular, I will focus on the Bahá'í missionary efforts with the First Nations people of the Yukon, and will examine the factors that have influenced the religion's growth and decline as well as individual participation in Bahá'í community activities over the years.

A. Bahá'í Pre-History

Long before the first Bahá'í "pioneers"[1] permanently settled in the Yukon Territory, a number of early Bahá'í visitors had already been to the area. The first of these visitors was an American Bahá'í, Miss Agnes Alexander, who traveled from Skagway to Whitehorse in 1905 (van den Hoonaard 1996: 35). She was followed by four more Bahá'í "travel teachers"—all women—in 1916, 1919, and 1922, at least two of whom gave public talks on the religion in the Yukon (van den Hoonard 1996: 122; Anderson n.d.: 752; and *CBN* #117, 10/59). In Dawson, one of these talks attracted more than 500 people (*CBN* #117, 10/59).

It appears that the inspiration for these visits, with the exception of the first, was a message written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1916 to the Bahá'ís of Canada, urging them to "become self-sacrificing and like unto the candles of guidance become ignited in the provinces of Canada" (quoted in *CBN* #117, 10/59; see also van den Hoonard 1996: 124). The Yukon was one of the areas of Canada that 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically mentioned as a place Bahá'ís should focus on in teaching their faith (*CBN* #117, 10/59). The flurry of teaching activity in the Yukon that his message produced was just the first in a long series of teaching efforts in this region.[2]

It is difficult to assess the impact, beyond the sensational, these travel teachers may have had on the residents of the Yukon. It appears, however, that while these visitors were undoubtedly interested in attracting converts to their religion, they had no particular interest in converting First Nations people. At least one individual, a Mrs. Dora Bray of Dawson City, became Bahá'í as a result of these visits, in 1922; she was also the first Black woman to become a Bahá'í in Canada (van den Hoonaard 1996: 88, 123). Mrs. Bray subsequently moved to

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[1] This is the term Bahá'ís use to refer to missionaries. Specifically, a "pioneer" is one who moves to an area of the world where there are few or no Bahá'ís, in order to teach others about, and attract new converts to, the Bahá'í religion. Bahá'í missionaries are unpaid volunteers; they receive no stipend for their work. In this dissertation, I have generally used the word "pioneer" when referring to Bahá'í missionaries, because the latter term has negative connotations for most Bahá'ís in North America.

[2] All of these teaching efforts appear to have been motivated by messages such as these.

Washington State, and there is no evidence to suggest that her own activities as a Bahá'í had much direct influence on other Yukon residents at the time (van den Hoonaard 1996: 123). From the perspective of many of those who later became Bahá'í, however, these early teachers did have an impact on the First Nations people of the Yukon. For example, Doris McLean (8/27/95)—a Tagish woman who became Bahá'í in the early 1960s—shares this perspective:

> Long time ago I lived out in Carcross, and I look back on the history of the Bahá'í Faith and seen...who went through...And the only way at that time to come through the Yukon was to get on the train at Skagway, go along the train route, come into Whitehorse, get on the boat and go to Dawson...And when you think of Marion Jack, those old-time travel teachers, I think it was Emogene Hoagg was another one, and knowing that my parents were little children probably, or young adults—and we used to live about two blocks from the railroad station—and knowing them as Bahá'ís of great capacity, I know darn well they did not go through Carcross and not say a prayer for those inhabitants, and that all those prayers affected the Tagish people that were there as they went by and said prayers. I'm positive of it...

B. The 1950s: Setting the Stage

The "modern" period of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon began with the arrival of "pioneers" Ted and Joan Anderson from Chicago in September 1953. Just a few months earlier, in May, the two attended an international Bahá'í conference in Wilmette, Illinois, where they heard of the need for "pioneers" to settle in "one of the 100 remote goal areas of the world where no Bahá'ís as yet lived" (Anderson n.d.: 1). They volunteered to go, and in July were asked to go to the Yukon Territory.

As with any missionaries new to an area, particularly one in which other religions are already well established—the Anglican Church was dominant in this instance—the Andersons were initially slow in attracting people to join their religion (see, for example, Stark n.d.: 292). During the first several years the Andersons lived in the Yukon, enrollments of new Bahá'ís were few and far between. Those who did express interest in the religion tended to be individuals who had only recently arrived in the Yukon, from abroad or from other parts of Canada (Anderson n.d.: various entries). Since these individuals had few social contacts in the region, they were more likely than other Yukoners to welcome contact with these Bahá'í "pioneers," and to decide to become Bahá'í (Lofland and Stark (in Stark n.d.: 176-177) observed a similar social phenomenon among converts to the Unificationist Church). Even as these individuals joined the Bahá'í Faith, however, the fact that some of them left the Territory again shortly after their conversion served to keep the number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon quite small throughout the 1950s. Thus, it was not until April of 1959 that the Bahá'í community in Whitehorse had the requisite number of Bahá'ís—nine adults—to form the first Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) in the Yukon, the first official administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith to be established in that area.

Despite their slow start, the Yukon Bahá'ís did initiate a number of activities during the 1950s that had a long-term effect on the growth of the Bahá'í religion in Whitehorse and in the surrounding First Nations communities. For example, the establishment in 1954 of a Bahá'í talk show on radio CFWH—which ran for four years and often featured interviews with prominent Bahá'í visitors to the Yukon—introduced the religion to the general public and helped to attract many individuals to the informational "fireside" meetings held at the Anderson home each week. Numerous articles and advertisements in the local newspaper also provided a forum for sharing the Bahá'í message and for publicizing Bahá'í events, such as the annual Yukon Bahá'í conference, first held in 1958. In addition, individual friendships were important in drawing others to the religion. While most who came into contact with the Bahá'ís during those years never converted, many others did, sometimes years after they first heard of Bahá'í.

1959 proved to be a significant year for the tiny Yukon Bahá'í community, for in addition to the formation of the first LSA of Whitehorse, the community witnessed the declaration[3] of the first Native Bahá'í. Prior to this, all of those who joined the Bahá'í Faith had been European or of European descent, yet it had long been a goal of the Yukon Bahá'ís to attract First Nations people to their religion. This goal stems from a letter that the Andersons had received from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, during their first year in the Yukon. In response to a letter the Andersons had written to him concerning who they should teach, Shoghi Effendi wrote, in June 1954:

> The Guardian...urges you to concentrate on the native population, as it is for that reason that we have opened new countries to the Faith. After all, Europeans, Americans, etc., can become Bahá'ís in their homeland. We have entered new fields all over the world to bring the light of divine guidance to the native populations, who have thus far been deprived of the spiritual teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.[4] May you be confirmed with this teaching effort among the natives.

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[3] Bahá'ís generally prefer to use the terms "declaration" or "enrollment" in place of "conversion," and to refer to a convert to the Bahá'í religion as a "declarant" (see, for example, Momen 1989: 66-67). For the most part, and where convenient, I have chosen to use the Bahá'í terms since "conversion" tends to connote a radical change in one's religious outlook, and, as I have mentioned in Chapter I, a radical change is *not* usually present in Bahá'í "conversion."

[4] While Bahá'ís dislike comparisons to Christian missionaries, the tone of this letter, from the perspective of a non-Bahá'í—and no doubt from that of a Native person—sounds somewhat patronizing and surprisingly similar to that of 19th century Christian missionaries in North America.

> The great goal would be an assembly in Whitehorse, made up of native Bahá'ís, or at least the majority natives... (JA 12/15/78).

In an effort to make good on the Guardian's request, this small group of Bahá'ís—in cooperation with the Indian Affairs Agent and some of the local churches—sought to establish a non-denominational organization to assist the First Nations people in counteracting some of the prejudices and problems they faced in Yukon society. Thus, the Yukon Indian Advancement Association was born, in July of 1956. The aims of the YIAA, as stated in the 1957 charter, included: 1) to assist in promoting better understanding and cooperation between Native and non-Native people in the Yukon, 2) to promote "better facilities for [the] health and education of Indian people," and 3) to "encourage and develop the native arts and crafts and their cultural and commercial use" (Anderson, n.d.: 7/31/56; 8/3/56; 9/21/56; 1 or 2/57).

The Yukon Indian Advancement Association was, by some accounts, assimilationist in its goals (see, for example, Coates 1991: 225). Nevertheless, it proved to be an important organization in promoting the interests of First Nations people, not only within the Yukon, but also throughout Canada. For example, according to Native Bahá'í Shirley Lindstrom (1978), it was in part through the efforts of the YIAA that First Nations people in Canada gained the right to vote.[5] In the Yukon, the YIAA also helped pave the way for the creation of a vocational school to provide job training for First Nations people, and, along with the Anglican Church, for the establishment in 1962 of Skookum Jim Hall—one of the first Friendship Centres[6] in Canada (Lindstrom 1978; Anderson, R. Ted 1965).

Through their participation in the Yukon Indian Advancement Association, the Bahá'ís came to know numerous people in the Whitehorse First Nations community. According to Native Bahá'í Shirley Lindstrom (1978), it was through their participation in this organization that "many of the early Native people became Bahá'ís...and out of...about sixty people, I think there was about 45 or so who became Bahá'ís." Her assertion is probably somewhat of an exaggeration; I have been unable to confirm this figure through any other source. It is true, however, that some of the First Nations people whom the Bahá'ís met through the YIAA did, eventually, become Bahá'í, including Shirley Lindstrom and other members of her extended family, as well as Sally Jackson (now Anderson), who was the first Native convert to the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon.

In the fall of 1959, the Yukon Bahá'í community held its second annual conference at their property at Jackson Lake, some miles outside Whitehorse. Attendees, including a number of non-Bahá'ís, came from Alaska, the Yukon and other parts of Canada. It was at this conference that Sally Jackson, a Tlingit from Teslin, became a Bahá'í. While she was one of four to become Bahá'í at the conference—bringing the number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon to twelve—hers was the most exciting for the Yukon Bahá'í community, in that it was the first step towards meeting the goal the Guardian had set for them in 1954.

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[5] Yukon MP Erik Nielson was also a key player in winning the right to vote for Canada's status Indians.

[6] Friendship Centres serve as a social and economic resource for First Nations people, and provide a welcoming place for them to gather.

C. The 1960s: Growth and Growing Pains

1. Native Expansion

Having established their first Local Spiritual Assembly in Whitehorse and having gained their first Native convert, the Yukon Bahá'ís set a more ambitious goal for themselves: to double their numbers by the end of their third annual conference in September, 1960 (Anderson n.d.: 8/60). This would mean twelve new Bahá'ís. To achieve this goal, Tlingit Bahá'í Sally Jackson proposed that every Bahá'í in the Yukon, as well as the four Bahá'ís who were to speak at the conference, recite three special prayers each day until the conference: the "Tablet of Ahmad," the "Long Obligatory Prayer" and a prayer for teaching that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had given the Canadian Bahá'ís during his visit to the country in 1912 (Anderson n.d.).

The Bahá'ís' prayerful efforts appear to have paid off, with a little help from advanced advertisement and friendly outreach. In the days prior to and during the conference, eleven individuals, including seven from the Yukon and three from Alaska, became Bahá'í. At least two of these individuals were Tlingit, one was Eskimo, and one was Black. The Yukon Bahá'ís were elated; their community now numbered eighteen, and their goal of twelve new Bahá'ís had nearly been reached. Four days later, they had found their twelfth new member: Joseph Smith,[7] the first Tutchone to become a Bahá'í (Anderson n.d.: 9/9/60).

Later that month, the wife of one of the newest Tlingit Bahá'ís also joined the Faith, bringing the total number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon to twenty (Anderson n.d.: 9/22/60). Things picked up dramatically the following January, with the arrival of a travel teacher from Alaska, newly declared Tlingit believer Jim Walton. While those who became Bahá'í in the following months of 1961 did not necessarily do so because of Jim Walton, he certainly assisted in introducing a great number of First Nations people to the Faith during that time. The fact that Jim was fluent in Tlingit no doubt also impressed his Tlingit-speaking elders, many of whom became Bahá'í in the first few weeks of 1961 (Anderson n.d.: various entries). As I shall discuss in the following chapter, cultural and linguistic ties between Bahá'ís and those they sought to teach influenced First Nations conversions to the Bahá'í Faith.

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[7] A pseudonym; see Chapter VII.

January 1961 was an exciting time for the Bahá'ís of the Yukon. In the first week of that month, fourteen people, most of whom were First Nations, signed Bahá'í declaration cards.[8] At one "fireside" meeting, on January 4th, all nine First Nations people whom Jim Walton had brought became Bahá'í that night (Anderson n.d.: 1/5/61, 1/6/61). The Bahá'í marriages of new believers Frank Williams and Jennie Shakoon on January 6th, and another First Nations couple on January 20th, introduced the religion to a number of First Nations people, many of whom became Bahá'í shortly afterwards, including Frank Williams' daughter, granddaughter, and grandson. By January 21st, there were 55 Bahá'ís in at least eight localities in the Yukon: Whitehorse, Camp Takhini, Carcross, Marsh Lake, Teslin, Aishihik, Carmacks, and the Native village near Whitehorse, which the Bahá'ís called "Whitehorse Flats"[9] (Anderson n.d.: 1/21/61). The majority of the 36 new Bahá'ís were "of Indian background, representing several tribes...Tlingit, Tagish, and Southern Tutchone" (Anderson n.d.: 1/21/61).

The sudden influx of new Bahá'ís in the Yukon during this period represented a new stage in the development of the Bahá'í community, not only at the local level, but at the national level, as well. For example, one article in the February 1961 issue of the *Bahá'í News* (# 133) noted that, at the time, there were "scarcely 1,000 Bahá'ís in a population of almost 17 million" in Canada; with the declaration of these 36 new Bahá'ís in the Yukon, then, the Canadian Bahá'í population increased by 3.6 percent in one month alone. Joan Anderson (1978) recalls how little prepared either the Yukon Bahá'ís or the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada were for such growth:

> And I remember [Jim Walton] coming home and saying, "How many cards've you got, Joanie?" You know, we'd have these little cards that you sign when you became a Bahá'í. I said, "Oh, I got about five." And he says, "You better start typing." I never forgot that. Cause I did, I started typing. I mean, we never—we'd have one, two, three new Bahá'ís at a time. I mean, you just didn't have 35 in two or three weeks...So we wrote them and asked them for some cards, and they sent us four or five. You know? Well, there wasn't time to write back and ask for any more...And one of the Bahá'ís said, "I don't think the NSA really has had this happen before. Let's phone Africa and find out what they do there."

While the number of new Bahá'ís dropped off somewhat after January, there continued to be a steady number of declarations over the next several years. For example, from February

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[8] In many parts of the world, individuals indicate their desire to become Bahá'í by signing declaration cards, on which they state their belief in Bahá'u'lláh as a messenger of God, and their willingness to abide by Bahá'í laws.

[9] For a chart of the growth of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon compared to the growth rate of the total Yukon population, see Figure 3.

1961 to the end of 1963, at least 88 additional people signed Bahá'í declaration cards[10] (Anderson n.d.: various entries; *Canadian Bahá'í News*, various issues). This kind of growth was not limited to the Yukon, however. By November 1963, the total number of Bahá'ís in Canada had risen from approximately 1,000 in February 1961 to 1,500,[11] due in part to the teaching efforts of some of the same individuals who were teaching in the Yukon, including some First Nations Bahá'ís (*CBN*, #133, 2/61 and #166, 11/63). Most of these new Bahá'ís, it appears, were First Nations people; by March 1963, fully one-third of registered Bahá'ís in Canada (500 out of 1,500) were First Nations (*CBN*, Special Jubilee Edition, 4/63). In fact, the largest Bahá'í community in Canada at the time was located on the Poorman reserve in Saskatchewan, which, according to one source, was "almost entirely Bahá'í" (see *CBN*, Special Jubilee Edition, 4/63).

From the perspective of many of the Bahá'ís I interviewed, this period of the 1960s stands out as the "Golden Age" of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon. Sandra Johnson (8/24/95), for example, remembers that there was always "lots of activity, lots of things happening. Really exciting times it was." Much of this activity took place at the home of Bahá'í "pioneers" Joan and Ted Anderson, whose weekly "firesides," "deepenings," and social gatherings attracted many people. For example, Clara Schinkel (8/28/95) recalls,

> ...when I first came into the Faith, we used to go to Joanie and Ted's place. And I don't know when Joanie and Ted slept. Really. They were going day and night, you know. There was a lot of young people coming in, and we'd have dances there and discussions. Just lively discussions, you know. With a lot of music, a lot of singing...it was just really lively. And...so much fun...

Perhaps the highlight of each year were the summer activities that took place at the Bahá'í property on Jackson Lake, in the hills outside of Whitehorse. The first Yukon Bahá'í conference began as a modest affair in 1958, with a handful of participants in one small cabin (Anderson n.d.: 8/30/58). With the increasing number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon, however, the conference—and the property—grew to a huge yearly gathering of Bahá'ís with their family and friends, all camping out and attending classes and workshops in one of three cabins. As early as 1961, for example, the annual Bahá'í conference was attracting over 70 people from throughout the Yukon, Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington State. By 1964, the number of participants had grown to 110, and to 135 by 1967, "with an average class attendance of 25 for adult classes" (Anderson 1967; see also *CBN* #177, 1/64). Maria Benoit (5/22/96) recalls how much her family and others enjoyed these and other Bahá'í gatherings at Jackson Lake:

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[10] The population of the Yukon at about this time (1961) was 14,628, out of which approximately 2,100 were "status" Indians or First Nations people, with at least a thousand more "non-status" (DBS 1966: 177; *WH Star* 6/22/61). The total Bahá'í population in the Yukon in 1963 was 102 (*CBN* #167, 2/63).

[11] Out of a total Canadian population of approximately 18, 200,000 in 1961 (DBS 1966: 176). For a chart comparing the growth rate of the total Canadian and Canadian Bahá'í populations over time, see Figure 4.

> ...we...looked forward to going to Jackson Lake, cause we always had things to do and it was an outside activity...we just had fun and...at the same time learned about the Bahá'í Faith...[D]ifferent people would come to the...Jackson Lake...summer...gathering, they used to call it. We met lots of people from Alaska and all over, different parts of the world...and we just generally had...a good time there...

These were exciting times, as Doris McLean (8/27/95) explains:

> All these people got so excited about the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'u'lláh, in 1962. There were firesides that were going on, left, right and center. You know, firesides that were finishing four in the morning, three in the morning...Nobody got tired, there was such excitement; the Native people were becoming Bahá'ís...and they have such a lot of high energy and high spirit...and they just took everything so serious, that you gave to the fund...you went teaching, you fasted, you participated. It was...a live religion. It was so potent. It wasn't dead, it wasn't dead for a thousand years...Such excitement, to know that Bahá'u'lláh was here.

Elsewhere, she says,

> There was no such thing as apathy...everything was alive...there was youth seminars, there was youth groups, there was winter schools, there was summer schools, there was spring schools, you know. It was all kinds of exciting things. If it wasn't happening in Whitehorse, you went to Juneau, you went to Fairbanks, you attended these things. And it was just from one great big meeting to the next...nothing stopped us in those days, you know? (DM 8/27/95).

Travel—to attend Bahá'í schools, to visit other Bahá'ís, to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and to teach the Faith—was certainly an important part of being a Bahá'í in the 1960s.[12] Many of the stories I heard about in recording individuals' experiences in the Bahá'í Faith were about their travels to various parts of Alaska, Canada, and elsewhere, to teach. Doris (8/27/95), for example, relates one rather infamous teaching trip nick-named "Operation Turkey":

> They were all going to Fairbanks, eh? And somebody says, hey, you guys, take some turkey...Make some turkey sandwiches. So they give them this turkey...they'd just roasted a turkey...and just gave it to them to take on their trip

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[12] Such opportunities for travel may have been one of the appeals of the Bahá'í Faith for First Nations people. Cruikshank (personal communication), for example, notes that elders she worked with in the Yukon "*all* talked about travel as a highly valued way of spending time, whether from settlement to settlement...or from Carcross to Haifa."

> to make sandwiches. Here by the time they got halfway out the turkey froze, in the car, it was so cold! That's why they called it Operation Turkey.

Native believer Shirley Lindstrom proved to be a particularly effective Bahá'í travel teacher. Just months after becoming a Bahá'í in 1962, for example, she traveled alone to Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories, to help establish the first Local Spiritual Assembly there. Shirley later moved with her family to Saskatchewan, where they remained for several years to work with the First Nations people at the Fort Qu'Appelle Bahá'í Institute. She also proved to be a very active Bahá'í teacher in the Yukon, and had an important influence on many I met in their decision to become Bahá'í (personal communications). Shirley's sister Doris McLean (8/27/95) recalls the many teaching trips that Shirley made to Dawson City, in the northern part of the Territory, and the long-term impact of her teaching efforts:

> I remember Shirley going teaching in Dawson City, going up to Dawson by herself from Mayo when it was snowing, blizzarding out and she'd phone me and says, "Oh, I'm going to Dawson. No one wants to come with me but I've got to go...And she was an excellent teacher. And I remember in Dawson City one night, 1970, where 63 people became Bahá'ís one evening...And I remember [sitting in] this big huge circle. I look across and they're tears streaming down my sister's eyes. And I'm saying, you are here to witness the seeds that you planted. And that was true. You know, all those trips that she went on, through the snow, through blizzard, giving up the nice comfort of her home...That was the fruits of that.

As for Doris, within one month of becoming a Bahá'í, in March 1962, she, along with her cousin Hazel, moved to Sitka, Alaska, to help form the first Local Spiritual Assembly there. Of her experience in Sitka, Doris (4/19/81) says,

> ...they needed two more Bahá'ís in Sitka, Alaska, and I thought it was a good place to go so that's where I went...But, it was lonely there...all the people that were there were all old[er age] Bahá'ís. And when they first seen Hazel and I, they couldn't believe that anybody under 65 were Bahá'ís. And when we left there were 28 Bahá'ís, and Hazel has never come back since then, and that was in 1963.[13] I remember the date was April the 16th when we left, and we got to Sitka, Alaska, and we landed on the water, and these little houses, and it was frightening for us but we went.

It was not merely the young people who traveled to teach their faith, however. Peter Johns, Sr. was one of a number of First Nations elders who traveled extensively throughout the

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[13] According to written records, the year was actually 1962 (for example, Anderson n.d.).

Yukon and Southeast Alaska, helping to introduce the religion to many First Nations people (DM 8/27/95; also Anderson n.d., various entries). Another such teacher was Carcross chief Johnny Johns, who traveled throughout the Yukon in 1969 to share the Bahá'í Faith with all the First Nations chiefs and band councils. Their efforts certainly seem to have paid off; between 1963 and 1970, the Bahá'í population in the Yukon increased by more than 66%, from 102 to 170 (*CBN* #157, 2/63; Bahá'í 1969).

The influx of First Nations converts into the community during the 1960s appears to have had both positive and negative consequences for the Yukon Bahá'í community. On the positive side, the continued growth of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon enabled the formation of several new Local Spiritual Assemblies in the 1960s. Two of these new LSAs were elected in April of 1962: one in the Whitehorse Native village (named "Whitehorse Flats" by the Bahá'ís), the other in the village of Carcross (Anderson n.d.: 4/20/62; 4/21/62). All nine members of the LSA in "Whitehorse Flats" were First Nations, while in Carcross, eight of them were (*WH Star*, 5/3/62; personal communications). Another all Native LSA was formed in Haines Junction in April 1967 (Anderson, Joan 1967b). By 1969, there were five LSAs in the Yukon—Whitehorse, Whitehorse Flats (all First Nations), Carcross, Haines Junction (all First Nations), and Porter Creek—and registered Bahá'ís living in fourteen other localities (Anderson n.d.: 4/20/69; Bahá'í 1969).

Within the greater Canadian Bahá'í community, the growing number of Yukon Bahá'ís also enabled their participation in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly. To this end, in 1965, the Yukon Bahá'ís held their first Bahá'í convention. Here, they elected delegates to send to the annual national convention, where members of the National Spiritual Assembly were elected. Not surprisingly, given the number of First Nations Bahá'ís in the Yukon, three of the six delegates elected at that first Yukon Bahá'í convention were Native: Annie Drugan (now Annie Auston), Shirley Lindstrom, and Liz Jackson.

The growth of the Faith in the Yukon appears also to have provided Bahá'ís with increasing clout in the eyes of the Territorial government. For example, the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Whitehorse gained legal status through their incorporation in 1961, and Bahá'í marriage was granted legal recognition in the Yukon in 1964 (Anderson n.d.: 3/14/61, 12/9/62 (notes)). Moreover, the media began to take greater notice of the religion, as well. By the early-to-mid-1960s, for example, articles about Bahá'í visitors, local events and issues were regularly featured in the local newspapers. Media attention also extended to radio and television; in 1964, CBC radio interviewed Auxiliary Board member[14] Peggy Ross during one of her visits to

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[14] The Auxiliary Board, along with their Assistants and the Continental Board of Counsellors, make up the appointed, as opposed to the elected, branch of Bahá'í administration. Their function is to advise and provide needed assistance to the Bahá'í communities and Spiritual Assemblies within their designated region, whether at the local, national, or international level. In addition, the Continental Board of Counsellors

the Yukon, and, in 1969, aired a number of interviews with First Nations Bahá'ís attending the first indigenous Bahá'í council in the Yukon (*CBN* #178, 11/64; Anderson n.d.: 9/27/69). In 1966, CBC television included a segment of Frank Williams' Bahá'í funeral as part of the program, "This Hour has Seven Days" (Anderson n.d.: 9/14/66).

One negative consequence of the growth of the Yukon Bahá'í community in the 1960s, particularly among First Nations people, was the increased opposition on the part of other religious groups. For example, in a letter to Lorne Murphy, dated January 30, 1964, Joan Anderson writes, "[The] Baptists have been giving us a hard time lately. The Baptist minister in Carcross said publicly in church recently that the Bahá'ís don't believe in God." One middle-aged Native woman also recalls the hostility she faced as a new Bahá'í in the Anglican hostel in Whitehorse, and says that the clergy became so concerned about her "bad" influence that they insisted that her younger brother and sisters "go for confirmation classes. Cause I was not going to lead them down the wrong path, as far as the Bishop was concerned. So they got confirmed." In another instance, in 1967, the minister at Bethany Tabernacle (Pentecostal) warned his congregation of the "sinful" new religions in the Yukon, including the Bahá'í Faith:

> Beware...beware dear friend, that you be not led by the cunning deceit of sinful men, this vital new religion [how the Bahá'ís were advertising themselves in the newspaper], awake [i.e., Jehovah's Witnesses], our latter day movement, etc...And onward goes the list of the devil's tools to delude and snare the unwary soul (Anderson, Joan 1967a).

Given the competition for First Nations souls that had existed between the more established churches of the Yukon long before the Bahá'ís ever came on the scene (see, for example, King 1982 [1967]; McClellan 1981: 396), it is perhaps not surprising that the Bahá'ís should have encountered hostility from Christian clergy in the Yukon. Even in 1959, when the Bahá'í Faith counted only a handful of local members, the Anglican Bishop had seen fit to criticize it (see *WH Star* 4/30/59). The growth of the Bahá'í community in the Yukon, however, combined with the increase in the number of other religious groups in the area, all of whom were competing for adherents, suddenly posed a very real threat to the spiritual hold that other, more established, churches had over their congregations. In the case of the Anglican Church, such a fear was not unfounded; Anglicans made up the largest percentage of new Bahá'ís in the 1960s, and probably made up a good portion of those who converted to the newly arrived evangelical movements, as well[15] (Anderson, R. Ted 1969).

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appoints members of the Auxiliary Board, and keeps the remaining Hands of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice informed of "the conditions of the [Bahá'í Faith] in their areas" (Momen 1989: 26, 58-59).

[15] Census statistics indicate that movements such as Pentecostal and Jehovah's Witnesses were among the fastest growing religious denominations in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s, while the percentage of

Another reason for some of the clergy's antagonism towards the Bahá'í Faith was that it may have been perceived, not as a legitimate—i.e., Christian—religion, but as a cover for the revival of Native "spiritual and cultural identity"—something which the Christian churches had hoped to eradicate (Yukon Archives 1966?). Indeed, I am told that, at one point in the 1960s or 1970s, many Whites in the Yukon assumed that the Bahá'í Faith *was* a Native religion, since so many members were First Nations people (AT 10/17/98).

Despite the negative reaction of some Christian clergy to the Bahá'í Faith, however, it would be misleading to suggest that all clergy in the Yukon opposed the religion. For example, the Bahá'ís maintained a working relationship with several of the Christian churches and clergy in Whitehorse, through their volunteer efforts on the Yukon Indian Advancement Association and through their involvement on the Yukon's Interfaith Centennial Committee (Anderson, R. Ted 1966). The Catholic and Unitarian Churches appear to have been particularly responsive to Bahá'ís overtures. For example, after the Bahá'ís sent letters to various clergy of the Yukon offering to send them information about the religion, both the Catholics and the Unitarians asked to receive some Bahá'í books, and the Unitarians invited Ted Anderson to speak at one of their meetings in Whitehorse (Anderson, Joan 1967a). One Native woman, when she asked her priest at the Catholic Church about the Bahá'í Faith, was reportedly told that the Bahá'ís "believe as [the Catholics] do" (Anderson, R. Ted 1966).

Even within the Anglican Church, there were some who made positive overtures towards the Bahá'ís; for example, in 1965, Native Bahá'í Shirley Lindstrom was invited by the local Anglican minister to speak about her faith at his church in Mayo. The same minister, it appears, also attended one of the meetings at that year's annual Bahá'í winter school in Mayo (Anderson n.d.: 11/22/65, 11/25-29/65).

Nevertheless, religious opposition, and sometimes outright hostility, continued, particularly in some of the more isolated communities of the Yukon. Historically, churches in the Yukon—particularly Anglican and Roman Catholic—had fought bitterly amongst themselves for dominance (Coates 1991). While such was no longer the case in the more populated areas of the Yukon, where there were many competing denominations, these more remote communities continued to be dominated by only one or two churches (see, for example, Acheson 1981) Thus, any introduction of a new religion to these communities was perceived as a threat to that dominance. With respect to Bahá'í, church leaders often sought to discourage individuals from investigating the new religion by spreading lies about the Bahá'ís; in more than one instance, Bahá'ís were said to be "devil-worshippers" who sacrificed their children (personal communications). As a result, the local First Nations population tended to support their religious

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Canadians in more mainline denominations—most notably Anglican and Baptist—declined during the same period (IC 1973: 189, see also DBS 1969; SC 1977, and 1985).

leadership in opposing the new faith. Such opposition often had a negative impact on the ability of the Bahá'ís to attract or retain new believers.

The ability of the Bahá'í community to retain its First Nations converts was, in fact, an issue of on-going concern. For despite the enthusiasm with which First Nations people seemed to embrace the Bahá'í Faith, many of these same individuals soon drifted away from active participation in Bahá'í community life—if, indeed, they had been "active" in the first place—or moved on to other religious movements. How does one explain these two trends? What attracted these First Nations people to the Bahá'í Faith in the first place, and how is one to interpret their conversions? What factors appear to have influenced individual participation—or lack of participation—in the Bahá'í community, and the outright departure of some converts from the Bahá'í community? These questions will be addressed in both the following section and the next chapter.

2. Consequences of Conversion and Growth

The late 1950s and early 1960s seem to have been a time for dramatic growth throughout the Bahá'í world, not just in the Yukon or other parts of Canada. For example, whereas the Bahá'í international community numbered approximately 200,000 in the early 1950s, this figure had jumped to 400,000 by 1963 (Smith 2000: 139; BIC 1992: 14). Much of this increase occurred in third world countries, particularly among indigenous and dispossessed people. For example, the *Canadian Bahá'í News* (#152, 9/62 and #155, 12/62) reported that over 700 Kuna Indians had become Bahá'í in Panama during a three week period in 1962, while India had gained about 30,000 new believers—mostly from the scheduled castes—between April and December of that same year (see also Garlington 1998).

What would account for such a pattern of worldwide growth in a matter of two or three years? One factor that appears to have had a significant influence[16] on Bahá'í growth throughout the world—if only indirectly—is the goals that Shoghi Effendi had set for the Bahá'í international community during the "Ten Year Crusade" (see Chapter III). Among the goals to be achieved between 1953 and 1963, were to double the number of countries in which Bahá'ís resided, and to more "than quadruple the number of National Spiritual Assemblies" (there were 12 in 1953), as well as to substantially increase the size and ethnic diversity of existing national Bahá'í communities (White 1981: 420-421; see also UHJ 1981: 70). In addition, following the death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957, the Hands of the Cause, then the leaders of the Bahá'í world community, had decided to hold elections for the first Universal House of Justice in 1963. They believed that the success of this election depended upon the achievement of these other goals. So by the early 1960s, the pressure was on. In an effort to meet their goals, many Bahá'í national communities adopted new and more vigorous forms of teaching, which they hoped would attract greater numbers of converts to their religion than they had gained through previous methods. While other factors certainly played a part, one of the most effective means of attracting new converts in many areas of the world, including Canada, Africa, and India, proved to be the use of indigenous Bahá'ís—many of whom, themselves, had just become Bahá'í—and indigenous culture in the Bahá'í teaching efforts (see, for example, *CBN* # 157, 2/63; see also Garlington 1998).

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[16] Another factor that may also have influenced conversion in third world countries is the fact that as the colonial period was drawing to a close, those people who had been previously colonized may have asserted their independence in part by choosing a religion not associated with their colonizers or with the dominant cultural group, as with the scheduled castes in India (see, for example, Garlington 1998).

With the completion of the "Ten Year Crusade" in 1963, however, these intensive teaching efforts appear to have subsided somewhat in Canada, if not abroad; although individual teaching efforts certainly continued, there does not seem to have been quite the same sense of urgency to their teaching methods as before. In the Yukon, for instance, the emphasis seems to have shifted away from attracting new converts to community-building, and to developing a Bahá'í infrastructure through the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies. The fact that fewer numbers of people in the Yukon joined the religion in the mid to late 1960s—no more than a dozen or so new Bahá'ís each year—seems to support this interpretation. The majority of these new Bahá'ís were members of the same extended family, many of whom were young people whose parents had become Bahá'í in the early 1960s. Thus, these individuals were not new "converts" at all, having been raised for several years in the Bahá'í Faith. This trend further supports the interpretation that community building became the emphasis among the Yukon Bahá'ís after the mid-1960s.

As I will discuss somewhat later in this chapter, this same kind of dramatic growth, followed by a period of "retrenchment" and community-building would repeat itself in the early 1970s, with the introduction of "mass teaching" to the Yukon and the rest of Canada. Not surprisingly, this new teaching effort was—once again—motivated primarily by the urgent need to fulfill a new set of Bahá'í goals, those of the "Nine Year Plan."

The question that remains, however, is how is one to interpret the conversions that resulted from this kind of teaching effort? Most Bahá'ís, including myself, would like to believe that it was simply the beauty of the Bahá'í message itself—that God had sent a messenger for this day who would unite all the peoples of the world—that attracted these individuals to the Bahá'í Faith. While this may have been the case for many converts, it is unrealistic to expect that such would hold true for all. Given the language barriers and cultural differences that often existed between Bahá'í teachers and those they hoped to convert, it is reasonable to assume that many of these "converts" may not have even realized that they were joining a religion when they signed their Bahá'í declaration cards. For example, in Canada, individuals were often invited to sign such a card after they had attended a Bahá'í meeting at which entertainment had been provided, or food had been served (see, for example, *CBN* # 157, 2/63; personal communications). This practice no doubt confused many First Nations "converts," who may have felt obliged to sign a card after having received hospitality, or who thought they were signing up to be invited to more Bahá'í events.[17]

While the use of indigenous Bahá'í teachers theoretically would have minimized such misunderstandings, these individuals were often hardly more familiar with their new religion than those they sought to teach. As a result, Bahá'í communities often found themselves overwhelmed by converts who knew next to nothing about the Bahá'í Faith, and experienced a relatively high rate of attrition or non-involvement among these new Bahá'ís. This occurred to some degree in the Yukon; for example, although the Bahá'í community continued to expand throughout the 1960s, it lost at least 41 members between 1961 and 1963, to death, relocation, or attrition (Anderson n.d.: various entries; *CBN*, various issues). Between 1967 and 1972, at least 16 individuals from the "Whitehorse Flats" community in the Yukon either died or left the Bahá'í Faith, many to join the Pentecostal movement[18] (various membership lists; personal communications).

Of those who remained on the Yukon Bahá'í membership list, their participation in Bahá'í community events was often quite low. For example, only 38 out of 111 eligible Bahá'ís voted at the 1967 Yukon Regional Bahá'í Convention (Anderson, Joan 1967c), and of 150 Bahá'ís in the Yukon, fewer than 20 had contributed to the Bahá'í fund during the 1968-1969 fiscal year (Anderson, Joan 1969). Such a low rate of participation, however, was—and continues to be—common for many North American Bahá'í communities (see, for example, Cole 1998b: 237). Those Bahá'í activities that attracted greater participation were generally those that involved less administrative responsibility and more social interaction than the above-mentioned events.

Stark (1996) has suggested that religions that are "costly" to join and to belong to—i.e., which require a fair amount of sacrifice on the part of converts—tend to have the most success in retaining new converts, and experience the highest levels of participation. Costly demands, he argues, serve to

> ...strengthen a religious group in two ways. First, they create a barrier to group entry. No longer is it possible to merely drop in and reap the benefits of membership. To take part at all you must qualify by accepting the sacrifices

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[17] In fact, such confusion still occurs in Bahá'í teaching; I heard recently of one or two individuals in Seattle who had signed declaration cards, thinking that they were asking for more information about the religion. When told later that they had joined a religion, they said that had not been their intention (personal communication).

[18] Those who left to become Pentecostal included some who had served on the first Local Spiritual Assembly there (personal communications).

> demanded from everyone. Thus, high costs tend to *screen out* free-riders—those potential members whose commitment and participation would otherwise be low...Secondly, high costs tend to *increase* participation among those who do join by increasing the rewards derived from participation (Stark 1996: 138).

Joining the Bahá'í Faith is not a difficult process. It does not involve any standardized form of ritual, such as baptism, nor does it require one to renounce one's previous beliefs. The only thing that is required for individuals to become a Bahá'í is that they assert their belief in Bahá'u'lláh as the most recent prophet of God. In some parts of the world, including Canada, becoming a Bahá'í *officially* also means signing a declaration card; it is by this means that the Bahá'í administration keeps track of its members.

The fact that it is so easy to become a Bahá'í is perhaps, in part, one reason why the international Bahá'í community has been able to attract so many converts over the years. In light of Stark's (1996) assertion, however, it is also, perhaps, the reason why so many of these converts either leave the Bahá'í Faith shortly after joining, or never truly become "active" participants in the Bahá'í community. This trend is even less surprising, given that in some parts of the world, converts are not expected to give up their previous church membership,[19] no doubt in an effort to encourage more people to become Bahá'í. Such was the policy in the Yukon in the 1960s; First Nations people who joined the Bahá'í community were not required to give up their church membership if they did not wish to do so (Anderson n.d.: various entries; personal communications). As a result, perhaps the majority of these new "Bahá'ís" did not identify themselves as *exclusively* Bahá'í, and many continued to identify themselves more with their original church membership than with Bahá'í. For example, in the 1960s, quite a number of First Nations "Bahá'ís" received an Anglican funeral and burial when they died, no doubt because they had continued to identify themselves primarily as Anglican[20] (Anderson n.d.: various entries). In the case of one individual, his own wife did not even learn he had become a Bahá'í until after he died—three and a half years later!—when she had already arranged an Anglican funeral for him (Anderson, R. Ted 1966).

From the perspective of most Bahá'ís, the main reason for this kind of phenomenon was the lack of sufficient "deepening" among new believers. The process of "deepening" may be understood as one of deliberate and conscious enculturation in the Bahá'í Faith. It entails not only daily reading in the Bahá'í writings, but also learning about Bahá'í history (i.e., the origins of the religion), laws and administration, and the principle teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. I would argue that it is largely through "deepening" that new converts adopt a Bahá'í identify for themselves and that "deepening" thus provides Bahá'ís with a common foundation from which to build a community. Here I would compare Bahá'í identity with ethnic identity; just as an awareness of a common culture and "ethnic past" maintains a sense of ethnic identity within a group, "deepening" instills in the convert a shared sense of identity with other Bahá'ís, by developing his or her awareness of a common Bahá'í "culture" and history.

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[19] In the U.S. today, new Bahá'ís *are* expected to resign their membership in other churches. This requirement was adopted more for practical than for doctrinal reasons (i.e., probably to ensure greater accuracy in counting the total number of Bahá'í adherents), and should not be confused with any kind of requirement to repudiate one's prior *beliefs*. Moreover, while U.S. Bahá'ís may not be members of other churches, they may attend the services of religious groups if they wish.

[20] No doubt, some of these individuals may have decided that they were *not* Bahá'í. As is the case now, however, unless an individual had explicitly denied membership in the Bahá'í Faith, he or she would have

A lack of "deepening" appears to have had some influence on Native attrition and low rates of participation in the Bahá'í community in the 1960s. Native believer Ronald Bill (6/20/96), for example, notes that many people were left to their own devices to learn about their new religion, and so "they never really studied the Faith." Without any kind of guidance, he believes, it is difficult for individuals to become dedicated Bahá'ís; indeed, many of these individuals eventually quit the Bahá'í to become Pentecostal. He says that he himself did not really become a confirmed Bahá'í until after eight or nine years of studying the Bahá'í writings; reading these writings, he asserts, is what convinced him of the truth of his faith (RB 6/20/96).

It is important to point out, however, that "deepening" in this context entails, at least in part, the ability to read. If, indeed, the great majority of Yukon First Nations converts in the 1960s were elderly, as I have heard they were (personal communications), many of these individuals were barely literate, if at all. Thus, one could not reasonably expect these people to "deepen" themselves in the Bahá'í writings, even if they had the motivation to do so. For some reason, it appears that there was not much emphasis given to developing methods of "deepening" that made use of the Native people's oral skills.[21] While I am aware of several tape recordings the Bahá'ís made that provided translations of Bahá'í pamphlets into some of the Native languages, the only readily available opportunities for "deepening" that did not require literacy were the weekly classes taught by the White "pioneers" in Whitehorse. These, of course, were in English, which many elders had great difficulty with, and were inaccessible to those who did not live nearby.

Thus, while it would appear that a lack of "deepening" may have been a factor in First Nations attrition in the Yukon Bahá'í community, this was probably due more to the failure of the White "pioneers" to adequately address the language-literacy issue than to a lack of interest on the part of First Nations converts. In addition, I would suggest that there were other factors

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remained on the Bahá'í roles indefinitely, since those who have signed Bahá'í declaration cards are considered Bahá'í unless they notify the Bahá'í community directly of their intention to quit the religion.

involved in the loss of interest in the Bahá'í Faith on the part of many of these First Nations people, factors that were not necessarily considered by the Yukon Bahá'ís. Among these were the obstacles posed by geographic distance and cultural differences, the degree to which the Yukon Bahá'í community was able to address the social and spiritual needs of new converts, and the failure of White "pioneers" to recognize their cultural bias in the "deepening" process.

While these issues existed in the 1960s, however, and certainly appear to have had some impact on the retention of new converts in the Bahá'í community, they do not seem to have been especially problematic for the Yukon Bahá'í community until the 1970s. As shall be discussed in the following section, the 1970s brought both a spectacular increase in the number of new Bahá'ís in the Yukon through a series of mass teaching projects, and an influx of a new "breed" of White Bahá'ís to the Yukon from southern Canada. Both of these factors appear to have exacerbated the earlier challenges faced by those in the Yukon Bahá'í community, and set into motion a pattern of dysfunctionalism that continued to influence the development and character of the Bahá'í community in the Yukon into the 1990s.

D. The 1970s: Mass Teaching and Its Aftermath

The early 1970s witnessed a period of unprecedented growth in the Bahá'í community, both in the Yukon, and in Canada as a whole. For example, according to various Bahá'í sources (Clarke 1999; Anderson n.d.: 3/29/72), the Canadian Bahá'í community mushroomed from 4,557 in 1969 to nearly 7,400 members in 1972, and from 170 to over 400 in the Yukon. Much of this growth was due to the inauguration of a series of nationwide "mass teaching" projects in 1970, which were, in turn, prompted by the need to fulfill Canada's national goals for the "Nine-Year Plan." The first of these teaching projects, in the fall and winter of 1970-1971, apparently encountered great success in attracting new converts to the Faith. This was particularly the case in the Yukon, where, in a period of less than three weeks, more than 225 individuals signed Bahá'í declaration cards (Anderson n.d.: 10/18/70). In the weeks to follow, many more declared as well, enabling the formation of eight new Local Spiritual Assemblies by April 1971, fulfilling one of the "Nine-Year Plan" goals the Canadian Bahá'ís had set for the Yukon (Anderson n.d.: 4/21/71). While the Yukon Bahá'ís lost two of their Assemblies later in the year, when the communities of Porter Creek and Whitehorse Flats were annexed by the city of Whitehorse, the fact that so many new Assemblies were established in such a short time was quite a feat for the Bahá'ís.[22]

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[21] By contrast, in areas such as central India, traditional oral forms, such as Hindu *bhajans*, were used for this purpose (Garlington 1998)

[22] Whether or not these Assemblies were viable or not—i.e., able to function with at least a minimum of five members (a quorum)—is a different question, and one that I cannot readily answer.

From a Bahá'í perspective, the 1970-1971 proclamation project galvanized the First Nations people of the Yukon. As one Bahá'í observer of these events writes,

> The Territory-wide proclamation attracted at least one heart from almost every Native family in the Yukon and, in many cases, whole families. It was the same incredible victory in every village and town the proclamation team visited...It was an unbelievable time. To meet a Bahá'í in the Yukon during those days was to meet a God-intoxicated soul (Johnson et. al., 1998: 24).

Once the Yukon proclamation had drawn to a close, many of these First Nations believers were so "on fire" that they just picked up and followed the proclamation team down to southeast Alaska. For example, Annie Auston (7/4/96) recalls that when the team went on to Alaska, "we all just followed. It seemed like...we just joined and...followed along. I had no intentions of going into Alaska. But here I found myself in Petersburg." Another Bahá'í remembers that, in Pelly, new believers left their nets out on the river for three weeks to go teaching in Alaska (BvZ 5/30/96).

These travel teachers signed up many new Bahá'ís in southeast Alaska, as well; for example, the Andersons (n.d.: 1/21/71) report that over 80 enrolled in southeast Alaska during a three week period in January 1971. The following summer, many of these same teachers traveled to northern Alaska, introducing the Bahá'í Faith to many new communities there. Included on this trip was a visit to Old Crow, the northernmost community in the Yukon, where 25 individuals became Bahá'í (Anderson n.d.: 8/16/71).

As exciting as these events seemed at the time, the task of integrating these new converts into the Bahá'í community presented an immense challenge for the Yukon Bahá'ís. From a Bahá'í standpoint, perhaps the most important step in this process was to "deepen" new believers in their faith. The need for more "deepening" seemed particularly evident in light of the difficulties that the Yukon Bahá'í community had in retaining earlier First Nations converts. According to Sargent (1989: 3), the main difficulty in retaining First Nations believers, both in the Yukon and elsewhere in Canada, was that there was "very little transference...taking place. By transference I mean—the ownership of the Faith—the taking on of the individual responsibility to assist and further the development of the Faith by the Native friends." It was assumed, therefore, that if these converts were sufficiently steeped in the history, administration, and writings of their new faith, they would adopt a more Bahá'í-oriented identity, and become committed and "active" participants in the Yukon Bahá'í community.

In an effort to address this need, the newly formed Canadian National Indigenous Teaching Committee adopted a program of intensive nine-day institutes, modeled on those developed in Alaska. These institutes were aimed at "deepening" and training First Nations believers so that they might become more effective Bahá'í teachers and more involved in the administrative affairs of the Faith (see, for example, Sargent 1989: 3). In the Yukon, perhaps the first precursor to these institutes was a historic meeting between Navajo Auxiliary Board Member Chester Kahn and about 18 First Nations Bahá'ís, following one of the sessions of the annual Yukon Bahá'í conference in June 1970 (Anderson n.d.: 6/28/70). This was, apparently, the first time that the First Nations people had met alone with a member of the Bahá'í international administration to talk about teaching. While the exclusion of non-Natives from this meeting upset a number of the non-Natives present at the conference, it was viewed as an important step in drawing the First Nations Bahá'ís into greater involvement in the teaching work (Anderson n.d.: 6/28/70).

This historic all-Native meeting was followed some days later by a two-day "deepening" "with about eleven of the most active native Bahá'í teachers in the Yukon" (Anderson n.d.: 7/4-5/70). Chester Kahn emphasized that "those Yukon Indians present at this Native Teaching Institute could and must spread the Bahá'í Faith among the Yukon Indians—that they were the 'keys' to doing so" (Anderson n.d.: 7/4-5/70). From the perspective of "pioneer" Ted Anderson (in Johnson et. al. 1998: 24), this meeting "marked a major turning-point in the spread of the Faith amongst the First Nation peoples of the Yukon." Prior to this, it appears that much of the responsibility for teaching in the Yukon had been given over to White Bahá'ís, such as Ted and Joan Anderson. For example, while First Nations Bahá'ís shared the Faith with others, they generally brought interested "seekers" to the Andersons, or to other White Bahá'ís, to learn more about the Faith, and it was usually the Whites who "deepened" new believers (Anderson n.d.: various entries).

In the years following the 1970-1971 proclamation in the Yukon and Alaska, the Bahá'ís held a series of nine-day teacher-training institutes, attended by many First Nations Bahá'ís (EB 11/5/98). According to Tagish believer Mark Wedge (7/22/96), these institutes "played an important role in...the development" of the Bahá'í Faith among the First Nations people of the Yukon. By providing both new converts and long-time Bahá'ís with the opportunity for intensive reading and discussion on the Bahá'í writings, the institutes encouraged them to become active and confident Bahá'í teachers. One indication of the success of these institutes—for those who attended them—is that, as Sargent (1989: 3) observes, "most if not all of the steadfast Native Bahá'í workers we have today were those that attended those institutes...." Indeed, many of those First Nations people from the Yukon who attended these deepening institutes became some of the most dedicated and well-traveled Bahá'í teachers in Canada and abroad. Doris McLean (8/27/95), for example, says that members of her extended family had gone

> Bahá'í teaching all over the world. I think they covered the world...I don't think there's any one of them that went to Africa...or Australia...but I think they've got the rest of the world covered.

These individuals also played an important role in the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the rest of Canada. During the mid-1970s, the Canadian Bahá'ís again undertook a number of large-scale teaching projects in "virtually every major region of the country," which greatly increased both the size and diversity of the Bahá'í community in Canada. Much of this teaching work was done on Native reserves, with the help of First Nations Bahá'ís from the Yukon (UHJ 1978: 201, 1981: 163). Clara Schinkel (8/28/95), for example, recalls a teaching trip she took with seven other members of her family during that time:

> There was a call that came out, they wanted really all the First Nations to teach...and it was Canada wide. And the largest contingent of First Nations to leave any area was from the Yukon. There was eight of them and all my family that left from here...We started teaching...from Yellowknife right down to...Quebec actually...In BC, all over.

Clara's cousin Mark Wedge also participated in these teaching projects, including the one Clara took to the Northwest Territories. Mark (7/8/96) says of his experience,

> I traveled across Canada—and it took ten months for me to travel across, you know. I left January...then we went travel teaching up until April...until the...National Convention. After the National Convention...we went to...Yellowknife, Hay River, Fort Ray, then I went down into central BC. We did travel teaching all through BC...We met Clara in Northwest Territories. Clara and Mabel [Baker] over there, then they went down there. And so people were just traveling all over to win the Five-Year plan goals. And it was from that letter that the National Spiritual Assembly wrote to these Native Bahá'ís, saying...you need to do this...and we started travel teaching...and going to different reserves and...it was really a magical time. There was a lot of magic, because...we were living on prayers and teaching the Faith and it was really powerful for me and...people were becoming Bahá'ís...They were forming Assemblies...

Despite the apparent success of the nine-day institutes in raising up large numbers of First Nations Bahá'í teachers, not all of those who joined the religion in the Yukon during the 1970s were able to attend these institutes. In fact, the majority of these new believers were scarcely "deepened" at all, in part because so many entered the Bahá'í community at one time. One has to wonder, as well, given the intensive method of teaching and the large numbers of people who joined at once, with very little knowledge of the religion, how effective these so-called conversions were. As it turns out, while "mass teaching" was effective in "signing up" names on the Bahá'í roles, it was not so effective in winning devoted converts. It is in part for this reason that "deepening" was not entirely successful; some individuals apparently did not *want* to be Bahá'í, and no amount of "deepening" would change that.

Also hampering these efforts were the tremendous geographical distances between individual Bahá'í communities in the Yukon. For example, while there were a good number of "deepening" opportunities available to new Bahá'ís in the Whitehorse area—through classes and talks held at Joan and Ted Anderson's place, and at the Jackson Lake gatherings—these were not always viable options for converts who lived in areas remote from Whitehorse. The use of "mass teaching" methods, so popular in Canada during the early to mid-1970s, brought additional problems, as well, with respect to retaining converts in these more isolated areas of the Yukon.

For instance, what generally occurred with these "mass teaching" projects is that individual teachers or teaching teams would visit the region once, sign up new converts, and then disappear, never to be seen again by the new converts. This happened almost across the board in the Yukon and Alaska rural settlements during the mass proclamations of the early 1970s. As a result, while a great many people often "declared" during such visits, they seldom knew much at all about their new religion, and were given little or no guidance as to what they should do once these visiting teachers left the community. Socially isolated from other, more "experienced" Bahá'ís and basically ignorant of what they had joined, these converts invariably returned to their original church (various personal communications). As one woman from Old Crow told me, she became a Bahá'í, but when the Bahá'ís did not return, she went back to her old church; she needed to belong to *some* kind of spiritual community.

Thus, it appears that through their "mass teaching" efforts in the rural Yukon, the Bahá'ís were repeating many of the same "mistakes" that their 19th century Christian counterparts had made in their efforts to convert the First Nations people, with much the same result (see, for example, Coates 1991). In some ways, their conversion efforts were even less "successful" than those of the early Christian missionaries. The latter were sure to travel to these rural communities at least once a year to teach their converts prayers, hymns, and other Christian doctrine, and recruited local Native catechists to help in the process. The Bahá'ís did not even do that much. Certainly, they invited new converts to attend the nine-day intensive "deepening" institutes that were held in the Whitehorse area, but this was hardly a viable option for most in the isolated regions of the Yukon. Thus, it is not surprising that when these individuals encountered opposition towards their new-found religion, or when another religion came along, such as the Pentecostal Church, that provided more direct spiritual guidance, more intensive interaction and social support, and a more permanent local presence, these Bahá'í "converts" invariably left the Faith.

This is not to say that the Bahá'ís did nothing for isolated converts. Bahá'ís from Whitehorse and other more established Bahá'í communities, for example, periodically traveled to some of the less remote areas of the Yukon to visit isolated Bahá'ís and those expressing an interest in the religion. Apparently, the isolated First Nations believers greatly enjoyed and looked forward to these visits (Anderson n.d.: various entries; personal communications). After the mid-1970s, however, even these visits appear to have stopped, often quite suddenly and for no apparent reason. In some cases, those who had been organizing the visits—such as Joan and Ted Anderson and Reg Wilson—moved away and no one took responsibility for continuing these visits (personal communications). In other instances, community or personal problems may have precluded travel to these isolated individuals.

Whatever the reason, the fact that these visits did not continue had a negative effect on these isolated Bahá'ís. Many of them appear to have left the religion, even though their names still appear on Bahá'í membership records. One White Bahá'í, for example, told of the hostility and anger she encountered when she tried contacting some of these individuals about the Bahá'í Faith after she had moved into their community, some ten years after these visits stopped. One of these people was a Native woman who, along with her husband, had become a Bahá'í in the 1960s. At one point in the mid-1970s, there was a Bahá'í event in Alaska which they had planned to attend with some other Bahá'ís from Whitehorse, who were to have picked them up on the way. When the Whitehorse Bahá'ís failed to show up, the woman's husband apparently went off and got drunk and was killed in a fatal accident that night; she wanted nothing to do with the Bahá'ís after that. I heard of another, similar story, in a different community (personal communications).

Even in those far-flung regions of the Yukon where there *were* Bahá'ís to follow up with new converts, they seldom numbered more than two or three in each community, and were often far outnumbered by those they sought to "deepen." Paul Grant,[23] for example, recalls the difficulties that he faced in his efforts to work with new Bahá'ís at his "pioneer" post in Fort Liard,[24] a community several hours southeast of Whitehorse. He relates that, prior to the proclamation in 1970, there were only two Bahá'ís in Fort Liard: him and another young man. By the next morning, however, there were over 50. Logistically, it was nearly impossible for him and his fellow "pioneer" to meet with or to hold "deepening" classes for all of these new Bahá'ís, even under the most favorable conditions.

The fact that Paul and most other Bahá'í "pioneers" were newcomers to these isolated communities, and were invariably White—whereas the majority of new Bahá'ís were First Nations—made their task even more of a challenge. In contrast to the early "pioneers" in Whitehorse, who made the effort to get to know and gain the trust of First Nations people before they even tried to teach them the Faith, these newer "pioneers" were expected to "deepen" individuals they knew next to nothing about. However well intentioned, this approach appears at once impractical and paternalistic. Had these "pioneers" in 1970 been able to really take the time to *befriend* these new Bahá'ís—as Paul Grant tried to do—the majority of converts might have felt more comfortable seeking out information about their new religion, and have chosen to participate fully in Bahá'í community life.

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[23] A pseudonym.

[24] Also a fictitious name.

Circumstances, however, generally precluded this outcome. For example, Paul states that, for various reasons, he got to know very few of the First Nations Bahá'ís during his stint in Fort Liard, and seldom had the opportunity to speak with them about the Faith for more than a few minutes at a time. As a result, few of the First Nations people who signed declaration cards in that community in 1970 still identify themselves, however loosely, as Bahá'í—and even these individuals appear to know very little about the religion (personal observation; various personal communications).

Another factor complicating efforts to incorporate these individuals into the Bahá'í community was the fact that, at least in some areas, many of those who had signed Bahá'í declaration cards had apparently been under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time and, thus, did not remember ever having signed them, or—if they did remember—wondered what they had gotten themselves into[25] (Andersons n.d.: various entries; personal communications). Even some of those who had been sober when they signed their card appear to have had second thoughts about what they had done. For example, several people had signed declaration cards when the Bahá'í teaching team came through the Inland Tlingit community of Teslin in the fall of 1970, but when the National Spiritual Assembly later tried to confirm their enrollments they denied ever having signed their cards (personal communication). Another individual also encountered this kind of response from individuals when she went, some years later, to check on the status of Bahá'ís in some of the rural First Nations communities north of Whitehorse:

> ...when I was in Pelly, I went and approached this one person. She said, "No...I [didn't sign] a card, they signed me up" or something to this effect. "But you must have signed the card." But she said, "Oh, I didn't know what I was doing."

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to integrating First Nations converts into the greater Yukon Bahá'í community, however, was the fact that it appears to have been primarily White "pioneers" who were responsible for "deepening" these new Bahá'ís, and who provided the "role models" for "appropriate" Bahá'í behavior. Exactly why the bulk of responsibility for "deepening" new believers should have fallen to these individuals is an intriguing question, especially since, by the late 1960s, there were a good number of First Nations people who were quite capable of taking on this role themselves. One explanation for this is that they were viewed, whether because of their status as "pioneers" or as Whites in a White-dominated society, or both, as somehow more

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[25] There is no evidence to that these individuals were manipulated into signing declaration cards while they were under the influence; in their eagerness to sign up new Bahá'ís, however, the Bahá'í teachers may have overlooked the fact that some of these individuals were under the influence.

"qualified" than others to educate Bahá'í converts about their new faith (AT 10/17/98). It is possible that many of the First Nations Bahá'ís perceived these White "pioneers" just as they did the Christian clergy—as a source of "power" and "knowledge" within the Bahá'í community who must thus be respected and deferred to.

The fact that it was primarily White Bahá'ís who were "deepening" First Nations people leads one to question, if the aim of Bahá'í deepening is to create in new converts a coherent Bahá'í identity, what did this Bahá'í identity entail? What Bahá'í "culture" were these converts being asked to adopt for themselves?

Most White Bahá'ís—in North America, at least—tend to be unaware of their own cultural biases, which naturally shape their perception of Bahá'í teaching, administration, ritual practice, and appropriate social behavior. Naturally, because they represent the dominant cultural group in most North American Bahá'í communities, the Bahá'í "culture" of these communities tends to be very White in orientation. Thus, when they "deepen" new converts, White Bahá'ís are essentially enculturating these converts into *White* (i.e., Euro-Canadian) Bahá'í culture.[26] While this is not a problem where the convert is White, it *is* a problem where the convert is of another cultural background. This, I would propose, is what happened in the Yukon in the 1970s.

I would suggest that the degree to which the "deepening" process succeeded or failed in encouraging active and enthusiastic participation in the Yukon Bahá'í community lay not in how much deepening individual converts received, but in the perceived similarities or differences between Native and White cultural values and behavioral expectations. It appears, for example, that those individuals whom the Bahá'í "pioneers" were able to reach most effectively, both in their teaching and "deepening," were "those that were able to cross the cultural barrier to [the Whites]. But when it came to the masses—the generality of the people—there were obviously cultural differences that were difficult to overcome" (Sargent 1989: 2). Indeed, it seems that the First Nations people who became the most "active" and "deepened" Bahá'ís were the Tagish (of the Carcross and Tagish areas south of Whitehorse), who had had perhaps the most prolonged contact with Whites, and were thus most familiar with White Canadian culture and thought processes. In addition, Andy Tamas (10/17/98) suggests that perhaps

> ...one of the reasons that...[these] people became actively involved in the Faith—more of them proportionally became...visible participants of the Faith in

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[26] The reader will, of course, note the irony here: that individuals are attracted to the Bahá'í Faith because of its principles of equality and the oneness of mankind, and yet are expected to adopt White cultural values. The imposition of these cultural biases are, however, totally *unconscious* on the part of most (if not all) White Bahá'ís.

> many respects—was because Tlingit[27] culture, at the sociolinguistic dimension, and the pattern uses of power and speech and all of that are probably more similar to White Canadian...patterns than the Athapaskan patterns are. Athapaskan patterns...are fundamentally different than mainstream American or Canadian cultural patterns. The Tlingit, I think their patterns are more similar, and so...going from one world to the next was relatively easier for Tlingit people than it was for...Athapaskan folk.

Where these cultural differences were greater, the biases of White Bahá'ís often discouraged First Nations Bahá'ís from participating to any great degree in the Bahá'í community. For example, Mark Wedge (7/22/96) comments that while an understanding of First Nations culture and spiritual expression is integral to the "deepening" process among First Nations people, because of the White Bahá'ís' lack of familiarity with First Nations culture, such spiritual expression is misunderstood or devalued by many Whites. As a result, he says, the "deepening" process was often an uncomfortable one for many First Nations believers:

> ...we struggled with a lot of these things, between the aboriginal-western kind of perspective of how to approach deepening and consolidation...because part of the thing was that a lot of aboriginal people were not vocalizing or...saying things. They would sit and...listen...but they wouldn't interact oftentimes...Which creates problems, because then the concept of what we see as unity is where everybody participates. But by the dynamics and characteristics of people, oftentimes what happens is some people are less or more passive, in interacting and consultation. Doesn't mean they...[don't] have anything to say. They're not comfortable in...saying it (MW 7/22/96).

It was in part to address problems such as these, and the pain and frustration that they engendered in many First Nations Bahá'ís, that the National Spiritual Assemblies of Canada and Alaska organized a series of all-Native Councils, the first of which was held in Haines, Alaska in 1975 (FB11/5/98). Organized by the First Nations believers themselves, these councils were designed both "to reflect the native culture" and to encourage First Nations Bahá'ís "to take an increasingly more active role in the Faith" (UHJ 1981: 198, 201). It was out of these councils that the idea was born to establish a permanent Bahá'í teaching institute in the Yukon, that would be a "place of learning" for the First Nations people (FB 11/5/98; DM 8/27/95; AA 7/4/96). Such an institute would eventually be built at Lake LaBerge, near Whitehorse, in 1984: the Yukon Bahá'í Institute.

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[27] Here, he is actually referring to the First Nations Bahá'ís who today refer to themselves as "Tagish." At an earlier period, however, these same individuals referred to themselves as "Tlingit," perhaps in part because that was the language that the majority of elders spoke at the time.

E. Troubled Waters: the 1980s and early 1990s

Exactly when the idea first took shape for building a permanent Bahá'í teaching institute is difficult to determine, although it apparently emerged partly as a result of consultation at three different Native Councils:

> We had Native Councils in the beginning, and that was where the Institute kind of developed from...These Native Councils...Native people from...a lot of different places came and joined the Native Council...And it was...at three Native Councils where they were talking...about a place...they wanted a...place of learning...a meeting place...So that's where that kind of developed from. Out of the unity councils (AA 7/4/96).

A recommendation for such an institute was presented at the Canadian National Convention, sometime in 1981 or early 1982, by several of the First Nations delegates from the Yukon (AT 10/17/98). Perhaps in part because of the enthusiasm of its First Nations supporters, or because of the large number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon—according to one source, the Yukon had "more Bahá'ís per capita than anywhere else on the continent" (*WH Star* 7/6/84)—the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly agreed to support this recommendation, and requested that one of its members be invited to attend the next Native Council, at Teslin, in July 1982 (BNC 1982). Following additional consultation at this council and elsewhere on the finer details of the institute to be built, and the selection of an appropriate site, construction on the Yukon Bahá'í Institute began in 1983, on land donated by two local Bahá'ís, and was completed in the summer of 1984.

The building and dedication of the Yukon Bahá'í Institute aroused considerable interest and excitement in the local and national Bahá'í communities, for it was the first of its kind in Canada. It was hoped that the new Institute would serve as an important resource, learning center, and meeting place for the First Nations people of the Yukon, and would attract increasing numbers of people to the Faith. In the short term, the Institute was a marvelous rallying point for the Yukon Bahá'í community. It instilled a renewed sense of unity and purpose in the community, and provided jobs for both First Nations and non-Native Bahá'ís alike, as carpenters, laborers, managers, and cooks. Such opportunities for service were particularly important in that they provided recognition for individuals whose skills and quiet dedication to the Faith might not ordinarily have been recognized by the rest of the Bahá'í community (various personal communications; AT 10/17/98).

The construction and dedication of the Institute, and the great number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon at the time, also helped to attract public attention to the Faith. For example, by the mid-1980s, just about everyone in the Yukon "knew about the Bahá'í Faith and heard of it...may not've known in-depth about it, but they'd heard about it" (MW 7/22/96). People in the Yukon were particularly impressed by the positive example that the Bahá'ís set for others, and by the degree of racial and cultural integration in the Bahá'í community, which was apparently unmatched by anything else in the Yukon (AT 10/17/98; personal communication). According to one White Bahá'í man, Yukon government leaders were so impressed by the Bahá'ís that they invited the Local Spiritual Assembly of Whitehorse to help them rewrite the laws on liquor and to help reorganize the jail system. Mark Wedge (7/22/96) recalls that the Liberal Party even "approached one member of...the Bahá'ís, saying...how can we tie into this thing?...So it was very much recognized...that...the Bahá'ís were a major force."

It appears, however, that these glory days of the Faith in the Yukon were to be short lived. By the late 1980s or early 1990s, it had gone into a decline, from which it only recently seems to be emerging. For instance, some sources estimate the number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon at 700-900 in the early to mid-1980s (*WH Star* 7/22/83, 7/6/84), but by 1989, this number had dropped to 641,[28] if one counts those with and without known addresses, and this number had dropped still further by 1999, to 567; of these, approximately 30 percent are First Nations (Clarke 1999). When taking only those with known addresses into account, these numbers fall by about half, to 335 in 1989 and 242 in 1999 (Clarke 1999). Likewise, the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies fell from 14 in 1981, to 10 in 1989, to 7 in 1996, to 5 in 1999 (*WH Star* 6/23/81; Clarke 1999). Even the Yukon Bahá'í Institute itself, which contributed so much to the growth and development of the Faith in the Yukon in the 1980s, and to its stature in the public eye, is now so underused by the Bahá'í community that the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly is thinking of selling it (various personal communications).

The question to be addressed, then, is what factors led to this decline? These factors are particularly difficult to pinpoint, because there are no written records available for the Yukon Bahá'í community from this time period, and those I interviewed were often quite fuzzy in their memories of this period, as well. It appears, however, that a number of issues may have contributed to a decline in numbers and participation in the Yukon Bahá'í community after the mid-1980s.

The first of these issues concerns the Yukon Bahá'í Institute itself. It has been pointed out that, even with the increased activity in the Bahá'í community during the time it was being built and in the years immediately following, the building itself was never, and still has not been, used to its fullest potential. Rather than serving as a cornerstone of Bahá'í community development, as it was no doubt intended, it has become more of a burden to the community than anything else. One obvious difficulty was that the Institute was built about thirty miles from Whitehorse, and is far from any First Nations community, thus making it impossible to get to without a car, which many First Nations Bahá'ís did not have access to. Perhaps a more fundamental problem is that the Institute was apparently developed more out of the vision and enthusiasm of a few individuals than out of a fully grassroots level movement (AT 10/17/98). According to Tamas (10/17/98)—a community development expert and a Bahá'í who was living in the Yukon at the time the Institute was conceived and built—for an Institute such as this one to successfully meet the needs of the community, and to assist in the further development of the community as a cultural, educational, or spiritual resource, it must be built with the whole-hearted support of the entire community. From his perspective, the mandate to build the Institute was a "very shallow" one. Tamas (10/17/98) suggests that the fact that there was not a grassroots mandate for the building actually served to undermine much of the development that had already taken place in the Bahá'í community, in that it took energy away from things that should have been done. Thus, it is not surprising that the Yukon Bahá'í community has had difficulty in sustaining the activities and commitment necessary to justify the Institute's existence.

The Yukon Bahá'í Institute also became a source of frustration for First Nations Bahá'ís, who felt that there was not enough First Nations input into the day-to-day running of the Institute. From the outset, the First Nations Bahá'ís who supported the Institute had hoped that it would help to resolve the earlier problems that cultural misunderstandings between First Nations and White Bahá'ís had caused in the Bahá'í community. They also hoped to address the problem of "deepening" First Nations Bahá'ís, by providing a place of learning designed especially for the First Nations people (DM 8/27/95). The way in which the Institute has been managed—specifically, the fact that there have never been any full-time First Nations staff there since the building's completion, and that the majority of board members have been non-Native—appears to have aggravated the problem instead. Several individuals recalled that, while many First Nations Bahá'ís had eagerly volunteered to help at the Institute during its construction and for some years afterwards, they were often relegated to menial tasks, and their help taken for granted (personal conversations). Some of these volunteers became resentful and disillusioned with the Bahá'í community as a result. As one middle-aged Native Bahá'í observes, the way in which the Institute has been managed smacks of White paternalism: "it's an age-old problem," she says, "that a lot of people don't think [the First Nations people are] capable."

This is not to say that all White Bahá'ís share this paternalistic attitude; indeed, the early White Bahá'ís in the Yukon demonstrated a refreshing lack of paternalism towards the First Nations people, which was one of the primary factors that convinced many of those I interviewed to become Bahá'í in the first place. With an increasing number of White Bahá'ís from southern Canada moving into the Yukon from the mid-1970s onward, however, this dynamic began to change, particularly after the departure from the Territory of Ted and Joan Anderson in 1972, and Reg Wilson in 1974.

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[28] This number and the next three figures include only adults and youth.

According to Andy Tamas (10/17/98), who was a pioneer to the Yukon in the late 1970s and 1980s, a major source of this change was the unconscious imposition of White Canadian cultural values on the organization of Bahá'í activities. Already by the late-1970s, Bahá'í Feasts, summer schools, and other such events had come to be "conducted in a way that...[was] rooted in what [were] essentially alien patterns...to the Native people." As a result, First Nations Bahá'ís "started no longer feeling quite as at home" at these events (AT 10/17/98). As a member of the Whitehorse Local Spiritual Assembly, Andy (10/17/98) observed first-hand how this kind of cultural dynamic helped to reduce the participation of First Nations people in the Bahá'í community. For example, in the midst of consultation about where to hold Bahá'í Feast in the summer time,

> ...a Native member of the Assembly says—"Let's hold the Feast outdoors. We can hold it in such-and-such a campground. It would be really nice. People would come. You know, we could make a fire...it would be very beautiful. It's a warm time of the year...it's a good thing to do." And they had identified a location. One of the non-Native people on the Assembly said, "Oh, but that wouldn't be dignified." And a look passed over the face of the two Native people that were on the Assembly at the time, and one of them subsequently started not attending Assembly meetings.

Here, the non-Native person, however unintentionally, judged the Native person's suggestion based on his own understanding of what was appropriate or "dignified" behavior, without realizing he was greatly offending the Native person and his or her cultural values in the process:

> Native people have been worshipping God outdoors with fire...for fifty thousand years...White guy, a fire outside is a bonfire where you bring your marshmallows and you roast wieners...Right? It's the culture...embedded in the form of practice. And the Native person isn't going to arise and contest the statement because they have a conflict avoidance...They don't have a conflict in...the abrupt and in-your-face kind of way that White folk do.[29] They just withdraw. What they sense within the Bahá'í community is paternalistic patterns, similar to what they got everywhere else. Minorities say that all the time; we got Blacks in eastern Canada are saying it feels just like a White Sunday, go to church thing, I'm not going to go to that, I get...the same feelings of racism and prejudice in Bahá'í events that I do in non-Bahá'í events. Why should I give my heart and soul to that? (AT 10/17/98)

Another difficulty lay in the fact that some of the White Bahá'ís who had moved to the Yukon from southern Canada made little or no effort to get to know the culture or history of the

First Nations people in the Yukon. Rather, they took it for granted that the behavior of First Nations Bahá'ís should mirror that of other, White Canadians; as a result, these White Bahá'ís were wont to criticize the First Nations believers whenever they perceived a conflict between First Nations culture and the practice of the Bahá'í Faith. The irony of this behavior is not lost on First Nations Bahá'ís; as one young Tagish woman suggests, "They've seen it before. They've been through it before. It was called mission school." That these White Bahá'ís would criticize First Nations cultural behavior is even more ironic, given the fact that when Bahá'ís "pioneer" to other countries, they are expected to respect and adapt to the indigenous cultures of their new homeland. As this same young woman points out, pioneering to the Yukon amounts to the same thing:

> This is...their country, you know. If they can't be Indian here, where can they be Indian? And besides, the Bahá'í Faith...does not say we can't be Indians...I think a lot of people would argue, "Well, this is Canada"...and blah, blah, blah. But...[i]f you go out to the village, there's maybe three White people living there and the rest are Native

Doris McLean (8/27/95) discusses how this kind of cultural insensitivity, as well as the paternalistic attitude of some of the White Bahá'ís, caused a lot of pain in the community:

> ...people...certainly don't understand the aboriginal people, and nobody's here to make a person change their ways, because the Guardian says [to] retain your identity...and a lot of good comes out of it. But when it comes at, you know, that "you're here, you're going to take care of it" attitude sort of thing, a patronizing attitude, and condescending, well then you lose your flock...And so basically, I think that's what kind of more or less happened in this Bahá'í community....

Other First Nations Bahá'ís also commented about the prejudice they had experienced or observed on the part of some White Bahá'ís in the late 1980s, particularly towards First Nations people in prominent positions within the Bahá'í community. One White woman, for instance, made life particularly difficult for Native believer Shirley Lindstrom, after Shirley was appointed an Auxiliary Board Member in 1984 (personal communication). One reason for this prejudice, a young Native Bahá'í woman suggests, was jealousy on the part of some White Bahá'ís:

> It just comes down to that, because in the writings it clearly states...the station that the First Nations people have. When they become enlightened...and educated, they'll basically set aflame the world...And I think just because of [non-Native] people not being able to get rid of self and ego and all that, they can't deal with [this idea]...They feel...in some ways threatened because there's special attention given to the First Nations people...I think it was just mainly...the

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29 Such conflict avoidance is common among many First Nations people (see, for example, Philips 1993).

> non-Native people feeling jealous...that's the only thing I can pinpoint...They were jealous of all the attention that's given to the First Nation people here.

These negative patterns, however, seem to have been more dominant in the Whitehorse area, where the majority of non-Native Bahá'ís lived, than in the rural communities of the Yukon. For example, Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (5/19/96), who became a Bahá'í in Mayo, says,

> I remember moving from Mayo to Whitehorse was like day and night. 'Cause in Mayo all the Bahá'ís were really together and we were such a small number and...we...kind of were like a little family...And all these people were very helpful...So when I moved to Whitehorse, I found that the Bahá'í community, although it was great in number, they weren't very helpful. They didn't see that there were needs...particularly [of] single parents, and there were several of us in the community. And...the local Assembly asked me...to host a Feast. And it was in the springtime...It was just gorgeous...And [my daughters] and I went and we picked crocuses...And the Feast was at the school, so we went there and we put all the chairs in this big circle, and we got this beautiful Celtic music and we put it on a tape so this music was playing so beautifully as people came in...and then as the friends came in we gave them a crocus. It was so wonderful to see...how much these girls wanted to participate...Well, this one individual in this community, he shut that down so fast, he said, "I refuse to sit in that circle. I'm not going to a Feast where I have to sit in a circle like an Indian. I'm not an Indian." And on and on and on.

Even some of the non-Natives I spoke with noted the contrast between the Whitehorse Bahá'í community and those in the rural villages. For example, one older woman who became a Bahá'í in the First Nations village of Carcross and later lived in Teslin, comments that "life in the outposts [was] completely different from life in Whitehorse." Race and cultural differences were certainly less of an issue in the rural villages, where the vast majority of people, both in the Bahá'í community and in the community at large, were First Nations, and the relative isolation of these villages engendered a closer relationship between Bahá'ís, both within each rural village and between villages, than in Whitehorse.

By the late 1980s, or early 1990s, however, it appears that even in the rural communities, there was increasing disunity among the Bahá'ís, which led to a decline both in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the Yukon, and in the level of participation in Bahá'í activities. For example, one individual who had lived in Mayo mentions that the Bahá'ís there lost their Assembly due to personal issues within the Bahá'í community:

> something happened in Mayo and I don't think it's up to me to discuss it. It...had [to go] through the National...[After that] they couldn't get [an

> Assembly]...because it was only within a period of about three, four months...everybody pretty well moved out, at that point...A few people quit, wouldn't serve... One had lost voting rights, one resigned.

The increasing involvement of First Nations Bahá'ís in band politics also may have contributed to the disunity or declining participation in various Bahá'í communities. Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (5/19/96) observes that in the late 1980s,

> ...there was a lot of desire for First Nations [Bahá'ís] to become involved politically, to make changes. Not realizing, of course, that when once you get involved politically, then you have to oppose somebody. And you can't, you just can't function in a political world, which is the old world, and be committed to the teachings...for Bahá'u'lľáh says avoid...politics...you know, avoid it, because it's...a cause of disunity. So a lot of the friends got involved in this, and chose that...so the [Bahá'í] community suffered from it. We suffered together.

Another individual states that in Carcross, political contention created divisions not only within the Bahá'í community, but in family clans, as well. He estimates that it will take "at least a generation" to repair the damage done to the Bahá'í Faith there. While this person did not say so, I would guess that some of the "damage" to which he refers may have been a loss of respect for the Bahá'ís in the eyes of many in the First Nations (non-Bahá'í) community.

Part of the difficulty with this issue—i.e., participation in First Nations politics—stems from the prohibition on "partisan politics" in the Bahá'í writings. According to one Bahá'í source (BIC 1992: 46), this prohibition extends to joining political parties and discussing "individual candidates or parties," but does not include voting in general elections, which Bahá'ís are free do if they choose. There appears, however, to be some disagreement among Bahá'ís over how to interpret this law. In the Yukon, for example, I have heard some First Nations Bahá'ís justify their participation in First Nations politics because it does not entail aligning with any political party—since there are, to my knowledge, no "parties" associated with First Nations community elections[30] (personal communications). Others, however, felt compelled to disagree, as the National Spiritual Assembly perceived such involvement as potentially divisive and contrary to the principles of the Faith. That one local First Nations Bahá'í was serving as an NSA member and another as a member of the Auxiliary Board made life in the Yukon Bahá'í community at this time (the late 1980s and early 1990s) rather awkward for them. As Louise Profeit-LeBlanc comments, even though she herself had no authority over anyone in the community,[31] her affiliation with the National Assembly made others resent her and made her feel uncomfortable. "I tried to stay out of [politics]," she says, "But...the National Spiritual Assembly got wind of this and we had to deal with it, so naturally because I'm serving on the National Assembly, then I became a victim. Of that prejudice. Because, like I was [perceived as] the cop" (LPL 5/19/96).

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[30] In some parts of the world, Bahá'ís have actually been encouraged to run for office, as in the case of one woman from a scheduled caste who was nominated as a candidate for mayor of her village in India (personal communication).

No doubt quite a few people quit the religion or simply dropped out of active participation in Bahá'í activities as a result of this kind of confrontation. In more recent years, the growing interest in First Nations spirituality and First Nations land claims has also served to reduce Native involvement in the Faith. For example, I know of at least two individuals whose interest in Native spirituality have led them away from active involvement in the Faith, although at least one of them still considers herself a Bahá'í. While some do not find this interest particularly problematic, being a matter of personal choice and a means of asserting one's Native identity, others see it as divisive, in that, as one middle-aged Native Bahá'í woman asserts, Native spirituality is

> ...not for large populations, it's for the Indians only...So it separates, it segregates...I mean a lot of White people participate in...ceremonies and all this. But ultimately the Indians, they are the know-it-alls. That doesn't make me feel very good.

The majority of those I interviewed, however, seem to have taken more of a middle road to this issue. These individuals have continued to participate in Bahá'í community activities, while incorporating First Nations elements into Bahá'í ritual practice—for example, burning sage, cedar, or sweet grass (which are not practices indigenous to the area but which are considered "First Nations" nonetheless) as part of the prayers spoken at the opening of a meeting. For these individuals, I would suggest, the integration of First Nations cultural elements into their observance of Bahá'í activities is a reflection of their identity as Bahá'ís *and* as First Nations people. In other words, both identities appear to be equally important to them. I shall return to this point in Chapter VIII.

While the observance of First Nations spirituality is mainly a personal issue, however, the issue of land claims is a very public one, that is also strongly linked to First Nations identity and self-determination. Partly for this reason, perhaps, it is difficult for anyone in Yukon society today to remain neutral on the issue of land claims. Even between First Nations communities, land claims have become a source of debate and contention; whereas they worked together for twenty years to reach a land claims agreement with the federal government, now they must decide "who gets what" out of a rather limited proverbial pie (personal communications). Yet, curiously, within the Bahá'í community, there is a peculiar lack of dialogue about this issue. This lack of dialogue, however, does not necessarily mean that Bahá'ís have no interest in this issue or that they are in agreement on what should be done. Rather, I would suggest that this issue is considered *so*

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[31] Only the institution of the NSA itself has any authority (see Chapter III).

potentially divisive—both between Native and White and between Native and Native—that few wish to broach the subject.

Nevertheless, there appear to be at least two views on this issue, one of which might be viewed by non-Bahá'í Natives as highly controversial. One Native woman, for example, says that before she became Bahá'í, she was an "avid advocate of land claims," but she now thinks "it was such a waste of time." I do not think from this statement that she is *opposed* to the First Nations people achieving self-government or a just settlement for the loss of their original lands, simply that, for her, this goal is of secondary importance to what she sees as the ultimate solution to society's problems—that is, the Bahá'í teachings. This view, I believe, is probably a minority one among the First Nations Bahá'ís I met; I got the impression that most would disagree with the view that land claims are a "waste of time." For example, many of the First Nations Bahá'ís I know have been active participants in the Council of Yukon First Nations' on-going land claims discussions and, no doubt, in their own First Nations community debates over this issue. Their participation, however, has not made the land claims process any less divisive. For example, the fact that some of the First Nations Bahá'ís who are the most active in the land claims process are also the most vocal about their identity as First Nations Bahá'ís may be one source of contention for others in the greater First Nations community. The question remains, however, how First Nations Bahá'í involvement in the land claims process will ultimately influence both the outcome of this process itself, and the Bahá'í community.

F. Whither the Way: Since 1996

Despite the decline in the number of Bahá'ís in the Yukon since the mid-1980s, and the fact that fewer Bahá'ís—whether First Nations *or* White—are participating regularly in the Bahá'í community, one could hardly suggest that the Yukon Bahá'í community is at death's door. For example, there are still many "out there" who consider themselves Bahá'ís, even those who rarely, if ever, attend Bahá'í functions.[32] Of these people, Doris McLean (8/27/95) says,

> They still...believe in Bahá'u'lláh, a lot of them still give to the fund...lot of them...identify themselves as Bahá'ís. Last night we were out at the...Kwanlin Dun Hall, and there was this fellow there who's in his forties, and I introduced him to one of the members of the Bahá'í community, and made the introductions...and referred to this guy as an old-time Bahá'í. Never flinched, shook the hand, waved, you know, went out there. So I know within my heart

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[32] It is interesting to note here that religious commitment and participation has declined among other denominations in Canada, as well. For example, Clark (1998: 6) notes that the number of Canadians reporting no religious affiliation nearly doubled between 1981 and 1991. In addition, 32% of Canadian adults who claimed a religious affiliation in a 1996 survey "did not attend religious services at all. Another significant minority (10%) said they only attended once or twice a year" (Clark 1998: 6).

> he's still a Bahá'í. You know, otherwise he would've said, "Oh, Doris, I kind of forgot about that sort of thing."

Andy Tamas (10/17/98) adds that many of these First Nations Bahá'ís have

> ...memorized more prayers than many of the people that were on the Assembly, myself included, but weren't actively involved. I met a guy, who...someone told me was a Bahá'í. Well, this guy lived in a dumpster, and he was...one of Whitehorse's homeless drunks. I came across him one day and someone said, "That guy's on the voter's list. His name is so-and-so and such-and-so," and I walked up to him and I said, "Alláh'u'Abhá."[33] And he turned around to me, and in his bleary...beat-up, toothless face, said, "Alláh'u'Abhá" back, and started quoting from the writings of the Guardian. Blew my mind. This guy knew more about the Faith than I did, and he was a drunk. See? But he...never showed up at Feast. And he wasn't the only one.

In my own research, I met a number of individuals who, as far as many White Bahá'ís were concerned, were "inactive" believers, yet who demonstrated, as Andy said, a profound knowledge of the Bahá'í writings, a deep love for Bahá'u'lláh, and a commitment to teaching others about their religion. Some of these people had been hurt by other Bahá'ís, and had withdrawn from active participation in the community, but continued to live their faith in their own way, while others simply had too much to do in their lives to go to meetings. The fact that many Bahá'ís such as these came out of the woodwork when the Yukon Bahá'í Institute was being built demonstrates that there are always those who are willing to be of service for the Bahá'í Faith, when the need arises.[34] As Doris McLean (8/27/95) suggests "Once they get the spirit of [the Faith] going again, you will never see this place like it [is now]."

Another positive sign for the Faith in the Yukon is that, even with so much apparent "inactivity," the Yukon Bahá'í community compares favorably with the rest of Canada in terms of the continued identification of First Nations people with the Faith. For example, while First Nations people amount to only 13% of the total Canadian Bahá'í population, they make up more than 35% of the Yukon Bahá'í population, of those with known addresses[35] (Clarke 1999). Moreover, it appears that the Bahá'í Faith may again be gaining momentum among Yukon First Nations people, at least among the Tagish. For example, in the intervening years since I first went to the Yukon, I have witnessed a number of those I interviewed, who had withdrawn from active participation in Bahá'í community life, becoming once again enthusiastic participants in Bahá'í activities. I also met a Gwich'in woman who re-declared as a Bahá'í while I was in the Yukon, after having left the religion years earlier. She had become a Bahá'í as a young woman sometime in the early or mid-1970s, and had even traveled to other communities in Alaska to teach her new religion, but had subsequently resigned because of the persecution she faced in her First Nations village of Old Crow. Her faith was apparently renewed, however, through her participation in one of the First Nations Bahá'í councils held in 1996.

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[33] "Alláh'u'Abhá" is a Bahá'í greeting that means "God is Most Glorious" or "God is All-Glorious" (Momen 1989: 15).

[34] This "coming out of the woodwork" has tended to happen in Bahá'í communities throughout North America. When a few individuals take the initiative to teach and to bring the community together, individuals the "active" Bahá'ís have not seen for years begin coming to Bahá'í events and volunteering to help with things in the community (various personal communications).

Indeed, the organization of two First Nations Bahá'í councils in 1996, one at Haines, Alaska, the other at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute near Whitehorse, appears to have had a profound influence on the level of participation and enthusiasm of many First Nations believers in the Bahá'í community, and to have rekindled an interest in the Bahá'í Faith on the part of others in the greater indigenous community. For example, these two councils attracted a number of previously "inactive" Bahá'ís, many of whom were still hurt from negative experiences within the Bahá'í community. Rather than turning into a diatribe against White Bahá'ís, however, the consultation and sharing that emerged at these councils provided a healing dialogue for those present—both First Nations and non-Native—and inspired many of these individuals to renew their commitment to their faith.

One of those people was Pete Sidney. When I first met Pete, he spoke about the lack of love among the Bahá'ís and the lack of respect he received as an elder from others in the Bahá'í community. As a result, he had stopped teaching, and had been "inactive" for quite some time. While Pete did, eventually, begin attending Bahá'í Feasts and Holy Day celebrations a few months before I left the Yukon, it was at the First Nations Bahá'í council at Haines that I witnessed in him a remarkable transformation. From one who had seemed discouraged and depressed, he became a radiant and happy man, who took joy in talking about and teaching his beloved faith. He died not long after, in February 1997.

These First Nations councils also served to draw attention to the Bahá'í Faith from those outside the Bahá'í community. For example, several of the local First Nations people who were not Bahá'í—and at least one White non-Bahá'í—attended some of the meetings at Haines. The gathering at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute near Whitehorse aroused even greater public interest. Aside from attracting many of the local First Nations people to a public performance and "powwow" at the potlatch house in the Kwanlin Dun First Nation village in Whitehorse, the council also attracted the interest of a national broadcasting company, Vision TV, which filmed many of the council sessions, as well as the "powwow," for the television series "Mosaic."

These First Nations Bahá'í councils, the positive healing they brought to the community, and the public interest they engendered in the Faith, were, themselves, inspired by the renewed

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[35] If those with known addresses are included, this percentage drops to a little less than 30.

sense of purpose given to the First Nations people by the "Four Year Plan" of the Universal House of Justice, inaugurated in its April 1996 message to the Bahá'ís of North America. In this message, the first one of its kind, the Universal House of Justice (1996: 10) reminded the indigenous people of North America of their "glorious destiny" if they should arise to teach and to serve others in the name of Bahá'u'lláh, and said,

> We call upon the indigenous believers who are firmly rooted in the Bahá'í Teachings to aid, through both deed and word, those who have not yet attained that level of understanding. Progress along the path to their destiny requires that they refuse to be drawn into the divisiveness and militancy around them, and that they strive to make their own distinctive contribution to the pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, both beyond the confines of North America and at home. They should be ever mindful of the vital contribution they can make to the work of the Faith throughout the American continent...

The sense of healing in the Bahá'í community has also come from another source, from within the community itself. For example, I believe there has been a growing realization on the part of many Bahá'ís—not just First Nations people, but non-Native as well—that there have been some serious problems in the community that need to be addressed, not by finger pointing, but through a sincere willingness to forgive and move forward. From my perspective, there have been an increasing number of Bahá'ís willing to reach out to others, and to encourage greater love and unity in the community through efforts such as the Whitehorse Bahá'í community picnic held in July 1996, and the Marion Jack Institute, which serves as a deepening and support group for Bahá'í women of all backgrounds.[36]

Today the Yukon Bahá'í community seems to be standing at a crossroads. Taking Whitehorse—with which I am most familiar—as an example, it appears that the Bahá'í community continues to shrink, as it loses members to death, relocation, and attrition. There have also been no new declarations in the last few years. On the other hand, the Bahá'ís who have remained in the community seem to have grown closer over the years since I left the Yukon. One individual, for example, mentioned that the Bahá'ís in Whitehorse today (2000) spend much more time socializing together before and after Feast than they did when I was a member of the community in 1996. The introduction of "Ruhi Circles"—small "deepening" groups of 8 to 10 that meet regularly to share personal stories and experiences—to the equation also appears to have brought people in the community closer together, if only to those within their study group (personal communication). Moreover, while there are some individuals who no longer attend

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[36] As a number of people have pointed out, my own presence in the Yukon may have influenced these efforts, as well. For instance, my efforts to interview people about their faith, and to befriend those in the Bahá'í community who may have felt neglected or been hurt by other Bahá'ís in the past, probably encouraged them to reach out to others and to become more actively involved in the Bahá'í community.

Feast and other Bahá'í activities as they did when I was in the Yukon, others, who rarely if ever came to such events in the past, have begun coming to them (personal communication). Finally, even the Yukon Bahá'í Institute has, in the last year, begun to attract a greater number of Bahá'ís than in the previous several years (personal communication).

Taking these two trends into account, it is hard to predict the future of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon. Nevertheless, perhaps the recognition that the community is no longer the size that it once was, and that problems still remain, will work for the positive, rather than the negative. Certainly, its shrinking size has prompted those who remain to make a greater effort at community building, and to grow closer together. Ironically, perhaps that is exactly what the Yukon Bahá'ís need if they wish once again to attract others to their religion: a loving sense of community.

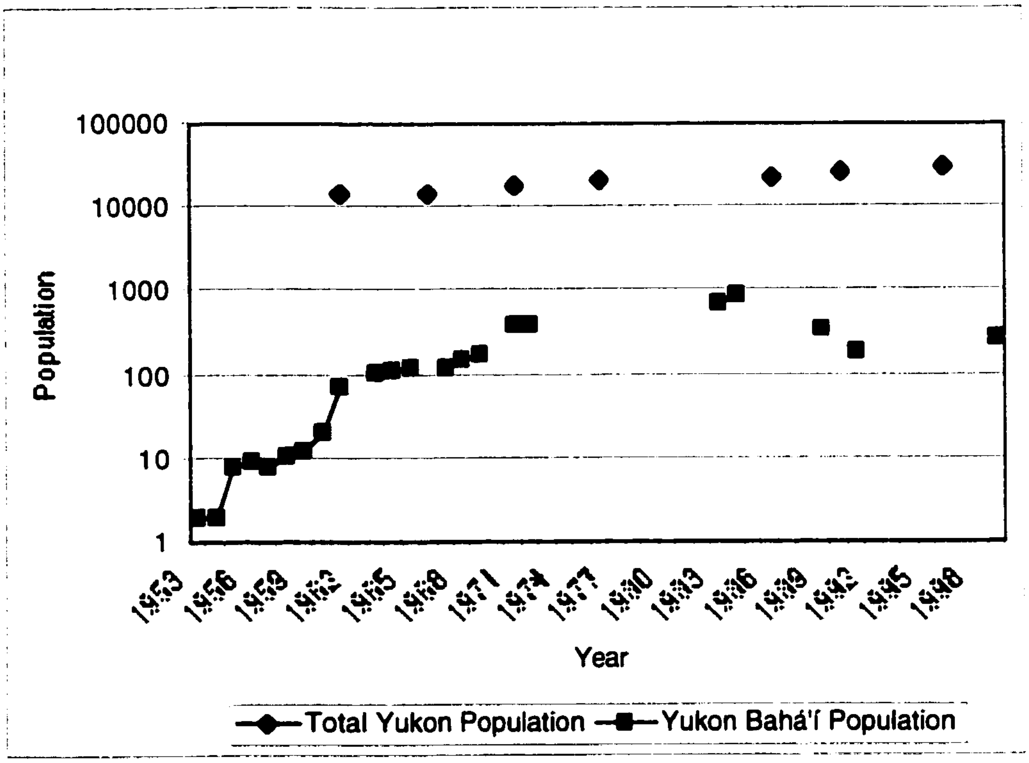

Figure 3. Growth of Total Yukon and Yukon Bahá'í Populations

Data sources for total Yukon population for the years:
1961 (DBS 1966: 177); 1966 (DBS 1969: 155); 1971 (SC 1972: 1369); 1976 (SC 1977: 155); 1986 (SC1989: 2-28); 1990 (SC1991: 82); 1996 (SC 1996?).

Data sources for Yukon Bahá'í populations for the years:
1953-1959 (Anderson n.d.); 1960-61, 1963 (*CBN* # 129-130, 143, 159); 1964-65, 1967, 1969, 1972 (Bahá'ís 1964-65, 1967, 1969, 1972); 1969 (Anderson, R. Ted 1968); 1971 (Anderson, Joan and Ted 1971); 1983-1984 (*WH Star* 7/22/83, 7/6/84); 1989, 1999 (Clarke 1999); 1991 (SC1993: 15).

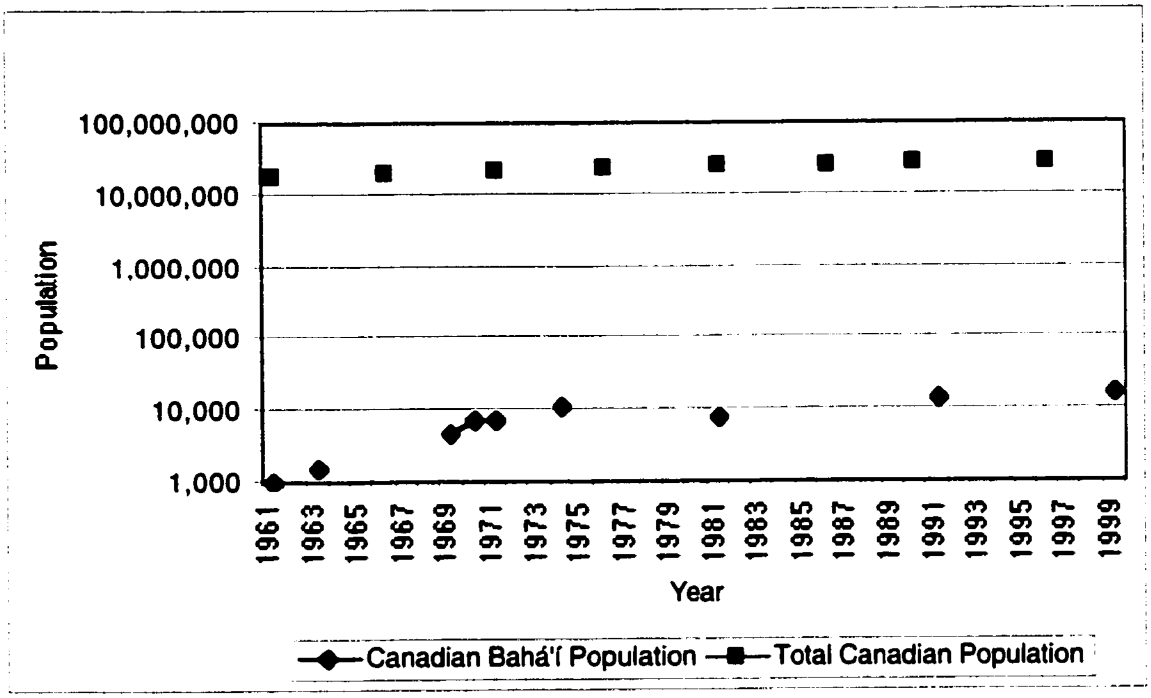

Figure 4. Growth of Total Canadian and Canadian Bahá'í Populations

Data source for total Canadian population for the years:
1961 (DBC 1966: 176); 1966 (DBC 1969: 153); 1971 (SC 1972: 1369); 1976 (SC 1977: 135); 1981 (SC 1985: 37); 1986 (SC 1987: 2-14); 1990 (SC 1991: 82).

Data source for Canadian Bahá'í population for the years:
1961, 1963 (*CBN* # 133, 166); 1969-71, 1974, 1999 (Clarke 1999); 1981 (SC 1985: 60); 1991 (SC 1993: 15).

Chapter VII: Becoming Bahá'í

A. Introduction

In Chapter I, I raised a number of issues relating to the concept of religious conversion, suggesting that the term itself is problematic for many Bahá'ís, in that its most common usage does not adequately address the nature of their experience in choosing to become Bahá'í. First of all, as commonly used, the term conversion implies a radical or sudden change in one's outlook or beliefs, and often an outright abandonment of past beliefs and social ties (see, for example Bankston et. al. 1981). While it is true that choosing to become Bahá'í often entails a re-interpretation or a re-alignment of one's previous beliefs, it in no way contradicts or devalues the essential elements of that belief.[1] In fact, many of those I interviewed in the Yukon joined the Bahá'í Faith precisely because it fulfilled or enhanced their understanding of their earlier beliefs. Moreover, to suggest that conversion involves purely internal cognitive or cultural factors ignores the importance of external social factors on the individual's decision to join a new religion. At least for those I interviewed in the Yukon, both sets of factors influenced their conversion. Finally, one cannot assume that the conversion process is complete when the individual declares his/her belief in Bahá'u'lláh. Rather it is an on-going process of self-transformation—what Barker (1993) calls "internal conversion"—that continues long after the individual signs his/her declaration card, and that may be nurtured through a life-long commitment of "deepening," prayer, and teaching the Bahá'í Faith to others.

It is for these reasons that I have chosen in the following chapter to use, wherever possible, the term "becoming Bahá'í" in place of "conversion" or "convert." Where I use the term conversion or convert, it is to be understood as referring simply to a change in one's religious outlook; I leave it to others to re-define the term, or to invent a new one, to reflect a broader understanding of religious change than that often provided in the social science literature.

This chapter will examine both the factors influencing First Nations conversion to the Bahá'í Faith, and the impact of conversion on the lives of individual Bahá'ís. In the numerous accounts I heard and recorded of individual Bahá'í conversions in the Yukon, it appears that both internal cognitive or cultural factors and external social factors influenced First Nations Bahá'í conversion. The most commonly mentioned internal factors behind conversion were dreams and visions, the perceived fulfillment of Christian and/or traditional Native teachings and prophecies, and personal soul-searching, although these factors were not always present for every individual. As for external social factors, it appears that both the relationship between the new Bahá'í and others in the Bahá'í community, and the behavior of Bahá'ís towards potential converts also had an important influence on First Nations conversion to the Faith.

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[1] This does not necessarily mean, however, that one's new Bahá'í identity might not conflict with one's existing political or social allegiances.

How Bahá'í converts incorporated their new faith into their lives varied from individual to individual, depending not only upon the degree to which they were familiarized with, or "deepened" in, the teachings, history, and writings of their new religion, but also on whether or not they received encouragement and support from other Bahá'ís in the community. Similarly, among those I interviewed who were raised in the Bahá'í Faith, the manner and degree to which these individuals have incorporated the Bahá'í teachings into their lives as adolescents and as adults also depends upon the degree to which they have accepted their parents' religion as their own and been "deepened" in the Bahá'í writings. Thus, the experiences of both groups will be considered here.

For the sake of brevity, it is necessary for me to summarize the key elements of individual narratives in the discussion below, rather than to include each person's story in its entirety; however, I have attempted to incorporate the individual's own words as much as possible into these summaries.

B. Factors influencing conversion

1. *Internal Cognitive and Cultural Factors*

Doris McLean (8/27/95) observes that, in the early 1960s, "a lot of people came in [to the Bahá'í Faith] with dreams and visions." In the indigenous cultures of the Yukon, as elsewhere, dreams and visions were regarded as legitimate sources of spiritual power or guidance (see, for example, McClellan 1975: 332, 530-537). While the vast majority of Yukon First Nations people were at least nominally Christian by the mid-20th century, many of them continued to view dreams and visions as significant; for example, Clara Schinkel (8/28/95) comments that, even today, her "family really believes in dreams." Thus, it is not surprising that the dreams and visions of those who became Bahá'í often had a powerful influence on their eventual acceptance of the Faith, or upon their ability to legitimize their Bahá'í conversion to others.

Doris' and Clara's cousin, Peter Sidney (8/29/95), for example, tells of a vision he had that influenced his decision to become a Bahá'í:

> ...the sky opened up...rolled back four ways. And there was...a ladder coming down...like steps...And on that...piled up high, was bread. Bread...of all kinds...buns and loaves...All shapes and forms. And this...man on the other side...light hair...And long whiskers on, and I think to myself, it must be Jesus...Stood beside...the steps...[A]fter I became a Bahá'í I saw pictures of 'Abdu'l-Bahá...it must have been him. He had his hands in his sleeves. And I was thinking...I'm going to grab...a couple of these breads here...I thought I

> needed it. And he tell me, "No...don't touch that." And he took his hand out and he give me...three small loaves stuck together. [He said,] "This is for you, especially for you. You take this"....Well, the following November...was when I signed my [Bahá'í] declaration card. I didn't know I had to sign a declaration card, you see. But...that vision...that's what convinced me it's...about the Faith...I was on the right track. And I didn't realize that I was looking for that...for all my life. I didn't realize it until...that vision of mine.

Pete's mother, Angela Sidney (in Cruikshank 1990: 157), also recounts a vision she had in 1972, when she was very ill, and that led to her to become a Bahá'í:

> That time...the sun was way over this way. Towards the sun there's a ladder coming down—a big golden ladder. It's just gold, shiny like everything. It came down, and I started to go up that ladder. I just took one step. On both sides there was a person, both sides standing there. And they told me, "No, it's not for you. Go over that way, over this way where the sun sets." And so I looked that way and here I saw a church, same as that, golden, shining through just like it was sunlight. "You've got to go there first, and then you'll be ready to go."
>
> So Ida and I talked about it. Maybe that's the church. When I told them this dream they said maybe that's Baha'i Church...And that's why I joined in, too. I think it told me to go to that church. And then I heard somebody say to me, "You're not going to die. You're not going to die yet. Until you start going to that church all the time." That's what they tell me. So I think that's that Baha'i temple, that's what they mean. Because it's all shining. I saw up in the sky something, just like the sky opened. Somebody stuck his head out like that and he's kind of dark-looking person, and his head was just like a turban with a tassel on it. That's what I saw first...And then after that, all those things came to me.

It is interesting to note that both Pete Sidney's and Angela Sidney's accounts share similar themes. For example, each one saw the sky—which appears to have represented the spirit world—opening up and a ladder coming down, and each one was told that something they wanted or thought they should do was not for them, and that they were to have or do something else—which each interpreted as the Bahá'í Faith—that was better for them, instead. Also worthy of note is the fact that these two visions resemble, in some ways, the traditional narrative genre about shamanistic journeys to the spirit world. For example, McClellan (1975: 553-558) recounts a story of one individual, an old blind man, who climbs a ladder to heaven, where his sight was restored and he learned about Jesus; another story recounts the visit of a shaman who travels to heaven by means of a suspended cage, like an elevator. The similarities of these journeys to

Pete Sidney's and Angela Sidney's accounts suggests that, at least in their minds, there exists a continuity between traditional ideas of spirituality and the Bahá'í Faith.

The vision of Joseph Smith,[2] the first Southern Tutchone to become a Bahá'í in the Yukon, also contains elements of this traditional genre as well. In brief, like many protagonists in such narratives, Joseph nearly died and while he was unconscious, he dreamt of walking down a road and meeting a man, dressed in a white gown and cap, with white hair, who he believed was God. This man told Joseph to go back to his people and warn them that they must "Start drinking water and leave...the firewater alone" (SA 5/22/98; also DWi 11/4/98). When he awoke, Joseph apparently forgot about this dream until he went into a bar and ordered a beer; when he tried to drink it, nothing came out (DWi 11/4/98)! Some time later, at the home of Ted and Joan Anderson,[3] he saw a picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and recognized him as the man from his dream. At this point, Joan told him about the Bahá'í Faith and showed him a small replica of the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, Illinois, on which a visiting Bahá'í had left a Bahá'í ring for the next person to join the Faith. Spotting the ring, Joseph said, "That's what he ['Abdu'l-Bahá] showed me!" (Anderson n.d.: 9/9/60). He became a Bahá'í shortly afterwards.

While most individuals I interviewed shared their dreams and visions as their own personal history, some individuals' dreams are by now so well known to the Yukon Bahá'ís that they have become community, rather than simply personal, history. These are stories that have been told over and over again, not only by the individuals themselves, but also by others in the community. Joseph Smith's dream is one such example. While he died more than twenty years ago, I heard about this dream from at least four other sources. Another dream well known to First Nations Bahá'ís is that of Dora Wedge—Angela Sidney's sister—who at the time I interviewed her, was the eldest Bahá'í in the Yukon. Even before I had the chance to meet her, I heard from a number of people about a marvelous dream that Dora had had that led her to become a Bahá'í; however, the story is best told in Dora's own words:

> I became a Bahá'í...really, through my dream. [In 1948]...fourteen years before I heard about the Faith.... I dreamt we were in a boat...Annie, Doris and Leslie and myself. Well, I don't know how we got there. It was...[a large] lake, and we...drifted to...the shore...When we got to the shore...there was a hill...and there was little steps up in there. So...we just start to go right up....When we got up on top, it was just nice green grass and flowers all over. And there was one big building way off...And there was a man standing in the door...he had a big,

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[2] I have chosen to use a pseudonym here, since there is some debate over whether this individual remained a Bahá'í; while the First Nations Bahá'ís I know emphatically assert that Joseph remained a Bahá'í until he died, others in the First Nations community have denied that he was ever a Bahá'í.

[3] He had been brought to visit the Andersons by Reg Wilson, whom he met some time earlier (DWi 5/9/96).

> big gown on and [a turban]. He's standing there, he had his hands wide open...and it looked like he wanted us to come. So I [told] those kids, "Hurry up, let's go over there...." And when we got there...that man, he's gone, disappeared. I don't know...where he went...We went in there and people [were] all over...some sitting down and way up high...I woke up there. And I wonder about this...So I ran down to my sister['s]. I told her about it..."I dreamt I went to heaven last night," I tell her. "Oh, you can't go by yourself," she says. "When the last day comes...the whole world's going to wake up...even the dead...." So she kind of set me off right there. I didn't want to say anymore....I wonder[ed] about it...every now and again I [thought] about it, I didn't know what it was (DW 5/9/96).

It wasn't until 1961, when Dora first heard of the Bahá'í Faith, that her dream began to make sense. She was introduced to the religion by her sister-in-law, Agnes Johns, who lived nearby. Agnes, who had become a Bahá'í earlier that year, invited Dora and Dora's sister Angela to her home for a Bahá'í meeting. While her sister expressed little interest in the new religion, Dora was curious, and the next day when she and Angela returned to Agnes' house, she asked her niece Clara, who was also a Bahá'í, where Bahá'ís go to church. Clara told her that the Bahá'ís did not have a church, but she showed Dora a picture of one of the Bahá'í holy places in Haifa, Israel, the Shrine of the Báb:

> And just [as] soon as I saw that [picture], I know that's what I dreamt...just like I dreamt it last night...I look at it and I say, "Oh, this is what I dreamt!"...And...I told her my dream. "Oh, we've got to get you down to Ted and Joanie's place," she says. "Joanie will be very interested in it. You have to let her know"...She says that's the Bahá'í [building] that people come [to] from all over. "It's way over in Haifa, so they have to go a long ways, but people go there," she says. "That's what it is, a Bahá'í building. Shrine of the Báb, they call it"...And I don't know how long after we went down. And we went to a meeting...to Joanie's. And when I come in there, to Joanie's house, I saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá's picture on the wall. And I knew that was the man I saw standing in front of that building...Oh, it [was] just like cold water spill on me, you know, when I saw that. And I knew that was the man I saw in that dream (DW 5/9/96).

Although Dora did not become a Bahá'í immediately, the realization of her dream had a great impact on her, and she continued to learn more about the Faith and to attend Bahá'í meetings until she declared in early 1962.

I believe that both Joseph's and Dora's stories are significant for Bahá'í community history in the Yukon because their acceptance of the religion had an influence on the decision of others to investigate and join the Bahá'í Faith. For example, Joseph was not "afraid to tell people...his dream he had...[that] the Indian people will have to stop drinking...[He] didn't care what he sounded like, so long as he got the message across" (SA 5/22/98). No doubt in part because of this message, and because of his enthusiasm for his new faith, he attracted several others from his Native community to the religion[4] (Anderson n.d.: 1/11/61, 6/17-18/61, 12/14/61). As a result of Dora's decision to become Bahá'í, at least three others in her family—those she had seen in her dream—chose to investigate the Faith and to become Bahá'í: her daughter, Annie Auston, her son, Leslie Johns, and her niece, Doris McLean (various interviews).

Annie and Doris each mention that they knew of Dora's dream long before she became a Bahá'í. Doris (8/27/95), for example, says,

> I remember her having that dream as a child, and I remember thinking about it. So when she became a Bahá'í and recognized 'Abdu'l-Bahá as being part of that dream, I remembered and so did everybody else...the dream of Aunt Dora...cause Aunt Dora never dreams like us. She only dreams dreams that come true and have great meaning.[5]

Because they were devout Baptists, however, both Annie and Doris were at first very skeptical of Dora's new found belief. Annie (5/9/96), for example, states that she was concerned because she had been told by the missionaries "to beware of false prophets and all of this kind of thing." Nevertheless, the fact that Dora remained firm about her decision to become Bahá'í convinced Annie (5/9/96), at least, that "there must be something to this, whatever it is," and both she and Doris began attending Bahá'í meetings to investigate the religion for themselves.

While dreams and visions, such as those of Pete and Angela Sidney, Joseph Smith, and Dora Wedge, were often significant factors influencing individual conversion to the Bahá'í Faith, they were certainly not the only factors. For example, while Dora's dream and her decision to become Bahá'í led Annie and Doris to investigate the Bahá'í Faith, what led them to take the new religion seriously was the Bahá'í claim that Christ had returned and that Bahá'u'lláh was the prophet of God for this day. Although they were initially skeptical, they found the Bahá'í writings about the return of Christ to be "pretty reasonable" (AA 5/9/96). Having attended mission school and being devout Baptists, both were very knowledgeable about the Bible, and were aware that "there was a possibility that there was someone coming" (DM 8/27/95). Doris (8/27/95) says that "the very first evening I heard of the Bahá'í Faith, I made a decision that, yes this was true...I knew what they were telling me was the truth—that Bahá'u'lláh was the manifestation of God for this day, that the Báb...was the return of [Christ]...My first time I heard I knew, because my studies had led me to that...."

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[4] I was unable to confirm, however, whether any of these individuals had remained Bahá'í.

[5] McClellan (1975: 332) also refers to distinguishing between ordinary and true dreaming: "even among ordinary people some dream 'better' than others and are often able to 'dream true.'"

Doris' niece, Sandra Johnson had a similar experience in her investigation of the Bahá'í Faith. Before she became a Bahá'í, Sandra was active in the Anglican church; thus, like Doris and Annie, when Sandra first heard of the new religion, she was quite skeptical about it:

> I was visiting my Aunt Clara in the hospital...and...on their ID bracelet they usually have religion [listed]...And I saw this religion, "This can't be right. I've never...heard of such a thing." I couldn't even pronounce it. And I said to her, "What...do you call this?" and she said, "Bahá'í." I said, "And that's a religion?" She said yes...And I thought to myself, "Poor Auntie Clara! My God, is she ever misguided!"...I felt so sorry for her...I ended up saying prayers...for her eventually (SJ 8/24/95).

She became curious, however, when her Aunt Doris and Annie became Bahá'í:

> ...they were sort of my role models in a way...They're older than I am, and I used to really look up to them...and admire them a great deal. And, I knew Doris was a very staunch Baptist and Annie was very, very respectable and she was a Baptist as well...I thought they were very sensible people...And they grew very concerned...when they found out that [Dora] was mixed up...in the Bahá'í Faith, then they were going to investigate [it]...And I often wondered what happened, because the next thing I know Doris and Annie became Bahá'ís (SJ 8/24/95).

It wasn't until the summer of 1962, however, that Sandra really began looking into the religion, attending "fireside" meetings at the home of Joan and Ted Anderson and the Bahá'í summer school at Jackson Lake:

> I listened to these people talking [about the Faith]...and I became very excited about it, and yet afraid...what if they're wrong or whatever...And then I asked my Aunt Clara..."Tell me about this Bahá'í Faith...What is it all about?" And so she told me briefly something about it...and suggested I read this book which was called *Thief in the Night*...Because all my questions were related to the Bible...Like I said, "Well, if this is Christ returned, how come in the Bible it says that He shall return...as a thief in the night?" And this is a question I had asked previously at my church. I had asked different missionaries...and they all could not answer me. They always said, "Oh, you just believe"...I wasn't supposed to question. But these questions never left me. And so I asked Clara and that was what she gave me, the *Thief in the Night*. I started reading and I became so excited because all the questions that I had pertaining to the Bible were there and it was all answered so logically, so simply I could not believe why anyone

> could not see it...to me that was just confirmation, it was absolute truth. (SJ 8/24/95)

From a Bahá'í perspective, the Bahá'í Faith fulfills not only Christian prophecies about the return of Christ, but traditional Native prophecies, as well. For example, Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (5/19/96) tells of a prophecy her grandmother shared with her that Louise believes refers to the Bahá'í Faith:

> 'At the time of the end...two medicine men gonna come here[6]...One, he's more powerful than [the other] one...they're gonna bring us medicine. When they come...they're gonna make everybody go under one big tent...Chinamen, even the Black one...White man, Indian. Gonna get together...under that tent.'

From a Bahá'í perspective, these two medicine men are interpreted to be the twin prophets, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the medicine they bring is spiritual and is the means to unify mankind. The fact that the Bahá'í Writings refer to the prophets of God as "divine physicians" would appear to legitimize this interpretation for Bahá'ís (see, for example, Bahá'u'lláh 1983: 80-81). In addition, the fact that the Báb, while viewed by Bahá'ís as a prophet of God in his own right, apparently considered his own mission to be insignificant in comparison to that of the "Manifestation" who would follow him—i.e., Bahá'u'lláh—supports the interpretation that, while there would be two medicine men, one would be stronger than the other (Faizi 1989: 5-6).

Both Dora Wedge and her niece, Ida Calmegane, shared with me another prophecy that was apparently well known to elders from around the southern Yukon, and which the two women believe refers to the Bahá'í Faith. Ida's mother, Angela Sidney, also refers to this prophecy in her life history (see Cruikshank, et. al. 1990: 154-155). In brief, some time in the mid-19th century, there was a medicine man—most commonly called Major or Magi—who died for a time, and when he returned to life, he told his people about the future:

> And he said there was gonna be two things come from the East and...if we follow them...we would be alright. Because he said there's gonna be lots of problems. He told them about the First and Second World War. When all the blood was shed...all over the world...And he said we—the Indian people, the First Nations people—were gonna go through some really hard time where we were going to really, really suffer...And he said it's important for us to keep our culture...and to know our history and our background...And that if we follow those stars from the East, those things from the East, he said we'll be okay. That's the right way to go (IC 8/23/95).

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[6] This narrative follows a style of speech common to older First Nations people, for whom English is/was not a first language; Louise shared this prophecy as she heard it from her grandmother.

These two "things from the East" Ida (8/23/95) interprets to be Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith and his predecessor, the Báb, both of whom came from the east (Iran). This interpretation, she believes, contributed to the growth of the Bahá'í Faith among the First Nations people of the Yukon: "You know, once the Native people realized that's what he was suggesting then, I think that's really why the Faith took fire up here" (IC 8/23/95).

According to both Dora and Angela Sidney, this prophecy also anticipated the coming of a nine-legged animal[7] that would feed the people, which they both interpret as representing the Bahá'í Faith:

> He tells about it's going to be the last day, someday. So he said, "It's not going to happen right away. It's going to be long time yet," he said. "And," he said, "that animal is going to have nine legs. A nine-legged animal is going to be our food...And that's the one us Indians think maybe that's Bahá'í. That Bahá'í assembly has nine points...Well, nothing like that happened until Bahá'í people started coming here, telling about things like that. That's why we think—my family—we think maybe that's what he meant. Because there's no animal got nine legs. And he said, "That's going to be your food, isn't it?" It's just like food (Sidney in Cruikshank et. al. 1990: 154-155).

Doris McLean (8/27/95) adds that this reference to food is spiritual, and that in the Bahá'í Faith, "spiritual food is prayers, meditations, the reading of the writings, and the fasting, giving to the fund, is feeding off of this spiritual food."

It appears that both traditional Native prophecies and the perceived parallels between the Bahá'í Faith and traditional Native teachings may have led many First Nations people to embrace the Faith in the early 1960s. For example, one Native man, who is no longer a Bahá'í, speculates that what probably "caught the attention of the Indian people" about this new religion was its similarity to "the Indian Faith." Regarding his own experience, he says, "when I first heard of [the Bahá'í Faith], I began to see...parallel lines in what the teachings were in comparison [to] what I learned when I was growing up. And that was the Indian belief." Doris (8/27/95) also states that there are "a lot of similar things in the Bahá'í Faith that's similar in the...Native aboriginal teachings. So it was...not something that was new to them...." Indeed, for some individuals, such as Patsy Henderson (cited in CS 11/14/96), the Bahá'í Faith represented a revitalization of the traditional clan system and beliefs.

This does not imply, however, that First Nations people were necessarily aware of the finer points of Bahá'í doctrine when they became Bahá'í—indeed, most, perhaps, were not—or that such prophecies and teachings were the principle factors in their conversions, simply that these things appear to have played a role. Moreover, it is also important to recognize the degree to which individual interpretation influences the use of traditional teachings and oral narratives, including the story of Magi. For example, such stories have been used by First Nations people to legitimize not only Bahá'í conversion but also Christian conversion (see, for example, Cruikshank 1994).

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[7] I have seen no reference to a nine-legged animal in any other version of this prophecy narrative; it appears to be common only to First Nations Bahá'ís.

According to Ida (8/23/95) and Doris (8/27/95), those who were most influenced by traditional prophecies in accepting the Bahá'í Faith were the elders; the younger generations had a more difficult time accepting the Faith. Two factors may have contributed to this demographic pattern of conversion. On the one hand, the traditional Native cultures of the southern Yukon allowed for the incorporation of new ideas and new sources of spiritual power, into one's existing worldview (see, for example, McClellan 1975). Thus, it was possible for elders who had been raised traditionally (i.e., who had learned traditional skills and oral narratives from their parents and grandparents) to accept the Bahá'í Faith—or at least some elements of it—as compatible with their traditional beliefs. Their experience, however, often contrasted with that of younger generations—the youth and the middle aged—who had attended residential or mission school and who been raised as Christians. Such upbringing served to enculturate children with Anglo-Christian, rather than traditional Native, values, and often biased them against any non-Christian beliefs (RB 6/20/96; Coates 1991; for a description of one such school and its impact on religious attitudes, see King 1982 [1967]).

For example, one middle-aged Native woman recounts that both her mother and many of her siblings were "very prejudiced towards the Faith, and I grew up semi-prejudiced also," even though her father and two of her brothers became Bahá'í. This prejudice, she says, stems from the fact that her mother "was brought up in the Anglican Church with Bishop Stringer and Bishop Bompas. They...embedded in the Native people that there is no other religion that exists except for being an Anglican." No doubt in part because of her prejudice, she says she had to do "a lot of soul searching" before she became a Bahá'í: "I attended a lot of different sects: Bethany Tabernacle, Pentecostal, Holy Rollers, Anglican, Baptist, Catholic. But I couldn't find that peace and happiness within me." Only years later, after her father died, did she finally realize that it was the Bahá'í Faith that she had been looking for.

Certainly, for those educated in residential or mission school, becoming Bahá'í meant having to overcome one's religious prejudices, or one's cynicism towards religion in general. For example, Ronald Bill (6/20/96) says that he initially had a very "dim view of religion" before he became a Bahá'í, because of his experience in residential school. As noted above, Doris, Annie, and Sandra each had to overcome their own religious prejudice before they were able to become Bahá'í—and even then, they worried that they were making the "wrong" decision.

One individual who initially had great difficulty in accepting the Bahá'í Faith is Cora Joe,[8] who remained active in the Anglican Church after many others in her family had become Bahá'í. Cora says, "it took me a long time to become a Bahá'í...I had to go through some really hard times before I realized that...there was something else" besides the Anglican Church. There are a number of factors that eventually led her to join the Bahá'í Faith; perhaps the most influential, however, was the disillusionment she experienced with the Anglican Church after she and her first husband were divorced. Her faith in God was eventually renewed after she witnessed some evangelical Christians heal a child in the hospital where she worked, and for a time she attended church with them. In the final analysis, however, it was the love and support showed to her by her Bahá'í family during her time of crisis that led her to take the Bahá'í religion seriously.

Another individual who did a lot of soul-searching before she became a Bahá'í is Sally Anderson. Her experience, however, was different from Cora's, in that despite being raised Anglican and attending the Anglican residential school at Carcross, she was not satisfied spiritually: "I was still searching for...I can't really say what, but I was still searching for... religion....for God?...There was just something I was lacking" (SA 5/22/98). Thus, when she was diagnosed with TB and confined first to the Whitehorse hospital, and later to Edmonton, Sally says she began to investigate other churches:

> I still did some searching...for something, even though they...had an Anglican pastor there and we were visited by them...I...looked into the Baptists and other denominations of Christianity that were there...I can't say really that I had any questions that...I could ask and which could be answered. It was just a feeling that...needed to be satisfied but wasn't...Just a void that needed something more (SA 5/22/98).

None of these other denominations seemed to fulfill Sally's unnamed need either, until she learned about the Bahá'í Faith. The first time she heard about this religion, she says, "I was attracted almost right then. Just by their...teaching of unity, that all...are created...equal in the sight of God" (SA 5/22/98). She was particularly drawn to the Faith by a talk she heard by Ellsworth Blackwell, a Black Bahá'í visiting from the States:

> And that was about the time that I really began to be convinced that...this was what I'd been looking for. Just Ellsworth's manner of speaking, his warmth and his sincerity when he spoke about the Bahá'í Faith...All of it just really began to gel. I could see the truth of the Bahá'í Faith. But he told not only of the...oneness of the people, that all are created by God and are equal in his sight, but he also spoke of the oneness of religion...although there were so many

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[8] A pseudonym.

religions, the source of that religion is one...Which really began...to answer that need I had (SA 5/22/98).

It is interesting to note the role that rationality or "common sense" appears to have played in people's decision to become Bahá'í. In particular, the fact that the Bahá'í Faith somehow "made sense" in light of their prior experiences or existing religious belief, or that these things made sense in light of the Faith, seems to have been what prompted many individuals to investigate and accept the religion. The role of rationality in this process might appear to support the rationalist/deprivation model of conversion, which assumes that people choose a new religion based on the fact that it is more rational than their previous set of beliefs or that it is more successful in explaining life's exigencies (see, for example, Bankston et. al. 1981; Geertz 1993). I would propose a different explanation, however. In particular, I would suggest that the importance of rationality in the decision by First Nations people to become Bahá'í stems from a *pre-existing* cultural practice of examining and evaluating new ideas each time they are introduced. As McClellan (1975) has noted, Athapaskan groups of the southern Yukon were ever open to new ideas, adopting those that fit in well with their existing beliefs, or were particularly useful, and discarding those that were not. Thus, in accepting the Bahá'í Faith, First Nations people were not replacing a less rational religious system with a more rational one, but were adding onto or complementing their existing system of belief.

2. *External Social Factors in Becoming Bahá'í*

For none of those I interviewed, however, was the decision to become Bahá'í based solely on internal cognitive factors such as cultural upbringing, religious doctrine, or psychological trauma. For most people, such as Cora Joe and Sally Anderson, the decision to investigate and to become Bahá'í also depended upon external, social factors. These social factors include both interpersonal ties to others in the Bahá'í community—whether through friendship, kinship, marriage, or cultural-linguistic ties—and the behavior of Bahá'ís towards potential converts.

With respect to friendship and family ties, it appears that many of the First Nations Bahá'ís who declared in the early 1960s had either known and been friends with people in the Bahá'í community for some time before deciding to join the Faith, or were closely related to someone else who had joined the Faith (This pattern has been noted elsewhere, as well; see, for example, Stiles 1984 and Stark n.d.: 183-189). Perhaps the most dramatic example of this pattern of conversion in the Yukon may be seen in the Johns family: descendants of Maria and Tagish Johns,[9] and their relatives. When I first began my research in the Yukon, I did not realize that virtually all of those I would eventually interview were related; as it turned out, fifteen out of the twenty-one Bahá'ís I interviewed were related to each other. Of these fifteen, eight had become Bahá'í in the early 1960s, and were related either by blood or by marriage to at least twelve others who had joined the Faith between January 1961 and July 1962.

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[9] Descent was traditionally reckoned matrilineally, but those of the younger generations (young adults and middle-aged) with whom I worked tended to reckon it bilaterally, at least as far as Native descent was concerned.

While it is not possible for me to reconstruct how all these people influenced each other in their decisions to join the Bahá'í Faith, I will attempt a summary based on the information I acquired through individual interviews, each of which reveals, to some extent, the influence that family connections had on the individual's conversion. Clara Schinkel's interview provides an excellent example of how family and social ties played a part in her, her mother's and her brother's declarations.

One of Maria and Tagish Johns' grandchildren, Clara was the first of the Johns' descendants to become Bahá'í, in January of 1961. She was not the first member of her extended family to declare, however. The first was her maternal grandfather, Frank Williams, who became a Bahá'í earlier that month; it was at his wedding that Clara first heard of the religion. In particular, she was greatly moved by one of the prayers that was read at the reception, and when she asked about it, was told that it was a Bahá'í prayer (CS 8/28/95). It was not until a few days later, however, when she had broken her arm and ended up in the hospital, that she was able to learn more about the Faith, from a Tlingit Bahá'í visiting from Alaska, Jim Walton:

> I asked him...about the Bahá'í Faith...about that prayer. That prayer really kept bothering me, you know. It really got to me. So I asked him about it, and he started telling me about Bahá'í prayer...He explained to me what a Bahá'í prayer was...and he told me about Bahá'u'lláh...The only book he could get me was *God Loves Laughter*[10] (CS 8/28/95).

Clara was enthralled by what she read and the next time she saw Jim Walton, she says,

> I just kept asking him about...Bahá'u'lláh...I just couldn't get enough of hearing about him...And then my mother came...and I told her...about the Bahá'í Faith and everything, you know. And...while mom was there Jim Walton came in, so I introduced...her to him. And...one of my brothers, Charles, was in the hospital also...And so mom took Jim down and introduced him to Charles, too. So, I think I read that *God Loves Laughter* one night, and then the next day he brought over *The Dawn-Breakers*.[11] So I started...reading *The Dawn-Breakers*. And it was

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[10] This is a very funny book by the Bahá'í William Sears (1960), about his own spiritual journey to the Faith.

[11] *The Dawn-Breakers* (Azam c. 1932) is a history of the early years of the Bahá'í Faith (actually, of the Bábi movement).

> like a lot of things started falling into place for me...So when Jim came there, I told him, 'Jim, I [want to] be a Bahá'í.' I think I studied about three days...And so I signed my [declaration] card, and then, later on, I think it was...that same week, my mother signed her card and my brother signed a card (CS 8/28/95).

In addition to Clara, her brother Charles, and her mother, Agnes Johns, and one of Clara's maternal aunts also became Bahá'í in January of 1961. These individuals were, apparently, the only Bahá'ís in Clara's extended family until January 1962, when Clara's father, Peter Johns, Sr., and his sister and brother-in-law, Dora and Harold Wedge, became Bahá'í. They were followed in March by Clara's sister Doris, Dora's daughter and son, Annie and Les, and Dora and Peter's great-nephew, Melvin Baker. Another sister of Clara and Doris, Shirley Lindstrom, came into the Faith in April 1962 with her husband Cal, followed that summer by Doris and Clara's niece, Sandra Sidney, Melvin Baker's parents, Mabel and John, Dora and Peter's niece, Hazel Johns, and Peter Johns, Junior. Over the coming years, many more of their family continued to join the Faith, to the point where, at one time, their extended family was one of the largest Bahá'í families in the world, numbering more than 100 Bahá'í adherents.[12]

From the interviews I conducted, it appears that what initially led each of these individuals to investigate the Bahá'í Faith was the fact that someone else in their family had become Bahá'í. For example, as previously noted, Dora first learned of the religion through Agnes Johns and Clara, and it was her decision to become Bahá'í that led Annie and Doris to investigate the Faith, and no doubt her husband, as well. Similarly, it was most likely Agnes Johns' interest in the Faith that also led her husband to learn more about it. Sandra, as I mentioned already, became interested in the Faith in part because her two mentors, Annie and Doris, became Bahá'í. In turn, she believes that her father, Pete Sidney, first became interested in the Faith when she asked him for permission to get married some time later[13] (8/24/95). Over time, the increasing number of people within the Johns family who became Bahá'í influenced the remaining family members to join in, as well, even if simply out of a desire to conform (see Stark n.d.). As Angela Sidney (in Cruikshank 1990: 155) notes, "I think I was the last one joined in because I'm Anglican. All of my kids joined the Bahá'í. That's why I joined in, me, too."

While familial ties certainly aided in the spread of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon, another factor also appears important for conversion; that is, where individuals who were greatly respected or admired became Bahá'í, their conversions had an even greater influence on others to investigate the Faith. For example, Clara's declaration apparently did not have a great impact on many others in her family: "when I came into the Faith," she says, "Doris and Shirley and all of the family said, God, what's Clara gotten into next? Cause I was always...joining something" (CS 8/28/95). By contrast, once the rest of her family learned of her father's decision to become a Bahá'í, things "just really started snowballing. All the family came in" (CS 8/28/95). The difference between Clara's family's reaction to her own conversion and to that of her father lies in the fact that her father was well respected in the community and had studied to be a lay minister in the Anglican Church. Thus, when he decided to become a Bahá'í, Doris (8/27/95) says, people "knew my Dad wouldn't be foolish and join anything" without really studying it. As Clara (8/28/95) observes,

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[12] Clara Schinkel (8/28/95) believes that there were at one time about 121 Bahá'ís in her family; her sister Doris McLean (8/27/95) thinks it was 104.

[13] Pete's sister Mabel Baker was also a Bahá'í, so he may also have learned about the religion from her, or from his cousin Shirley Lindstrom and her husband Cal, with whom he worked for a time before becoming a Bahá'í.

> ...when dad started studying the Faith, he didn't just jump into it...He really studied it, he compared it, he read...the [Biblical] prophecies and everything he could get his hands on...So...when dad came into the Faith, that really made the rest of the family [start] looking at it.

For example, Clara's sister Shirley Lindstrom had no interest in the Bahá'í Faith—she saw it as a false religion—until their father became Bahá'í. Once she learned of his decision to join the Faith, however, she began to ask a lot of questions, and within three months had become a Bahá'í herself (CS 8/28/95).

I would suggest that the conversion of a number of First Nations leaders to the Bahá'í Faith in the early 1960s, may also have had an influence on other First Nations conversions to the religion. For example, it appears that, shortly after one chief became Bahá'í, a number of other people from his First Nations community also joined, suggesting that these individuals may have decided to investigate the new religion because he thought it was something worthwhile (Anderson n.d.: various entries). I am also aware of at least three individuals in another First Nations community who became Bahá'í after their chief taught them the Faith (Anderson n.d.: various entries). This pattern of conversion is not unique to the Yukon; indeed, at various times in Bahá'í history, there have been instances in which entire communities have become Bahá'í following the conversion of their spiritual or political leaders (see, for example, Stiles 1984). This kind of "group" conversion has been noted in other religions, as well (see, for example, Stark n.d.: 183-189). I was unable to interview any of the individuals I refer to above, however—most of them being deceased—and I am unaware of whether these chiefs were traditional leaders, were elected, or were appointed by Indian Affairs. Thus, it is impossible for me to know in this instance how great an influence either chief might have had on the decision of others to investigate or join the Bahá'í Faith.[14]

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[14] Nevertheless, the fact that quite a number of individuals in one of these First Nations communities left the Bahá'í Faith and became Pentecostal following the death of their chief suggests to me that, at least in this case, his personal charisma may have been the primary factor influencing their Bahá'í conversion.

Whatever their influence, it appears that it would have extended mainly to other elders, because "it was [the] elders that became Bahá'ís. It was not the young ones" (DM 8/27/95). That fewer middle-aged and younger people followed their elders' example to become Bahá'í in the 1960s may be due in part to their education in residential and mission school and to new social and economic patterns that developed by the mid-20th century, both of which served to undermine the traditional social order and respect for elders (see, for example, Cruikshank 1985: 180-182). One middle-aged Native Bahá'í laments that more of her age-cohort did not follow the influence of their elders: "you know the wisdom of the elders," she says, "If people truly, truly believed in what the elders were saying, and understanding their wisdom, they would all be Bahá'ís in the Yukon today."[15]

Yet another factor that seems to have had some influence in people's decision to become Bahá'í, at least in the early 1960s, is the presence of linguistic or cultural ties between those who were teaching the Bahá'í Faith and those they sought to teach. For example, it is not by coincidence that many of the First Nations people who joined the Faith in early 1961 were Tlingit speakers; as noted above, one of the first Bahá'ís to teach the Faith in the Yukon First Nations communities was a Tlingit Bahá'í from Alaska, Jim Walton. Sally Anderson (5/22/98) notes that Jim "came over to the Yukon and spoke with the Indian people...at firesides and so on...He...was very fluent in the Tlingit language, and that made an impression...on many of the people who spoke Tlingit in...the Yukon."

Moreover, as these individuals came into the Bahá'í Faith, they began to teach other Tlingit speakers about their new religion, traveling to various communities both within the Yukon and in southeast Alaska.[16] In general, after 1960, the majority of those who traveled or pioneered to First Nations communities to teach the Faith in the Yukon were First Nations Bahá'ís. The efforts of these individuals, such as Peter Johns, Sr. and Shirley Lindstrom drew many other First Nations people to the Faith (Anderson n.d.: various entries); Shirley Lindstrom, for example, was instrumental in teaching her faith to at least three Bahá'ís I interviewed. It appears that First Nations believers also had a hand in translating some of the Bahá'í teachings into their own languages,[17] and thus making the Bahá'í teachings more accessible to at least some First Nations language speakers; Peter Semple, an Athapaskan originally from Northwest Territories, was one such individual (see, for example, UHJ 1976: 498).

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[15] Ironically, of course, some of these same elders appear to have later left the religion (see, for instance, footnote 12).

[16] It is important to note here that while many of these early Bahá'ís in the Yukon were Tlingit speakers, many of these Tlingit speakers were descended from Athapaskan peoples—i.e., Tagish. While those in this category were once identified as Tlingit, they now self-identify as Tagish. This identification with Tagish may be due in part to the politics of land claims.

[17] These were not written translations, but tape recordings (Andersons n.d.: various entries).

A final important influence on many First Nations people's decision to become Bahá'í was the fact that the Bahá'ís they met were truly living their faith. Doris McLean (8/27/95), for example, says,

> ...these Bahá'ís that were teaching me...were absolutely beautiful, wonderful, loving people, and kind...Unprejudiced...To me, they were true Christian people...And really at the time it was very important for me, because they were living the life. If they...were not living the life of a Bahá'í, I don't think I would have really...came in [to the Faith].

Her cousin Annie (5/9/96) adds, there "was always something magnetic-like [about the Bahá'ís]...they were always happy...They had something and I knew they had something...And I thought, what wonderful people." Thus, when a woman from the Baptist church told them to stay away from the Bahá'ís because "they're bad people, they're evil" (DM 8/27/95), her comment made no sense to either Doris or Annie. As Annie (5/9/96) recalls,

> ...to have somebody say to stay away from them...Well, I just couldn't see it...I couldn't accept it...it was not the thing to say to me, anyway...So, when...she said...don't pay any attention, well...it wasn't long after, [I] decided to become a Bahá'í....

While Sandra Johnson (8/24/95) does not cite the kindness of Bahá'ís as a conscious factor in her decision to become Bahá'í, as Annie and Doris do, she does comment on the importance of the sincere love from others in the Bahá'í community in making her feel at home in her new faith: "Such warmth and love from so many people, it was just overwhelming. And I think [it] was really what I needed at that time in my life, because prior to that...I was thinking that life really wasn't worth living." Later, she adds, "I had lots of support...from the Bahá'í community...they were so loving and supportive...I really, really feel that love, that bonding...took place...it meant so much. Probably because it was so lacking in residential school."

The kindness and lack of prejudice shown by Bahá'ís towards First Nations people, in particular, often stood in great contrast to the behavior of other Whites in the Yukon in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, whereas most Whites in the Territory had little, if any, social contact with First Nations people (see, for example, King 1982 [1967]; Coates 1991), the Bahá'ís went out of their way to befriend First Nations people, and welcomed them into their home on a regular basis (Anderson n.d.: various entries). Doris McLean (8/27/95) comments,

> I think basically what it was that really attracted the aboriginal people to the Faith at that time [the early 1960s] was their love, their...kindness people showing them, and their hospitality, and just respect....Like...they went through a rough time with Christianity, and the government...and then they meet these wonderful Bahá'ís who just said, hey you're worthwhile, you're somebody...

Of her own experience, Sally Anderson (5/22/98) says that the Bahá'ís she met

> ...were warm and very accepting of me. Course, being Indian, you feel sort of left out when you meet the people of other colors in Whitehorse, especially. But I didn't find that among the Bahá'ís....

Sandra Johnson (8/24/95) also observes,

> ...the love and support that [the Bahá'ís] had...it was so genuine and real that you never thought of any differences. You never thought...I'm an Indian or anything like that...Because prejudice is...very real...even though it may be subtle or whatever, it is so real...like you could go to the store and because you were Native, they'd follow you around, make sure you're not going to steal. You'd go to the counter, they'd serve everybody else first...Of course there were a few that weren't like that, but still, that's basically what you're used to. And when you met Joan and Ted and Reg Wilson and a lot of those Bahá'ís that were from Alaska, there was none of that. I mean, their love was genuine.

C. Learning to be a Bahá'í

For those who decide to join the Bahá'í Faith, what does this decision entail? How does it impact their day-to-day lives? Becoming Bahá'í means, first and foremost, declaring one's belief in Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this day. Yet becoming a Bahá'í does not end when one signs a declaration card indicating one's belief in Bahá'u'lláh; this represents merely the beginning of an on-going spiritual journey, in which one strives each and every day to truly live according to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

The key to this process of spiritual transformation, or of "internal conversion," and to becoming a steadfast Bahá'í lies in developing one's relationship with God and Bahá'u'lláh.[18] An important part of this process is a willingness to continually "deepen" oneself in the history, laws, and administration of the Faith, as well as in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Momen 1989: 68). The U.S. Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly (1995: 38) asserts that, through "deepening," through daily prayer and meditation, through obedience to Bahá'í laws,[19] and through teaching, or sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message with others, the individual Bahá'í will become

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[18] It must be noted that this concept of developing a personal relationship with God, through His intermediary, as a central aspect of one's religious life is based on a Judeo-Christian-Muslim view of the "divine." Such a concept is not necessarily shared by those in indigenous cultures who become Bahá'í, although traditional Athapaskan religions have tended to be highly personalized in other ways (see, for example, VanStone 1974)

[19] This includes recognizing and being obedient to the authority of the administrative bodies of the Faith, what Bahá'ís refer to as obedience to the "Covenant." Those who consistently deny or disobey the authority of these administrative bodies are ex-communicated as "Covenant-breakers."

> 'so saturated' with Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the Bahá'í spirit that everyone who meets us will see 'a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work' that sets us apart and makes people wonder what our secret is.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, "deepening" is particularly important in enculturating new Bahá'ís in the values and culture of their new faith, and in providing individuals with a sense of belonging to a greater Bahá'í community, whose members have a common "past" and "culture" and share common goals. By learning about the history and administration of the Bahá'í Faith, from its origins to its current organization, new Bahá'ís learn appropriate social behavior, the boundaries of Bahá'í identity,[20] and the goals and aspirations of their new community. Through "deepening," converts are—theoretically, at least—inspired to embrace their Bahá'í identity, and to become "active" members of this community. Those who are insufficiently "deepened" tend not to develop a strong sense of Bahá'í identity or to participate actively in the Bahá'í community.

Quite a number of those I interviewed mentioned "deepening" as an important factor in their becoming steadfast and "active" Bahá'ís. Doris McLean (8/27/95), for example, says that learning the history of the Faith is

> ...what kept us in solid. And to know that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the exemplar, and not any other Bahá'í...and you just take a look at that—that's what keeps you firm, you know? When you fall in love with Bahá'u'lláh, you're in for life. But when you fall in love with the Bahá'ís, it's only a skip-beat.

Ronald Bill (6/20/96) also comments that what made him a stronger Bahá'í was the fact that he

> ...read and became more interested...And I looked for proofs...And...if you look for proofs you get more and more convinced, eh?...And the way I became more convinced is...through [reading] William Sears' work...*Thief in the Night*...I went through all the references he made...I spent about nine years doing that, eight or nine years.

A number of individuals whom I interviewed also stressed the importance prayer and teaching in maintaining their commitment to the Bahá'í Faith. For example, Ida Calmegane (6/26/96) says, " I believe that what makes me really stay in the Faith is that I say my prayers all the time and I do a lot of teaching, whenever I go anywhere...Certainly...saying prayers all the time, it really helps." Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (5/19/96) also comments on the importance of prayer in her life as a Bahá'í: "there isn't a day that goes by when I don't pray. Even when I don't feel like praying...that [is what] keeps me strong." Annie Auston (5/9/96), adds that the confirmations she gets teaching others about her religion are what inspire her to remain steadfast as a Bahá'í:

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[20] The "boundaries of Bahá'í identity" delineate not only the boundary between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, but also that between Bahá'ís and convenant breakers. While the latter share with other Bahá'ís some of the same history, "culture," and goals, they are deliberately excluded from membership in the Bahá'í community. An interesting side note here, however, is that most covenant breakers belong to small, breakaway sects, which are not recognized by the international Bahá'í community (affiliated with the Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í World Centre in Israel) but which identify themselves as Bahá'í (sometimes as the "true" or "orthodox" Bahá'ís). Most non-Bahá'ís do not distinguish between these communities.

> Being a Bahá'í [with] all different confirmations, [such as]...knowing when you rise up and...do anything for the Faith, that the Concourse on High helps...like with us going out on different teaching trips...Different confirmations...that is what really keeps you strong...And then...sometimes...in different situations...we're told not to do this or...that and then if we keep on, eventually we learn why...So there's just absolutely no doubt....Because whatever doubt there is, it's gone long time ago...with all the confirmations and everything.

It is interesting to note here some of the parallels, or continuities between the Bahá'í Faith and traditional ritual practices. For example, prayer has apparently always been an important element of First Nations ritual practice, whether in the traditional belief, Christianity, or the Bahá'í Faith. Another ritual practice that is shared at least by the traditional Yukon Native religions and the Bahá'í Faith is fasting; in both instances, fasting is considered a means of spiritual, as well as physical, purification (see, for example McClellan 1975: 573; also MW 7/22/96). While the conditions under which fasting or prayer might occur are different from one set of beliefs to another, they appear to have a common purpose: to achieve a transformation of the individual. Similarities such as these, between First Nations practices and beliefs and those of the Bahá'í Faith, will be addressed further in the next chapter.

Personal transformation, as I conceive it here, may entail a radical change in behavior, such as illustrated below, or simply a change in perspective. For many of the First Nations Bahá'ís I interviewed, their desire to share their new religion with others transformed them into some of the most eloquent and well-traveled Bahá'í teachers in Canada, despite the fact that few had gone beyond the eighth grade or had ever left the Yukon before becoming Bahá'í. Doris (8/27/95), for example, notes that members of her extended family have

> ...participated in [a] lot of teaching trips and a lot of functions around the world. They've gone all over...They've been to Europe...Sweden...Ireland...Greenland, they've gone all over. I've been to Russia, I've gone to Europe four times. My children, also...both my daughters served for a year...in Haifa, Israel...My sister and I...we had the bounty and the privilege to go to Iran in 1975...[She] and I were the first Canadian Indians to go to Iran.

As virtually any Bahá'í can attest, however, being a Bahá'í is not without its challenges. For instance, one aspect of becoming Bahá'í means learning to abide by Bahá'í social laws, including avoidance of alcohol and drugs. For many of the First Nations people who had been alcoholics before joining the Faith, giving up alcohol often proved to be a difficult, if not a life-long struggle. As one woman observes, the decision to become Bahá'í did not necessarily incur sudden changes in people's behavior: "being raised in a dysfunctional home," she says, "[the] Bahá'í Faith didn't change our family overnight. Slowly things started coming...like my mother...realized that...she needed her sobriety in order to be a true Bahá'í and...stuff like that."

For those who were eventually able to give up drinking, however, their new found sobriety was a clear sign to themselves and to others that they had changed as a result of their faith. For example, Mark Wedge (personal communication, 5/1/96) notes that being Bahá'í for many First Nations people means first and foremost being sober. Moreover, such behavioral changes often had a significant influence on others in their decision to become Bahá'í or to investigate the religion. For example, one woman recalls:

> ...my brother was really a fallen down alcoholic, you know, just terrible alcoholic and he changed so much through the Faith that I just couldn't believe that anyone could change that much, and...[I thought] that there certainly sure must be something, there sure must be power in that Faith, for him to change like that...[It] sure make me feel good.

A different sort of challenge that faced many new Bahá'ís in the Yukon was the often negative reaction of non-Bahá'ís towards the Faith. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Bahá'ís found their greatest opposition in the various churches—Anglican, Baptist and Pentecostal, especially—and, as mentioned previously, in some of the more isolated First Nations communities of the Yukon, where these denominations often dominated the religious life of the community. In some areas, for example, hostility to the Faith was so great that visiting Bahá'ís themselves were threatened with physical harm when they came to teach the Faith (CS 8/28/95; EBFB 11/5/98). Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (5/19/96) comments on the hostility she and her children experienced from others after she became Bahá'í; her children, in particular, were "ostracized by the fundamentalist Christians, Pentecostals...They'd throw rocks at them." Another Native woman, who became Bahá'í as a youth, found life at the Anglican hostel in Whitehorse particularly unpleasant after she became Bahá'í:

> I went back to the hostel. And I noticed something was wrong—didn't quite know what it was. But I'd walk into the room and...the supervisor and the cook, or it could've been also when the minister's wife came over, they would be [whispering] and when I'd walk by, looking at me. So I knew very well they were talking about me, but I didn't know what on earth it was about...Cause I got along

> really good with them, you know. In fact...before I became a Bahá'í they used to figure I was an example of how a young lady should be conducting herself. After I became a Bahá'í it was a totally different story...anything that I did was under scrutiny, and they criticized me. It...made my life a little miserable.

The hostility of the hostel staff and of the Anglican clergy towards her new faith proved especially difficult for her as a youth trying to finish high school. She eventually ended up quitting school and leaving the hostel because she "didn't have support, moral or emotional or whatever" that she needed to graduate.

Both she and Louise and *did* have the support of their Bahá'í community, however, so the hostility they faced from non-Bahá'ís did not result in either of them leaving the Bahá'í Faith. Others had a different experience. One woman from the Gwich'in community of Old Crow told me that she and a number of others had become Bahá'í sometime in the 1970s, but that she ended up leaving the religion because she and the other converts were socially ostracized from the rest of their First Nations community after the visiting Bahá'ís left. This ostracism was not necessarily deliberate, but since the entire community belonged to the Anglican Church, choosing a new religion meant exclusion from this spiritual community. Had these new converts been visited periodically by their Bahá'í teachers until they were able to develop a strong local religious community of their own, perhaps this exclusion would not have been as much of a problem, and more converts might have remained Bahá'í. What happened, however, was that those who came to teach the new religion stayed only a short while, and then left Old Crow, not to return again for some years. As indicated in Chapter VI, this pattern was to be repeated quite often in the geographically remote[21] communities of the Yukon and Alaska, particularly in the 1970s.

Having the social support of others in the Bahá'í community seems to have been an important factor in ensuring the retention and long-term participation of new converts in the Bahá'í Faith. Yet it is a factor that Bahá'ís have tended to underestimate, focusing instead on "deepening." While "deepening" is certainly a vital aspect of this process, as illustrated above, developing a strong Bahá'í identity cannot occur in social isolation. A sense of belonging to a larger community is also necessary; indeed, this appears to be one reason why some people joined the Bahá'ís, because of the sense of belonging that they felt. In the case of those I interviewed, I believe that both social support *and* "deepening," along with prayers, and teaching, contributed equally to their continued commitment to their faith.

D. Born or Re-born to the Faith: Growing up Bahá'í

Having discussed the factors that led some of the First Nations people in the Yukon to accept the Bahá'í Faith, and the impact of becoming Bahá'í on these individuals, let us now turn to the experiences of individuals raised in the Bahá'í Faith. In short, how do their experiences as Bahá'ís differ from those of their parents and grandparents? How are they similar?

New Bahá'ís often assume that being raised in the Faith automatically makes one a Bahá'í, or that it somehow makes following the Bahá'í laws (i.e., "living the life") easier than for those new to the Faith. As I learned in my research in the Yukon, however, the process of accepting the Bahá'í religion as one's own, and of "living the life" can be just as challenging for those raised in Bahá'í families as for those who joined the Faith as youth or adults; perhaps even more so. For example, several of those I interviewed indicated that they grew up taking their religion for granted, not truly understanding or accepting it for themselves until they were quite a bit older. Tricia Johnson (7/9/96) shares her own insights into this perspective:

> All my life I...did know of God, and I did believe in God...But...I think it's just because it was mom and dad teaching me, that I never questioned it, either...I just took it as my own thoughts and beliefs, too. And I think it did help me develop into the person I am today...But...I think my biggest regret...is I took that for granted. Like I just..."I'm a Bahá'í...I believe in God, I say my prayers." But I don't think I really accepted it in my heart...Even when it came to being fifteen and when I had to sign the Bahá'í card, I just did it. Just simply because...I grew up as a Bahá'í...but...I never really seemed to take it seriously, or to do my own investigating to fully accept it, as I have now.

For some people, coming to recognize and accept the Bahá'í Faith for themselves proved to be quite a struggle. One young Native woman, for example, says that as "a teenager...I was...kind of confused and...I really didn't know how to carry the message [of Bahá'u'lláh]...I just sort of got lost." This sentiment is echoed by another young woman, who comments that, as a teenager, she "went on a different path...realizing that the right way was the right way to go and I didn't take that path." As a result, she says, "I went through so much trials and tribulations." Yet another individual remembers as a teen

> ...having these discussions with myself...because a lot of my peers were getting into...alcohol and drugs, sex, all these things. I started wondering, because I knew that...I wasn't supposed to be doing this, that it's...not the thing to do. And I remember...asking myself, "Is Bahá'u'lláh really who he says he is?"...And this is the logical part of me, that...needed to understand this thing. Because, I mean, it was so much easier just to slip into...the alcohol, drugs, and all that.

For at least two First Nations women, Tricia Johnson and her sister Cheryl, it took growing up and having children for them to realize the need for them to investigate the Bahá'í Faith on their own. Tricia (7/9/96), for example, says,

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[21] Remote, that is, from the major population centers such as Whitehorse and Anchorage.

> And with me now, especially...because...I am expecting my first child, I've realized the importance [of this process]. And especially in the writings when they talk about mother's responsibility...that's scary, you know, you have to be responsible for another human being. So...I want to do my own investigating now.

In spite of—or perhaps because of—the struggles each of these individuals have had to go through to accept the Bahá'í Faith as valid for themselves, each person also commented on the positive and often transformational influence their faith has had on their lives. For example, while some of those raised as Bahá'ís experimented with drugs and alcohol as they were growing up, at least two individuals noted the importance of their faith in helping them to avoid alcohol and drugs as teenagers. Moreover, the Bahá'í emphasis on acquiring an education apparently served to encourage several of these individuals to pursue higher education, either at the local Yukon College, or at one of the universities and colleges "outside" (CB 7/11/96; MJ 8/22/96). Several individuals also pointed to their travel teaching experiences in other parts of the world as having a positive influence on their lives as Bahá'ís. Mark Wedge (7/8/96), for example, speaks of the inspirational effect of his experience as a Bahá'í travel teacher in Iceland:

> ...coming back on the plane, I remember not wanting to come home. Because what I began to discover was that this travel teaching, there's something magical that was happening....Because...you're caught on the spot and without anything and...you don't know what you're doing and you're feeling incapable and all these things, I began to realize that there was something powerful about it. And that when you were doing these things, you felt special...And so I remember not wanting to come home. I just wanted to travel teach forever....

For Charlene Baker (7/11/96), going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land was the turning point in her life as a Bahá'í:

> ...all together, the...whole experience was just wonderful...And it...made me realize, at a young age, that I don't need drugs and I don't need alcohol, and so, at that time, I decided for myself that I'm...[going to] follow the Bahá'í Faith. This is...true and...I decided that this is what's [going to] help me...And so I decided to ask God to scrape all of the negativity, all of the negative things in my life at that time, out of me and...help me to begin a new life.

After she returned from Israel, Charlene became very involved in the Yukon Bahá'í community as a youth assistant to the Auxiliary Board—one of the administrative branches of the Bahá'í Faith—and traveled not only to other parts of the Yukon to teach the Faith, but to Latin America, as well. Of her trip to Latin America, she says, "it was wonderful, wonderful to...be able to go to different places and to proclaim your love for Bahá'u'lláh, and meet people that are...doing the same thing. And...it's like your family's extended all over the world" (CB 7/11/96).

In general, the experiences of those raised in the Bahá'í religion have tended to parallel those of their parents and grandparents who became Bahá'í as youth or adults. Individuals in both groups often had to struggle with their own issues before recognizing the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's message for their own lives, and are regularly challenged in their efforts to put the Bahá'í teachings into practice. Perhaps the greatest difference between the experiences of the two groups is that, in contrast to their parents and grandparents, those raised Bahá'í grew up, for the most part, with a very positive attitude towards people of other religions and races. For example, Maria Benoit (5/22/96) says of her upbringing as a Bahá'í,

> I think it influenced our lives in a...different way, of learning respect for other people and other beliefs, and...you know, knowing that all people are one. I mean, we've always...been raised with that, knowing that...we don't have racial discrimination among our people...you know, the ones that...were raised as Bahá'ís. We...look at all people as one and all religions [are one]...cause we all believe in the same thing...I think our teachings were a little bit different than most people...the way we were brought up. You know, we weren't brought up to be prejudiced amongst other people...mainly because of the Bahá'í Faith.

As an adult, this upbringing has provided Maria with practical tools to live and work in a multi-cultural, multi-religious environment, just as it has many others who have been raised as Bahá'ís. As the Executive Director of the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, Maria (5/22/96) says that, for her, being a Bahá'í is an advantage because it

> Kind of fits, hand in hand...with the job that I do...because...when you're working for your own First Nation...you're only specific to deliver to your own First Nation. The people of your own community. Whereas, in [the] Friendship Centre...you deliver to all people...[it] doesn't matter where they're from (5/22/96).

E. Conclusions

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, there are a variety of factors, both internal and external, which appear to have influenced the decisions of First Nations people in the Yukon to become Bahá'í. For those I interviewed who joined the Faith as youth or adults (14 individuals), these factors included the relevance of dreams or visions (57.1%, or 8 out of 14); a perceived correlation between their prior beliefs or a fulfillment of religious prophecy (57.1%); a personal crisis or soul-searching (at least 28.5%; 4 out of 14 mentioned this directly); the influence of family or friends (64.3%, or 9 out of 14); and positive encounters with other Bahá'ís

(57.1%). There is certainly some overlap here; most whom I interviewed cited at least two or three of these factors as having at least some influence on their decision to become Bahá'í.

It is with their decision to join the Bahá'í Faith, however, that these individuals began the real process of conversion—i.e., of adapting their lives to better reflect the values and teachings of their new religion. What is interesting to note is that, at least for those I interviewed, this process of religious discovery and of self-transformation has often been much the same for those raised Bahá'í as for their parents and grandparents who became Bahá'í as youth and adults. In particular, individuals in both groups—both "born Bahá'ís" and "found Bahá'ís"—must determine for themselves, through independent investigation, the validity of Bahá'u'lláh's message for their own lives, and must learn through daily "deepening," prayer, and teaching, to apply his teachings to their lives. Perhaps the most important thing for each of them, however, is that this process be a joyful one; as Louise Profeit-Leblanc (5/19/96) suggests,

> ...being a Bahá'í, to me...it's just being what God wants you to be, for this day. He wants you to be totally alive, he wants you to share this elixir...you know, I've...experienced a lot of tests and I will continue to, but you can't take Bahá'u'lláh away from me.

Chapter VIII. First Nations Identity and the Bahá'í Faith

A. Constructing Identity: An Integrative Approach

During the 1960s, First Nations people who became Bahá'í were absorbed into a religious community that retained a largely indigenous cultural flavor. White Bahá'ís familiar with the Yukon during this time note that Bahá'í community rituals and administration tended to be organized in a manner that was both comfortable and familiar to the First Nations people, who were, at the time, the dominant group in the Yukon Bahá'í community (personal communications). Thus, it appears that, during the early years of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon, to be a Bahá'í was not incompatible with being First Nations; these identities overlapped fairly well.

By the 1970s, however, those First Nations people coming into the religion encountered a Bahá'í culture that was increasingly dominated by White Canadian cultural values and behavioral expectations. Ironically, of course, many of these converts had initially been attracted to the religion by the rhetoric of "unity in diversity," in which their own cultural expression of these new teachings were to be valued and developed; instead, they found their cultural forms devalued. In this environment, to be a Bahá'í was often in conflict with one's First Nations identity, particularly as the First Nations people of the Yukon came to be more politically active in the pursuit of land claims, and more assertive in their cultural expression. Integrating these two identities thus proved quite a challenge for First Nations Bahá'ís, who sometimes found themselves forced to choose between the two.

As suggested in Chapter VI, those whose cultural values and expectations diverged the most from the dominant Bahá'í cultural pattern tended to have the most difficulty adopting a strong Bahá'í identity, and in remaining "active" in the Bahá'í community (or in remaining Bahá'í at all). By contrast, those who have remained the most "active" over the years are those who have been able to integrate their First Nations and Bahá'í identities, and who perceive similarities between their First Nations culture and the Bahá'í teachings. The question I would like to address in this chapter, then, is how do these individuals integrate these two identities?

In Chapter I, I suggested that it is largely through the construction of a shared "ethnic past" that members of an ethnic group develop a sense of belonging and ethnic identity. While this "ethnic past" may be perceived as a given, the boundaries—and sometimes even the contents—of ethnic identity are "subject to change, always depending on varying situations" (Svensson 1985: 38). As these change, so, too, is the "ethnic past" reconstructed to make meaning of the present; what is emphasized are those elements that will strengthen ethnic identity and group solidarity within the context of their current experience.

In my research, I found that First Nations Bahá'ís use stories about the past—whether traditional oral narratives or stories about the Bahá'í Faith—to make sense of their place in the

First Nations and Bahá'í communities of the Yukon. By telling these stories, they are able to integrate their First Nations and Bahá'í identities, and to legitimize to others their identity as both First Nations people *and* Bahá'ís. The way in which they talk about the past and interpret cultural practice and behavior, however, reflects not an "objective" past, but the current experience of these storytellers. For example, the emphasis of many First Nations Bahá'ís on the "good old days" of the Bahá'í community (defined by older people as the 1960s, and by the younger people as the 1970s or early 1980s) reflects the fact that they feel uncomfortable with the present situation in the Yukon Bahá'í community. By talking about the way people—particularly the early White "pioneers"—behaved in the "good old days," I believe, these First Nations people hope to motivate those in the current Bahá'í community to adopt attitudes and behaviors that are more culturally tolerant, and thus more authentically[1] "Bahá'í."

As the reader had no doubt noted, in this chapter, I discuss Bahá'í and First Nations identity in much the same way. While the two are not synonymous, in that Bahá'í is not an *ethnic* identity (i.e., it lacks the element of common descent, however perceived), I believe they are analogous, in that both are culturally based. Moreover, as a minority religious group, even within their culture of origin, Bahá'ís have had to assert their identity as a distinct and legitimate religion vis-à-vis other religious groups, just as ethnic minority groups tend to assert their identity vis-à-vis the dominant ethnic group—and other minorities—in their society. In doing so, Bahá'ís, like ethnic groups, have used stories about the past, whether about the origins of the Bahá'í Faith or about the history of the Bahá'í Faith in their community, to inform appropriate social behavior, legitimize their identity, and make sense of their present experience.

B. Traditional Narrative: a First Nations "Old" Testament

In their discussion of Native Christian identity, Schultz and Tinker (1996: 60) suggest that "the appropriate Old Testament for Native American people is not the Hebrew Old Testament with that people's stories and history, but the stories that each of our tribes tell and our histories." Charleston (1996: 73), another Native Christian, agrees with this assessment, saying,

> Native People...have their own original covenant relationship with the Creator and their own original understanding of God prior to the birth of a Christ. It is a Tradition that has evolved over centuries. It tells of the active, living, revealing presence of God in relation to Native People through generations of Native life and experience.

Native Christians are not the only ones to assert the existence of an earlier covenant with God before the advent of a universal religion; the same assertion holds for First Nations Bahá'ís in the Yukon and elsewhere (see, for example, Weixelman 1985). For example, in response to my question about Bahá'í history in the Yukon, Mark Wedge (7/8/96) commented that while

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[1] Authentic, that is, from the point of view of these Bahá'ís (i.e., more in keeping with the Bahá'í teachings).

> ...there's contemporary [history]—what's happened in the last five...ten... fifteen...twenty years...I think it goes back even before that. You've heard some of the [traditional] stories...I think that these things can't be separated [from each other]...Because, really, that's the foundation...It's like Genesis is to the New Testament...I think when you look at the history of the Bahá'í Faith...all this other stuff is the foundation upon which the Faith is built.

It is these traditional narratives that provided spiritual guidance for the First Nations people long before the arrival of the first Whites in the area, and that continue to provide a link between traditional First Nations culture and values and the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

As mentioned in Chapter VII, some of these traditional narratives—particularly prophecy narratives—have been used to justify First Nations "conversion" to the Bahá'í Faith; the Bahá'í teachings or the prophets themselves—i.e., the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—are perceived as having fulfilled these prophecies of old. In this section, however, I will examine, not prophecy narratives but other traditional stories—particularly those of the Tagish, who make up the largest percentage of First Nations Bahá'ís—and their relation to the Bahá'í Faith. In particular, I will examine how these stories are seen by Tagish Bahá'ís to exemplify or elucidate the Bahá'í teachings, how the Bahá'í teachings appear to reaffirm the values and ideas inherent in these stories, and how those I interviewed use these stories to talk about and legitimize their identity as Tagish Bahá'í.

In discussing one of these traditional stories and its relation to the Bahá'í writings, Mark Wedge (5/5/96) mentioned that there are two kinds of stories:

> One [kind]...won't change, they're accurate...But the other stories are more dynamic...They can change a little bit, but the context doesn't change. So what happens is that these stories...might be told with different variations, but...the meaning of them, it's like *The Hidden Words*[2]...the essence of the...spiritual teachings of all the Manifestations are in those [Hidden] words. The essence of it, the inner meaning of it...So that those stories, when they're told in that manner, they hold those truths...And you have to look for those meanings...

It is these stories and the truths embedded therein, Dora Wedge (5/5/96) suggests, that led many First Nations people to the Bahá'í Faith:

> Now, you see all these stories from way back, it all fits right into the Bahá'í Faith. Everything...And these stories, carried on from generation to generation, that's how they never forget.

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[2] This is a book of short "poems" by Bahá'u'lláh (1985 [1932]) which outline his essential teachings in distilled form.

So what *are* some of these truths? A good place to begin is with the story of *Tl'anaheedakw*, a young mother who, after losing her entire clan to a massacre, decides to become a "lucky lady" to others in distress: "'I'm going to show up to any people that...[are] really poor, like needs help or something or need to be rich. That's the only time they going to hear me and my baby,' she says...'I'm going to show up to them, to help them, give them good luck'" (DW 5/5/96). In order to acquire this good luck, however, certain procedures must be followed:

> On meeting her, if one can only succeed in wresting away her child and following the prescribed ritual, the reward will be vast wealth. In order to seize the child, one must strip naked, and throw urine at the woman. Then one refuses to return the baby until the mother either defecates four golden balls or else scratches one's back with her long golden fingernails. The golden balls or the scabs from the healed scratches are carefully preserved to bring wealth and good luck to the owner and all his relatives as long as a vestige of them remains (McClellan 1975: 572-573).

Ritual bathing and fasting is also required of the individual, if he or she is to gain the full benefits of their encounter with this woman (McClellan 1975: 573).

Such an encounter, however, need not result merely in material wealth. According to Mark Wedge (5/5/96), it is the spiritual transformation of the individual who encounters *Tl'anaheedakw* that brings about the change of luck, and thus, it is spiritual, as well as material, wealth that one gains. Mark (5/5/96) explains, for example, that when one asks *Tl'anaheedakw* to defecate gold,

> ...when that lady's supposed to do that, she's supposed to tell you those things about yourself that you don't want to hear. She's...going to say bad things about you...But if you listen to those things that she tells you, it's going to be like gold...if you pay attention to it, that's how your character's going to change...That's what's going to bring you that luck...because your character starts changing.

Mark (5/5/96) relates this narrative, and the spiritual transformation effected by one's encounter with *Tl'anaheedakw*, to the spiritual transformation that occurs within each individual as a result of his or her encounter with Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í teachings:

> So...when the [Universal] House of Justice talks about transformation, transformation is kind of like that, it's how we change...And so oftentimes what happens is that if we hear [critical] things, we shouldn't get angry with them, about us. We should learn from these [criticisms]...When she tells you these things, it's for our growth. That's how our character changes.

The story of *Nøts* and *Keedu t'ei kaa*, or the "Man Behind the Dam," is also a significant one for Tagish Bahá'ís, particularly those of the Deisheetaan clan. For the purposes of this discussion, only the portion of the story that is relevant to Bahá'í is included here:

> ...this is a story when the people were hunting for beaver pelts and they were trading with the Russians—I guess that's when it was, must have been around that time—but anyway, this Nøts..I don't know where he was from, somewhere down here. He would go up towards...Ross River area, I guess, that way, hunting beaver...And when he go along, he wasn't getting any luck. And while he was walking along, he noticed that this animal was following him. And it was a wolverine, so he stopped and he talked to that animal...[tape ended and cut off part of the narrative]. Anyway, that wolverine walks around that beaver house four times and then he stood on top of that beaver house and he raised his hands four times. And then he talked to that man, he said, "I want you to set your net, your beaver net...in front of the dam, where the water goes over the dam and...you're going to catch something. Don't keep it, you just look at it really good. And then you put it back." So, that Nøts, he set his beaver net in front of the dam and in just no time, the little moose hoof bells that they used to use on it, started ringing. And so he started pulling that net up—and there's variations of the story I understand, but one said that it's a human face that come up with red hair, yellow eyebrows and yellow eyes. And then he pulled it up further and he seen that it had six legs, three legs on each side. And then he pulled it up further and it had two tails. And then so he let that beaver back down again...After that, beaver just started coming to him...he got his luck back, and the beaver just started coming (MW 5/5/96).

From a traditional perspective, this narrative is significant, not only for its association with the Deisheetaan clan of the Tagish and Inland Tlingit people, but also for its moral implications for the individual and the community. For example, it is this split-tail beaver, or *Keedu t'ei kaa*, that the Deisheetaan identify as their clan animal; hence, it and all other beavers, should be accorded respect. In addition, it is this split-tail beaver that gives life to the beaver people—and, hence, by association, to the Deisheetaan—because it is he that protects the other beavers from the elements, by holding up and supporting the beaver dam. Hence his name *Keedu t'ei kaa*, which means, "Man Behind the Dam." Thus, it is the responsibility of the people to feed him, so that he may look after them (MW 5/5/96).

This relationship, Mark Wedge (5/5/96) suggests, is a form of a covenant, just like the covenant between God and humanity in the Bahá'í Faith. If one understands the significance of the covenant between *Keedu t'ei kaa* and the beaver people, then one may also understand the Bahá'í covenant:

> Now, the concept of...Bahá'u'lláh's covenant is this one...Because you got the twin manifestations, that's where the Cause rests, on those two tails. It's like the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh...that's the firmly planted. His head is like 'Abdu'l-Bahá...he says, "Look at me, follow me, be as I am." That's the example we should always follow...These three people...'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, are the three central figures in the Bahá'í Faith...[and] when you add...the Bahá'í administration, you look on one side [of the beaver] it's like the institution of the learned,[3] other side is [the] institution of the elected, and those two need each other. It's tied up in the symbol. And that whole thing...all of these things together is like this Covenant.

Continuing the analogy, Mark (5/5/96) goes on to explain the importance of giving to the Bahá'í fund at Feast:

> ...it's at the Feast that we feed the fund...So when those beavers feed this fund or the Covenant...when we contribute to the funds [it] is like feeding this man behind the dam at the Feast...part of that Covenant is to feed this man.

A third traditional narrative that I heard within the context of the Bahá'í Faith is that of Crow (or Raven, depending on who is telling the story) bringing daylight to the world. While in the Yukon, I heard a number of different versions of this story; as I was unable to record any of these renderings, however, I am able only to provide a summary of the main points as I heard and remembered them:

A long time ago, the world was dark: the sun, the moon and the stars were not in the sky, but were kept in boxes in the home of a powerful chief. Crow/Raven believed that these things should be shared with others, so he devised a plan to steal these things from the chief, by impregnating the chief's daughter, who then bore Crow/Raven as her son. As he grew, Crow/Raven began to ask to play with the box of stars that his grandfather, the chief, kept in his house. While the chief loved his grandson and wanted to make him happy, he at first refused to let Crow/Raven play with his box. Crow/Raven began to cry and cry, until his grandfather relented. As soon as he had the box in his hands, however, Crow/Raven opened it and let the stars escape. Thus, when just a short time later, Crow/Raven wanted to play with the box holding the moon, the chief again hesitated; again, Crow/Raven wept and wept, until his grandfather finally obliged him. Then, once again, Crow/Raven opened the box holding the moon, and the moon, too, was released. Needless to say, the chief was upset at the loss of his precious possessions, so he resisted when Crow/Raven asked to play with the box holding the sun, until he could bear Crow/Raven's tears no longer; upon receiving the box, Crow/Raven once again opened it. This time, seizing the sun is his beak, flew up through the smoke hole, burning himself black in the process, whereupon he released the sun and there was daylight (for another version of this story, see McClellan 1987: 257; see also Swanton 1909: 3-5, 80-83).

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[3] The "institutions of the learned" are represented by the 1) Hands of the Cause, 2) Continental Board of Counsellors, 3) the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants (see Chapter 6 footnote 12), whereas the "institutions of the elected" are the 1) Universal House of Justice, 2) National Spiritual Assemblies, and 3) Local Spiritual Assemblies.

This story has been understood by at least some First Nations Bahá'ís as a reference to the spiritual teachings of God. For example, a slightly different version of this story—in which the world was still in darkness even after the sun, until a fourth box, containing daylight, was opened—was told at the opening of the First Nations Bahá'í council in Haines, Alaska; according to the young Tlingit man who told this story, the fact that the world was not illumined until the contents of the fourth box was released, suggests that the fourth box represented not physical, but spiritual illumination. His interpretation of the story was readily accepted by those First Nations Bahá'ís in attendance at the gathering, many of whom referred to this story, and the need to open and share "the box" with others, repeatedly during the day's consultation.

The sun and the moon themselves are also important elements of the story for Bahá'í interpretation. For example, in a two-dimensional wood carving at the Yukon Bahá'í Institute that illustrates this story, the sun and the moon are said to represent two of the central figures of the Faith: respectively, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. According to Mark Wedge (5/5/96), Bahá'u'lláh is like the sun because he is "the manifestation that gives light to the world, through his teachings," whereas his son is like the moon because, like the moon, which does not generate light of its own but reflects that of the sun,

> ...what 'Abdu'l-Bahá does [as the "exemplar" of the Bahá'í teachings]...is...reflect the light that Bahá'u'lláh has shed to the world...So the story is when Crow lets that sun out of the box...that sun, coming out of the box, is when the manifestation comes and gives light to the world...And every teaching of every people, so far as I know, will have ways of how the light comes to the world (MW 5/5/96).

Stories such as these are significant, at least for this discussion, in that they provide a bridge between the cultural values and worldview of First Nations people and that of the Bahá'í Faith. For example, Mark Wedge (5/5/96) suggests that by knowing and understanding their traditional stories, it is possible for First Nations Bahá'ís to better understand and apply the Bahá'í teachings to their lives. Likewise, by relating the Bahá'í teachings to these stories, those who are not familiar with the traditional spirituality and religion of the Tagish[4] people might better understand and respect these traditions. Moreover, the fact that Tagish Bahá'ís are able to reinterpret these traditional stories in light of their new faith not only gives new meaning to their earlier spiritual traditions, but also establishes the legitimacy of their new religion as compatible with, if not integral to, their cultural identity.

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[4] And Tlingit people, who share many of these stories with the Tagish.

A more controversial use of these traditional stories vis-à-vis the Bahá'í Faith and First Nations identity may be illustrated in the way some Tagish Bahá'ís—namely, members of the Johns family—have interpreted the story of Skookum Jim. This is perhaps the traditional Native story that is the most familiar to people in the Yukon. In summary, Skookum Jim once found a frog trapped in a ditch on the side of the road and he helped it out. Some time later, Skookum Jim was injured when a drunken man kicked him in the stomach. While his cousin's wife, Maria Johns was looking after him, he called to her and showed her a frog on his belly, that was licking the wound.

> This appearance of an animal helper required a specific response...Maria got a flat board and held it out for the frog to jump on. The frog sat quietly on the board while Maria got some silk thread and beads. One was expected to pay an animal helper in a traditional manner, so she put that payment on the board next to the frog. Then Maria took out her medicine bag and removed from it several pieces of swan's down, which she put all around the frog as a gift...Maria...carried the frog and her offerings down to the creek, where she left them. Skookum Jim soon recovered and made his way back to Tagish (Johnson, et. al. 1998: 10-11).

Several months later, Skookum Jim set out from Tagish to visit his mother in the area that is now Carcross. About half-way there, he camped and went to sleep; as he slept, he had a vision of a beautiful woman who said she wanted to marry him. When he replied that he could not, as he was already married, she said,

> "If you can't go with me, then I'll give you a walking stick"...He thanked her and she replied, "You saved me one time, and I saved you when you were sick."
>
> She pointed to the east and said, "Look this way." Skookum Jim looked and saw a light...shining in the sky. "That's not for you, though. That's for somebody else."
>
> Then she pointed towards the Yukon River. "You go this way, and you will have your luck." (Johnson, et. al. 1998: 11)

When Skookum Jim woke up, he made his way to Carcross, visited with his mother, and returned to Tagish. Once he returned, people there asked him why he had been gone so long.

Skookum Jim thought he had been gone four days; he was gone eleven (Johnson, et. al. 1998: 12).

Perhaps a year later, Maria and Tagish Johns, Skookum Jim, and his nephews Patsy Henderson and Dawson Charlie traveled together down the Yukon to look for Skookum Jim's sisters who had gone downstream with George Carmack two years earlier. At Laberge, Tagish and Maria Johns turned back because they were concerned about leaving their aging parents alone at Tagish, while Skookum Jim and the others continued on to find his sisters, and eventually to find gold[5] (Johnson, et. al. 1998: 12; see also Sidney in Cruikshank 1990: 63).

Cruikshank (1991: 127-135) states that from a First Nations perspective, this story illustrates how Skookum Jim "understood the social obligations that were part of his world." In particular, he looked after his mother and his sisters, and showed respect and help to an animal (the frog) in need. While his discovery of gold was brought about by the aid of his frog helper, he had not been looking for gold but for his sisters.

For some of the Tagish Bahá'ís I met, however, this story symbolized even more than this. While Skookum Jim found the gold in the north, what became of the light he was shown in the east? One explanation is that it represented the gold rush in Atlin. Johnson et. al. (1998: 17) offer another explanation, one that is particularly relevant for the Tagish Bahá'ís—and for the Johns family in particular:

> Peter Sidney, Maria's [Johns] grandson...offered me another explanation when he drew my attention to the fact that all four of Maria's children...had been inspired to embrace the Bahá'í Faith. The teachings of its Prophet-Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, constituted a powerful Light that was just beginning to radiate from out of the east (Persia), at the same time as Skookum Jim's dream. Pete felt that Maria's family was shown this Light because she was the one who had paid that frog and made medicine with the swan's down. Maria and her husband...turned back from Dawson, but the family found an even greater treasure...

I share this story because it is indicative of the importance of using traditional oral narrative in legitimizing identity, and illustrates how the "ethnic past" can be recreated to make sense of the present. For example, in this version of the story, Skookum Jim's dream of this light in the east is seen to coincide with the introduction of the Bahá'í Faith to the west from Persia. While the two events do appear to have occurred within the same time period, about 1893-1895, their connection in this story serves to create an inherent link between Tagish and Bahá'í history and, thus, between Tagish and Bahá'í identity. In particular, the story suggests that members of the Johns family of Tagish and Carcross were somehow *destined* to become Bahá'í. I will discuss below why this interpretation might be problematic for other non-Bahá'í Natives.

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[5] Patsy Henderson was not among those who eventually found gold.

C. First Nations Cultural Practices, the Bahá'í Faith, and Their Impact on First Nations Bahá'í Identity

The willingness of Tagish Bahá'ís to identify with both their cultural heritage and the Bahá'í Faith stems not only from the perceived similarity between their traditional values and beliefs and those of Bahá'í (as interpreted through traditional stories), but also from the similarities between traditional First Nations cultural practices and those of the Bahá'í Faith. This section will address some of these similarities and their significance for First Nations Bahá'ís.

At the First Nations Bahá'í gathering in the Yukon in November 1996, I had the opportunity to attend a workshop given by two Native Bahá'ís, Clara Schinkel and Ida Calmegane, concerning a comparison of their Tagish and Tlingit traditions and the Bahá'í Faith. Their discussion focused primarily on the parallels they perceived between traditional clan laws and the laws of the Bahá'í Faith. It was apparent that, from their perspective, while the form of the law, or of the cultural practice that ensued therefrom, sometimes differed between the traditional clan system and the Bahá'í Faith, the principle or the aim behind this form was essentially the same. An example of this may be seen in the way in which these two systems address and resolve disputes. Clara Schinkel (11/14/96) comments that while the clan system resolves a dispute through the potlatch, and the Bahá'í Faith through the Local Spiritual Assembly, both involve consultation of all parties involved:

> Under the clan system, if we have a dispute, we have what is called a potlatch, where all the people, from both clans, come together. And if you have a dispute over some area or something, it's decided at that potlatch. And you must come up...with a solution for your problem. In the same way, if we have problems in...our [Bahá'í] community, we should take it to a Local Spiritual Assembly. And that Local Spiritual Assembly will...help the people to solve the problem. So we can see, we have the potlatch on one side, here in the clan system, and the Local Spiritual Assembly on the other side.

Perhaps a more dramatic example of the perceived underlying parallels between these two systems concerns the marriage laws of each. On the surface, the two traditions appear quite dissimilar; according to Clara (11/14/96), in the Tagish clan system, it was the bride's parents that selected her future husband,[6] while in the Bahá'í Faith it is up to the bride and groom to choose their future spouse (CS 11/14/96). Further, in the clan system, a man was expected to live with his future in-laws for a year[7] before a marriage could take place, while no such requirement is expected of a Bahá'í groom-to-be (IC 11/14/96). Nevertheless, the two systems are similar in that they both require that the parties involved become familiar with the character of the potential spouse in order to assure a good match, and they both provide the opportunity for all parties involved to give their consent before a marriage can take place. For example, in the clan system, one of the primary reasons for having the groom live with his future in-laws prior to marriage was so that they could get to know his character; since divorce was strongly discouraged in traditional First Nations culture, this was a precaution to ensure that the bride and groom would get along (IC and CS 11/14/96). As noted above, while there is no such similar stipulation for a groom-to-be in the Bahá'í Faith, both the bride and the groom are encouraged to get to know one another's character before choosing to marry, and they must obtain their parents' consent in order to marry (Smith 2000: 233). Like the clan law concerning marriage, the purpose of these two stipulations—getting to know the character of one's potential spouse and parental consent for marriage—is to ensure that the match is a good one, since divorce is strongly discouraged in the Bahá'í Faith, as well.

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[6] This is only partially accurate; according to McClellan (1975: 367), it was the groom's parents, often at the groom's request, who initiated marriage negotiations with the bride's parents. The bride's parents, however, made the ultimate decision, by accepting or rejecting a proposal.

For the older Tagish Bahá'ís, it appears that the similarity between traditional clan laws and the Bahá'í Faith may have been a factor in their decision to become Bahá'í; they saw it as a renewal of their culture. For example, Clara Schinkel (11/14/96) recalls Patsy Henderson, who became a Bahá'í as an elder in the early 1960s, telling her, "'Thank God I lived to see the clan system come back again. The clan system I was raised by...[It] took the White people to bring it back. The White people took it away and now other people are bringing it back.'" She adds, "When Patsy Henderson was...mentioning that the White people brought back the clan system, we were talking about the laws of the Bahá'í teachings. They are so similar to the teachings of...the First Nations" (CS 11/14/96).

For the younger generation of Tagish Bahá'í converts, however, it was the Bahá'í Faith that gave them pride in their Native identity and a desire to learn more about their cultural heritage. The majority of these individuals, who are now middle-aged, attended mission school, where they learned to reject their traditional teachings—and their Native identity with it—as heathen. At least for some individuals, it was only through the Bahá'í teachings that they came to accept themselves as Native people.[8] Clara (11/14/96), for example, speaks of her own experience:

> I can remember when I left the mission school, I didn't even want to be known as a Native, and here I'm a full-blooded Indian...because of all these things that I

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[7] According to McClellan's (1975: 368) informants, this "trial" period could extend anywhere from six months to two years.

> learned in the mission school...I went through great, great turmoil. And tried to get my identity. You know, thank God the Faith came and found me...it's through these teachings that I started learning to be a mother; it started teaching me my responsibility to my family, and to everyone else around me...I have those roots. Those roots were strong and deep. And it gave me a foothold, to start building on and looking at [my culture]. How did these people survive before the White people came?...And that gave me great pride in who I am...It made me really proud to be an Indian, and to know that we had all these laws to live by.

Another individual, an elderly Tlingit Bahá'í attending the First Nations Bahá'í council in Haines, Alaska, said that what had impressed him about the Faith was that it enabled him to embrace his culture, commenting that the Bahá'ís have "turned upside-down" what the Christians had told the First Nations people. His experience is echoed by a younger mixed Tagish and Tutchone woman in her thirties, who writes that her "cultural background will always be first and foremost in her life and I'm glad the Bahá'í faith encourages me to know who I really am" (personal communication).

It appears that, for some First Nations Bahá'ís, the motivation to learn about their culture stems from their desire to teach their religion to others. For example, one middle-aged woman observes that "I never did an Indian dance 'til I became a Bahá'í, then I became an Indian because it was gonna help the cause of God...We have lost our identity [as Indians], but if it's gonna help the cause of God I'm gonna be the best Indian I know how" [BNC 1982). Another individual, Mark Wedge (7/22/96), indicates that, although he was raised a Bahá'í, he knew little about his own cultural heritage as he was growing up, at least with respect to Native spiritual teachings and the significance of certain cultural practices such as the potlatch. It was only as he got older and became more involved in the Bahá'í Faith that he realized the importance of learning about his Native culture, particularly if he was to teach other First Nations people about his faith. With reference to his own self-discovery as a Native person, Mark shares this story about a potlatch that he attended with his mother in Teslin:

> And this is when...Jack Smarch was there, welcoming at the door. He...spoke to me in Tlingit and I didn't understand what he was saying and I was trying to say I don't understand Tlingit. So I say, "Howgushee," which means I don't know. And I didn't know what else to say, so...I just left it at that and I went in. He kind of looked strange at me...And [later] he was sitting beside her [Mark's mother] and he said, "Who is this young man?" And Mum said, "Oh...he's my youngest son."

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[8] Ironically, perhaps, by the time they became Bahá'í, a number of these individuals had lost their legal status as Indians—or did soon after—because they had married White men, or their parents had become

> He...leaned over and he told her, "When he came in the door I asked him who he was and he said he didn't know." And that had a profound [effect] on me, because I began to start saying, well, who is Mark?...What is this potlatch? Where is the spirituality? What is all this stuff about? And I remember then trying to...integrate some of the Indian religion or traditional stuff, into what was happening.

What ultimately enabled Mark to understand the spiritual significance of the potlatch was his recognition that, while the form of expression may be different, the potlatch serves the same function for the Native community as the Nineteen-Day Feast does for the Bahá'í community:

> Every people have some way of calling their people together...societal gatherings...and generally, there's certain things...about them. There's prayer, or...something that's sacred. There's some sort of...business that occurs. And there's also socialization, they have fun...it's very fundamental...So when we look at the Feast...there's a certain order...a certain...structure...set around it, but [like the potlatch] the Feast is about the community...It's not a new creation (MW 7/22/96).

It is interesting to note that, while Mark Wedge focuses on a different aspect of the Bahá'í Faith, when discussing its similarity to the potlatch, than does his cousin Clara Schinkel, they both emphasize that it is the similarity *in function* between the potlatch and that aspect of the Bahá'í religion that is important. I would suggest that, in doing so, both individuals seek to do two things simultaneously: to validate their traditional culture—and, thus, their Native identity—vis-à-vis the Bahá'í Faith, and to assert their adherence to the Bahá'í Faith as coherent with their Native identity.

What is also significant for many First Nations Bahá'ís, however, is not that functional similarities exist between Native cultural practices and the Bahá'í Faith, but that these cultural practices be used *within the context* of the Bahá'í Faith. The significance here is that by using Native cultural practices during Bahá'í meetings, for example, First Nations Bahá'ís might feel more comfortable and at home with the proceedings, or better understand what is going on. For example, Mark Wedge tells about his experience on one of the Cree reserves in Canada, where he and another Bahá'í were trying to "deepen" a number of First Nations Bahá'ís on the Faith; no one would respond to anything they said until, finally,

> ...this elder stood up in the back of the circle. He said, "I'm gonna help you guys to help us with [these] teachings"...So he took his sweet grass out and he put it on the campfire and he started praying, this Cree, in the traditional manner...And it was powerful; as soon as he said that, everybody started talking (7/8/96).

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enfranchised.

> ...once that elder used the sweet grass...then people opened up...By using that sweet grass, which people were comfortable with, then they understood...also about prayer. And...the attitude and sacredness of it...Whereas by just saying the words and reading from a book, oftentimes it's...[not as] powerful (7/22/96).

Closer to home, I observed that, as elsewhere in North America (see, for example, Radin, in Geertz 1993: 127), the circle is used by First Nations Bahá'ís in the Yukon as a sacred symbol, and the talking circle was employed as a significant element in each of the First Nations Bahá'í events I attended in the Yukon and Alaska. Whether or not this cultural practice was indigenous to the North is unknown; whatever its origins, it seems to have universal appeal among the First Nations people I am familiar with. I believe, however, that the significance of the talking circle for First Nations Bahá'ís is that it allows each individual to speak in his or her turn without interruption from others. This method of consultation is much more respectful than the competitive free-for-all so characteristic of mainstream Bahá'í meetings, and is also more in line with the types of communicative behavior observed among various First Nations people (see, for example, Philips 1993). This is one of the most effective means I have observed for Bahá'í consultation, which is based on the principle that, if every person is able to speak his or her truth, the group might make harmonious and wise decisions together.

The use of traditional singing and dancing, and smudging (although this practice, too, may have originated elsewhere) are also important to some First Nations people in their efforts to express themselves as Bahá'ís. Marilyn Jensen (8/22/96), for example, observes "I love dancing and singing so much because I think it has...a real strong spiritual element." One of her relatives, Charlene Baker (personal communication 4/27/98) goes further, writing, "I feel weak when I cannot practice what my great-grandmother taught me—to dance, sing and tell stories." While these cultural practices contain important spiritual elements for First Nations Bahá'_S, howeVer, they have sometimes been vieWed by Uhite Bahá'_s who are unfamiliar with them as enteRtainment (in the case of singing and dancing) more than as a cejtral element of a spiriTual gaTheRing, or diSmiSsed altogeTheR as someThing alien and "suPeRstiTiouS" (in the case of smUdging)'

HeRein lieS one of the problemS thaT face FiRst NaTions Bahá'_s ij the YUkon, and no doubt elseWheRe. Uhile the Bahá'_ writings themSelveS encouRage cultuRal diVersiTy, and stress the imPortance for "pioneers" to understand the indigenous cultures in which they live, many of those I interviewed have, at one point or other, encountered, if not racism, then certainly cultural insensitivity on the part of some White Bahá'ís. This insensitivity may be due to the fact that many White Bahá'ís have grown up as Christians, with the attitude that

> ...everything else was wrong, and [Christianity] was the truth. I bring that attitude with me when I become a Bahá'í...That what Bahá'u'lláh says is...the truth...[and] that all the knowledge that we have in our history and our cultures is not valid (MW 7/22/96).

Certainly, this view is not unique to White Bahá'ís; the same problem has plagued Native Christians for centuries. Nevertheless, the difficulty with such an attitude, is that not only does it contradict the Bahá'í teachings, but it also discourages First Nations people from looking into their culture, because they feel that by doing so they are not being "good" Bahá'ís (MW 7/22/96). In essence, such an attitude implies that First Nations Bahá'ís must choose between their First Nations and Bahá'í identities.

It appears that this may be what has happened in the Yukon Bahá'í community. With the gradual imposition—however unconscious—of White Canadian cultural values and behavioral expectations on the Yukon Bahá'í community in the 1970s and 1980s, First Nations people came to feel increasingly marginalized within the mainstream Bahá'í community. This marginalization, combined with outright racism on the part of some White Bahá'ís towards their Native co-religionists, made many First Nations people feel uncomfortable or even unwelcome in the Bahá'í community. As a result, some First Nations people left the community, while others became jaded, if not against the Bahá'í Faith, then against participating in the Bahá'í community. Although these individuals may still consider themselves Bahá'í, they appear to identify more closely with other First Nations people than with other Bahá'ís. Despite such tests, however, the majority of those I met have remained steadfast Bahá'ís *and* retained their Native identity. This they have accomplished through emphasizing the compatibility and coherence of "traditional" Native and Bahá'í values, beliefs, and practices.

D. Conflicting Identities: First Nations Communities and First Nations Bahá'ís

From the perspective of many of the First Nations Bahá'ís I interviewed, their two identities, while not the same, were not necessarily in conflict, and *should* not be in conflict. From the perspective of many in the greater First Nations community, the two identities are not only very different, but it may even be counterproductive to link the two at all. As mentioned earlier, ethnic identity entails in part the notion that members of the group share common goals and aspirations, which may be social, economic, or political (see, for example, Roosens 1989; Pflüg 1998). In achieving these ends, Svensson (1985: 36) notes that the "dominant society must be constantly reminded of the cultural distinctiveness inherent in minority groups. In this way, the basic claims qua ethnic minority, or indigenous groups, becomes legitimate and justified." Today, the First Nations people of the Yukon are struggling to assert their independence vis-à-vis the federal and territorial governments and the dominant White culture, by means of land claims and legislation that will guarantee self-determination. To this end, it is important for them to emphasize their First Nations identity as *separate* and *unique*. To correlate First Nations stories and cultural practice with those of Bahá'í is counterproductive to this end, in that Bahá'í identity affirms membership in a *universal* religion. Thus, while I did not interview any non-Bahá'í Natives, I would guess that many would find the assertion of First Nations Bahá'í identity somewhat controversial.

Perhaps adding to the controversy is the fact that, while there are a number of First Nations represented within the Yukon Bahá'í community, the majority of these are Tagish. Not only are they Tagish, but they are, for the most part, members of one extended family. While this is not necessarily controversial in itself, the fact that members of this family are so visible in the First Nations community and as part of the land claims process *is* problematic, in that many of these individuals have been reinstated as band members only within the last fifteen years. The fact that they are Bahá'í only complicates matters in that, within this context, their affiliation with the Bahá'í Faith is perceived as having not only religious, but also political implications. For example, the assertion by some Johns family members that their family is responsible—at least in part—for the revitalization of "traditional" Tagish culture, and that the Bahá'í Faith has provided some of the inspiration for this revitalization, is certainly controversial within their First Nations community. Certainly, many of these individuals have helped, through their participation in the Tagish Nation Dancers, to generate renewed interest in "traditional" Tlingit and Tagish songs and dances, and to educate Tagish youngsters and others about Tagish culture. Yet the fact that this dance troupe is made up largely of Bahá'ís, who sometimes use their performances for Bahá'í purposes (i.e., for teaching the Faith), might lead one to conclude that there is a one-to-one correlation between the Tagish Nation and the Bahá'í Faith. Such a correlation is not necessarily appreciated by other Tagish who are not Bahá'í; non-Bahá'ís, in fact, make up the majority of Tagish.

For the same reason, the use of the Skookum Jim story by some of the Tagish Bahá'ís to affirm their own Bahá'í identity is also somewhat problematic. From a First Nations perspective, this story would appear to affirm "traditional" Tagish social values and customs vis-à-vis those of the dominant White society, which tended to portray Skookum Jim as atypical—and therefore somehow "better"—of his race (Cruikshank 1991: 124-135). Thus, to link this story with a religion that White people introduced to the Yukon—and to suggest that this religion is the spiritual equivalent to Skookum Jim's gold—may seem to undermine the meaning of the story for many Tagish people—at least for those who are not Bahá'ís, or members of the Johns family. The fact that this story serves to legitimize a *Johns* identity, in particular, may be controversial as well, since there are descendants of many others who were part of this story living today, yet they are somehow seen to be "excluded" from this special "blessing" that the Johns family received. Nevertheless, what is perhaps most interesting about this use of Skookum Jim's story is not that it is controversial, but that it serves much the same function for these Tagish Bahá'ís as the traditional clan-owned stories told at the potlatches of old. In particular, both are used validate and legitimize one's identity or rank vis-à-vis others in the First Nations community and to assert one's ownership of a particular resource or privilege (in this case, membership in the Bahá'í Faith).

E. Conclusions

For the most part, the First Nations Bahá'ís I worked with have been able to create for themselves a coherent Native Bahá'í identity. Through the use of both traditional oral narrative and stories about Bahá'í history in the Yukon, these First Nations Bahá'ís have sought to assert, on the one hand, their identity as First Nations people in the Bahá'í Faith, in a religious culture that is dominated by Whites, and on the other hand, to legitimize their acceptance and practice of Bahá'í vis-à-vis their Native culture and identity. This is not to say that all First Nations Bahá'ís have integrated their two identities to the same degree; certainly, while some choose to emphasize their First Nations over their Bahá'í identity, others seem to feel their Bahá'í identity is primary, and still others have sought a balance of the two. It apparent, however, that most, if not all, of those whom I spoke with share a common identity that is both Native *and* Bahá'í; their cultural and Bahá'í identities both inform and are informed by each other, and are inextricably linked. While the attempt by these Bahá'ís to integrate their two identities has proven somewhat problematic for non-Bahá'í Natives and non-Native Bahá'ís alike, such an effort is vital, if they are to remain both active participants in the Bahá'í community and active members of their First Nation communities.

IX. Conclusions

A. Research Questions and Findings

In conducting my research in the Yukon Territory, I set out to record the conversion stories of First Nations people to the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon Territory, and to determine those factors influencing both their conversions and the degree of their continued commitment to their new religion. My initial assumptions in undertaking this research were that the conversion of these First Nations people to the Bahá'í Faith had been influenced primarily by cultural and cognitive factors; for example, by individuals' dreams and visions, by a perceived continuity between their previous and new religious beliefs, and/or by their acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a prophet of God.

I found that were a number of factors influencing First Nations conversion to the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon, some of which I had anticipated, and some of which I had not. In particular, while cultural and cognitive factors did have an impact on the conversions of those I interviewed, social factors played a significant role, as well. For example, conversion occurred most frequently along lines of pre-existing social relationships—i.e., familial—and where social interaction between Bahá'ís and potential converts were most intense. With respect to cultural factors, it appears that many individuals in the 1960s and early 1970s became Bahá'í because it encouraged them to retain or revitalize their Native culture and identity. I say *appears* because no one I interviewed brought this up directly. My conclusions regarding the link between Native cultural identity and Bahá'í conversion, therefore, are based on more on other existing historical factors than on interview information.

With respect to retention, those I interviewed tended to emphasize three factors in their continued commitment to their new faith: prayer, teaching the Bahá'í Faith, and "deepening"—that is, educating themselves about the history, laws, and administration of their new faith, through reading or memorizing the Bahá'í writings, so as to develop a strong Bahá'í identity. What they did not emphasize, and rarely mentioned, was the importance of social factors in their remaining dedicated Bahá'ís: namely, the social support they received from others in the Bahá'í community, at least when they first became Bahá'í, and the family ties they shared with others who were Bahá'í.

Based on my research, I would suggest that social factors were actually *more* important than belief in influencing conversion and the retention of converts. For instance, while it appears that a number of those who became Bahá'í in Old Crow "believed" in Bahá'u'lláh or in the Bahá'í teachings, that belief alone was insufficient in retaining these converts without social support from others in the Bahá'í community, something which they did *not* receive.

In general, there was a notable difference between the 1960s and the 1970s and '80s in terms of the amount of social support First Nations people received from the Bahá'í community. This difference had a significant influence on the conversion and retention of First Nations people to the Faith. For example, in contrast to the mainline churches, the Bahá'í community of the 1960s offered First Nations people a place to belong and feel welcome regardless of their race. In a social climate where Native culture, identity, and community structure was constantly denigrated and under attack, having been severely undermined by mission schooling, intrusive government policies, and socioeconomic change, the Bahá'í community must have appeared refreshingly tolerant and supportive to many First Nations people. Here, they were not expected to give up their cultural identity to be valued; rather, their cultural expression was encouraged. It was undoubtedly this kind of cultural openness and social support that attracted many First Nations people to the Faith during this time.

The fact that First Nations people often learned of the Faith from First Nations Bahá'ís, rather than from Whites, may also have influenced their conversion to the Bahá'í Faith. Particularly in the early 1970s, many First Nations people became Bahá'í as a result of a series of teaching projects that employed First Nations Bahá'í teachers and Native culture—namely, singing and dancing—to attract converts. My theory is that many assumed that Bahá'í, as its ideology and teaching methods would suggest, represented a means to assert Native identity at a time when First Nations people were beginning to organize politically and to demand support and recognition for their culture.

The Bahá'í community during the 1960s and early 1970s is remembered as a closely-knit one, with a lot of social activities going on all the time. Both these activities and the tolerance for First Nations cultural expression within the Faith served to encourage continued commitment to and participation in the Bahá'í community; while some First Nations Bahá'ís may not have had a thorough grasp of Bahá'í doctrine, they felt a sense of belonging to a greater community, where their social needs could be met.

Things began to change in the 1970s, however. During this time period, there was a gradual transition from a Native dominated Bahá'í culture in the Yukon to a White dominated Bahá'í culture, due to the influx of White "pioneers" from southern Canada, who were unfamiliar with First Nations culture and its practice within the Yukon Bahá'í community. As a result, there proved to be a growing dichotomy for First Nations converts in the 1970s, between the Bahá'í Faith as initially presented to them in the teaching phase and the dominant Bahá'í culture they encountered within their new religious community. This dichotomy brings up another significant factor in the retention of new converts, which I shall discuss below: the coherence—or lack of coherence—between Native and Bahá'í identities.

The Bahá'í community of the 1970s also witnessed a shift from the closely-knit feeling that had existed in the 1960s, to a more institutionalized feeling. For example, there was less of an emphasis on social activities within the community and the events that did occur tended to be held not in individual homes, as they had been in the past, but in public meeting halls, which tended to de-personalize these events for First Nations Bahá'ís. Most of those I interviewed pointed to the departure of the earlier White Bahá'ís—who were perceived as very open and loving towards the First Nations people—and the arrival of new White Bahá'ís from southern Canada as the primary source of this change.

I would suggest that many of those Bahá'í converts who left the Faith did so as a result of the perceived loss of social support and interaction within the Bahá'í community. Even if they agreed with Bahá'í principles, or believed in Bahá'u'lláh, if the Bahá'í Faith could not satisfy their need for social support and interaction, they chose to go elsewhere for it. This does not necessarily mean that they did not consider themselves Bahá'í, simply that they did not find the Faith as efficacious for them as it once was.

One factor influencing the retention of converts that has yet to be addressed is the issue of identity. I suggested earlier that many of the First Nations people who became Bahá'í were most likely attracted to the Faith—at least in part—by the fact that this religion did not expect them to give up their Native identity to belong, and that it actually encouraged them, during the earlier years, to retain or revitalize their Native identity.

Conversion to Bahá'í does not necessarily conflict with one's ethnic identity; it can enhance or compete with it depending on the Bahá'í "culture" in existence at the time, and on the aims or goals of both groups. Based on my findings, I would propose that the degree to which Bahá'í and Native identities are coherent and complementary influences the degree to which ethnic converts to Bahá'í (in this case, First Nations people) remain committed to one or the other, or both, of these identities. Bahá'í identity tends to be more appealing and easier to legitimize vis-à-vis ethnic identity when it enhances the latter than when Bahá'í identity is seen to undermine or compete with ethnic identity. Historically speaking, it appears that in the Yukon, both situations occurred: in the 1960s, the two tended towards coherence, whereas in the 1970s and onward, the tendency was towards competition.

For example, during the 1960s, the goals of the Bahá'í community and those of the First Nations people seemed to coincide, at least in terms of ending race discrimination in the Yukon, improving job opportunities, job training, and education. At the same time, the Bahá'í "culture" in the 1960s had a predominantly Native flavor. Thus, to be Bahá'í and Native in the 1960s did not pose much of a conflict: while First Nations converts did not necessarily develop a strong Bahá'í identity during this time period (because of a lack of "deepening"), there was no perceived conflict between Bahá'í and Native identity.

In the 1970s, by contrast, there was an increasing divide between Native and Bahá'í identities, for reasons that were both internal and external to the Bahá'í community. Within the Bahá'í community, the influx of White Bahá'ís from southern Canada produced a dichotomy between the Bahá'í ideology of a culturally diverse and accepting community and the reality of a White dominated Bahá'í culture. At the same time, there was an increasing emphasis in the 1970s among the First Nations communities of the Yukon on asserting a *separate* and *unique* Native identity vis-à-vis the White dominated society. The push for land claims and self-determination was, in part, the impetus for this. As a result of the changes in the 1970s, First Nations Bahá'ís found themselves, for the most part, forced to choose between their Native and Bahá'í identities. Most apparently chose to emphasize their Native identity.

Most Bahá'ís I spoke with argue that it is because of a lack of "deepening" that First Nations Bahá'ís left the Faith during this time. I would suggest that the attempt to "deepen" them failed precisely because it entailed enculturating new converts into a Bahá'í cultural pattern that was quite different from Native cultural patterns. This served merely to accentuate, for most First Nations people, the lack of coherence between Native and Bahá'í identities.

Those First Nations people who remained "active" members of the Bahá'í community appear to have been those who developed, early on in the 1960s, a strong sense of Bahá'í identity, and who have found a way to *integrate* both their Bahá'í and Native identities. It seems that, for some individuals at least, the most effective way to integrate these two identities is through a re-interpretation of their traditional oral narratives and cultural practices in light of their faith. In re-interpreting these narratives and cultural practices—i.e., by drawing parallels between Native and Bahá'í practices or between the values inherent in the stories and certain Bahá'í principles—they seek to legitimize both their Bahá'í identity vis-à-vis their Native identity and their Native identity vis-à-vis Bahá'í. While their interpretations of these stories might not be accepted by others in the First Nations community, their attempt to integrate their two identities through the use of oral narrative is not unusual, given the degree of individuality and personal interpretation inherent in traditional Yukon First Nations culture and spirituality.

B. Significance and Implications of the Research

In drawing these conclusions, it is important to note once again that they are based on my observations of a single Bahá'í community and on interviews with twenty-some individuals--most of whom belong to the same extended family. Thus, my conclusions are not necessarily applicable to Bahá'í converts in general, or even to other First Nations Bahá'ís—or ex-Bahá'ís—in the Yukon whom I did not interview. Neither is my own view of the Whitehorse Bahá'í community necessarily "accurate" as it is perceived by others, limited as it is by my own biases as a Bahá'í and as a researcher. Were I to undertake further research in this area, I would take into consideration a number of factors that I did not consider here, and that I believe would provide a more complete and balanced picture of Bahá'í conversion and the Bahá'í community in the Yukon. For example, an examination of the behavior of members of *each* of the three ethnic groups represented in the Whitehorse Bahá'í community (i.e., Native, White, and Persian), particularly in terms of their interaction with Bahá'ís from the other two ethnic groups, would enable a more thorough ethnographic analysis of the community. In addition, interviews with Persian and White Bahá'ís about the experiences in the community and their perception of Yukon Bahá'í history would provide a richer account of the past than that recorded here. Finally, the inclusion of non-Bahá'ís, former Bahá'ís, and a greater number of "inactive" Bahá'ís—particularly those who are *not* members of the Johns family—as part of the interview sample would reduce the amount of bias inherent in this research.

Despite these limitations, I would suggest that my research findings *do* have significance for a broader audience than for the Yukon Bahá'í community alone. For example, my conclusions challenge the view, accepted by many in anthropology and sociology, that conversion involves a radical change in outlook and a rejection of one's former beliefs. For those I interviewed, becoming Bahá'í did *not* involve a rejection of their past belief; more often, it reaffirmed it, and for some, it also reaffirmed a previously rejected Native identity. This view of conversion appears to be encouraged in the Bahá'í writings, which stress the on-going nature of religious revelation, and the continuity between older religions and the Bahá'í Faith. Moreover, while becoming Bahá'í often *does* entail behavioral change, as the new convert struggles to apply Bahá'í laws to his or her own life, this transformation is seldom as sudden and dramatic as that suggested in much of the anthropological and sociological literature. Rather, it is an on-going, life-long process of "internal conversion," aided by continual study or "deepening" and, in the case of the First Nations Bahá'ís I interviewed, by a reworking or reinterpretation of older beliefs and practices to conform to Bahá'í ideology. Finally, whereas conversion tends to be presented as being motivated primarily by internal cognitive/cultural factors, my research appears to support Stark's (n.d.) theory that social ties are equally if not more important than the former, both in promoting conversion *and* in retaining converts.

Based on these findings, I would conclude that the currently accepted definition of conversion—that of a religious change that replaces one set of religious beliefs with another, and that involves a rejection of the past—excludes the Bahá'í experience, and must be broadened to consider religious change that does not involve a replacement of rejection of past beliefs and practices. Moreover, any definition must also consider both cognitive *and* social aspects of conversion.

With respect to identity, I found that Bahá'í religious identity is in many ways similar to ethnic identity as described in the anthropological literature, although Bahá'í identity, of course, is not predicated on common biological descent. Both Bahá'í identity and ethnic identity, for example, arise out of an attempt by members of each group to distinguish themselves from other groups in society, particularly the dominant religious or cultural group.[1] Both Bahá'ís and ethnic groups use certain "cultural" features, including behavioral expectations, ritual practice, etc., to identify themselves as unique from other groups. Both also assert their uniqueness through their presentation of the past, and both can change how they construct their identity and history depending on the current context.

An examination of Bahá'í history in the Yukon and of First Nations Bahá'í use of oral narrative would also suggest that the past, and stories about that past, are never constant, however they might be perceived by those within the group. Although the stories themselves might not change, the way they are used to interpret the past, and their purpose in being told, can change according to the current context. This would support that which the literature on ethnicity and ethnic identity asserts: that as the needs and goals of the speaker (or ethnic group) change, so, too, do the way in which these "histories" are told or used. From this I would conclude that the past is shaped and interpreted as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past. The aim of the researcher, then, should be to determine both what motivates and informs the story-teller's narrative (i.e., the context in which it is told], and how that narrative—whether about religious history or some "primordial" ethnic past—gives meaning to the present as experienced by the individual.

Within a Bahá'í context, my findings serve to highlight some of the factors influencing conversion, retention, and community participation that have tended to be ignored or de-emphasized in the general Bahá'í community. For example, Bahá'ís in North America tend to stress belief in Bahá'u'lláh as central to conversion, and "deepening" in the Bahá'í teachings as vital to one's spiritual health, while downplaying the importance of social factors. In fact, I would suggest that social factors are perhaps *more* important than "doctrinal" factors in attracting and retaining new converts, and in encouraging the participation of "inactive" members within the Bahá'í community. For instance, while "deepening" is essential to developing a strong Bahá'í identity, so, too, is the sense of belonging that the new believer—or old believer, for that matter—gains from the intense social interaction and social support that he or she feels from others within the Bahá'í community. Where such social support is felt to be lacking, individuals will tend to fall away from the Faith, whether by becoming "inactive" or by leaving the religion all together.

Another factor influencing conversion, retention, and participation, which appears to be related to the first, is the dominance—in North America, at least—of White cultural values in Bahá'í culture and religious expression. As members of the dominant cultural group in both the greater North American society and the Bahá'í community, White Bahá'ís tend to be unconscious of both their own cultural biases and the way in which they impose these biases on others. What may feel comfortable and "normal" for White Bahá'ís, however—whether it be the way in which one "deepens," one's communication style during consultation, or one's style of worship—may not necessarily be perceived by others as such. Most non-Whites, in fact, like their First Nations counterparts in the Yukon, probably feel very *un*comfortable with the form of Bahá'í "culture" they encounter in a White-dominated Bahá'í community.

Thus, the challenge for White Bahá'ís, in particular, is to critically examine the cultural and personal biases they bring to the Faith, and how these biases influence participation in Bahá'í community activities, as well as to acknowledge the validity of other cultural forms of religious expression within the Faith. I would suggest that, where Bahá'ís are able to encourage cultural diversity within the Faith—for example, through the development of indigenous forms of "deepening," consultation, and worship—they will experience greater success both in attracting and retaining new converts to their religion, and in creating a truly loving and "active" Bahá'í community.

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[1] The Bahá'ís have always been a minority group, even within their culture of origin (see, for example, Stiles 1984).

Glossary of Bahá'í Terms

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Meaning "Servant of Bahá." 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the son of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and was appointed as his successor.

Akka: The prison-city in the Ottoman Empire (now Israel) where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in 1868.

Alláh'u'Abhá: A Bahá'í greeting meaning "God is most glorious," or "God is all glorious." It isone version of the "Greatest Name" of God.

Auxiliary Board: Those appointed (by the Continental Board of Counsellors) to assist and support Local Spiritual and National Spiritual Assemblies with administrative affairs in their region.

Bahá'u'lláh: Meaning "Glory of God." Bahá'u'lláh was the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Báb: Meaning "Gate." The Báb claimed to be the return of the Twelfth Imám of Shi'ite Islám. In addition to founding his own religion, he anticipated the coming of an even greater prophet of God, "He whom God shall make manifest."

The Covenant: Refers generally to the line of succession in the Bahá'í Faith designated by Bahá'u'lláh and his son. Authority to lead the Faith is said to pass from Bahá'u'lláh to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice.

Covenant Breaker: One who professes belief in Bahá'u'lláh, but who deliberately and publicly denies the authority of Bahá'u'lláh's successors, including 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. Covenant Breakers are shunned by other Bahá'ís.

Declare: A Bahá'í phrase for the decision one makes to become a Bahá'í (i.e., "He declared himself a Bahá'í")

Declaration Card: A card one signs in becoming Bahá'í that states one's belief in Bahá'u'lláh, one's acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh's successors, and one's willingness to abide by Bahá'í laws. Declaration cards are used most often in western countries, and are used to keep track of membership.

Deepening: The study of the Bahá'í Faith "in all its aspects" (Momen 1989: 68). Deepening includes reading and memorizing the writings of the major figures of the Faith, familiarizing oneself with and adopting Bahá'í laws and principles, and learning about the administrative order of the Faith.

Effendi, Shoghi: The grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, appointed as his successor in 1921.

Feast (or Nineteen-Day Feast): The focal point of Bahá'í community life, providing believers with a means for communal ritual observance and social interaction every nineteen days.

The Greatest Name: From the Islámic tradition, it is the greatest of God's names. Bahá'ís believe this name is "Bahá, which means glory, splendour or light" (Momen 1989: 90). Variations of this name include "Alláh'u'Abhá, Yá-Bahá'u'l-Abhá, and Yá Bahá'u'lláh.

Imám (or Twelfth Imám): From Shi'ite Islám, one of twelve recognized successors of Muhammad. The first was 'Alí, the last of whom was the Hidden Imám (whom the Báb claimed to be).

Institutions of the Learned: These represent those members of the Bahá'í administration who are appointed to assist the elected bodies of the Universal House of Justice, the National Spiritual Assemblies, and the Local Spiritual Assemblies in their teaching and "deepening" efforts. At the international level, they are represented by the Continental Board of Counsellors; at the Regional level by the Auxiliary Board, and at the local level by Auxiliary Board Assistants.

Institutions of the Elected: These are the elected administrative bodies of the Faith, including the Universal House of Justice, the National Spiritual Assemblies, and the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Continental Board of Counsellors: Those appointed by the Universal House of Justice to support the international efforts of that body.

Hands of the Cause: Those exemplary Bahá'ís, appointed first by Bahá'u'lláh, and later Shoghi Effendi, who were charged with the "specific duties of protecting and propagating the Faith" (Momen 1989: 95). The Hands of the Cause became the leaders of the Bahá'í World upon Shoghi Effendi's death in 1957, until the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963.

Manifestation: A prophet of God. Literally, the manifestation of God on earth.

Man yuzhiruhu Alláh: Meaning "He whom God shall make manifest." The name by which the Báb referred to the prophet who would come after him, who would fulfill the prophecies of all religions, and would unite the peoples of the world. Bahá'u'lláh claimed to have been Man yuzhiruhu Alláh.

Mirzá Husayn-'Ali: Bahá'u'lláh's given name.

New World Order: The "Divine Civilization" as envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh and further refined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This world order provides a model for a future society that will entail the establishment of universal peace and the unification of the world under one democratically elected government. The principle behind this World Order is the recognition of the unity of mankind.

Pioneer: A Bahá'í missionary. One who settles in a foreign country or region to teach the Bahá'í Faith.

Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad: The Báb's given name.

Spiritual Assembly: A nine-member elected body that oversees the administrative affairs of a Bahá'í community. There are both Local and National Spiritual Assemblies.

Subh-i-Azal: Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother, who competed with him for leadership of the Bábi community. He was exiled to Cyprus in 1868.

Universal House of Justice: The supreme administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith, centered in Haifa, Israel. The Universal House of Justice is made up of nine members elected every five years by the membership of all of the National Spiritual Assemblies. This body provides leadership for the international Bahá'í community and is considered infallible, although its individual members are not.

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Personal Communications and Interviews

Anonymous, various personal communications with individuals in Alaska and Yukon Territory (including interviews with individuals whose names are not cited in text).

Interviews recorded by author (listed alphabetically by interviewee's last name, with date of interview):

(SA 5/22/98)	Sally Anderson, May 22, 1998, Everett, WA
(CB 7/11/96)	Charlene Baker, July 11, 1996, Whitehorse, YT
(EB 11/5/98)	Elinore Bennett, November 5, 1998, Victoria, BC*
(FB 11/5/98)	Fletcher Bennett, November 5, 1998, Victoria, BC*
(MB 5/22/96)	Maria Benoit, May 22, 1996, Whitehorse, YT
(RB 6/20/96)	Ronald Bill, June 20, 1996, Whitehorse, YT*
(IC 8/23/95)	Ida Calmegane, August 23, 1995, Tagish, YT*
(IC 6/26/98)	Ida Calmegane, June 26, 1996, Tagish, YT
(MJ 8/22/96)	Marilyn Jensen, August 22, 1996, Whitehorse, YT
(LJ 8/5/96)	Les Johns, August 5, 1996, Whitehorse, YT*
(CJ 7/9/96)	Cheryl Johnson, July 9, 1996, Whitehorse, YT
(SJ 8/24/95)	Sandra Johnson, August 24, 1995, Whitehorse, YT
(TJ 7/9/96)	Tricia Johnson, July 9, 1996, Whitehorse, YT
(AA 5/9/96)	Annie Auston, May 9, 1996, Tagish, YT
(AA 7/4/96)	Annie Auston, July 4, 1996, Tagish, YT
(DM 8/27/95)	Doris McLean, August 27, 1995, Whitehorse, YT
(LPL 5/19/96	Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, May 19, 1996, Whitehorse YT
(CS 8/28/95)	Clara Schinkel, August 28, 1995, Whitehorse, YT
(PS 8/25/95)	Pete Sidney, August 25, 1995, Whitehorse, YT*
(PS 8/29/95)	Pete Sidney, August 29, 1995, Whitehorse, YT
(AT 10/17/98)	Andy Tamas, October 17, 1998, phone interview
[BvZ 5/30/96]	Bill van Zoest, May 30, 1996, Carcross, YT*
(DW 5/5/96)	Dora Wedge, May 5, 1996, Tagish, YT
(DW 5/9/96)	Dora Wedge, May 9, 1996, Carcross, YT
(DW 7/4/96)	Dora Wedge, July 4, 1996, Tagish, YT
(MW 5/5/96)	Mark Wedge, May 5, 1996, Tagish, YT
(MW 7/8/96)	Mark Wedge, July 8, 1996, Tagish, YT
(MW 7/22/96)	Mark Wedge, July 22, 1996, Tagish, YT
(DWi 11/4/98)	Doug Wilson, November 4, 1998, Victoria, BC

*Asterisks denote those interviews which were only partially tape recorded or not tape recorded; all others were tape recorded in their entirety.

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M.A. in Sociocultural Anthropology. University of Washington, Seattle, WA. 1994.

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Teaching Assistant. Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. September-December 1993.

Teacher, History and English. The Vail-Deane School, Mountainside, NJ. September 1989-June 1990.

Teacher, Oral Communications and Study Skills. Native American Preparatory School (at New Mexico State University), Las Cruces, NM. June 1989-August 1989.

Teaching Assistant. Sunrise Preschool of the Arts, Fort Washington, PA. January-June 1989.

Research Experience

Doctoral Researcher, Canadian Studies Graduate Student Fellow. Yukon Territory, Canada. March 1996-August 1996.

Research Assistant. Department of Forestry, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. January-July 1993.

Educational Researcher. Chief Leschi School, Tacoma, WA. April-June 1993.

Other Experience

Admissions Interviewer (Volunteer}. Harvard College Schools and Scholarships Committee, Seattle, WA. November 1994-March 2000.

Fundraising Volunteer. Habitat for Humanity, Lynnwood, WA. October 1999-June 2000.

Board Member. Indian Rights Association, Philadelphia, PA. January 1991-January 1992.