

Laura Dreyfus-Barney (1897-1974), the International Council of Women and International Intellectual Cooperation at Paris, Geneva, and Rome

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During the International Council of Women's (ICW) 1927 congress Alfred Zimmern, deputy director of the Paris Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), addressed an open meeting on "The Work of the League of Nations for Intellectual Co-operation and How the International Council of Women and its National Councils Might Cooperate with the League's Work for Intellectual Co-operation" (ICW 1927). His talk was chaired by Laura Dreyfus-Barney, a wealthy American domiciled in Paris, who was the ICW liaison officer with the IIIC (from 1925) and an expert member of the League's Sub-committee of Experts to Make the League known to Young People. Dreyfus Barney convened the ICW Cinema Sub-committee (1926-46) and from 1930 was ICW Liaison officer at the International Institute of Educational Cinematography (IIEC) in Rome. She was vice-president (1925-35), then president (1935-47), of the ICW Peace and Disarmament Committee and vice-chair of the Peace and Disarmament Committee of the Women's International Organisations. After WW2 she was ICW liaison officer with the United Nations until 1970 (Goodman, 2018).

Dreyfus-Barney was a prominent follower of the Bahá'í Faith, which originated in Iran in the 1840s. From 1900 she spent two years in the household of the exiled Bahá'í leader 'Abdul'Bahá in the prison city of Akka', where she studied the Bahá'í faith and became fluent in Persian. Prior to 1922 she travelled as a Bahá'í emissary to Palestine, Persia, the Caucasus, Russian Turkistan, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Turkey, China, Indochina, Korea and India (Khademi 2013). Her activities in the ICW around intellectual co-operation and her support of the Bahá'í Faith illustrate what Massey (2005, 141) terms a "meeting of histories", albeit with tensions.

Dreyfus-Barney publicised intellectual cooperation in the ICW *Bulletin*, noting that it aimed "to free the mind from prejudice, hostility and ignorance, and to fortify it through co-operation and wider knowledge of human relationships" in order "to abolish antagonistic feeling", and "to create ... "mutual understanding by safeguarding the school, the book the press, the radio, the cinematograph and all public platforms from pernicious influences working against Peace" (Dreyfus-Barney 1933, 5-6). She proposed a resolution to the ICW's 1927 conference (originating in a meeting of the League's Liaison Committee of Major International Associations) that to enable the child to strike root in its "natural setting of family and homeland ... the child, as the citizen of tomorrow, was to learn that it would have to fulfil ... its obligations to its family, companions, village, town or city and country" and was to be taught that solidarity should not be confined within national boundaries: "for there exists between peoples as between the various members of any one society a community of rights and duties as well as an actual and ever-increasing interdependence". The resolution noted that civilisation was "the common world of all people, including those who in the course of centuries have been the most bitter enemies; and that notwithstanding inevitable differences it is out of the fact of this common heritage and the desire to preserve and to develop it, that the League of Nations was born" (ICW 1927, 14-15).

This resolution resonated with Bahá'í beliefs about the earth as a single homeland and one household. Bahá'ís situate all human societies, cultures and nations as interdependent in a global common system that renders national borders and boundaries artificial, arbitrary distinctions (Saiedi 2013, 68). This view is grounded in a pluralistic theology that incorporates a series of divine teachers, including Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus, who are seen as emanating from one source. This pluralistic theology supports a vision of unity in diversity (Smith 1996, Stockman 2013) through metaphors like humanity as a flower garden made

beautiful by its diversity of colour and form. What Bahá'ís term “the greater peace” represents a new world order that will result from a spiritualisation of the world and connects peace and notions of global civilisation (Stockman 2013, 61).

Bahá'ís view collective security as an element of what they term “the lesser peace” and positioned the League as a progressive but insufficient mechanism to bring about world peace (Goodman 2020). The individualist underpinnings of the ICW/Liaison Committee resolution illustrates some of the shortcomings for Bahá'ís of intellectual cooperation. The resolution suggests interdependence but places the self at the centre of concentric circles that span outwards as the child, as citizen of tomorrow, learns to fulfil obligations to family, companions, village, town or city and country. It is underpinned by a cultural-cognitive model of the enlargement and enrichment of a self that following Papastephanou (2015) is a Western mode of maintaining the coherence of a modern self, via a successful negotiation of distance between self and other in which the self is the centre of attention and primary beneficiary.

Bahá'ís reject party politics and work towards a new world order through cooperative methods geared to bring about change via consensus. Dreyfus-Barney's role in the establishment of the Liaison Committee illustrates this stance. The Liaison Committee was founded after a 1924 resolution of the fifth assembly of the League. It operated as an umbrella committee to co-ordinate international non-governmental associations concerned with education in international understanding and world peace (Hermon 1987, Fuchs 2007). Dreyfus-Barney's correspondence with Marie Butts (general secretary of the International Bureau of Education) illustrates that she sought a mechanism to enable the major international associations to study questions aimed at fostering global agreement among the younger generation. Networking was central to Dreyfus-Barney's approach to change via consensus and she discussed her proposal with Inazō Nitobé, Sorin Oprescu, Princess Radziwill, Lady Aberdeen and Julien Luchaire. It was decided with Luchaire that Dreyfus-Barney would send a letter in the name of the ICW inviting certain organisations to study how the new committee would be formed (Dreyfus-Barney 1934).

Dreyfus-Barney articulated this co-operative approach to consensus-building in her address to the Institute of World Affairs meeting in California in 1932. Here, she outlined the mechanisms of intellectual cooperation and the “field of work for moral disarmament”, telling delegates that it was necessary to adapt methods to a new world order, “where everything is inter-dependent” and where understanding was imperative between nations, races and classes”. In a situation where countries and continents were “knitted together this new world order was to be worked out in consultation and by good will” (Dreyfus-Barney 1932).

In America Dreyfus-Barney also pursued her interest in educational cinematography. In 1931 she had organised an ICW cinematography conference at the IIEC which involved delegates from China, Persia, Indochina, South America and Europe. At the IIEC's 1934 cinematography conference, she represented a number of organisations, including the ICW, the Liaison Committee, and the International Commission on the Educational and Social Use of the Film, of which she was treasurer. This Commission, established after the IIEC's 1926 International Motion Picture Conference, met at the IIEC. When preparing the IIEC's 1934 congress, IIEC director, Lucien de Feo drew on Dreyfus-Barney's first-hand knowledge gleaned while travelling prior to 1922. She spent a month prior to the congress working on film and “people from different races and cultures”, a strand of the conference programme that de Feo (1933) considered might prove sensitive.

Dreyfus-Barney's 1934 congress paper, published in the *International Review of Educational Cinematography* (Dreyfus-Barney 1935) urged the greatest care in the choice of films for export, particularly when considering “the mental characteristics of Oriental peoples and peoples of the Far East, who have lively imaginations and great sensibility” (ibid., 255). Such comments resonate with a Bahá'í vision of unity in diversity, but also with 1930s views around how empires incorporated diverse peoples into the polity by viewing them as “different” (Kallaway and Swartz 2016). Referring to her travels prior to 1922 she describes film as a “real problem when one turns to the colored races” and notes, “It was already possible to see the prodigious effect of the cinema on the population and I began to worry that the white race in its role as forerunner were letting there many hazardous, disconcerting and destructive things” (Dreyfus-Barney 1935, 256). The white race as “forerunner” plugs into racialized configurations but also links to Bahá'í views that removing prejudice between peoples was a white responsibility (Anon 1910).

While Bahá'ís viewed the League as a progressive but insufficient mechanism to bring about world peace, their rejection of partisan politics led Bahá'ís like Dreyfus-Barney to support educational initiatives and civil society organisations and to promote intellectual cooperation in order to move towards the “greater peace” via co-operative, consensual means. Her League-(and later UN-) related activities, her activities in the ICW and her Bahá'í activities were two sides of the same coin (Dreyfus-Barney 1948). Her activities in pursuit of intellectual co-operation intertwined elements that were personal, organisational and transnational. Their threads resonated with Bahá'í beliefs but also plugged into configurations in tension that circulated around individualism and race.

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