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Are We the Baddies? Chris Chan, Wahid Azal, and the Challenge of Lolcow Spirituality

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ABSTRACT: A "lolcow" is an unfortunate person who is "milked for laughs" on the internet. The prototypical example, Chris Chan (b. 1982), is an autistic, transgender layabout from Ruckersville, Virginia, who has fascinated gawkers and trolls since 2007. In 2021, while in jail for incest with his elderly mother, he declared himself to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Wahid Azal (b. 1971) is a Persian-Australian ranter who renounced the Bahā'ī religion of his upbringing for the rival Bayānī (Azalī-Bābī) tradition, an iteration of which he now heads as a self-recognized divine manifestation. Like Chris Chan, he is "famous on the internet," where he is known primarily for various online vendettas—often against Bahā'īs and (other) ex-Bahā'īs, but more recently against that notorious tool of Western imperialism, CESNUR. Even if neither Chan's Neo Spiritual Christianity (f. 2022) nor Azal's NUR-Fāṭimīya Sufi Order (f. 2002 or 2005) amounts to much, the antics of their founders have attracted noteworthy "audience cults." How to approach such figures raises vexing methodological and ethical questions.

KEY WORDS: Lolcows, Chris Chan, Sonichu, Neo Spiritual Christianity, Wahid Azal, Bayānism, NUR-Fāṭimīya Sufi Order, CESNUR.

Introduction

A "lolcow" is an unfortunate person, usually relatively unknown rather than a celebrity or politician, who is mocked or harassed ("milked for laughs") on the internet—a laughingstock, if you will. The term slightly predates Chris Chan's emergence from obscurity in late 2007, but it is unclear exactly when and where it originated, or to whom it first referred (GoGoNojo 2025).

The phenomenon it describes is older still; picture a ring of students teasing a child with some abnormality (CWCki: "Kick the Autistic"). Before Chris Chan there was "Star Wars Kid" Ghyslain Raza, a chubby high-school student who suffered public ridicule and cyberbullying after becoming the unwitting star of a viral 2003 internet video showcasing his lightsaber skills (although audience

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reaction was mostly positive). Gene Ray (1927–2015), creator of the "Time Cube" website (from 1997), attracted numerous ironic fans, a few of whom contacted him pretending to have embraced his crank cosmology. At one point, an MIT student group even invited Ray to lecture there (Rocks and Austin 2025).

While eccentric outsiders like Emperor Norton (1818–1880) or Henry Darger (1892–1973) have long been around, a lolcow presupposes an internet audience. One discerns traces of the crowd psychology behind the "Kill Barney!" proto-memes of the 1990s (referring to the purple dinosaur star of the children's TV show *Barney and Friends*), as well as the fascination with visceral disgust represented by Goatse (1999), Tubgirl (2000), and other shock sites. In fact, lolcows form part of a wider online ecosystem dedicated to degeneracy as lowbrow entertainment. Chris Chan, for example, was discovered by posters on 4chan and Something Awful.

Although "global village idiots" (O'Farrell 2001) receive regular mockery from other corners of the internet (e.g., YouTube's Flat Earth debunking channels), Chris Chan is the Patient Zero of self-conscious lolcow fandom. Other similar figures emerged over the 2010s (Ulillillia, Cyraxx, Drachenlord, Nikocado Avocado, Daniel Larson, Amberlynn Reid), while lolcow-like features came to be recognized in already-active influencers (Rudyard Lynch, Eisel Mazard). Nevertheless, Chris Chan remains the lolcow *par excellence*, having virtually defined what it means to be a lolcow.

The premier website devoted to monitoring lolcows, Kiwi Farms, was founded in 2013 as "CWCki Forums," a name referencing Chris Chan's initials: Christian (né Christopher, later Christine) Weston Chandler. Site owner Joshua Moon changed the name in 2014 to signal an expanded focus. The CWCki (created in 2008 and pronounced "quickie") is a wiki—not a wiki page, an entire wiki—devoted to Chris. These two sites are the major sources of "Christory," along with Geno Samuel's magisterial YouTube series *Chris Chan: A Comprehensive History* (from 2018). With its first season at 85 episodes, it is already one of the longest biographical documentaries ever made (though ineligible for any of the categories listed in the Guinness World Records), boosted by the fact that its subject is among the most thoroughly documented people in history. One wit describes the series as structured less like *Tiger King* and more like Ken Burns's *The Civil War* (Sperg 2022).

Wahid Azal has long objected to how academics and journalists frame his work, and will probably criticize the present comparative project along similar lines. Nevertheless, he resembles Chris Chan in many important ways: their shared messianic pretensions, grandiose visionary and genealogical claims; a life defined by strange online infatuations, vendettas, and trolling / catfishing episodes; their mostly unsympathetic audiences of voyeurs; contests with not-very-serious rivals (Azal 2024d); performative ritual execrations (CWCki: "Curse-ye-ha-me-ha"); expulsion from numerous forums for bad behavior; a monumental series of self-published, self-absorbed works that posit a numinous fantasy world intersecting ours; and attempts to piggyback on wider socio-political movements of the day (be they autism awareness, LGBT identity, Brony fandom, Antifa, the cult of the Divine Feminine, or the Palestinian cause). Both men have transformed into the opposite of what they once were, and indeed, something they were brought up to revile—Chris Chan into a trans woman, Wahid Azal into a Covenant-breaker. Both have founded religious groups, albeit tiny, mostly virtual ones that would go unnoticed if not for hate-watching.

This religious aspect distinguishes them from most lolcows. Chris Chan orbiter and erstwhile paramour Jacob Sockness claims to be a deity from a fantasy world called Kidasuna, but has not attempted to recruit any followers other than Chris (CWCki: "Jacob Sockness" and "Kidasuna"). Rudyard Lynch has conversed with God, the devil, and Wotan by means of ayahuasca, and mentions organizing a secretive parapolitical or occult fraternity ("human capital group") called the Order of the Crimson Dragon (Whatifalthist 2024). I struggle to think of any more examples.

In the framework proposed by Stark and Bainbridge (1985, 26–35), lolcow-led "cult movements" (insofar as they exist, lolcows being more or less defined by their negative charisma) are dwarfed by their "audience cults." While the attention is overwhelmingly ironic—one speaks of "followers" primarily in the social-media sense, not the religious sense—it still carries religious significance. In each case we find, on one hand, a robust audience cult; and on the other, a kind of scapegoat. In this sense, Chris Chan is not wrong to liken himself to Jesus, albeit as a despised criminal rather than the glorious figure of the resurrection. Meanwhile, Wahid Azal refers to himself as "this Bābī Qalandar," and perceptively states that he is "walking the Path of Blame (*malāmīyah*)" (WahidAzal556 2025b, cf. Azal 2006, 3).

Lolcowism can be studied either from the side of the lolcows themselves, or from the perspective of the audience, as in reception theory. Our story concerns not only a pair of marginal individuals who have somehow achieved a measure of notoriety, but the audience cults (in the case of Chris Chan, we are speaking of a full-blown fan community) that have come to define the lives of these unfortunates. These audience cults are in turn molded by adjacent internet subcultures, such as those of gamers (Kiwi Farms posters cheerfully address one another as niggers, faggots, or retards) or Bahā'ī intellectuals.

It should go without saying that a subject like this comes with trigger warnings for absolutely everything, not least exotic varieties of sexual abuse, or humiliation of the mentally disabled. The world's wisdom traditions admonish us to "Touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17). "Thou shalt not disfigure the soul" (Orange Catholic Bible). "What you contemplate, you imitate" (John Michael Greer). Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), Guardian of the Bahā'ī Faith, instructs believers to "shun entirely all Covenant-breakers as they are afflicted with what we might try and define as a contagious spiritual disease" (Continental Board of Counselors 1999, par. 7), although the Universal House of Justice recognizes that some "have the unpleasant duty to read such literature" (Hornby 1988, par. 611). Newcomers to Christory will encounter warnings like "Do not google. You will never be the same again" or "Turn back now!"

Yet deep calls to deep, and depravity to depravity. Like the hero of Rudyard Kipling's (1865–1936) poem, "The Prodigal Son" ("The fatted calf is dressed for me / But the husks have greater zest for me..."), here we are among the swine, perhaps half swine ourselves. In that case, a further warning is in order: some of these people can be dangerous. The main page of the CWCki advises viewers not to attempt to contact Chris Chan, or anyone associated with him: "*Observe* Christory. Don't *make* Christory." Kiwi Farms has a parallel saying: "Don't touch the poo." For that matter, it would be unwise to offend the denizens of Kiwi Farms, whose formidable, crowdsourced intelligence amounts to "weaponized autism." Members twice doxxed "final troll" Isabella Loretta Janke, who fancied herself something of a computer security expert. (Changing her name and moving to another US state availed her nothing.) Meanwhile, several informants report receiving threats and/or legal harassment from Wahid Azal, although his bark may be worse than his bite.

Chris Chan and Neo Spiritual Christianity

> But essentially, as going back to the, mmm but all religions, all religions that are, that promote goodness and light power, and everything, are good, it's just the majority of them are the bigger piece of the, just a piece of the bigger, of the bigger ultimate picture. Which is why I, I identify as multi-religious, and I'm open for, uh, the positive interpretations and enlightenments from everybody and everything. Ah! Ugh, pardon me, I'm a little gassy.
>
> –Mrs. Jesus Christine Weston Chandler Sonichu Prime, the One Avatar of All Existence, the CPU Goddess Blue Heart of the Commodore Consoles, and the One Reincarnation of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Himself (CwcvilleGuardian 2023b, 22:30)

> He's not the messiah, he's a very naughty boy.
>
> –Monty Python's *Life of Brian*

Christopher Weston Chandler was born in 1982 in Charlottesville, Virginia (but grew up in Ruckersville and Richmond) to parents Robert Franklin Chandler, Jr. (1927–2011), an electrical engineer for Western Electric and General Electric; and Barbara Ann Weston Chandler (b. 1941), who held a series of secretarial jobs. Both had been married before (Chris has three half-siblings); their ages may have played a role in Chris's condition. From childhood, Chris was identified as "high-functioning autistic," a label he later embraced. ("High-functioning" means that he can do things like talk and feed himself). Early news coverage includes a 1993 newspaper article on his change of name from "Christopher" to "Christian," due to an incident involving an animatronic bear (Green 1993; CWCki: "Christopher's name change"); as well as a 1994 local TV news segment after he won a 1,000-dollar shopping spree at Kay-Bee Toys as the grand prize in a drawing associated with the *Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog* cartoon (CWCki: "Sonic the Hedgehog Watch & Win Sweepstakes").

The Chandlers fought to have Chris mainstreamed, although he did receive some special education courses. One incident that would prove important later occurred during a high school art class, in connection with an assignment to design the cover for a CD case. Since trademarked characters were disallowed, Chris created Sonichu, a mash-up of Sonic and Pikachu (of Pokémon fame) that would become a sort of totem for him. By 2004, he was rarely seen without a homemade medallion of a cabossed Sonichu (made from Crayola Model Magic) around

his neck. That same year, he began writing and drawing a *Sonichu* webcomic. The fifteen-issue series features Chris as a self-insert and depicts his real-life struggles as anime battles. For example, the villain Count Graduon represents his high school graduation in 2000, which ended Chris's happiest years. The stories are set in CWCville (pronounced "quickville"), a cartoon version of Ruckersville or Charlottesville where Chris is mayor.

From 2000 to 2006, Chris attended Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) and earned an associate's degree in Computer-Aided Drafting and Design (CADD). When his attempts to find a job foundered—Chris has only worked for a few months in his life, mostly at a Wendy's fast-food restaurant (CWCki: "Chris and work" and "Chris's resume")—his father arranged for him to receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) payments (CWCki: "Monthly tugboat"). His search for a "boyfriend-free girl" proved similarly fruitless, perhaps because his approach consisted of walking around with a sign (and later, distributing leaflets) advertising this desire (CWCki: "Attraction Sign" and "Love Quest"). Frustrating his efforts were PVCC student affairs dean Mary Lee Walsh and several campus or mall security personnel (CWCki: "Jerkops"), whom Chris turned into villains in his comic.

On his twenty-fifth birthday (24 February 2007), Chris released his first YouTube video—the avuncular "Future Message" in which he counsels a notional audience of high school students to abstain from alcohol and tobacco, "stay straight," and "keep in mind what your true, original gender is." Boys who feel awkward around girls should practice talking to a My Little Pony figure while stroking its mane; girls are told to use a Transformers Autobot toy instead. Later that year, anons on 4chan discovered the *Sonichu* comic, which by then contained sex scenes. Around the same time, Something Awful goons reported sightings of Chris engaged in his "Love Quest." These stories elicited comparisons with Ignatius J. Reilly from *A Confederacy of Dunces*, or "Buffalo Bill" from *The Silence of the Lambs*. Soon the wiki-style satire site *Encyclopedia Dramatica* created a page about Chris. When his attempts to edit or delete it failed, Chris tried to overwhelm the site with personal information about himself, illuminated with original erotic crayon art that can be fairly described as naïve but grotesque (e.g., CWCki: "She Came for CWC" or "Warning—Naughty Women"). Trolling began in earnest.

In this "classic" era, Chris Chan regularly appeared on his YouTube channel in his signature Ralph Lauren polo shirt and Sonichu medallion to rage against some offense, or coo flirtatiously at a supposed female admirer (invariably a catfishing situation). One troll persuaded Chris to photograph himself in his mother's underwear (CWCki: "Lordsillynipples"). Another—an actual woman this time—agreed to go with Chris (who famously hates pickles) on a date to a mall food court, only to allow herself to be stolen away by a confederate wearing a pickle costume (CWCki: "Man in the Pickle Suit" and "Date with Emily"). When another YouTuber began impersonating him, Chris mistook the situation for a serious attempt at identity theft; the dispute escalated into a very uneven singing contest over the rights to his name (CWCki: "Liquid Chris").

Trolls sent unwanted pizzas (and on one occasion, hookers) to the Chandler house, pretended to be business executives intent on licensing Sonichu, tricked Chris into destroying his PlayStation 3, arranged for his father to walk in on him masturbating, and uploaded a video of Chris humping a blowup doll to slutload.com. Perhaps the most disturbing incident came when the troll known as BlueSpike—a thirteen-year-old boy pretending to be one of Chris's virtual girlfriends—made him break apart his Sonichu medallion and shove the pieces up his ass. (An audio recording may be heard on episode 10 of the *Comprehensive History*.) These alternately cruel and amusing episodes have been retrospectively organized into grand Christorical "sagas," illustrated by charts more complex than the textual history of the Bible.

A few people treated Chris with kindness: Tiffany Gowen, the high school classmate who danced with him at their prom; Rochelle "Rocky" Shoemaker, the pastoral counselor who struggled in vain to help Chris, then a member of her United Methodist congregation; game store proprietor Michael Snyder, who asked the court not to give Chris a felony conviction for vehicular assault. (Chris, angry at being banned, deliberately drove his car into Snyder in 2011). Several trolls—including Marvin, the man in the pickle suit—later regretted their actions and helped defend Chris against other, more malevolent trolls.

At some point, Chris came to believe that CWCville (or "Dimension C-197," cf. Dimension C-137 from *Rick and Morty*) was real. Much responsibility for his mental breakdown belongs to a troll cabal called the Idea Guys, who in late 2017 persuaded Chris that Nazis had occupied CWCville—picture cute cartoon animals being herded into rape camps—and were preparing an invasion of our world (or

"Dimension 1218," a number derived from Marvel Comics). To evade Nazi surveillance, Chris tore apart various objects in his house, including a Christmas tree, that he was told contained bugging devices (CWCki: "Nazis").

In 2018, he announced that he had married four cartoon characters, including three OCs (original characters) and the Pokémon Mewtwo, and pantomimed cuddling with their invisible forms (CWCki: "Polyamorous marriage"; see O'Neal 2013 and Hegarty 2019 for other men purporting to marry cartoon characters). These were his only romantic relationships between the 2012 loss of his virginity to a hooker (CWCki: "Mia Hamm") and the events of 2021 (CWCki: "Affair with Mother"). The Idea Guys further convinced Chris that one of his spouses was being tortured in the other world and demanded that he film himself begging on his knees. He complied. (See episode 62 of the *Comprehensive History*). The Idea Guys ultimately extorted thousands of dollars from him, and forced him to make other demeaning videos, including one where he hits himself repeatedly in the face while calling himself a "dirty, dirty whore."

Chris began predicting an imminent "Dimensional Merge" between C-197 and 1218. He clung to this belief long after the Idea Guys were discredited, and still holds it today. Elements of the role-playing video game franchise *Hyperdimension Neptunia*, which features "CPU goddesses" associated with particular video game consoles, were incorporated into Chris's imaginary; this is the source of his claim to be the goddess Blue Heart of the Commodore 64 console.

Amidst this madness, Chris transitioned to female (CWCki: "Chris and gender"). He was cross-dressing by 2011, and from 2014, began qualifying his male identity with "tomgirl" or "lesbian in a male body." In 2016, he legally changed his name to "Christine" and his sex to female on his driver's license. That same year, he attempted to use "binaural beats" to hypnotize himself into growing a vagina (CWCki: "Subliminal Frequency Hypnosis"), then–when this did not work–sliced open his perineum in a drunken attempt at self-surgery (CWCki: "Self-inflicted taint wound").

Some Christorians suspect his female identity of being just another troll-fostered delusion, to be taken no more seriously than his claim to be an electric hedgehog Pokémon. Perhaps his transition was calculated to attract lesbians, on the assumption that they might prove more receptive to his advances than heterosexual women. On the other hand, it would be easy to read his early antipathy towards homosexuality and gender fluidity as expressions of insecurity

on these very points (CWCki: "Homos"); certainly, few heterosexual men would think of staring at a Sailor Moon poster every night in order to stay straight (CWCki: "Sailor Moon Poster of Fail"). Accordingly, diverse pronoun usages can be observed among Christorians. This paper employs masculine pronouns—not out of any particular stance on Chris's self-identity, or transgender issues in general, but in order to avoid confusion when I explain that on 27 June 2021 (and every three days thereafter, for about a month), Chris put on a condom, then inserted his penis into his 79-year-old mother.

Inappropriate aspects of their relationship had long been noted (e.g., CWCki: "PVCC NEW info: on Chris and Barbara spoon eachother!"), and viewers of the *Comprehensive History* will attest to much foreshadowing. Chris told the troll Isabella Janke of the affair on the evening of 27 July, during a four-hour video call on the Signal app (CWCki: "Incest Call"), portions of which were leaked onto Discord servers a few days later. In it, Chris states that his mother made the first move, but admits that "she was partially confused at one point." We learn that "it took a few tries," and that he "approached her with care and caution," then "branched out slow and steady." Subsequent text messages offer further detail:

> And obviously those, out of the eight guys, counting Robertchu [Chris's late father], before me were not hitting her G-Spot as much with their cocks. I had attempted the first night to rub her in there; I found her spot, but it hurt her. But, alternatively, I did find that at cunnilingus, I was good at it with my tongue (CWCki: "Incest Texts").

Was it rape? Many observers surmise that Barbara has dementia (if her glassy-eyed expression was not a performance calculated to elicit online donations) and was therefore unable to consent. On the other hand, it is also possible to suspect her of grooming her special-needs son. Given their respective cognitive impairments, perhaps neither was fully responsible.

After the leaks, the Greene County (Virginia) Sheriff's Office fielded hundreds of calls, some from mandated reporters, and sent deputies to conduct a welfare check on Barbara. Chris was served an Emergency Protective Order banning him from the house and from any contact with his mother. On 1 August, he was arrested at a Richmond hotel (CWCki: "Incest arrest") and jailed. The court appointed Charlottesville attorney David Heilberg to represent him. An article in the (Charlottesville) *Daily Progress* (later quoted by *Newsweek* and other outlets) describes Chris's behavior at his 5 August arraignment:

> Heilberg told the court he would be asking for evaluations of Chandler, who interrupted by stomping her feet and saying loudly that she needed "to get everything back home" [i.e., to retrieve her belongings from the hotel]. She then said loudly, "I won't feel safe proceeding until" she gets the items back (Beigie 2021).

Chris was denied bail. By this time, public awareness of Chris Chan had reached an all-time high. A FOX News segment on *Tucker Carlson Tonight* focused on the transgender angle and the possibility of Chris being assigned to a female jail (Carlson 2021). The hashtags "Chris-Chan" and "CHRIS CHAN DID WHAT" trended on Twitter, briefly overtaking those associated with the then-in-progress Olympics. (See episode 85, 35:20 of the *Comprehensive History*).

Chris remained in custody awaiting trial for one year and seven months—mostly in the Central Virginia Regional Jail (where he was segregated from the general population), but with a notable stint in the Western State Hospital for a competency evaluation. Charged with felony incest, he faced a potential prison sentence of ten years. (Crucially, he was not charged with rape). Plea bargaining is the norm, and as Heilberg must have calculated, no jury would sympathize with Chris; hence the multiple continuances. Heilberg could not have been entirely pleased with his client's seeming willingness to chat about the case with all comers. While incarcerated, Chris wrote long letters to fans in which he explained, for example, that he had sex with his mother by mutual consent, for purposes of healing and soul-bonding "as I had done for and with a chosen few back in Isreal [*sic*] over 2000 years ago" (CWCki: "Jail Letter—19 September 2021").

Perusing his jail-supplied Bible apparently convinced Chris that he was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. This was not his first time claiming divinity (recall "CPU goddess Blue Heart"). Chris's poor grasp of reality cast doubt on his otherwise damning admissions. Alternatively, as Heilberg suggested to the press, perhaps trolls had manipulated him into confessing to incest, or perhaps these conversations amounted to a kind of fantasy role-play (CWCki: "David Heilberg"). Who can say?

Such uncertainties notwithstanding, Heilberg filed a motion for autism disorder deferred disposition, which in Virginia permits a defendant diagnosed with autism or an intellectual disability—either "upon a plea of guilty, or after a plea of not guilty, and the facts found by the court would justify a finding of guilt"—to receive probation, if "the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the criminal conduct was caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to the person's

disorder or disability" (Virginia Code § 19.2-303.6). Although autism does not commonly drive people to commit incest with their mothers, it was certainly a contributing factor, and Chris's issues go well beyond mere autism. Perhaps there were behind-the-scenes negotiations. One important consideration was that a felony conviction would have terminated his SSDI payments, likely rendering him homeless upon his release.

Court records were sealed at Heilberg's request, ostensibly to avoid tainting any future jury pool, but also to fend off the circus that is Chris Chan fandom. Probation was granted in March 2023, whereupon Chris relocated to Gateway Homes, a mental health institution in rural Chesterfield County. On 9 August, the incest charge was dismissed, the court presumably being satisfied with his progress. By then, Chris had moved into a five-bedroom house in Big Island (near Lynchburg), having agreed with the owner, Caden Peck, and his Praetor group to share in the proceeds from the online sale of artwork and other items (such as replica Sonichu medallions) produced or licensed by Chris.

In retrospect, the State of Virginia handled the situation well. Now in his forties, Chris has settled into a new life apart from his mother (whom he occasionally sees, presumably under supervision) and is often accompanied by a possibly Finnish woman known as Flutter (after the *My Little Pony* character Fluttershy), who apparently wrote Chris in jail and now frustrates the best efforts of Kiwi Farms to doxx her. Chris has even been spotted in Finland several times. He still regularly appears on YouTube, often playing video games—Chris may have pioneered the Let's Play format back in 2003—and answering Superchat questions, as long as they are "positive." The censorship of certain words (including "mother") has not prevented trolls from creative workarounds: "AdolfHitler donated $2! Chris did the barbussy have any stank?" (CwcvilleGuardian 2023b, 19:44).

Chris now denies the incest allegations. In a 2023 video (CwcvilleGuardian 2023a), he asserts that "I was innocent. There never, ever, ever, ever, *ever* was any sex between Barbara and me, period." He complains that "you all really erroneously misunderstood me." Blame lies with "all the haters and fakers and the toxic sinners" who "tried to manipulate me"—especially Isabella Janke, whose goal was to blackmail him into committing suicide. (This detail is likely true.) While most of his fans are good, a minority who are "the worst" wrote "smut fan-fictions. You've *shipped* me with Barbara! *You shipped me* with that...that Snorlax!" Aside from the uncomplimentary Pokémon reference, Chris

here alludes to his belief that fictional events, once written, become real in some other universe; thus, the writers of such stories unwittingly create horrors. In subsequent livestreams, he clarifies that the incest took place in another dimension (CwcvilleGuardian 2023b, 12:00), specifically that of the *Transformers: Shattered Glass* comics, a parallel universe with "opposite morals and everything," similar to the Mirror Universe from *Star Trek* (CwcvilleGuardian 2023c, 27:00). In our world, Chris "foreknew" that Bella would betray him, and frustrated her scheme by intentionally arranging to be arrested and sent to jail, where he suffered for our sins. "And I meditated and learned everything. I *am* Jesús [here pronounced as in Spanish] Christ reincarnated. I *am* the One Avatar of All Existence [...]" (CwcvilleGuardian 2023a).

Chris grew up attending Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches, but was ultimately made to feel unwelcome. (The Baptists expelled him, while the Methodists asked him to take off his My Little Pony unicorn cosplay gear.) Some notion of his early theology may be gleaned from *Sonichu* no. 9 (2009), where God and Jesus, in answer to his prayers, appear in a dream to pair him with his true sweetheart, the trollsona Ivy. Since God seemed to be "giving me the Middle Finger" in real life, around 2013 Chris gravitated to New Age beliefs: crystals, tarot cards, psychic powers, and a view of "God(dess)" as something "within all of us, as energy and direction" (CWCki: "Chris and religion"). His repeated references to the "Akashic Records" may have been inspired by that other great Virginia psychic, Edgar Cayce (1877–1945), if they did not come from some video game.

Chris has long referred to his old house as the "Sonichu Temple." In 2019, he began calling his fans "Devotees of Chris Chan Sonichu" (DoCCS). For a few months in 2021, a "Golden Church of Sonichu" Discord server was available to Praetor customers who bought a golden medallion (recall the non-fungible token craze). While in jail, Chris named his dispensation "Neo Spiritual Christianity" (no hyphen), and revealed at least 21 commandments, "The Lord Goddess Blue Heart's Prayer," and a symbol consisting of a crucified blue heart between two yellow lightning bolts. There are numerous deities, under a mother goddess called Emanuel or Emanuelle. Chris identifies C-197 with the "new earth" from Revelation 21:1 (CWCki: "Jail Letter–18 January 2022"). His conflict with his trolls assumes cosmic significance as the Dimensional Merge promises a "Collective Shift for the Majority that are Good, and those recoverable,

from Earth 1218 to Earth 1C-211987," while the "Minority who are the Toxic (Darkest) Sinners, Haters, Fakers, and Darkest Demonics [...] shall be left behind on 1218 Earth to burn" (CWCki: "Jail Letter–4 October 2021").

Like some Kansas antipope whose regalia amounts to cosplay, Chris imitates the trappings of his ancestral churchianity; the new religion exists to exalt him, rather than vice versa. Whether he has any genuine believers is difficult to know. His "audience cult" may also be losing momentum, now that the spectacle of Chris Chan has died down, and (barring some new atrocity) the remainder of his story will likely prove anticlimactic. Indeed, the events of 2021 led some to quit the fandom, if not the internet, in disgust. On the other hand, some new adaptation—a Netflix true-crime series, perhaps—may reignite interest in Chris. Already dozens of artists have covered "So Need a Cute Girl" (2003), his revised lyrics to "I Want It That Way," by the Backstreet Boys ("Tell me why I'm stuck as a virgin with rage / Tell me why I so need a cute girl my age"), while Jordan Owen has produced a whole Chris Chan heavy metal concept album, *Nowhere Land* (2022), in a remonstrative vein. Its climax, "Oedipus Prime," is appropriately discordant.

In contrast to his Theban predecessor, Chris is marked by transgressions that lack any positive, heroic element, and do not translate into agonistic spiritual power. The liminal perversity of Greek tragedy, or for that matter the Book of Genesis, paradoxically elevates and ennobles the reader; the almost systematic litanies of taboo-violation serve wider narratives in which order arises out of chaos, and basic values and institutions are established. Chris's true cultural antecedents are degradation-centric films like *Freaks*, *Pink Flamingos*, or *A Serbian Film*, or the reality series *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. Don Lashomb (2021, back cover copy) observes that Chris and Andy Warhol (1928–1987) "are thought of as the oddest of oddities, and yet they represent the course of our society as a whole." A horrifying thought, but for Lashomb, the ubiquity of pop-culture artifacts (which Warhol sought to transform into high art) has reached saturation, as "more recent generations have grown up breathing pop culture as if it were air," and "favorite entertainment franchises are treated akin to religions."

Wahid Azal and the NUR-Fāṭimīya Sufi Order

> [C]entral to the Bayān is the insistence that justice cannot be deferred to history, consensus, or gradual recognition. Ontological truth, once present, demands immediate

> reconfiguration of law, economy, and social life. This is why the Bayān does not frame authority as something inherited, delegated, or bureaucratically administered, but as something that appears and compels by virtue of Presence. Recognition is not a right to be requested, nor a status to be earned through compliance with existing norms; it is a test that divides, here and now, between receptivity and veiling, Affirmation (ithbāt) and negation (nafy), Light (nūr) and infernal fire (nār).
>
> –Wahid Azal, Mirror of the Bayān, and Camphorated Servant of the Truly Real (Azal 2026a, xxxi)

> Yeah, well, you know, that's just, like, your opinion, man.
>
> –*The Big Lebowski*

Nima Hazini–the future Wahid Azal–was born in 1971 in Tehran, to Soheil Hazini (1949–2012), later a structural engineer and real estate developer, and Mitra Hazini (née Manavi, b. 1951). He has two younger sisters and a large extended family on multiple continents. His parents met at a Bahā'ī winter school in Graz in 1967, when Mitra was sixteen and Soheil an eighteen-year-old university student. They married in January 1971; Nima was born in December.

For several years, the family lived in Stuttgart while Soheil pursued graduate studies. They returned to Iran in 1974 but fled the 1979 Islamic Revolution to join relatives in California. Soheil's career caused them to relocate to Denver (1981), Sydney (1982), and the Gold Coast (1983; for this family background, see Azal 2024e and 2025w). Nima remained in Australia through high school, becoming a citizen of that country; however, he hated Australia and resented his father for taking him away from the USA. (The two often quarreled, even more than fathers and their teenage sons normally do.) This, plus the presence of relatives in Albuquerque, helps explain his decision to attend the University of New Mexico (1989–1994), where he studied philosophy and history. Among his professors, he recalls with special fondness John Bussanich, who specializes in ancient Greek and Indian philosophy, and Patricia Risso, a historian of Islam (Azal 2006, 8).

After graduation, Nima enrolled in UCLA's graduate department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures under Suhrawardī (1154–1191) scholar Hossein Ziai (1944–2011), but "mastered out" (one informant contradicts his claim to have been awarded the MA degree) and left for New York City in 1997. "After my experience at UCLA in the '90s," Wahid writes, "I have since come to

believe that a Ph.D. is only a culturally constructed validation specific to a Western context of knowledge production," similar to an *ʾijāza* from a traditional Islamic *madrasa*. "Only a consensus reality privileges one over the other" (Azal 2013). He returned to Australia in 1999.

From childhood, Nima experienced instances of precognition, out-of-the-body travel, miraculous protection, and a mysterious familiarity with Arabic, even before studying the language. "I always knew I was unlike other people," he recalls. This was especially visible in his early religious leanings:

> Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I innately knew that there was something intrinsically wrong with the Bahaism of my family, but could not articulate it completely until my late adolescence and then early university years.
>
> The first time at 11 years old when I saw the portrait of the Primal Point was a surreal experience because it felt like I was looking in a mirror at myself. At this age, I instinctively knew that the true station of the Primal Point was way, way beyond that of the founder of bahaism. [...]
>
> Whilst the bahais of my family excoriated Him, as all bahais do, the first moment I beheld a picture of Subh-i-Azal was a moment of sheer ecstasy as if I was beholding the Face of Mercy itself. I told my father, who scolded me, saying not to mention this to anyone in our family (WahidAzal556 2025a)

An excursus, for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with his allusions: the Hazinis were Bahāʾīs, followers of the religion founded by Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAli Nūrī, styled Bahāʾu'llāh (the "Glory of God," 1817–1892), a nineteenth-century Persian aristocrat exiled to the Ottoman Empire. Bahāʾīs regard him as the Manifestation of God for our age, equal to Jesus, Muhammad (570–632), and other religion-founding prophets. The religion's public face—which spread globally during the twentieth century—emphasizes progressive principles like interracial harmony, and expects world peace under a world government. (For entrée to this material, see Cole 1998 and Warburg 2006).

Bahāʾī sacred history begins not with Bahāʾu'llāh but with a predecessor, Siyyid ʿAli Muḥammad Shīrāzī, called the Bāb ("Gate," 1819–1850; cf. the four *Abwāb* of Twelver Shi'ite tradition). This is the "Primal Point" referred to above. As a millenarian figure claiming divine authority, if not outright divinity, the Bāb inspired uprisings in several Persian towns in 1848–1850. They were suppressed; he was executed. (For introductions to the Bābī movement, see MacEoin 2008 and Amanat 1989.) During the 1860s, a schism occurred among the surviving Bābīs. One faction remained loyal to the Bāb's chosen successor, Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī, styled

Subh-i-Azal ("Morning of Eternity," 1831–1912); they were consequently known as "Azalīs." The other followed Azal's older half-brother Bahā'u'llāh, thus "Bahā'īs." There were mutual execrations, and even murders.

Today, the Bahā'īs remember the Bāb as a sort of John the Baptist to Bahā'u'llāh's Jesus, and Subh-i-Azal as a Judas figure—the first "Covenant breaker" (*nāqiḍ,* pl. *nāqiḍūn*), although neither he nor the Azalīs ever swore fealty to Bahā'u'llāh in the first place (rather the reverse). Bahā'īs are taught to revile, and commanded to shun, Covenant-breakers, i.e., partisans of the losing sides in various succession disputes, whence Soheil's rebuke of young Nima.

Often thought to have disappeared or assimilated, the rump Bābīs / Azalīs played a role in the Persian Constitutional Revolution (MacEoin 1987; Bayat 1991, 68–9; Afary 1996, 47–8 and 197–99) and apparently persist as a loose network of several thousand people, active within certain Sufi lineages (Azal 2024j, 7, 13–4). We are told that they prefer to be called "Bayānīs," from *Bayān* ("elucidation"), i.e., the writings of the Bāb, considered collectively. Another group of Azalīs settled in Famagusta, Cyprus, where Ottoman authorities transferred Subh-i-Azal in 1868, along with his family and followers (Momen 1991).

The majority of Wahid's ancestors were Persian Jews, not Twelver Shi'ites, when they converted to the Bahā'ī religion in the 1880s. (See Amanat 2011 for general background on this group). Wahid places Jewish Bahā'īs at the "top of the ladder" of the "nouveau riche Persian Baha'i aristocracy" (talk.religion.bahai, 25 September 2009). In 1986, at fifteen—the age of spiritual maturity, when Bahā'ī youth are expected to sign a declaration card—Nima formally enrolled himself in the ranks of believers. He twice accompanied his maternal grandparents on pilgrimage to the Bahā'ī shrines in Haifa and Akka, in northern Israel. Along the way, they visited relatives in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. A rabbi, on learning of Nima's Jewish roots, held a bar mitzvah for him at the Wailing Wall. In later years, Wahid would state that "I am not a Jew" (talk.religion.bahai, 29 May 2009; Azal 2006, 16 qualifies this with "other than by ancestral connection"), and indeed, often vilify others as Jews or even "kikes" (talk.religion.bahai, *passim*). But this is to anticipate.

For Nima, the 1990s and early 2000s were a time of intense intellectual and spiritual exploration. At university, he clashed with local Bahā'ī authorities

(talk.religion.bahai, 27 April 2001) and learned to view his religion more critically, although he continued to attend youth conferences. He also visited Hindu and Buddhist groups, only to be struck by their pervasive corruption and abuse (Azal 2024g). At some point he assumed "Sadra" as his middle name, likely honoring the *Ishrāqī* philosopher Mullā Sadrā (1572–1640).

Aside from relatives, the hundreds of influences listed in the "Prolegomenon" of his *Liber Decatriarchia Mystica* include Sufi philosophers (especially ibn al-'Arabī, 1165–1240) and their scholarly interpreters (especially Henry Corbin, 1903–1978); neo-Platonists and Western esoteric figures (Aleister Crowley, 1875–1947, is thanked twice); great Asian philosophers; the prophets and imams recognized by Twelver Shi'ism; famous Kabbalists and scholars of the tradition; religious perennialists (with whom he acknowledges a "love/hate intellectual relationship"); various existentialist, postmodernist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial writers (Frantz Fanon, 1925–1961, will prove particularly important); and then-prominent Bahā'īs and ex-Bahā'īs.

Wahid also salutes several spiritual organizations, including half a dozen Western Sufi orders and an equal number of ceremonial magic groups. Other names include Chabad rebbe Menachem Schneerson (1902–1994), identified as the archetypal return of Isaac Luria (1534–1572)—Wahid was Abraham Abulafia (1240–1291)—and "the Madame [Helena Petrovna] Blavatsky [1831–1891] of our Age, Jennifer Starlight," an Australian trance channeler (Azal 2006, 7 and 16).

Entheogens are a significant theme. Wahid reports that "on my 18th birthday, via psilocybin mushrooms I experienced the totality of Being *at two bows length or nearer* face to Face!" (WahidAzal556 2025a). Qur'an 53:9 gives this as Muhammad's closest proximity to God during the *mi'rāj*; see Azal 2024f for Wahid's exegesis of this versicule. The "Prolegomenon" hails psychedelic pioneers Terence McKenna (1946–2000) and Dennis McKenna, Richard Evans Schultes (1915–2001), Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998) and Don Juan Matus, and Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), *inter alia*; and credits "Jean-Marc Siralbion-Manning, the [Santo] Daimistas and [Dutch-Australian neo-shaman] Vilmar Darpan for launching me on the flight path of Ayahuasca." Note that Wahid denies ever having used or sold any kind of illegal drugs (Azal 2019c, 3:00).

Between 1994 and 1996, the "Talisman" listserv (organized by Bahā'ī scholar John Walbridge and hosted by Indiana University Bloomington) held a snowballing discussion of various controversial Bahā'ī issues, including such proposed reforms as the admission of women onto the Universal House of Justice (the nine-man council that has led the religion since 1963). Many posts cast Bahā'ī authorities, who had long exercised control over the religion's public presentation, as the enemies of open discussion. Although prospective Bahā'ī authors are required to submit their writings on the faith for "review" (pre-publication censorship), no such restrictions applied to the new medium of internet discourse. When conservative Bahā'īs on the list complained of what they saw as attacks on the religion's central tenets, the Bahā'ī hierarchy responded by issuing a series of advisory letters, then threatening prominent participants with expulsion.

Nima was active on Talisman from early 1995, contributing regular compilations of news from Iran, and posing such enthusiastic questions as whether the Buddhist *śūnyatā* "is in any way analogous to the One (the God-beyond-God) of Neoplatonism or the Gottheit of Meister Eckhart [ca. 1260–1328]" (20 Feb. 1996 to Bruce Burrill). While a few posts were more combative, he generally comes across as a polite young man. Walbridge dissolved the online salon shortly after accidentally posting a message meant for an inner, secret discussion list called "Majnun" onto the general Talisman list. Nima resigned from the Bahā'ī religion at the end of 1996, around the same time as Walbridge and other Talisman-connected Bahā'ī intellectuals.

In August 1997, during a visit to Albuquerque, Mahdi Sheikhbahaei (Safi Ali Shah II, d. 2015), head of the Nimatullahi Soefi Order (NISO), initiated Nima into the Ni'matullāhī, Safī'alīshāhī, and Qādirī lineages. An Isfahani *pīr* living in Rotterdam, Sheikhbahaei "was simultaneously a clandestine Bayani," and performed the transmission "specifically in the names of the Bāb, the Letters of the Living [the Bāb's first eighteen disciples], and Subh-i-Azal" (Azal 2024j, 7). Nima received the *dhikr* of *hū rabb* ("He is the Lord"; Azal 2006, 105) and the Sufi name of Wahdat 'Alī Shāh (Azal 2024j, 14). That night, he dreamed of being taken inside the Ka'ba—or rather, its celestial counterpart in the archetypal mirror world of Hūrqalyā—where Fāṭima al-Zāhra ("the resplendent" Fāṭima, a glorified version of Muhammad's daughter) pierced his tongue with her husband 'Alī's legendary forked sword Ḏū-l-Faqār (Azal 2008, 5; Azal 2024j, 14 n17; Magick

2014, 5:00; Azal 2006, 107 places a different dream after his 1997 initiation, and this one "[e]arlier in 1996").

Sheikhbahaei urged Nima to contact other Bayānīs, which he did around 1999–2000 (Azal 2024j, 14 n18). He served as the American Ni'matullāhī-Safī'alīshāhī representative until 1999, establishing a short-lived headquarters in Toms River, New Jersey. With or without permission, he began calling himself a *shaykh* in his own right. He last saw Sheikhbahaei in 1998, at a Sufi festival in the Netherlands. At some point, Nima repudiated his master. He told Harry Leo Duran ("Corax," 1956–2021) that

> It was A BIG, BIG MISTAKE to befriend you and get entangled with you wackos and come to NJ, which I deeply regret. I have not had anything to do with you people for over six months, nor the Nimatullahi / Safialishahi order, and I could not get out of New Jersey and away from that rackett [*sic*] of Sheikhabaei's [*sic*] Nimatullahi / Safialishahi sufism fast enough [...] (talk.religion.bahai, 10 Nov. 1999).
>
> AND YOUR EXAMPLE AND THAT OF THE ENTIRE SUFI COMMUNITY OF THE EAST COAST TOGETHER WITH THOSE IN HOLLAND HAS PROVEN [...] [that] IRREFUTABLY. YOU PEOPLE ARE LOST FLAKES!!!!!!!!!!!!! (talk.religion.bahai, 11 Nov. 1999).

Nima changed his tune a few years later:

> Per his own words the bayah [oath of fealty] I made with Mehdi Sheikhbahaei only extended to the moment of my first fana / annihilation in God which occured [*sic*] a few months prior to my departure from the United States. The repudiation was a prediction made by the Pir himself in July 1997 and something he himself said I would come to, nay have to, do. [...] since January 2000 I have been periodically calling the Pir in Holland and he is appraised [*sic*] of my state and condition and has confirmed it (talk.religion.bahai, 28 Dec. 2002).

Around this time, Nima began claiming to be the archetypal return of the eighteenth Letter of the Living, Quddūs (himself the return of the Prophet Muhammad). In 2000, Perth-based scholar Sepehr Manuchehri "introduced me to the oeuvre and vita of Subh-i-Azal" (Azal 2006, 8, 219–20).

In New York and New Jersey, Nima belonged to a circle of like-minded spiritual seekers whose Sufism was part of a wider interest in Aghori tantra, Western ceremonial magic, and other edgy traditions. Duran's widow Barbara Campbell recalls discovering "skulls in a cauldron when we moved!" She explains that "Harry's roommate Chaz had gotten Harry involved in Santeria and instead of using the skulls he acquired in med school to get back into neurosurgery, he used them in a cauldron which I got rid of" (Campbell 2021 and 2023). Another poster

revealed that Duran had also joined Michael Aquino's (1946–2019) Temple of Set, a Satanist group.

While Wahid now regrets his involvement with these people, he boasts of having read all of Aleister Crowley's writings (talk.religion.bahai, 17 Oct. 2004), and finds in the Bornless Ritual (*Liber Samekh*, sec. C) an answer to his earlier question to Bruce Burrill on Talisman. Crowley, he explains,

> is talking about the God beyond God who is Beyond Good and Evil both, i.e. Ayn Sof / the Void (Sunyata) of Mahayana Buddhism or the Nirguna Parabrahman of the Vedanta (talk.religion.bahai, 18 Oct. 2004).

If the Bāb was Wahid's spiritual father—his Hermes Trismegistus to ibn al-'Arabī's Plato (ca. 428–347 BCE)—and Qurrat al-'Ayn (the Bāb's foremost female disciple, known to the Bahā'īs as "Tāhirih," 1814 or 1817–1852) his spiritual mother (Azal 2006, 4), then Crowley was "the Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsai [1753–1826] of My universal Revelation," referring to the founder of the nineteenth-century Shaykhī movement out of which Bābism arose (talk.religion.bahai, 23 Dec. 2002). *Liber Decatriarchia Mystica* offers more qualified praise of Crowley:

> While I deeply respect and cherish the *oeuvre* of the Great Beast, [...] between Perdurabo and I, at least, there is no question in my mind as to who stands as the true *Ipsissimus* of the Age, and it is certainly not the sage once resident at Boleskine—who for all his genius was one serious mess up (Azal 2006, 339 n92).

Wahid once called Aleister Crowley "a total pussy" compared to the Order of Nine Angles, a neo-Nazi Satanic group (talk.religion.bahai, 11 Jan. 2020). Another poster shared the following:

> I have close friends who are members of various occult paths including a member of the Order of the Nine Angles (O9A) who recently told me that Nima is one of their order and that he is still a Bahai, just not one affiliated with the Haifan Bahai organization. His praxis within the O9A involves an "Insight Role" of complete antagonism and enmity to the Bahais, the adoption of Azali Babism/Bayanism in the fashion of taqiya, and with the object of fomenting as much chaos as possible through innovative methods of theurgy so as to harness the occult powers that are unleashed.
>
> The path of the O9A requires the adept to become totally committed to the "insight role." This is a false identity, or deep-cover persona, that can manifest as the polar opposite of the initiate's personality. This "deep fake" is practically indistinguishable from reality when executed properly and thus the practitioner can plausibly deny any charge to the contrary for those who aren't in the know such as myself.

> As a devout Bahai turned exoterically anti-Bahai, Nima Wahid Azal adapts the Sufi Malamat model (or way of blame) [...] (Edward Finch to Denis Giron and Nathan Abookire, talk.religion.bahai, 22 Jan. 2020).

Wahid now identifies with the Left-Hand Path (*vāmamārga*) in the sense of Shaktism, not Satanism (Azal 2025k, 90, 123 n104; cf. 2026d, 371), which he dismisses as shallow, immature, and a form of counter-initiation (after René Guénon, 1886–1951):

> I've hung out with all kinds of occultists who have been hardcore Satanists, whether in Europe or the United States or even here in Australia. And by and large, I look at these people as being a little bit misled initiatically, because their narratives [...], rather than being a form of rebellion against existing mores, are actually seeking to validate the existing mores and the behavior of the oligarchies and plutocrats of the time (Azal 2022g, 9:25).

Other exemplars of counter-initiation include "New Age fluff bunnies" and, of course, the Bahā'īs (Azal 2006, 25–8).

Despite his resignation from the Bahā'ī religion and his Bayānī/Sufi affiliation, Nima continued to privately believe in Bahā'ī teachings as late as 1999 (Hazini 1999). In December 2000, he could still write that "I have at no time attacked the Central Baha'i Figures" (Hazini 2001). Soon afterward, however, he was claiming to use the writings of Bahā'u'llāh for toilet paper (talk.religion.bahai, 24 December 2002), or comparing the significance of the Bahā'ī founder unfavorably to that of Crowley (talk.religion.bahai, 23 December 2002 and 20 October 2004).

The catalyst for Nima's radicalization may have been a 4 September 2000 fight with several of his Bahā'ī relatives that erupted after a dinner hosted by his maternal grandparents in their thirteenth-floor apartment. In Nima's version, "Mr. W" (his uncle by marriage, Gold Coast property developer Soheil Abedian, founder of the Sunland Group) let slip that he considered unmarried men to be losers, and proceeded to boast of his own accomplishments. Nima "stated that I did not believe that building opulent, decadent and snobbish projects [...] constituted true service to society by any stretch of the imagination." Abedian's son Sahba ("Mr. X") interrupted with "Fuck you [...] you fucking covenant breaker!" Nima responded in kind.

> As I was being insulted like this for merely stating a frank opinion, and unnerved beyond belief by such self-righteous arrogance as Mr. X was now displaying, I got up from my chair to leave, and X also got up. Next Mr. Y jumped from his chair, tackled and pinned me in a

> body/headlock at which point misters W and X began hitting me from both directions [...] During this back and forth altercation, Mr. X exclaimed, "You don't know who I am in this city, you motherfucker, covenant breaker" [...] Mr. W has boasted numerous times in my presence about the power and influence he wields on the Gold Coast more than any other person in the city. He has claimed that he controls various local city council members and politicians, the city mayor, judges, solicitors, the police, several state politicians and lawmakers, the local media, and federal MPs, suggesting that he has ties to organised crime and that on the Gold Coast he is completely untouchable and that anyone who crosses him will be physically and financially destroyed (Hazini 2001).

I am otherwise informed that Nima was in fact the aggressor, and that "Mr. Y" (Karim T. Rafaat, then a UC San Diego medical student, and an accomplished martial artist) was merely restraining him from throwing Sahba off the balcony. The same source doubts the possibility of the alleged mafia connections. It may be relevant that Abedian *père* has since been accused of improper political donations (Crime and Misconduct Commission 2006; note that Bahā'īs are commanded to abstain from partisan politics), as well as deceit in connection with a Dubai bribery case (Lenaghan 2013). Another Sunland executive, Abedian's son-in-law Riaz Rezvani, was accused of assault in an unrelated boardroom incident (Stoltz 2020).

Soon afterward, the 2 December 2000 issue of the *Australian Bahā'ī Bulletin* published a notice stating that several Bahā'īs had some concerns about Nima. He had resigned four years earlier; there was little any Bahā'ī body could do other than advise believers to "leave him to himself" (in Hazini 2001). Nima called the statement "overtly defamatory and libelous," questioned by what right the Bahā'ī administration had surveilled him (internal correspondence establishes that his movements and activities had been tracked since at least 1997), and threatened litigation and a media campaign if his demands for an explanation and retraction were not met. (They were not met). He reflects:

> It is indeed curious that this statement should come in the wake of a violent physical assault against my person three months ago by a member of the LSA [Bahā'ī Local Spiritual Assembly] of the Gold Coast–a member who is a wealthy donor to the AO [Bahā'ī Administrative Order], and seemingly based on his own statements has claimed he has the ear of one or two UHJ [Bahā'ī Universal House of Justice] members and a member of your own NSA [Bahā'ī National Spiritual Assembly]. I believe that the publication of this statement is nothing more than yet another carefully crafted attempt by the AO at a cover-up of corruption and abuses by its close patrons (Hazini 2001).
>
> The Bottom Line, Ron, is that indeed I was being spied on. And, more importantly, I was being spied on by "the Institutions" from within my own extended family, i.e. the Stalinist modus operandi of the baha'i cult throughout. Other than some close family members, who under unguarded circumstances blabbed to others, I had not told very many people

> that I was at the time with the Nimatullahi Sufis. Apparently, per the file copies my contacts in Wilmette sent me, I was being spied upon from Santa Fe New Mexico all the way to Holland and then Australia. That is 3 continents (Oto Ron House, talk.religion.bahai, 6 Dec. 2005).

Wahid has since filed formal human rights complaints with the Queensland Human Rights Commission (Azal 2025f) and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (WahidAzal556 2025c). Citing a 2004–2006 narcotics trafficking case involving three Bahā'īs in Western Australia (talk.religion.bahai, 7 June 2006), he now views the Bahā'ī religion as a global mafia, and Bahā'u'llāh himself as a crime boss (Azal 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

Wahid states that his "mother, father and sisters aren't Baha'is" anymore (NUR 2009, comment dated 7 May). He further indicates that his parents left the religion under administrative pressure, after refusing to disown him (Azal 2019a, 1:46:00), and has published a photo of a clause in his father's will stating that the testator no longer regards himself as a Bahā'ī and does not desire a Bahā'ī burial (Azal 2020a). My information is that Mitra resigned at some point after Soheil's death, because she did not believe in the religion, and had only remained within it for the sake of family. The sisters remain at least nominal Bahā'īs. Contrary to Wahid's account, I am told that the Bahā'ī administration has handled the situation with restraint, e.g., not requiring any relatives to shun him.

Alert readers will wonder how Nima supported himself, or whether he had another source of funds. His employment history remains mysterious. Stephen R. Friberg told G. Brent Poirier (who told the Talisman list, 20 December 1995) that "Nima sold me six books on Islamic and Sufi philosophy at the bookstore he has so patiently stocked" while Friberg was in New Mexico. I have come across scattered references to Nima quitting unspecified jobs in California and New York. Much like Chris Chan, whose résumé focuses on his unremunerated stewardship of the *Sonichu* characters, Wahid's LinkedIn contains no indication of any work experience except "Director–Library of the Greatest Name" (from 2004), his self-publishing imprint. (Azal 2025u condemns LinkedIn as a "desecration of the human vocation").

Old discussion forums are peppered with rumors and accusations–seemingly from people who knew him–of flight from debts, multiple bankruptcies, theft, grift, and even extortion. I stress that this is hearsay. A post on talk.religion.bahai quotes U.S.-Australian ex-Bahā'ī (Claudia) Starr Saffa as follows:

> Nima has never held a job except as the janitor for his parents' apartments while collecting Oz study monies [...] His parents were always looking for the rents he was supposed to have collected while manning the apartments (and even brought police with them to collect it while I was there) [...] His two identity bankruptcy [i.e., one under the name of Nima Hazini, and one as Wahid Azal] is another matter. [...] Too bad Harry Duran and others got taken for ten thousand dollars each by him (talk.religion.bahai, 3 March 2009).

Her reference to "Oz study monies" may reflect a brief period in which Nima was enrolled in law courses at the Queensland University of Technology. My source confirms that Nima's father

> did attempt to utilize his help managing a block of apartments for a short period which turned into a disaster and that would be the extent of any involvement he ever had job-wise on the Gold Coast (I mean as in no other jobs whatsoever, family related or otherwise).

From that point on, he lived largely off his parents. Soheil Hazini declared bankruptcy in 2010, after a crash in the Australian real estate market caused by the 2008 global financial crisis, and died two years later. Wahid states that he was "a partner in a family business" and "on the board" (talk.religion.bahai, 12 Jan. 2020). I speculate that he may now be receiving unemployment payments, donations from patrons and disciples, and/or fees for Zoom courses that he teaches. He acknowledges that he numbers "among the poor monetarily" (WahidAzal556 2025a).

As the reader can imagine, Wahid has endured much criticism from his relatives to the effect that he is a loser, a disappointment, a *bacheh soosool* (a spoiled child, a momma's boy), a *doodool tala* (which carries the same semantic range; lit. "golden weenie"), and a Hasan Kachal ("Hasan the Bald," a character from Iranian folklore famous for his laziness). Christorians may be reminded of the 4 Nov. 2009 "Father Call," in which a troll pretending to be the father of one of Chris Chan's virtual sweethearts grills Chris about his intentions:

> YOU? You want to date my daughter? [...] You don't sound like you've grown up. [...] You don't have a job. You're still living with your parents. You're almost thirty years old. This is ridiculous. [...] BE A MAN.

Ten years later, in response to "Get a job," Chris protested that "I am Employed by Emanuelle, this world's GOD [...] And in my job, I have been doing my part in completing the Dimension Merge" (Twitter, 8 June 2019). Wahid, too, answers to a higher spiritual calling.

In 2002, on a train from the Gold Coast to Brisbane, Nima found himself spontaneously writing the Arabic words *hīya Allah nūr al-hayy al-'ishq fī*

al-samawātī wa'l-ard ("She is God, the Light of the Living Love in the Heavens and the earth"). A railway power failure immediately ensued (Azal 2006, 107–8, cf. WahidAzal556 2025a). The NUR-Fāṭimīya Sufi Order is sometimes traced to this revelation (and sometimes to other mystical visions of his), much as Islam may be said to have begun with the angel Gabriel's command to Muhammad, "Read!" (Qur'an 96). The Gold Coast and Brisbane are even named as the new Mecca and Medina (Azal 2022a, 168 n71).

The feminine pronoun is significant: Wahid, following a line of thought from Corbin's *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (1977) and Terry Culhane's *I Beheld a Maiden...* (2001), proclaims a Divine Feminine that he identifies with Fāṭima (605–632; Azal 2026d, 814–16, n2) and his putative ancestress Qurrat al-'Ayn, among other holy females. *Effulgences of Wisdom* (Azal 2024i) reflects on various women of biblical and Qur'anic tradition (on the model of ibn al-'Arabī's *Bezels of Wisdom*, which contemplates the male prophets of Islam). Wahid also encouraged Starr Saffa, a frequent poster to his Usenet groups, to write *Tahirih Theology: Female Cosmic Christ Spirit of the Age, Concealed No Longer* (Starr Saffa 2005), but later disavowed that book as "superficial New Age fluff" (Azal 2005). Offended, perhaps, by her spiritual claims for herself, and general disconnect from scholarship on Bābism, he would go on to post numerous insulting, abusive comments about her, along with her phone number.

On 23 Nov. 2002, Nima announced to talk.religion.bahai that he was changing his name, and that "from this day forward I am not Nima Hazini but Nima Saoshyant. Saoshyant is the name of the Zoroastrian end time messiah whom my father at birth very much wished to name me after but was overruled by others." The story resembles one told by Chris Chan's father, who "wanted to name his son Christian when the boy was born" but was "chicken." He substituted "Christopher," only for "Christian" to be restored through divine intervention in the form of an animatronic bear (Green 1993; CWCki: "Leonard Bearstein").

In 2004, Nima started the bayanic.com website and the "Bayan19" Yahoo group, thus publicly announcing his Bayānī affiliation. That same year, he legally changed his name to "Wahid Azal" ("the One Praeternal"; see Azal 2006, 51, 104, 140 n18) in the Queensland registry. "N. Wahid Azal" seems to be an unofficial variant. Also in 2004, the debut of what would have been his first book, *Liber CI* [CLVI?]*: 156, The Book of Truth*, was frustrated when his vanity publisher, William Merriett Pleasant, allegedly pocketed the money without

producing the book (Azal 2006, 7, 298–99; talk.religion.bahai, 27 June 2004, 14 July 2004, 1–2 March 2005, etc.). Wahid suspects Pleasant—a black Bahā'ī from Savannah, Georgia, later disenrolled for his local political activism—of acting under orders from the Bahā'ī administration.

After seven years of "occasionally using entheogens as holy sacraments in my meditative practice as well as in my personal magickal ceremonies," Wahid experimented with a different brew:

> In mid June 2005, I obtained a pure, most potent specimen of Australian Black Wattle Acacia in the Bush. Note that Acacia is accounted as the highest secret of the Order of the Knights Templar [...] and thus that of the 33rd (and highest) degree of modern Freemasonry itself (Azal 2006, 12).

To clarify, the bark of *Acacia* (presumably *A. mearnsii* or *A. decurrens*) provides the N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), and *Peganum harmala* (Syrian rue) the monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI). Flattery and Schwartz (1989) identify the latter with the Avestan *haoma*, a line of speculation well known to Wahid (Azal 2025gg, 338). The result was a mystical experience in which he beheld Terence McKenna's hyperspatial machine elves, the unfolding of the thousand-petaled lotus of his crown chakra, and "a *Form* appearing as an *Eye* who was also a *Face* appearing as the *Word* who was also a *Pyramid* and a *Pentagram* and the *Ankh* symbol that was a living *mandala* [...]" (Azal 2006, 13–4). For the next seven nights, Wahid received dream revelations from the Báb, Qurrat al-'Ayn, and Subh-i-Azal.

Liber Decatriarchia Mystica goes on to describe a "6 dimensional Hyper-Octahedron, i.e. Metatron's cube" in place of the traditional Tree of Life. The book came together "extremely fast, almost at a lightning speed rate," in language that "obviously reveals an inspired, often hyperbolic metaphysical glossolalia of sorts" (Azal 2006, 17, 19). The treatise is modeled after the *Sefer Yesira*, but—following hints given in ibn al-'Arabī's *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* and *Book of the Description of the Encompassing Circles*—describes thirteen rather than ten sefirot (hence the title; cf. John Dee's [1527–1608] *De Heptarchia Mystica*) (Azal 2006, 49–50). Much attention is given to *ḥurūfī*-style proofs of Wahid's bona fides, e.g., "Nima" spelled backwards becomes *āmīn* ("trustworthy"), while "Wahid Azal" is numerologically equivalent to *Allah* (Azal 2006, 150, 67).

Despite passing reference to "my prophetic career" (Azal 2006, 21), and his claim to be the archetypal return of Muhammad (Azal 2006, 101), Wahid is not a prophet in the sense that Muhammad, the "Seal of the Prophets," was. The operative metaphor is that of a mirror (a prophet, imam, etc.) reflecting the sun (God). Though shining with the same light, the mirror is not the sun. More than one mirror can reflect the sun. A mirror might even reflect light from another mirror. In *Liber Decatriarchia Mystica*, we read that

> my primary rank and station is that of Mirror to the Essence of the Godhead (*mirát dhát Allah*), which contains all other stations within it but is not specifically the station [held by Muhammad] of prophet legatee (*nabí, nubuwwa*). It is quantum levels beyond it (Azal 2006, 101).

That is, the stations of messenger (*rasūl*), prophet (*nabī*), or recipient of divine inspiration (*muḥaddath*) "are not separate ranks but differentiated vectorial unfoldings of a single *tajallī*" or progressively interior divine self-disclosure, as in Akbarian or Suhrawardian emanationism (Azal 2026l).

Wahid further identifies himself with the main figures of Bābism:

> I am claiming outright, and without the least equivocation, to be the real Promised One of the Bayan, the real *He whom God shall make Manifest* (مَن يُظهره الله [*man yuẓhiruhu'llāh,* a Bābī messianic figure whom Bahā'īs identify with Bahā'u'llāh]) (who is now He Who is Manifest من اظهر الله [*man aizharu'llah*]), come to set accounts straight with those who usurped the creed I established in my previous Manifestation as the Primal Point and in my station as the first Mirror as Subh-i-Azal. In other words, in this time, I am the Speaking Bayan (بيان الناطق [*bayān al-natiq,* cf. the "Speaking Qur'an" of Shi'ism]) and so whosoever seek to know the *Essence of the Seven Letters* [i.e., the Bāb] and the *Pre-Eternal Fruit* [Subh-i-Azal] of His Blessed Tree should seek to know me since I am both of Them as a Single Person (WahidAzal556 2025a; cf. Azal 2006, 98–110, n1)

The Completion of the Arabic Bayān *and the Eight Paths* (Azal 2022a) is proof of Wahid's claims, since no one else (especially not Bahā'u'llāh) has succeeded in completing the Arabic *Bayān*—a specific, unfinished text by the Bāb, intended to contain nineteen chapters of nineteen sections (Azal 2022a, 161 n1).

Wahid distinguishes three phases of the Bayānī revelation. The first two are the eras of the Bāb and himself, while "the third will occur in the future with *She whom God shall make Manifest*: the Return of Fatima" (WahidAzal556 2025a). That is, several centuries hence, Wahid will be succeeded by a woman who is the archetypal return of Muhammad's daughter Fāṭima as well as of Qurrat al-'Ayn (Azal 2025k, 31; 2024h, 12). Future leaders of the NUR-FSO will also be women (Azal 2024i, xxxvi; 2024h, 13). This commitment to matriarchy explains the otherwise

perplexing rule that "[l]esbians are allowed to marry formally in the NUR, but gay men are not" (Azal 2026d, 704; cf. 2022a, 174–75).

While all this is couched in Islamicate Bābī symbolism, a vestigial Bahā'ī influence can be detected in Wahid's more universalizing claim (mimicking Shoghi Effendi's praise for Bahā'u'llāh in chapter six of *God Passes By*) to fulfill the messianic expectations of other world religious traditions:

> I am indeed the promised Saoshyant, the true Kalki Avatar, the true Second Coming of Christ [...], the promised universal Messiah, Manjushri returned as the Maitreya Buddha, the Return of the Inca Sun-King Wirococha, the Return of Pharaoh Akhenaten, the Sixth Sun of the Mayan prophecies [...] et al., come to make the separation between the Light (gnosis) and the Darkness (exoteric religion) permanent (Azal 2006, 108).

On the other hand, "the whole universe is the Manifestation of God, not just a single person. So, yes, I am a Manifestation of God, but so are you" (WahidAzal556 and OfficialDCShepard 2024, 54–6).

Disapproving of "self-styled popular gurus" who "sit cross legged upon some *dais* all day long" and preside over "abusive cults," Wahid resolved to avoid "simply spawning some *ashram*," and instead to make his teachings widely available on the internet. At the same time, he has withheld some secrets with the intention of founding "an entire initiatic *Mystery School*" (Azal 2006, 20–2). His first follower (the "First to Believe") was a tree, possibly the one seen in a photograph on his blog, with a prominent eye-shaped swirl in its bark (Azal 2025i). Since "no human was found worthy enough to occupy that lofty station," the Bāb archetypally returned in the form of this tree (WahidAzal556 2025a).

Just as the Bāb had appointed his eighteen Letters of the Living, so did Wahid name Letters of his own. In 2014, he estimated that "a core group of about five or six people" attended, while "sometimes between ten-twenty people show up" to special ceremonies (Magick 2014, 12:00). This is consistent with observable online activity. There are biweekly gatherings, with some events held in the "Valley of NUR," a bucolic location in Queensland that Wahid describes as "the current terrestrial *axis mundi* and *qiblah*" (WahidAzal556 2025a). The group practices an "*Islamaic* Theurgy" (note the adjective) in which "[p]silocybin mushrooms, Haoma / Ayahuasca, cannabis and DMT are also considered to be sacramental tools for spiritual wayfaring (and only for that purpose)" (WahidAzal556 2025a). *Temples of the Pure Religion of Gnosis* (Azal 2026d) details various laws, prayers, and practices, including some 55 listed holidays.

In 2022, Wahid named Salman S. Sheikh, Mohammad Rahal, and Syeda Nade Ali Gillani as his *khulafā* (representatives) for North America, Central/South America, and the Indian subcontinent, respectively (Azal 2022b, 2022c, and 2022d). Sheikh, a Pakistani-American esoteric writer living in Philadelphia (and one of Wahid's Letters of NUR), often interviews him on YouTube. Other frequent interlocutors include Keyvan Yahya, a Persian-German computational neuroscientist at the Technische Universität Chemnitz; Matt Douglas (aka Matt Barker), an American teacher and digital creator living in Hua Hin, Thailand; Sam C. Burch, an Aboriginal rights activist and creative writing instructor from Brisbane, who has a Ph.D. from the University of Queensland; and Stephan V. Beyer, the Chicago lawyer and author of *Singing to the Plants: A Guide to Mestizo Shamanism in the Upper Amazon* (Beyer 2009), whose doctorates are in psychology and Buddhist Studies.

Perhaps the most prominent adherent to date has been Peter Lamborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey, 1945–2022), the late Persianist and radical activist. Wahid read his books in college—*TAZ, the Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Wilson 1991) proved especially influential—and finally met him at a 1995 meeting of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society (MIAS). As for Wilson's erstwhile support for the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), Wahid writes that he "literally grilled" the anarchist, who "assured me that it was all ultimately a cosplay" aimed at "bringing public opprobrium and blame upon himself as a means so that he would never be erected into some guru," i.e., the path of *malāmīyah*. "He made a bad decision that spectacularly backfired" (Azal 2026j; cf. Azal 2024a). Wahid has sparred with Wikipedia editors over the claim that Wilson joined the NUR-FSO before his death (Azal 2022e and 2025c).

Where the Bahā'īs view themselves as an independent world religion (a stance established by Shoghi Effendi in the early twentieth century), and the Bayānīs remain within the Muslim *ummah* (albeit as *ghulat*, i.e. "exaggerators" who ascribe divinity to some saintly figure), Wahid states that "I am not a Muslim but by personal innovation a Bayání Gnostic Universalist," adding that "Everything of the very best is contained within" this path: "Mazdaeanism, *batíní* Ismá'ílísm, esoteric Twelver Shi'ism, Sufism, Neo-Zoroastrian Illuminationist Platonism, Hermeticism, Qabbalah and Persian Neoplatonism *tout court* all rolled into one" (Azal 2006, 18). Elsewhere, he volunteers the term "post-Islamic," which "is to

Islam what postmodernism is to modernity. It is not outside of it. Rather, as it were, it is at the very center of its interiority and identity" (Azal 2024b, xxvii n1 and 2024j, 19–20). For his followers,

> Islam is not a confessional identity in the FSO. It is an existential facticity, and since we have our own version of the *shar'ia* as revealed and amended by me, that means that mainstream Islamic orthodoxy does not consider us to be Muslims (WahidAzal556 2025a).

However, individual members such as Salman Sheikh do identify as Muslims.

Politics are central to Wahid's message. His earlier posts are relatively centrist:

> There is at this time no better system(s) in existence other than Western liberal democracies and to think there is one is to be either a hopeless utopian dreamer entangled in paradigms of pure fantasy or to delude oneself just as generations of naive idealistic Marxists did with their impratical [*sic*] agendas [...] (Hazini 2001).

Wahid later flirted with Duginism (viz. Time Monk Radio Network 2015), whose anti-Western Eurasianism and mystical Traditionalism must have appealed. Still, he eventually distanced himself and adopted a position on the Green Marxian Left. Major inspirations include Wilson / Bey, Fanon, Shahid King Bolsen, and Kohei Saito. In a crucial gloss, Wahid interprets the Báb's command in the Arabic *Bayán*, "Do not buy or sell the Four Elements" (9th unity, 11th gate), in anti-capitalist terms. *Essays in Bayānī Political Ontology* explains that

> What [Karl] Marx [1818–1883] exposes as alienation, the Bayān identifies as metaphysical imposture. [...] This is because Marxism remains bound to a materialist grammar in which nature appears as raw substrate—external to the worker, appropriable through labor, and historically mediated through class struggle. Even its most ecological variants preserve this assumption, imagining a rational or equitable administration of nature rather than questioning the premise of administration itself. The Bayān does something categorically different. It declares the elements to be *pre-legal ontic trusts*: unknowable, unexchangeable, and anterior to every regime of value. Their sale is not exploitation; it is a metaphysical falsehood, a claim upon being that cannot, in truth, exist. This is why the prohibition is absolute rather than reformist. It does not regulate extraction; it annuls the ontology that makes extraction intelligible (Azal 2026a, 124).
>
> The corporate state operates through risk assessment, procedural legitimacy, and managed dissent. It can negotiate demands. It can absorb critique. It can even tolerate radical rhetoric, provided it remains within the grammar of policy, rights, and future reform. What it cannot process is an ontological refusal that invalidates its foundational assumptions. This is because [the] Bayānic subject does not request rights to air, water, land, or life. He or she denies the state's authority to distribute them as *metaphysical axiom*. He or she does not argue that privatization is harmful; he or she declares it *metaphysically impossible*. [...] In this sense, the Bayān does what neither Marxism nor its ecological descendants can do. Marxism dreams of a redeemed future.

> Degrowth [Communism] imagines a gentler present. The Bayān judges now. It does not await historical maturation, cultural enlightenment, or institutional reform. It names, in law, what accords with being and what does not (Azal 2026a, 126).

The Bahā'ī religion, by contrast, represents exactly the spirit of gradualism and accommodationism that the Bayān rejects. Azal calls it a "counter-revolution" instigated by imperial powers intent on diluting the revolutionary force of the Bābī movement. The *Essays* shows no interest in gradual reform but demands an immediate and thoroughgoing instauration (see the epigraph that begins this section), even though it does not deny the state's objective reality. Chris Chan displays the same impatience and puerility when he famously calls for videos showing the squalid interior of his house to be taken "off the internet now now now now now now!" (CWCki: "THAT IS MY HOUSE").

In his *Completion of the Arabic* Bayān (15th unity, 16th gate), Wahid envisions a "Luminous House of the Treasury" (*bayt'ul-māl al-nūrānīya*) that will guarantee "lifelong health and mental care, shelter, food, education, and material protection" to all NUR-FSO members. After all, "if the world won't adopt Green Democratic-Socialism, we, the NUR, will build a sacralised Green Democratic-Socialist (or Green Communist) order and take it to the world" (Azal 2022a, 185 n172).

The *Completion* also anticipates an imminent "environmental apocalypse" (Azal 2022a, 182 n159). *Liber Decatriarchia Mystica* (Azal 2006, 10) urges "all the truly realized and high living adepts out there [...] of whatever tradition, lineage or spiritual persuasion they may be," as "the last collective beacons of hope and salvation for this planet," to gather into a UN- or EU-style body. Several Brazilian ayahuasca groups as well as the (fourteenth) Dalai Lama are requested to initiate this endeavor, which is to reflect the principle of "theophanocracy" (after Terry Culhane).

In 2010, Wahid met (online) German artist and journalist Roya Jakoby (née Kirsten Bettina Knörzer, 1968–2019). Raised in Munich, Roya earned a master's degree in communications from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, then spent two years in the New York City art world (under her birth name, she married artist and graphic designer Jan Audun Uretsky, 1960–2016, in 2002) before moving to London, where she worked as a journalist for the *Guardian* (Azal 2021b). In 2011, Wahid traveled there to meet her in person. On his return to Australia, he learned that Roya was pregnant. He joined her in Berlin, just before their

daughter Nuriel was born in March 2012—six weeks after Soheil Hazini's death (at 62) from stage 4 colon cancer. Wahid and Roya married in July. They remained in Berlin for seven years, until Roya's March 2019 death, apparently from a toxic reaction to an anti-lice scalp ointment that she had neglected to wash off before going to sleep. She was 51. Afterward, Wahid returned with Nuriel to Queensland, for fear that the German courts might find him an unfit parent.

The NUR-FSO remembers Roya as "the *first martyr* in the Light," and recognizes her grave in Berlin as a place of pilgrimage (Azal 2026d, 702). That she represents the Divine Feminine for Wahid seems clear—he calls her "Earth Angel," after a term from Corbin's *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, and "Red Mother" (*Śonāmbā*), an epithet of the Indian goddess Durga.

Certain "procedural irregularities" led Wahid to suspect "possible narrative management," i.e., a "cover-up" (Azal 2025o). To begin with, hospital administrators told him that the state would dispose of Roya's body if funeral arrangements were not made promptly. Yet, medical authorities took eight days to issue a death certificate, without which no funerary arrangements could be made. Wahid also notes contradictions between the official cause of death (a diabetic stroke), the toxicology report, and recent bloodwork showing no sign of diabetes. The Berlin district attorney's office (*Staatsanwaltschaft*) refused to release the coroner's report until Wahid escalated to the federal police (*Bundeskriminalamt*), whose investigator asked the provocative question, "Do you suspect the Bahá'ís were involved in Roya's murder?" (Azal 2025y; Wahid does not indicate which of them was the first to bring up the Bahā'īs). *The Wretched of the Corporate State* (Azal 2025hh) uses his treatment by the German bureaucracy as a symbol of structural racism.

As for how Roya could have been murdered while the family was alone in their apartment, Wahid considers that "some kind of weaponized potassium" might have been slipped to her earlier in the day (Azal 2019d, 2). He came to suspect that their anti-fascist activism (Roya had been a friend of Alternative für Deutschland defector Franziska Schreiber) "probably placed both of us on potential watchlists—not only by far-right actors, but also by German intelligence and international players interested in 'ideological containment'" (Azal 2025y). The implication was that the ostensibly anti-racist Bahā'īs had conspired with far-right elements within the German deep state. To Wahid, this also raised questions about Soheil's untimely death in Australia (Azal 2025x).

As "the most prominent public Bayānī voice in the world," he speculates that the Bahā'ī religion, with its global reach and intelligence ties, had an interest in "neutralizing" him—an interest that converged with that of shadowy elements within Western governments (Azal 2025o). For some reason, none of these forces dared assassinate Wahid himself. At one point, he wrote the Bahā'ī Universal House of Justice directly to demand an answer: "yes or no, were you involved in the murder of my wife Kirsten Roya Azal? Did you commission the poisoning of my wife?" (Azal 2021a).

Another shadow emerged in connection with Roya's funeral. When Wahid first met her in London, Roya was enmeshed in a messy custody dispute over her first child, Inji (b. 2006). A 2019 e-mail exchange between Wahid and Inji's father, Pier Galliet (which Wahid later uploaded to the internet; see Azal and Galliet 2019) establishes that Wahid attempted to send word of Roya's death to twelve-year-old Inji via her youth choir. His message was instead forwarded to Galliet, who (overlooking the breach in protocol) offered his condolences and said he was interested in attending Roya's funeral with Inji. In succeeding e-mails, Wahid stressed that Inji was welcome, but Galliet was not. In fact, if Galliet ever set foot in Germany, Wahid knew "people who would not hesitate to nail you and your crooked friends to a wall." Galliet interpreted this as a physical threat and notified authorities.

Wahid's hostility is explained by his view of Galliet as a pedophile "who had molested his own daughter" (Azal 2026j). While Wahid often accuses his enemies of pedophilia, seemingly without reason or evidence, he acquired this particular conviction from Roya, who (as Galliet states) abducted Inji to Hamburg in 2007, only for the German courts to return her to London in 2009. Since Roya "subjected her to persistent abuse," Galliet was awarded full custody in 2010, with Roya "restricted to a weekly fully supervised 2 hour contact session" and required to "undergo 2 years of psychiatric counselling before she could apply to change the aforementioned contact arrangements." Her parental rights were completely terminated due to "allegations in 2011 from a recent ex-fiancee of Inji's mother that she was planning to have me assaulted and Inji abducted again" (Azal and Galliet 2019). Wahid's eulogy for Roya portrays her as a martyr who "suffered for the past 11–12 years as a consequence of wrongs no one should ever have to suffer." Wahid promises to connect half-sisters Nuriel and Inji (a university

student at this writing). He castigates "that accursed demon of perdition" (i.e., Galliet) as well as the "satanic" British family court system (Azal 2020d).

Here and elsewhere, Wahid emphasizes the importance of *tabarra* ("dissociation" from evil), because love means nothing without hate, and a God who is "a happy-clappy fluff-bunny" would be unworthy of worship (Azal 2023). In that spirit, in 2025, in over a dozen blog posts, he publicly broke ties with his mother, Mitra, and one of his sisters, Nika. While relations had been strained for years, the trigger was Mitra's Facebook messages praising Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu, Reza Pahlavi (son of the late shah), and Pauline Hanson (Azal 2025bb and 2025cc). To Wahid, these posts were no mere expressions of political opinion, but "the announcement of a relational rupture." The reader should understand that older Iranian expatriates are often staunchly pro-Israel, partly out of a perception that Iran's theocratic government (which they fled) sides with the Palestinians.

Wahid also suspects a friend of Mitra's of exercising "undue influence" and "coercive control" over her, e.g., by curating her Facebook wall, supposedly on behalf of Chabad (Azal 2025z and 2025dd). In another inspiration for *The Wretched of the Corporate State*, Wahid's complaint to (Social) Services Australia's Fraud and Compliance unit went nowhere when its staff came to identify *him* as the problem.

As for Nika, "[f]or twenty-five years I have watched my sister drift into the orbit of institutions that trade in moral inversion and evil," most recently the UK-based organization Lawyers for Israel. "Nika sold out; I did not. She aligned with the devil; I aligned with God. Final message to my Zionist sister: [...] Fuck Israel" (Azal 2025e). Wahid further anathematizes her in pseudo-Qur'anic verse:

1. Perish the hands of the traitor, *Nika*, for her soul shall be brought low!
2. She preferred delusion to truth; therefore she broke the covenant and sold her fidelity to the Jew! (Azal 2025ee; note the "Covenant-breaker" language).

Wahid's political views (which here receive the imprimatur of divine revelation) could not be called nuanced. A less enlightened person might have tolerated the contrary opinions of relatives, or considered that reasonable people can disagree on such matters, but for Wahid, moderation and compromise are of the devil. Ironically, he criticizes his mother for her "binary moral landscape" that admits of "no middle ground" (Azal 2025v). Elsewhere he calls "intolerance of ambiguity"

and "black-and-white thinking [...] the lifeblood of every totalitarian system, religious or secular" (Azal 2025l, 49).

To address the anti-Semitic elephant in the room, while Wahid sometimes writes as though he were socialized by 4chan, he is also capable of engaging with Judaica at a high level, as he does in his comments on Steven Wasserstrom's (1993 and 2002) hypothesized Islamic neo-Platonic origins for the *Sefer Yesira* (Azal 2020c). The explanation lies in Wahid's distinction between (good) Mizrahi Jews like his ancestors, who once lived alongside Muslims in peace; and (bad) "European AshkeNazi Jews," whose "Semitic and Jewish pedigree is questionable since they are descendents [*sic*] of the Slavo-Turk kingdom of the Khazars" (talk.religion.bahai, 10 April 2015).

Scoffing at the notion "that reptilian shape-shifting aliens, hidden celestial Archons, the Devil, the Jews, the Illuminati, or similar" are responsible for all the world's ills (Azal 2025k, xxix), Wahid describes a complex global conspiracy dominated not by Jews per se, but by Western capitalists/imperialists—only some of them Jewish—from their base in the City of London, i.e. the Square Mile. (Azal 2015, 6 denounces Wall Street as well.) His writings often refer to "Anglo-Zionist" machinations, a pairing seemingly inspired by the history of Bahā'ī collaboration with these powers. The result is an

> Empire of pedophiles, child rapists and cannibals run by the Sabbatean-Frankist cabal of Lubavitcher (Chabad) demons (*dibbukim*). May this Lubavitcher menace return to the *Sitra Ahra* (hell) where it rightfully belongs and go back into the *Qelippoth* (infernal shells of darkness) and the Tree of Death (*etz ha-mavet*) from where it first emerged. And may the real Jews finally emerge to put this *abomination of desolation* in its place and thereby permanently shut the door to the criminally conspiratorial and heretical Zoharic-Lurianic Gnosticism that has spawned Sabbataeanism, then Frankism and then finally these Lubavitchers constituting the Synagogue of Satan (Azal 2026c).

Note his reference to "the real Jews." Wahid clarifies:

> Now, what we have just said above is in no way, shape, form or manner any kind of endorsement of Antisemitism, since the Sabbatian-Frankists have always been and continue to be, first and foremost, enemies to all actual Jews. For example, their possible active involvement in the Holocaust (as a strategy to attain a certain end) is something that is only now beginning to be discussed among some circles. We also mentioned in the notes the possibility of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* itself being a deliberate Sabbatian-Frankist forgery in order to intentionally cultivate Antisemitism for the specific long-term purpose to that end (Azal 2025k, 95–6).

For all his fine distinctions, Wahid borrows heavily from conspiratorial language and concepts. Although he now condemns Alexander Dugin's "Fourth Political Theory" (Azal 2016), its portrayal of Zionists and Atlanticists as the villains of modern geopolitics offers an intriguing parallel. Prior to his Duginist phase, Wahid described a more ecumenical conspiracy reminiscent of the "Black Lodge" from Theosophical lore:

> As Revealed to me by the Archangel Metatron, behind exoteric religion in the past 2,800 years has stealthily stood in the shadowy corners of power globally a Black Magick power cult and lineage of dark sorcerers, the Black Brotherhood. It is this cult and powerful secret society who has [been], and still is, responsible for supporting and maintaining exoteric religion and its power structures (Azal 2006, 109).

As Wahid explains (Azal 2025aa, 103 n23), his language of a "Sabbatean-Frankist cabal" comes from rabbi/conspiracy theorist Marvin S. Antelman (1933–2013), who was in turn inspired by Gershom Scholem's (1897–1982) then-recent scholarship on Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) and Jacob Frank (1726–1791), beginning with *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (1971). Zevi, a Smyrniot rabbi turned messianic claimant, interpreted the Lurianic *tikkun olam* ("repairing the world" by liberating the divine sparks from their *qlippoth*) to require the deliberate violation of Jewish law, i.e. "redemption through sin." Frank, a Podolian merchant who claimed to be Zevi's reincarnation, launched a sort of eighteenth-century sequel. Although Sabbateanism is now confined to the few thousand members of Turkey's Dönme minority, and Frankism seems to have died out in the nineteenth century, Scholem argues that their non-literal approach to Torah observance influenced the liberalizing trends of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment. Antelman's *To Eliminate the Opiate* (two volumes, 1974 and 2002) represents these currents as a secret society spreading its corruption through puppet organizations like Soviet Communism or the Bavarian Illuminati. Scholem wrote in his copy of the first volume, "Nonsense based on me!!!!" (see scanned page in Leshem 2020).

As Jewish messianic claimants who embraced antinomianism via the Divine Feminine, Zevi and Frank might seem as though they would appeal to Wahid (Zevi even converted to Bektashi Islam, albeit under compulsion), but no—he objects to the Lurianic Kabbalah on the grounds that God's unicity is incompatible with the concept of *tsimtsum* ("contraction" of the divine to allow a space for the creation of the world) (Azal 2026e). However, from an Akbarian perspective, apparent evil (even conspiracies) must, at some level, accord with the divine will. In any case,

Wahid believes that Sabbatean-Frankism survives as a secretive force within or behind the Catholic Church (to which Frank converted), various Jewish organizations, and global elites in general. Crucially, CESNUR turns out to be a "Sabbatean-Frankist global outreach front" (Azal 2025l, 2, 4, 18, *et passim*).

Wahid's embrace of Antelman is odd, given that the rabbi is an anti-Communist religious Zionist, and Wahid a Marxian anti-Zionist. Like the bit about the Khazars, Frankism appears in anti-Semitic or alt-Right discourse with some regularity—Candace Owens recently mentioned it (Grisar 2024), as did Dugin (2026). Wahid's suspicions of cannibalism and pedophilia seem to reflect "Sabbatian-Frankist sexual inversion rituals, where salvation is achieved through transgression" (Azal 2025l, 64) and "flouting and inverting all law and morality" liberates the divine sparks (Azal 2025k, 90). One wonders how much these projections owe to Wahid's own experience of the Left-Hand Path. Where he once felt a connection to Chabad, he now condemns the movement (whose very name references three sefirot in the Lurianic system), and accuses its members of taking advantage of his mother, in addition to their role in the global conspiracy.

Wahid has long been fascinated by the *Protocols*. Bennett (2025b) screenshots a post of his saying that, even if fake, they nevertheless accurately describe Jewish behavior. It is far from the only example. On the other hand, Wahid's *Protocols of the Elders of Britain* (a multipart series on talk.religion.bahai, from 29 April 2009; not to be confused with the eponymous short story by John Brunner, 1934–1995) alters the text of the *Protocols*, for example, by replacing "Jews" with "Anglo-Saxons," and other such substitutions. This resonates with other comments of his:

> The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* may be a documentary fabrication of the Tsarist secret police at the turn of the last century, but in its slur against the Jews what it reveals is actually true; yet what it says does not exclusively apply to the Jewish elite but rather the British financial elite. What is and has been doing exactly what the fictitious Illuminati has been accused of and what the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* impugns about the Jews in the conspiracy theory literature is none other than the Corporation of London (talk.religion.bahai, 20 Nov. 2011).

Here too Wahid seems to be following *To Eliminate the Opiate* (Antelman 1974, xvii–xix and 2002, ch. 22). Recall also the claim of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 1982) that the *Protocols* reflect the genuine plans, not of Jews, but of the Priory of Sion (which Wahid admires; see Azal 2006, 6, 85, 155).

For Wahid, the main enemy—the nexus of white racism, neoliberalism, Western imperialism, and so on—manifests through any number of puppet organizations. The Bahā'ī religion represents a "Western soft-power replacement theology," a "Western-approved substitute for Islam" that "preserves the optics and aesthetics of prophetic religion while quietly neutralizing its revolutionary core" (Azal 2025ff). Bahā'u'llāh himself cooperated with British colonial networks; Carnegie- and Rockefeller-funded peace societies helped the religion expand globally. (Compare with Guénon's similar view of Theosophy). Ex-Bahā'īs do not fare much better in his eyes; they are a "controlled opposition for the Haifan Baha'i establishment" (Azal 2026g; cf. 2026h), and an expression of a "racial contract" (after Charles W. Mills, 1951–2021) dedicated to the universalization of white liberal norms (Azal 2026f).

Since a few ex-Bahā'īs have joined the Unitarian Universalists (UUs), Wahid views that rather milquetoast denomination harshly, calling it a CIA front and

> a sophisticated mechanism for managing geopolitical friction with the Middle East. [...] By absorbing ex-Baha'is and reorienting their dissent toward liberal pluralism rather than oppositional theocracy, UU congregations effectively *depoliticize* individuals who might otherwise engage in transnational advocacy that could embarrass either the Haifan administration or its Western backers (Azal 2026i; cf. Azal 2026g).

Wahid is also suspicious of UU interfaith rhetoric:

> What makes this ecumenism colonially inflected is not merely its Western provenance, but its *asymmetrical structure of recognition*. Traditions rooted in law, revelation, metaphysical realism, or sacral authority are tolerated only after being stripped of precisely those features that challenge liberal sovereignty (Azal 2026a, lxiii).

"It is no exaggeration that the white liberal-centrist and his ideology is a species of fascism and white supremacy," says Wahid (Azal 2026b).

Of the dozens of ex-Bahā'ī / Bahā'ī dissident blogs and discussion groups that flourished in the early 2000s, few survive today. The most prominent is the r/exbahai subreddit (f. 2013), which Wahid suspects of being secretly moderated by Bahā'īs. If the NUR-FSO ever publishes his Collected Works, whole volumes will have to be devoted to his feuds with ex-Bahā'īs Dale Husband and D.C. Shepard, *inter alia*. Interestingly, Wahid's complaint that ex-Bahā'īs "want to just basically perpetuate the grievance itself, without resolution" (Azal 2026p, 48:00 ff) agrees with Momen (2007). Wahid is also the primary moderator of, and contributor to, the r/bayan subreddit, with the more substantial items cross-posted to Blogger or Substack. YouTube videos are another

important medium. Some are interviews with Wahid by his disciples; others are from his Zoom courses on Mullā Sadrā, Suhrawardī, ibn al-'Arabī, or the Qur'an.

His Library of the Greatest Name reaches fifteen volumes at this writing (up to Azal 2026n). Most have been uploaded to archive.org and the National Library of Australia website, where they are free to read. Shorter essays are often posted to academia.edu. Wahid was suspended from Facebook in 2025; he responded by calling for the mass abandonment of that platform, while simultaneously petitioning to be reinstated (Azal 2025d, 2025m). Compare with Chris Chan's boycotts of Sega, for coloring Sonic's arms blue instead of peach for the *Sonic Boom* series (CWCki: "Sonic Boom Protests"); and of Hasbro, for rebooting the My Little Pony franchise (CWCki: "My Little Pony Protests").

Wahid practically lives on the internet, and much NUR-FSO activity takes place there. For one illustrative moment, I single out the 2022 episode in which members rallied around Salman Sheikh after his falling out with San Francisco grifter Douglas Duane Dietrich. At the time, Dietrich was associated with Peter Moon, proprietor of the Time Travel Education Center, and co-author with Preston B. Nichols of *The Montauk Project: Experiments in Time* (Nichols and Moon 1992). Sheikh first discovered Dietrich in 2015, and from 2017, sent monthly donations totaling thousands of dollars (Sheikh 2022a, 2022b). "I always did right by them," he recalls. "I honestly believed their mission" (Sheikh 2022c, 1:45). Sheikh and Dietrich each appeared on the other's YouTube channel several times. However, Sheikh grew uncomfortable with Dietrich's racism and plagiarism and withdrew from further collaboration. Then, in the course of a nearly twelve-hour 22 May 2022 YouTube livestream, Dietrich disparaged Sheikh's Sufism and Freemasonry as Satanism-adjacent heresies (Dietrich 2022).

Dietrich (b. 1966 in Taipei) is the son of a US Navy veteran father and a half-Taiwanese, half-Japanese mother. By his own account (Dietrich 2019 and 2020), his mother, as a diplomatic translator for the Japanese Empire, collected a semen sample from Adolf Hitler (1889–1945, but Dietrich says he escaped to a subterranean realm) in 1936 via fellatio, then froze it for thirty years before artificially inseminating herself; thus Dietrich is Hitler's biological son. Contrary to popular perception, Hitler "believed in equal rights for all races" and "would be disgusted with White Supremacists." He fought US and Soviet breeding programs aimed at replacing their populations with "human ape hybrids who would literally work for peanuts." Unfortunately, Hitler's plans for a vampire nation-state

were frustrated by Joseph Stalin's (1878–1953) extermination of this misunderstood minority (except for Dietrich, who is a vampire). Also, Japan won World War II.

Around 1982, US Army intelligence officer Michael Aquino (later the founder of the Temple of Set) recruited Dietrich to work with him at San Francisco's Presidio military base, hoping to convert him to the worship of the Edomite anti-gods. Instead, Dietrich—a civilian research librarian whose job was to incinerate classified records—became a whistleblower, alerting the world to the reality of various *X-Files*-type topics, as well as the prevalence of Satanic ritual abuse at the Presidio. The reader will not be surprised to learn that Steve Outtrim (2016) and Richard K. Cole, Jr. (2026) have found holes in Dietrich's claims, for example, to have worked at the Presidio during the 1980s or served in the US Marine Corps in the 1990s.

Matt Douglas, making a guest appearance on Sheikh's YouTube channel (Sheikh 2022c), agrees that some of Dietrich's assertions are "highly questionable, in particular, his claim about a neutron bomb creating zombies." The idea was that prions released by the bomb would affect the human brain similar to mad cow disease; Douglas points out that in a fusion reaction, gamma rays "are gonna fry you before you get a chance to be turned into a zombie." As for Moon, "immediately when he started talking about time travel, that sent a red flag up." On inspection, Douglas found that Moon's representation of the underlying physics "wasn't something that could be an honest mistake, and in fact involved considerable visual/verbal sleight-of-hand, to get you to buy his bullshit."

Wahid made a video of his own (Azal 2022f) focusing on Dietrich's claim that the text of Qur'an 25:29—which calls Satan "a deserter to man in his hour of need"—somehow relates to H.P. Lovecraft's (1890–1937) fictional monster, Cthulhu. Like Laurence Galian (2003, 394), Dietrich traces *Cthulhu* to the Arabic *khadhulu* ("Betrayer," "Forsaker," or "Abandoner"), and translates the versicule as "*Mankind, Shaitan is Khadhulaa.*" Wahid points out that *khadhulaa* is a verb. Of course, any phonetic similarity is coincidental; *Cthulhu* is more likely inspired by *chthonic*. The same passage in Galian goes on to propose a specious Sumerian etymology. It discusses the Sufi concepts of *tafrid* ("singling out" God as one's focus) and *tajrid* ("divesting" oneself of worldly attachments). Dietrich mentions all of these things too, suggesting that he is following the Galian book.

On his reading, *tafrid* and *tajrid* amount to a kind of goetic *qigong* practice through which the Sufi invites possession by demons. Cthulhu is conceived as a dragon-like "Lord of the Abyss" who challenges the Sufi to abandon everything–even conventional morality–for the sake of crossing this Abyss. (Note the Crowleyan resonances). Wahid rightly dismisses all of this as a romantic Orientalizing misrepresentation of Sufism and Islam, arising from the "conspirituality" subculture (after Ward and Voas 2011).

In an odd twist of fate, the Galian book was originally supposed to be coauthored by Michael McCarron ("Salim Ali"), who once joined Nima and Harry Duran on a trip to the Netherlands to visit Sheikhbahaei. The collaboration ended when McCarron and Galian quarreled over a woman; Duran then forced McCarron to pay nearly USD 5,000, so that Galian could self-publish the manuscript. Peter Lamborn Wilson praised the book as "hip Islam" rather than "square Islam" (Campbell 2021 and 2023).

Sheikh has since hosted other Dietrich defectors on his YouTube channel, including Ani Osaru, Jameson Reese, Daniel Arola, and Penny Bradley. The first two are occultists and conspiracy theorists; Bradley is a survivor of the Secret Space Program.

The paleo-Bayānīs remain uninterested in the NUR-FSO. "O People of the Bayān," Wahid writes in his *Tablet of Invitation to the People of the Bayān*, "We have waited for you longer than the nineteen years that the Primal Point advised Us to wait for you! We will continue to wait for you beyond that" (Azal 2024h, 22). Wahid also hopes to remarry, and requests the assistance of the Bayānī community in finding him a suitable wife (who would have to move to Australia) "so that We may [...] meet our obligation towards the Book of God regarding marriage with a believer; and also so that there may be a new mother for Our Light" (Azal 2024h, 22, 44 n34).

Wahid reports multiple attempts by agents or actors of some sort to destabilize him, and/or insinuate themselves into Bayānī forums. He fumes at "these various trolls and *criminals* online that have been entangled with me for quite a long time, almost two decades now" (but especially after 2016). He warns that "there are many eyes watching them, and everybody is in agreement–including a branch of German law enforcement–that these people are engaging in outright criminal activity" (Azal 2020b, 1:44 ff; 4:20 ff). Compare with Chris Chan's angry threat

to his trolls, should images of his house not be taken down: "I'll send in detectives, I'll send in police, I'll send in everything in my power!" (CWCki: "THAT IS MY HOUSE").

Like Chris Chan, Wahid complains of catfishing attempts and connects the deaths of his wife and father with incidents that occurred in 2023 and 2025. The first featured an unnamed Turkish woman from Izmir who "contacted me via Facebook, feigning romantic interest." Wahid was struck by her resemblance to the image on the "Eve" card of his NUR Tarot deck (painted by Habib Shahbazi; Azal 2024c). Their exchanges lasted 36 days, and "ended abruptly" (Azal 2025o).

The second incident involved one Ronia Ahmad or Ronia Haidar, apparently a Lebanese Alawite, psychotherapist, "Sufi priestess," and "part-time mortician" whose first message (again via Facebook) was, "Your light called to mine through the veil. I feel we've known each other across lifetimes." Soon she was asking Wahid to "Tell me about [Swiss Traditionalist writer Frithjof] Schuon [1907–1998]" (Azal 2025s). "What began as a seemingly earnest spiritual connection," he recalls, "rapidly revealed itself to be a carefully stage-managed infiltration" (Azal 2025a). During their month-long interactions, Ronia "not only defended the Bahá'í faith with unrelenting insistence, but also maneuvered me into an email exchange with individuals affiliated with the European identitarian far-right—some of the same ideological circles implicated in the constellation of actors behind Roya's murder" (Azal 2025o).

Ronia turned out to be a follower of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866?–1949), whose philosophy and cult Wahid would harshly criticize (e.g. Azal 2025t). The online relationship took a strange turn:

> Suddenly, she mentioned an 'anonymous benefactor' funding her Sufi-Gurdjieffian work. She casually name-dropped a few shady NGOs. She defended cults. She spoke glowingly of the Bahá'ís and a Dr. Vahid at an ER. She then 'accidentally' looped me into an email thread with a white nationalist disguised as a religious pluralist. [...] Her professional profile disappeared. Her email address bounced. Her backstory mutated. Now she wasn't a mortician, she was a grief doula. Not a Sufi, but a 'quantum priestess of the lunar wound'. The house she claimed to live in? Undeliverable. The man she claimed was her father? Possibly fictional (Azal 2025s).

And then Ronia disappeared, her digital footprint carefully scrubbed (Azal 2025r). Wahid now believes she was an intelligence agent (Azal 2025q), possibly working for Mossad (Azal 2025p) and/or CESNUR (Azal 2025a). He has filed complaints with the Australian Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security

(Azal 2025n) and the Queensland Human Rights Commission (on the grounds of religious discrimination and spiritual harassment; Azal 2025h).

Another possibility occurs to me—that Ronia and the Turkish woman were ordinary civilians who had second thoughts about dating Wahid and decided to "ghost" him. Anyway, catfishers generally go after money; it is difficult to imagine what use Wahid would be to any intelligence agency. For comparison, he also thinks that Starr Saffa's "entire friendship with me was phony from start to finish, predicated on keeping an eye on me and appraising [*sic*] [University of Michigan history professor Juan R.I.] Cole, [Kalimát Press publisher Anthony A.] Lee and company as to my activities" (talk.religion.bahai, 9 Dec. 2005). Meanwhile, Dale Husband is an "uncover [*sic*] Baha'i working for the Bahai Internet Agency while pretending to be an atheist and UU member" (WahidAzal556 and OfficialDCShepard 2024, 9). I probably work for the US military (talk.religion.bahai, 18 Feb. 2013), if I am even a single person (Azal 2025gg, 57). Visitors to the r/bayan subreddit can expect to encounter similar suspicion, and will find Wahid vigilant against online infiltration by Bahā'īs, Zionists, Duginists, and other imagined foes.

To anticipate an obvious question, I gather that Nima was sent to psychologists in his youth, and that his issues were then poorly understood. In any case, psychiatric labels have limited explanatory power. As "Turkey Tom" Swanson puts it,

> Some people get the short end of the stick when it comes to genetics, and not all of them deal with it gracefully. Sure, congenital issues can account for some shortcomings, but how many? When does someone cross the line, and, despite their defects, when can they be held accountable for their actions? (Swanson 2023).

Wahid blames others more often than one would expect from a practitioner of *malāmīyah*. In a rare moment of self-awareness, he writes, "I apologize for the intensity that is my personality, but I am what I am, and I have always meant well, in the good and the bad times" (Azal 2006, 7).

Wahid is sensitive to the reductive hazards of a biographical or psychological approach to his scholarship, which, for all its unevenness, sometimes displays real brilliance. A recent example would be his analysis of Jamshid Maʿānī (1936–2009?), an Iranian Bahā'ī who, as a Bahā'ī missionary ("pioneer") among the Dayaks of Borneo in 1962 or 1963, dreamed that Bahā'u'llāh appointed him as the next prophet. Wahid, with obvious sympathy, takes a history-of-ideas approach to

a pair of Maʿānī's pamphlets, which "sit at a strange crossroads between late Bahāʾī universalism, perennialist humanism (in a Huxleyan sense), quasi-mystical cosmology, and an almost technocratic-utopian sociology" (Azal 2026m). Notice that Wahid is able to treat the Bahā'ī element dispassionately. Beyond that, he brings out aspects of Islamicate history and theology (including Bahā'ī lore) that evade others. I am reminded of Donald Harman Akenson's description of St. Paul:

> At first sight, he's the kind of person none of us really wants to meet. He's injured in some way we can't quite define: there's something that makes him uneasy, and he transmits that discomfort to everyone he deals with. [...] He can be trying. People he's attempted to talk to have beaten him up [...] [His] writing is notoriously jagged, full of metaphors that fly right out of the frame of discussion, packed with contradictions of his own arguments and mined with analogies that backfire. That is no real problem, once one realizes that his mind simply does not work like that of most people, and this because he has his own mode of perception (Akenson 2000, 7–8).

Like Paul, Wahid—after his own *enantiodromia*—places himself at the head of a religious movement that may not entirely welcome his leadership or theological innovations. (Following Eisenman 1997, he sides with James, the brother of Jesus, against "the satanic Paulianist Lie"; see Azal 2006, 36 *et passim*; cf. Azal 2025j, 32–3). On the other hand, the NUR-FSO hardly seems poised to convert the ecumene of its day; rather, it resembles some forgotten faction, like the followers of Simon Magus.

Just as saints and heresiarchs have their tropes, so do lolcows. A lolcow ought to be a colorful character, and Wahid is certainly that. However, Chris Chan's story amuses, even when it is wrong to laugh. Wahid, on the other hand, is received as pathetic, annoying, or threatening, but not usually as funny. In that case, can he still count as a lolcow? Other terms such as "horrorcow" have been coined for non-comic lolcows, but none seem applicable here.

Slop Roach (2026) places 26 typical lolcow traits (crowdsourced from his audience) on a tier list, based on their prevalence among identified lolcows. Two traits—"lack of self-awareness" and "delusions of grandeur"—are shared by virtually all lolcows. Nick Crowley (2026) proposes a useful lolcow typology that distinguishes seven levels of severity: (1) unintentional comedy arising from the contrast between the lolcow's self-perception, and perception by others (this means that the lolcow must sincerely lack self-awareness, not be putting on an act like Filthy Frank / Pink Guy); (2) the even more delusional belief that one is the best or smartest in the world, and that everyone else is wrong or lying; (3) a

symbiotic relationship with trolls, whose attention the lolcow craves; (4) a tendency to overshare personal details, especially over the internet; (5) being perpetually online; (6) "main character syndrome"; and (7) an inability to learn from mistakes. Wahid clearly fits (5) and (6), while the other categories are debatable (thus raising the question of whether these seven traits exist on a cumulative scale after all). Although he complains of trolls, I am not convinced that he has any. Rather, he reliably calls negative attention to himself on multiple forums, almost as if he were trying to recruit antagonists with the right kinds of subject interests.

Kiwi Farms, CESNUR, and Me

> Each person must ask what his relationship is to the scapegoat. I am not aware of my own, and I am persuaded that the same holds true for my readers. We only have legitimate enmities. And yet the entire universe swarms with scapegoats.
>
> —René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (1986, 41)

> Are we the baddies?
>
> —Mitchell and Webb

The internet is full of audience cults, some associated with client cults (think of YouTube's scam gurus), and a few with full-blown cult movements. Which of these ought to be considered religious is difficult to say, due to the difficulty of demarcating the category of "religion." For example, the "Final Fantasy House" from the early 2000s was a group of *Final Fantasy VII* fans led by Jennifer Cornet, who lived together in a State College, Pennsylvania, apartment to role-play full-time as characters from that game (Genkicrack 2005; M. 2025). They recruited new participants online. When defectors exposed the group's dysfunction and squalor, remaining members moved across the country and eventually shifted to the *Hannibal* TV series fandom. Like later cohorts of Otherkin / Fictionkin, Cornet described their activities not as role-playing, but as "soul-bonding" with—i.e., recognizing themselves as incarnations of—their characters, who were thought to exist in a parallel universe. If this seems reminiscent of Chris Chan's various delusions, recall that "soul-bonding" was a phrase he used to justify his sexual relations with his mother.

Embodying a character from popular culture does not seem fundamentally different from embodying one from religious lore, a phenomenon well attested cross-culturally. Wahid Azal follows Bābī precedent when he claims to be the archetypal return of various religious figures. Consider also the tulpamancy practiced by certain Bronies (e.g. DeadwingDork 2025; see Mikles and Laycock 2015 and Joffe 2016 for the Tibetan and Theosophical background).

As we depart from models based on what we might call "legacy" religions (on analogy with legacy media)—i.e., religion as an all-encompassing identity group comparable to one's nationality, not a mere hobby or personal interest—we face fundamental questions. What does it mean to study religion, or to support freedom of religion, when the very category blurs into adjacent phenomena? (I submit that religion is usefully understood as a *genre*, with tropes that evolve). And what significance can religious expression have at such granular levels? To be sure, both Chris Chan and Wahid Azal adopt the trappings of the major-league religions they are imitating (as do the Bahā'īs). Yet even mainstream religious groups dissolve into multivocality; no one really thinks that the Archbishop of Canterbury "represents" the whole Anglican Communion anymore.

The micro scale of most lolcow fandoms also makes it difficult for researchers to avoid becoming "part of the story," so to speak, to the extent that scholars or journalists can be distinguished from ordinary fans. After all, we are hardly immune to the underlying psychological forces. Arguably, drawing attention to lolcows—even from an academic motivation—only makes their predicament worse. Indeed, the very concept has been criticized as inherently abusive (e.g., Rauchberg 2025). On the other hand, most lolcows are already internet-famous. Moreover, the phenomenon is clearly significant, perhaps even emblematic of a broader generational maladaptiveness.

No Wikipedia article exists on Chris Chan. After several attempts to create one in 2009, administrators blocked ("salted") his name from being used as a page title. Steps were also taken to block any mention of him in other articles. For example, the entry for "Kiwi Farms" explains only that the site was "launched as a forum website to troll and harass an individual originally noticed in 2007 on the *Something Awful* forums," and that its earlier name, CWCki Forums, was "based on their initials." The reasoning behind this erasure seems to be that coverage of Chris Chan would be unencyclopedic, attract trolls, and itself constitute a form of cyberbullying (see "Wikipedia: Biographies of Living

Persons," subsection "Avoid Victimization"). Administrator Daniel Rigal calls Chris "an extremely vulnerable, non-notable, private individual who is being hounded by an organization which has already driven people to suicide." (This last point is disputed). According to oversighter Blade of the Northern Lights, "there's zero chance that will ever be an article. This person has been burned quite enough without Wikipedia throwing yet more gasoline and lit matches on what are obviously some deep scars" (Wikipedia: Administrators' Noticeboard / Incident Archive 1074, 4 Aug. 2021).

YouTube, by contrast, abounds with Chris Chan content, but terminated Geno Samuel's original Chris Chan channel in 2018, when he applied to monetize it. YouTube is notoriously cagey about its content standards—witness all the pointless euphemisms for advertiser-unfriendly words like "rape" or "suicide"—but in this case issued "community guidelines" strikes over depictions of bullying. Samuel successfully appealed, although his channel was never returned; the episodes were reuploaded (with edits) to a backup channel (CWCki: "Chris Chan: A Comprehensive History"). In 2026, YouTube issued content strikes against episode 12 of Samuel's revised, remastered edition of the series, resulting in a seven-day suspension. YouTube's AI apparently detected a "slutload.com" watermark in one clip, and a *Playboy* link in a chat log shown onscreen. Two weeks earlier, episode 10—in which BlueSpike forces Chris to violate himself rectally—had been reuploaded without objection. One thinks of the alien songs celebrating the rape of Fr. Sandoz in Mary Doria Russell's science-fiction novel *The Sparrow* (1996).

If creating a Wikipedia page about Chris might qualify as harassment, then what does that say about the present paper, or any academic study of the lolcow phenomenon? And by what principle ought other, possibly similar cases to be decided? For example, Greta Thunberg has Asperger's; does she deserve protection from potentially hostile internet audiences? Does it matter that she actively courts publicity (as does Chris Chan), or that she and her handlers manage it more effectively? What about Jacob Chansley (aka Jacob Angeli), the "QAnon Shaman"—is he fair game? After all, he has been diagnosed with multiple psychiatric disorders. Does hosting articles on such well-known figures make Wikipedia complicit in victimizing the vulnerable? The possibility that random people might be thrust unwillingly into the spotlight sits uncomfortably with

such moralizing. What about "Dog Shit Girl," who went viral in 2005 for refusing to clean up after her dog on the Seoul subway? What about Monica Lewinsky?

Other concerns involve noteworthiness and the availability of reliable sources. For example, Tucker Carlson has reported on Chris, but referred to him as "Chan," as if that were his actual surname. Is prime-time coverage sufficient to establish noteworthiness? Is FOX a reliable source, despite its sloppy errors? To the cynic, the process invites what is known as "Wiki-lawyering." A sufficiently motivated Wikipedian might even compose articles or books—possibly for scholarly journals or presses—for the sake of citing them as reliable sources on Wikipedia. If this seems far-fetched, consider that edit wars over Bābī and Bahā'ī subjects have centered on the question of what counts as a reliable source, e.g., whether a book published by a Bahā'ī press is somehow more legitimate than one from the Library of the Greatest Name.

There is, as yet, no Wikipedia article on "Bayānism" or "Wahid Azal," while "Bábism" and "Báb" (note the acute accents, in conformity with the official Bahā'ī house style) show telltale signs of Bahā'ī bias. Since Wikipedia articles on obscure topics are vulnerable to capture by a determined lobby, it may be that Bahā'ī perspectives prevail less through superior sources than superior numbers. While more attention has focused on paid editing by PR firms and bad-faith edits by governments and politicians, religious groups have also been caught trying to game the system (Wikipedia: "Conflict-of-interest editing on Wikipedia"). Of course, few Wikipedians are truly neutral, especially when it comes to subjects of passionate interest. As an *Atlantic* article put it, "All Wikipedia editors, whether volunteer or paid, come to their keyboards with some kind of bias" (Pinsker 2015). Much the same could be said of academia, where, for example, Bahā'ī loyalists and critics have contested the presentation of that religion (see Momen 2007 and Bei 2011).

Kiwi Farms has attracted much controversy for what is often billed as crowdsourced harassment—similar, perhaps, to China's "human flesh search engine" (*rénròu sōusuǒ,* 人肉搜索) that investigates and doxxes offenders in pursuit of vigilante justice. Although the site formally discourages harassment ("No trolling plans"; "THE KIWI FARMS [...] DOES NOT CONDONE 'SWATTING' OR ANY FORM OF HARASSMENT"), critics view such statements as disingenuous, since the very purpose of Kiwi Farms is to celebrate, if not directly organize, such acts. Its biggest enemies are networked transgender activists—no

strangers to campaigns of abuse directed against their enemies—led by Canadian Communist Twitch streamer Clara "Keffals" Sorrenti. Most news coverage of Kiwi Farms focuses on either the harassment angle or the information-security angle, i.e., the back-and-forth struggles to deplatform or protect the site. A *Wired* article (Cross 2023) goes deeper than most, identifying an "ethical minefield" and "classic rights conflict" that forces adversaries either to advocate broader corporate or governmental censorship, or to content themselves with merely inconveniencing Kiwi Farms users.

If the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) represents Freedom of Speech in this conflict, then CESNUR represents Freedom of Religion—the second of Franklin D. Roosevelt's (1882–1945) Four Freedoms—in the conflict over "cults." This, too, involves a classic rights conflict, with the price of freedom being tolerance for abusive groups. As Rosita Šorytė (2025) points out, Wahid Azal, perhaps counterintuitively, sides with the anti-cult movement. If heretofore, anti-cult groups could be roughly divided into mainstream-religious and secular varieties, then Wahid represents an emerging third wing that Šorytė dubs "New Age" (although he deplores the label). For Wahid, cults are distinguished not only by their lack of genuine spiritual inspiration, but also by the "problem of authoritarianism" (Azal 2025k, 87)—Wahid characterizes himself as anti-authoritarian (Azal 2025k, 9)—in which divine law is reduced to the arbitrary dictates of the leader (Azal 2025k, 59, 66).

The immediate context for his stance is his opposition to the Ahmadi Religion for Peace and Light (AROPL, but Wahid often writes "AROLP" or even "ARLOP"), founded in 2015 by Egyptian-American documentary videographer and putative *mahdī* Abdullah Hashem (b. 1983; not to be confused with the far larger Ahmadiyya movement, founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, 1835–1908). To convey some notion of Hashem's teachings (and perhaps, his merits as *mahdī*), when asked for a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, he proposed a "giant *mubāhala*" (mutual execration) between delegations of Jewish and Muslim leaders, recapitulating the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:17–40). That is, each side should erect a wooden altar, sacrifice a bull, and call down fire from heaven. "If fire consumes the offering of Israel, in front of the whole world, then everybody should immediately convert to Judaism," or else Islam, in case its altar blazes instead. If nothing happens, then the two sides could consider third religions, or else agree to live together peacefully

in a secular society (The Mahdi Has Appeared 2023, 22:00). Wahid discovered AROPL on Facebook soon after the group's founding, when someone linked to it on a now-defunct Shi'ite *'irfān* list he co-moderated (Azal 2025l, 54), and has since devoted several books to its condemnation.

Wake Up! (Azal 2025k) centers on purely theological objections, although its conclusion, "ARLOP as a Sabbatean-Frankist Black Mass," returns us to familiar territory. The first essay in a follow-up volume, *The Goal of the Unwise* (Azal 2025l)—the title lampoons Hashem's *magnum opus*, *The Goal of the Wise* (2022)—introduces the role of CESNUR. *The Goal of the Wisecrack* is Wahid's response to a serialization of Šorytė's article in CESNUR's online magazine, *Bitter Winter*. He accuses her of "cheap polemic masquerading as scholarship [...] racist Orientalist ridicule [of him], cult-apologist propaganda, and narrative warfare" (Azal 2025aa, 3). *Against the Postmodern Germ* (Azal 2025gg; additional chapter at Azal 2025b) expands the discussion (and the conspiracy) to include cannabis journalist Chris Bennett, whose reportage Wahid perceives to be reliant on, if not commissioned by, CESNUR.

What, in the eyes of Azal, makes AROPL a "cult" in the pejorative sense? To begin with, Hashem is no genuine *mahdī*, but a nihilistic, antinomian tyrant who practices "psychospiritual manipulation" (Azal 2025l, xviii) extending to "sexual abuse, coercive abortions, blood oaths, and *demands for murder*" (Azal 2025aa, 15). Wahid warns that Hashem is poised to become another Jim Jones (1931–1978), David Koresh (1959–1993), or Shoko Asahara (1955–2018; Azal 2025k, xxvii). He registers no surprise at the police raid of AROPL's headquarters in Crewe, Cheshire, on suspicion of human trafficking and sexual offenses (Azal 2026k). Furthermore, he claims that Hashem has illegitimately appropriated a predecessor movement—that of Iraqi seer Ahmed al-Hasan—in much the same way that Bahā'u'llāh usurped the lineage of the Bāb (Azal 2025l, xiv–xv).

Wahid also accuses "this fiend" of plagiarizing "quite a fair bit of material from our publicized writings whilst totally dumbing them down" (Azal 2025k, xv), such as "the claim put into the mouth of Ahmad al-Hasan that each mahdi is tied to a planet" (Azal 2025l, 59), which Wahid believes to have been inspired by his translation of Suhrawardī's *Spiritual Influxes and Sanctifications* (Azal 2025g). According to Azal, Hashem borrows not only from Wahid, but from such disparate sources as the gnostic *Apocryphon of John* and *Va-Avo Hayom el ha-Ayin* (*And I*

Came Today to the Spring), a Sabbatean text attributed to Jonathan Eybeschütz (1690–1764) that supplied Hashem with "motifs of erotic mysticism, messianic self-deification, antinomian inversion of religious law together with apocalyptic Gnostic cosmology" (Azal 2025l, 58–9, 66–7). If Wahid's suspicions of plagiarism seem intrinsically unlikely, and the similarities merely thematic, we are reminded that AROPL benefits from the vast resources of CESNUR (Azal 2025k, 64–5); thus Hashem need not have studied any of this material himself. On the other hand, it is not unthinkable that he read Gershom Scholem as a religion major at Indiana University / Purdue.

Wake Up! castigates the "Western Ivory Tower" for promoting "an extremely kooky NRM cult" (i.e., AROPL) via "a carefully executed perception management campaign" (Azal 2025k, xii). The scholars involved are thought to be motivated by "some kind of research opportunity to fill up the details of their professional CVs" (Azal 2025k, 101). *The Goal of the Unwise* identifies CESNUR as the major offending body, and the Catholic Church as its puppet-masters. After all, CESNUR's co-founder and managing director, Massimo Introvigne, is a former officer of the Alleanza Cattolica, a conservative lay association (Introvigne 2008).

Šorytė—who, by the way, is married to Introvigne—expresses some confusion as to whether CESNUR is supposed to be funding the cults, or vice versa. According to Azal, CESNUR seems to invest in cult start-ups, which are then expected to produce a return on investment, perhaps as the equivalent of offshore shell companies (Azal 2025l, 19, 21–2). At the same time, the cults serve a political function in the imperialist struggle to weaken and divide non-Western societies. This fits the classic modus operandi of the Frankists, who "infiltrate and play all sides of a given equation against the proverbial middle," and were welcomed into the Church as "useful long-term assets to be deployed as cover in its own agendas" (Azal 2025l, 10, 14).

Following anti-cult writer Luigi Corvaglia, *The Goal of the Wisecrack* situates CESNUR within a "machinery of influence" staffed by a "transnational web of lawyers, pseudo-academics, and lobbyists" who weaponize the language of religious freedom to defend cults "useful to Empire" like AROPL and the Bahā'īs, while attacking critics like Wahid (Azal 2025aa, 6, 8, 10), apparently because his critique of reincarnation poses a structural threat to AROPL's theology (Azal 2025aa, 21, 23). *Against the Postmodern Germ* describes how "[y]ounger or peripheral academics—particularly in Islamic Studies—often find CESNUR-linked

venues welcoming, collegial, and comparatively easy to publish in," only to experience pressure to conform to certain ideological norms (Azal 2025gg, 39).

Like many anti-cult writers, Wahid observes that CESNUR and its affiliated scholars have entered cozy relationships with the NRMs they study, when they should pay more attention to "survivor" accounts (Azal 2025gg, 17, 19). He perceives a conflict of interest in CESNUR's dual role as both a research hub and an activist channel (Azal 2025aa, 20), resulting in "hybrid texts that oscillate between scholarship and advocacy" (Azal 2025gg, 18). He also speaks of a "moderation paradigm" and an "academic civility trap" (Azal 2025gg, 38–9) that discourage criticism. These are old controversies, and I acknowledge that the anti-cult position deserves to be taken seriously. At the same time, CESNUR scholars (and NRM researchers more generally; CESNUR is not as dominant in the field as Wahid imagines) are very diverse in their perspectives and approaches. Azal (2025gg, 20) sees CESNUR's pluralism as selective, not extending to rival ideologies. However, critics of the organization have occasionally spoken at its conferences, which are in any case generally open to new participants. (Wahid could have submitted.)

Wahid also complains of a "double epistemic standard" by which his religious epiphanies are treated less respectfully than, say, Hashem's (Azal 2025aa, 93). I recognize the difficulty, and wonder (for example) whether it is arbitrary of me to assume that no sane person thinks that Chris Chan is really Jesus, or to treat Bahā'u'llāh differently from Emperor Norton (who likewise wrote the world leaders of his day, inviting them to accept his supposed station). I cannot pretend to neutrality, but realize that my personal opinions are of limited interest. When some overbold soul lays claim to the dignities due a Jesus or a Muhammad, despite lacking the virtues or accomplishments of these worthies, I generally try to keep a straight face and let the bombast speak for itself, although I am not above the occasional "wisecrack."

Wahid protests CESNUR's practices of "deadnaming, stigmatizing, or ridiculing critics' identities and beliefs" (Azal 2025aa, 94). In particular, he criticizes Šorytė for mentioning the birth name of transgender anti-cultist Be Scofield (Azal 2025aa, 50). However, Wahid not only deadnames ex-Bahā'ī D.C. Shepard, but regularly mocks their (i.e., Shepard's) transgenderism to the point of vulgarity. Wahid further accuses Šorytė of violating journalistic ethics in the use of stereotypes (Azal 2025aa, 53) but ignores these principles himself.

He dismisses her as a polemicist, but resorts to "polemical hyperbole" and "deliberately fiery language" in his own monographs, and even faults her for taking these flourishes seriously (Azal 2025aa, 81). He complains that she quotes him selectively to "maximize strangeness," as when she recounts his dream of "ritual *tongue-piercing* with the Zulfiqar (don't know where she got that from)" (Azal 2025aa, 71). Šorytė distorts nothing; the previous section provides multiple citations for the dream, which Wahid professes not to remember. She supposedly appeals to racist Orientalist tropes by overemphasizing his entheogen use and Crowleyan influences, "even connecting me to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*" (Azal 2025aa, 31 and 76). I discuss all these elements at some length above, and do not think I have exaggerated their importance to his thought. If Šorytė "imputes dangerousness" to Wahid and "suggests police-report implications" (Azal 2025aa, 21–2), then she agrees with many—including his mother.

Wahid objects to being pathologized through the deployment of psychiatric labels like "delusional" or "paranoid" (Azal 2025aa, 55, 77–9). While some of the passages quoted above may seem textbook examples of these symptoms, religious delusion is notoriously difficult to distinguish from ordinary belief, whether culturally commonplace or eccentric. Likewise, paranoia is defined as a *false* belief. (Chris Chan is not paranoid; a vast conspiracy dedicated to his humiliation demonstrably exists). In any case, Wahid's point is that such *ad hominem* attacks avoid the substance of his critique. "The very charge of irrationality and fanaticism hurled at critics mirrors the cultic irrationality CESNUR works to sanitize" (Azal 2025aa, 4).

Against the Postmodern Germ had its genesis in Wahid's observation (Azal 2025gg, 4–35, 37, 40–1, 77–8 n8) that Chris Bennett (2025b) borrows from Bahaipedia (entry for "Jelal Azal"), which in turn relies on Moojan Momen (1991). Bennett, whose reportage normally focuses on marijuana, had questioned Wahid's 2014 claim to have obtained a fatwā from Grand Ayatollah Muhammad-Sadiq Rohani (1926–2022) declaring the use of plant-based psychedelics to be *halāl* (Bennett 2025a). Their exchanges ultimately degenerate into proctological invective (see Bennett 2025c). Wahid also mentions a 2021–2022 disagreement on Facebook over whether the active ingredient in *haoma* was marijuana (Azal 2026p, 2:30).

Bennett states that he "had no knowledge or contact with" CESNUR before researching his articles; however, at some point he corresponded with Introvigne

(Bennett 2025d; Azal 2025gg, 24–5). Wahid takes this as evidence (a "smoking gun") that CESNUR had commissioned Bennett to write the series in the first place. "Long before Bennett ever typed a word about *fatwās*, psychedelics, or my spiritual vocation," he asserts, "CESNUR had already established a template for depicting me," namely my own 2011 paper surveying Bahā'ī and Subud dissent (Azal 2025gg, 25). Although fewer than a hundred words of it were about Wahid, he has clearly never forgotten them, and even burlesques them in *mathnawi* form:

> Old Bei Dawei's paper set the key,
> A prototype of how to frame out me:
> "Paranoid yet erudite," one-man sect,
> A file to flag, to pity, then reject (Azal 2025gg, 366).

As if to confirm his suspicions, Momen—whom Wahid despises for diminishing Azalī history in favor of a Bahā'ī-centric narrative—cites my paper in a 2018 referee report for the journal *Die Welt des Islams*, in which he recommends the rejection of Wahid's article, "The Organizational Hierarchy of the Bābīs during the Period of Subh-i-Azal's Residency in Baghdad (1852–1863)" (in Azal 2025gg, 63 ff n7). This incident "provides incontrovertible evidence that I had already been on CESNUR's radar for several years prior to the review, and possibly even longer" (Azal 2025gg, 70). However, Momen has no discernible connection to CESNUR. As for Bennett,

> No journalist working alone [...] would naturally excavate such a vast, obscure, multi-decade digital footprint [as Wahid's]—unless they be an obsessed stalker or a professional operator, which CESNUR is. Yet this is precisely what CESNUR-affiliated networks are known for (and what Bei Dawei did on CESNUR's behalf in the '00s): assembling dossiers on critics of their favoured groups, maintaining internal memory across decades, and recycling these materials whenever a public opportunity arises to discredit a dissident voice (Azal 2025gg, 356).

I may be able to shed some light on this. Rather than being assigned to the task of opposition research by CESNUR, I came up with the topic entirely on my own, as with the present paper. I doubt CESNUR organizers even knew or cared about Wahid in those days, although I imagine he is well known to its board by now. For that matter, I was not very interested in him either—he was something of an outlier relative to the other ex-Bahā'īs. In retrospect, I acknowledge that my précis could have been improved upon; to begin with, I neglected to note the founding of the NUR-FSO a few years earlier. Whether my paper influenced Bennett or Šorytė, I cannot say, but it is at least plausible that they arrived at their conclusions about Wahid independently.

Wahid theorizes that "once an outlet with CESNUR's audience canonizes an antagonist, future scholarly exchange will be pre-filtered by that persona" (Azal 2025aa, 25). The mechanism by which this takes place is a kind of viral memesis:

> Now, by *postmodern germ* I mean a class of semiotic pathogens that propagate through informational ecologies without stable authorship, ontological grounding, or discursive accountability. These germs operate not as intentional fabrications but as autonomous viral entities—replicators—whose survival depends on their ability to exploit cognitive vulnerabilities, platform architectures, and cultural anxieties (Azal 2025gg, 2).

"Postmodernity" here refers "not to an abstract philosophical movement but to a media ecosystem characterized by rapid replication, superficial referencing, collapsed expertise, and the dissolution of epistemic boundaries" (Azal 2025gg, 7). This applies especially to online discourse:

> In the digital environment, the authority of a narrative is no longer determined by its evidentiary depth but by its *searchability*. The most accessible narrative becomes the most credible [...] This algorithmic sedimentation of bias is one of the core mechanisms of parapolitical disinformation: the technological amplification of inherited narratives whose origins lie in selective historiography (Azal 2025gg, 8).

Wahid goes on to describe a "collapse of *source hierarchies,*" with tertiary sources like wiki pages dominating even academic discussion; "*mediated visibility*," which advantages groups like the Bahā'īs with greater "discursive infrastructure," financial resources, and "institutional amplification"; and "genre drift," e.g., when "polemical narratives cross from academic writing into journalistic prose" (Azal 2025gg, 9). He writes of "*discursive inertia,*" "*affective plausibility*," "*epistemic foreclosure,*" and other such concepts, which boil down to the observation that repetition and gatekeeping allow certain ideas to become the default assumptions.

If all this seems remote from the issue of lolcows, consider that one of Wahid's main criticisms of CESNUR concerns "the oscillation between quasi-academic summaries, sectarian apologetic language, and conversational snark" (Azal 2025gg, 357). Šorytė's "wisecrack" is not any specific joke, but her entire article, which "offers not serious argument but a caricature"; "not innocent wit," but "the tactical deployment of irony and mockery as weapons of epistemic violence," through a "technology of silencing" that "translates serious intellectual, theological, and ethical objections into fodder for a laugh-track" (Azal 2025aa, 3–4).

Of late, Wahid has begun reevaluating CESNUR's work (Azal 2026o, 2026p, and 2026q) and has found much value in its early scholarship (Azal 2026q, 3:00). He even praises Introvigne, whom he had earlier called "the devil incarnate" (Azal 2025aa, 81). Interestingly, CESNUR's liberal Atlanticist ethos is now ascribed to unconscious cultural bias rather than any explicit conspiratorial aims. (The Sabbatean-Frankists go unmentioned.) While we may debate the details, surely few of us would claim to have transcended the limitations of our milieux.

Wahid's observations about online discourse are well taken, even if he exaggerates the role of CESNUR. Like the Swedenborgian and Tibetan afterlives—or even this present life, according to some theologies—the internet is a fluid realm that provides almost anything desired, whether edifying or corrupting. In a sense, whatever we encounter turns out to be a reflection of our own minds. Given this psychological dimension, lolcows take on new significance, perhaps as projections of some deep unconscious collective yearning (as in Jung's Shadow archetype). Even their transgressions assume a numinous quality. This fascination is one of the most difficult aspects of the lolcow phenomenon to convey. At the end of episode 85 of the *Comprehensive History* (i.e., the season finale), Geno Samuel, reflecting on Chris Chan's transformation from "an insignificant and ill-functioning individual into an icon of significance," notes the role of Christorians who feel "compelled to spread the word." At that very moment (109:50), in a departure from his usual filming style, he fixes the camera on himself. I join him in his confession, and hold out hope that these niche interests nevertheless touch on something universal.

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