DIVINE POLITY:
THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE UNITED NATIONS

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Abstract

This thesis argues that in order to understand more fully the engagement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the United Nations—specifically NGOs that express a religious or faith-based commitment—we must consider both their actions and the rationale behind them, the *what* as well as the *why*. To study the underlying rationale, the thesis introduces the concept of the *organizational substrate*, which offers a new analytical tool to draw out this undertheorized dimension of religious NGOs (Chapter 2). The substrate complements the analytical tools currently deployed by social scientists and goes beyond descriptions of organizational behavior to examine the internal rationale underpinning the behavior. The internal rationale is explored through a focused analysis of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office (BIC). This organization is selected because of its reputation as a valued and effective contributor in UN fora; its seventy-year history of engagement (1945-2015); and its scriptural engagement with questions of politics and world order. The thesis also contributes to the nascent scholarship about UN-accredited religious NGOs outside of the Christian tradition. Having identified the constitutive elements of the BIC's organizational substrate, using a hermeneutic and historical approach, the thesis develops a distinct periodization of the BIC's engagement from 1945-2015. The periodization provides a historical framework (though not a historical analysis) for examining the manner in which the substrate shapes action across different historical circumstances. Each of the four historical periods offers evidence of the salience of the organizational substrate for understanding the operation of the NGO. The first period, 1945-1970 (Chapter 3) enables us to see the manner in which the substrate frames the BIC's rationale for engagement with the UN and its understanding of the UN in the context of the broader processes of civilizational, social and political evolution. In the second period, 1970-1986 (Chapter 4), the thesis demonstrates the pivotal role of Bahá'í authoritative structures in articulating, elucidating, and socializing the substrate of the organization. Between 1986 and 2008 (Chapter 5), the substrate-based analysis reveals a distinct epistemology and methodology—associated with the conception and pursuit of peace. During the final period, 2008-2015 (Chapter 6), the substrate undergirds the shift to an explicitly discursive, organic approach to engagement in UN processes, and a reconceptualization of the terms of engagement with the UN. This thesis goes beyond social scientific approaches to the study of religious actors at the

UN, to demonstrate that knowledge and action require understanding of the distinct rationality of each NGO. It is by identifying and observing the operation of the organizational substrate that this pivotal and foundational element of NGO engagement at the UN comes to light.

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Abbreviations

BIC	Bahá'í International Community
BIC OPI	Bahá'í International Community – Office of Public Information
BWC	Bahá'í World Centre
CONGO	Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FBO	Faith-based organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSA	National Spiritual Assembly
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OIC	Organization for Islamic Cooperation
RNGO	Religious non-governmental organization
UHJ	Universal House of Justice
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNNGLS	United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service
UN OPI	United Nations Office of Public Information
UNW	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
US NSA	National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States
US-Canada NSA	National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada

Introduction

This thesis examines the nature and expression of the internal logic employed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaging with the United Nations. Specifically, it focuses on organizations that express a religious or faith-based commitment in their work. I argue that in order to understand more fully the engagement of these NGOs in the political arena, we must consider both their actions and the rationale underpinning them—the "what" as well as the "why." To study the underlying rationale, I introduce the concept of the *organizational substrate*, a new analytical construct, which draws out this undertheorized dimension of religious NGOs (RNGOs). I use the organizational substrate to study the manner in which the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office (hereafter "BIC")—a long-standing, active, and respected RNGO at the UN[1]—engages in this international forum. Two key research questions framed the exploration in this thesis: (1) How can we understand the internal rationale of organizations, specifically RNGOs, engaging with the UN?; (2) How has the BIC's internal rationale shaped its 70-year relationship with the UN? This thesis sheds light on the methodological question of how to study the religious dimension of NGOs active at the UN, and of civil society organizations more broadly. It also opens new ground in addressing the public engagement of the Bahá'í community.

The central concerns of this thesis emerge from my initial study of religious RNGOs at the UN, conducted between 2000 and 2002, as a graduate student. The results of this exploratory survey were published in *Voluntas: The International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* (Berger 2003) and constitute one of the first studies of

[1] A 2002 report by Religion Counts titled *Religion and Public Policy at the UN* noted that when interviewees were asked to identify key religious actors at the UN, two groups stood out (after the Holy See whose status as Permanent Observer is unique): the Quakers and the Bahá'is—"two religious NGOs often praised for UN work" (Religion Counts 2002, 14). The report further noted: "These faiths share some common traits that may explain their high regard in UN circles. Both hold basic tenets consistent with UN ideals—for Quakers an end to war and conflict, for Bahá'ís the establishment of a peaceful and equitable world. Both seek to build consensus on issues by engaging all concerned parties. Perhaps most important, both operate as facilitators rather than partisan advocates" (Religion Counts 2002, 37). The report also noted that the Bahá'í International Community is "especially active" at the UN (Religion Counts 2002, 41).

this organizational domain.[2] Research about religious, spiritual, and faith-based[3] non-governmental and civil society organizations has grown tremendously in the past 15 years—propelled by interest, need, and concern. Interest—because the increasingly public role of religious organizations challenges assumptions (largely held in the West) about the place of religion in a modern, secular society; need—because religious organizations are showing themselves to be effective providers of critical social services in regions and among populations not reached by other means; and concern—in the face of growing fundamentalism and radicalization, couched in religious terms and at times finding expression through violent means. Leading scholars of international politics have called religion one of the "most influential factors in world affairs" (Shah, Stepan, and Toft 2012, 3).

Any study pertaining to religion and religious organizations must situate itself within contemporary debates about the nature of religion, the religion-secular binary, and the changing role of religion in the modern world. The idea of "religion" is a contested one, given its European genealogy, and its foundation in a distinctly Christian theology (Dubuisson 2003; King 1999; Masuzawa 2005). The term has been used to denote various concepts such as: ideas, values, groupings, identity, and institutions, among others (Carrette and Miall 2017; Deneulin and Rakodi 2011). Scholars have explored the division of life into "religious" and "secular" domains, questioning the intellectual underpinnings and assumptions driving these distinctions (Casanova 1994; Asad 1993, 2003; Taylor 2007; Hurd 2008). These debates are explored in Chapter 1, which carries

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[2] In 2002, Religion Counts produced a report titled *Religion and Public Policy at the UN,* which examined how religion operates at the UN, the relationship between religious and secular actors, and highlighted best practices among religious groups at the UN (Religion Counts 2002). See Footnote 1.

[3] These terms are used interchangeably. The task of defining a religious organization is an elusive one as there is no single agreed-upon definition of religion. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will follow my own definition of religious NGOs as "organizations whose identity and mission are derived from a religious or spiritual tradition and which operate as registered or unregistered, non-profit, voluntary organizations" (Berger 2003, 16). The term "NGO" is commonly used in the UN context and tends to imply more direct engagement with advocacy and policy processes. The term "faith-based" is considered more inclusive of entities that do not affiliate with a particular religion (the World Peace Prayer Society, for example), it also tends to be used by humanitarian and relief-focused organizations. Terminology also varies in different contexts: RNGO is a term used by organizations active within the UN, while "faith-based" is often used by national governments and development agencies. Some organizations prefer the term "spiritual" rather than "religious"; such organizations generally do not identify with Western religious institutional structures and tend to include Buddhist and Hindu organizations for example. For a more detailed discussion, see Berger, 2016. Note that the UN itself does not differentiate between "religious" and "secular" NGOs.

out a literature review, in order to highlight the significance and contributions made by this study and to clarify the need for an organizational substrate—the central contribution of this thesis.

This study does not seek to define religion as such. Rather, it is interested in the internal logic of organizations that self-identify as "religious" (or "spiritual" or "faith-based"). It approaches the RNGO as a rational actor—one that operates on the basis of conscious, deliberate, and reasoned logic. It neither equates "religious" reasoning with irrationality nor does it assume, *a priori*, particular similarities or differences with other types of rationality. Too often the assumption is made that religious engagement in international affairs is either a tool for proselytization (and hence approached with suspicion by secular actors) or that it endorses the logic of international affairs. By examining the internal rationale of a religious organization that has consultative status at the UN, I am seeking to discern the underlying logic that permeates the organization's understanding of society, of its place and role within society, and of the organizational behaviors that embody that role. I argue that this helps to resolve one of the main tensions in literature about RNGOs—namely, what constitutes "religious" actions when much of religious NGOs' engagement is indistinguishable from that of secular ones, especially in the humanitarian context. I intend to show that the underlying logic and meaning attached to actions by their protagonists is what renders these actions "religious"—it is the difference between washing one's body and the sacrament of baptism or ritual purification, between dieting and fasting, between organizing a community gathering and fostering local capacity for peaceful deliberation and decision-making. It may be helpful to think of this type of rationality in terms of "counter-rationality"—a term used by political scientist Wendy Brown to denote a "different figuration of human beings, citizenship, economic life, and the political" (Brown 2005, 59).

The notion that ideas play a motivational role in human and organizational behavior and in the construction of particular rationales has been demonstrated by scholars across a range of disciplines. Max Weber famously argued that one of the factors enabling modern capitalism to arise and take root in the West may have been a Protestant (particularly Calvinist) work ethic (Weber 1930). Robin Gill, Christian

theologian and ethicist, in his three-volume study of theology and society challenges sociology's tendency to treat theology as epiphenomenal, and seeks to demonstrate the manner in which theology and the ideas derived therefrom are socially significant (Gill 2012, 2013a, 2013b). International relations scholar, Kathryn Sikkink, notes the central role of NGOs as carriers of ideas and values. She argues, for example: "the emergence of human rights policy is not a simple victory of ideas of interests. Rather it demonstrates the power of ideas to reshape understandings of human interest" (Sikkink 1993, 140). In their 15-volume United Nations Intellectual History Project series, Louis Emmerij, Richard Jolly, and Thomas G. Weiss posit: "ideas and concepts are a main driving force in human progress, and they arguably have been one of the most important contributions of the [United Nations]" (Emmerji, Jolly, and Weiss 2005, xiii).

The UN provides an important vantage point for the study of religious organizations in international affairs. Indeed, the presence of religion and religious actors at the UN is more prominent today than at any other time during its history and takes a multitude of forms including institutional, normative, operational, and discursive. Among the most prominent religious actors is a growing body of NGOs that either self-identify as "religious," "spiritual," or "interfaith" and/or whose missions is rooted in the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions. Of the over 4,500 NGOs formally associated with the UN (a partnership termed "consultative status") approximately 10% fall into the category of religious NGOs (Carrette and Miall 2017). In what was the first systematic study of RNGOs at the UN, I highlighted the importance of motivation as an area of research, noting that a key parameter that sets religious NGOs apart from their secular counterparts is the rootedness of their missions and approaches in the teachings of their respective faiths (Berger 2003). The motivational dimension was not discussed in any detail, as the aim of the study was a broader exploratory analysis of a new organizational field. My thesis builds on the groundwork laid by this initial study and draws on the growing body of scholarship about the engagement of RNGOs at the UN. It seeks to extend the motivational issue into a deeper organizational formation and recognizes the need for a clearer conceptual analysis, which the present thesis seeks to address.

Research on RNGO-UN engagement has followed a number of lines of inquiry: among them, empirical studies mapping the field and distinguishing it from the larger body of UN-accredited NGOs (Berger 2003; Petersen 2010); historical accounts of the involvement of religious actors at the UN (Lehmann 2016; Rossi 2006); studies of (largely conservative) RNGOs in advocacy and policy development (Butler 2000, 2006; Boehle 2010a; Haynes 2013; Karam 2014; NORAD 2013); exploration of the UN's interaction with religious actors (Boehle 2010b; Religion Counts 2002; Weiner 2010); institutional reports of UN agency engagement with "faith-based organizations" (UNICEF 2012; UNDP 2014; UNHCR 2014; UNFPA 2009; UNAIDS 2009); case studies of specific RNGOs or religions at the UN (Atwood 2012; Beittinger-Lee 2017b; Beittinger-Lee and Miall 2017; Carrette 2013, 2017; Kayaoğlu 2011; Lehmann 2016; Rossi 2006). These studies have begun to acknowledge that religious beliefs and ideas motivate religious organizations to seek a formal relationship with the UN and that they play a role in shaping the selection of issues that organizations pursue at the UN. Other scholars such as Gerard Clarke have examined faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the United Kingdom and developed a typology of the ways in which FBOs "deploy faith" in their social and political engagement (Clarke 2008). What distinguishes this thesis is the exploration of the rationale used by religious organizations, as derived from religious sources, in the context of the organization's engagement with the UN. It formulates an original framework for analyzing the religious organization's work, in this case—in the context of the UN.

Methodology: Approaching the Subject

In approaching the BIC's relationship to the UN and the necessity for an organizational substrate, this study seeks to make a contribution to the methodological question of how to study RNGOs at the UN. Scholars have approached the study of RNGOs in various ways. For example, Jeffrey Haynes, in his book *Faith-based Organizations at the United Nations*, examines the manner in which faith-based organizations endeavor to influence debate and decision-making in this international arena (Haynes 2013). However, while Haynes acknowledges the motivational power of "faith-based worldviews and values," his research does not seek to interrogate the rationality constructed by these worldviews. Haynes carries out his research using a social scientific methods; this thesis sets itself within the broader context of religious studies

in order to identify the internal logic of NGOs expressing a religious or faith-based commitment. Karsten Lehmann's sociological study *Religious NGOs in International Relations* examines the dynamic construction of concepts of the "religious" and "secular" by two Catholic RNGOs—Pax Romana and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA)—in the context of their engagement with the UN (Lehmann 2016). Although Lehmann traces the theological underpinnings of the organizations' reading of international affairs, the UN, and human rights (illuminating the relationship between beliefs and action), he does not offer an analytical tool for conducting this investigation in a systematic manner. Jeremy Carrette and Hugh Miall's edited volume, *Religion, NGOs and the United Nations* uses historical, conceptual, quantitative, and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive description of RNGOs at the UN and to document how RNGOs seek to establish legitimacy and to influence the UN. While the study, among other things, aims at understanding the "rationale for religious involvement in the UN" (Trigeaud 2017, 2), it does not offer a close reading of how such rationale is constructed, expressed, and embodied by organizations engaging with the UN. I will address the abovementioned studies in greater detail in Chapter 1. What this thesis seeks to do is to offer a new understanding of NGO engagement by introducing the organizational substrate, which I examine according to the five considerations below.

1. Analysis of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office

The question of the internal rationale of religious NGOs at the UN is explored through a focused analysis of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office (hereafter "BIC") seventy-year engagement with the UN. I have chosen the BIC as the focal point for study for a number of reasons. First, the BIC's relationship with the UN dates back to 1945 and provides a rich historical record for study.[4] Second, the BIC is an active and well-respected NGO at the UN and among its NGO peers, as attested to

[4] The BIC was granted Consultative Status (Category II) with ECOSOC in 1970. The organization also has consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as accreditation with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI). The Bahá'í International Community maintains United Nations offices in New York and Geneva, as well as regional offices in Addis Ababa, Brussels, and Jakarta.

by independent reports[5] as well as its history of being elected to leadership positions of numerous and prominent NGO committees. Third, no study has focused on the BIC's engagement with the UN.[6] Fourth, the BIC is in a unique position as it represents the perspective of an *entire* religious community to the UN.[7] The international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, called on the BIC to be "the windows of the Bahá'í community to the world," displaying "ever more clearly the unifying principles, the hope, the promise, the majesty of the emerging order" (UHJ 1986b). Fifth, the founding of the Bahá'í Faith in mid-nineteenth century Iran is significant as the religion fits neither the mold of an "ancient religion" nor the category of "new religious movements," which are generally considered to have emerged in the mid-twentieth century. Its history is contemporary with the rise of nation states and the international global order; its sacred texts address extensively, among other things, the nature and emergence of a "new World Order,"[8] the institutional, social, and spiritual requisites of a global society, and the characteristics of a "Divine Polity,"[9] which embodies a distinct

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[5] See Footnote 1.

[6] One exception to this is a thesis completed in the political science department at Fudan University, China (Wu 2012); the work has not been translated into English. The literature review will address studies that have focused on specific aspects of BIC's engagement with the UN (see, Ghanea 2003; Negele 2016).

[7] There are more than 5 million Bahá'ís in the world. The Bahá'í Faith is established in virtually every country and in many dependent territories and overseas departments of countries. Bahá'ís reside in well over 100,000 localities. There are currently 188 councils at the national level that oversee the work of communities (BWC 2017).

[8] The Bahá'í use of the term "new world order" predates the use of the term by Woodrow Wilson in his *Fourteen Points* in 1918, by about 60 years. Bahá'u'lláh states, "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, ch. 70).

[9] Shoghi Effendi, the leader of the Bahá'í Community from 1921 to1957, uses this term twice in his writings to differentiate the global political community being established by Bahá'ís as they strive to put into practice the unifying teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi writes: "Let [Bahá'ís] refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions. Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship... Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá'u'lláh, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 64). In his historical treatise, *God Passes By* ([1944] 1999), he elaborates the "essential elements of that Divine polity which [Bahá'u'lláh] proclaimed" (Shoghi Effendi [1944] 1999, 282). Among them: "The independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition; the oneness of the entire human race...the basic unity of all religions; the condemnation of all forms of prejudice...the equality of men and women...the introduction of compulsory education; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty; the institution of a world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes between nations; the exaltation of work, performed in the spirit of service, to the rank of

relationship between religion and secular authority (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 64). Sixth, most studies of religious organizations at the UN have focused on Christian organizations, as these comprise the overwhelming majority of UN-accredited RNGOs. As such, most of what we know about religious agency in this arena is informed by a normatively Christian understanding of religion and its involvement in international affairs. Seventh, since 2001, with the dawning interest in religion and international affairs, scholars have largely focused on disruptive and violent expressions of the religious impulse (or interpretations of religion). This trend has reinforced the notion of the "irrationality" of religiously motivated actions, as well as the assumption of incompatibility of religion and politics. The role of religious organizations pursuing social change in a peaceful, law-abiding manner has received little attention (Clarke 2006).

While generalizing findings is a limitation of this focused approach, this case study allows us to probe the internal rationale of a religious organization outside of the Christian tradition. As such, it helps to identify language, categories, and concepts that may be relevant for organizations rooted in traditions others than Christianity, in so far as it explores correlations between internal logics of belief and the institutional engagement with the UN.

2. Hermeneutic Approach

In order to study the BIC's internal rationale, I construct a method that combines interpretivist, hermeneutical, and historical approaches to the study of religion. Interpretivist methodologies recognize the central role that shared meaning, language, and consciousness play in the construction of social reality. As such they are well suited to the study of the shared construction of meaning and of the resulting behavior that embodies this system of meaning.[10] Hermeneutic methodology emphasizes the

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worship; the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society, and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations; and the establishment of a permanent and universal peace..." (Shoghi Effendi [1944] 1999, 281–82).

[10] This is also referred to as "reflectivist methodology"—a term introduced by eminent American scholar of international relations, Robert Keohane, to describe a procedure that emphasizes the importance of "intersubjective meanings" of international institutional activity (Keohane 1988, 392). According to "reflective scholars" (as differentiated from "rationalist" scholars), how people *think about* institutional

importance of interpretation in understanding social reality. As scholars of international development Severine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi note in their detailed review of - scholarship about religion in development over the past thirty years: "Social reality is constituted by social practices and institutions that have meanings for those who participate in them" (Deneuline and Rakodi 2011, 50). This methodology recognizes the importance of the meanings people assign to their actions, including actions emanating from religious beliefs.

The hermeneutic approach enables me to go "inside" a religious philosophy in order to understand how it reads, negotiates, challenges, and interacts with the frameworks of broader society. In the course of this study, I also remain mindful of the hermeneutical principles outlined in the Bahá'í writings.[11] Canadian Sociologist Will van den Hoonaard, author of *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community in Canada* stresses the advantages of approaching the study of the Bahá'í community from an inductive perspective, which would embed "the research fully in the context of the meanings that Bahá'ís assign to the things they say and do" (van den Hoonaard 2001, 112). Furthermore, van den Hoonaard notes that such a perspective ensures that the "gathered data maintain a meaningful place in relationship to the wider belief system" (van den Hoonaard 2001, 112). The inductive approach enables me to focus on the question of meaning with respect to the practices of the BIC, including: the decision to engage with the UN, selection of issues on which to engage, and the selection of methods for engagement, among others. In this way, I seek to make a contribution to the theory and method of the study of religion as well as a contribution to the study of the Bahá'í community's engagement in the public sphere.

It is necessary to underline a further methodological issue in order to ensure clarification of the substrate. A substrate-based approach to the study of an RNGO

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norms and rules and the discourse they engage in, is as important as the measurement of their behavior. Social scientists have largely explained religion as a social phenomenon and examined its interaction with other variables (Deneulin and Rakodi 2011, 50). Deneulin and Rakodi argue that such approaches have led to a gross over-simplification of "complex and contested concepts, including religion." They posit that the study of religious organizations requires interpretivist methods in order to "portray the religious values and beliefs held by adherents, as well as the meaning of rituals in which they participate and symbols they use, through their eyes as far as possible" (Deneulin and Rakodi 2011, 52).

[11] The hermeneutical principles in the u writings are discussed on p. 63.

requires attentiveness to the particularism of the tradition, with which the organization identifies. This enables the organization to be studied in terms of concepts and framework that are meaningful to the tradition itself rather than those external to it. This is not to suggest that 'external' categories (e.g. in the sense that the categories of 'church' or 'faith' are external to the Buddhist tradition) cannot be meaningfully adapted and used to study other traditions. Rather, the intention is to enable to the particularities of a given tradition to inform the research and to enrich the understanding of the distinctive epistemology, teleology, ontology, and structure of a given tradition. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, invokes this approach when he states:

> Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men. In this most perfect balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard... (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, 198)

The sensitivity to the distinctiveness of the tradition informs the study of the BIC and is particularly relevant in the discussion of approaches to the study organizational rationale (e.g. the appropriateness of the discipline of theology in studying various traditions), the BIC's conception of peace, and its conception of religion. We can see this type of sensitivity in Robert Byrd's historical analysis of Quaker interventions in foreign policy (Byrd 1960), in which Quaker epistemology, ontology, and concepts internal to the tradition are used to structure and frame the analysis. I will return to Byrd's study throughout this thesis.

3. Historical Method

In order to study the seventy years of the BIC-UN relationship, I have organized the data into four periods: 1945-1970, 1970-1986, 1986-2008, and 2008-2015. The demarcation of historical periods is not an exact science as Robert Byrd points out in his periodization of the 300-year history of Quakers engagement in American foreign policy (Byrd 1960, 109). As Byrd states: "there must always be an element of the

arbitrary when history is divided into periods" (Byrd 1960, 109).[12] At the same time, however, Byrd notes that, "the principles and patterns of the Quaker approach . . . take on more meaning if attention is directed toward the development of these principles and patterns over the 300 years of Quaker history" (Byrd 109). The efficacy of this long-view approach is that the insights from each period are informed by the longer historical trajectory of engagement.[13] Karsten Lehmann's and Joseph S. Rossi's historical studies of Protestant and Catholic engagement respectively with the UN as well as Byrd's study, however, do not offer a picture of recent history in which civil society, including religious civil society, has flourished and sought to influence debates and decision making at all levels of society: Lehmann and Rossi end their history in the 1970s, while Byrd's study concludes with the formation of the UN in 1945. My thesis examines the history of engagement from 1945 through 2015, and offers a detailed examination of RNGO engagement during the 1990s (and onwards), a period which witnessed the rise of global civil society. My approach differs from Byrd, Rossi and Lehmann as my aims differ from theirs: my thesis is not a detailed historical study. Rather, my focus is on the expression of the substrate within a given historical period. This periodization renders my analytical framework more visible and operationally clear.

The periodized approach also enables a more nuanced examination of the substrate. Against the backdrop of ever-changing social and political circumstances—both in the broader society and within the Bahá'í community—it becomes possible to discern a common foundation for actions taken by the BIC. The periodized approach also reveals a broader set of insights about the operation of the substrate than would be apparent using a method that was not attentive to different periods in the history of engagement. Such insights include: (a) the developmental nature of the BIC-UN relationship; (b) the evolutionary and organic quality of the substrate; (c) the relationship between the

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[12] Byrd organized the history into six periods: 1647-1691: "Winning the Right to Differ"; 1691-1775: "The Protection and Enjoyment of their Differences"; 1775-1850: "An Uneasiness That Something More in Needed"; 1850-1914: "From the General to the Particular"; 1914-1945: "From Sins to Problems"; 1945-1960, "From Observer to Participant."

[13] While not focused on RNGOs specifically, Indian economist Devaki Jain's *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Justice* (2005) presents a periodized history of the efforts of women's civil society organizations and movements to influence the UN's development agenda between 1945 and 2005, and offers a powerful account of how women and social movements shaped thinking about development at the UN.

substrate and the socio-political context of organizational development; and, (d) the progressive embodiment of the substrate. The periodized approach enables me to demonstrate how the defining elements of each period are illuminated through the understanding of the substrate. The four historical periods outlined earlier are demarcated with reference to the authoritative letters of the Universal House of Justice (the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith),[14] historical data from *The Bahá'í World*,[15] as well as the annual reports of the BIC.

The organizational substrate cannot be studied in isolation, much in the same way that the expression of human DNA cannot be studied outside of a social and physical context. In each historical period, I explore the expression of the substrate with reference to distinct historical circumstances that shape the UN environment, civil society, and with attentiveness to the particular stage and characteristics of the Bahá'í community's development.

Finally, in assessing the methodological approach of this thesis, it is important to note that the work of the BIC has, from its earliest days, proceeded along two avenues: (a) involvement in significant global issues, including social and economic development, as well as human rights; and (b) defense of the Bahá'í community from persecution. Given the highly sensitive and confidential nature of the latter—involving life-and-death issues for Bahá'ís facing imprisonment, torture, and death and confidential exchanges between the BIC and relevant government entities, it is not possible to examine this particular area of engagement within the time frame of this thesis. But it will remain one for future scholars to examine in greater detail. Within the limits of this thesis, the issue will be noted in the broader context rather than in the detailed analysis.

4. Sources

In order to carry out the research, I have drawn on archival materials from the National Bahá'í Archives of the United States (Wilmette, Illinois), the archives of the Bahá'í

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[14] Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion of the Universal House of Justice and its role vis-à-vis the BIC.

[15] The *Bahá'í World* series (1926-2006) chronicles over eighty years of the history of the Bahá'í community, its thought, activities, and fundamental precepts.

International Community's United Nations Office (New York), the Dag Hammarskjold Library (United Nations Headquarters, New York), the archives of the Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs (Washington, DC), as well as personal archives of past and present representatives of the Bahá'í International Community.

Upon requesting access to the archives at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel, I was advised that the archives are not organized as a research facility but rather as a depository of resources and that it would not be feasible to undertake the research there myself. The Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice suggested that I seek the help of the Chief Operating Officer of the Bahá'í International Community's Office in New York. This help was granted. Before accessing archival documents housed in the Bahá'í archives listed, I formally sought (and obtained) permission from the relevant Bahá'í institutions. Other sources include published primary sources such as Bahá'í sacred texts (print and online); on-line sources such as the official website of the Bahá'í International Community (www.bic.org), the official website of the worldwide Bahá'í community (www.bahai.org), the BIC's YouTube channel, and the UN website. I also conducted open-ended interviews with past and present representatives of BIC, BIC delegates to various UN Commissions, as well as BIC staff. This empirical work stands alongside the broader empirical and historical scholarship of related fields of study, which will be outlined in Chapter 1.

5. Positionality

As a long-time member of the Bahá'í community, and someone who has worked at the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations office for eleven years (2004-2015), I am conscious of both the advantages and challenges associated with my positionality. On the one hand, I bring to the research two decades of lived experience of the Bahá'í community (in Canada, Japan, and the United States), its values, and structures; and perhaps a more nuanced understanding of the nature and aims of the community than those possessed by someone encountering it for the first time. At the same time, my membership in the community may suggest partiality toward some elements of the subject being studied, shaped as it is by a Bahá'í worldview. Yet many challenge the virtue of "objectivity" as the gold standard of scholarship as the production of

knowledge is always filtered through lived experience. Many studies of the various elements of the Bahá'í Faith have been conducted by Bahá'ís who have reflected on their position vis-à-vis the research subject (e.g. Crosson 2013; Farid-Arbab 2016; Karlberg 2004; Venters 2015). As Scott Thomas points out: "Neither secular reason nor theology provides a 'non-ideological space' from which to study the world or from which competing paradigms can be compared" (Thomas 2005, 77). My positionality does however inform a corrective to studies, which underplay the internal structures of RNGOs (hence its location in religious studies and not political science) and allows a continuous exchange between religious belief and engagement in political processes, which this study is seeking to address.

Outline of the Argument

This thesis argues that what I am calling the organizational substrate is required to understand the logic of BIC engagement with the UN, and the logic of NGOs more generally. In the case of RNGOs, the logic of engagement illuminates the nature and expression of the 'religious' dimension of NGO activity. The substrate calls attention to the construction of what I refer to as a 'divine polity'—a distinct, self-organized political community, whose actions are rooted in the principles and tenets of a particular religion or faith tradition. I use the term 'political' in its broader sense (rather than the narrower partisan sense) to denote the instruments and processes used by a given community to reach decisions about matters relating to social order and to issues confronting the community and society as a whole.[16] While the term 'divine polity' is used in the Bahá'í Writings to refer to the distinctive community being built by Bahá'ís as they strive to put into practice the teachings and precepts of the Bahá'í Faith, I use this more generally as a term of conjunction to bring together the question of faith tradition and its enactment within the UN sphere. This enables me to bring into conversation two seemingly disparate logics—that of a faith tradition and that of secular polity—in order to illuminate the nature and implications of this exchange and commingling at the UN.

[16] As Shahriar Razavi, writing about Bahá'í participation in public discourse, points out: "Any effort to contribute to the betterment of society sooner or later encounters the question of politics and needs to navigate it. In this regard, it is necessary to draw a clear distinction between, on the one hand, partisan political activity and, on the other, action and discourse aimed at bringing about constructive social change" (Razavi 2018, 173).

In order to support the central argument of this thesis—namely that the organizational substrate enables us to understand the logic of BIC engagement with the UN—I first establish the nature of the organizational substrate and demonstrate four ways in which it finds expression throughout the history of BIC-UN engagement. The history of this engagement is organized into four periods, each of which exhibits a distinct facet of the operation of the substrate: (a) the manner in which the substrate shapes the motivation for engagement with the UN; (b) the role of authority in articulating and socializing the substrate; (c) the manner in which the substrate shapes the conceptions of peace and the means for the pursuit of peace; and (d) the expression of the substrate in the organization's terms of engagement with the UN. The historical approach highlights the generative nature of the substrate, namely its capacity to shape organizational behavior in a way that responds—creatively yet consistently—to continually shifting socio-political contexts and circumstances. Chapters 5 and 6, which correspond to the two later periods of engagement, are considerably longer than Chapters 3 and 4, which correspond to earlier periods. This reflects the unfolding complexity of the BIC-UN engagement, in terms of the BIC's transition from an Observer NGO to an NGO in Consultative Status with the UN; the range of BIC's contributions to the UN, its agencies, and to global civil society; and the development of the worldwide Bahá'í community, in particular its national offices of external affairs, which, represented by the BIC, comprise an increasingly elaborate mechanism for engagement with society as a whole. Together, the chapters support the claim that the organizational substrate is vital to a more complete understanding of the manner in which NGOs, and especially those professing a religious commitment, operate at the UN.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I argue that in order to advance in our understanding of NGOs at the UN, we need to examine the internal logic and rationale that shapes their engagement in international affairs. In the case of RNGOs, this requires an analysis of the manner in which religious commitments shape this rationale. To do this, a new methodology is needed that goes beyond the limitations inherent in positivist approaches and Judeo-Christian frames of reference. This chapter locates the research question at the confluence of seminal debates in the field of religion including the changing role of religion in the modern world, the category of religion, the religion-

secular binary, the role of religion in the UN, and role of religious beliefs in motivating behavior. It assesses the contributions made by scholars across diverse disciplines to furthering the understanding of religion, and specifically religious NGOs at the UN. The final part of the chapter reviews current scholarship about the Bahá'í community that is examined in this thesis and its institutional presence at the UN.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical grounding and analytical framework for the study. I first discuss a number of macro-and micro-level approaches drawn from the fields of religion, philosophy, and sociology that have been used to study underlying structures of thought (e.g. theological inquiry, episteme, worldview, habitus). I proceed to introduce a new analytical concept, the organizational substrate, which facilitates inquiry into the internal rationale of an RNGO. In order to demonstrate the operation of the substrate (the focus of Chapters 3-6), I proceed to identify the substrate of the BIC using Bahá'í hermeneutics and relevant authoritative statements. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the constituent elements of the BIC's substrate: an evolutionary view of history (teleology), the principle of the oneness of humanity (teleology/ ontology), and the authoritative and governing structure of the Bahá'í community.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate the manner in which the substrate frames the BIC's rationale for engagement with the UN, its understanding of the UN in the broader processes of civilizational, social, and political evolution, and its understanding of its relationship with the UN. This period demonstrates the operation of the organizational substrate during the earliest, foundation-setting days of the BIC-UN relationship, when the BIC was largely unknown at the UN and one of its primary goals was to secure recognition as a legitimate participant and contributor in UN-sponsored civil society fora. A substrate-based examination of the BIC's activities during this period enables us to discern BIC's distinct teleological and ontological orientation, which finds expression in the BIC's earliest formal statements to the UN, its approach to engagement in this political arena, and in the manner that it organizes and guides its representatives at various international fora.

Chapter 4 examines the critical role of authoritative structures in articulating, elucidating, and socializing the substrate throughout the organization. The chapter

opens with a discussion of the broader question of authoritative structures in RNGOs and the implications of these structures for organizational identity and an RNGO's relationship with the UN. In order to examine the role of BIC's authoritative structures vis-à-vis the substrate, I provide an overview of the structure and terms of reference of the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, namely the Universal House of Justice. I demonstrate that the Universal House of Justice carries out three major roles concerning the substrate: it articulates and elaborates elements of the substrate, in response to BIC's needs and capacity; it fosters institutional coherence by cultivating a shared epistemology rooted in the substrate; and it harmonizes the external affairs efforts of BIC's national affiliates. Having attained consultative status at the opening of this period[17], the BIC's work at the UN grows in scope, including in particular its efforts to address persecution against the Bahá'í community in Iran[18]—all of which unfolds under the close guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

Chapter 5 concerns itself with the role of the substrate in the BIC's conception of peace and the manner in which BIC pursued peace through its engagement with the UN. Through a detailed study of the BIC's statements to the UN, its engagement in global conferences and its collaboration with civil society, this chapter carries out a substrate-based analysis of the BIC's conception and approaches to of peace. I argue that the substrate reveals a distinct epistemology and methodology associated with Bahá'í conception of peace. Among the distinctive feature of this conception are that it: (a) denotes a quality of relationship among nations not expressed solely in terms of the absence of violence; (b) signals a capacity to address complex problems in a constructive, principle-based manner; (c) represents a stage in a greater process leading to a mature system of global governance; (d) must be achieved and built by means that are unifying; and (d) can be discerned through a "process" which has been established

[17] In 1970, the BIC was granted consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council; as such, it was no longer an 'observer' NGO but a full participant with the privileges accorded to organizations in consultative status.

[18] This period is characterized by the Bahá'í community's emergence from obscurity—an emergence precipitated by the swift, systematic, widespread, and sustained diplomatic actions of the BIC and national Bahá'í communities in response to the tide of persecution that that swept over the Iranian Bahá'í community in the later years of the 1970s, reaching a dramatic peak in the early 1980s. During this time, seeking to stem the violence unleashed against it, the BIC, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, put all possible diplomatic means into play. The BIC's actions resulted in raising the consciousness of the world's governments about the existence of the Bahá'í community, its aims, its vision, and the violent persecution facing its members in countries such as Iran (UHJ 1994, 130–43)

in the twentieth century. This period unfolds against the turbulence that accompanied the conclusion of the Cold War, an attendant rethinking of the global order, as well as the efflorescence of global civil society driven, in part, through the UN global conferences of the 1990s.

Chapter 6 focuses on the expression of the substrate in the redefinition of the terms of reference for the BIC's relationship with the UN. During this period, the BIC shifts its frame of reference for engagement from one focused on influencing processes at the UN to one focused on "participation in the discourses of society." I argue that the new terms of reference for the BIC-UN engagement, as introduced by the Universal House of Justice, continue to embody the substrate by ensuring that the *means* of social change are in themselves unifying. An analysis of the concept of participation in the discourses of society reveals its broader significance for: conceptualizing the role of civil society at the UN, challenging the religion-secular binary, the reconciliation of unity and difference, organic and evolutionary dimensions of the BIC-UN relationship, the role of knowledge in advancing human flourishing, and the nature of BIC's communication with and contributions to the UN.

In Chapter 7, I consider the significance and contribution of my findings to broader discourses about conceptions of religion, the methodology for the study of religion and religious organizations, religion at the UN, and scholarship about the Bahá'í community. My findings advance these discourses by demonstrating the following: (a) it is the meaning attached to organizational behavior rather than its substance that renders that behavior "religious"—the substrate provides the epistemological foundation for the construction of this meaning; (b) the substrate enables a study of organizational behavior based on the rationale and normative commitments immanent to the organization, thus expanding the lexicon and analytical tools traditionally used to study RNGOs at the UN; (c) a conception of religion in terms of a system of knowledge and practice helps to transcend the religion-secular binary by focusing not on the provenance of such systems but rather the body of insights that can be gleaned from diverse ways of knowing and being in the world; (d) the role of the substrate in making explicit the epistemological foundations of organizational behavior, such that they can be more effectively translated into action; (e) the motivations for RNGO

engagement with the UN go beyond advocacy and the promulgation of particular beliefs, to embody new ways of thinking about the world, the nature of problems besetting it, and the manner in which these should be addressed and by whom; and (f) the Bahá'í community's engagement with the UN challenges traditional conceptions of the relationship between religious organizations and secular authorities and offers an example of "post-revolutionary modalities of radical and political social transformation" (Brown 2005, 113).

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While the insights from the historical analysis in my thesis are drawn from the experience of the BIC's engagement with the UN, the questions raised are not limited to the BIC alone. I draw on a range of other RNGOs to demonstrate facets of my argument. The historical critical analysis reveals questions and insights that are relevant for the study of other RNGOs and for the analysis of civil society at the UN more broadly. As such, my findings are not relevant only to the Bahá'í community but to NGOs and civil society more broadly. I argue that the substrate draws out the "counter-rationality" of NGOs professing a religious commitment, a rationality that challenges prevailing assumptions about modernity, progress, and the human condition. In this way, it complements social science methods by looking at internal meaning-making dimensions of organizational behavior.

This study addresses itself to scholars in the field of religion, scholars concerned with the role of civil society in the emerging system of global governance, the role of the UN, as well as those interested in studies of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í community.

Chapter 1

Religious NGOs at the United Nations: Discerning Organizational Logic

In this chapter, I assess the engagements across various disciplines and intellectual concerns in relation to religion at the UN. I demonstrate that in order to more fully understand the engagement of religious NGOs at the UN, we need a tool to discern and analyze more effectively the internal rationale of these organizations. (In the next chapter, I introduce and describe in detail a new analytical concept—the organizational substrate.) This thesis locates itself at the confluence of a number of seminal debates within the broader field of religion and the public sphere: debates about the nature of modernity, the category of religion, the religion-secular divide, the role of civil society, and methodological approaches to the study of religion. These debates illuminate the contested nature of key concepts under consideration as well as the broader significance of the research question.

I. Religion and the UN

The UN—the preeminent locus of international affairs—provides an important vantage point for the study of religion in the public sphere. The presence of religion and religious actors at the UN is more prominent today than at any other time during its history and takes a multitude of forms. Institutionally, intergovernmental and governmental delegations such as the Permanent Mission of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See play a major representative role. The OIC is the largest intergovernmental organization with a mission to the UN, consisting of fifty-seven member states, while the Holy See represents the voice and experience of the worldwide Catholic community.[19] In addition, a number of UN member states have official religions, which shape their foreign policy and perspectives on issues under consideration by the UN. Normatively,

[19] Four popes have addressed the UN General Assembly: Paul VI (October 4, 1965), John Paul II (October 2, 1979 and October 5, 1995), Benedict XVI (April 18, 2008), and Francis (September 25, 2015).

religion is addressed in the UN human rights framework in terms of the right to freedom of religion or belief—a non-derogable right, meaning that it may not be violated under any circumstances. In a less direct but widely acknowledged manner, both the Charter of the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are normatively rooted in values emanating from the world's religious traditions (Glendon 2002).

References to religion, spirituality, and religious actors have been featured prominently in the statements of various Secretaries-General (Dorn 2007; Kille 2007; Obiezu, Burke, and Meijer 2015); in the historic gathering of over 2,000 religious leaders at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders;[20] and in increasing attention to the roles of religious organizations and actors in UN deliberations.[21] Religious symbolism is also present throughout the physical environment of the UN—in its Meditation Room and in prominently displayed works of religiously themed art donated by member states. The UN itself has come to publicly acknowledge the constructive role that religious actors play in the world today:

> Faith-based organizations are . . . among the powerful agents of social change. The language of faith reaches to the deepest roots of human motivation. In addition, faith-based organizations and institutions are among the largest, most stable, and well-resourced social networks. Many of these networks transcend political, ethnic, and socio-economic boundaries, and have the capacity to coordinate and execute large-scale social action. In many regions of the world, faith-based organizations and institutions, by virtue of their long-standing presence and service in diverse communities, have come to command the trust and respect of local populations. (UN Women 2016, 2)

While only a decade ago the question of religion and religious actors may have seemed out of place in the presumed secular domain of the UN, it is today—as outlined above—a well-established facet of the its cultural, intellectual, and operational environment.

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[20] In a dramatic gesture, in August 2000, the United Nations General Assembly Hall hosted over two thousand of the world's religious and spiritual leaders, who gathered together for the World Peace Summit to demonstrate their willingness to work together to eliminate their causes of war.

[21] For example, the High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace (October 2007), the first high-level session of the UN General Assembly to address interreligious and intercultural cooperation.

Of the over 4,500 NGOs in consultative status with the UN,[22] approximately 10% identify as religious NGOs and see themselves as having a religious identity.[23] Research about religious NGOs at the UN traces back to 2002[24] and can be broadly organized into the following categories: empirical studies mapping the field and distinguishing it from the larger body of UN-accredited NGOs (Berger 2003; Petersen 2010); historical accounts of the involvement of religious actors at the UN (Lehmann 2016; Rossi 2006); studies of (largely conservative) RNGOs' role in advocacy and policy development (Boehle 2010a; Butler 2000; Butler 2006; Haynes 2013; Karam 2014; NORAD 2013); exploration of the UN's interaction with religious actors (Boehle 2010b, Religion Counts 2002; Weiner 2010); institutional reports of UN agency engagement with faith-based organizations;[25] case studies of specific RNGOs or religions at the UN (Atwood 2012; Beittinger-Lee and Miall 2017; Beittinger-Lee 2017b; Carrette 2013; Carrette and Miall 2017; Kayaoğlu 2011; Lehmann 2016; Rossi 2006). In just fifteen years, a new expression of religious agency—RNGO engagement in processes of global governance—has come to light. The abovementioned research has shed much light on the wealth of resources that RNGOs bring to this engagement with the UN, whether human, social, structural, or financial.

There is still much that is not known about how religious beliefs and constructs shape the internal rationale of RNGOs, and how this rationality is embodied in the decisions and actions of the organizations. It is this next frontier of research on religion at the UN that my thesis will address. I will argue that in order to examine the internal logic of RNGOs it is necessary to engage and question previous research in the following areas:

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[22] Article 71 of the UN Charter lays the groundwork for UN consultation with non-governmental organizations. Today, the relationship between the UN and NGOs is governed by Resolution 1996/31 of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC 1996, 54). International, regional and national NGOs, and non-profit public or voluntary organizations are eligible for consultative status. The three categories of status are: general, special, and roster consultative status. As of September 2016, over 4,500 NGOs have been accorded consultative status by the UN (ECOSOC 2016).

[23] Depending on the study, the figure varies between 10-15%, as seen in research over the past 15 years (Religion Counts 2002; Berger 2003; Petersen 2010; Haynes 2013; Carrette and Miall 2014; Lehmann 2016; Trigeaud 2017).

[24] A notable exception is Neal Malicky's doctoral thesis about Christian organizations at the UN (Malicky 1968).

[25] The following UN agencies that have developed formal frameworks for engagement: UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNDP, and the UN Refugee Agency (UNFPA 2009; UNAIDS 2009; UNICEF 2012a; UNDP 2014; UNHCR 2014).

(1) religion and modernity; (2) the category of religion; (3) the religious-secular binary; (4) the limitations of analytical concepts and tools derived from the study of Christian organizations;[26] (5) the roles of RNGOs beyond the service-advocacy binary; and (6) the ideational resources of RNGOs. I will address each of these in turn.

1. Religion and Modernity

The growing salience of religious actors in international affairs has prompted a rethinking of the public role of religion. From the Iranian Revolution (1978-1979) to the Church-backed Solidarity movement in Poland (1980-1989), and from the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York (2001), to the prominent role of religion in development efforts, religious actors have become the focus of a growing research agenda. As previously noted, some scholars have haled religion as one of the "most influential factors in world affairs" (Shah, Stepan, and Toft 2012, 3). Others have argued that the deeply influential role of religion and religious actors calls into question "the larger intellectual framework of modernity" (Camilleri 2012, 1020).

As Talal Asad, Scott Thomas and others have noted, the defining political events in the closing decades of the twentieth century have brought about the realization that the simple narrative of progress from the religious to the secular that has dominated the social sciences so far is grossly inadequate (Asad 2003; Thomas 2005). Some have argued that we are witnessing a "resurgence of religion," noting the unexpected degree of influence that religious actors are exerting in the "secular" public sphere (Thomas 2005). Others, such as political scientist Elizabeth Hurd, have challenged the "resurgence" narrative noting: "What often passes as religious resurgence is a series of challenges to particular political settlements involving religion, politics and the state" (Hurd 2008, 46). Yet others go so far as to label the secularization theory a myth—merely a "powerful story we tell ourselves about how we want to be in the world" (Thomas 2005, 75; citing Bellah 1991). The past two decades have seen an efflorescence of theories illuminating various facets of religion's agency role in the

[26] While many religious traditions are represented by RNGOs at the UN, Christian organizations (and specifically Catholic organizations) account for over half of all RNGOs, and as such have received the overwhelming focus of scholarly literature.

modern world; among them: concepts of the axial age (Jaspers 2010; Boy and Torpey 2013), multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 1999), the subtraction theory (Taylor 2007), and post-secularism, which I discuss in the next section (Habermas 2008; Camilleri 2012; Mavelli and Petito 2012). In his *Seven Ways of Looking at Religion*, philosopher of religion Benjamin Schewel organizes the contemporary discourse on the history of religion and its place in modernity into seven "narratives": subtraction, renewal, transsecular, postnaturalist, construct, perennial, and developmental (Schewel 2017). These scholarly efforts signal a desire to describe and evaluate how we understand the changing role of religion in society, both throughout history and in the modern world. My thesis aims to complement these efforts by seeking to understand the logic underlying the engagement of a subset of religious actors, namely religious NGOs. I do this by going "inside" the religious tradition in order to see the world through the lenses of meaning and significance that shape the behavior and rationale of religious organizations engaging with the political organization of the UN.

2. The Category of "Religion"

Inquiry into the manner in which religious agency is expressed and embodied in the international arena must acknowledge the debates concerning the contested category of religion. Many scholars have questioned the utility and universality of the concepts of 'religion' and 'religions' noting their European origin and intellectual foundations in Christian theology (Asad 2003; Dubuisson 2003; Fitzgerald 2011; King 1999; Masuzawa 2005). Several languages lack an equivalent word for 'religion,' nor is the term indigenous to many religious scriptures themselves. As Severine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi note, any academic discipline is "based explicitly or implicitly on assumptions influenced by the social, political, and cultural context in which it develops" (Deneulin and Rakodi 2011, 49). It is important then, as a researcher in the field of religious studies, to be aware of the assumptions and intellectual history that underpin definitions of religion. International relations scholar Scott Thomas points out: "The conceptualization of religion is not merely a question of theory but one that shapes the kinds of questions that are asked about religion and its operation and expression in human society" (Thomas 2005, 24).

In light of my methodology, which places importance on attending to the particularity of the tradition being studied, it is also important to evaluate how a given religious NGO understands the term 'religion' rather than assuming a universal understanding of this concept or imposing a definition from outside of the tradition. In considering Hindu or Buddhist NGOs, for example, one must be attentive to the fact that the term 'religion' is not indigenous to these traditions, nor is it used by the majority of their adherents to describe the community of followers or the texts and practices of that community. In my thesis, I will be using the term 'religion' in two ways: first—in the context of 'religion-secular' debate and in reference to the problematic of 'religion' as it is engaged by scholars across disciplines of philosophy, sociology, ethnography, international relations, and religious studies. I engage with the critical literature around the concept of religion and demonstrate the need for the concept of the substrate to navigate some of the critical tensions. At the same time, I retain the term 'religion' given its use by RNGOs at the UN[27], as well as its use by the Bahá'í community within its authoritative texts, in community life, and by its organizations, such as the BIC.[28]

The deployment of the category of religion is also salient in the manner in which it is used to differentiate between NGOs that are presumed to be secular or religious. Scholars have raised questions as to the meaningfulness and intention behind such

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[27] For example, the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN, which formed in 1972, describes itself as a "coalition of representatives of *religious, spiritual and ethical* non-governmental organizations who exchange varying points of view and are dedicated to the pursuit of peace, understanding and mutual respect." Italics added (Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations 2018).

[28] The Writings of the Bahá'í Faith make numerous and explicit references to the concept of 'religion'. Among them: religion as the "chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world, and of tranquility amongst its peoples" (Bahá'u'lláh 2018*)*; "If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act...Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion" (`Abdu'l-Bahá 2006); "Bahá'u'lláh has not brought into existence a new religion to stand beside the present multiplicity of sectarian organizations...He has recast the whole conception of religion as the principal force impelling the development of consciousness" (Bahá'í World Centre 2005, 23). The BIC, too, in its statements to the UN has, on occasion explicitly outlined it view of religion. For example, it has referred to religion as "the essential foundation or reality of religion, not the dogmas and blind imitations which have gradually encrusted it and which are the cause of its decline..." (BIC 1995f); further, it has described religion as "...an ongoing process through which humanity becomes conscious of the spiritual dimension of human life and learns to orient its individual and collective life accordingly" (BIC 2015d, 2).

categorization. What function does such a differentiation serve? When are such labels salient and when are they not? Who assigns the labels? According to what criteria? (Berger 2003; Bush 2017b). These questions will be addressed in the section below about religion and the UN. A further nuance in the taxonomy of religious organizations is the differentiation between "faith-based" and "religious" NGOs—with some organizations choosing to identify as the former and some as the latter. The term "faith-based" is commonly used by entities that do not identify with the term "religion," and is more inclusive of humanitarian and relief-focused organizations. It is also frequently used by governments and development agencies as it avoids the need to judge whether the values associated with the organization are part of a recognized religion (Berger 2016). Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings, in their review of scholarship about faith-based organizations in international development, aptly note that notions of faith-based organizations in development contribute to the normative conceptualization of development as a secular process (Clarke and Jennings 2008). I would argue that the same is true for RNGOs. It is thus important to be aware of the intellectual and normative underpinnings of the term religion and its use—by whom, in what manner, and toward what end—in reference to organizations.

The contested nature of the category of religion is closely associated with debates about the religious-secular divide—the tendency to separate social reality into mutually exclusive domains of the religious and the secular, long understood as a defining feature of modernity. Elizabeth Hurd argues that these terms have come to operate as foundational cultural and normative categories in international affairs—normalizing a particular European experience of religion and politics (Hurd 2011). Sociologist José Casanova sheds light on the genealogy of these terms by differentiating between the "secular" as an epistemic category and "secularism" as a political doctrine (Casanova 2009). The work of scholars such as Hurd, Casanova, Taylor, and Asad helps refine our understanding of the operation of these terms and to challenge the usefulness of conceiving them as mutually exclusive constructs. Especially since today, as it has been noted, the "distinction between religious and secular is more deceptive than informative" (Barnett 2012, 167). In this chapter I also explore how these categories operate in the UN setting. For now, it is important to appreciate the enduring salience of this binary as well as its disadvantages; in particular, the manner in which it places

religion in ideological opposition to modernity, thereby limiting the kinds of questions scholars ask about religious entities. I contend that questions of logic and rationale—terms associated with the lexicon of modernity—are precisely those that are left unaddressed when religions are confined to the domain of the private and irrational.

Further efforts to describe the nature of the contemporary political environment in which religious actors are playing an increasingly prominent and decisive role, have yielded the concept of the post-secular. The term originates from the later works of German sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas, who argues that "the modernization of public consciousness" is not a process by which religious sensibilities are secularized in a zero-sum game (Habermas 2008). Rather, both religious and secular resources are needed—as equal partners—to renew the social contract and to promote more just and inclusive communities. Political scientists Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, writing about the post-secular in international politics note that the post-secular manifests also in the "epoch-making process of slow, but ineluctable, transformation of the normative structure of international society beyond its Eurocentric civilizational origin and liberal ideological configuration" (Mavelli and Petito 2012, 5). In this context, they argue that post-secular thinking is "an attempt to find a new grammar and modern forms of instrumental rationality . . . that draw on both secular and religious imaginaries" (Mavelli and Petito 2012, 8). This thesis explores the imaginary of religious RNGOs to discern this new grammar and modern forms of instrumental rationality.

3. The Religion-Secular Binary

The religious-secular binary is at the heart of Western research about religious organizations and is intimately related to our understanding of the nature of modernity. Despite the prominence of the demarcation of the "religious" and "secular" spheres of life, scholars such as Talal Asad and José Casanova helped to unearth the genealogy of these constructs, demonstrating how religion and secularization have emerged as concepts in the West (Asad 1993; Asad 2003; Casanova 1994). The majority of research on RNGOs and FBOs—largely conducted by social scientists adhering to a normatively secular worldview—has proceeded on the assumption that one of the most salient features of these organizations is their religious nature, which renders them

distinct from secular organizations. Some scholars have characterized this distinction in terms of adherence to an "immanent" rather than a "transcendent" worldview (Wilson 2014, 221), while others have highlighted distinct features of religious organizations such as their links to local institutions, moral authority, long history (rooted in the existence of religious institutions), and their ability to mobilize financial resources (Berger 2003; Carrette and Miall 2017; Marshall 2013). Jeremy Carrette and Sophie-Helene Trigeault, note the prevailing dominance of the religion-secular binary among NGOs at the UN. They argue: "we cannot escape [this binary] because it constitutes the way we think about the world" and emphasize the importance of understanding how the binary operates at the UN (Carrette and Trigeault 2014, 22).

In this thesis, however, I argue that internal logic and rationale is more salient to consider from an organizational behavior perspective than the distinction between the religious-secular. As previously mentioned, the construction of the binary itself limits the kinds of questions that we ask of religious or secular organizations, and the kinds of analytical tools that scholars deploy. Furthermore, as long as religion and modernity are placed at opposite ends of an ideological spectrum, it will not be possible to understand the alternative logics of modernity advanced by these organizations. As Michael Barnett and Janice Gross Stein point out in *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*, often the ideological variation among organizations from the same faith tradition is greater than that between religion and secular organizations (Barnett and Gross Stein 2012, 23). Binary labels paint a picture of mutually exclusive and conflicting domains of thought and activity associated with "religious" and "secular" entities. In his study of *Faith-based Organizations at the United Nations*, Haynes belies these assumptions. He states:

> FBOs *must* accord with the UN's secular, liberal and irreligious values, and this is obviously a problem for entities whose very *raison d'être* has its foundation in religious values. When assessing the impact of FBOs at the UN, it is crucial to bear in mind that the UN is a secular organisation, built on non-religious values, which reflect the characteristics and global spread of a post-Westphalian Western-directed and focused international order. (Haynes 2013, 6)[29]

[29] Kerstin Martens raises a similar question in her book, *NGOs and the United Nations: Institutionalization, Professionalization and Adaptation* (2010)—namely whether a consultative relationship with the UN compromises the ability of an RNGO to advocate effectively for the interests its

What are "religious," "irreligious," and "non-religious" values? What does it mean that the UN is "built on non-religious values"? Are the UN's values "obviously a problem" for religious entities? The simple binaries outlined by Haynes do not capture what is clearly a much more complex reality.

An extension of this binary thinking manifests in the tendency to associate secular organizations with modern and progressive positions and perspectives, while religious organizations are labeled as "pre-modern," or even regressive. Certainly examples can be found to support this categorization, but research in recent years (e.g. Lehmann 2016, Carrette and Miall 2017) suggests that the landscape is much more nuanced and does not lend itself to such rigid labeling. The question of the religious-secular distinction among NGOs may simply be the "wrong question" (Tomalin 2012, 701), one which leads to simplistic answers and distracts from a deeper analysis of the manner in which different rationalities find expression in the public sphere. The value of the organizational substrate lies in its ability to navigate these tensions and provides a method for the analysis of organizations irrespective of their affiliation with the religious or faith tradition.

4. Beyond Analyses of Christian Organizations

One of the hindrances to a deeper investigation of the internal rationale of RNGOs is an underlying assumption about the normativity of Christian conceptions of religion and religious engagement in the public sphere. As I discussed in the introduction, and as Barnett notes: "Much of what we think about religious agencies derives from scattered studies and observations of Christian organizations . . . we know very little about religiously inspired organizations outside of Christianity" (Barnett 2012, 170). For this reason, we lack a broader set of insights into questions such as the relationship between

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represents. How does an RNGO, whose access to the UN depends on its strict adherence to criteria set by the UN, maintain integrity of mission—particularly if part of that mission is to challenge some of the values on which the organization is based? If the actions of RNGOs adhere closely to the rules put in place by the UN, does that imply that the NGO has somehow been co-opted, that its mission is compromised, or that it is less "religious"? These questions belie a zero-sum-game understanding of the religious-secular divide. I argue that it is by interrogating the internal rationale of organizations, and the manner in which this rationale supports the UN-RNGO relationship, that such questions can be answered more fully.

the state and the religious organizations; the aims and approaches of diverse religious organizations; their relationship to institutional religious structures; and the nature of religion itself. This is not surprising given that currently Christian agencies constitute the majority of religious NGOs in consultative status with the UN. Nonetheless, approximately 20% of RNGOs in consultative status represent other faith communities (Carrette and Miall 2017, 47).

One of the corollaries of this state of affairs is that the primary tools and categories of analysis being employed are derived from a Christian framework and are, therefore, not well suited for the study of organizations rooted in other traditions.[30] Much depends on the researcher's frame of reference as well—the overwhelming majority of scholars writing about religion in international affairs have been from North America and Europe, thus bringing a familiarity with Judeo-Christian traditions to their reading of religious agency in international affairs. In contrast, this study seeks to develop an analytical tool to examine organizational logic and rationale in a manner that has relevance across diverse religious and faith traditions and that is not rooted in the frameworks and lexicon of any one particular tradition.

5. Beyond Service and Advocacy

Much of the research about religious and faith-based organizations conceives of the activities of these organizations in terms of a service/ advocacy binary. It is not incorrect to say that a significant proportion of these organizations attend to the needs of underserved and vulnerable populations, and others advocate on their behalf on issues concerning human rights, debt-reduction, economic inequality, and other social justice issues. The service/ advocacy binary, however, obscures an important dimension RNGO and FBOs efforts, which scholars have only recently begun to examine and theorize—an epistemological, critical role. In Molejdijk, Jedan, and Beaumont's *Exploring the Post-Secular*, which explores the relationship between religion and modernity, Luke Bretherton examines the role of FBOs in urban settings and notes the "potential for religion and for FBOs to fundamentally challenge, from a multiplicity of

[30] Consider, for example, in the case of Muslim organizations, the notion of the "religion-state" divide, which is less familiar and accepted in many parts of the Muslim world (Nejima 2015), or the different conceptions of religion and spirituality among Hindu and Buddhist NGOs (Carrette 2015).

theological and political standpoints, the way that contemporary society operates, to confront and alter values that drive it, and to shift the power dynamics in contemporary global politics" (Molejdijk, Jedan, and Beaumont 2010, 210). Similarly, Duncan McDuie-Ra and John Rees, argue: "the possibility of religion as a deep source for contesting development orthodoxy and providing alternatives is poorly conceptualized and often ignored" (Molejdijk, Jedan, and Beaumont 2010, 30).

We also need to acknowledge that some organizations, such as ISIS, Hamas, or the Muslim Brotherhood, have contested various orthodoxies using violent means. Indeed, there is no lack of organizations, past or present, that have legitimized violence on religious grounds in order to oppose the ruling order (Appleby 1999; Hoffmann 1995; Juergensmeyer 2003). However, this fact doesn't tell the whole story. What about religious organizations that abide by the law yet, at the same time, seek to challenge the vision, the rationality, and the sources of power embedded within the governing structures of society? As Gerard Clarke notes, the ways in which FBOs have pursued political change "via established political avenues has been undertheorized" (Wilson 2014, 273 cf. Clarke 2006). In her concluding article in the *Cross Currents* journal issue dedicated to religion at the UN, Azza Karam, Senior Cultural Advisor at the UN Development Fund, writes: "What we are therefore advocating for, and potentially foreseeing, is that the engagement between [the UN system and faith-based organizations] will fundamentally alter the human development paradigms themselves" (Karam 2010, 472).

In this thesis, I argue that it is by interrogating the internal logic and rationale of religious organizations that we can begin to examine how religious beliefs, convictions, and ideas constitute a distinct logic—one that often challenges the values and assumptions underpinning the structures and relationships ordering society. As international relations scholar Amitav Acharya writes in *Rethinking Power, Institutions and Ideas in World Politics*, we need to "identify and explore alternative understandings that can expand the meanings of power, institutions and ideas in the broader and more inclusive context of world politics" (Acharya 2014, 1) and to call attention to the relative merits of different ways of knowing the 'international' (Acharya 2014, 50; cf. Jorgensen 2010, para. 8).Without an understanding of the

different ways of organizational knowing and being, we remain with only a partial picture of the engagement of religious organizations in the public sphere and in international affairs—we can see the "what" of engagement but not the "why."

The question of rationality is central in Wendy Brown's study titled *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Brown 2005). In it, she argues that the "political sphere along with every other dimension of contemporary existence is submitted to economic rationality," and that "all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality" (Brown 2005, 40). This is plainly evident in the discourse about religious organizations in the public sphere, which discusses their activism using terms such as "spiritual capital," "social capital," and "religious assets." Brown argues the need for an alternative vision of the good, one that rejects *homo economicus* as the norm of the human *and* rejects associated notions of economy and society (Brown 2005, 59). Such a vision of the good she refers to as a "counterrationality—a different figuration of human beings, citizenship, economic life and the political—and one that is critical to the long labor of fashioning of a more just society" (Brown 2005, 59). The contours and nature of such rationality—neglected yet critical facets of religious NGO engagement—are precisely the focus of this thesis.

6. Ideational Resources of RNGOs

As was mentioned in the introduction, the assertion that religious ideas shape action dates back to the work of Emile Durkheim (2008), Max Weber (1930) and more recently Robin Gill (2012; 2013a; 2013b). The notion that ideas, as well as material interests, have a role in shaping behavior has also emerged from the fields of political science, challenging the long-standing belief in the social sciences that material interests alone (or primarily) drove action. Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane have argued that ideas that have their broadest impact when they take the form of "worldviews," which, the authors note, can be rooted in religion as much as in scientific rationality (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 4). As previously noted, Sikkink views the central role of NGOs as ideational one. She argues that the emergence of human rights policy, for example, "is not a simple victory of ideas over interests. Rather it demonstrates the power of ideas to reshape understandings of human interest" (Sikkink 1993, 140). This thesis builds on existing research by looking at the manner in

which religious ideas find expression in a transnational civil society, one that seeks to influence political discourse and decision-making both nationally and internationally.[31]

A number of scholars have begun to examine the manner in which religious beliefs and ideas guide and motivate religious actors at the UN. While these have been focused almost exclusively on Christian organizations, they also shed light on the rationale underlying other religious actors' decision to engage with the UN as well as the focus and contours of that engagement. As Sister Deirdre Mullen, former director of Mercy Global Concern (a UN-accredited RNGO) notes: "Investing in a representative at the UN is a community's way of taking Catholic social teaching seriously and concretely" (Mullen 2015, 22). Similarly, David Atwood, in his reflections as a former Quaker representative to the UN titled, *From the Inside Out: Observations on Quaker Work at the UN*, writes: "although most of my work over the past 35 years or so has been largely secular in nature, it is the sense that I have of the spiritual nature of this work that has enabled me to remain engaged" (Atwood 2012, 2).

Atwood notes that Quaker work at the UN is "based fundamentally on the belief that there is that of God in all . . . and that our daily work needs to be transparently based in our larger visions" (Atwood 2012, 12). In a landmark study of broader Quaker intervention in international relations from 1967 to 1945, Robert Byrd traces the way in which foundational Quaker "patterns of thought"— such as the relationship between the spiritual and the political, and the concept of power, among others—have shaped their work in this arena over 300 years of the movement's history (Byrd 1960). Similarly, Joseph Rossi's study, *Uncharted Territory: The American Catholic Church at the United Nations, 1946-1972*, argues that "the Bishops' Peace Committee (of the National Catholic Welfare Conference) and the UN Office itself were, in fact, direct responses to papal requests for long-term Christian solutions to the turmoil of the world community" (Rossi 2006, 28) and identifies the theological constructs that form the

[31] The influence of religious ideas on organizational logic and behavior has largely focused on violent expressions of religious belief (Juergensmeyer 2003; Appleby 1999; Hoffmann 1995). Because expressions of "religiously-motivated" violence have represented a security threat and profoundly impacted American and European geopolitics, this issue has received much attention from governments, think tanks, and academia, thus driving a particular research agenda. I discuss this is greater detail later in the introduction.

foundation for Christian efforts to foster cooperation among the nations of the world.[32] Here we see the strong influence of the Quaker and Catholic theology in shaping the communities' engagement in the arena of international relations.

In his study of the human rights discourse of two Christian NGOs at the UN—Commission of Churches on International Affairs and Pax Romana—Karsten Lehmann asserts that, "religiously affiliated actors cannot be properly analyzed without focusing upon the subjectively meaningful behavior of individuals (in the Weberian sense) as the starting point for the analyses" (Lehmann 2016, 7). His study focuses on the UN- and human rights-related discourses inside the above mentioned organizations and documents the manner in which their theological reflections grounded their reading of international relations, the determination of organizational roles and responsibilities, and the framing of engagement in religious terms.[33] Lehmann cites a 1955 report of the World Council of Churches, which asserts:

> ...the world desperately needs an international ethos to provide a solid groundwork for the development of international law and institutions. This requires not only attempts to find international life into greater harmony with God's will. (World Council of Churches 1955, 141, qtd. in Lehmann 2016, 83)

Lehmann's study helps us to understand the dynamic relationship between theological reflection and legitimation and the kinds of political programmes and human rights positions adopted by the organizations. It also highlights the seminal place of the Second Vatican Conference in articulating the nature and significance of a "UN apostolate." My work seeks to expand the research and reflections put forward by Atwood, Rossi, and Lehmann by extending the analysis beyond the limits of Christian theology, by extending the period under consideration to cover seven decades of the

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[32] These constructs include: (1) Sovereignty of God; (2) right conscience; (3) human dignity; (4) essential unity of the human race (Rossi 2006, 42). An eloquent testament to the intimate relationship between religious beliefs and engagement at the UN is found in Pope Paul VI's address to the UN. He states: "As you know very well, peace is not built merely by means of politics and a balance of power and interests. It is built with the mind, with ideas, with the works of peace . . . the edifice of modern civilization has to be built on spiritual principles, for they are the only ones capable not only of supporting it, but of shedding light on it and inspiring it" (Pope Paul VI 1965, n.p.).

[33] Lehmann notes that religiously affiliated organizations that operate according to "particular constructions of reality" (Lehmann 2016, 49). He notes that the first Charter of the Commission of Churches in International Affairs asserted its "conviction that in this new chapter of history the judgment and guidance of the Christian conscience upon international problems must be clearer and more decisive than hitherto" (World Council of Churches 1955, 141, qtd. in Lehmann 2016, 83).

RNGO-UN relationship, and by presenting a new construct by means of which to study the internal structures and logic of religious organizations.

Other studies have sought to demonstrate different facets of the manner in which spiritual and religious ideas find expression in the public sphere. Jeremy Carrette, for example, uses the concept of "push-pull factors" to analyze the engagement of Hindu and Buddhist religious NGOs at the UN. In one of the few analyses of Hindu and Buddhist NGOs, he notes that it is the NGOs' "foundational motivations" that "push" the organization to engage with the UN (Carrette 2017, 210). Specifically, Carrette identifies "reformist and global cultural dynamics" and values as key internal mechanisms "pushing" Hindu and Buddhist NGOs (such as Soka Gakkai, Brahma Kumaris and Bharat Sevashram Sangha) to engage with the UN. I seek to build on Carrette's work by putting forward a number of questions to extend the internal logic of the tradition: How do the reformist and globally-oriented values find their roots in faiths that date back thousands of years? That is, what makes these values Buddhist or Hindu? To what extent are the NGOs shaped by "globalization, post-Darwinian senses of time . . . modernist desires for social transformation and new technological networks" (Carrette 2017, 211) and to what extent are they driven by values inherent in the tradition itself?

Literature on religion and development has also sought to clarify the manner in which religious beliefs and convictions relate to organizations' social and/or political engagement. In their volume, *Development, Civil Society, and Faith-based Organizations*, Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings introduce a four-part typology to distinguish the ways in which faith is "deployed" in public engagement: passive, active, persuasive, and exclusive (Clarke and Jennings 2008, 32). In "passive" organizations, religious teachings are subsidiary to broader humanitarian principles in determining action; in "active"' organizations, religious faith provides an "explicit motivation" for action; "persuasive" organizations are explicitly guided by their faith and also seek to "bring new converts . . . to advance the interests of the faith at the expense of other interests"; while in "exclusive" organizations, "social and political involvement is rooted in the faith and is often militant or violent and/or directed against rival faiths"

(Clarke and Jennings 2008, 32–33).[34] It is interesting to note that according to Clarke and Jennings' typology, the more rooted the actions of an organization are in their religious faith the more it is associated with exclusivity, proselytizing, and violence. Considering these findings, one might assume that the more rooted an organization is in its particular faith tradition, the more it tends toward socially undesirable behaviors (e.g. exclusivity, violence). I argue that what is needed to understand the motivational mechanisms of these organizations is an analytical framework that enables us to discern the inner logic that shapes organizational behavior.

II. The Bahá'í International Community and the Bahá'í Faith

I explore the question of the internal rationale of religious NGOs at the UN through a focused analysis of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office seventy-year engagement with the UN. In the introduction, I outlined the reasons for the selection of this particular organization, which included the BIC's reputation as a respected, engaged, and influential RNGO in UN circles; its long-standing relationship with the UN (1945-present); its mandate to represent the membership of an *entire* faith community; and the geographic spread of the Bahá'í community. The official website of the Bahá'í community states that today, "the Bahá'í Faith is established in more than 100,000 localities in virtually every country and territory around the world" (BIC 2017, n.p.).

Several other characteristics of the Bahá'í Faith make the BIC of particular interest for this study. The emergence of the Bahá'í Faith in the mid-nineteenth century in Iran is significant, as the religion fits neither the mold of an "ancient religion" nor a new religious movement. Rather, its emergence is contemporary with the rise of nation states and the early formation of an international order. It is the first world religion to emerge in the full light of history, with the preserved and authenticated texts penned by four successive leaders[35] of the Bahá'í community prior to the election of an

[34] Clarke and Jennings note that the categories are not mutually exclusive—organizations may deploy faith differently depending on the issues or contexts in which they are involved.
[35] These include: the forerunner to the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, the Báb (Arabic, "the Gate." The Báb is also known as the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith), 1819-1850; Bahá'u'lláh (Arabic, "Glory of God"),

international governing body[36] in 1963. Further, the holy texts of the Bahá'í Faith, referred to as "the Writings," deal extensively with not only the moral but also the structural and institutional requirements of a more just and equitable global society. A seminal passage from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi (and one which will be discussed in greater detail in the succeeding chapter), offers a glimpse of the nature of the vision and aims of the Bahá'í community. It is quoted at length as it encapsulates many seminal themes that have particular relevance for the Bahá'í community's engagement with the UN:

> The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. (Shoghi Effendi [1931] 1991, 42–43)

We learn from this passage that the pivotal tenet of the Bahá'í Faith is concerned with fostering harmonious relationships among peoples and nations, and more specifically, with binding them together into a coherent whole. We learn that this vision is inextricably linked with institutional arrangements capable of embodying the oneness

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1817-1892, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith; 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Arabic, "Servant of Bahá"), the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh, 1844-1921; Shoghi Effendi, the grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1897-1957.

[36] The Universal House of Justice

of humanity, and that it requires that the whole civilized world be "reconstructed" in a manner that will render it capable of unifying all essential facets of collective life.

My thesis seeks to make a contribution to the bourgeoning study of the Bahá'í Faith. To date, much of what we know about the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í community has come from scholars in the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies—a discipline in which some of the earlier studies of the Bahá'í Faith found an intellectual home (e.g. Amanat 1989; Cole 1998; Scharbrodt 2002; Shahvar 2009; Sharon 2004; Smith 1987). Scholarship has also focused on scriptural analysis of the Bahá'í Writings (e.g. Saiedi 2000, 2010); case studies of Bahá'í communities (e.g. van den Hoonaard 1988, 1996; McMullen 2000, 2015; Stockman 1985; Venters 2015); the global Bahá'í community (e.g. Warburg, Hvithamar, and Warmind 2005); the persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran (e.g. Ghanea 2003; Karlberg 2010; Negele 2016); and studies of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith (e.g. Khan 2005; Stockman 2012; Ma'ani 2013). A growing number of publications have begun to explore the application of Bahá'í principles to question of social and economic concern including gender equality and women's empowerment (e.g. Khan and Khan 2003; Murphy-Graham 2012), development (e.g. Hanley 2014; Arbab 2000), governance, international relations, and peace (e.g. Bahador and Ghanea 2003; Karlberg 2004; Lepard 2003; Lerche 2004; Ma'ani Ewing 2008; Tahririha-Danesh 2001), and economic life (e.g. Garris 2007).[37]

There are very few studies of the engagement of the Bahá'í community in the public sphere. One notable exception, which begins to fill this void is an edited volume titled, *Religion and Public Discourse in an Age of Global Transition: Reflections on Bahá'í Practice and Thought* (Schewel and Cameron, 2018). The volume brings Bahá'í practice and thought into conversation various aspects of contemporary scholarship on religion and the public sphere on themes including: civil society; science, religion and the public sphere; education; Bahá'í contributions to public discourse; Bahá'í engagement in the gender equality discourse at the UN; and the media and public

[37] Journals of Bahá'í scholarship include the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* and the *Bahá'í Studies Review*.

discourse, among others. A number of ideas explored in this volume will be examined further in this thesis.[38]

A handful of studies have begun to examine facets of the Bahá'í International Community's engagement with the UN. These include Johnson Wu's doctoral thesis in political science entitled "The Bahá'í International Community in Global Governance" (Wu 2012) and Gundula Negele's chapter entitled "Engagement for Religious Freedom at the United Nations: The Contribution of the Bahá'ís" (Negele 2016) in the edited volume on *Human Rights and Religion in Educational Contexts*. Wu's research concerns the broader role of religious NGOs in global civil society, and in the processes of global governance. He uses global governance theory to examine the distinctive contributions of RNGOs at the UN, and to assess the influence that their engagement has had. This is done with a particular focus on the BIC, specifically its "culture of consultation," the Bahá'í concept of development, and BIC's involvement in processes of UN reform.[39] Negele's chapter concerns the BIC's contributions to the UN-based discourse and debates about religious freedom and explores how the Bahá'í concept of dignity and its associated "obligation to search independently for truth" undergird the organization's contributions at the UN (Negele 2016, 91). Both studies acknowledge the centrality of key Bahá'í concepts to the work of the BIC—Wu focuses on the principle of "consultation," while Negele explores the Bahá'í understanding of dignity. Both demonstrate the distinctive conceptual and epistemological foundations of BIC's actions in the international sphere. This thesis complements these efforts by addressing the question of the internal logic employed by the BIC.

One reason for the dearth of scholarship about the BIC at the UN may be the very nature of the Bahá'í community's approach to social change. The community's strict adherence to the scriptural principle of *non-engagement in partisan politics* prevents it from engaging in more traditional processes of social change—such as protests, seeking out political office, lobbying, and so on—that would bring Bahá'ís into an

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[38] My own contribution to the volume emerges from this thesis.

[39] Wu's thesis was completed at Fudan University, China and has not yet been translated into English. This brief overview of his work is based on my interview with the author.

adversarial dynamic that runs counter to the ethos of the community. Yet this is precisely what makes this community a fascinating object of study: a relatively young tradition with an ambitious and transformative social agenda that relates itself to the organization of human life at every level of society, with an active presence at the UN and over 170 countries, yet guided by a strict mandate of non-engagement in partisan politics. My thesis seeks to fill the void of studies of the Bahá'í community and the UN, by studying the internal logic of the Bahá'í community's office at the UN. This enables us to discern the manner in which a distinct and scripturally rooted orientation toward public and political life is expressed by one of the longest-standing, most active, and least well understood RNGOs at the UN. Such a study expands our understanding of the range of expressions of the religious impulse in contemporary politics and sharpens our ability to discern approaches to social change, which may not be discernible using other analytical frameworks.

Unlike other studies, which have looked inward at the dynamics within the Bahá'í community, this study looks to the nature of the Bahá'í community's engagement in the international arena and seeks to yield new insight about the role of religion and civil society in international affairs. I will endeavor in this study to offer an original analysis of the operational dynamic of a religious NGO—the Bahá'í International Community—in order to demonstrate that we must seek to understand an organization's internal logic in order to fully appreciate how it engages with the UN.

Chapter 2

The Organizational Substrate: A New Analytical Framework

I. Overview

This chapter seeks to answer the first of two research questions addressed by this thesis, namely: How can we understand the internal rationale of organizations, specifically RNGOs, engaging with the UN? To answer this question, the chapter introduces the *organizational substrate*—a new analytical tool, which provides an original way to examine the internal rationale or logic of an organization. I will argue that in order to understand the behavior of RNGOs, we need to go beyond analyses of organizational positions on issues and policies before the UN, beyond historical conditions shaping organizational behavior, beyond the socio-cultural determinants of knowledge, and beyond the organizations' view of the world. As has been noted in the context of Christian organizations:

> It is one thing to identify discursive and practical contexts which appear to facilitate an upsurge in faith-motivated activity, but it is quite another to understand the changing nature of Christian agency that populates these spaces of possibility. (Cloke, Thomas, and Williams 2012, 106)

Cloke et al.'s reminder about the importance, relevance, and complexity of examining what they call the "theological landscape" of "faith motivation" (Cloke, Thomas, and Williams 2012, 105) applies not only to Christian organizations but, as I will show in my thesis, to religious organizations in general. It is this interior world of meaning and motivation that the substrate seeks to analyze.

In order to demonstrate the distinctive features of the substrate, I will first discuss several macro- and micro-level analytical tools, which inform inquiry into an organization's internal rationale. These include: theological inquiry and political theology, the episteme, worldview, and habitus. I will then demonstrate how the substrate builds on and complements tools and methodologies employed by theologians, social scientists, and philosophers in order to go beyond descriptions of observed RNGO behavior to examine the rationale underpinning it.

In the second half of this chapter, I outline a methodology for identifying the organizational substrate of the BIC. I then discuss the constituent elements of the BIC's organizational substrate: its evolutionary perspective and the principle of the oneness of humanity. The organizational substrate expands the repertoire of the types of analyses that can be conducted in order to better understand the role of religion in modern life. Specifically, the substrate examines the systems of meaning underlying organizational behavior[40] and enables us to interrogate the changing nature of religion in the modern world.[41]

II. Various Approaches to the Study of Organizational Rationale

1. Theological Inquiry

Theological inquiry is an approach that has been used to address questions of meaning and practice in relation to a particular religious tradition. Most relevant to this thesis is the question of how theological inquiry has shed light on individual and organizational behavior. Sociologist Max Weber in his now classical study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), was among the first to note that religious ideas have the capacity to motivate individuals to exhibit new forms and patterns of behavior (Weber 1930). Around this same time, Emile Durkheim argued that religious beliefs stimulated individuals to participate positively in social life (Durkheim [1912] 2008). More recently, theologian Robin Gill, in his three-volume work on sociological theology brings theology and sociology into dialogue, challenging the view of theology as epiphenomenal to social life, and putting forward a fresh perspective on the role of theology in the modern world (Gill 2012; Gill 2013a; Gill 2013b).

A number of scholars have examined the manner in which theology serves to motivate particular kinds of organizational behavior. In their study of European faith-based

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[40] My aim is to take steps toward responding to the call for a "meta-theory that tries to describe systematically the *formation of meanings* about things religious" (von Stuckrad 2003, 262, emphasis added).

[41] Note that many RNGOs in consultative status with the UN are rooted in religious traditions and faith systems that are thousands of years old. The unique dynamic of continuity and change is particularly salient to the study and understanding of the changing role of religion in the modern world.

organizations, Paul Cloke, Samuel Thomas and Andrew Williams explore the ways in which evangelicalism, radical orthodoxy, and postmodern theology have shaped the changing nature of Christian social action and activism (Cloke et al. 2012). Among other things, Cloke et al. note a distinction between "quietist" and "transformational" approaches—the former emphasizing the Kingdom of God as being reserved for an eschatological future, while the latter encourages active social practice on the basis of doing what is right in contemporary social contexts (Cloke et al. 2012, 109). Other studies have examined the manner in which theology frames the goals of social action, the means for their achievement, and the actors who carry them out (e.g. Cloke 2010; Frei 1994; Milbank 2006; Plant 2009).

There are challenges associated with studying the internal rationale of religious organizations through the lens of theology. First, the discipline and practice of theology has its roots in Christian scholarship and has been largely shaped by the intellectual and social history of this religious tradition. It raises problems akin to those inherent to attempts at defining the concept of religion itself. As one scholar succinctly notes:

> The way that the term [religion] has been employed results in the privileging of certain features of Christian and post-Christian Western culture and locates "other cultures" within an implicitly theological framework that transforms them as much as it attempts to make sense of them. (King 1999, 60)

King stresses that problematizing categories that are normally taken for granted—such as religion and, I would add, theology—is an important first step in recovering (or discovering) indigenous perspectives and practices. It is instructive to consider terms used by various religions to denote the study of their own tradition, such as the term *Ilm al-kalam* in Islam ("the science of the debate"), *dharma* in Buddhism, *darshana* in Hinduism (literally "view" or "viewpoint"), and Rabbinical commentary in Judaism.

In the writings of the Bahá'í Faith, however, the term 'theology' is used in a very specific way, principally in terms of a critique of dynamics and patterns of thinking that obstruct intellectual and social progress. Bahá'u'lláh, for example, cautions his followers against engaging in sciences which "begin with words and end with words" and which lead to "idle disputation" (Bahá'u'lláh 1993, Note 110). Such sciences refer to "those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather

than help it to attain the truth" (Ibid.). Similarly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the head of the Bahá'í community from 1897 – 1921, critiques "ancestral forms and theological interpretations . . . which [do] not bear the analysis of reason," and are "without standards of proof and without real foundation" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2017, Section 52). The question that arises then, in respect to the study of religious organizations rooted in other systems of belief, such as the BIC, is whether a discipline such as theology, which emerged from Christian and Western intellectual traditions, is well suited to the purpose.[42] While it could be argued that a scholar could define theological inquiry, at the outset, in a manner that is sensitive to the particularities of the tradition being studied (e.g. acknowledging the intellectual and cultural history of 'theological' inquiry), I argue that it is equally, if not more compelling, to mine the tradition being studied for distinct approaches to the study of its system of thought. In this way, the lexicon and range of tools available to the scholar of religion is augmented and further refined.

In general, studies of religious organizations pay little attention to the belief system shaping organizational behavior—making only passing references to religious laws and observances and how they shape and motivate the behavior. One such example, is Katherine Marshall's study *Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers*, which only provides a cursory review of some scriptural concepts animating Jewish organizations, such as *tikkun olam* ("healing the world") and *tzedakah* ("justice" or "charity"); and among Muslim organizations, concepts such as *zakat* (obligatory charity), *sadaqa* (voluntary charity), and *waqf* (charitable endowments) (Marshall 2013, 155). An exception to this approach is found in research that explores the manner in which Muslim social service organizations are shaped and influenced by Islamic values (Nejima 2015). Researchers have also intensified their focus on the manner in which particular theologies are used by extremist and fundamentalist organizations to justify discrimination, violence, and misogyny.[43]

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[42] A further challenge associated with the discipline of theology for the study of religious rationale is the assumption it makes about the "pre-modern" origin of all religions, ignoring the fact that not all religions are "rooted in pre-modernity" (Ford 2013, 9). This, in addition to its normatively Christian framework of religion, predisposes traditional theology to view religion as a phenomenon that must continually struggle to "sustain significant continuity with the past," fighting against "the constant changes and uprooting of modernity" (Ford 2013, 9).

[43] Berger notes: "research about terrorism and violence committed in the name of religion quickly proliferated since the attacks on the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001. In the past

Political theology, as the name suggests, has also shed light on the relationship between religion and public life and has particular relevance for the study of RNGOs as these organizations have consciously chosen to engage in the domain of international governance. Political theology concerns itself with "issues which involve meaning and purpose of human life and human sociality, how we order our lives together" (Phillips 2012, 2). Stated differently, political theology is "the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social and economic aspects) from the perspective of differing interpretations of God's ways in the world" (Phillips 2012, 3).[44] The political question has been an important one in Christian theology, as reflected in movements such as liberation theology, Catholic social teaching, and more recently, feminist theology. The moral thrusts of these theologies have shaped the vision of many RNGOs at the UN.[45] Yet political theology is not adequate as a tool for my purposes of analysis as its focus is more on the political arrangements towards which religiously based critique is directed, rather than the rationale of the RNGOs who are generating this critique from a distinct epistemological vantage point.

2. Episteme

Episteme can mean simply "knowledge" or a "system of knowledge." While this is not a term traditionally associated with analyses of religion or religious organizations, the specialized use of this term by French philosopher Michel Foucault is of particular

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decade, media attention has focused on extremist organizations citing religious scriptures to justify barbaric and hateful crimes. Examples include Boko Haram, ISIS or ISIL, Al Qaeda, and Hezbollah, and Aum Shinrikyo (split in 2007), among many others. The ongoing challenge in containing religiously motivated violence is that those committing the violence believe it to be sanctioned by divine mandate. Such a belief has shown to have tremendous potency, especially when coupled with a sense of pride (individually and collectively), a supporting religious community, and a culture of violence" (Berger 2016, 11). Sociologist and scholar of religion Mark Juergensmeyer, in his book, *Terror in the Mind of God* highlights the concept of performative violence, which "implies an underlying power and legitimizing theology" (Juergensmeyer 2003, 156).

[44] Phillips citing Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (2006), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell).

[45] See for example, Emeka Xris Obiezu's discussion of the influence of Vatican II on the RNGOs at the UN (Obiezu 2013). Michael Kessler, in his book *Political Theology for a Plural Age*, refers to the Catholic encyclical, "Rerum Novarum," as "the most serious political statement of the nineteenth century" (Kessler 2013, 25).

relevance to my thesis. Foucault used this term to describe a critical apparatus for examining the hidden assumptions of knowledge. In his 1969 treatise on systems of thought and knowledge, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defines episteme as, "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems" (Foucault 1969, 191). Philosophy of religion scholar Jeremy Carrette underlines: "The episteme was not so much a type of knowledge as a set of relations for a given period. It was a 'hidden network', 'the fundamental codes of culture' or, as Foucault states, in line with his earlier work, the 'conditions of possibility'" (Carrette 2000, 15).

While the episteme operates at the macro level of culture, rather than at the level of individuals or organizations, it is nonetheless useful to consider in terms of an underlying structure of thought that "defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in practice" (Foucault 1970, 168). Foucault uses the term episteme, for example, to demonstrate the structures of thought that shaped various periods of Western intellectual history (i.e. Renaissance, Classical age, Modern period). In *The Order of Things*, he gives the example of the domain of "analysis of wealth" which generates and sustains concepts of "money, price, value, circulation, market . . . banking custom, trade practice" (Foucault 1970, 182). Similarly, in *Madness and Civilization* (1965), Foucault explores the way that cultural, intellectual and economic structures shape how "madness" is known and experienced within a given society. He is concerned here with the deep structure of knowledge that constructs society's perception and understanding of mental health and mental illness.

The episteme provides a method for discerning and identifying the structures of thought. Foucault's "archaeological" method proceeded on the assumption that systems of thought (or "epistemes") were governed by rules (beyond simply those of logic or grammar) that operated at the sub-conscious level of society. Insofar as this thesis is seeking to identify the rationale shaping the behavior of RNGOs at the UN, my approach is similar to Foucault's archaeological method of identifying the hidden rules of thought and behavior. The application of Foucauldian analysis to religious structure has been examined by scholars such as Carrette, whose *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporeality and Political Spirituality* explores Foucault's examination of

religious and theological ideas. Rather than placing Foucault in any single disciplinary frame, Carrette endeavors to "follow Foucault's disruptive spirit" and to read him through the "literary/ religious/ cultural tropes of his writing in order to unfold an understanding of 'religion' inside his work" (Carrette 2000, xi). In a similar way, it is important to read the rationale of RNGOs in terms of the religious organization's own understanding, rather than imposing on it structures of thought drawn from different intellectual traditions.

The episteme also sheds light on the analysis of religious rationale by looking at religions in terms of structures of thought and knowledge. In that sense, we can think of each religion as introducing new structures of knowledge, new "conditions of possibility" for human thought and behavior. It is, however, necessary to provide an analytical tool that focuses the intellectual exploration on the internal logic, which is enabled with the organizational substrate.

As an analytical tool for the study of RNGOs, the episteme poses a number of challenges, which limits its effectiveness for this study. First, Foucault does not elaborate on the nature of agency of an individual or an organization; rather, the episteme primarily "constrains" thought and behavior. This is a very different construct from that of "motivation," which is a characteristic often ascribed to religious teachings, laws, and narratives. Second, according to Foucault, epistemes operate largely beneath the consciousness of individuals. Third, Foucault's view of history is one that focuses on discontinuity, eschewing any possibility of a narrative that would assign meaning and direction to historical events. This view is particularly problematic in the context of studies of religious organizations given the teleology embedded in religious narratives and texts. Finally, while an episteme is not static and recognizes the possibility of change through epistemic "ruptures" or "breaks," these take place over hundreds of years. As such the concept of the episteme is less useful when studying phenomena from a developmental, evolutionary perspective. Given the relatively rapid changes in the modes of religious activism and organizational structures, Foucault's episteme is not well suited to the study of organizations in this setting.

3. Worldview

The concept of *Weltanschauung*, drawn from German philosophy, connotes a particular cognitive orientation of an individual or a group, and includes the ideas and beliefs shaping that individual's or group's interpretation of and interaction with the world. Both *Weltanschauung* and its English-language equivalent, worldview, have been used extensively by philosophers, social scientists, and theologians in their discussions of how such an understanding conditions people's experience of the world and their grasp of its material, social, and spiritual dimensions. A leading scholar of religion who coined the term "worldview analysis," notes the importance of the study of the interior dimension of religion:

> Since the study of man is in an important sense participatory—for one has to enter into men's intentions, beliefs, myths, desires, in order to understand why they act as they do. (Smart 1968, 104)

Smart identifies six dimensions of the worldview: doctrinal/ philosophical, narrative/mythic, ethical/legal, ritual/ practical, experiential/emotional, social/organizational (Smart 2000, 8). Of particular importance to my analysis is Smart's doctrinal/ philosophical dimension, which, he notes, "provides a kind of vision or way of looking at things, which itself can inspire us to act, and guide our minds in a certain way" (Smart 2000, 89).

Smart argued that the concept of worldview analysis was more useful than "religious studies" as it helps to escape the religious-secular binary imposed by the latter, as well as acknowledging the universal significance of the interior dimension of human intentions and beliefs. Smart's contemporary, anthropologist Clifford Geertz, also used the term worldview to describe one's understanding of how reality is put together. He described his observations of religious activity as being composed of both "worldview" and "ethos"—"frames of perception . . . through which experience is interpreted and they are guides for action, blueprints for conduct. The worldview side of the religious perspective centers around the problem of belief, the ethos side around the problem of action" (Geertz 1968, 98).

Smart used the term "doctrinal scheme" to refer to sets of doctrines which constitute a kind of organic entity,[46] noting that, in order to understand the scheme, it is important to understand each of its components in the context of the whole. Such an "organic" approach is helpful as it begins to recognize the dynamic nature of worldviews. Indeed he comments that worldviews are an "engine of continuity and change" (Smart 2000, 1). This is particularly significant when looking at religious organizations whose expression of religious ideas has continuously adapted to changing structures and conditions, as demonstrated, for the example, in the decision by religious institutions or entities to establish a religious NGO in order to instigate a relationship with the UN. In this sense, Smart's analysis is in step with Foucault's "conditions of possibility" because, he observes: "when religions start . . . they [are not] concerned so much with maintaining equilibrium as with providing—in a revolutionary way—a new way of looking at the world and society" (Smart 2000, 133). The organizational substrate that is introduced in this chapter seeks to identify elements of this "new way of looking at society" and the manner in which this shapes RNGO behavior.

As the changing nature of religious agency is a key feature of religious organizations in modern society, a more nuanced understanding of organizational change is key to their study. Scholars have identified, for example, changes in theological understanding of "citizenship," the move from "quietist" to "transformational" approaches, and the shift from "faith as personal belief" to "faith as practice" (Cloke, Thomas, and Williams 2012, 111). Similarly, in his research of the seventy-year history of the World Council of Church's (WCC) engagement with the UN, Lehmann notes major alterations in the organization's understanding of what was perceived as religious and secular (Lehmann 2016, 115). Whereas the concept of human rights was once considered as a matter outside of the concern of the WCC, the Catholic Church's changing understanding of its role in the world (precipitated in part by the Second Vatican Council) resulted in the recognition that promotion of human rights should be considered a Christian duty. In a similar manner, one observes a religious order such as the Order of St. Augustine, which, though formed in 1244, some 750 years later, reinvents itself as an RNGO and seeks accreditation from the UN Economic and Social Council. It is these dynamics of

[46] Smart does not use the term "system" as he feels that it is too rigid (Smart 2000, 92).

change and continuity within religious organizations—a prominent feature of religion in modernity—that prompt the necessity for more precise analytical tools.

At the level of an organization, Patrick Kilby notes that *Weltanschauung* (worldview) values play a key role in NGO accountability structures. He differentiates between the permanent nature of such values and "temporal" values (for example, human rights, humanitarian relief), "terminal" values (ending poverty, universal education), and organizational values such as honesty and integrity (Kilby 2006). The majority of NGOs in Kilby's study placed duty toward these values as their most important accountability. They saw themselves as having a certain worldview underlying their relationships with donors, constituents, and government (Kilby 2006, 959). The study goes on to note that because such values often originate from a "moral or religiously-based ethic," they are "internal" and often poorly understood by outsiders. Moreover, there is a general assumption that these values are held in common by most NGOs. Whether this assumption is correct or not, the question that remains is how values inform organizational practice. More precise analytical tools are needed to begin to answer this question.

While the concept of worldview provides us with helpful tools and concepts, it is ultimately too broad for the study of the internal rationale of RNGOs at the UN. Smart's six dimensions of worldviews are better suited to the analysis of religious communities, the actions of which encompass the life cycle and daily, lived experiences of individuals who represent a much broader spectrum of activity than that of a mission-driven organization. To use Smart's terminology, the most relevant dimensions to my analysis will be doctrinal and philosophical, and social or institutional, but we require a more specific focus on organizations to fully grasp the RNGO's understanding.

4. Habitus

Another term that has been used to study norms that guide behavior and thinking is French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," which he defines as "a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices" (Bourdieu 1979, vii). Habitus is created

through social rather than individual processes; it is not a fixed way of thinking and acting but rather shifts in relation to different contexts over time. These contexts interact with individual dispositions to give rise to modes of thinking and doing. As such, habitus is a subconscious construct, reproduced subconsciously by members of society (Bourdieu 1984, 170).

Alnoor Ebrahim, in his book *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting and Learning*, relates Bourdieu's concept of habitus (as well as other concepts by Bourdieu and Foucault) to analyze relations between development NGOs and their funders (Ebrahim 2003). Ebrahim notes that such relations can be viewed as following a general set of largely unconscious rules and patterns of behavior that are perpetuated through the behaviors and practices of respective NGOs (Ebrahim 2003, 18). He also uses Bourdieu's conceptual and methodological tools to examine the relationship between structure and agency, namely the extent to which NGOs can resist existing structures shaping NGO-funder relations to exercise organizational independence and to create new patterns of behavior (Ebrahim 2003, 20).

Although, in general, the concept of habitus has not received much attention in the field of organizational analysis,[47] it offers valuable insight into the exploration of the formation and reproduction of enduring dispositions that govern behavior. My analysis differs from Bourdieu's sociological concept in that it seeks to discern the structures of internal logic—made explicit to varying degrees—within the religious NGO. Unlike the habitus, the internal organizational logic does not arise from social and institutional interactions but, rather, is conveyed through various means by authoritative sources within the organization.[48] The concept of the habitus is instructive for the manner in which it highlights the importance of social context, events, and everyday actions in shaping behavioral norms. But, yet again, the theoretical reach is constrained as we cannot fully access the motivations of RNGOs.

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[47] A notable exception to this is Emirbayer and Johnson's study (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008), which explores the implications of Pierre Bourdieu's work for organizational analysis, with a specific focus on Bourdieu's focus on *habitus*.

[48] The question of authority is explored further in Chapter 4 of this thesis, "Substrate and Authority: The Role of the Universal House of Justice."

5. Insights from Organizational Analyses

While the four concepts discussed above (i.e. theology, episteme, worldview, habitus) offer insights into the way that thought is organized and meaning is generated, they are better suited to the macro-analysis of cultures rather than the micro-analysis of organizations, which are the focus of this thesis. A handful of studies in the area of religious and secular organizations has provided insight into the study of their internal rationale. One of the earlier studies of RNGOs analyzes these organizations according to four dimensions: religious, organizational,[49] strategic, and service dimensions (Berger 2003). The religious dimensions are addressed descriptively from the perspective of affiliation and the degree of influence they exerted over organizational decision-making. The issue of motivation is addressed only in terms of the organizational aims put forward in the mission statement and the means employed to carry out these aims. The concept of motivation is presented in binary terms of religious/transcendent vs. non-religious/immanent motivation, but the implications of the proposed analysis are not discussed. Furthermore, the study does not address the internal rationale for selecting particular aims and specific approaches for carrying them out: why do some organizations focus predominantly on poverty eradication, others on conflict resolution, or on fostering solidarity, or on political revolt? How do organizations select the methods by which they work, and why do some organizations resort to violent means?

Other studies have addressed the degree to which faith is relevant within religious organizations—ranging from not highly relevant to principal motivation—and the extent to which it exerts influence over decision-making (Boehle 2010b; Bradley 2009; Clarke 2006; Demerath et al. 1998). A sociological study of RNGOs at the UN reports that "religion is not simply incidental to the decision-making processes of RNGOs, but is a real source of difference from secular NGOs in terms of funding and priorities" (Bush 2017a, 65). Further, a comparison between RNGOs with and without religious affiliation finds that RNGOs associated with a religious institution are "significantly

[49] The organizational dimension of RNGOs encompasses variables including: representation (religious, geographic, etc.), geographic range, organizational structure (e.g. corporate, federated, etc.), and financial resources (Berger 2003, 9).

more likely than unaffiliated RNGOs to take into account religious community concerns when setting their agenda" (Bush 2017b, 66–67).[50] While the above-mentioned studies have illuminated various facets of the operation of the internal rationale of religious organizations, their analysis is limited by a number of factors. First, much of the research focuses predominantly on Christian organizations, and perpetuates a normatively Christian conception of religion. Second, the analyses (with some exceptions) do not challenge the "religious" and "secular" categories commonly employed, implicitly accepting this binary scheme. Third, they imply a fixed motivational and organizational architecture, which does not take into account a longer historical time frame associated with religious entities, nor do they address a theory of organizational change.

Several studies, including those of secular organizations, offer analytical tools that discern a more dynamic interplay between internal and external factors shaping organizational behavior and offer new insights into the nature of agency exercised by development and advocacy NGOs (e.g. Ebrahim 2003; Lehmann 2016; Martens, 2010). In her study of NGO institutionalization at the UN, German international relations scholar Kerstin Martens argues that NGO behavior is shaped by internal factors including organizational structure (whether it is centralized or not, for instance) and function (for example, advocacy) as well as by the rules and regulations concerning NGO activity at the UN (Martens 2005). Research by Alnoor Ebrahim on organizational change within development NGOs (Ebrahim 2003) and Karsten Lehmann's case study of Christian NGOs at the UN (Lehmann 2016) note a dialectical relationship between internal and external factors shaping NGO behavior. These studies provide pieces of a larger puzzle: Martens analyzes NGO behavior through the lens of institutionalization and resource mobilization theory; Ebrahim sheds light on the manner in which NGOs exercise agency by contesting and contributing to societal discourses about development and progress; and Lehmann highlights the manner in

[50] In her study, Bush posed this question to RNGOs: "Do you believe that the approach of religious NGOs to UN interlocutors is different from that of secular NGOs? If yes, can you explain the difference?" Organizations responded by saying, for example: "Our belief system informs our way of thinking and acting"; "We view our actions as having a positive philosophical underpinning which eschews the theory of 'realpolitik' in favour of one based in Christian principles" (Bush 2017b, 66). Bush notes that, based on the data from the comparison of RNGOs with and without religious affiliation, unaffiliated RNGOs resemble the secular NGOs in terms of the factors shaping their programmatic agenda (Bush 2017b, 66).

which "religiously affiliated actors are characterized by very complex internal structures that are formed in constant exchange with their respective sociocultural contexts" (Ebrahim 2003, 7). While these studies have acknowledged the role of an organization's internal dynamics, they have remained in the realm of broadly sociological readings and do not provide, therefore, an analytical tool precise enough to identify the underlying dynamic of the organization, which shapes and gives rise to its identity, goals, and processes. There remains no coherent analytical tool for capturing the inner logic of RNGOs.

III. A New Analytic: The Organizational Substrate

The *organizational substrate*—to which I have been alluding thus far and which I will discuss in detail—provides an original way to examine the internal logic of an RNGO. This new construct enables me to go beyond observations of the historical and socio-cultural determinants of organizational behavior in order to go "inside" the organization to study the generative elements shaping its behavior. In this way, the substrate augments the repertoire of tools and their attendant analytical capabilities used to examine the role of religion in the modern world. Moreover, it provides a tool suited to the analysis of institutions, rather than to cultures and traditions as a whole.

The term *substrate* is intentionally drawn from the fields of biology and chemistry in order to highlight the dynamic and generative nature of the phenomenon being studied. It is helpful to begin with a definition of substrate in order to grasp its essential analytical capability:

> A thing, which underlies or forms the basis of another; a substratum, a foundation.
> *Biology*. The surface or material on which any particular organism occurs or grows.
> *Chemistry.* The substance which a particular agent or reagent acts on [. . .] bringing about a specific transformation. (Dictionary 2017, n.p.)[51]

[51] Related concepts include the *neural substrate*, which refers to brain structures that underlie specific behaviors or psychological states; the meaning of substrate also extends to organic matter such as soil, in the sense that the soil is the *substrate* of most seed plants.

One can think of the substrate as performing a similar function to that of DNA in the human body. The DNA molecule carries most of the genetic instructions that shape the growth, development, and functioning of all living organisms. It constitutes the core identity of that being, and distinguishes it from other, even very similar, entities. However, DNA is not the sole determinant of such distinctions; that is, just by knowing the DNA, one cannot fully know the organism's phenotype,[52] which is shaped both by the expression of the organism's genes as well as the influence of environmental factors and the interactions between the two. This is the case with the substrate as well: the substrate is not a formula for a particular set of organizational behaviors. Rather it denotes a common generative foundation for a set of organizational behaviors, evocative of the relationship between plants and the soil substrate on which they live, or the neural substrate[53] that underlies a specific behavior.

The substrate complements and builds on the range of analytical tools used to study religious and ideological determinants of individual, social, and organizational behavior. First of all, the substrate operates outside of the boundaries imposed by the classical categorization of religious versus secular, so it can be used to study both religious and secular organizations. It is important to note that the religious-secular binary reinforces a particular view of the world, which largely predetermines (and, I argue, narrows) the kinds of questions asked of organizational entities. An apt analogy would be, for instance, a demographic study focused on racial differences as compared to one, which divides the population being studied into, say, parents and non-parents. The categories signal what the researcher considers to be most salient about the population being studied. In this case, the substrate eschews the religious-secular binary as the most salient characteristic of organizations and focuses, instead, on the ideational or ideological dimensions of organizational life. Thus, albeit indirectly, the substrate interrogates the category of religion, and opens up new horizons of possibilities for reading religious entities. Consider for example, the following question: Can different Catholic organizations have different substrates? I argue that they can. Knowing if an organization is "religious" or "secular," or even with what religion it identifies, would not help us find a satisfactory answer. We need to know what foundational values it is

[52] Phenotype refers to an organism's observable characteristics or traits.
[53] The set of brain structures.

trying to embody and whether they are determined by an authoritative religious body or not.

Second, the substrate provides a way of studying the internal and subjective dimension of the organization. It addresses not only the ideas shaping organizational rationale but also the intentions behind them. In this way, the analysis makes visible new dimensions of organizational behavior, in the spirit of "thick description," pioneered by ethnographer Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, which explains both the behavior and its context, thereby allowing the observer to perceive its meaning (Geertz 1973). Geertz gives the example of an ethnographer's understanding of the "wink of an eye" and how this action can be interpreted in simply biological and mechanical terms (the movement of an eyelid) or in terms of the intention of the individual producing this motion (whether it be to convey deception, humor, and so on). As scholars such as Barnett have noted, the output of religious and secular NGOs is often indistinguishable (Barnett 2012); the substrate interrogates the meanings and intentions framing organizational behavior.

Third, the substrate enables scholars to move fluidly between different religious traditions, rather than be confined to epistemologies and analytical tools grounded in the Christian tradition, which tend to analyze religious entities as proto-Christian forms, as King suggests (King 1999).

Fourth, the substrate moves beyond analyses rooted in static conceptions of religions as fixed sets of doctrines or laws and enables us, therefore, to discern the unique dynamic between continuity and change that characterizes religious NGOs. Consequently, it discerns the developmental and evolutionary dimensions of organizational thought and behavior. This is particularly salient in the analysis of RNGOs at the UN, which are grounded in traditions or religious orders reaching back hundreds or even thousands of years. It helps us to see how an order like the aforementioned Augustinians, whose order, founded in the thirteenth, eventually appears at the UN as an NGO. Political theorist William Connolly highlights the utility of concepts drawn from biology for the study of phenomena in the political sphere. In a journal article titled, "Biology, Politics, Creativity," he writes:

> I share the view that bio-cultural connections should become more central to political inquiry… The approach considered in this response is one in which variable degrees of agency are pushed deeply into simple organisms, into processes of embryological unfolding, and into subliminal elements of cultural relations. Such an approach appreciates the creative element in evolution as well as in subliminal processes in play within and between us. Several practitioners of complexity theory in biology have been exploring such routes. They may contribute to a more layered set of interfaces between biology and cultural interpretation that are even less reductionist in character . . . (Connolly 2013, 508).

The organizational substrate incorporates elements of the analytical tools discussed in the preceding section: it focuses on epistemological elements and "conditions of possibility" (episteme); it applies to religious and secular entities (worldviews); it attends to questions of meaning and practice with respect to a religious tradition, and takes religious ideas seriously (theology/political theology); and recognizes the interplay between contextual/structural factors and ideational/generative factors (habitus). Importantly, it locates these elements within organizational concepts and practices.

IV. The Organizational Substrate and the Bahá'í International Community

Having introduced the concept of the organizational substrate in response to the first research question (How can we understand the internal rationale of NGOs, specifically 'religious' NGOs engaging with the UN?) we now turn to the second question that frames this thesis: How has the BIC's internal rationale shaped its 70-year relationship with the UN? In order to answer this question, I begin by situating it within the broader context of Bahá'í scholarship. I then proceed to outline a method for identifying the substrate of the BIC and discuss its constituent elements. Having laid the theoretical and conceptual groundwork, I move on, in Chapters 3 – 6, to the examine the manner in which the substrate has shaped the BIC's relationship with the UN.

1. Bahá'í Scholarship

Having reviewed a number of macro- and micro-analytical tools used to study structures of thought, and elaborated on the additional and unique analytical capabilities of the organizational substrate, I now proceed to outline how to identify such a substrate.[54] The focus of my analysis is the Bahá'í International Community—an RNGO in consultative status with the UN, and one that has been active at the UN since the UN's founding conference in 1946.[55] As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the BIC was selected for this analysis owing to a number of factors: its long-standing and wide-ranging engagement with the UN—which provides a rich historical record for examination—the BIC's reputation as an active, well-respected, and effective NGO at the UN; the dearth of research about the Bahá'í community's engagement in the international arena; the BIC's unique status as an RNGO representing an entire religious community;[56] the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith in the mid-nineteenth century; and the fact that it represents a tradition other than Christian ones which have been the focus of most studies of religion at the UN.[57]

While the Bahá'í community's engagement in the international sphere has not been the focus of scholarly analysis (with the exception of Wu's 2012 political science thesis, *The Bahá'í International Community and Global Governance*), a number of scholars, themselves members of the Bahá'í community, have written about the structures of thought shaping the Bahá'í community (Arbab 2000; Farid-Arbab 2016; Karlberg 2004; Lample 2009; Saiedi 2000). While a detailed account of this scholarship is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is helpful to review these contributions in the context of the intellectual path they have forged—a path which I have tread in the course of

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[54] In the introductory chapter, I discuss the specific historical, interpretivist, and hermeneutical approaches and methodologies used in this study.

[55] The Bahá'í community also established formal relations with the UN's predecessor, the League of Nations.

[56] The Holy See represents the worldwide Catholic community, not as an RNGO, but as a Permanent Observer.

[57] As mentioned in the introductory chapter, while a limitation of this focused approach is the challenge of generalizing findings, a focus on the BIC enables me to study the internal rationale of a religious organization outside of the Christian tradition, and as such helps to identify language, categories, and concepts that may be relevant for other organizations rooted in religious constructs other than Christianity.

developing and refining the concept of the organizational substrate. It is important to note that, with the exception of Sona Farid-Arbab, all of the above-mentioned scholars have focused their analyses on the Bahá'í Faith or the Bahá'í community as a whole. Farid-Arbab, instead, conducted an analysis on a Bahá'í-inspired organization.

Bahá'í scholarship on the structures of thought of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í community converges on analyses that highlight organic, evolutionary, and systemic dimensions of Bahá'í epistemology. In his 2004 book, *Beyond the Culture of Contest*, communications scholar Michael Karlberg, posits that the Bahá'í community constitutes an "alternative cultural formation," one which provides an alternative to norms of conflict and competition embedded in the modern social order (Karlberg 2004, 123). He uses the term "cultural code" to denote "conventions, or rules of correspondence, through which thought, talk and action become mutually intelligible within a shared culture" (Karlberg 2004, 8). Further, Karlberg claims that the Bahá'í community shares an "organic" worldview—as embodied in references in the Bahá'í Writings to "the organic interdependence of the human species, the organic nature of the relationships between human beings and their environment" and the organic processes of growth and adaption that characterize social evolution (Karlberg 2004, 129). Sociologist Nader Saiedi has argued that the Bahá'í Faith initiates a "a new paradigm, a model, a new logic of discourse, a new episteme, and a new problematic" in approaching reality (Saiedi 2000, 43). According to Saiedi, the novel element of the Bahá'í Faith is "the unity and organic synthesis of at least three fundamental principles—spiritual transcendence, historical consciousness and global unity" (Saiedi 2000, 45). These principles constitute the foundations of what he calls a "conceptual and moral system" (Saiedi 2000, 45), which frames the meaning of Bahá'í scriptures, and, I would add, the actions of the Bahá'í community.

Authors Paul Lample and Farzam Arbab, both with a background in science, have referred in their research to the Bahá'í Faith as a "system of knowledge and practice" (Arbab 2000; Lample 2009).[58] Lample differentiates between religion as a "system of knowledge that guides understanding and action in response to Revelation" and science

[58] The Universal House of Justice used this same term in *One Common Faith* (2005), a publication it commissioned.

as a "system of knowledge that guides understanding and action in the realm of nature" (Lample 2009, 22). Both note that religion and science are distinct yet complementary systems, neither representing a subset of the other. Lample uses the terms "worldview," as well as "philosophical" or "moral framework" in his examination of the manner in which the Bahá'í community seeks to understand the Bahá'í Revelation and to act on this understanding.

In terms of organizational analyses, Sona Farid-Arbab, a philosopher of education, in her book *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*, explores the philosophical framework of FUNDAEC,[59] a Colombian organization inspired by the Bahá'í teachings and dedicated to helping specific populations to "participate in the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge" about the different processes of community life (Farid-Arbab 2016, 9). Farid-Arbab explores the "evolving conceptual framework" of thought and action that underpins the book's central pedagogical concept—moral empowerment. Further, she identifies two "interrelated sets of Bahá'í teachings" that underlie moral empowerment, one concerning the principle of the oneness of humankind, and the second concerning the evolution of human society (Farid-Arbab 2016, 12). What emerges from the foregoing analyes of Bahá'í scholarship is a convergence around concepts that denote an orientation towards an organic, evotionary, and systemic modes of thought. In seeking to identify the internal rationale and logic of a Bahá'í organization, it is important to deploy a tool capable of discerning the operation of such ways of thinking. It is precisely this, which calls for a new analytical construct for reading the BIC (and other RNGOs).

2. A Method for Identifying the Organizational Substrate of the BIC

In identifying the substrate of the BIC, we begin with the question of authority: What is the source of authority which articulates the elements of the organizational substrate? In the case of RNGOs, we need to first determine the organization's relationship with structures of authority in the respective religion—to what extent do the authoritative

[59] FUNDAEC is the acronym, in Spanish, for "Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences."

structures of the religious community articulate the organizational logic and rationale?[60] It is helpful to use my earlier terminology describing four types of relationships between the organizational entity and its relationship to its respective formal religious institutions—sub-ordinate (e.g. some Catholic orders), cooperative (e.g. many Islamic relief organizations), independent (e.g. Muslims for Progressive Values), or oppositional (e.g. Catholics for a Free Choice, for example) (Berger 2003). In the case of the BIC—an RNGO established and guided by the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the worldwide Bahá'í community—we can classify the relationship as "subordinate" and state unequivocally that only the Universal House of Justice has the authority to articulate a vision, rationale, and logic to guide the work of the organization.[61]

In order to understand how the substrate operates within such an organization, it is necessary to understand something about the structure of religious authority. While this question will be elabored in greater detail in Chapter 4 ("Substrate and Authority"), it is helptul to mention here that one of the fundamental differences between the Bahá'í Faith and other authoritative religious institutions is that the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, in addition to laying down a set of laws, provided for the establishment of specific institutions mandated to apply these laws "loyally and intelligently" according to the "requirements of progressive society" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 19). The Universal House of Justice has further elucidated the nature of authority in the Bahá'í community:

> In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centers appointed to which the believers must turn . . . The Book is the record of

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[60] See for example Evelyn Bush's findings about the degree to which formal religious institutional affiliation determines agenda setting for RNGOs (Bush 2017a), as well as Berger's distinction in her "Framework for the Analysis of RNGOs" between different types of relationships to religious leadership—subordinate, cooperative, independent (Berger 2010).

[61] It may be helpful to contrast this with Farid-Arbab's method of identifying the elements of the conceptual framework FUNDAEC. As this organization was created independently and is what Farid-Arbab refers to as a "Bahá'í-inspired" organization, the method for identfiying the conceptual framework guiding the organization involves interviews with its founders (themselves Bahá'ís) in order to determine how their reading of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith motivated the aims and processes of their work. Farid-Arbab writes: "Discussions with individuals who have played crucial roles in the creation of FUNDAEC underscore the importance of two interrelated sets of Bahá'í teachings that gradually led them to their conception of moral empowerment . . . The first has to do with the principle of the oneness of humankind and the second with the evolution of human society" (Farid-Arbab 2016, 9).

> the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of the Book—and it is he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one center is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. (UHJ 1986a, 160)[62]

Given the authoritative role of the Universal House of Justice, the substrate can be identified based on the legislation and guidance of this institution, pertaining to the BIC.

Before moving on to identify the elements of the BIC's organizational substrate, it is instructive to consider how a substrate can be identified in the absence of such a clearly 'subordinate' relationship between the RNGO and its authoritative religious institution. Byrd, in his study of the "character, pattern, and development" of Quaker involvement in foreign policy (analogous to the search for an organizational substrate), opens his study with a detailed account of the challenges that arose at the outset of the research given the decentralization of the Society of Friends and the absence of an organizational hierarchy, which could offer authoritative statements on behalf of the Friends (Byrd 1960, xiii-xix). Despite these challenges, Byrd persisted with his inquiry noting:

> ...a stubborn fact remains: there are three hundred years of unbroken Quaker history and a continuing Society of increasing membership that is identified with a particular way of life, including a particular approach to international relations... But how in the midst of this diversity, are the basic pattern, the central theme to be identified? (Byrd 1960, vxiii)

In the absence of an authoritative institution, the researcher must devise her own methodology for identifying the generative moral foundation of a given organization or movement, and be able to demonstrate its validity. Byrd responds to this challenge by identifying the informal, unofficial centers of Quaker leadership (i.e. the London and

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[62] The authoritative texts of the Bahá'í Faith encompass nearly forty-six years of Revelation by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and sixty-five years of authorized interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. In His Will and Testament, Bahá'u'lláh designated 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest son, as the sole authorized interpreter of his Writings. Since its establishment in 1963, the Universal House of Justice, has elucidated the meaning of the Bahá'í Writings and is authorized to legislate on matters not explicitly addressed in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi.

Philadelphia Yearly Meetings), by studying and triangulating insights drawn from Quaker periodicals, newsletters, policy statements, as well as the personal statements of leading "public" figures in the Quaker community (e.g. William Penn, Rufus Jones, Lucretia Mott). In the end, Byrd seeks to accomplish his goal by differentiating between "that which comes and goes in the Quaker tradition" and "that which has persisted" (Byrd 1960, xviii)—the former being considered irrelevant to the study, and the latter germane. Byrd admits that this is not an exact science; the likelihood of error, however, "has not been sufficient reason to preclude the effort" (Byrd 1960, xviii). The method for identifying the substrate, what Byrd refers to as "the basic pattern," the "particular approach" to international relations, will vary according to the authoritative structures of the tradition. What is particularly instructive about Byrd's study is the affirmation that, even in the absence of a centralized authority structure, a distinct and sustained rationale and epistemology govern the tradition's engagement in the political arena.

Returning to the task at hand, we can proceed to identify the organizational substrate of the BIC with reference to the legislation and guidance of the Universal House of Justice. In doing so, it is necessary to consider a number of hermeneutical principles that obtain for the study of Bahá'í Writings: (1) The meaning of the Bahá'í Writings is not fixed, but rather progressively disclosed throughout the course of the Revelation and, further, progressively elucidated by the Universal House of Justice. (2) The text must be read in light of the stage of the development of the Bahá'í community at any particular time. This point is particularly relevant when reading texts pertaining to engagement in the life of society, and in politics more specifically. (3) Finally, the text must be understood both in terms of its particular historical and cultural context and in terms of its universal applicability. That is to say that the meaning of a text is neither limited to its particular context nor can it be fully understood in the absence of this context.[63] With these orienting remarks, I now proceed to discuss a crucial document that will assist us in the identification of the substrate.

[63] For further scholarship about Bahá'í hermeneutics, see Fazel and Fananapazir 1992, May 1989, and Lample 2009.

In a seminal letter to the Bahá'í community in Iran, the Universal House of Justice outlined its "vision of the framework that shapes the Bahá'í approach to the subject of [politics]" (UHJ 2013, 1). While the question of the community's engagement in politics has been progressively clarified throughout the history of the Bahá'í Faith, this letter represents the first iteration of a conceptual framework guiding these endeavors. In light of the above-mentioned hermeneutical principles, we must read this letter both in terms of its particular socio-historical context (the Iranian Bahá'í community in 2013) and in terms of its broader application to questions of the Bahá'í community's engagement in politics. The letter elucidates the following six elements of the framework: (1) conviction that humanity has reached a developmental threshold, namely that of its "collective maturity"; (2) belief that the principle of the oneness of humankind implies a change in the structure of society; (3) learning process focused on discovery of more just relationships among the individual, community, and social/governing institutions; (4) understanding of individual, community, and social/governing institutions as protagonists in advancing a new civilization; (5) a conception of power free from notions of dominance and division; and (6) a vision of the world characterized by unity in its cultural diversity .

In light of earlier remarks concerning Bahá'í hermeneutics, we can read the framework outlined in the letter in terms of an elucidation, by the Universal House of Justice, of the Bahá'í community's continually evolving understanding of the aims and manner of its engagement in the political sphere. As I mentioned earlier, the meaning of the Writings is *progressively elucidated* by the Universal House of Justice in accordance with the needs, questions, and exigencies of the day. In other words, the Universal House of Justice is responding to a set of circumstances specific to Iran in 2013. It is, at the same time, attentive to the experience, maturity, and capacity of the Bahá'í community to carry out its guidance. Thus when looking at a statement from 2013 we cannot simply extract all of the elements and say that these have comprised the substrate for the BIC since the beginning of its engagement with the UN in 1945. Rather, elements of the framework must be seen both in the light of the immutable tenets of the Bahá'í Faith as well as the progressive elucidation of the application of these tenets in light of circumstances. This is in line with the nature of the substrate, which is a *generative* concept—it finds expression in a wide diversity of approaches

and behaviors, which are continually evolving and changing in response to factors internal and external to the organization. We can use the analogy of a doctor who practices medicine in different countries: she may change her diet, clothing, language, and mode of transportation, but will remain an individual concerned primarily with the promotion of health and the treatment of disease.

In addition, since we are identifying the substrate of an organization that has been in existence since 1945, we need to recognize elements of the framework that has been at the core of its work throughout its seventy-year history—the foundational, generative substance that shapes the life and identity of the organization. We must look, that is, at those immutable elements without which we could no longer correctly identify the organization as "Bahá'í." In light of the hermeneutical principles of the Bahá'í Faith, the only elements that are "immutable" are those that have been introduced by Bahá'u'lláh and progressively clarified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It is important, however, to note that the term "immutable," as I am using it here, refers only to the existence of the concept itself and not to the human understanding of the concept, which continually evolves; the concept is fixed, but our understanding of it is not.[64]

Based on my reading of the 2 March 2013 letter, and in light of Bahá'í hermeneutics, I argue that we can identify two elements of the BIC's substrate: (1) a developmental view of history, and (2) the principle of the oneness of humankind.

In addition, I posit a third element of the substrate, one inextricably linked to the first two: the authoritative and governing structure of the Bahá'í community—a system known as the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The Administrative Order consists of elected local, national, and international bodies, which exercise legislative, executive, and judicial authority within their defined sphere of action.[65] These institutions do not tend solely to the affairs of Bahá'ís and their respective communities; rather, the

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[64] The Bahá'í Writings state that the meaning of the Word of God "can never be exhausted" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, 175).

[65] At the local level, the Bahá'í community elects, annually, nine-member Local Spiritual Assemblies; at the national level, annually, each Bahá'í community elects is nine-member National Spiritual Assembly. At the international level, since 1963, the worldwide Bahá'í community elects nine individuals to serve on the Universal House of Justice.

Administrative Order is conceived as a channel through which the spirit, teachings, and tenets of the Bahá'í Faith find expression throughout the world. This system, described initially by Bahá'u'lláh, elaborated on by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and erected by Shoghi Effendi, is described by the latter as a "framework," and as an "inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child[66] is being nurtured and developed," a system which serves as "the nucleus [and] the very pattern of the New World Order[67]" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 143).

This element forms part of the substrate for a number of reasons. First, the BIC operates within the realm of international affairs, within which the structures governing national and global affairs and the relationships among member states are fundamental to all facets of UN operation. The BIC relates to the UN not as an autonomous NGO but as a representative of Bahá'í communities in over 180 nations.[68] Second, the principle of the oneness of humankind, as elaborated by Shoghi Effendi, is inextricably linked with the relationships among nation states and with a supranational system of governance. Shoghi Effendi states:

> [The principle of the oneness of humankind] is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family . . . (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43).

In the same letter to the Bahá'í community, he notes that this principle, "does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 44). As I will discuss in Chapter 4, it is this structural/authoritative element of the substrate that has enabled the BIC to forge its identity as an organization representing the aspirations and interests of the peoples of

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[66] The nascent Bahá'í community

[67] The term "new World Order" refers to the system of teachings, elaborated by the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. This system, which reconceptualizes relationships at all levels of society and guides the establishment of a world civilization is characterized by: a system of collective security, an international executive body, a world parliament, a supreme tribunal, abolition of economic barriers, interdependence of capital and labor, eradication of religious fanaticism and racial animosity, single code of international law, a shift from militant nationalism to a sense of world citizenship. "Such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 74).

[68] This information is reported to the UN in mandatory Quadrennial Reports submitted by every NGO.

the world, and to convey its vision and convictions operationally through the channels and function of the Administrative Order.

It may be confusing to readers to note that all three elements of the substrate—the view of history, the oneness of humankind, and the governing/authoritative structure of the Bahá'í community—relate not only to the BIC but to the Bahá'í Faith as a whole. While this is indeed the case, it does not mean that I am conflating the BIC with the Bahá'í Faith. Rather, I am identifying the foundational, generative elements drawn from the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, which have brought the BIC into association with the UN and shaped this relationship. Another DNA analogy may be helpful here: the cells of our arms and kidneys, for example, carry the same DNA; nonetheless, while one group of cells develops into an arm, the other becomes a kidney, as different portions of that same DNA are activated for a specific purpose. As I examine the expression of the elements of the substrate in the specific context of engagement in the field of international affairs and global governance, we will notice that various facets of the Bahá'í Faith are more relevant to some endeavors than others. My argument is that the three above-mentioned elements combine to generate a distinct form of organizational engagement with the UN, thus helping us to understand the nature of a distinct form of religious agency in the international sphere.

3. Elements of the Substrate of the BIC

Having elaborated the method for identifying the substrate of the BIC, I will now proceed to outline the three constituent elements of its substrate in greater detail.

Evolutionary Perspective on History and Religion

An evolutionary and developmental view of human history is "inseparable" from an understanding of the Bahá'í community's engagement in politics (UHJ 2013a, 2). The Bahá'í Faith sees humanity as having traversed the stages of its collective infancy and adolescence, and standing today at the "threshold of maturity" (UHJ 2013a, 2). "Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life," writes the Universal House of Justice, "are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age" (UHJ

2013a, 2). The manner in which such a perspective has shaped the engagement of the BIC with the UN is discussed in the succeeding chapters, especially in Chapter 4.

The Universal House of Justice differentiates between two fundamental processes interacting throughout history: that of disintegration and of integration. It discerns the process of disintegration in, "the impotence of leaders at all levels to mend the fractures appearing in the structure of society, in the dismantling of social norms that have long held in check unseemly passions, and in the despondency and indifference exhibited not only by individuals but also by entire societies that have lost any vital sense of purpose" (UHJ 2013a, 3). Unfolding in parallel, the process of integration draws together diverse peoples, nations states, and social groups, unfolding new arenas for cooperation. Bahá'ís, then, strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with dynamics associated with the process of integration, "which, they are confident, will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons" (UHJ 2013a, 3).

Embedded within this view of human history, is a similarly evolutionary perspective on the history of religion. Bahá'u'lláh introduced the concept of progressive revelation to denote an ongoing, evolutionary process in which religious guidance is progressively unfolded to humanity in accordance with the level of spiritual and social development of humanity. Shoghi Effendi explains:

> The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin . . . and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society. (Shoghi Effendi 1980, 5)[69]

[69] According to the Bahá'í Writings, divine guidance is revealed to humanity through a succession of figures associated with the world's great religions; among them: Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and—more recently—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. In the veiled language of revelation, Bahá'u'lláh explains: "As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. Whenever this robe hath fulfilled its purpose, the Almighty will assuredly renew it. For every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God. Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitted the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, ch. 34).

According to Bahá'u'lláh, the cumulative body of Divine Revelation constitutes the fundamental means for the advancement of humanity. In this sense, Bahá'u'lláh recasts the entire conception of religion as a continuous force that, throughout history, has propelled and stimulated the development of human consciousness (BWC 2005, 23). One facet of the development of this consciousness is that of social organization. The Bahá'í teachings state that religion, through the teachings and influence of the prophets and founders of these religious, has guided humanity through increasingly complex levels of social organization—from the family, to the tribe, to the city-state, and to nation states.

The Bahá'í perspective of history has much in common with the concepts of "axiality" (Jaspers 2010) and echoes thinkers who focused on the changeable, fluid, evolutionary dimensions of history and religion, such as G.W.F. Hegel, Charles Darwin, and Alfred North Whitehead.[70] Indeed among the defining elements of modernity over the past two centuries have been novel conceptions of time and history. As Foucault notes in *The Order of Things*, "the order of time is beginning" (Foucault 1970, 319). Very much along these lines, in the opening years of the twentieth century, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, "The universal energy is dynamic. Nothing is stationary in the material world of outer phenomena or in the inner world of intellect and consciousness. Religion is the outer expression of the divine reality. Therefore, it must be living, vitalized, moving and progressive" ('Abdu'l-Bahá [1912] 1982, 140). This further underscores the organic and dynamic conception of religion that animates the substrate.

The Oneness of Humankind

The principle of the oneness of humankind is "the foundation of the Faith of God," and the "distinguishing feature of His Law" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 36). This principle refers not only to cooperation and goodwill among individuals but "concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43).

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[70] For an incisive analysis of prevalent narratives of religious history see Benjamin Schewel's *Seven Narratives of Religion* (Schewel 2017). Schewel argues that contemporary scholarly discourse on religion can be categorized according to seven central narratives: subtraction, renewal, transsecular, postnaturalist, construct, perennial, and developmental.

The oneness of humankind emerges in the Bahá'í Writings as a historical imperative and a teleological principle. 'Abdu'l-Bahá highlights the historical imperative associated with this principle: "For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, and being strengthened every day" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1978, 31). Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh states: "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, 286). While the achievement of unity is the overarching aim and generating motivation of every Bahá'í endeavor, it takes on a particular significance in the context of the Bahá'í community's engagement with the UN and in political affairs more broadly. The Universal House of Justice, in a 2006 letter to the beleaguered Bahá'í community in Egypt crystallizes this point:

> Human society has arrived at a stage in its evolution when unity of the whole human race is imperative. To not appreciate this reality is to not grasp the meaning of the current crisis in world affairs. The principle of the oneness of humankind identifies the code for resolving the far-reaching issues involved. (UHJ 2006, 2)

It is important to note that the protagonists of this vision will not be the Bahá'ís themselves but rather the peoples of the world. Unity will not be achieved by a subset of the global community—by one group of people on behalf of the masses. The Bahá'í Writings assert that "[a]ll men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, 215). Thus, every nation and every group will make its unique contribution to the advancement of human civilization.

The core doctrinal tenets of the Bahá'í Faith, then, must be understood in the context of the broader goal of the achievement of the organic unity of the body of nations. As Shoghi Effendi elucidates, the principle of the oneness of humankind implies "an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43). Together, Bahá'í principles and tenets seek to foster the spiritual, social, intellectual, structural and material conditions conducive to the achievement of this unity. Among these we may identify the following: the elimination of prejudice and discrimination, the achievement of universal education, gender equality, elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, the harmony between science and religion, freedom of religion, a universal

auxiliary language, the centrality of justice to all human endeavors, and the independent investigation of truth. The principle of the oneness of humankind can be said to provide an overarching frame through which to view the collective progress of humanity.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the phases in the progressive achievement of unity as “seven candles.” Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, he notes that the “first candle” is “unity in the political ream, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned.” The second is “unity of thought in world undertakings”; the third, “unity in freedom”; the fourth, “unity in religion which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself”; the fifth, “unity of nations . . . which in this century will be securely established”; the sixth, “unity of races”; and the seventh, “unity of language,[71] the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1978, 32).

The Structure of Authority

The third element of the substrate of the BIC concerns the structure of authority in the Bahá’í community, known as the Bahá’í Administrative Order. The authority to lead the Bahá’í community resides within local, national, and international elected bodies—a system elaborated in the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith. The Universal House of Justice, an institution explicitly ordained by Bahá’u’lláh, sits at the head of the Administrative Order, and is invested with the responsibility to, “ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings” (UHJ 1972). In his writings, Bahá’u’lláh also invested the Universal House of Justice with the authority to legislate on issues that He had not specifically addressed. “Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution,” writes Bahá’u’lláh, “such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time” (Bahá’u’lláh 1982, 27).

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[71] The Bahá’í Writings refer to an “auxiliary” language rather than a language to replace all others.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order, however, is not an end in itself. It does not provide fixed rules nor does it express an immutable set of institutional arrangements. Rather, it represents a balance between the immutability and integrity of the principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the elasticity of their application, which enables these principles to be progressively embodied and expressed in society. Shoghi Effendi clarifies this relationship between the immutable and organic dimensions of the Administrative Order. On the one hand, the Administrative Order must adhere to the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation; "such is the immutability of His revealed Word," which "preserves the identity of His Faith, and guards the integrity of His law" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 23). Complementary to this is the "elasticity" of the Administrative Order, which "even as a living organism" is able "to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirement of an ever-changing society" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 23).[72]

While the authority rests with the institutions of the Bahá'í community (the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice), the power of action rests with individual believers. The Universal House of Justice thus elaborates on the complementary relationship between individual initiative and the authoritative guidance of Bahá'í institutions of governance:

> The power of action in the believers is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and surges at the level of collective volition...To realize its highest purpose, this power needs to express itself through orderly avenues of activity. Even though individuals may strive to be guided in their actions by their personal understanding of the Divine Texts, and much can be accomplished thereby, such actions, untempered by the overall direction provided by authorized institutions, are incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advancement of civilization. (UHJ 1989, n.p.)

Two concluding points are important to mention about the Administrative Order as an element of the substrate. First, to reiterate a point made earlier in the chapter, the

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[72] Shoghi Effendi states that "the machinery of the Cause has been so fashioned, that whatever is deemed necessary to incorporate into it in order to keep it in the forefront of all progressive movements, can, according to the provisions made by Bahá'u'lláh, be safely embodied therein" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 23).

Administrative Order is not conceived to tend solely to the internal affairs of the Bahá'í community; it is a system, an organism, intended to serve as a nucleus for the pattern of relationships among individuals, communities, and institutions that will characterize a unified and just global community. Second, it is a system that is integral to the Bahá'í Faith; Shoghi Effendi described it as the "inviolable stronghold" within which the Bahá'í community is "being nurtured and developed" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 144).

V. Summary

This chapter has introduced the organizational substrate as a tool for interrogating the internal rationale that shapes RNGO engagement with the UN. The need for such a tool arises from efforts to understand more fully the nature of religious agency in the public and political sphere. Whereas most of the research on religious actors has focused on the outward behaviors of organizations, or the positions they have taken on various issues, new avenues of research are shedding light on the manner in which religious frameworks and epistemologies give rise to particular modes of engagement, thereby examining the religious organization "from the inside out."

Yet, the majority of approaches remain rooted in concepts whose analytical power may be reaching its limits, concepts rooted in the religious-secular binary, normatively Christian and Western conceptions of religion, as well as theoretical devices that assume a static notion of religious agency and rationale. The organizational substrate is a tool that addresses itself to these challenges by building on Foucault's concept of "episteme" and Smart's "worldview analysis," and borrowing from the language of biology to develop an instrument suited to the analysis of contemporary and dynamic modes of religious engagement in politics. The substrate helps us to move beyond the religious-secular category to shed light on the ideational, meaning-making, and motivational dimensions of religious engagement in the public sphere. This analytical tool also expands our analytical and descriptive capacity beyond concepts such as organizational "positions," "lobbying," "advocacy," or "proselytizing" to yield a more nuanced understanding of the epistemological dimensions of organizational behavior. Further the substrate brings attention to an overlooked characteristic of religious

organizations—namely the intimate relationship between continuity and change, integrity and adaptation, which are central to an understanding of religion in the modern world.

The three elements of the organizational substrate of the Bahá'í International Community that I have identified in this chapter are the evolutionary view of history/religion, the principle of the oneness of humankind, and the Bahá'í Administrative Order. It is the combination of these three elements that renders the substrate unique to the BIC. The individual elements of the substrate may of course form part of other organizational substrates, but it is their unique combination that generates a rationale and a logic of engagement unique to the BIC. I will now demonstrate the significance of the substrate by examining how it illuminates the inner logic of BIC's actions throughout successive periods of its engagement with the UN. The substrate brings into focus the emergence of what I have referred to as a 'divine polity' – a distinct community pursuing social change on the basis of the teachings and tenets of the Bahá'í Faith, and contributing to the realization of the vision set forth in the authoritative writings of the tradition.

Chapter 3

Substrate and Meaning: Rationale for Engagement (1945-1970)

I. Overview

My examination of how the substrate shapes the BIC's rationale for engagement with the UN and its understanding of the significance of the UN in the context of broader civilizational processes starts with a twenty-five-year period beginning in 1945—when the representatives of the Bahá'í community[73] attended the founding conference of the UN in San Francisco.[74] By the end of this quarter-century of engagement, in 1970, the Bahá'í International Community obtained consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, thus extending its privileges from observer to full participant (Howe 1970).[75] This first of four periods in the seventy-year history analyzed in this thesis focuses on the operation of the substrate during the early formative years of both the UN and the BIC.

Drawing on archival documents gathered from the National Bahá'í Archives in Wilmette, Illinois, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office archives, as well as authoritative Bahá'í sources, I argue that the substrate enables us to

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[73] The "Bahá'í International Community" as such was not formed until 1948, thus the registered entity representing the Bahá'í community at the conference was the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. In 1947, this entity applied to the UN for "accredited observer" status as a national NGO. Later that year, the eight existing National Spiritual Assemblies around the globe (represented by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States), applied for status as an international NGO, under the name of "Bahá'í International Community." When the Canadian Bahá'í community elected its own National Spiritual Assembly, the BIC became a union of nine national assemblies "for the purpose of maintaining a relationship with the UN . . . 'The Bahá'í International Community' has no other function or authority" (*The Bahá'í World* 1952, 43).

[74] The conference was formally called the United Nations Conference on International Organization and took place from 25 April to 26 June 1945. The UN Charter was opened for signature on 26 June. Fifty nations took part in the Conference. (For more information about the Bahá'í community's presence at the founding conference, see Holley 1946.) The Bahá'í community had also established representation to the League of Nations, in the form of the International Bahá'í Bureau. For a summary of Bahá'í activities associated with the League of Nations, see Chapter X in *One Common Faith*, published under the auspices of the Universal House of Justice (BWC 2005).

[75] Consultative status for NGOs has its foundation in Article 71 of the UN Charter, which stated that: "The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned" (United Nations 1945). Shortly after the founding of the UN, forty-five NGOs were granted consultative status with ECOSOC.

discern a unique dimension of RNGO engagement with the UN—namely one of meaning—thereby helping us to understand the rationale, which attracted the organization to engage with the UN in the first place. In the specific case of the BIC, I will demonstrate that the Bahá'í conception of history and the Bahá'í tenet of the oneness of humanity—two dimensions of the substrate—lend a particular significance to the creation of the UN. As has been noted: "Social reality is constituted by social practices and institutions that have meanings for those who participate in them" (Deneulin and Rakodi 2011, 51). In my analysis, I educe two elements of the Bahá'í conception of history—namely, an evolutionary view of history as well as the interplay of two parallel processes of social integration and disintegration—in order to demonstrate how they give rise to a unique understanding of the UN and of global governance more broadly. In the process, I also aim to show that the Bahá'í community's desire to associate with the UN is, thereof, not rooted in a naïve notion of it as an idealized political entity but rather in the recognition of the UN's place in the context of humanity's millennia-long efforts to construct an ordered system of relationships among the peoples and, more recently, the nations of the world.

I seek to demonstrate that the historical and teleological dimensions of the substrate illuminate a dimension of RNGO engagement that helps to discern a facet of its religious nature. The "religious" dimension, I argue, is not manifest only in the outwardly visible actions of the organization but, equally importantly, in the logic and rationale underlying behavior. The substrate reveals what has been referred to as "different ways of knowing the international" (Acharya 2014, 4) and a "counter-rationality"—a rationality that reveals a different understanding of what it means to be human and to participate in economic and political life (Brown 2005, 59). Further, I demonstrate that the rationale of the BIC is embodied in its practice of non-participation in partisan politics in a manner that ensures coherence between its ends and its means of engagement with the UN.

I begin by discussing the significance of consultative status (or absence therefore) as an important institutional parameter within which the substrate finds expression during this period.

II. The Substrate and the Institutional Environment

The question of consultative status is key to analyzing the relationship between an NGO or RNGO and the UN for two reasons: the status, granted by a UN body, confers legitimacy on the organization, and confers privileges of association to the organization depending on the type of status being accorded.[76] First, the consultative status defines the terms of the NGO-UN by delineating the privileges associated with this status. According to ECOSOC Resolution 1296, an organization seeking consultative status should demonstrate "recognized international standing," be "international in its structure," its aims should conform "with the spirit, purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations," and it should be "[qualified] to make a significant contribution to the work of the [Economic and Social] Council." Once granted, consultative status gives the NGO the privilege, among others, to submit to the Council written statements relevant to its work, to make oral statements during Council sessions, to propose items for the Council's provisional agenda, and to attend public meetings and UN conferences (ECOSOC 1968). By the end of 1970 (the year that BIC was granted consultative status), the total number of NGOs in consultative status numbered 419 (UN OPI 1972, 626–29). Of these, roughly thirty (or 9%) had a religious identity or affiliation and could be considered RNGOs according to the contemporary understanding of this term.[77]

This latter point was of particular importance for relatively less well-known organizations, and particularly religious organizations, which—during this period of UN history in which there was little familiarity with religions outside of Christianity and Judaism—were viewed, with a large dose of skepticism. In order for the BIC to engage fully with the UN, it first needed to secure consultative status, which in turn required that the BIC earn the trust of the UN community and familiarize it with its identity, aims, precepts, and experience. Note, for example, how different the BIC's

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[76] There are three different kinds of consultative status: (1) General: "organizations that are concerned with most of the activities of the [Economic and Social] Council"; (2) Special: "organizations that have a special competence in, and are concerned specifically with, only a few of the fields of activity covered by the [Economic and Social] Council"; (3) Roster: organizations considered by the Council or Secretary-General to be able to make useful contributions to the Council (ECOSOC 1996).

[77] This is a rough approximation based on the name of the organization. Of the thirty 'religious' organizations, the majority were of Christian or Catholic denomination, several were Jewish, one was Muslim. Also included was the Sri Aurobindo Society.

situation was from that of the Quakers, whose identity in 1946 was already well established in the international community, and further elevated by receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947. Similarly, Catholic NGOs, which enjoyed strong diplomatic support from the US delegation, were among the first RNGOs to secure ECOSOC accreditation.[78]

Consultative status is relevant to the discussion of the substrate because the greater the number of privileges conferred on the organization, the wider the range of organizational behaviors can be observed and studied to learn about the operation of the substrate. BIC's securing of consultative status in 1970 marked a major milestone, not only because of the privileges associated with it, but because it bestowed on this as yet little known religious community the UN's recognition as a legitimate, independent, international religious entity, whose voice and experience were valued by the international community.

During this stage, the BIC, not yet having secured consultative status, operated within the UN as an observer. While it may seem that this limits the scope for the analysis of the organization, the substrate points to a different set of questions about this period, the answers to which shed light on the activities and approaches of the BIC in the years that follow. If we were to focus only on what the organization was doing at the UN in terms of a *realpolitik* or sociological analysis, we might conclude that not much was happening and that the organization was not effective in its engagement with the UN. The substrate, on the other hand, focuses on the meaning dimension of the BIC's engagement with the UN. Why, we must ask, does a little known one hundred-year old religious organization, with historical roots in Shi'a Iran, wish to associate with the UN? How does it understand the significance and role of the UN in the international community and in terms of human civilization? Is it simply seeking to advance the interests of its membership, or to propagate its worldview? While meaning is often

[78] The first Catholic NGOs to be granted consultative status with ECOSOC included the Catholic International Union for Social Service, the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference. In *Uncharted Territory: The American Catholic Church at the United Nations, 1946-1972*, Joseph S. Rossi notes the US delegation to the UN assisted American Catholic organizations to secure consultative status (Rossi 2006, 5). Rossi also notes that Catherine Schaefer, representing the (American) National Catholic Welfare Council, was, more than any other consultant at the 1945 UN Conference in San Francisco, responsible for incorporating into the UN Charter a provision for the accreditation of NGO representatives.

overlooked, I argue that it represents an essential facet of the expression of religious agency at the UN. In the case of the BIC, and that of many other RNGOs, the substrate helps us to discern the characteristics of what theologian John Milbank has called a "transpolitical community . . . a community whose purposes exceed the purposes of politics" (Casanova et al. 2013, 35).

While the majority of research about religious NGOs at the UN seeks to answer the "what" and the "how" of RNGO engagement, the substrate provides a tool to discern and establish the "why," the rationale for engagement as articulated from the perspective of the faith community in question. Simply put, it is not the actions of the organizations in question that are religious per se, but rather the underlying rationale that situates the actions in the context of a particular narrative of the journey of humanity.

In the next section, I analyze two elements of the substrate—a conception of history and the oneness of humankind—in order to show how the substrate shapes the BIC's rationale for engagement with the UN and how it gives rise to a specifically "non-partisan" mode of engagement.

III. The Bahá'í Conception of History: A Civilizational Time Frame

As was outlined in the previous chapter, an evolutionary and developmental view of human history is inseparable from an understanding of the Bahá'í community's involvement in politics. Two facets of the Bahá'í conception of history are particularly salient for the analysis of the BIC's engagement with the UN: (1) the progression of humanity through successive stages of development—akin to stages of childhood, adolescence, and maturity in the life cycle of a human being; and (2) the presence of two parallel and interacting processes throughout history, those of integration and disintegration. I will argue that this conception of history—as an element of the substrate—is essential in helping to explain the Bahá'í community's desire to engage with the UN and the manner in which it structured its engagement during this foundational period. Here, my work expands on Joseph Rossi's study of the American Catholic Church at the UN and Karsten Lehmann's study of Christian RNGOs at the

UN by extending their analysis beyond Christian organizations, by stretching the period under consideration to cover a full seven decades of engagement with the UN, and, most importantly, by introducing an analytic by means of which to study the internal structure and logic of RNGOs.

The Bahá'í teachings consider history as an evolutionary process characterized by humankind's collective progression through stages of childhood, adolescence, and maturity—a progression that spans the trajectory of human civilization, past, present, and future.[79] Within the context of such a vast time-horizon, and with the perspective of humanity as having collectively traversed various stages of development, the challenges and opportunities facing humanity today take on a different significance. The UN provides a powerful example of the paradigm shift that occurs when the perspective of time is lengthened in the analysis. When considered from the viewpoint of the last century, for example, the UN appears as a moderate improvement from its even more imperfect predecessor, the League of Nations. One might point to its outdated structures (such as the Security Council veto power); the challenges it faces in maintaining coherence across diverse agencies, funds, program, and other bodies; chronic funding shortages; the politicization of top jobs and positions on key bodies (the Human Rights Council, for example); its failure to deliver on commitments, and so on. The consciousness of a vastly expanded, developmentally oriented time horizon, however, enables us to see the UN in a different light. Shoghi Effendi, traces humanity's trajectory through progressively larger orders of human organization. He describes this trajectory in terms of an "an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 42).

In light of this millennia-long process, the fact that humanity has created an institution to which all the nations of the world belong, within which they consult together

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[79] Shoghi Effendi notes that: "That mystic, all-pervasive, yet indefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual and the development of the fruit must, if we would correctly apprehend the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society." (Shoghi Effendi [1938]1991, 163–64).

peacefully, and to whose ideals and vision (as contained in its charter) have formally acceded, takes on great civilizational significance. One need only recall the rapid, sweeping political and social transformations that shifted governing structures from the empires of the nineteenth century to the formation of the UN in the twentieth century. As Pope Paul VI noted in the first papal address to the General Assembly in 1965: "We have to get used to a new way of thinking about man, a new way of thinking about man's community life, and . . . a new way of thinking about the pathways of history and the destinies of the world" (Pope Paul VI 1965, n.p.). Then BIC Representative, Victor de Araujo, writing to all National Spiritual Assemblies on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the UN, stressed the importance of "[gaining] a correct perspective on the UN" (de Araujo 1970, n.p.). In this same letter he writes:

> The UN is a mere beginning . . . if Bahá'ís can view the United Nations as an expression of the power of unity released into the world by the Báb[80] and Bahá'u'lláh . . .they will see the UN in a different light. They can instead view it as evidence of the gradual awakening of man's consciousness to the essential need for the unity of mankind. (de Araujo 1970, n.p.)[81]

A closer analysis of the question of meaning reveals different levels of meaning associated with the Bahá'í community's engagement with the UN—we can think of these levels as encompassing different time-frames: temporal/political (shorter time frame—securing recognition), civilizational (longer time frame—global solidarity), and spiritual/ultimate meaning (timeless—ever-growing levels of unity). The latter echoes what theologian Paul Tillich referred to as an "ultimate concern"—one that transcends temporal, worldly concerns based in reason or emotion (Tillich 1958, 44). The distinction between the temporal and the spiritual is echoed in Pope Paul VI's address to the UN, where he describes the UN as "a reflection . . . in the temporal field of what our Catholic Church aspires to be in the spiritual field" (Pope Paul VI 1965, n.p.).

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[80] According to the Bahá'í Faith, the 'Báb' (meaning "the Gate" in Arabic meaning) was a prophet and founder of the Bábí religion. In 1844, he revealed himself to be the promised Qa'im (or Mihdi) of Islam. The Báb's teachings sought to awaken people to the coming of a new period in human history, one that would witness the unification of the entire human race. This would come about through the influence of a promised spiritual leader, or 'Manifestation of God.' This anticipated figure was Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

[81] In this letter, de Araujo notes: "We well know that the transition from nationalism to internationalism will be a slow one and that the promise that Bahá'u'lláh has given us of an eventual world federation will not occur overnight. The Lesser Peace is, however, being built gradually, and we can see in the United Nations determined and often successful efforts in that direction."

Bringing the formation of the UN into the context of a broader historical time-horizon, the Pope, in that same address to the UN, comments:

> Here we are celebrating the epilogue to a laborious pilgrimage...It began on the day when we were commanded: "Go bring the good news to all nations." You are the ones who represent all nations . . . Hence we have an awareness of living through a privileged moment . . . when a wish borne in our heart for almost twenty centuries is being accomplished. (Pope Paul VI 1965, n.p.)

The substrate helps us to understand that the BIC views the UN in terms of a millennia-long process in which humanity has sought to construct incrementally larger areas of ordered relationships—an area that today encompasses all the nations of the world. The Bahá'í community's desire to associate with the UN, then, is driven by the recognition that the formation of the UN represents an important step along an unfolding historical trajectory leading to increasing degrees of human solidary and capacity to organize ever larger segments of the human population. The BIC's distinct notion of time affirms the observation that time is a "pivotal category underpinning the . . . analysis of historical processes" (Dubois and Hunter-Bowman 2015, 576).[82] BIC's optimism and belief in the opportunities created by the emergence of the UN stem from an appreciation of this trajectory that the peoples of the world have traversed to reach the point at which such an organization became possible.

Historical Process of Integration and Disintegration

A further facet of the Bahá'í conception of history is a differentiation between two fundamental processes interacting throughout history—the processes of integration and disintegration; "both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity" (UHJ 2013a, para. 4). As an element of the substrate, these two trajectories also shape the Bahá'í community's understanding of the UN. The Universal House of Justice discerns processes of disintegration in the vulnerabilities and inadequacies of governing institutions, the inability of leaders to mend the social fractures threatening security and stability, in the despondency of individuals and

[82] As Dubois and Hunter-Bowman note, "There is no one self-evident conception of time" (Dubois and Hunter-Bowman 2015, 576); a notion echoed by Taylor's differentiation between "ordinary time" and "higher time" (Taylor 2007, 55).

societies who find themselves bereft of a sense of hope or purpose. The Universal House of Justice also points to the parallel tendency of "groups of nations to formalize relationships which enable them to cooperate in matters of mutual interest" (UHJ 1985b, para. 27) and to the impact of communication technology, scientific discovery, and massive migration on the emergence of a heightened consciousness of a shared common humanity. Bahá'ís then, aware of the parallel nature of these processes, "strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with the forces associated with the process of integration" (UHJ 2013a, para. 4). By associating with the UN through the BIC, the Bahá'í community aligns itself with the forces leading towards a progressive integration of the nations and peoples of the world into one global community.

Shoghi Effendi also casts the formation of the UN in the context of the evolution of the processes shaping international governance and relationships among nation states. In a circa 1947 letter to the American Bahá'í community, he traces the processes of a historical trajectory that lays the groundwork for the emergence of structures of global governance. In it, he writes:

> ...the process, dates back to the outbreak of the first World War that threw the great republic of the West[83] into the vortex of the first stage of a world upheaval. It received its initial impetus through the formulation of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, closely associating for the first time that republic with the fortunes of the Old World. It suffered its first setback through the dissociation of that republic from the newly born League of Nations . . . It acquired added momentum through the outbreak of the second World War, inflicting unprecedented suffering on that republic, and involving it still further in the affairs of all the continents of the globe. It was further reinforced through the declaration embodied in the Atlantic Charter, as voiced by one of its chief progenitors, Franklin D. Roosevelt. It assumed a definite outline through the birth of the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference. It acquired added significance through the choice of the City of the Covenant[84] itself as the seat of the newly born organization . . .It must, however long and tortuous the way, lead, through a series of victories and reverses, to the political unification of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, to the emergence of a world government . . . (Shoghi Effendi 1970, 33)

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[83] The United States of America

[84] On 19 June 1912, during his visit to New York City, 'Abdu'l-Bahá named it the "City of the Covenant".

This excerpt demonstrates attention to a process-oriented reading of history, one characterized by "victories and reverses"; highlights the significant role of the United States, in part, through the actions of two of its presidents; casts political phenomena in light of their spiritual significance; and sets out the goals of the process as the "political unification" of the East and West, the emergence of a "world government," and the establishment of the "Lesser Peace."[85]

This particular reading of history, one in which the identity and aims of the Bahá'í community are so closely aligned with the vision and ideals of the UN, predisposes the BIC to seek to engage meaningful with the UN. In his study of RNGOs at the UN, Jeremy Carrette refers to these as "push-factors"—elements of an NGO's mission or theology that incline it toward a particular kind of behavior in the public sphere (Carrette 2013). In this case, the socio-political commentary of Shoghi Effendi, which casts the UN in the context of humanity's coming of age, predisposes the Bahá'í community to align itself, and allocate resources to engagement with institutions associated with the emergence of a new world order.

IV. Oneness of Humanity: Substrate, Teleology and Ontology

During this period, the substrate also helps us to discern the meaning underlying organizational behavior and decision-making by directing attention to the ontological and teleological Bahá'í precept of the oneness of humanity—"the pivot round which all of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 42). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Bahá'í Writings stated that the oneness of

[85] As mentioned in the preceding chapter, in his letters to the Bahá'í community Shoghi Effendi references the creation of the United Nations and of the League of Nations, noting that they are closely associated with processes leading to the "Lesser Peace" and the "Most Great Peace." The former—to be established by the nations themselves—denotes the "political unification of the world" and the "reconstruction of mankind, as the result of its recognition of its oneness and wholeness." The latter, which will be achieved in the distant future, is associated with "the organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 123). The reference by the Head of the Bahá'í Community to these global institutions and the processes that led to their formation provide the Bahá'í community with an understanding of the significance of these institutions, not only from a governance perspective (temporal meaning), but also from the perspective of the development and maturation of humanity as a whole.

humanity concerns itself primarily with relationships among "states and nations as members of one human family" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43). Further, the oneness of humanity implies an "organic change in the structure of present-day society" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43). It is not only an ontological principle, which speaks to the unity of humankind at a spiritual level, but a teleological one. Shoghi Effendi explains the evolutionary trajectory:

> [The oneness of humankind] represents the consummation of human evolution—an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations. (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43)

In his 1936 letter to the Bahá'í community of North America, Shoghi Effendi unequivocally states that "nation-building has come to an end" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 202). Emphasizing the developmental stage of the world community "growing to maturity," he urges nations to recognize the oneness . . . of human relationships," and to establish, "the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 202). As scholars of globalization Manfred Steger and Paul James note, the consciousness of modernity is animated by the "emergence of the global imaginary," in which the familiar concept of community or society now encompasses the entire world (Steger and James 2013, 35). As Bahá'u'lláh stated in the latter years of the 19th century—unequivocally affirming the new unit of social analysis: "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, 251).

In this context, the substrate enables us to identify a distinct teleological orientation, focused on the gradual progression from a world of sovereign states to a global community, that animates the BIC's earliest communication and contributions to the UN. In a letter to UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie, the Bahá'í community expressed its desire to "be associated with the [United Nations'] consultative processes . . . for the evolution of world unity along social and political lines" (US NSA 1948). In the following statements, we see a reconceptualization of the role of the nation state in the context of the emerging world community. In its submission to the first session of the Commission on Human Rights, the BIC states that the "destiny of the national state is

to build the bridge from local autonomy to world unity . . . to serve as the . . . pillar supporting the new institutions reflecting the full and final expression of human relationships in an ordered society" (US-Canada NSA 1947, n.p.). The concept of human rights, similarly, is expressed in terms of its role in the emergence of a "new order based on the wholeness of human relationships." "A right attains social status," states the BIC, "only after it has become a moral value asserted and maintained as a necessary quality of human relationships by the members of the community" (US-Canada NSA 1947, n.p.). Similarly, in its recommendations to UN deliberations and processes concerning the Review of the Charter, the BIC asserts that, "real sovereignty is no longer vested in the institutions of the national state because the nations have become interdependent" and consequently proposes lines of action such as removing the option for member states to leave the UN, greater freedom of discussion for the General Assembly, eliminating permanent membership on the Security Council and references to "enemy states,"[86] and recommends compulsory jurisdiction for the International Court of Justice (BIC 1955b).

The ontological dimension of the substrate also helps us to understand the emphasis placed on the constitution of the BIC's delegations to some of the earliest international conferences and gatherings organized by the UN. The deliberately international character of the delegations served to embody the concept of the oneness of humankind—not only in outlook but also in representation and structure. "The very existence of so widespread and varied a community can serve the cause of human rights by demonstrating that, under certain conditions, the spirit of equality and cooperation can prevail . . . The aim is to generate by union the moral force necessary to create institutions imbued with a world outlook" (US-Canada NSA 1948a, n.p.). As early as 1949, the first representative of the BIC at the UN indicated that, in selecting delegates to international conferences, effort was made to include "as wide a range of racial and national backgrounds as possible" (Mottahedeh 1949). That same year, the BIC delegation to the International Conference of International NGOs—held in Lake Success, New York—included citizens of China, Iran, the United States, and Canada;

[86] This clause remains in the UN Charter to this day.

not insignificant was the fact that one of the US delegates was an African American. It was "the most international of all the delegations" (BIC 1952).

Reports of the BIC's activities at the UN during this period noted that BIC was often among the few NGOs sending local delegates to international conferences. This was unusual, wrote Mildred Mottahedeh, as "many of even the largest NGOs whose membership runs into the millions send delegates mostly from Western Europe and the US" (Mottahedeh 1949, n.p.).[87] The focus of Bahá'í efforts on supporting the construction of a global community was embodied in BIC's efforts at conferences to build bridges among different groups and factions, to serve as the point of unity, even among member states (Mottahedeh 1951). Recognition of Bahá'í contributions was evident in repeated requests, by conference officials, to chair various committees and lead efforts to carry out specific public information tasks.[88]

Substrate and the Meaning of "Non-Partisanship"

Inextricably linked with engagement with the UN is the question of method and approach, namely *how* does an NGO go about pursuing its goals within the context of its interaction with the UN? While the question of method is the focus of Chapter 6 of this thesis, a distinctive aspect of the Bahá'í approach—non-participation in partisan politics—is very relevant to my argument during every period of the BIC-UN relationship. I will examine this facet of the relationship in light of the central questions of each chapter, namely questions of meaning, authority, mission, and method. For the remainder of this chapter, I will examine how the substrate helps to discern the meaning and rationale underlying the BIC's strict adherence to this aspect.

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[87] Between 1945 and 1970, the Bahá'í community grew in size and geographic spread. In 1946, the Bahá'í community had elected eight National Spiritual Assemblies (Australia and New Zealand; Egypt and Sudan; British Isles; Germany and Austria; India and Burma; Iraq; Persia). By 1968, National Spiritual Assemblies numbered eighty-one (UHJ 1974, 560).

[88] For example, BIC representative Mildred Mottahedeh was nominated to chair a UN committee to oversee national meetings of NGOs in all UN member states (1949 UN Conference on International NGOs), while BIC representative Ugo Giachery was nominated by the UN Department of Public Information to Chair the Committee on "special problems of UN information in Europe" and was accepted by delegates without dissent. As Committee Chair, Giachery became part of the Steering Committee for the 1951 Regional Conference on NGOs. At the 1950 UN Conference on International NGOs in Geneva, only three out of 103 NGOs represented sent a full five-member delegation; BIC was among the three (BIC 1952).

The concept in question was first articulated by Shoghi Effendi in terms of "non-involvement in politics," in two letters written to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, in 1932 and 1936 respectively. In these letters, Shoghi Effendi stipulates that Bahá'ís are to refrain from "interference in the political affairs of any particular government," to demonstrate "unqualified loyalty and obedience" to the "considered judgment" of their respective government, and to rise above "all particularism and partisanship" (Shoghi Effendi [1938]1991, 64). He cautioned that non-involvement in politics, however, did not imply the "slightest indifference" to the interests of one's own country, nor "insubordination to the authority of recognized and established governments" (Shoghi Effendi [1938]1991, 65). Rather, Shoghi Effendi encouraged Bahá'ís to "serve, in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion, the highest interests" of their country (Shoghi Effendi [1938]1991, 65) The ontological and teleological dimensions of the substrate reveal a very practical dimension of this precept—the preservation of unity of a growing, far-flung Bahá'í community, living under the authority of contending governments.[89] "Such a Faith knows no division of class or party," writes Shoghi Effendi in 1936, "firmly convinced that in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 198).

The longstanding engagement of the BIC with the UN could appear, on the surface, to contradict this tenet—after all, the UN is the preeminent international political arena. In a general sense, of course, politics encompasses activities associated with governance and the social order; indeed, any effort to contribute to the betterment of society sooner or later must contend with the question of politics. The term, "new World Order," is used by Bahá'u'lláh in his Book of Laws (Bahá'u'lláh 1993, 85), and the example of engagement at the highest level of governmental leadership is set by him in his letters to the monarchs and leaders of his time (Bahá'u'lláh 2017c). What emerges throughout the course of the BIC's relationship with the UN is a history of progressive elucidation—first by Shoghi Effendi, then by the Universal House of Justice—and refinement—through the actions of the BIC—of this principle and its application in the

[89] In a 1947 letter to the Bahá'ís of Vienna, Shoghi Effendi asks, "How can we [preserve unity] if every Bahá'í is a member of a different political party—some of them diametrically opposed to one another?" (Shoghi Effendi 1956, 311)

international arena. In the final analysis, Bahá'í adherence to this precept is not meant to call into question the intentions of those employing such methods, but rather to make the point that the level of unity that can be reached by resort to such methods is necessarily limited.

In one of the earliest communications to the UN, we can see the expression of the substrate linked to the concept of non-engagement in partisan politics. In response to a question from the Chair of the UN Special Committee of Palestine regarding the Bahá'í attitude towards the status of that country Shoghi Effendi writes:

> The Bahá'í Faith is entirely nonpolitical and we neither take sides in the present tragic dispute going on over the future of the Holy Land and its people nor have we any statement to make or advice to give as to what the nature of the political future of this country should be. Our aim is the establishment of universal peace in this world and our desire is to see justice prevail in every domain of human society, including the domain of politics. (Qtd. in US NSA 1956, 597)

It is important to read this response in light of both its immediate and its more universal implications—what we might refer to as its temporal and ultimate meaning. First, the statement about the Faith being "entirely non-political" must be understood in terms of the level of knowledge about the Bahá'í Faith in the earliest days of the UN—that is, almost non-existent. In light of this, Shoghi Effendi, addressing one of the most contentious and politically fraught issues of the day, must present the Bahá'í community's stance regarding politics in the most unequivocal terms. It must also be understood in light of the persecution of the Bahá'í community during this time and accusations that the community had designs on the reins of power in Iran. It is important therefore, that, during these foundational and earliest exchanges with the UN, this feature of the Bahá'í community is made abundantly clear. From the perspective of its civilizational meaning, the substrate grounds this approach in the ontology and teleology of the oneness of humankind.

We can see, throughout this period, the manner in which Bahá'í representatives strive to engage with the UN in a manner that avoids becoming enmeshed in partisan political issues. Early in this period, Bahá'í representatives are being elected to leadership positions on various NGO committees and are attending international conferences. In

the document entitled "Suggestions for Bahá'í Delegates to UN NGO Conferences," the BIC instructs its delegates: "We are absolutely forbidden to take part in any political dispute. You can sometimes wisely lead the discussion away from the political angle to a truly constructive point of action" (BIC 1950, n.p.). This stance becomes particularly relevant in light of NGO dynamics at the UN at that time. A BIC conference report notes that BIC delegates "felt that the tone of these International NGO Conference had considerably deteriorated" from the noble aims expressed and evidenced at the 1948 conference. "The petty politics, the lobbying, the jockeying for power are reflected the present political condition. Rivalries were intense and there was a sharp competition for leadership" (Mottahedeh 1950, n.p.). This same report notes that BIC delegates' efforts to be "constructive and non-political" came to be favorably recognized by other NGOs at the Conference (Mottahedeh 1950, n.p.).

The stance of non-participation in politics is challenged further as the BIC office is drawn into the work of defending the Bahá'í community in Morocco from the rising wave of persecution in the 1950s. In a document outlining the strategy for an appeal, the BIC stresses that, in their communication with member states, Bahá'ís are focused on a "presentation of the facts" of the case, which is to serve as a the basis of the argument to be developed by the appropriate UN body, rather than by the BIC itself (BIC 1955a). In a letter to Secretary-General U Thant, the BIC reassures him of the Bahá'í tenet of obedience to one's respective government: "As you are no doubt aware, the Bahá'í Faith forbids any form of subversion. Obedience to the laws of the government in all countries where Bahá'ís reside is a fundamental teaching of Bahá'u'lláh" (BIC 1962, 1).[90] The substrate helps us to understand that these actions are not simply animated by a desire to eschew partisanship for its own sake, but that they form part of a much broader vision, which encompasses the transformation of relationships at all levels of society, in a manner conducive to the emergence of a new

[90] It is interesting to note that a positive side-effect of Bahá'í efforts to quell the persecution of Bahá'ís in Morocco, was the rapid spread of information about the Bahá'í Faith to many ambassadors and ministers of UN member states whom the Bahá'ís called on for help. In their meetings, Bahá'í representatives informed diplomats not only about the situation in Morocco but also presented accurate information about the Bahá'í Faith in general, its beliefs, practices, structure, and community life. As ambassadors forwarded this documentation to their foreign offices, an increasing number of governments had become acquainted with the precepts of this young world religion.

global social order. They emerge from deep within the inner logic of the substrate of the BIC.

V. Summary

In this chapter, I have examined how the substrate shaped the BIC's rationale for engagement with the UN and its understanding of the UN in the context of broader processes of the advancement of human civilization. In this formative and foundational period, for both the UN and the BIC, the BIC operated as an observer NGO, until successfully securing consultative status in 1970. During this period, we see the manner in which the Bahá'í Faith's evolutionary and developmental view of history shaped the BIC's view of the UN as a one of the achievements that punctuated a millennia-long process of creating institutions and processes to order increasingly larger areas of society. Building on the experience of the shortfalls of the League of Nations, the UN comes to represent the first entity to subsume under its roof the peaceful association of all the nations of the world. The substrate enables us to view historical processes through the lens of the BIC, discerning between processes of social disintegration and those of integration—both playing a role in the march towards a global social order. The Bahá'ís' engagement with the UN can be understood, with the help of the substrate, as a conscious effort to support an institution, which represents—in the international political sphere—the processes of integration forging a new global order. Thus we are able to discern a distinctly 'religious' element of engagement, namely a reading of society, in terms of the stages of its spiritual and civilizational development.

Second, I have argued that the oneness of humankind—a constituent element of the substrate and a pivotal tenet of the Bahá'í Faith—exerts its influence on the BIC-UN relationship. We can see the substrate expressed in the BIC's understanding of the evolving role of the nation state and the concept of human rights—both conceived in terms of their role in forging the machinery and the social constructs of the global social order. I argued that the approach of non-engagement in politics, advocated by Shoghi Effendi during this period, forges the means of engagement in a manner coherent with the aims. Here, the substrate enables us to discern a normatively non-adversarial approach that eschews contests for power and political partisanship in favor of methods that are in and of themselves unifying.

The substrate has helped us to look into what Lehmann calls the "black box of religiously affiliated [NGOs]" (Lehmann 2016, 8) by focusing on the internal organizational process that constitute the rationale and logic of engagement with the UN. In the analysis of this period, the substrate has enabled us to venture beyond descriptions of organizational behavior and reasoning, to grasp the significance—in temporal and civilizational terms—of the actions of the BIC. As Byrd succinctly notes in his 1968 study *Quaker Ways in Foreign Affairs*:

> Ultimately, the validity of the Quaker approach must rest on the validity of Quaker conclusions concerning the fundamental nature of the universe, man, God, and the relationship between the Supreme Being and man. To the extent that the [Quakers] are unsound at these points, their approach to foreign policy will be in error. If they are sound on these points, the logic and validity of their approach to foreign policy will follow. (Byrd 1960, 206)

Chapter 4

Substrate and Authority:
The Role of the Universal House of Justice (1970-1986)

I. Overview

In the previous chapter, I examined how the substrate shaped the BIC's rationale for engagement with and its understanding of the UN in the context of the advancement of human civilization. The substrate enabled me to discern the BIC's distinct reading of society in terms of processes of integration and disintegration that accompany humanity as it progresses toward its collective maturity.

In this chapter, I will argue that the organizational substrate of an RNGO operates through authoritative structures, namely those invested with the mandate to articulate the organization's vision, aims, and method of engagement. It is important to recall that the substrate is not simply a statement, a belief, or even a paradigm; rather, it is the generative moral foundation that shapes the behavior of the organization and infuses it with a distinct moral identity. Such a foundation finds expression in different contexts and across historical periods and requires a mechanism for its continual transmission and elaboration. In order to examine the role of authority vis-à-vis the substrate, in this chapter I focus on the authoritative international governing body of the Bahá'í community, the Universal House of Justice, and its guidance of the work of the BIC. I demonstrate that the Universal House of Justice carries out three major roles in relation to the substrate: (a) it progressively articulates and elaborates elements of the substrate; (b) it fosters institutional coherence by cultivating a shared epistemology that is rooted in the substrate; and (c) it harmonizes the external affairs efforts of the BIC and National Spiritual Assemblies to give expression to the substrate. These roles can be summarized as: transmission, intersubjective understanding, and structural coherence.

In order to understand how the substrate is operationalized, we need to closely examine the role of the Universal House of Justice in guiding the work of the BIC. In the *specific* case of the BIC, the authoritative governing structure of the Bahá'í Faith is also an element of its substrate: the Administrative Order. As discussed in Chapter 2 ("The

Organizational Substrate"), the Administrative Order was established by the founder of the Bahá'í Faith and elaborated by successive leaders of the Bahá'í community between 1897 and 1957. It is, as Shoghi Effendi has described, as integral to the Bahá'í Faith as the soul is to the body. The Administrative Order is fundamental to the BIC-UN relationship because while the BIC is registered as an NGO with the UN, structurally, it is not an autonomous entity. Rather, it relates to the UN as the representative of Bahá'í communities in over 180 nations, under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. It is helpful to recall that the concept of the oneness of humankind, an element of the BIC's substrate, is concerned "primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family" and "stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43)—thus the concept and the institutional structures are inextricably linked. As such, the structural-authoritative elements of the Bahá'í Faith assume paramount importance in the BIC-UN relationship and are so foundational as to constitute an element of the BIC's substrate.

During the period from 1970 to 1986, we see the operation of the substrate in a uniquely formative period of the organization. We witness the BIC's traversal from its status as observer NGO to an organization in consultative status with the UN; from a little-known religious organization to one representing a global religion that has "[emerged] from obscurity" (UHJ 1985a, para. 1);[91] and from a nascent external affairs organization to one called upon to serve as the "windows of the Bahá'í community to the world" (UHJ 1986b, para. 1). This period begins when the BIC is granted consultative status by the UN Economic and Social Council. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this was an event of particular significance as it conferred on this as yet little known religious community the recognition of the UN as a legitimate,

[91] The Universal House of Justice uses the term, "emergence from obscurity" in its 1985 Ridván Message (UHJ 1985). This emergence was precipitated by the swift systematic, widespread and sustained diplomatic actions of the BIC and national Bahá'í communities in response to tide of persecution that swept over the Bahá'í community in the later years of the 1970s, reaching a dramatic peak in the early 1980s. During this time, seeking to stem the violence unleashed on the Bahá'í community, the Bahá'í community, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, appealed to the highest levels of government and international law. These diplomatic efforts succeeded not only in containing the violence and persecution, but also in raising the consciousness of the majority of the world's governments about the existence of this religious community, its aims, and its challenges.

independent, international religious entity, whose voice and experience were valued by the international community.[92] It should also be noted that, in 1970, only twenty-eight of the 214 NGOs in consultative status with the UN had a religious affiliation. Of these, the overwhelming majority were Christian organizations, the rest were Jewish and Muslim. The conclusion of this period (and the beginning of the next one) in 1986 is demarcated by a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the BIC, which notes that the BIC has reached a "new, potent stage in the development of the external affairs of the worldwide Bahá'í community" (UHJ 1986b, para. 1). This letter calls on the BIC to be "the windows of the Bahá'í community to the world," displaying "ever more clearly the unifying principles, the hope, the promise, the majesty of the emerging order" (UHJ 1986b, para. 1)—thus signaling a new level of maturity, capacity, and responsibility of the organization.

An analysis of the expression of the substrate during this period also enables us to examine the internal NGO mechanisms and processes that contributed to a paradigm-shifting transition in world politics that defined this period. It is during this period that the foundation was laid for the gradual transition from *international* (or inter-governmental) governance to *global governance* "characterized by the decreased salience of states and the increased involvement of non-state actors in norm- and rule-setting processes and compliance monitoring" (McKeon 2009, 6; cf. Rittberger 2001, 2). In the 1970s and early 1980s, NGO involvement in UN processes was still in its early stages; some have referred to this period as the "first generation of UN-civil society relations" (UN-NGLS 2004; Berger 2010).[93] While the number of ECOSOC-

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[92] The BIC is granted "Category II" consultative status. According to ECOSOC Resolution 1296 (XLIV), governing consultative arrangements during this period, Category II organizations "have a special competence in . . . only a few the fields of activity covered by the Council," (ECOSOC 1968, para 16b) and are known internationally within these fields. Category I organizations, are "concerned with most of the activities of the Council," "have marked and sustained contributions to make to the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations," and "are closely involved with the economic and social life of the peoples of the areas they represent and whose membership, which should be considerable, is broadly representative of major segments of population in a large number of countries" (ECOSOC 1968, para. 16a). See discussion of Consultative Status in Chapter 3.

[93] This first generation paves the way for the next one with the conclusion of the Cold War and the advent of UN global conferences of the 1990s. The Cold War profoundly shaped many facets of intergovernmental deliberations during this time, as two ideological blocks came to dominate the global landscape, affecting the dynamics of NGO relations as well. The number of UN member states continued to grow, with thirty-two new member states joining between 1970 and 1985. The majority of member

accredited NGOs nearly doubled during this period (from 419 to 758) the influence yielded by civil society remained relatively circumscribed. NGO input into UN processes consisted largely of involvement in major conferences, and was limited to attendance at NGO-specific venues, from which NGOs "commented on UN deliberations at arms length" (UN-NGLS 2004). The 1972 Stockholm conference was an exception to this rule with over 400 (accredited and non-accredited) participating NGOs (Schechter 2005, 3). Thirteen years later, the 1985 World Conference on the International Women's Year, held in Nairobi, would set a new record, attracting over 8,000 NGO representatives and setting the stage for NGOs to "unleash their energies" (Jolly, Emmerij, and Weiss 2005, 57). As Indian economist Devaki Jain notes, UN conferences "led to a strengthening of national, regional, and global networks . . . fighting for changes in laws and policies" (Jain 2005, 66). It was during this period that civil society learned to use global conferences to mobilize and build capacity to lobby for change.

II. Authority, Religion and NGOs at the UN

From the perspective of the UN, the issue of an NGO's authority to speak for those it represents is an important one. The 1968 ECOSOC Resolution, which governed consultative arrangements with NGOs during this period, stipulated that an NGO seeking consultative status with the UN "shall have authority to speak for its members through its authorized representatives," and that "evidence of this authority shall be presented if requested" (ECOSOC 1968, para. 6). The question of the source and scope of organizational authority is intimately tied to the question of legitimacy. Hugo Slim, scholar of humanitarian ethics, defines legitimacy as "the particular status with which an organisation is imbued and perceived . . . that enables it to operate with the general consent of peoples, governments, companies and non-state groups around the world" (Slim 2002, 5). This legitimacy, he argues, is derived both legally and morally. Since NGOs do not receive their mandate from nation states operating under international law, their "legality and moral recognition must therefore be argued more from first

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states are now newly liberated countries, constituting a new "Third World" majority in the General Assembly, and thereby impacting the nature of deliberations, agenda-setting, and resource allocation.

principles than from specific international statutes" (Slim 2002, 6). Thus moral legitimacy is a significant component of the overall legitimacy of an NGO. In order to understand the engagement of NGOs (and even more so RNGOs) at the UN, it is necessary to understand the manner in which the organization seeks to establish and maintain its legitimacy in this political arena. In this chapter I demonstrate the roles of the authoritative structures of the BIC and the substrate in securing this kind of recognition for the BIC.

In order to understand how the substrate shapes organizational behavior, it is necessary to first identify the source of authority in the organization and, second, to understand how the organization relates to the authoritative institutions of its respective faith tradition. The question of authority takes on particular significance in the case of religious NGOs as their identity is defined in terms of affiliation with a particular religious community or moral tradition. What makes this a challenging issue, particularly from the perspective of the UN in their engagement with RNGOs, are multiple interpretations of religious doctrine presenting themselves as representative of a particular religious tradition. As Jeffrey Haynes points out, faith-based perspectives even within a single tradition, offer a range of viewpoints along the conservative-liberal spectrum (Haynes 2014, 79). He asks, "What does it mean to be a Christian . . . Muslim or Jew in relation to human rights . . . ? Who gets to be the definitive voice of Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christians, Muslims or Jews?" (Haynes 2014, 79). In the case of RNGOs, the locus of authority can reside in the founders of the organization, a charismatic leader, a board of directors, the founder of a religion or religious/ spiritual movement, or another recognized entity.

The Organization for Islamic Cooperation, while not an RNGO but a Permanent Observer to the UN, provides an instructive example on the identification of religious authority, particularly in light of its representation of both Sunni and Shi'a Muslim communities.[94] The OIC is guided by the Islamic Summit, which convenes every three

[94] Sunni Muslims do not look to a formal religious hierarchy of authority (Marshall 2013, 78), while Shi'a Muslims have ayatollahs who represent a strong temporal and spiritual authority (Marshall 2013, 77). OIC has affiliated organizations such as the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent, the Islamic Development Bank, and others.

years to provide guidance on all relevant issues (Marshall 2013, 79). The Declaration of the First Islamic Summit Conference states that the OIC expresses "its unshakable faith in the precepts of Islam" (OIC 1969, 1). Further, the OIC's Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, intended as a complement to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stipulates that the Islamic sharia is "the only source of reference for the explanation or clarification of any of the articles of this declaration" (Marshall 2013, 79).[95] Statements such as this clarify the source of authority in the organization.

In cases where the source of RNGO authority lies outside of the authoritative institutional structures, it is helpful to ascertain the nature of the relationship between the RNGO and the structures in question. As I outlined in my earlier work (Berger 2010), we can conceptualize an RNGO's relationship with its respective authoritative institutional structures according to a four-part typology: subordinate, cooperative, independent, or oppositional.[96] These vary across and within religious traditions. In a *subordinate* relationship, the RNGO is under the direct authority of its religious institution, as is the case with the Bahá'í International Community (discussed in detail in the next section), and with certain Roman Catholic religious orders, which have been granted the status of "International Religious Organization" by the Holy See's Secretariat of State (Beittinger-Lee 2017b, 177).

In a *cooperative* relationship, RNGOs are strongly influenced by the views and concerns of their respective institutional hierarchy but are not mandated to conform to all of its positions. Many RNGOs representing Roman Catholic religious orders fall into this category (for example, the Congregations of St. Joseph, the Loretto

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[95] The UN Human Rights Council has not adopted this declaration because it sees some of its elements as irreconcilable with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Marshall 2013, 80).

[96] In the Chapter 1, I discuss the typology introduced by Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings, which identifies four ways in which faith is "deployed" in public engagement: passive, active, persuasive, and exclusive (Clarke and Jennings 2008, 32). According to this typology, passive organizations largely use broader humanitarian principles to determine action (religious teachings are subsidiary); in exclusive organizations, "social and political involvement is rooted in the faith and is often militant or violent and/or directed against rival faiths" (Clarke and Jennings 2008, 32–33). The more rooted the actions of an organization are in their religious faith, the authors claim, the more these actions are associated with exclusivity, proselytizing, and violence. I argue that this typology rests of an incomplete understanding of "religion" (where more religion is equated with socially maladaptive outcomes). For this reason, it is important to have tools that help to discern the religious dimensions of organizational behavior.

Community, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and Passionists International).[97] The Quaker UN Office would also fall into this category. As Byrd noted in his study *Quaker Ways in Foreign Policy*, there is "no organizational hierarchy to organize the views into an authoritative statement of a Quaker position on any given subject at any given moment" (Byrd 1960, xiii). Rather, the work of the Quaker UN Office is "rooted in Quaker testimonies of peace, truth, justice, equality" (Quaker Office 2017, n.p.).[98] In an *independent* relationship, the RNGO sets its own vision and aims, independently of those articulated by a religious institution (if such an institution exists). Many Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim organizations, associated with decentralized religious and spiritual traditions, can be categorized as independent (such as Soka Gakkai International, Muslims for Progressive Values, and the International Council of Jewish Women). The final category, the *oppositional* relationship, applies to organizations that openly challenge the view of their respective religious institutions. The Muslim advocacy organization Musawah[99]—whose work challenges many authoritative interpretations of Islamic scripture—or Catholics for Choice—which "serves as a voice for Catholic who believe that the Catholic tradition support a woman's moral and legal right to follow her conscience in matters of sexuality and health" (Catholics for Choice 2017, n.p.)—belong to this category. In order to understand how the substrate shapes organizational behavior, it is necessary to first identify the source of authority in the organization and, second, to understand how the organization relates to the authoritative institutions of its own faith tradition.

The authoritative structures or voices within an organization are those that articulate the mission of the organization and its core values which are rooted in the substrate. A question frequently raised by civil society scholars is how NGOs can effectively pursue their respective missions without compromising their core values. How can they avoid cooptation by the very structures they seek to influence and reform? (Baur and Schmitz 2012; Campbell 2001; Martens 2005; Willetts 1996). French Sociologist Alain

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[97] As Beittinger-Lee's research has shown, Catholic NGOs at the UN vary in their degree of closeness to the Vatican (Beittinger-Lee 2017b)

[98] See: http://www.quno.org/about. The London Yearly Meeting of the Friends has the unquestioned position of priority among Quakers although that priority is not recognized in any structural or formal manner (Byrd 1960, xvi).

[99] Musawah is active at the UN but does not have consultative status.

Touraine characterizes this as a tension between "ethics based on conviction" and the "logic of efficacy" (qtd. in Campbell 2001, 353). Likewise, political scientist David Campbell writes:

> If [organizations] opt for purity—clinging rigidly to a set of oppositional values as expressed by their core community constituents—they risk political irrelevance or descent into a self-righteous parochialism that is resistant to criticism and blind to its own limitations . . . If instead they engage the political system on its own terms, they risk capitulation—movement goals are watered down, core supporters alienated, and the animation and vitality provided by key values diminished. Taken to an extreme, neither strategy has much to recommend it. (Campbell 2001, 362)

While Campbell argues that "co-optation cannot be avoided," I posit that the dynamic of NGO-UN collaboration cannot be examined using a framework that perceives the outcome of such collaboration purely as a choice between "clinging rigidly to a set of oppositional values" or "capitulation." Surely NGOs—and RNGOs—that have sustained a relationship with the UN for decades would not describe the outcome of their association in these terms. By studying the role of the Universal House of Justice in communicating the substrate, I argue that we gain insight into the processes by which an RNGO seeks to embody its own substrate, while adhering to the rules and parameters of consultative status conferred upon it by the UN.

III. Authoritative Structures Guiding the BIC

The relationship between the BIC and authoritative Bahá'í institutions can be characterized as subordinate: the BIC receives its mandate and is guided by the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice.[100] In order to understand the operation of the substrate in the BIC-UN relationship, it is

[100] From 1945 to 1957, the Bahá'í community's engagement with the UN was guided by Shoghi Effendi. The leadership of the Bahá'í community has been passed down from the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, to his eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (as per Bahá'u'lláh's Will and Testament). 'Abdu'l-Bahá served as the Head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1897 to 1921. In his Will and Testament, he, in turn, appointed his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi to lead the Bahá'í community. As Shoghi Effendi left no will, following his death the Bahá'í Community was guided by the Hands of the Cause of God, a group of Bahá'ís appointed by Shoghi Effendi, whose main function was to protect and propagate the Bahá'í Faith. The Hands of the Cause guided the Bahá'í community for the six years, until the community was able to elect its first Universal House of Justice in 1963.

necessary to understand the relationship between the Universal House of Justice and the BIC.

The Universal House of Justice, an institution ordained by Bahá'u'lláh (the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith) is charged with applying the Bahá'í teachings to the needs of an evolving society and is empowered to legislate on matters not explicitly covered in the sacred texts of the Bahá'í Faith. The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice provides its Terms of Reference:

> The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause—who, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture—constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. (UHJ 1972, para. 7)

What is particularly salient about the Universal House of Justice—and the Bahá'í system of governance as a whole—is that "Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions . . . and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 145).

Two facets of the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice are particularly relevant for the foregoing analysis of the role of the Universal House of Justice vis-à-vis the substrate. First, the Constitution states that one of the "fundamental" roles of the Universal House of Justice is "to maintain the integrity and flexibility" of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith (UHJ 1972, para. 3). This is significant because it conveys a unique orientation toward the engagement of the Bahá'í Faith in society. On the one hand, it mandates adherence to the principles of the Bahá'í Faith (thus maintaining *integrity* of the Bahá'í Faith), on the other, it asserts the evolutionary and developmental nature of human society, which requires *flexibility* to apply the principles in a manner relevant and appropriate to varying social and historical contexts. It is this flexibility that characterizes the substrate of the BIC and is among its most distinctive features.

The painstaking attention to matters of authority, integrity and flexibility was evident in Shoghi Effendi's guidance of the Bahá'í community when it first applied for

consultative status with ECOSOC in 1948. At that time, the Bahá'í community was represented at the UN through the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. The application for consultative status was rejected on the grounds that the Bahá'í community did not meet the criteria for an "international organization." In 1948, the worldwide Bahá'í community did not yet have an international coordinating structure; the Universal House of Justice had not yet been elected; Shoghi Effendi was the Head of the community. While the Bahá'í representative suggested putting in place a temporary structure to meet UN criteria, Shoghi Effendi chose not to accept this recommendation. He stressed that he did not sanction "any form of [internal] cooperation which in any way would anticipate the unique functions of the House of Justice" (US NSA 1948, 1). To meet the UN's criteria however, Shoghi Effendi directed both existing and subsequently formed National Spiritual Assemblies to formally authorize the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States to represent them in matters pertaining to the UN. At any given point in time, the line of authority was clearly articulated and documented. We can see in this example of Shoghi Effendi's leadership the foundational role of the administrative order in guiding the affairs of the BIC, both in terms of structure and policy.

A second facet of the Constitution that we must consider are its references to the "powers and duties" of the Universal House of Justice with regards to international order. These include, doing the "utmost for the realization of greater cordiality and comity amongst the nations and for the attainment of universal peace," "[safeguarding] the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals; and [giving] attention . . . to the development of countries and the stability of states" (UHJ 1972, para. 12). What comes into sharper relief during this period is the manner in which the duties of the Universal House of Justice align with the spirit and principles of the Charter of the UN. The Universal House of Justice does not see itself as an institution administering solely to the needs of the Bahá'í community as a subset of the global community. Rather, it looks in the direction of the "development of countries" and the "stability of states"—in other words, to the relations among nations as a whole. It is significant that, as early as 1972—in the very early days of civil-society engagement with the UN and decades before religion would become a topic of interest in international affairs—the mandate

of an RNGO, such as the BIC, would be so intimately concerned with the structures and processes of global governance.

The Universal House of Justice assumed the guidance of the BIC in 1967[101] immediately providing the BIC with specific guidance regarding seeking consultative status with the UN. According to this guidance, the BIC would apply "under the authority of the Universal House of Justice" (UHJ 1966, 1); its members would be the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, and its aims would be those set forth in the Yearbook of International Organizations[102] "and any others, which after consultation, may be considered appropriate" (UHJ 1966, 1). Thus the authority of the Universal House of Justice was clearly established.[103] The period covered by this chapter is the first period during which the BIC operates entirely under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

In the remainder of the chapter, I outline three roles of the Universal House of Justice vis-à-vis the substrate: (1) transmission of the substrate; (2) fostering institutional coherence (and institutional capacity to embody the substrate); and (3) fostering a new epistemic community.

1. The Universal House of Justice: Transmission of the Substrate

The communication of the substrate is a core function within any organization as the organization's moral orientation and internal rationale are foundational to its identity. This is even more so with religious NGOs, whose identity derives from its affiliation or identification with particular traditions of thought and belief. Within each organization,

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[101] Shoghi Effendi guided the BIC, in his capacity as Head of the Bahá'í Faith, from 1945 until his passing in 1957. He led the initial establishment of the relationship between the Bahá'í community and the UN, and informed and approved the content of BIC statements to the UN. Between 1957 and 1967, the work of the BIC was guided by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, in collaboration with the Hands of the Cause (a select group of Bahá'ís, appointed for life by Bahá'u'lláh, Abdul-Baha or Shoghi Effendi, whose main function was to propagate and protect the Bahá'í Faith on the international level.)

[102] See UN OPI (United Nations Office of Public Information) 1972, 345.

[103] In its application for consultative status, the BIC indicated that it "reports to the Universal House of Justice, the governing body of this non-governmental organization" (ECOSOC 1967, 1).

a mechanism exists for the transmission of the core values and beliefs embodied in the substrate. This transmission mechanism varies according to the nature of the relationship between the RNGO and its respective religious institution. For example, the mechanism could be the religious institution itself the RNGOs' Board of Directors. For the BIC, however, this vehicle is the Universal House of Justice itself.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Shoghi Effendi's letters and guidance illuminated the BIC's understanding of the historical, political, and civilizational significance of the UN; guided the application of the principle of the oneness of humanity in the work of the BIC; and clarified the structural elements of external affairs and diplomatic work in the international arena. In this way, Shoghi Effendi, was continually conveying the historical context and significance of the BIC's engagement with the UN, and demonstrating the application of the principle of the oneness of humanity against a backdrop of complex international dynamics and the development of the Bahá'í community. Following his passing, this role was assumed by the Universal House of Justice.

Unfortunately, only a small fraction of the correspondence between the Universal House of Justice and the BIC could be retrieved from the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office Archives in New York; if any remaining correspondence still resides at the Archives of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, it is not readily accessible.[104] Despite this challenge, a number of other sources provided critical and relevant information: the annual messages of the Universal House of Justice to the worldwide Bahá'í community (known as Ridván messages[105]) and mentions in the Bahá'í historical reference series—the *Bahá'í World* Volumes. An emblematic example of the role of the Universal House of Justice in communicating the

[104] In response to my request for access to such correspondence, I received a reply from the Department of the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice noting that "many of the records you have requested form the Archives at the World Centre either do not exist or would require such extensive efforts to research and organize that, owing to the limited resources and pressure of work, it is not possible to provide them. As the Archives are not organized as a research facility but rather as a depository of resources for the use of the Universal House of Justice, regrettably it would not be feasible for you to undertake research here yourself." (Universal House of Justice Department of the Secretariat to Julia Berger, 5 October 2016, transmitted by email.)

[105] These are issued annually on April 21st, the first day of the twelve-day Bahá'í Festival of Ridván.

substrate is revealed in a 1986 letter from the House to a gathering of senior BIC staff. In this seminal communication, the historical significance of the BIC's diplomatic work since 1945 is presented.[106] The letter recalls "the embryonic efforts 39 years ago to associate the interests of the Faith with the work of the United Nations," and the "momentous progress achieved" since that period; it notes that, "the foundation of eight National Spiritual Assemblies on which those efforts were launched has . . . broadened nearly nineteenfold" with the establishment of 148 National Spiritual Assemblies" (UHJ 1986, para. 2). Further, it highlights the BIC's trajectory "from that small beginning to the historic moment in 1970 when the Bahá'í International Community was accorded consultative status . . . [to the] remarkable occasion in December 1985 when the name of the Faith was recorded in a Resolution passed by the General Assembly" (UHJ 1986, para. 2).[107] The Universal House of Justice thus conveys to the BIC the significance of its historical trajectory and development of capacity throughout its four decades of engagement with the UN.

In addition, the letter calls on the BIC to be "the windows of the Bahá'í community to the world," displaying "ever more clearly the unifying principles, the hope, the promise, the majesty of the emerging order" (UHJ 1986, para 1). The analogy of the window is used to demonstrate the relationship between the BIC and the Bahá'í community, as well as that between the BIC and broader society; it affirms the identity of the BIC. Foundational elements such as the "unifying principles" (centered on the oneness of humanity), "the hope, the promise" (contained in the teleological, historical element of the substrate), and "the majesty of the emerging order" (referencing the substrate's structural and governance dimensions) are all included in this letter. In this way, the Universal House of Justice unequivocally frames the BIC's identity as rooted in the substrate, and clarifies the nature of the BIC's engagement with the UN.[108]

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[106] We can note here an example of the historical element of the substrate.

[107] This refers to Doc. A/RES/40/141, General Assembly, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The resolution was adopted at the 116th plenary meeting of the General Assembly, 13 December 1985. The reference to the persecution of Bahá'ís is in operative paragraph 8 (qtd. in Ghanea 2003, 304).

[108] It is helpful to read communications from the House of Justice to the BIC in light of the annual Ridván messages (referenced above). The 1984 Ridván message, for example, illuminates the broader Bahá'í context within which the BIC carries out its mandate: "The emergence from obscurity . . . has been attended by changes . . . signs of a crystallization of a public image of the Cause . . . growing

2. The Universal House of Justice: Fostering Institutional Coherence

The second major role of the Universal House of Justice involves fostering institutional coherence between the BIC and the external affairs offices of National Spiritual Assemblies. By fostering institutional coherence, the Universal House of Justice ensures that the external affairs efforts convey a unified message that embodies the oneness of humanity (as an element of the substrate) both conceptually and structurally.

The structure and function of authority in the Bahá'í Faith is inextricably linked to the oneness of humanity, which is an axial principle of the Bahá'í Faith and an element of the BIC's organizational substrate. In order for the Bahá'í community to (a) be a unified community, and (b) to be an instrument which, in turn, fosters unity among the nations of the world, it must recognize a common source of authority. Structure and function must be perfectly aligned. As mentioned earlier, Shoghi Effendi underlines the relationship between the oneness of humanity and governing institutions, stating that "[the principle of the oneness of humankind] does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 43). During this period, in 1972, the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice is adopted, further clarifying the mandate and authority of this governing body.

Recall that the BIC represents the worldwide Bahá'í community at the UN, through its association with National Spiritual Assemblies (NSAs). During this period, 75 new NSAs are formed, bringing the total to 148 by 1986.[109] This is significant as one of the criteria for maintaining consultative status with ECOSOC is an international presence and capacity for international outreach. As NSAs are established, they are integrated into the Bahá'í Administrative Order and increase the BIC's capacity to coordinate and

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maturity and confidence are indicated by increased administrative ability, a desire for Bahá'í communities to render service to the larger body of mankind and a deepening understanding of the relevance of the divine Message to modern problems" (UHJ 1984a, para 1).

[109] This constitutes a 19-fold increase from the eight NSAs that first constituted the BIC in 1945. Note also that during this period, thirty-two new member states joined the UN. Furthermore, by 1985, the majority of member states are now newly liberated countries, constituting a new "Third World" majority in the General Assembly, and thereby impacting the nature of deliberations, agenda-setting, and resource allocation.

mobilize towards shared goals. One of the ways in which this unity is manifested is the composition of BIC delegations to major UN conferences. From its earliest days at the UN, one of the distinguishing features of BIC's delegations was the participation of Bahá'ís native to the host country or region of the conference; by contrast, most other NGO sent primarily representatives from Europe or North America. This deliberate effort on the part of the BIC served to embody the diversity and unity of the Bahá'í community, and to build the external affairs capacity of national Bahá'í communities. The Universal House of Justice also fostered coherence by articulating global plans and goals for the Bahá'í world,[110] which included the strengthening of relations with the UN, support of International UN Years such as the International Women's Year (1975),[111] the International Year of Youth (1985),[112] and the International Year of Peace (1986).

The relationship between the Universal House of Justice and the BIC is consistent with Evelyn Bush's findings about religious NGOs at the UN, which demonstrate a critical difference between RNGOs formally affiliated with a religious institution and those without such an affiliation as the former (affiliated RNGOs) are much more likely to take into account religious community concerns when setting their agendas (Bush 2017, 65).[113] Bush argues that affiliated RNGOs are more likely to be influenced, in setting

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[110] During this period, the Universal House of Justice formulated its Nine Year Plan (1964-1973), Five Year Plan (1974-1979), and Seven Year Plan (1979-1986).

[111] Following the UN's designation of 1975 as International Women's Year, the Universal House of Justice called upon eighty countries to "stimulate and promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Bahá'í community life so that through their accomplishments the [Bahá'í community] will demonstrate the distinction of the Cause of God in this field of human endeavor" (UHJ 1976, 360). That same year, which marked the beginning of the UN Decade for Women, the Universal House of Justice sent letters to National Spiritual Assemblies explaining the goals of the decade and encouraging Bahá'ís to contribute toward these ends. In the decades that followed, National Bahá'í Offices for the Advancement of Women were created and guided by the BIC's Office for the Advancement of Women, which was established in 1992**.**

[112] In a letter addressed to the Bahá'í Youth of the World, the Universal House of Justice writes: "The designation of 1985 by the United Nations as International Youth Year opens new vistas for the activities in which the young members of our community are engaged. The hope of the United Nations in thus focusing on youth is to encourage their conscious participation in the affairs of the world through their involvement in international development and such other undertakings and relationships as may aid the realization of their aspirations for a world without war" (UHJ 1984b, para. 1). In response to this call and in support of this UN initiative, numerous National Bahá'í Youth Conferences were held in Botswana, United States, Belgium, India, Malaysia, Hawaii, Nepal, and other locations.

[113] "In contrast unaffiliated RNGOS actually looked more like the secular NGOs in the previous analysis, reporting more concerned than did their affiliated counterparts with media visibility" (Bush 2017, 66).

their agenda, by the concerns and priorities of their religious communities, as these communities are their primary sources of funding. I would argue, however, that in the case of the BIC, the rationale underlying its engagement is not driven by financial considerations[114] but rather by a clearly established relationship of authority between the BIC and the Universal House of Justice. My research supports Bush's finding that "religion is not simply incidental to decision-making processes of RNGOs but is a real source of difference in terms of . . . priorities" (Bush 2017, 65). In addition, my thesis expands on this finding to suggest that the difference between NGOs lies in the nature of the substrate that shapes organizational logic and the manner in which authoritative structures transmit and operationalize the substrate.

By means of the guidance referenced above, the Universal House of Justice was building the capacity of the BIC to serve as a more effective instrument for the advancement of unity in the international arena and strengthening its capacity as a builder of global civil society, thus giving expression to one of the elements of the substrate. As political theorist John Keane reminds us, "global civil society was formed by the horizon-stretching effects of previous social formations," which "made possible the 'action-and-reaction at a distance' effects that are an intrinsic feature of global civil society" (Keane 2003, 40). He acknowledges the role played by "religious civilizations" in developing "world-views and world-girdling institutions that feed the streams of social life that are today global" (Keane 2003, 40). What we continue to witness today, in the substrate of RNGOs such as the BIC, are the generative forces that stretch our associative horizons further, establish and strengthen global institutions, and continue to develop capacity for transnational coordination. It is important to remember that the mandate of many RNGOs, such as the BIC, is based on what the organizations understand to be divine revelation—the vision and desire to strengthen the institutions of a global polity are rooted in the revelation itself. In the case of RNGOs, the substrate gives rise to a distinct social construction, which I refer to as the divine polity.

[114] According to Bahá'í law, only Bahá'ís are able to contribute to Bahá'í funds and institutions. The budget of the BIC is furnished entirely by the Universal House of Justice.

3. The Universal House of Justice: Forging a New Epistemic Community

In the foregoing sections, I have argued that the substrate is conveyed in the goals and direction set for the Bahá'í International Community by the Universal House of Justice. In addition to this function, the authoritative Bahá'í institution has a central role in fostering a new epistemic community—one that is rooted in and shaped by the elements of the substrate. The term "epistemic community," as introduced in Adler and Haas' foundational article, refers to a group of professionals who share four key characteristics: (1) a set of normative and principled beliefs which provide a value-based rationale for action; (2) causal beliefs about a set of problems in their academic/professional domain; (3) shared notions of validity; and (4) a set of common practices (Adler and Haas 1992a, 3). Adler and Haas clarify that an epistemic community need not be limited to scientists or professionals, it can also be described as individuals bound together by a "shared belief or faith in the verity and the applicability of particular forms of knowledge or specific truths" (Adler and Haas 1992a, 3). The idea of fostering an "epistemic community" is helpful in describing some aspects of the authoritative role of the Universal House of Justice during this period. By studying the statements issued by the BIC to the UN as well as a number of its internal policy documents—all of which were reviewed and approved by the Universal House of Justice—we discern efforts of the Universal House of Justice to foster a community—represented at the UN by the BIC—rooted in a distinct epistemology.

One of the ways in which this epistemology is communicated is in the framing of issues under consideration by the UN in terms of the elements of the substrate, such as the developmental/evolutionary view of history and the progressive expression of the oneness of humanity in all facets of human endeavor. In an internal memo about BIC's engagement with the UN, the BIC cites guidance given by the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States: "The guidance that Bahá'í institutions offer to mankind does not comprise a series of specific answers to current problems, but rather the illumination of an entirely new way of life" (BIC 1976, 7). It is in the specific manner that progress and the advancement of humanity are framed by the authoritative institution that we can see the strong influence of the substrate, and the way that the substrate illuminates a new way of looking at the world.

This way of reading the world is rooted in the recognition of the gradual maturation of humanity as a whole, as embodied in its growing capacity for solidarity and unity in different realms of human endeavor. In a 1985 statement, for example, the BIC notes that among the key achievements of the UN, have been its contributions to forging "unity in the political realm, unity of thought in world undertakings, unity in freedom, unity in religion, unity of nations, unity of races, and unity of language" (BIC 1985b, 2). Similarly, in the context of the promotion of human rights, the BIC states that

> the body of mankind, like the body of an individual, suffers when any of its parts are harmed, and that the denial of rights to any segment of human society presents the whole of humanity from benefiting from the orderly development of the talents and faculties inherent in that segment. (BIC 1985a, 1)

We can discern an effort to frame issues and processes from the perspective of the prosperity of humanity as a whole, thus establishing the primacy of the global condition and its implications for individual countries and regions, rather than trying to fit particularistic interests into a global vision. The BIC, guided by the Universal House of Justice, uses specific frames by means of which it reads the global condition and articulates approaches.

As many scholars have noted, the manner in which issues are framed shapes how reality is interpreted and which aspects of reality are more salient and apparent (Benford and Snow 2000; Joachim 2003; Karlberg 2012). The book *UN Ideas that Changed the World*, notes that ideas "change how issues are perceived, and the language to describe them; frame agendas for action; alter the ways that groups perceive their interests; and become embedded in institutions, which adopt responsibility for carrying the idea forward," (Emmerij, Jolly, and Weiss 2005, 42). Framing processes are significant because organizations such as NGOs do not simply introduce ideas but are also "actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning" (Benford and Snow 2000, 613). In this way, the BIC (under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which reviews all formal written and oral statements from the BIC to the UN) embodies the substrate in the manner in which it frames issues under consideration at the UN.

The framing of an issue or a problem gives rise to a particular set of approaches to it. For example, if poverty is construed as a lack of material resources, solutions will be framed in terms of providing the missing resources; but if the same problem is framed in terms of weak governance, then solutions will be focused on strengthening decision-making institutions and processes. In that vein, as the BIC's diagnosis of social ills is cast in terms of humanity's struggles towards greater degrees of unity and justice[115] in the context of an ever-advancing civilization, it follows that the approaches it advocates are framed in terms of efforts that contribute to fostering the conditions of unity such as universal education, or the establishment of a global federation.[116] In their study of epistemic communities and international relations theory, political scientists Emanuel Adler and Peter Haas argue that:

> Among the necessary conditions for minimal progressive change in international relations are the redefinition of values and the reconciliation of national interests with human interests in general.... To the extent that epistemic communities make some of the world problems more amenable to human reason and intervention, they can curb some of the international system's anarchic tendencies, temper some of the excesses of a purely state-centric order, and perhaps even help bring about a better international order. (Adler and Haas 1992b, 390)

The role of the Universal House of Justice in fostering an epistemic community rooted in the elements of the substrate helps us to discern the extent to which the substrate shapes the life and actions of the RNGO. The substrate does not simply shape the articulation of policy or of positions on particular issues. Rather, the substrate forms the basis of a new way of thinking, of reading society, of being in society, and of engaging with it. As the BIC writes in a 1980 statement regarding the arms race:

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[115] In one of its statements, the BIC writes, "This divine plan for humanity has evolved, in the civilization of this planet, from the early stage of family, clan, and tribe to the present stage of nation-states, and must inevitably go to the stage of fulfillment—that of the world . . . . And it is to this end that the peoples and governments of the world must direct all their energies—to achieve unity in diversity for this planet" (BIC 1980, 2).

[116] In a 1971 statement addressing disarmament, BIC asserts that "Disarmament requires also the creation of a world federation, with the necessary organs to rule with justice on behalf of all governments and peoples . . . . Such a world body must have at its command enough arms and armed forces to prevent one nation from attacking another or, if this occurs, to put down the aggressor; and each nation will retain only sufficient arms to keep internal order. Only then will a devastating world war become impossible and limited wars be stopped promptly" (BIC 1982, 1).

> What must occur in eliminating the arms race is something much more basic than simply opposing it. What is needed . . . is a re-creation of both human nature and society . . . It is a process that requires new root principles and laws to provide the impetus for the individual and for society. (BIC 1980, 3)

The authoritative role of the Universal House of Justice within the Bahá'í community, a role ordained by the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, confers on it the legitimacy and mandate to apply the elements of the substrate to the issues of the day and to "maintain the integrity and flexibility" of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

Thus, returning to the definition of the epistemic community put forward by Adler and Haas (Adler and Haas 1992a), I argue that the substrate serves as a foundation for a new epistemic community (the BIC) and that this community is fostered and guided by the authority of the Universal House of Justice. This concept expands our lexicon and analytical repertoire for the study of RNGOs because it moves us beyond the concepts of beliefs and values. We begin to see that the RNGO "project" at the UN is not simply one of lobbying for certain policies or expressing values or beliefs; but rather one of bringing forward a new way of thinking about the world, the nature of the problems within it, their root causes, and the manner in which these should be addressed.

IV. Summary

In this chapter I have argued that the organizational substrate is operationalized through structures of authority within the organization. Because the substrate is not simply an organizational position, statement, or belief, but rather a generative moral foundation, it requires a mechanism for its transmission and elaboration across various issue areas and historical periods. The issue of authority is particularly salient in the consultative relationship between the NGO and the UN as it conveys on whose behalf the organization speaks and on what basis this authority is conferred. This legitimacy becomes even more important in the case of RNGOs given the diversity of relationships between RNGOs and the authoritative institutions of their respective faith traditions—relationships ranging from the subordinate to the oppositional, all of which are represented among the RNGOs in consultative status with the UN. I argue that the Universal House of Justice gives expression to the substrate in three principal ways: (1)

by transmitting and elaborating the substrate; (2) by fostering institutional capacity to embody the substrate; and (3) by forging a new epistemic community rooted in the substrate. In turning our attention to authoritative structures we acknowledge the multi—faceted relationships and motivating structures that shape the behavior of religious institutions—neither of which is adequately discerned using prevailing approaches to the study of religious organizations. This chapter expands our range of analytical tools for the study of RNGOs by examining the mechanisms which operationalize the moral foundations of religious entities in the political realm and which foster institutional arrangements and epistemologies that embody the substrate.

Chapter 5

Substrate and Mission: Advancing Peace (1986 – 2008)

I. Overview

I will demonstrate that without a full understanding of the substrate of an NGO, we cannot recognize the complex set of motivational resources and interpretive frames that shape an organization's efforts to promote international peace. The case study of the BIC's efforts to promote peace during this period enables me to highlight the significance of the substrate for the analysis of an RNGO.

During the period analyzed in this chapter, the work of the BIC centered on the promotion of peace. What is significant about this period is not the BIC's focus on peace per se but rather its conception of peace and the manner in which it is pursued. Peace and conflict studies scholar, Oliver P. Richmond, notes that "peace is widely referred to but rarely defined" (Richmond 2008, 439). I argue that the substrate provides the theoretical framework to analyze the manner in which the BIC conceives of peace and the way it works toward this end in the international arena. My thesis supports the view of noted peacebuilding scholar, John Paul Lederach, who asserts that the study of religiously-inspired peacebuilding "requires that we explore the understanding and perspectives that undergird the practices, the terrain, and meaning at a deeper level than the description of a particular technique" (Lederach 2015, 550).

The organizational substrate responds to this call by enabling a sensitivity to the particularism of each tradition, including, *inter alia*, its distinct epistemology, ontology, and teleology, which together generate a unique conception of peace. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the BIC's understanding of peace centers on (a) the relationship between peace and unity; and (b) the nature of peace as a civilizational process. In order to do so, I present an analysis of the content of formal statements issued by the BIC during this period. I argue that the organizational substrate, as expressed in the content of the statements, generated a distinct interpretive frame for reading society and identifying steps to advance peace. Further, I demonstrate that the UN global conferences of the 1990s served as a major vehicle for the dissemination of the concepts derived from the substrate. In the second half of the chapter, I explore the

manner in which the substrate shaped the approach adopted by the BIC in its work toward peace. Specifically, I will discuss non-partisanship, the practice of "Bahá'í consultation" and the coordination and capacity building of BIC's national affiliates. Throughout the chapter, key concepts related to the emergence of civil society and to UN-RNGO relationship will be illuminated through a substrate-led analysis of the concept and practice of peace.

As I have shown in previous chapters, the substrate shapes the continual negotiation with the events and circumstances of a given historical period. Of particular significance in this period is the conclusion of the Cold War in 1992, which ushered in renewed hopes for peace and the opportunity to imagine a "new world order."[117] The end of the Cold War set the stage for the flourishing of civil society in countries across the world; new social movements and organizations formed, often with a transnational or global identity and agenda. As Haynes reminds us, the significant rise in the number of RNGOs was also associated with this period (Haynes 2013, 57). The groundbreaking decade of the 1990s, marked by the dramatic emergence of civil society and global deliberation,[118] culminated in the UN Millennium Summit (2000) and the adoption, by UN member states, of the Millennium Development Goals.

In parallel to the developments in the wider world, the Bahá'í community transformed in significant ways during this period—an important point to consider in order to grasp the development of its capacity to express the substrate in the international arena. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1985 the Universal House of Justice noted a "dramatic change in the status of the Faith" and the "emergence [of the Bahá'í Faith] from obscurity" (UHJ 1985a, 1). Contributing to the emergence were widespread diplomatic efforts on the part of the Bahá'í community to stem violent persecution of

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[117] This particular aspect of the Cold War is captured in the words of Mikhail Gorbachev, the final leader of the Soviet Union. In 1990 Gorbachev spoke of a "new type of progress throughout the world," and called for tolerance as "the alpha and the omega of a new world order" (G.H.W. Bush 1991). In similarly sweeping terms, in his 1991 State of the Union address, United States President George H. W. Bush asserted: "What is at stake is more than one small country; it is a big idea: a new world order, where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind—peace and security, freedom, and the rule of law" (qtd. in Barrett 1991).

[118] The years 1995 and 1998 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the UN and of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights respectively, creating a moment for reflection, stocktaking, and charting the future of the UN.

Bahá'ís in Iran.[119] Further, the Bahá'í Faith had been recognized as an independent world religion in authoritative publications,[120] in court rulings,[121] and among government representatives.[122] The community had also grown in size and geographic spread, and continued to consolidate its administrative structures as a consequence of the growing membership and outreach of the community.[123]

Given the heightened awareness of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice announced that it was time for the Bahá'í community to become more involved "in the life society around it . . . by exerting its influence towards unity, demonstrating its ability to settle differences by consultation rather than by confrontation, violence or schism" (UHJ 1985a, para 4). In 1986, the House of Justice launched a Six-Year Plan, the goals of which included "broadening the basis of international relations of the Bahá'í Faith," and "[fostering] association with organizations, prominent persons and those in authority concerning the promotion of peace, world order and allied objectives" (UHJ 1998c, 131). Under the auspices of the plan, the Universal House of Justice called on the BIC to be "the windows of the Bahá'í community to the world,"

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[119] In response to the severity of the persecution, the Universal House of Justice mobilized national Bahá'í communities to mount diplomatic and public information campaigns worldwide in order to acquaint government officials with the situation in Iran, to familiarize them with the nature and aims of the Bahá'í community (as these had been grossly distorted through Iranian media), and to make use of all available international mechanisms and processes to stem the persecution. By 1986, UN diplomats and UN missions from most countries had learned of the situation of the Bahá'ís, as well as the aims and activities of the global Bahá'í community.

[120] The 1988 Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year referenced the Bahá'í Faith as an independent world religion, and the second most widespread religion in the world by territory (UHJ 1998b, 571–606).

[121] Germany's constitutional High Court ruled that the Bahá'í Administrative Order was inseparable from Bahá'í belief and community life—a judgment with far-reaching implications in a country, in which the Bahá'í Faith had long been misrepresented as a "cult" (UHJ 1987). The nature of Bahá'í elected bodies in Germany had been challenged by local authorities as being technically incompatible with the requirements of German civil law.

[122] The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies held a special session to pay tribute to Bahá'u'lláh on the one hundredth anniversary of his ascension. On 22 April 1987, Mr. Donald Barrett, Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community, and Mr. Shimon Perez, Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister of Israel signed an agreement stating, that "Israel recognizes the members of the Bahá'í Faith as a recognized religious community in Israel . . . and confirms that the Bahá'í World Centre is the world spiritual and administrative centre of the Bahá'í world community and that the Universal House of Justice in Haifa is the Head of the Bahá'í Faith" (*Bahá'í World* 1998, 192).

[123] In 1986, there were 148 registered National Spiritual Assemblies and 4,627,800 Bahá'ís (Barrett 1991). By 2010, Encyclopedia Britannica estimated a total of 7.3 million Bahá'ís residing in 221 countries (Dodds 2005, 9).

displaying "ever more clearly the unifying principles, the hope, the promise, the majesty of the emerging order" (UHJ 1986b, para 1).

II. Conceptions of Peace

The concept of peace is, of course, foundational to the UN. The preamble to the UN Charter opens with the words, "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" (United Nations 1945). The Charter makes no less than fifty references to peace (most often in terms of "peace and security") and casts peace largely in terms of an absence of or prevention of threats, war, conflict, and aggression. In 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Peacekeeping*, which introduced, among other things, the idea of "post-conflict peacebuilding"—a concept centered on strengthening the structures of peace "in order to prevent a relapse into conflict" (Boutros-Ghali 1992, n.p.). Subsequent efforts—such as the *Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations* (UN General Assembly 2000), the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence (2001-2010), and the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission (2005)—have expanded the UN's conception of peace and of the mechanisms and processes for its promotion.[124] Richmond notes that making peace in the international system has mainly been conceptualized as a Western activity derived from war and in terms of institutionalizing norms associated with liberal peace (Richmond 2005, 2).[125]

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[124] Both *The Agenda for Peace* and the *Brahimi Report* identify three dimensions of UN peace operations: (a) conflict-prevention and peacemaking; (b) peacekeeping; and (c) peacebuilding. In 2004, expanding the concept further still, the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change concluded that contemporary threats to peace now include "a whole range of issues that have not traditionally been considered as part of the peace and security nexus at all—poverty, environmental degradation, pandemic diseases and the spread of organized crime" (Richmond 2008, 439–40).

[125] Richmond defines "liberal peace" as "an institutional peace to provide international governance and guarantees, a constitutional peace to ensure democracy and free trade, and a civil peace to ensure freedom and rights within society" (Richmond 2008, 439–40). He also notes that "Critical innovations in the discipline [of international relations] infer searching questions in terms of methodology, epistemology, and ontology about peace, ranging from ways of knowing peace, knowing the minds of others, connecting with debate on gender, culture, and identity. This concerns peace as emancipation, and post-structuralist concerns with discourse, knowledge and power, identity, othering, and empathy" (Richmond 2008, 441).

Every religion offers a distinct understanding of peace. Scholar of religion and conflict and co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook on Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, Atalia Omer, notes that the "theological genre resonates with works on forgiveness, nonviolence and reconciliation that . . . seek to identify an ethics and practice of reconciliation and peace from within the resources of a given tradition" (Omer 2015, 8). Similarly, scholars of theology and peacebuilding, Heather M. Dubois and Janna Hunter-Bowman, argue that a "lack of deep appreciation for theologies—embodied as well as verbal—limits understanding of social change processes and skews interpretations of religious actors" (Dubois and Hunter-Bowman 2015, 569).[126] This chapter endeavors to address this gap and to go beyond a theological analysis to demonstrate the manner in which the elements of the substrate give rise to a distinct conception of peace and approaches for its promotion in the arena of the UN.

There are four principal ways in which the BIC's concept of peace is rooted in its organizational substrate: (1) peace is inextricably linked to unity; (2) peace is conceptualized as a process; (3) peace unfolds in "political" time and "civilizational" time; (4) peace unfolds in an evolutionary process. In each of these elements we can see how the specific conceptualization is driven by the substrate. I will consider each of these in turn.

III. Substrate-based Conception of Peace

1. Unity as Foundational Element of Peace

The Bahá'í Faith asserts: "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable, unless and until its unity is firmly established" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, 286). The establishment of unity among the peoples and nations of the world is put forward as the prerequisite for the attainment of peace and security. The concept of unity is inextricably linked to the substrate element of the "oneness of humankind." In its 1985 statement to the peoples of the world, *The Promise of World Peace*, the Universal

[126] A growing body of literature is beginning to address the religious and spiritual resources for peacebuilding. Among them: James Heft, ed., *Beyond Violence: Religious Sources of Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004); Tanya B. Schwartz, *Faith-Based Organizations in Transnational Peacebuilding* (New York**:** Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018); Joyce S. Dubensky, ed., *Peacemakers in Action: Volume 2: Profiles in Religious Peacebuilding* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

House of Justice asserted that: "World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind," and that "any successful attempt to establish world peace" depends on the "universal acceptance of this spiritual principle" (UHJ 1985b, section III). Half a century earlier, Shoghi Effendi elaborated on the implications of the oneness of humankind, its relationship to unity, and its relevance for systems of governance:

> Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, [the oneness of humanity] seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world . . . It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity. (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 41)

Shoghi Effendi lists a number of characteristics of the unity that undergirds the concept of peace: (a) diversity is one of its fundamental constituent parts (he refers to "unity in diversity");[127] (b) excessive centralization and uniformity are to be avoided; (c) unity must be embodied in the governing institutions of society; and (d) those institutions must be capable of meeting the needs of "an ever-changing world." As Vivienne Jabri, a scholar of war and international relations points out: "The politics of peace must then rely on a conception of solidarity that has a capacity to transcend the signifying divide of state and culture, while at the same time recognizing the claims of both" (Jabri 2007, 268).

It is important also to observe the manner in which the concepts of justice and unity are understood in the Bahá'í writings and how this understanding is expressed by the BIC, as this further illuminates the "oneness of humanity" dimension of the substrate. Bahá'u'lláh refers to justice as "the best beloved of all things" (Bahá'u'lláh 1985, 3). Asserting the relationship between the concepts of unity and justice, he states: "The

[127] Note that Shoghi Effendi refers to various types of diversity including: ethnic origins, climate, history, language, tradition, thought, and habit.

purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men" (Bahá'u'lláh 1982, 67). In one of the most widely cited and disseminated statements by the BIC during this period, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, justice is described as the "power that can translate the consciousness of oneness into collective will," "the ruling principle of social organization," and the "practical expression of awareness" of the link between the individual and society (BIC OPI 1995, Section II). The relationship between justice and unity reveals the multi-faceted nature of the elements of the substrate and the manner in which they are articulated in relation to other elements of the Bahá'í Writings.

It is interesting to note (as Richmond reminds us in the foregoing section) that peace in the international system is predominantly conceptualized as an "activity derived from war" (Richmond 2005, 2). The substrate focuses our attention on the relational dimensions of peace—whether at the level of the family, community, nation or the world. It is disunity, rather than war, that is considered the more prevalent and consequential social ill. In the seminal statement of this period, *The Promise of World Peace*, the Universal House of Justice warns: "Disunity is a danger that the nations and peoples of the earth can no longer endure; the consequences are too terrible to contemplate, too obvious to require any demonstration" (1985b, Section IV). Similarly, Shoghi Effendi writes: "mankind is groaning, is dying to be led to unity, and to terminate its age-long martyrdom" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 201).

The Promise of World Peace was released on the eve of the UN International Year of Peace (1986); it was the first statement that the House of Justice addressed "To the Peoples of the World." Because of its broad reach into the various social, economic, and spiritual dimensions of peace, and the accompanying dissemination efforts that placed the statement (and translations thereof) into the hands of nearly every Head of State and UN Mission, it can be regarded as having set the agenda for the BIC's intellectual contributions to the UN during this period.[128] The statement identifies the pressing social ills of its time, by considering the manner in which these ills are barriers to the solidarity and unity of the peoples and nations of the world. The barriers listed

[128] By 1989, *The Promise of World Peace* had been translated into seventy-six languages and distributed to over two hundred Heads of State and more than two million individuals.

include: the view of human nature as "incorrigibly selfish and aggressive"; religious fanaticism; materialism; nuclear warfare; racism; extremes of wealth and poverty; unbridled nationalism; gender inequality; lack of universal education; and the lack of communication between peoples (due in part to the absence of a common language[129]). The coherence of the statement's vision of peace can be appreciated in its full light when viewed through the lens of the substrate: the construction of peace entails the gradual removal of barriers—mental, intellectual, social, structural, financial, technological, etc.—to the establishment of unity, rooted in justice, among the peoples and nations of the word.

2. Peace as Process

The BIC's conception of peace is also shaped by the teleological dimension of the substrate: peace is cast as the fruit of a process of the advancement of civilization; and before it "matures into a comprehensive reality, it must pass through difficult states, not unlike those experienced by individual nations until their internal consolidation was achieved" (BIC OPI 1999b). Peace, then, is conceived in the context of a broader civilizational trajectory, which advances in the direction of enlarging spheres of unity and order, starting with the family, until it encompasses the nations of the world. The earlier stages of this vast historical process include prejudice, war, exploitation and the "unavoidable tumult which marks [humanity's] collective coming of age" (UHJ 1985b, n.p.).

The teleological dimension of the substrate enables us to discern that the processes associated with the establishment of peace are evolutionary in nature. In its statement on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the UN, the BIC noted that discussions about the future of the UN "need to take place within the broad context of the evolution of the international order and its direction" (BIC 1995f, para. 15). By viewing the UN as one element—albeit a central one—within the evolution of the international order, much of its work can be understood in terms of its potential to strengthen mechanisms of global governance, thereby refocusing our attention away from the shortcomings or

[129] The Bahá'í Faith advocates the adoption of an auxiliary language to be used in addition to one's native tongue (Bahá'u'lláh 1982, 127).

flaws inherent to the organization and onto its civilizational value, both current and potential.

The BIC also applied this substrate-based hermeneutic to its reading of two major developments at the UN during this period: the series of UN global conferences and the growing involvement of civil society in global governance processes. While the UN global conferences were criticized for political wrangling and for failing to produce binding agreements, the BIC called attention to the significance of the gatherings. It noted the contribution of the conferences to establishing "a new methodology for global deliberations on critical issues" (BIC 1995f , Section II) and the growing capacity of member states—and of civil society as a whole—for sustained and more complex forms of collaboration; for achieving unity of thought; and for transcending the barriers of physical distance, nationality, gender and religion in working together on issues of common concern.[130] The adoption of a longer timeframe and an evolutionary perspective recasts the perception of and significance assigned to the UN's various accomplishments as well as its shortcomings and setbacks.

The substrate draws our attention to the salience of the concept of time within which this historical process occurs, as time is a "pivotal category underlying the conceptual analysis of historical processes" (Dubois and Hunter-Bowman 2015, 572). Dubois and Hunter-Bowman have also noted the importance of diverse conceptions of time within religious traditions and the manner in which they challenge the adequacy of a "singular, flat depiction of time" for understanding the world (Dubois and Hunter-Bowman 2015, 576). Eminent theologian Charles Taylor, for example, contrasts "ordinary time," and "higher time" (Taylor 2007, 547); Talal Asad refers to "simultaneous temporalities [that] embrace both individuals and groups in complexities that imply more than a simple process of secular time" (Asad 2003, 179). In a document outlining its external affairs strategy—which encompasses the work of the BIC as well as the diplomatic

[130] We can see the commentary echoed in the statements of the Universal House of Justice, which referred to the "gathering momentum of an emerging unity of thought in world undertakings" (BIC OPI 1995, para. 1). In its report about engagement in the Earth Summit, the BIC wrote, "The UNCED [UN Conference on the Environment and Development] process, culminating in the Earth Summit and the '92 Global Forum, will undoubtedly go down in history as having helped generate the 'unity of thought' necessary to the establishment of the Lesser Peace" (BIC 1992, 3).

work of National Spiritual Assemblies—the Universal House of Justice places the external affairs work of the Bahá'í community within the broader context of attaining the "Lesser Peace" (UHJ 1994, 1). This, along with the related Bahá'í concept of the Most Great Peace, introduces two temporal frames that are key to understanding the BIC's conception of peace.[131]

The Lesser Peace denotes a political unity of nations which will be achieved through the actions of national governments, and not through any direct action of the Bahá'í community (BIC OPI[132] 1999b, 1).[133] The Most Great Peace, on the other hand, extends beyond political and legal agreements to encompass a "spiritual unity" of the human race, which embodies the spiritual principles outlined by Bahá'u'lláh, and denotes a more mature form of unity. The 1994 External Affairs strategy related the work of external affairs to the Lesser Peace in the following manner:

> The Lesser Peace anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh will . . . be established by the nations themselves. It seems clear that two entities will push for its realization: the governments of the world, and the peoples of the world through the instrumentality of the organizations of civil society. But to lend spiritual impetus to the momentum, which that grand attainment will generate, the need for a Bahá'í strategy is evident. (BWC 1994, 1)

Thus the Universal House of Justice makes a distinction between the secular, political agreements needed to advance peace, and the embodiment of spiritual principles required for a more mature peace. One can also conceive of this distinction in the realm of human rights: the legal assurance of equal rights for all (as attained by the Lesser Peace) is necessarily different from the complete eradication of racial, religious, and gender prejudice, which occurs at the level of the individual conscience and is a

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[131] For an extended discussion of the concept of time, see Chapter 3, "Substrate and Meaning."

[132] The "Bahá'í International Community" in this case refers to the worldwide Bahá'í community's headquarters in Haifa, Israel. It does not refer to the United Nations Office.

[133] The Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information (with the approval of the Universal House of Justice) elaborated that the Lesser Peace "implies the achievement of a relationship among [the nations] that will enable them to resolve questions of international import through consultation rather than war and that will lead to the establishment of a world government. The attainment of peace in the political realm is discernible through the workings of a process that can be seen as having been definitely established in the twentieth century amid the terror and turmoil that have characterized so much of this period" community (BIC OPI 1999b, 1).

spiritual condition.[134] Thus we have the operation of two overlapping processes: progress towards the Lesser Peace, which the Bahá'í Writings state will be securely established during the twentieth century (UHJ 2001, para. 3)[135] and an unspecified time frame for the Most Great Peace "that must inevitably follow as the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1991, 162). The long-term Bahá'í vision is, therefore, a peace that will coherently embody material and spiritual requirements.

The substrate draws our attention to the pivotal category of time within unfolding historical processes. The manner in which an RNGO conceives of the category of time is central to its understanding of the meaning associated with particular events and processes. In contrast, the more short-term orientation that characterizes UN planning and review processes gives rise to a focus on certain facets of conflict or injustice while often hiding from view the root causes of the dynamics being observed. The shorter, single timeframe may obscure from the UN's perspective what Lederach describes as "a horizon that provides direction and purpose" (qtd. in Dubois and Hunter-Bowman 2015, 576). We can see the intimate association, in the view of the BIC, between its efforts and the horizon of direction and purpose provided by the concept of the Lesser Peace. In the report of its participation in the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, the BIC writes:

> These conference processes—important pieces of the mosaic of the Lesser Peace—have contributed substantively to "an emerging unity of thought in world undertakings," the realization of which our sacred scriptures describe as one of the lights of unity that will illumine the path to peace. (BIC 1995a, 5)

It is from the perspective of longer-term processes, as evoked by the substrate that the full meaning and significance of events can emerge. The substrate helps to reveal the

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[134] For a further discussion about this distinction, see *The Promise of World Peace* (UHJ 1985b, Section II).

[135] Note that the unity of nations, while closely associated with the Lesser Peace, is not equivalent to it. The Universal House of Justice notes that, "the Lesser Peace will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the various governments of the world. The unity of nations can be taken as that unity which arises from a recognition among the peoples of the various nations, that they are members of one common human family" (UHJ 2001, para. 6).

multiple layers of meaning assigned to events and processes, as they are understood in the context of advancing the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace.

What emerges from this analysis is a conception of peace rooted in the ontological and teleological dimensions of the substrate. As Dubois and Hunter-Bowman remind us, theological resources shed light on crucial, and often neglected, dimensions of peacebuilding. These resources are subsumed in my concept of the substrate and shape the RNGO's interpretive frame. By understanding the operation of the substrate, we are able to discern conceptions of peace and approaches to peace that are not captured by prevailing theories of international relations.

III. Substrate-based Approaches to Advancing Peace

The substrate shapes not only the conception of peace but also the manner in which the BIC proceeds to execute its mandate to "influence the processes toward world peace" (BWC 1994). The 1994 External Affairs Strategy states explicitly that this influence is to be exercised by the BIC by "coherently, comprehensively and continually imparting [its] ideas for the advancement of civilization" (BWC 1994, 1). This is to be done "through a unified voice" of a diverse community that "could come to be regarded as representative of the aspirations of the peoples of the world" (BWC 1994, 1). Further, it directs the BIC to concentrate its efforts on imparting these ideas in the fields of human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development.

In the remainder of this chapter I explore three substrate-based approaches used by the BIC to influence the processes toward world peace: (a) generation and dissemination of ideas for the advancement of civilization; (b) fostering a culture of principled deliberation; and (c) building coherence and capacity among national affiliates.

Before proceeding, it is helpful to recall the discussion about organizational legitimacy and cooperation in the preceding chapter. As Peter Willetts note in his book titled *Nongovernmental Organizations in World Politics*, the legitimacy of any organization is the "fundamental basis for influence" (Willetts 2011, 138). Given that the BIC was called upon to exercise moral leadership and moral authority as a means of advancing

world peace, the establishment of the legitimacy of the organization was paramount. What we will see in the sections that follow are concomitant efforts to exert influence toward processes of world peace (in a manner shaped by the substrate) and to maintain a high level of organizational legitimacy in order to facilitate the former. One of the ways in which organizational legitimacy was fostered by the BIC during this period was by highlighting the ethnic diversity of the Bahá'í community, its geographical spread, unity of vision, and efforts to embody Bahá'í principles in all facets of personal and community life. We can see an example of this in informational materials about the Bahá'í community prepared by the BIC:

> Composed of individuals from virtually every national, ethnic, and religious background . . . the worldwide Bahá'í community is nevertheless firmly united by a common commitment to a global program for moral, spiritual, and social progress. This program is characterized by support for . . . the elimination of all forms of prejudice; full equality between the sexes; the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth . . . universal education . . . and the establishment of a world federal system based on collective security and world citizenship. Taken as a whole, the worldwide Bahá'í community, in its day-to-day life, commitment to common principles, and activities aimed as assisting the whole of humanity, stands as a uniquely global organization with a broad and relevant reservoir of experience at building social cohesion. (BIC 1995d, n.p.)

1. Generation of Content

One of the major ways in which the BIC exerted influence during this period was through the development and circulation of formal statements related to issues under consideration by the UN. These demonstrate an effort to widely disseminate ideas and perspectives conveying social and moral principles elaborated in the Bahá'í Writings,[136] as well as the scope and method of the application of these principles to present day issues. In order to analyze the operation of the substrate in this mode of engagement, I carried out an archival analysis of the formal statements issued by the

[136] The Universal House of Justice elucidated the "essential merits" of spiritual principles in the following manner: "Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them" (BIC 1993).

BIC to the UN during this period. According to the quadrennial reports submitted by the BIC to the UN, the BIC issued a total of 323 statements during the period covered in this chapter.[137] An estimated 500,000 pieces of literature (including formal statements) were distributed by the BIC both at the UN global conferences and at UN Headquarters in New York City.

The chart in Figure 5.1 shows the major themes addressed in these statements. As nearly all statements referred to more than one theme, the total number of themes shown in the chart far exceeds the total number of statements.[138] The themes of the statements reflect the priorities set out for the BIC and listed in the 1994 External Affairs Strategy as outlined in the previous section (BWC 1994). While the themes in Figure 5.1 do not map directly onto this list, except for human rights and the advancement of women, the foregoing analysis of the themes of major BIC statements during this period demonstrates that a focus on global prosperity and moral development was reflected in statements across the wide diversity of themes shown below.

Before proceeding to analyze the operation of the substrate in the content of the statements, it is important to clarify the process by which statements were generated so as not to oversimplify the relationship between substrate and statement content. A number of internal and external factors shaped the BIC decision to issue a statement to the UN. External factors included, for example, incidents of persecution of the Bahá'í community requiring urgent diplomatic attention.[139] They also included UN-driven factors such as the number of opportunities to issue statements on particular issues (including the number of UN bodies/agencies addressing particular issues, UN

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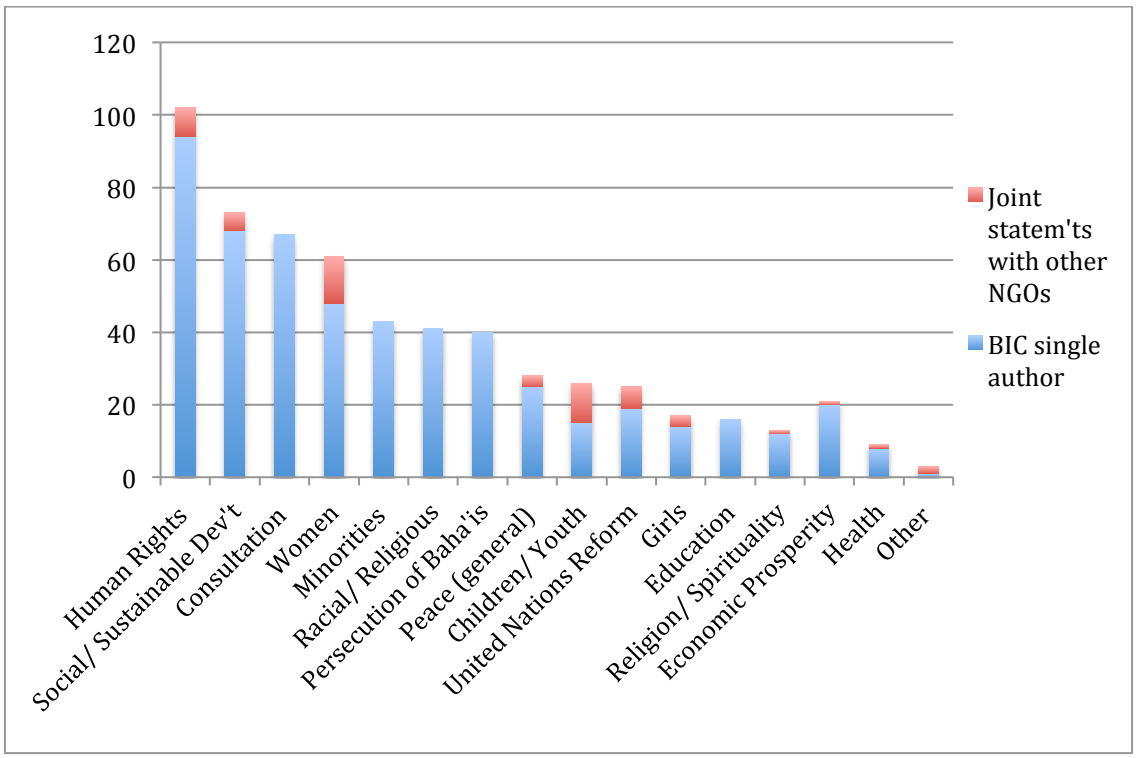
[137] This number includes written, oral, and joint (co-signed with other NGOs) statements.

[138] For example, a statement concerning the economic empowerment of women would be coded as addressing the themes of economic prosperity as well. A statement concerning the human rights of girls would be coded as addressing both human rights and girls. Of the 323 statements issued by the BIC during this period, fully 45% concerned human rights. Of these, about 25% addressed the persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran. In total, about 100 statements focused on various dimensions of human rights. Not all of the statements listed in the quadrennial reports were available in the archives of the Bahá'í International Community's New York Office. In cases were the full text of the statement was not available, the title was used to determine the primary themes addressed by the statement.

[139] The BIC issued forty statements during this period addressing the issue of the persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran.

conferences, international years, anniversaries, regional meetings), opportunities to provide input on draft UN documents and reports, and opportunities to co-draft or co-sign NGO statements. BIC-driven factors, as I argue in this thesis, are intimately associated with the impetus to give expression to the substrate. In addition to substrate-driven ones, there were also human resource factors (for instance, existing expertise on a given issue, availability of BIC staff and resources), as well as any specific instructions or requests from the Universal House of Justice.

Figure 5.1 Major themes addressed in BIC statements between 1986 and 2008



A substrate-driven analysis of the major themes in the statements enables us to discern the ontological and teleological dimensions of peace presented in these statements, as well an analysis of its structural (legal/institutional) dimensions. In order to conduct this analysis, I identified statements most widely distributed and/or translated during this period and that reflected a more "macro" approach and presented a broad perspective on a given issue—or set of issues—rather than statements that responded to more narrowly framed concerns (gender equality rather than women in the labor

market, for example).[140] Figure 5.2 shows the statements selected for analysis during this period.

An analysis of the themes presented in the statements reveals an elaboration of concepts and historical perspectives focused on the promotion of ideas, attitudes, social conditions, relationships, and institutional structures and norms that are conducive to greater social cohesion and unity. The following themes are analyzed in terms of their expression of the substrate and in the context of the aim of advancing peace.

Figure 5.2 Major statements issued by the BIC[141] between 1985 and 2008

Statement	Year	Reason for issue	Distribution (approx.)	Translation[142]
Promise of World Peace[143]	1985	UN International Year of Peace	2,000,000+	76 languages[144]
World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development*	1993	Concept paper for 1st Session of UN Commission on Sustainable Development	20,000+ electronic distribution lists**	Albanian, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Portuguese, Turkish
Turning Point for All Nations*	1995	50th Anniversary of the United Nations	10,000+ electronic distribution lists**	Albanian, Chinese, German, Portuguese
The Greatness that Might be Theirs*	1995	Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing)	5,000+ electronic distribution lists**	Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese

[140] Statements on broader topics, such as statements issued on the anniversary of the UN, address issues more holistically and offer a more holistic expression of the substrate. They are also less subject to the word-count limits imposed by the UN.

[141] With the exception of *The Promise of World Peace*, which was issued by the Universal House of Justice.

[142] National Spiritual Assemblies were encouraged to translate statements into their respective languages. It is likely that more translations exist beyond what is listed in the table. This data was not readily available.

[143] This statement was authored by the Universal House of Justice and addressed to the peoples of the world.

[144] In 1986, the UN Secretary General designated the BIC and five of its national affiliates (National Assemblies of Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Kenya, and Lesotho) as "Peace Messengers"—a designation bestowed on three hundred organizations throughout the world.

* National translations and distribution was encouraged.

** Statements were initially available only in hard copy and through the electronic distributions lists. Once the BIC launched its formal statement library, all statements were made accessible online.

(Figure 5.2 continued)

Statement	Year	Reason for issue	Distribution (approx.)	Translation[145]
Prosperity of Humankind[146]	1995	UN World Summit on Social Development	10,000+ electronic distribution lists**	Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Persian, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish
Valuing Spirituality in Development*	1998	Concept paper presented to the World Faiths Development Dialogue, hosted by World Bank and Archbishop of Canterbury	10,000+ electronic distribution lists**	Chinese, Danish, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish
Who Is Writing the Future? Reflections on the Twentieth Century[147]	1999	Marking the end of the 20th Century	[unknown] BIC website	[information not available]
Freedom to Believe: Upholding the Universal Standard of Human Rights*	2005	Responding to UNDP Human Development Report (2004) – Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World	100s+ BIC website	Albania, Dutch, French, German, Italian
The Search for Values in an Age of Transition	2005	60th Anniversary of the United Nations	100s+ BIC website	Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, German,
Beyond Legal Reform: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls*	2006	Addressing violence against women	100s+ BIC website	Arabic, Chinese, German, Hindi, Spanish
A New Framework for Global Prosperity	2006	Review of the First UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty	100s+ BIC website	[information not available]

* National translations and distribution encouraged.
** Statements were initially available only in hard copy and through the electronic distributions lists. Once the BIC launched its formal statement library, all statement were made accessible online.
[145] National Spiritual Assemblies were encouraged to translate statements into their respective languages. It is likely that more translations exist beyond what is listed in the table. Such data was not readily available.
[146] Statement prepared by the BIC Office of Public Information, Haifa, Israel.
[147] Ibid.

2. Oneness of Humanity: A New Interpretive Frame

One of the dominant themes addressed by the BIC is the interdependence of humanity and its implications for all facets of human endeavor. Through its statements, the BIC introduced a new interpretive frame for understanding social and material reality. Karlberg has referred to the interpretive frame of Bahá'í contributions to public discourse as the "social body frame" (Karlberg 2012, 24). The metaphor of the organic social body, Karlberg argues, aptly captures the "logic of interdependence" (Karlberg 2012, 31) and provides a "normative alternative" (Karlberg 2012, 15) to frames rooted in authoritarian social relations (such as the social command frame) or in terms of competition and self-maximization (the social contest frame). The fundamental relationship between interdependence and peace is captured in the statement of the Universal House of Justice issued on the occasion of the UN International Year of Peace:

> Permanent peace among nations is an essential stage, but not . . . the ultimate goal of the social development of humanity. Beyond the initial armistice forced upon the world by the fear of nuclear holocaust, beyond the political peace reluctantly entered into by suspicious rival nations, beyond pragmatic arrangements for security and coexistence, beyond even the many experiments in co-operation which these steps will make possible lies the crowning goal: the unification of all the peoples of the world in one universal family. (UHJ 1985b, Section IV)

At the root of the BIC's conception of peace is the view of humanity's progression towards the "unification of all the peoples of the world." It is toward this goal and within this interpretive frame that the contributions and perspectives of the BIC statements during this period must be understood.

The table below highlights various themes in the statements; selected excerpts from statements during this period demonstrate the manner in which these themes express elements of the substrate.

Figure 5.3 Analysis of themes in major BIC statements issued between1986 and 2008

Theme	Selected Excerpts from BIC statements
A global orientation: Statements provide a global unit of analysis to the pressing issues of the day. Issues at all levels of society are considered from a global perspective.	. . . all the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal, not particular or regional (BIC OPI 1999a, 1). As the integration of humanity gains momentum, those who are selected to take collective decisions on behalf of society will increasingly have to see all their efforts in a global perspective. Not only at the national, but also at the local level, the elected governors of human affairs should . . . consider themselves responsible for the welfare of all of humankind (BIC 1995c, Section VI). Given the interconnectedness of the global economic system, [extreme poverty] cannot be abolished while [extreme wealth] is allowed to exist. In this regard, efforts to eradicate poverty must include an earnest re-evaluation of global systems and processes—including governance, trade, and the private transactions—that perpetuate the growing extremes of wealth and poverty (BIC 2006a, para. 11).
Relational ontology: Statements highlight that relationships at all levels must be transformed in order to support human flourishing in the context of interdependence.	. . . the emergence of a peaceful and just social order . . . is contingent upon a fundamental redefinition of all human relationships—among individuals themselves, between human society and the natural world, between the individual and the community, and between individual citizens and their governing institutions . . . Outmoded notions of power and authority need to be recast (BIC 2001, para. 15). . . . the concept that humanity constitutes a single people presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction (UHJ 1985b, Section I).
Human rights: Concern for human rights must be animated by, and expressed within, the context of the recognition of the oneness of humanity.	Instilling in our children . . . recognition of the oneness of humanity, appreciation of unity in diversity, and a sense of citizenship in a world community will be the best guarantee of improved protection of human rights in the years to come (BIC 1997b). Concern that each human being should enjoy the freedom of thought and action conducive to his or her personal growth does not justify devotion to the cult of individualism that so deeply corrupts many areas of contemporary life. Nor does concern to ensure the welfare of society as a whole require a deification of the state as the supposed source of humanity's well-being . . . Only in a consultative framework made possible by the consciousness of the organic unity of humankind can all aspects of the concern for human rights find legitimate and creative expression (BIC OPI 1995, para. 11).

(Figure 5.3 continued)

Theme	Selected Excerpts from BIC statements
Collective decision-making: The "Bahá'í method of consultation"—a principle-based means of deliberation and decision-making—provides a vehicle for constructive and just collective action, beginning with the family and extending to international decision-making.	Improvement in the ability of all members of the community to consult is a primary measure of success in every Bahá'í development project... The ability of people to come together in these new and constructive patterns of participation and interaction is, in some respects, a more important outcome . . . than the quantifiable goals traditionally associated with development projects (BIC 1999, Section III). The political unity of nations implies the achievement of a relationship among them that will enable them to resolve questions of international import through consultation rather than war and that will lead to the establishment of a world government (BIC OPI 1999b, para. 2).
Protagonists of social change: The protagonists of change will be the people themselves, animated by the consciousness of solidarity in building a new social order; capacities must be developed to allow the expression of this role.[148]	If it is true that the governments of the world are striving through the medium of the United Nations system to construct a new global order, it is equally true that the peoples of the world are galvanized by this same vision . . . The transformation in the way that great numbers of ordinary people are coming to see themselves...raises fundamental questions about the role assigned to the general body of humanity in the planning of our planet's future (BIC OPI 1995, Introduction). Often the target populations of poverty eradication projects are perceived as masses of undernourished people, overwhelmed by their circumstances and needs rather than capable agents of change in their communities. The challenge for development efforts is to find methods that allow individuals and communities to solve their own problems; the ability of a community to take on more complex social issues is a key indicator of progress (BIC 2006a, para. 5)
Justice: Justice and unity are inextricably linked.	At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision-making because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved... justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked (BIC OPI 1995, Section II).

[148] Note that according to orthodox international relations theory "one dominant actor, in this case often the state, is the loci around which power, interest, resources, and societies revolve, moderated by institutional governance" (Richmond 2008, 442).

(Figure 5.3 continued)

Theme	Selected Excerpts from BIC statements
Gender equality: Gender equality must be understood and pursued in the context of advancing the oneness of humanity	If the Platform for Action is to win the worldwide support it requires . . . the principle on which it is founded . . . needs to be understood as an essential aspect of an even broader principle: the oneness of humanity (BIC 1995d, para. 2) The denial of equality between the sexes perpetrates an injustice against one-half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the work place, to political life, and ultimately to international relations (UHJ 1985b, Section II). So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease...(Schweitz 1995, para. 1, quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, 135).
Human Nature: Statements challenge the idea that human nature is intrinsically selfish.[149] Spiritual dimension of human life plays a central role in establishment of peace.	The essence of any program of social change is the understanding that the individual has a spiritual or moral dimension. This shapes their understanding of their life's purpose, their responsibilities towards the family, the community and the world (BIC 2006b, para. 4). The development of [spiritual] capabilities must be anchored in the central social and spiritual principle of our time, namely the interdependence and interconnectedness of humanity as a whole (BIC 2006b, para. 5). . . . uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful...Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man's true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit (UHJ 1985b, Introduction).

Statements issued during this period also give expression to the substrate by conveying a historical perspective on the conditions of present-day society. The expression of this historical perspective was explored in Chapter 3, which focused on the manner in which the substrate shaped the Bahá'í community's rationale for engagement with the UN. In this period, the developmental and evolutionary characteristics of the BIC's conception of history shape its understanding of progress towards peace, as shown in Figure 5.4.

[149] IR theory assumes "the realist inherency of violence in human nature and international relations" (Richmond 2008, 440). The exception is the positive view of human nature held by "idealists" who recognize the international capacity to cooperate and whose ideas are rooted in various notions of internationalism and interdependence (Richmond 2008, 443).

Figure 5.4 Evolutionary and developmental perspectives in BIC statements issued between 1986 and 2008

Theme	Selected Excerpts from BIC Statements
Evolutionary perspective: The BIC takes a long-term perspective on both global challenges and matters of UN reform, highlighting the trajectory that needs to be traversed as capacity for cooperation grows.	An evolutionary mindset implies the ability to envision an institution over a long time frame perceiving its inherent potential for development, identifying the fundamental principles governing its growth, formulating high-impact strategies for short-term implementation, and even anticipating radical discontinuities along its path (BIC 1995f, 7). The processes of United Nations reform must be understood as part of a broader evolutionary course, starting with early forms of international cooperation and leading to increasing levels of coherence in the administration of human affairs (BIC 2005, 2). If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? (UHJ 1985b, Section III)
Developmental perspective: Similar to the social body frame above, social progress is viewed in terms of the maturation of humanity, whose capacity for forging a global peaceful community is emerging.	The history of tribes, peoples and nations has effectively reached its conclusion. We are witnessing the beginning of the history of humankind, this history of a human race conscious of its own oneness (BIC OPI 1999a, 9). . . . prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world (UHJ 1985b, Introduction).

3. Structural and Institutional Dimensions: Emergence of a New World Order

The final element of the substrate, namely the authoritative and governing structures of the Bahá'í Faith and the accompanying focus on the structural dimensions of world order, is expressed in the BIC's statements during this period. Many of the seminal statements address themselves to the structures of governance and challenge assumptions about the structure of the international order. First, BIC statements stress the broader historical imperative for rethinking governance arrangements. In *The Promise of World Peace*, the Universal House of Justice writes:

> A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish,[150] recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life. (UHJ 1985b, Section IV)

The key message is the call for the creation of "laws and institutions that are universal in both character and authority" (BIC OPI 1995, Section I).

The specific architecture of global governance is not something laid out in the BIC's statements. Rather, the BIC advocates that a broad range of approaches should be considered:

> Rather than being modeled after any single one of the recognized systems of government, the solution may embody, reconcile and assimilate within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them. (BIC 1995f, 5)

As has been already mentioned, the Lesser Peace will be accomplished by the nations themselves; it is the elected leaders of society that will ultimately articulate and adopt structures and methods that will provide for the political unity of nations. The BIC sees its role as an active participant in the discourse and deliberations, which support the process by which these will be articulated. In its statements, it puts forward ideas concerning elements of governance including the "quality of leadership, the quality of governed and the quality of the structures and processes in place" (BIC 1998, Section V) as well as specific recommendations concerning issues such as collective security,[151] the processes of the General Assembly, and the International Criminal Court.

What emerges from this analysis of the BIC's statements during this period is a distinct framework for the advancement of peace. The substrate enables us to discern a much more nuanced conception of peace—one rooted in the teleological, ontological, and relational dimensions of peace. We see the use of a distinct discursive frame in the statements—what Karlberg calls a social body frame—which highlights the

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[150] Excessive nationalism, state sovereignty.

[151] "The Bahá'í Faith envisions a system of collective security within a framework of a global federation, a federation in which national borders have been conclusively defined, and in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded all rights to maintain armaments except for purposes of maintaining internal order" (BIC 2005, Section II).

interrelatedness of humanity and its social, legal, and institutional implications. Further, the historical and institutional dimensions of the substrate are present throughout the statements and combine with the concept of the oneness of humanity to generate a unique discourse on the subject of peace and the means for its attainment. In addition, we can discern the manner in which the BIC expresses the substrate in the context of what has been called the "the rationale of liberal . . . non-religious discourse" at the UN (Haynes 2014, 64). Yet, rather than being forced to adopt the rationale of the UN—as Haynes notes is the case in a number of RNGO case studies—the BIC sees its role in terms of conveying a different rationale, albeit in a manner that adheres fully to the norms of NGO association with the UN. Influence is thus exerted not by adopting a UN rationale at the expense of the substrate but as will be discussed in the next section, by demonstrating the efficacy of methods and approaches rooted in unity-seeking measures—an approach that validates Haynes' observation that RNGOs play a role in strengthening transnational civil society by "adding to the lexicon and vocabulary of the debate" (Haynes 2014, 64) and, I would argue, to the culture of the debate.

4. Dissemination of Ideas

In addition to the distribution of BIC statements, one of the primary mechanisms for the dissemination of ideas was through the major UN conferences that took place during this period.[152] As Nora McKeon describes:

> The UN summits revisited the themes, the cast of characters, the setting, the language and the rhetorical devices of international affairs... The summits were experienced as agenda setters, dealing with the desperately unfinished business of the twentieth century and bringing up the curtain on the twenty-first. The world community looked to them as occasions to frame emerging global issues and mobilize political will . . .

[152] During the period in question, the BIC participated actively in the following major UN summits (not an exhaustive list): World Summit for Children (1990); World Conference on Education for All (1990); UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992); World Conference on Human Rights (1993); UN Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (1994); International Conference on Population and Development (1994); Fourth World Conference on Women (1995); World Summit on Social Development (1995); Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (1996); World Food Summit (1996); World Youth Forum (1996, 1998, 2001); Millennium Summit (2000); World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (2001); Special Session of the General Assembly on Children (2002); World Assembly on Ageing (2002); World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002); World Summit on the Information Society (2003); and the 2005 World Summit (High-Level Plenary Meeting of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly).

> On their side, CSOs were attracted to the summits by the spaces they opened up and the opportunities they offered both to influence the substance of the discussions and the decision-making processes. (McKeon 2009, 10)

The BIC was deeply and extensively involved in the majority of these conferences, distributing tens of thousands of brochures and statements, coordinating workshops, receptions, and serving on international NGOs committees, drafting committees and other consultative bodies in advance of and during the conference. Figure 5.5 provides an overview of the extent of BIC engagement in three of the major World Conferences, with a focus on activities related to dissemination of ideas for the advancement of civilization.

What we glean from Figure 5.5 are BIC's extensive efforts and allocation of human resources to conference-related processes. These efforts sought to maximize the dissemination of BIC ideas related to the advancement of civilization and, further, to advance what BIC saw as the processes of the Lesser Peace. Ideas were disseminated both through BIC-authored statements, as well as through many contributions to drafting processes of key conference documents—the *Earth Charter* in particular. There was also an effort to demonstrate—symbolically, through the composition of delegations and initiatives such as the installation of the Peace Monument—the pivotal ideal of unity in diversity upheld by the Bahá'í community, and seen as central to the achievement of the goals of each of the conferences.

Figure 5.5 BIC engagement in the UN Conference for Environment and Development (1992), UN World Summit for Social Development (1995), and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (1995)

	UN Conference for Environment and Development/ Earth Summit (1992)[153]	UN World Summit for Social Development[154] (1995)	UN Fourth World Conference on Women[155] (1995)
Stated aims (concerned with dissemination of ideas)	• Bring Bahá'í principles to bear on thinking and deliberations • Unify efforts of NGOs (among themselves and between NGOs and governments)	• Influence processes toward the Lesser Peace • Bring Bahá'í principles to bear on issues under consideration	• Take part in substantive activities and share Bahá'í perspectives on gender equality • Be of service to conference organizers
Engagement in Preparatory process	• Almost 3 years • 39 UNCED-related conferences/ planning meetings • 5 UNCED-related committees	• 18 months	• BIC representative was member of Global Facilitating Committee for conference • BIC representative was Convener of Forum '95 Working Group (Geneva)
Human resources	• BIC Office of the Environment • 10,000s volunteer and staff hours at international, national, and local levels	• BIC Office of the Environment • Danish Task Force • European National Spiritual Assemblies • Volunteer coordinator • Media coordinator/ Bahá'í Office of Public Information • Hospitality coordinator • Conference activity coordinators	• BIC Office for the Advancement of Women • BIC Coordination team (9 persons) • Media coordinator
Delegates/ attendees	• 4 National Spiritual Assemblies were accredited to conference[156] • [not specified]	• 250 people • 24 National/ Regional Spiritual Assemblies officially represented	• 500-600 Bahá'ís (20% were men) • 7 accredited organizations founded by Bahá'ís
Countries represented	• 4	• 40+	• 60+

[153] Source: BIC 1992. Note that in 1989, the BIC established an Office for the Environment.

[154] Sources: BIC 1995c, 1994.

[155] Source: BIC 1995b. In 1992, the BIC established an Office for the Advancement of Women (OAW), which guided the formation and efforts of over 50 national OAW offices throughout the world.

[156] Brazil, Iceland, Singapore, United States

(Figure 5.5 continued)

	UN Conference for Environment and Development (1992)[157]	UN World Summit for Social Development[158] (1995)	UN Fourth World Conference on Women[159] (1995)
Nr. of statements distributed[160]	• 100,000s • 125,000 copies of Earth Charter (4 languages)	• 40,000+	• 20,000 – 25,000
Languages of statements	• English, French, Spanish, Portuguese	• 10+ languages	• English, Chinese, French, Spanish
Written and oral statements	• Oral stat't to plenary[161] • 16 written • 7 oral[162] • 10 joint NGO and UN agency statements	• Oral statement to the plenary[163] • 2+ written statements • 3 joint NGO declarations	• 10 written • 1 oral – Youth Day • BIC gave up its plenary spot to another NGO[164]
Other	• Earth Charter [165] • Peace monument[166] • Hosted symposium[167]	• Held 20 workshops and symposia[168]	

[157] Source: BIC 1992. Note that in 1989, the BIC established an Office for the Environment.

[158] Sources: BIC 1995c, 1994.

[159] Source: BIC 1995b. In 1992, the BIC established an Office for the Advancement of Women (OAW), which guided the formation and efforts of over 50 national OAW offices throughout the world.

[160] Statements were distributed at the conference and were also sent in large quantities to external affairs representatives around the world, as well as to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

[161] BIC was one of 13 NGOs selected by UNCED secretariat, from over 1,400 accredited NGOs, to make an oral statement to the Plenary Session of the Summit (BIC 1995a, 3–4).

[162] BIC was one of thirteen NGOs—selected by the UNCED Secretariat from among over 1,400 NGOs—to make an oral statement to the plenary session of the summit.

[163] Of the 2,400+ registered organizations, only 40 NGOs and NGO coalitions were able to make statements during the ten plenary sessions (BIC 1995c, 5)

[164] Of the 2,000 NGOs accredited to the conference, 50 were given the opportunity to present an oral statement. The BIC gave its spot to representatives of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, as a way of enabling the voices of women from Russia to be heard in this venue.

[165] The Earth Charter was spearheaded by Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987 in response to the World Commission on Environment and Development's call for a new charter to guide the transition to sustainable development. The initiative gave rise to unprecedented worldwide consultations concerning the ethical and moral foundations of sustainable development. BIC participated extensively throughout the entire process, both in terms of submitting suggested text, and playing a leadership role among civil society. Although BIC was not able to endorse the final version of the Charter, it continued to support the initiative that sought to establish widespread agreement on such principles.

[166] The Peace Monument was built by the BIC and the Bahá'í Community of Brazil for the Conference. The top of the monument bears the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens," and inside is deposited soil from nearly 150 countries. The monument "also served as a very high profile example of a project which fostered collaboration between...NGOs, the business sector, local, state and national government bodies, and the governments of many nations" (BIC 1992, 88).

[167] The symposium theme was "Values and Institutional Changes for a Sustainable Society."

[168] Bahá'ís were invited as speakers and panelists to 10+ workshops and symposia held by other organizations, including UNICEF (BIC 1995c, 2). According to the BIC's report, the "Bahá'ís were the most visible organization in the program booklet for the NGO Forum" (BIC 1995c, 2); over 600 organizations organized meetings and symposia during the forum (BIC 1995c, 2).

III. Influencing Processes toward World Peace: Building Unity, Solidarity, and Capacity for Collective Action

In addition to its role in shaping the generation of content for sharing and dissemination at the UN, the substrate plays a major role in devising the methodology and approach adopted by the BIC in its interaction with the UN, its agencies, member states, and NGO community. The substrate provides the analytical tool to examine the internal mechanisms of BIC's actions—the "DNA" of its engagement in peace building. It reveals a distinctive element of the BIC's efforts in this arena: namely that the efforts to foster social change (in this case, advancing peace) must be in themselves unifying. It is in this light that the work of the BIC must be examined. Two specific types of efforts will be explored in the foregoing sections: fostering principle-based collective deliberation and building capacity and coherence among national affiliates. The question of the BIC's approach to its engagement with the UN more generally will be explored in further detail in the next chapter. It is mentioned in this chapter in the specific context of the BIC's conception of and pursuit of peace.

1. Unifying People in Global Action: Fostering a Culture of Principled Deliberation

In Chapter 3, I introduced the concept of non-engagement in partisan politics—as elaborated by Shoghi Effendi and strictly adhered to by the BIC. It is one of the ways in which BIC ensures coherence between the means and ends of its engagement with the UN. As the goal pursued by the BIC is that of fostering unity of thought and action, the methods it adopts must, in themselves, be unifying. "It is not possible," the Universal House of Justice writes, "to build enduring unity through endeavours that require contention or assume that an inherent conflict of interests underlies all human interactions, however subtly" (UHJ 2013a, para. 16). As Jeffrey Haynes points out,

> what often seems to divide FBOs [faith-based organizations] . . . in a quite fundamental way, is the extent to which they are prepared to follow what I have referred to as "politicized" paths to achieve their objectives...To what extent are FBOs prepared to cut deals, be pragmatic, build coalitions, and, in short, use a variety of means to achieve the progress they require to reach their objectives? (Haynes 2014, 169)

The BIC's avoidance of engagement in partisan politics protects it from becoming enmeshed in the structural and ideological divisions that are an integral and unavoidable aspect of multi-party systems, and that would compromise the identity and aims of the organization.

In its engagement with the UN and NGO community, the BIC applies the principles of Bahá'í consultation—a principle-based approach to collective deliberation that is intended to be unifying rather than divisive. As Bahá'u'lláh has stated: "No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation" (qtd. in BIC OPI 1995, para. 34). This consultative process—whether it involves two individuals or many—seeks to shift discussion away from competing interests and opinions to a focus on principles. The aim is to create both a moral and intellectual environment in which collective goals and courses of action can surface and prevail. Participants are encouraged to express themselves freely, albeit courteously, enabling a rich diversity of perspectives to come to light. A Catholic-sponsored research report studying the presence of religion at the UN noted that interviewees (members of the UN community) had identified Bahá'ís, along with Quakers as "key religious actors" at the UN. Both organizations, held in "high regard in UN circles" for seeking to build consensus on issues by engaging all concerned parties (Religion Counts 2002, 37). "Perhaps most important," the report highlighted, "both operate as facilitators rather than partisan advocates" (Religion Counts 2002, 37). We can see in these efforts the centrality of the substrate operating at the level of the method of the organization.

The substrate-based analysis of the consultative process used by the BIC builds on studies that have explored the question of religion- and faith-based methods used by RNGOs at the UN. Social anthropologist Sophie-Helene Trigeaud, in her study of RNGO processes[169] associated with the UN Human Rights Council, notes the category of "religious-, values- and methods based processes" (Trigeaud 2017, 112). Trigeaud finds that religion is an "ethical, philosophical and theological motivation" for the

[169] Other types of processes include: networking, informal diplomacy, "breaking walls" [working around political, diplomatic barriers], education, and awareness-raising processes (Trigeaud 2017, 99).

agenda of many RNGOs (Trigeaud 2017, 113).[170] We need to go further, however, to understand how this motivation drives the specific approaches to engagement with the UN. A study of RNGOs at the UN notes: "Whenever a process is used by an RNGO that displays a religious, spiritual, or faith-inspired nature, identity or language, this process can be seen as a 'religious process'" (Beittinger-Lee 2017a, 149). Beittinger-Lee's research helps to orient us to the elements that distinguish a "religious" process from a non-religious one. I posit that it is the substrate that enables us to correctly perceive such distinctions. Without identifying the organizational substrate, how could we recognize a "religious, spiritual, or faith-inspired nature" of a particular process, particularly one outside of a familiar faith tradition? Without understanding the concept of the oneness of humanity and its implications for UN engagement, how would one recognize "consultation" or "non-engagement in partisan politics," or know that this is in fact a religiously guided process? Similarly, Beittinger-Lee directs our attention to the vocabulary used in RNGO statements (Beittinger-Lee 2017a); again, it is the substrate that enables us to discern vocabulary that is religious inspired rather than simply a reflection of the trends of the day.

The BIC's efforts during this period of its activity are characterized by a deep and wide-reaching engagement with the NGO community, one characterized by careful attention to upholding the principles of consultation in various fora. One of the distinctive qualities of this period of history at the UN is the explosion in the number of NGOs, especially following the UN global conferences of the 1990s. It is during this period that NGOs not only multiplied but also learned to work together in new configurations and coalitions,[171] learning to exert greater influence on the discourse, structures and processes at the UN. In the context of this rapidly expanding civil society, the practice of consultation took on greater significance.

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[170] For example, a representative of the International Fellowship for Reconciliation noted the focus of the organization on "refusal of armed violence" as a "means to keep peace in accordance to the message of Jesus Christ" (Trigeaud 2017, 112) and a Bahá'í representative citing rationale for engagement in promotion of interreligious dialogue saying that this kind of dialogue is an element of the Bahá'í Faith (Trigeaud 2017, 112).

[171] NGO groups organize around issues (for example, specific human rights—NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief), UN structures (such as the NGO Working Group on the Security Council, or the NGO Committee on UNICEF), or types of NGOs (Committee of Religious NGOs). NGO groups nominate, from amongst their membership, persons to serve as officers on their respective Executive Committees.

The consultative approach was perhaps most evident in the context of the BIC's engagement in various committees and executive-level positions on NGO committees at the UN. Since receiving consultative status with the UN, BIC representatives have been elected by their peers to leadership positions on a wide range of influential NGO committees.[172] Such positions included: co-chair of the UN Millennium Forum;[173] member of the International Steering Committee of the Beijing (Fourth World Conference on Women) NGO Forum;[174] chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women;[175] vice-president (1986-1988) and secretary (1988-1991) of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CONGO);[176] co-chair of Global Forum of NGO Committee on UNICEF; chair of NGO committees on human rights, freedom of religion or belief, social development, UNIFEM, UNICEF, Task Forces on UN Reform, Task Force on Access to the UN; as well as executive positions on NGO committees on human settlements, development, youth, family, and the UN Department of Public Information. BIC representatives also served on key drafting committees working on outcome documents of UN conferences, most significantly the NGO committee coordinating input into the Earth Charter document.

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[172] This is significant because BIC representatives do not put their names forward for election; rather, they are nominated by their peers, and a committee vote determines the selection of the candidate

[173] The Millennium Forum, organized in parallel to the UN Millennium Summit (2000), brought together over one thousand NGOs from over one hundred countries. According to Miles Stoby, an Assistant UN Secretary General and the Coordinator for the Preparations for the Millennium Summit and Assembly, "This is the first occasion when a global civil society forum has been convened to discuss the entire global agenda" (BIC 2000, 1).

[174] The International Steering Committee consisted of the NGO Forum Coordinator, the chairs of the three planning groups, the president of the Conference of NGOs (CONGO), and the past coordinator of Forum 1985. The Committee was responsible for setting the tone and agenda for the then largest-to-date gathering of NGOs. The BIC Representative served on this Committee from 1992 to1995. During the Beijing conference, the BIC Representative was also the Chair of the NGO Planning Group in New York ("NGO Focal Point"), another Bahá'í representative was elected to Chair the Indigenous Women's Caucus. The BIC Representative in Geneva, was elected to the position of Convener of the Geneva Working Group on the Beijing NGO Forum ("Forum '95").

[175] This is the largest NGO committee at the UN. The BIC has been elected to the position of chair or to other executive office positions on this committee almost every year between 1992 until the end of this period.

[176] CONGO's vision is to be the primary support and platform for a civil society represented by a global community of informed, empowered and committed NGOs that fully participate with the UN in decision-making and programs leading to a better world, a world of economic and social justice (CONGO 2017).

The consultative approach, which characterizes BIC engagement with various committees and task forces, was a principal expression of the substrate during this period. In the UN arena—often challenged by an oppositional dynamic, entrenched positions, and competition to secure advantage, access, or material resources—the BIC endeavored to put into practice the consultative methods observed within Bahá'í communities. Reflecting on engagement in the UN conferences of the 1990s, a former BIC representative noted: "A very significant part we played was in bringing NGOs together, in helping them to achieve a unity of purpose."[177] This was a conscious, deliberate, and often challenging practice that served to build consensus, bring underrepresented voices to the table,[178] and foster processes of deliberation that were in themselves unifying and, as such, considered by the Bahá'í community as building blocks of peace.[179]

2. Building Capacity and Coherence among National Affiliates

In the previous section, I discussed how the substrate shaped the BIC's approach to influencing the processes towards world peace. I argued that the practice of consultation provided a framework for the BIC's engagement with the UN and the NGO community, fostering principle-based deliberation and consensus on a wide variety of issues. In this final section, I explore how the BIC sought to exert influence by coordinating and building the capacity of its national affiliates. The substrate helps us to understand these efforts in the terms of strengthening the capacity of the Bahá'í

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[177] Lawrence Arturo, personal email to author, February 10, 2017. Another example of this is the BIC's role on the facilitation committee of the Gender Equality Architecture Reform Campaign (2006-2010) which, mobilized over three hundred NGOs—both secular and religious—to join together to advocate for the creation of UN Women—the new UN entity which consolidated the work of four disparate UN bodies working on gender equality.

[178] BIC Representatives took active part in the planning committees of most major UN conferences including the UN Conference on the Environment and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements, among others.

[179] In her report about the BIC's participation in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women and the processes leading up to it, Mary Power (BIC Representative) describes the challenges of seeking to remain neutral and principled when discussions became politicized, or when "extreme" and "radicalized" dominated, or when tensions rose between NGOs and the organizers of the conference BIC 1995b, 6). This challenges the assertion made by scholars who argue that RNGOs are forced to compromise their norms and beliefs in order to exert influence at the UN. I have shown that it is possible, as in the case of the BIC, for an RNGOs to exercise principle-based approaches in a manner that both adheres to the organizational substrate and is effective within UN fora.

community to speak with one voice and to undertake coherent and effective action to advance the external affairs goals articulated by the Universal House of Justice. It is here that the structural dimension of the substrate comes to the fore.

When analyzing the manner in which an organization exerts influence in a particular environment or on a particular issue, it is important to distinguish between (a) influence that results in outwardly visible change (say, policy changes, adoption of new methods, and so on), and (b) influence that builds capacity to carry out specific actions.[180] This distinction emerges, for example, in the way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the significance of the twentieth century, which he refers to as the “century of light” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982, Section 32). Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, he states, “Inasmuch as this century is the century of light, capacity for achieving peace has been assured” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982, Section 32) While the means to achieve the goal had been achieved, however, “volition and action” were still needed to realize the goal of universal peace (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982, Section 32).

The 1994 External Affairs Strategy had set out a new role for the BIC—namely, to guide and coordinate the efforts of the National Spiritual Assemblies in relation to their governments—specifying that in order to

> effect a coherent pattern in the development of diplomatic activities worldwide, the Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations Office will give direction to [external affairs] activities in the form of information, materials, ideas and advice addressed to National Spiritual Assemblies. In turn, the National Spiritual Assemblies will report their related activities to that office and generally correspond with it about diplomatic programmes. Furthermore, the office will assist the National Spiritual Assemblies through a process of training, which will assume various forms. (BWC 1994, 6)

We can see, in this area of work, the expression of the structural dimension of the substrate: as BIC is an integral part of a larger system, its actions must be understood in terms of the progress and flourishing of the system as a whole. When we look at this through the lens of the External Affairs Strategy directive to “influence the processes of

[180] The Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Public Information elaborated that the Lesser Peace “implies the achievement of a relationship among [the nations] that will enable them to resolve questions of international import through consultation rather than war” (BIC OPI 1999).

the Lesser Peace," we can distinguish between external-facing influence exerted through engagement with the UN and international civil society, as well as internal-facing influence aimed at strengthening the external affairs capacities of the Bahá'í community in order to serve in the promotion of processes advancing peace.

In 1997, the BIC launched its first global external affairs training effort, aimed at building the capacity of nearly one hundred National Spiritual Assemblies to engage with their government representatives.[181] The theme of the campaign was carefully selected in light of the diverse national political climates and circumstances within which Bahá'í communities would engage. Given the formation of new National Spiritual Assemblies following the collapse of the Soviet Union (in the newly independent states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia), as well as other newly formed Assemblies (such as Cambodia, Mongolia, Eritrea), the settings for diplomatic relations couldn't have been more different. In light of the recently launched UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), the growing experience of the Bahá'í community in the field of education, and the call for the Bahá'í community to speak in a unified voice, the theme of Human Rights Education was given preference over more politically sensitive issue of human rights and selected as the focus of the campaign.[182]

The UN global conferences provided another key opportunity to develop the capacity of National external affairs offices;[183] indeed, BIC along with National Affiliates were represented at all UN world conferences of the 1990s. Through participation in the conferences and in extensive preparatory processes, national Bahá'í representatives developed their capacity to build relationships with and present ideas to government officials and civil society and to discern the nature of processes associated with the advancement of world peace. Four conferences in particular served as critical opportunities for institutional maturation and refinement of transnational coordination: the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) in 1992; the UN

[181] While only one hundred Assemblies completed the training, the BIC invited 174 Assemblies (the totality during that period) to lend their support to the Decade for Human Rights Education.

[182] For further details see BIC 1997a.

[183] See Figure 5.5 on page 139.

World Summit for Social Development in 1995[184]; the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995; and the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996.[185]

At each of these landmark conferences, the Bahá'ís constituted among the largest delegations, with tens of thousands of statements being printed and distributed (see Figure 5.5). Extensive training opportunities and materials were prepared and conducted years in advance to prepare representatives of national Bahá'í communities to participate coherently in these global processes, interact with the media, effectively convey ideas and recommendations, and translate their experience into the development of their respective external affairs offices. At the core of the Bahá'í strategy to contribute ideas to the conference and to build relationships was an orientation to familiarize people with the nature of the Bahá'í community as one of the most diverse organizations on the planet and, at the same time, one characterized by unity. In this sense, the contribution of the BIC and of the National Assemblies—in addition to the statements and the consultative processes—was the presentation of a community that, against all of the forces of disintegration and separation, had constituted itself as a diverse, unified community. It was a practical and living expression of the organizational substrate that oriented all efforts in the direction of fostering conditions for solidarity, cohesion, and consensus.

IV. Summary

In this chapter, I have shown that the substrate provides a critical analytical tool for understanding the engagement of an NGO at the UN; in this case, specifically in the arena of peace. The substrate reveals that action is led not simply by beliefs but by a combination of elements so intrinsic as to constitute a sort of "organizational DNA."

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[184] The BIC was involved at national, regional and international levels in preparatory meetings; BIC representatives attended regional and preparatory committee meetings ("PrepComs"), were involved in caucuses, and interacted extensively with government and UN officials on drafting documents. Some National Spiritual Assemblies also participated in national consultations leading up to these conferences.

[185] Bahá'ís constituted the largest NGO delegation, representing eleven National Spiritual Assemblies. Bahá'ís were also the largest delegation of NGOs at the official Habitat conference and possibly the largest contingent of representatives of a NGO at the NGO Forum (BIC 1996, 2).

This has been demonstrated by analyzing how the substrate is expressed in the mandate of the organization—both in the nature of the aims it seeks to pursue and in the manner in which these are pursued. While much has been written about the contributions of religious organizations to the pursuit of peace—in its various dimensions of conflict resolution, peace-making, peacebuilding, and reconciliation—this chapter has contributed to the discourse by analyzing the organization's construct of peace—encompassing its ontological, teleological, and structural dimensions. A substrate-based analysis of the BIC's efforts to promote peace has revealed that peace (a) denotes a quality of relationship among nations not expressed solely in terms of the absence of violence; (b) signals a capacity to address complex problems in a constructive, principle-based manner; (c) represents a stage in a greater process leading to a mature system of global governance; (d) must be achieved and built by means that are unifying; and (e) can be discerned through a process which has been established in the twentieth century. It is with the help of the theoretical lens of the substrate that we can more fully appreciate the full significance of the Universal House of Justice's letter to the BIC, at the opening of this period, calling on it to be "the windows of the Bahá'í community to the world," displaying "ever more clearly the unifying principles, the hope, the promise, the majesty of the emerging order" (UHJ 1986b, para. 1).

Chapter 6

Substrate and Method: Participation in the Discourses of Society (2008-2015)

I. Overview

This chapter analyzes the first eight years (2008-2015) of an ongoing historical period, thereby bringing to a close my study of the first 70 years of the BIC-UN relationship (1945-2015). Even this relatively short span of time, however, reveals a distinct expression of the substrate in the adoption of new terms of engagement for BIC's relationship with the UN. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the substrate shapes the terms of BIC's engagement with the UN around the key notion of *participation in the discourses of society* (BWC 2014, 1). This modality incorporates within itself methods of work introduced in earlier chapters, such as non-participation in partisan politics and the Bahá'í practice of consultation. Further, it shifts the emphasis from *influencing* the processes toward world peace—according to the terminology used in the 1994 External Affairs Strategy—to *participating* in the discourses of society. It is a framing that situates the BIC in an evolving global conversation about the means for the betterment of humanity—a conversation that involves all participants in a common, unfolding enterprise of contributing toward an ever-advancing civilization.

Consistent with the approaches introduced in previous chapters, the new terms of reference embody the substrate by ensuring that the means of social change, such as the pursuit of the Lesser Peace, are in themselves unifying. An analysis of the concept of participation in the discourses of society enables us to examine how the substrate shapes BIC's engagement with the UN and the manner in which this concept shapes ideas about the role of civil society at the UN. An analysis of the operation of these new terms of reference pushes against the conceptual boundaries of the religious-secular binary and reveals BIC's distinct approach to the reconciliation of unity and difference and well as its distinct epistemology. The BIC's understanding of the concept of discourse is also explored in this chapter.

Before proceeding to discuss in detail the new terms of reference articulated by the Universal House of Justice, it is helpful to note the manner in which this period—one

characterized by global social and institutional crises and upheavals—has been described by the UN. This backdrop enables us to appreciate the environment of complexity, instability, and change within which the substrate finds expression. The UN Secretary-General from 2006 to 2015, Ban Ki-Moon, called the years of his tenure a "decade of tectonic turbulence and exponential change" (UNGA 2016, 4). In similar language, the 2011 UN Annual Report describes the year in terms of a "a pivotal juncture in world history when the status quo was irrevocably weakened and the contours a new world began to emerge" (UNGA 2011, 1). It is a period during which humanitarian disasters[186] and global financial crises tested the limits of multilateralism. Against the backdrop of these upheavals, the nations of the world—along with an unprecedented level of input from civil society—negotiated a new global development agenda,[187] to succeed the Millennium Development Goals. The year 2015 also marked the completion of the first decade of the age of social media, in which the voice of civil society was "resoundingly heard in global affairs" (UNGA 2016, 4).[188] It is in the context of an accelerated pace of change, turbulence, and complexity that the substrate finds expression during this period.

During this period, the question of the terms of reference for RNGO-UN engagement came to the fore as, one-by-one, five UN agencies developed explicit guidelines for engaging with faith-based organizations, which they saw as key collaborators for realizing each agency's respective mission. Between 2009 and 2014, the UN Population Fund, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme (UNDP),[189] and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued guidelines

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[186] 2012 was the third successive year of natural disasters causing in excess of US$ 100 billion in damage/ per year.

[187] Agenda 2030 is the product of one of the most inclusive and holistic processes in United Nations history. As the global framework for the next fifteen years and a promise by Member States to "leave no one behind," Agenda 2030 encapsulates the "global vision of the world we want to live in" (UNGA 2016, 9).

[188] It was the call from civil society for example, that urged the UN to institute dramatic changes to its gender equality institutions. After a widespread four-year campaign (2006-2010) involving NGOs across a wide spectrum of expertise—including religious and faith-based organizations—UN Women, a new UN entity, was created.

[189] In formulating its guidelines, UNDP invited the BIC Offices to comment on an early draft of the guidelines. In response, the BIC offered to convene a consultation so as to enable wider input on the draft.

for engaging with faith-based organizations and, in some cases, with local faith communities and faith leaders (UNFPA 2009; UNAIDS 2009; UNICEF 2012; UNDP 2014; UNHCR 2014). The guidelines focused on first establishing common ground between the UN agency and the FBO in question and, as appropriate, building a partnership that would combine the "complementary strengths and contributions of two or more parties to achieve greater impact and synergy than when operating separately" (UNICEF 2012, 51). In its own way, each set of guidelines recognized the diverse perspectives and experience that FBOs bring to the partnership and, at the same time, maintained that humanitarian principles and human rights instruments are fundamental constituents of the framework for action. Further, various UN agencies noted that "without listening to and then aligning the language of rights with the articulation of deeply held socio-cultural and religious values and beliefs, there can be a perception of alienation and imposition of foreign ideas despite the fact that the human rights framework is inherently based on these deeper values. Thus, language and approach are critical elements in the process of establishing and building meaningful partnerships" (UNICEF 2012, 54–55).[190]

In short, this was a transitional, tumultuous period of human affairs, one in which the voices of the peoples of the world were seeking to reach and to be heard at the highest levels of decision making, and in which social media began to transform the mechanisms of global civil society. It is this environment that serves as the backdrop for substrate's continually evolving expression in the BIC-UN relationship.

[190] Similarly, UNFPA notes that while the partnerships with faith-based organizations are expected to share the objectives identified by the International Conference on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals, UNFPA respects that faith-based organizations may reach these objectives "using their own language, networks and *modus operandi*" (UNFPA 2009, 3).

II. Modes of RNGO Engagement with the UN

In order to understand more fully how the substrate shapes the new terms of reference for BIC's engagement with the UN, it is also helpful to review how scholars have theorized RNGO engagement in this arena. This brief review will shed light on the kinds of questions that remain unanswered in this area and how the substrate helps to address them.

It must be noted that previous studies do not address the terms of engagement specifically, but rather look at the processes by which RNGOs engage with the UN (Berger 2003; Butler 2006; Carrette and Miall 2017; Haynes 2013; Trigeaud 2017). Despite a lack of perfect alignment between "terms of engagement" and "processes," the research on RNGO processes reveals the manner in which the nature of the relationship between the RNGOs and the UN has been theorized. In my earlier study, I noted that while processes such as networking, advocacy, monitoring and awareness-raising are common to most NGOs, "spiritual guidance, prayer, and modeling [desired outcomes and behavior]" can be identified as being unique to these organizations (Berger 2003, 14). Similar distinctions are made by Beittinger-Lee and Trigeaud (Beittinger-Lee 2017b; Trigeaud 2017). Trigeaud distinguishes between legally based[191] and adaptive processes used by NGOs; the former are derived from UN guidelines, the latter are shaped by the NGOs themselves (Trigeaud 2017, 90). Among the adaptive processes, she identifies religious processes, which include: "activities justified by core religious values," "prayers, ceremonies or rituals," "religious events," and "works towards religious issues" (Trigeaud 2017, 115). Without an understanding of the substrate, however, how does a researcher identify an activity as being "justified by core religious values"?[192] Further, who defines what constitutes "religious issues"? Does working toward a religious issue in an unethical way count as a religious process? I argue that the substrate enables the researcher to identify the foundational generative and moral elements and allows one to assess with greater confidence whether the

[191] In the context of her research about RNGOs at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, she includes legally-based processes such as: attending the HRC, presenting statements, organizing parallel events, participating in formal processes reviewing the human rights records of Member States (e.g. Universal Periodic Review), and consultation with UN bodies. (Trigeaud 2017, 92)

[192] It also raises the question of *whose core values* define the core religious values of the organization.

processes of the organization are "religious." In a similar manner, Beittinger-Lee argues that a religious process is one that "[displays] a religious, spiritual, or faith-inspired nature, identity or language" (Beittinger-Lee 2017a, 149). Again, I argue that it is the researcher's awareness of the substrate that enables them to discern the religious nature of the behavior they are observing. It is the underlying logic, rationale for the activity (which may *appear* very similar to activities of non-religious NGOs) that conveys its 'religious' quality.[193]

III. New Terms of Reference: Participation in the Discourses of Society

It must be clarified from the outset that while the term "participation in discourses" enters the BIC's lexicon during this period, the Bahá'í community's involvement in the life of the society, of which has always been a part, is not new. Bahá'u'lláh, in his Writings, admonishes his followers: "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976, 213). Beginning in 1867, Bahá'u'lláh wrote letters to the kings and rulers of the world urging them to pursue justice and disarmament, and to band together in a commonwealth of nations.[194] 'Abdu'l-Bahá—Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son and leader of the Bahá'í community after Bahá'u'lláh's passing—addressed the rulers and people of Persia in his treatise on modernity, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (`Abdu'l-Bahá'l [1875] 1990), and gave hundreds of public talks and addresses on the pressing issues of the day during his travels throughout Europe and North America. Further, Shoghi Effendi, in his account of the first century of the Bahá'í Faith, writes:

> ...the participation, whether of official or non-official, of representatives of these newly founded national Bahá'í communities in the activities and proceedings of a great variety of congresses, associations, conventions and conferences, held in various countries of Europe, Asia and America for the promotion of religious unity, peace, education, international cooperation, inter-racial amity and other humanitarian purposes. (Shoghi Effendi [1944] 1974, 342)

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[193] We can ask, for example, what it is about "quiet diplomacy" that makes it a distinctly Quaker practice. What is it a about consultation that makes it a distinctly Bahá'í practice? How can researchers know whether they are observing "quiet diplomacy" or a group engaged in "consultation"?

[194] Bahá'u'lláh addressed letters to, among others, Emperor Napoleon III, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm I, Tsar Alexander II, Emperor Franz Joseph, Pope Pius IX, Sultan Abdul-Aziz, and the Iranian ruler, Nasiri'd-Din Shah (Bahá'u'lláh 2017c).

In 1925, Shoghi Effendi encouraged the formation of the International Bahá'í Bureau in Geneva, home to the League of Nations at that time. The history of the Bahá'í Faith is one of engagement in the life of society and simultaneous establishment of communities and institutions embodying Bahá'u'lláh's vision for a new world order. The emergence of the term "participation in the discourses of society" demonstrates the organic and evolutionary quality of the Bahá'í community—as experience is gained, the language of the Bahá'í community evolves in a manner that more effectively describes the nature of engagement with society and is a more useful term for what the community is trying to accomplish. This new language, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, is gradually adopted by the Bahá'í community, and is continually refined as the community gains new insights into how best to achieve its aims.

Having discussed various approaches to the study of religiously motivated processes used by RNGO in their engagement with the UN, I now proceed to examine the terms introduced by the Universal House of Justice during this period. The reconceptualization of the nature of BIC's engagement with the UN during the period under consideration enables us to examine the unfolding expression of the substrate in this dimension of BIC activity.

In order to analyze the particular way in which participation in discourses is understood and operationalized by the BIC, it is important to consider the manner in which the Universal House of Justice framed this term in the context of the endeavors of the worldwide Bahá'í community in the 2014 External Affairs Strategy:

> The House of Justice has described three interrelated areas of endeavour—expansion and consolidation,[195] social action,[196] and participation in the prevalent discourses of society—which are central to the process of learning in which the Bahá'í community is engaged. Coherence among these three is maintained by ensuring they adhere to

[195] Expansion and consolidation refer to growth of the Bahá'í community's efforts toward expanding the community, nurturing the interests of those who have been attracted to the Bahá'í Faith, and accompanying them on this journey (UHJ 2005).

[196] "...all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly" (UHJ 2010a).

> elements of the conceptual framework that governs the current series of global Plans. Each area has implications for the Bahá'í community's involvement in the life of society. The one most closely associated with the promotion of the Lesser Peace is the Bahá'í community's efforts to participate in discourses; in this regard, its activities to focus the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation on the evolution of thought and the exploration of social reality show great promise. (BWC 2014, 1)

From this excerpt we discern the following crucial traits: first, participation in the prevalent discourses of society is related to other endeavors of the Bahá'í community; second, it constitutes, among other endeavors, a community-wide process of learning (the nature of this learning process will be discussed later in the chapter); third, all three areas of endeavor are coherent with the current global plan of the Universal House of Justice (i.e. The Five Year Plan 2011-2016), this coherence is ensured through a conceptual framework developed for this purpose. Having situated this concept within the activities and development of the Bahá'í community, the excerpt outlines the relevance of participation in discourses to external affairs specifically. We learn, fourthly, that participation in the discourses of society is a means of promoting the Lesser Peace—an overarching aim of BIC's engagement with the UN and in the international arena more broadly. Fifth, participation in discourses, while not explicitly defined, is associated with activities that "focus the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation on the evolution of thought and the exploration of social reality" (BWC 2014, 2). In this manner, the strategy situates and associates the external affairs activities with other efforts of the Bahá'í community under the umbrella of the "community's involvement in the life of society" and provides new language and orientation to guide the BIC in its relationship with the UN.[197]

Later in the 2014 External Affairs strategy document, a further key element of the new framing is introduced, namely the concept that the "profound and far-reaching transformation in the very character of mankind" required for the continual progress of humanity "cannot be achieved through the exertions of Bahá'ís alone. All of humanity

[197] The earliest instances of the BIC's use of the term "discourse" in this manner are in its 2007 Annual Report. The report states: "We understand a 'discourse' to include the following characteristics: (a) an organic process that develops over a period of time; (b) generates new insights and perspectives as it unfolds; (c) continually incorporates and builds on ideas and concepts; and (d) a learning orientation, which involves questioning, reflection, and knowledge generation with the goal of attaining a deeper understanding of issues and the articulation of possible solutions to pressing issues" (BIC 2007, 9).

participates in the process" (BWC 2014, 9). As stated in the opening paragraph of this chapter, this framing situates Bahá'ís in a collective endeavor, working shoulder-to-shoulder with other communities and individuals to contribute to the betterment of the world. At the heart of this reorientation is a maturing expression of the substrate in its drive toward a reorganization of relationships in all facets of human endeavor.[198]

The concept of discourse is not new. What is new is the authoritative reframing of the terms of engagement of the RNGO with the UN in terms of *participation in discourses*. The manner in which this embodies the substrate is the focus of this chapter. A brief examination of the concept of discourse reveals the rich intellectual history at the disposal of the Universal House of Justice. An overview of the term's lineage across disciplines of critical theory, sociology, linguistics, and philosophy is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the manner in which the term is used here removes it from its linguistic roots and situates it within the field of cultural studies. French philosopher Michel Foucault—who is most closely associated with the term—introduced new ways of thinking about discourses, not as a signs, signifiers, or text but rather as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, 49). In this sense, "a discourse is something which produces something else (an utterance, a concept, an effect), rather than something which exists in and of itself and can be analyzed in isolation" (Mills 1997,17). Foucault argued that it is a combination of power, knowledge, and truth that generates the effects of a discourse (Mills 1997, 15). He demonstrated this, for example, by examining the evolution of the conceptual distinction between "madness" (in the sense of deviant behavior) and "rationality" in Europe from Middle Ages to the eighteenth century and argued that it was particular conceptions of these conditions (as expressed in the prevalent discourses of the day) that gave rise to institutional structures (mental hospitals) which, in turn, embodied and perpetuated these conceptions (Foucault 1965).[199] The basic premise of discourse theory which emerged from Foucault's pioneering work is that "the ways we think

[198] Michael Karlberg refers to the Bahá'í community as a "distinct discourse community with an alternative way of thinking and talking about power and social reality" (Karlberg 2005, 20).

[199] Foucault carried out a similar analysis with respect to the development of the history of medicine in *The Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault 1973).

about talk about a subject influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject" (Karlberg 2005, 1).

The practice of discourse analysis in the field of civil society—and specifically among RNGOs—is still relatively new. In the past decade, a number of studies have begun to use discourse analysis to examine the discourses of religious organizations involved in advocacy (for example, Wuthnow 2011), communicative practices of religious organizations (von Stuckrad 2003, 2013; Kayaoğlu 2014), and religious communities (Karlberg 2005). Discourse analysis has also been applied to the study of NGOs involved in development in order to discern how they sought to challenge and influence the dominant conceptions of development (Ebrahim 2003).[200] Ebrahim's study found that while NGOs were strongly influenced by dominant development perspectives, they were also "profoundly influenced by the conditions surrounding their founding" (Ebrahim 2003, 50) such as emphasis on meeting basic needs or of fostering participation (Ebrahim 2003, 50). His finding concerning the influence of the founding conditions of an organization is helpful in understanding how NGOs negotiate dominant discourses on development. Where religious organizations are concerned, however, the construct of the founding condition doesn't adequately capture the structure of moral reasoning that gives rise to the creation of an RNGO structure and the evolution of its relationship with an entity like the UN. In his study of Muslim discourse at the UN, Kayaoğlu argues that the adoption of a "liberal discourse" (Kayaoğlu 2014, 64) by the OIC has left it vulnerable to cooptation and that the UN has "successfully molded [religious voices] into a liberal framework" (Kayaoğlu 2014, 70). Using discourse analysis, scholars have begun to examine the manner in which civil society, including religious organizations, interact with structures of power and knowledge and how, in this context, civil society is able to exert its influence on prevailing discourses.

I argue in this chapter that the substrate shapes new terms of reference for the BIC-UN relationship. It shapes the manner in which the BIC interacts with the prevailing discourses and power structures embedded within the UN community. Furthermore, I

[200] Ebrahim notes that discourses related to development are historically produced and socially constructed ways of thinking about and practicing development (Ebrahim 2003, 152).

will demonstrate that the mode of participation in the discourses of society embodies the evolutionary, unity-oriented facets of the substrate.

IV. The Substrate and Participation in Discourses

1. Reconceptualizing Engagement with Society: From "Influence" to "Participation"

As we saw in Chapter 5, the Universal House of Justice's 1994 External Affairs Strategy framed the BIC's engagement with the UN in terms of *influencing* the processes towards world peace by "coherently, comprehensively and continually imparting our ideas for the advancement of civilization" (BWC 1994, 1). The introduction of the new terms of reference by the Universal House of Justice—participation in the discourses of society—signaled a conceptual shift. Rather than positioning the BIC as one entity seeking to influence another entity, the framing situates the BIC as "part of a discourse among the community of nations" (BIC 2014b). The substrate helps us to understand this shift as the embodiment of one of its constituent elements: the oneness of humanity. While during the previous period (as explored in Chapter 5), the oneness of humanity was principally embodied in the "unified voice" and "diversified composition" (BWC 1994, 1) of the Bahá'í community, during this period, the oneness of humanity is also expressed in terms of oneness *with* humanity in the common search for answers to the pressing issues of the day. The purpose of participation in the discourses of society,

> is not to press others to accept a specific Bahá'í proposal or to engage in direct teaching, nor should activities be conceived as part of a public relations or academic exercise. Rather, those involved . . . are to adopt a posture of learning . . . standing shoulder to shoulder with others and offering insights drawn from the Bahá'í writings and from the community's growing experience in applying them. (BWC 2014, 4)

In this same vein, the BIC notes that these conversations and discourses do not belong to any one segment of society—they belong to all. The Universal House of Justice has emphasized that "the civilization that beckons humanity will not be attained through the efforts of the Bahá'í community alone" (UHJ 2010, para. 26). Rather, it will be constructed by numerous groups and organizations "animated by the spirit of world solidarity" (UHJ 2010, para. 26). It is in light of this framing and understanding that the

BIC's effort to foster civil society participation at the UN and to open the door for an increasing number of voices to find expression in these fora must be understood.

The difference between this approach and the manner in which the UN conceptualized the engagement of NGOs in consultative status with the UN was apparent in the structure of the reporting mechanisms that the UN had put in place to monitor the scope and relevance of their engagement. For example, one of the questions in the quadrennial report which all NGOs were required to submit asked for a quantitative description of the work of the NGO with respect to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG),[201] asking, for example, about the number of schools the NGO had built, the number of aid packages it had distributed, and so on. While the BIC had endeavored to adhere to this rubric since it was introduced in the 2000s, in its 2009-2012 Quadrennial Report, it reframed its contributions in the following manner:

> While members of the Bahá'í community, in their respective cities, towns and villages cooperate with others to improve the social and material well-being of their communities the Bahá'í International Community's work contributions to the UN cannot be easily quantified according to the MDG rubric.
>
> We believe that our collective advancement towards a more just and peaceful society requires profound alternations of social structures and a broadening of existing foundations of society. Attitudes, thoughts, and conceptions of fundamental issues need to be reshaped as a truly global community emerges and develops in its understanding of the nature of human flourishing as well as the social and material conditions required for such flourishing. We believe, then, that a key part of the transformation that is required must occur at the level of thought…
>
> We see ourselves as part of a discourse among the community of nations and seek to contribute to this discourse by offering new ways of approaching issues of global concern, by re-framing the way that certain problems are understood, by identifying assumptions and mental models underlying the understanding of reality and by drawing on insights from the fields of science as well as religion. (BIC 2013a, 7)

[201] The UN Millennium Development Goals are a set of eight goals that all UN member states agreed to achieve by 2015. These goals are: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development (United Nations General Assembly 2017).

This response, although seemingly insignificant in the context of the hundreds of quadrennial reports submitted to the UN, demonstrates what many scholars have failed to understand: that while the UN's secular, liberal, (often) materialist philosophy is different from that of RNGOs, this does not immediately force a choice between co-optation or confrontation between the two frameworks. In the context of a 'participation in discourses' framework, disparate perspectives are presented (in terms that the receiving party can understand) for the consideration of the UN or the specific entity in question.

2. Ensuring Coherence between Substrate and Action: Adoption of a Conceptual Framework

During this period, the Universal House of Justice, in guiding the affairs of the worldwide Bahá'í community and external affairs placed emphasis specifically on coherence: both across various areas of Bahá'í activity (BWC 2014, 1)[202] and between the principles the Bahá'í community professes and the actions is undertaken (Razavi 2015, 169). The Oxford English Dictionary defines coherence as "the quality of forming a unified whole" and "the quality of being logical and consistent" ("Coherence" 2017). Coherence among the diverse areas of endeavor is "maintained by ensuring they adhere to elements of the conceptual framework that governs the current series of global plans" (BWC 2014, 1). The 2014 External Affairs strategy document is the first to make explicit reference to a conceptual framework for this domain of Bahá'í activity. In order to understand how the substrate is expressed during this period, we must understand the role and nature of the conceptual framework as the term is used the Universal House of Justice.

In 2005, the Universal House of Justice stated: "The elements required for a concerted effort to infuse the diverse regions of the world with the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation have crystallized into a framework for action that now needs only to be exploited" (UHJ 2005, n.p.). The framework for action is comprised of both methods as well as concepts. The methods are distilled from several decades of experimenting with different approaches to community development including: a posture of learning,

[202] These areas are: expansion and consolidation, social action, and participation in the prevalent discourses of society (see BWC 2014, 4).

learning in action, systematization, a focus on capacity building, the development of a common vocabulary, and a focus on the three protagonists of development—individuals, communities, and social/governing institutions. The concepts, as we have discussed, are drawn from the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as expressed in the Bahá'í Writings and vary, to some extent, depending on the domain of activity.[203] It is the overarching purpose of advancing civilization—both in terms of its material and spiritual dimensions—that binds the elements of the framework together. During this period, conceptual frameworks for social action, scholarship, and engagement in politics, were introduced to the Bahá'í community (Office of Social and Economic Development 2012; UHJ 2013c; UHJ 2013a).[204]

Viewed through the lens of the substrate, the framework plays a fundamental role in making the elements of the substrate *explicit* and identifying the role of these elements in the specific areas of activity. We can see this in the manner in which the Universal House of Justice elaborated the "essential elements of the framework that shapes the Bahá'í approach to politics" (2013a, n.p.). These included:

> the conviction of the Bahá'í community that humanity, having passed through earlier stages of social evolution, stands at the threshold of its collective maturity; its belief that the principle of the oneness of humankind, the hallmark of the age of maturity, implies a change in the very structure of society; its dedication to a learning process that, animated by this principle, explores the workings of a new set of relationships among the individual, the community and the institutions of society, the three protagonists in the advancement of civilization; its confidence that a revised conception of power, freed from the notion of dominance with the accompanying ideas of contest, contention,

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[203] "The expression of the divers elements of the framework will not, of course, be uniform in all spheres of action. In relation to any given area of activity, some elements move to the fore, while others act only in the background" (Office of Social and Economic Development 2012).

[204] In the lead-up to this period, the issue of organizational coherence was a major focus for the UN. Following the 2005 World Summit (convened to review the Millennium Development Goals), it became clear that lack of coherence, collaboration, and synergy among the programs and mandates of the UN was a major obstacle to realizing the commitments that had been made by Member States. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment asserted: "The world needs a coherent and strong multilateral framework with the United Nations at its centre to meet the challenges of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment in a globalizing world. The United Nations needs to overcome its current fragmentation and to deliver as one" (A/61/583). A major victory for coherence efforts occurred in 2010, when, after four years of civil society organizing, the General Assembly adopted a resolution to create a new UN gender entity—UN Women—to replace four disparate, under-funded entities that shared the gender equality mandate.

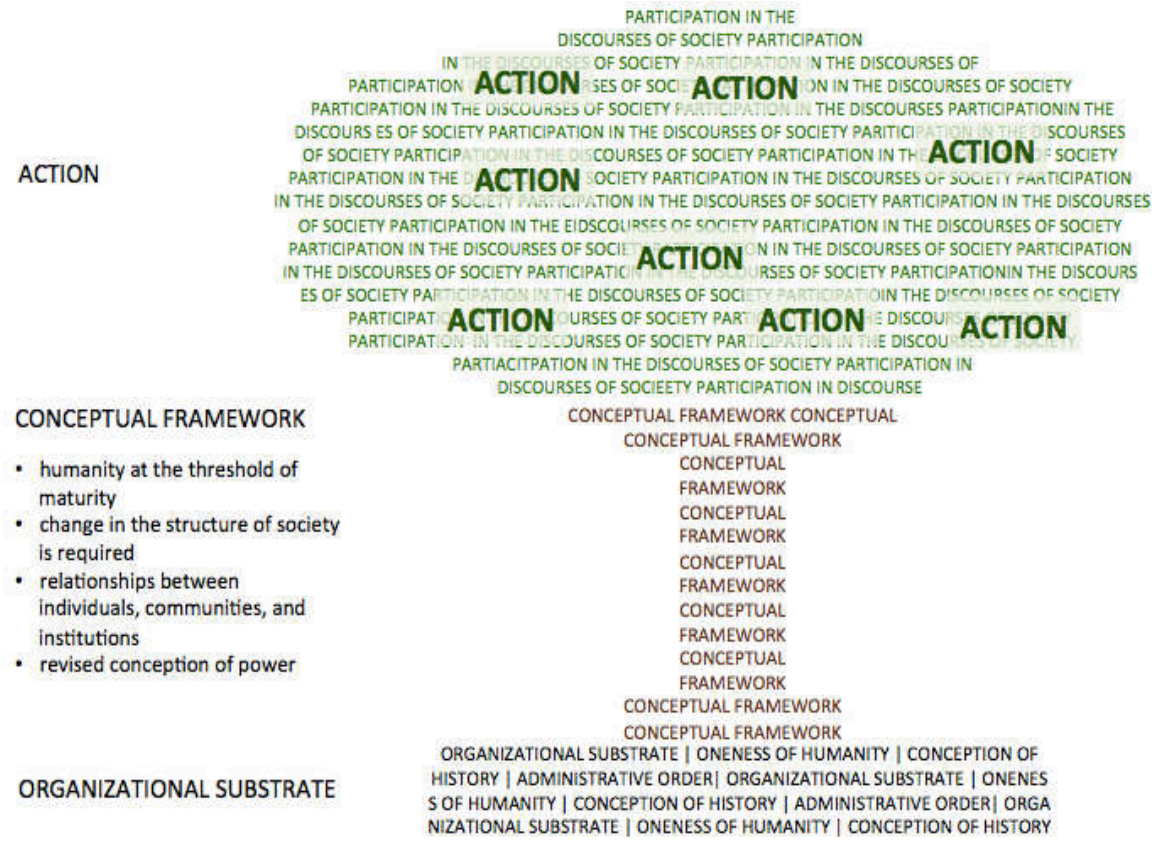
> division and superiority, underlies the desired set of relationships; its commitment to a vision of a world that, benefitting from humanity's rich cultural diversity, abides no lines of separation . . . (UHJ 2013a, para. 17)

In Figure 6.1 below, I use the image of a tree to demonstrate the relationship between the organizational substrate, the conceptual framework (drawn from the above excerpt) and actions taken by the BIC. The organization substrate, in this image, is depicted as the "soil" on which the tree develops. The conceptual framework is the trunk from which spring the actions of the organization. The tree—much like the organization—does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is subject to the environmental forces acting on it at any given time. In the same way, the BIC, while "rooted" in the substrate, continually responds to and negotiates conditions within the UN community, the NGO community, and society as a whole.

We can see that the conceptual framework introduced by the Universal House of Justice makes explicit the elements of the substrate in a manner that relates them to the goals of the BIC during that time and maintains coherence between external affairs activities (now conceived in terms of participation in discourses) and endeavors in the sphere of social action, and expansion and consolidation.

While the External Affairs Strategy was released in 2014, the BIC's annual reports from this period begin to introduce the concept of the framework as far back as 2008. In that year's Annual Report, the BIC wrote: "We find ourselves in the earliest stages of grappling with the evolving conceptual framework, which looks in the direction of increased coherence between the processes of the Five Year Plan and [BIC's] participation in the discourses of society" (BIC 2008a, 3).

Figure 6.1 The relationship between the substrate, conceptual framework and action in the work of the BIC.



Similarly, the introduction of the conceptual framework stimulated the BIC's reflection on the methodology and conceptual underpinnings of its efforts in various areas. Regarding its work in the area of gender equality, the BIC notes, "Having contributed in various measures to these discourses throughout the years, we are now learning how to do so within a coherent and evolving conceptual framework" (BIC 2009, 3). Throughout this period, the BIC endeavored to "increase [its] understanding of the framework for engagement with the UN and how this framework shapes the discursive, methodological and administrative areas of work" (BIC 2014a, 3).[205]

[205] In 2012, in order to inform its new mandate in the area of managing disaster relief to Bahá'í communities and coordinating assistance offered by Bahá'í communities, the BIC was asked by the Universal House of Justice to draft a conceptual framework guiding this work (BIC 2016). Elements of this conceptual framework included: the goal of Bahá'í disaster response as "advancing dual processes of personal and social transformation"; the social nature of disaster response ("natural-disaster-as-social-construction"); phases of response ("relief, reconstruction, development"); characteristics of Bahá'í disaster response efforts (such as universal participation, access to knowledge, collaboration among individuals, communities and institutions, oneness of humanity, every nation and group has a role to play

The Universal House of Justice also placed emphasis on the fact that this is an *evolving* conceptual framework—a tool that is continually refined as the Bahá'í community learns from its experience of participating in the discourses of society. In this sense, the framework itself embodies the evolutionary and developmental qualities of the substrate—it is organic and flexible; it is not a formula or a blueprint for engagement in society. As social theorist Yosef Jabareen points out, conceptual frameworks provide an interpretive approach to reality; their strength lies in their "flexibility, capacity for modification, and emphasis on understanding instead of prediction" (Jabareen 2009, 58). Figure 6.2 (on page 181) elaborates the above schematic (Figure 6.1) by highlighting the manner in which the elements of evolution and organic development are embodied in the framework.

While the substrate is constituted of immutable tenets of the Bahá'í Faith, the framework is constructed and progressively refined by the community in order to ensure that all facets of the community's functioning (including in its external and diplomatic endeavors) are consistent with the essential principles that it professes. While the elements of the framework do not change (the principle of the equality of women and men, for example, will never be discarded or modified), the understanding of how these principles are applied and find expression in society continues to evolve through the experience gained through participation in discourses.[206] This experience is gained by the BIC as it participates in discourses at the international level. The framework and the participation in discourses are both dynamic and organic modes of functioning. They combine coherence and flexibility; and evolve without compromising core assumptions. The continual refinement of the framework through praxis is depicted in Figure 6.2 on page 181.

The evolving conceptual framework is a tool by means of which the substrate finds expression in the BIC's contributions to the discourses in international fora. It provides an explicit, common, conceptual and methodological tool by means of which to "focus

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in the advancement of civilization); empowerment of local communities to meet their needs and build their future; role of National Spiritual Assemblies; and a learning orientation.

[206] The Universal House of Justice describes the conceptual framework as "a matrix that organizes thought and . . . becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates" (2013c).

the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation on the evolution of thought and the exploration of social reality" (BWC 2014, 1).

3. Substrate and Negotiating Differences

As has been noted earlier, RNGOs apply numerous methods in their engagement with the UN and in reaching their desired goals. These methods overlap with those of the broader field of civil society, such as networking, advocacy, monitoring, and awareness raising. Studies have identified, however, approaches specific to RNGOs, such as spiritual guidance, prayer, modeling desired behavior/outcomes, ceremonies/rituals, and other processes justified by religious values (Berger 2003; Trigeaud 2017; Beittinger-Lee 2017). Scholars have also observed a particular, seemingly intractable challenge that emerges in RNGOs engagement with the UN: the clash of religious and secular frameworks. In order for RNGOs to influence UN debates and policy—the argument goes—they have to adopt the "UN's liberal-secular ethos, code and modus operandi [as well as] UN sanctioned language, concepts and modes of engagement" (Haynes 2014, 170). It has been argued that the "liberal mold" of UN discourse—with its emphasis on individualism, a framework of human rights, and a belief in rational and scientific progress—clashes with the conservative Muslim agenda at the UN which tends, instead, to "value the community over the individual, duties over rights, and tradition over progress" (Kayaoğlu 2014, 72–73). According to Kayaoğlu, this leaves Muslim voices at the UN with only two options: "adapt to the liberal political-normative environment of the United Nations or remain on the margins of the organization" (Kayaoğlu 2014, 74). It is interesting also to recall the findings of the study by Clarke and Jennings who developed a typology of the ways in which faith is "deployed" in public engagement: the more an organization was guided by its faith, the more it tended towards fundamentalism, exclusion, and even violence (Clarke and Jennings 2008). In the three studies referenced above (i.e. Clarke and Jennings 2008; Haynes 2014; Kayaoğlu 2014), elements of the religious discourse are seen in opposition or resistance to that of the prevailing secular discourse.[207]

[207] It may be useful to consider the four-part typology introduced by Adil Najam, which organizes civil society-government relations according to four categories: cooperation, confrontation, complementarity, and co-optation (Najam 2000).

One of the ways in which the oneness of humanity dimension of the substrate finds expression during this period is in the manner that the BIC's engagement with the UN displays a mode of functioning which eschews adversarialism as a legitimate basis for political action. What we observe is a distinct manner in which the mode of participation in discourses shapes the BIC's negotiation of the diversity of frameworks, perspectives, and opinions present throughout the UN and civil society fora. Wendy Brown's eloquent analysis of modernity's struggles with difference and plurality frames the challenge at hand:

> Late modernity has revealed the limits in most of the usual models for holding together two or more truths. The many inflections of *dialectic* bear a common dependence on...a construction of the formulations at stake *as* opposites . . . *paradox* tends to be anti-political in the mutual undoing . . . of the truths it addresses, *contradiction* [implies] mutual cancellation . . . *Pluralism* capitulates to relativism . . . without giving us a clue about how to weigh or navigate [multiple truths]. *Integration* always entails the high price of assimilation; invariably, one side normatively governs and incorporates the other . . .
>
> None [of these models] provides a provides a frame in which several truths are enriched even as they are offset by each other . . . or better, a frame in which the relation or even interlocution between two truths enriches each . . . Moreover, none allows the truth themselves to be dynamic and the proliferation of truth itself to be part of the dynamism. (Brown 2005, 73–74)

I quote Brown at length in order to demonstrate the intellectual history and rich diversity of approaches to the negotiation of difference and their centrality in the political order. The encounter with difference, and the search for ways to navigate and reconcile unity and diversity are among the central preoccupations of the post-modern imagination. The approach of participation in the discourses of society recognizes the long-term, organic, and fluid nature of the evolution of thought and the importance of universal participation to the constructive advancement of this process. It does not require "submitting . . . one truth to another" but rather provides a frame for truth to be dynamic (or, more precisely, "dynamically discovered") and the "proliferation of truth...to be part of the dynamism" (Brown 2005, 74).

The drive to bridge epistemological and intellectual barriers in this manner was particularly evident in the BIC's engagement in the gender equality discourse during

this period—particularly in its efforts to bring into conversation with each other religious and secular perspectives and efforts to advance gender equality. We can observe this effort in the BIC's role on the Facilitation Committee[208] of the civil society-led Gender Equality Architecture Campaign (2006-2010), which mobilized and over 300 secular and religious NGOs to advocate for the consolidation of mandates and assets of the four existing UN gender agencies[209] into one consolidated entity (BIC 2010a, 16).

A further example is the BIC's leadership and founding role in the creation of the Civil Society Working Group of Faith-Based Organizations and Feminists for Gender Equality. Formed in 2015, with the encouragement of UN Women and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the group articulated its vision and goals in terms of: (a) expanding the space for constructive dialogue among academics (including theologians and scholars of religion), policy makers, NGOs, and UN agencies in the context of the implementation of the UN's global development agenda; and (b) cultivating a discourse concerning the dismantling of structures, attitudes, and practices that sustain inequality and discrimination (Faith and Feminism Working Group 2015, 2).[210] In its official statement to the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Working Group asserted the need to replace the "confrontational dynamic between secular and faith-based proponents of gender equality" (Working Group on Faith and Feminism 2016, 2) and stated that "religious and secular actors [need] to work together, to create a narrative that encompasses the ideals inherent in respective worldviews—a narrative that focuses on our common humanity, on justice and the establishment of a prosperous

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[208] The Facilitation Committee included representatives of the Center for Global Leadership, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the International Women's Health Coalition, the Women's Environment and Development Organization, and the World Federalist Movement.

[209] Prior to the creation of UN Women, the gender equality architecture of the UN was comprised of four separate entities: the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women, and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.

[210] The re-interpretation of religious texts to "uncover and promote understandings of religions that are gender equal" has emerged since the 1970s in the form of "feminist theologies" (Tomalin 2011, 4) . This has been largely in response to a model of development associated with a Western secular worldview, which has not found cultural resonance in communities and regions in which religion is fundamental to ideas of human nature, community life, progress, and development.

and peaceful world civilization for all" (Working Group on Faith and Feminism 2016, 2).[211]

Addressing the same Commission, the BIC urged the UN Commission on the Status of Women to challenge some of the divisive concepts commonly associated with the gender equality discourse. The document encourages the UN and civil society to:

> ...discard labels that have locked us in adversarial debates such as "secular vs. religious," "modern vs. traditional," "liberal vs. conservative," "Western vs. non-Western." The role of religion in human life and the equality of women and men are realities too complex to be reduced to such comparisons. (BIC 2015, 1)

What emerges from these efforts is the BIC's desire to identify conceptual barriers in the gender equality discourse as a way of both raising awareness of the points of division in the discourse, inviting diverse perspectives into the discourse, and offering its own suggestions for forging a more constructive conversation. We can see the oneness of humanity dimension of the substrate embodied in efforts to work toward consensus at the level of thought, narrative, and worldview. This endeavor speaks to Brown's above-mentioned account of modernity's struggles with difference and plurality. The oneness of humanity element of the substrate undergirds an epistemology that is essentially consultative in nature, in which "truths are enriched even as they are offset by each other," and in which "the proliferation of truth [is] itself . . . part of the dynamism" (Brown 2005, 73–74).

Another example emerges from the BIC's work in the area of human rights. Here too is an example of the encounter between different frameworks for action as the liberal, secular, individualist discourse of the UN often stands in sharp contrast to the approach of religious organizations (Tomalin 2006; Kayaoğlu 2014; Kayaoğlu 2011; Haynes 2014). This is an interesting challenge for the BIC in particular because the international human rights mechanisms are the primary means by which it seeks redress for Bahá'ís in countries where they are persecuted. While the BIC recognizes the limitations of the human rights framework, it also works with civil society and UN

[211] The statement was delivered by the BIC Representative, member of the working group's Steering Committee, who had been invited to do so by the Committee.

bodies to strengthen existing mechanisms and procedures,[212] thereby maintaining its adherence to non-partisan and consultative means of fostering change. In the arena of discourse, the BIC offers its perspective, alongside others, on the manner in which the foundations for human prosperity can be strengthened. In the context of global consultations on Agenda 2030, pertaining to human rights and inequality, the BIC asserts:

> A balance must be struck between the preservation of individual freedom and the promotion of the collective good. Freedom is indeed essential to all expressions of human life. Yet concern that each human being should enjoy the freedom of expression and freedom from want does not justify the exaltation of the individual or support for unbridled individualism, to the detriment of broader society.
>
> At that same time, concern for the welfare of society does not require a deification of the state as the only source of human well-being. Equilibrium of responsibilities is implied—responsibilities shared by individuals, communities and their social institutions. Human rights, then, achieve their highest expression when understood in the context of relationships, at the local, national and international levels. (BIC 2012b)

As in the gender equality discourse, the BIC identifies conceptual barriers and challenges in the state of the discourse. The relational focus of the substrate (fostering unity) is evident in how the BIC frames its critique of the human rights approach—identifying a false dichotomy in the conception of individual and community rights—as well as the manner in which the exercise of responsibility is conceived. It introduces the relational frame in which responsibilities are exercised by what BIC sees as the three principal actors in society: individuals, communities, and institutions. The aim of the contribution is not to critique the human rights framework per se, but rather to contribute alongside other perspectives to the effort of finding a more adequate

[212] The BIC's annual reports during this (and the previous) period document extensive engagement in civil society processes aimed at strengthening human rights mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Council, its Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review. BIC Representatives during this period served as Presidents of both the New York and Geneva-based NGO Committee's on Freedom of Religion or Belief, as a member of the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination, and were invited to speak on panels addressing human rights and religions, the defamation of religions, and discrimination against religious minorities (See BIC 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015).

foundation for human flourishing (which has unarguably been advanced through the implementation of human rights norms).[213]

In the sections that follow, I will demonstrate the manner in which the mode of "participation in discourses" embodies the evolutionary and oneness/unity dimensions of the substrate. I will do so by looking at the way this modality shaped: (a) the selection of discourses in which the BIC engaged: (b) the language, tone and form of the documents issued by the BIC; and (c) efforts to shape the culture of debate at the UN.

4. Selecting Discourses in which to Engage

One of the major differences between the 1994 and the 2014 External Affairs Strategies is that in the latter the Universal House of Justice does not specify the discourses in which the BIC should engage. Recall that the 1994 Strategy instructed the BIC to focus its attention on human rights, advancement of women, global prosperity, and moral empowerment. The 2014 Strategy, on the other hand, offered a set of parameters to consider: selection of a small number of discourses to which the BIC could give sustained attention,[214] avoidance of "themes so controversial that consensus appears beyond reach" (BWC 2014, 8), and focus on discourses that "have a real bearing on the course of humanity's advancement towards its maturity" (BWC 2014, 8). We can see the BIC reflecting carefully on the culture of various discourses in which they consider participating. In the 2012 Annual Report, the BIC notes:

> ...we may want to revisit our decisions to not participate in certain particularly contentious and dichotomized discourses (e.g. racism, right to development) and consider ways in which we could make a meaningful contribution. We may consider framing these discourses in a different, less confrontational way, and inviting organizations to explore these themes with us. Our involvement in the discourse on indigenous issues, for example, is teaching us how to offer contributions in an environment that is at once unified and contentious (while there is a strong solidarity among the indigenous groups

[213] This echoes scholarship that highlight the importance of engaging with religiously rooted critiques of human rights frameworks and of taking seriously systems of social ethics rooted in diverse religious and non-Western traditions (Tomalin 2006).

[214] The strategy indicated that "as time passes and experience accrues, [this] initial selection will naturally be subject to refinement and change" (BWC 2014, 8).

> themselves, they conceive of themselves in opposition to Member States and to the UN system in general). (BIC 2012a, 3)

The BIC was asked to endeavor to contribute gradually and deliberately on weighty themes of universal concern and of lasting importance. In 2015, the BIC's attention was focused on the following issues[215]: "Realizing the equality of women and men," "Human rights and the well-being of humankind," "Development and community building," "Youth as protagonists of social change," "Religion in the life of society," and the "Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran"[216] (BIC 2015a).

5. Developing Content

During this period, the substrate was expressed in the creation of content. Similar to the characteristic of the previous period, formal contributions to the UN were rooted in the historical narrative of humanity's progress as an ever-advancing civilization. The analysis provided in statements generally addressed itself to the root causes of the issues under consideration, causes most often identified as moral or spiritual in nature. Specific Bahá'í teachings and experience were then brought to bear on the problems at hand. Writing about the alleviation of poverty, on the occasion of the end of the first UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the BIC identified the deeper problems underlying more visible, material social issues, and presented this analysis in the context of the civilizational goal at hand:

> It is now increasingly acknowledged that such conditions as the marginalization of girls and women, poor governance, ethnic and religious antipathy, environmental degradation and unemployment constitute formidable obstacles to the progress and development of communities. These evidence a deeper crisis—one rooted in the values and attitudes that shape relationships at all levels of society.
>
> Viewed from this perspective, poverty can be described as the absence of those ethical, social and material resources needed to develop the moral, intellectual and social capacities of individuals, communities and institutions. Moral reasoning, group decision-making and freedom from

[215] As indicated on the homepage of the BIC's newly redesigned website (www.bic.org).

[216] Note that the defense of the persecuted Bahá'í community in Iran, has since the beginning of the BIC's engagement with the UN, represented a distinct and major facet of its mandate.

> racism, for example, are all essential tools for poverty alleviation. Such capacities must shape individual thinking as well as institutional arrangements and policy-making. To be clear, the goal at hand is not only to remove the ills of poverty but to engage the masses of humanity in the construction of a just global order. (BIC 2008b, 2)

Throughout this period, the BIC continued to provide substrate-based frames of reference for issues under consideration by the UN: development as capacity building (e.g. BIC 2015b); unity expressed in terms of relationships between individuals, communities, and institutions (e.g. BIC 2014c); modes of collective inquiry (e.g. BIC 2012c); reconceptualization of poverty (see excerpt above); and reframing of the concept of religion, among others.

The development of content, in keeping with the overarching emphasis on coherence, was also supported by the Office of Public Discourse (formed in 2012 at the Bahá'í World Centre), which shared insights with the BIC based on the growing experience of Bahá'í communities around the world and ensured consistency between BIC's contributions to discourses at the UN and the contribution made by national Bahá'í communities to discourses within their respective countries.[217]

Language and Form

During this period, the language used by the BIC to describe its written contributions was also shaped by the discursive turn. While RNGOs generally refer to the formal documents they issue to the UN as "statements," the BIC began to use terms such as "contribution," "initial reflections" and "initial considerations" in the titles of its formal documents.[218] Reporting on this conscious change in vocabulary and approach, the BIC noted:

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[217] In its 2013 Ridván message, the House of Justice announced that, "To enhance [participation in the discourses of society], to facilitate learning in this domain, and to ensure that steps taken are coherent with the other endeavours of the Bahá'í community, we have recently established at the Bahá'í World Centre the Office of Public Discourse. We will call on it to assist National Spiritual Assemblies in this field by gradually promoting and coordinating activities and systematizing experience" (UHJ 2013c).

[218] For example: *Summoning our Common Will: A Bahá'í Contribution to the United Nations Development Agenda* (BIC 2015c); *Builders of Civilization: Youth and the Advancement of Humankind. Contribution of the Bahá'í International Community to the 2014 World Conference on Youth* (BIC 2014d); *Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism: Bahá'í International Community's Contribution to the 18th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development* (BIC 2010b).

> In reflecting further on the guidance of the Universal House of Justice regarding discourses, we became more aware of the difference between "participation in discourses" and efforts to "persuade" others to accept a Bahá'í position . . . we began to move away from a focus on sharing "statements" to creating spaces for genuine conversations in which insights, including those of the Bahá'í community, could emerge and collective understanding could be advanced. This led to a number of small-group discussions with members of civil society, Member States, and UN agencies that were exploratory in nature and centered on a brief document or thought piece developed by our Office. We also invited friends from outside of our Office to facilitate these sessions. (BIC 2013b, 4)

As this reflection demonstrates, while the difference between a statement and a contribution may be subtle, for the BIC it embodied a major shift in perspective about the kind of enterprise it was involved in. The making of (formal) "statements" to the UN implies a certain kind of relationship between two entities, one akin to position-taking and imparting of information by one entity to another. The term "contribution," on the other hand, implies involvement in a collective process; it is not a rigid, final statement of truth, nor a formulaic solution to the problem at hand. It conveys an appreciation of the insights possessed by other contributors to a given discourse. Similarly, to be engaged in a discourse is different from making a statement: a discourse evolves, changes through experience, and generates insights as it unfolds. This approach was explicitly conveyed in various BIC statements during this period, such as its contribution to the 2010 Session of the UN Commission on the Sustainable Development:

> We invite others actively working to promote sustainable consumption and production to engage with us in dialogue . . . in order to learn from each other's perspectives and experiences and to collectively advance efforts to build a just and sustainable society. (BIC 2010b, 4)

Further denoting close attention to the language used by the BIC, the 2014 External Affairs Strategy admonished the Bahá'í community to exercise care in relation to the word "diplomatic" when describing aspects of external affairs work. While on the international stage, the word has a specific meaning describing facets of the BIC works (particularly as it addresses the persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran), at the national level it may convey the impression that the Bahá'ís are an "external group" seeking friendly relations with the government. It is not a word that conveys the

identity of a community of citizens "eager to work with a wide range of like-minded individuals and groups" for the progress of their country" (BWC 2014, 9). It is important in this case to note the extent to which the Universal House of Justice was developing the lexicon and sensibility of the community so as to foster and convey a sense of oneness of the Bahá'ís *with* the broader community, engaged in a collective enterprise of bettering the world rather than trying to exert influence as an outside entity.[219]

We also see during this period the BIC beginning to experiment with different modalities of communication, what could be referred to as more discursive modalities. Among these were: "perspective pieces" written by individual BIC representatives in an official blog format and less formal in nature than the official "statements" released by the BIC. The perspective pieces offered a more agile platform for contributing to various discourses in a timely, more conversational manner.[220] Other approaches to foster more dynamic modes of communication were the use of interviews with Bahá'í delegates to Commissions as well as with civil society and UN colleagues[221] to feature diverse perspective on issues under consideration at the UN or issues that BIC wanted to call attention to. In March 2008, the BIC created a BIC YouTube channel, which

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[219] Similar attention to language was evident in the BIC's process of drafting discussion documents, which were discussed in small groups (of invited individuals) on themes related to various facets of the work of the UN. In its 2013 Annual Report, the BIC relays its challenges in finding language that eschews the religious-secular binary in an effort to open new avenues for collective inquiry: "We struggled to find language that did not give rise to either/or dichotomies such as secular vs. religious, material vs. spiritual, and public vs. private; language that conveyed our understanding of reality as a coherent whole" (BIC 2013b, 5). The BIC also notes its efforts to build capacity to "integrate the language of social analysis and critique with that of spiritual principles" (BC 2013b, 5)

[220] See for example: *Climate Education in and Beyond the Classroom.* 23 July 2015. Serik Tokbolat [https://www.bic.org/perspectives/climate-education-and-beyond-classroom]; *Why Participation Will Be So Important in Advancing the Post-2015 Agenda. Or: Zeroing in on the Zero Draft*. 17 June 2015. Daniel Perell. [https://www.bic.org/perspectives/why-participation-will-be-so-important-advancing-post-2015-agenda-or-zeroing-zero-draft]. Perspective pieces also generally did not require the approval of the Universal House of Justice and, as such, could be made public more quickly.

[221] For example: *Interview with GEAR* [Gender Equality Architecture Reform] *Campaign Representatives*. 30 July 2010. BIC interviewed members of the leadership team of the Gender Equality Architecture Reform Campaign (BIC among them) to discuss the role of the Campaign in the passage of the UN resolution to establish UN Women. [https://www.bic.org/videos/interview-gear-campaign-representatives-part-1].

along with its growing presence on Facebook and Twitter enlarged its communicative repertoire.[222]

The BIC's website presence was also completely conceptualized during this period. Following a yearlong planning and design process (2014-2015), a new website was launched to reflect the orientation towards discourse. In the "About Us/Our Approach" section, the newly designed website states:

> The work of our offices can be broadly described in terms of contributing to policy discourses at the international level. This involves collaborating with individuals, groups, and organizations in a variety of social spaces where thought, public opinion, and policy take form and evolve. Our aim is to contribute to the collective shaping of attitudes needed to advance global prosperity and justice (BIC 2015a).

We can observe during this period the profound, though at times subtle, changes in the BIC's manner of communication and the roots of this approach in an orientation towards an organic, dynamic, and more collaborative form of engagement.

6. Culture

In seeking coherence with the mode of participation in discourses in all facets of its work, the BIC also endeavored to foster a culture of discourse and principled deliberation among the UN community. Prompted by the Universal House of Justice to "remain acutely aware of the inadequacies of current modes of thinking and doing" (UHJ 2010b, para. 36) the BIC explored how it could contribute more systematically and effectively to the promotion of a more constructive culture of discourse at the UN. Reflecting on the challenges plaguing effective deliberation at the UN, the BIC describes,

> a culture characterized by adversarial and positional debates . . . a tendency to dichotomize issues, an emphasis on technique over substance . . . a lack of appreciation for historical dimensions of issues under consideration, a pre-occupation with short-term outcomes, and a fragmented, siloed approach to problem-solving. (BIC 2013c, 1)

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[222] BIC's UN Channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/BICUNoffice/featured; Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Bahai.international.community/; Twitter feed: https://twitter.com/BahaiBIC.

Articulating its vision for the kind of culture that it wishes to engender, the BIC wrote that in its efforts at the UN it sought to "promote the understanding that progress is not contingent on technique but rather unity of thought, consistent action and dedication to learning" (BIC 2013c, 2).

One of the ways in which BIC took steps to create spaces and environments for this kind of exchange was in its establishment, in July 2012, of monthly Breakfast Meetings in collaboration with the NGO International Movement ATD Fourth World. Until then, a forum for such cross-institutional, cross-sectoral exchange did not exist at the UN. The Breakfast Meetings brought together representatives of Member States, UN agencies, and NGO representatives to discuss and explore issues of common concern related to the emerging Post-2015 Development Agenda.[223] Between July 2012 and December 2015, nearly forty such meetings were held, each exploring a different theme related to the parallel UN negotiations on Agenda 2030.[224] BIC also began to bring together colleagues from both UN and civil society to read together various working documents and discussion pieces that it had drafted on themes pertaining to matters under UN consideration. This approach sought to experiment with a more small-group discursive approach, more conducive to in-depth consultation and open exploration of issues. The approach resembles the "quiet diplomacy" approach used by the Quaker UN Office to bring together UN personnel and civil society representatives for off-the-record meetings. In those settings "issues can be explored, ideas exchanged, perceptions changes, directions set" (Atwood 2012, 17). Similar to the BIC approach, Quaker representatives explain that their focus has been on process rather than positions: "We have felt the real show is not winning on particular issues here, but rather strengthening the capacity of the institution to resolve the kinds of problems that need to be resolved if the world community is to be a community" (Religion Counts 2002, 37).

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[223] Subsequently renamed Agenda 2030, this was the global agenda to succeed the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

[224] See *Perspective: Ensuring Substantive Collaboration with Civil Society in Implementing Agenda 2030.* 28 September 2016. Serik Tokbolat. [https://www.bic.org/perspectives/perspective-ensuring-substantive-collaboration-civil-society-implementing-agenda-2030]

I have sought to demonstrate in this section that the mode of participation in discourses embodied the substrate by fostering a coherent, unified, organic, and consensus-oriented mode of engagement. This was reflected in the choice of discourses in which to engage, the language used in the documents and publications of the BIC, in experimentations with new forms of communication and collective deliberation, and in efforts to promote a culture of principled, inclusive deliberation. While the oneness of humanity dimension of the substrate appears most prominent in the foregoing analysis, the evolutionary view of history gave rise to a particular view of the importance of historical processes in the unfoldment and advancement of a given discourse. Further, while the structural elements of the substrate do not yet come to the fore, it is important to note that the very concept of participation in discourses was introduced (in the 2014 External Affairs Strategy) in the context of the development of the Bahá'í community as a whole: the coherence and integrity of the entire system of the Bahá'í community is of central importance during this period.

V. Substrate, Discourse and Learning

In this section, I will demonstrate that the substrate is operationalized in the discursive approach because this approach draws the BIC into what it sees as collective processes of learning and knowledge generation that, in turn, deepen its understanding of the substrate.

1. Participation in Discourses is Central to Learning

As stated earlier in this chapter, the 2014 External Affairs Strategy formally introduced into the Bahá'í external affairs lexicon the concept of participation in discourses as the new operational framework. It noted that, along with social action and efforts toward expansion and consolidation of the community, the participation in the discourses of society was "central to the process of learning in which the Bahá'í community is engaged" (BWC 2014, 1). In its 2 March 2013 letter to the Bahá'í community in Iran, the Universal House of Justice provided further clarification about this learning process in the context of Bahá'í engagement in politics: "At the heart of the learning process is inquiry into the nature of the relationships that bind the individual, the community, and

the institutions of society—actors on the stage of history who have been locked in a struggle for power throughout time" (UHJ 2013a, para. 12).[225]

The learning is oriented toward achieving greater understanding into the complex dynamics of oneness and unity (as element of the substrate) and the manner in which these are expressed in the essential relationships that comprise the social fabric. The process unfolds in a way that "resembles the growth and differentiation of a living organism. Haphazard change is avoided, and continuity of action maintained" (OSED 2012, para. 11). During this period, the BIC strove to "adopt a learning orientation" in all areas of its work (BIC 2009, 7). This is not to suggest that the organization was not learning prior to this period, but rather that it was *conscious* of itself as an organization engaged in such a process and reflected on its activity in this light. We will see that this mode of operating embodies the fluid, evolutionary, and dynamic quality of the substrate. By the end of 2015, the Universal House of Justice noted that the mode of learning had become "well established" in the community (UHJ 2015, para. 47).

How Learning Is Conceptualized

Organizational learning—a subject of considerable scholarly attention, albeit largely focused on the corporate sector—serves a number of important functions in organizational development. It encourages critical reflection on experience, allows for the refinement of methods, fosters increased understanding, provides a mechanism for dealing with (and learning from) failures, and helps organizations to avoid paralysis and stagnation (Roper and Pettit 2002). As writer and NGO activist Michael Edwards points out, developing the capacity for learning is more important than simply accumulating information (Edwards 1997). While the study of organizational learning is still gaining ground, Ebrahim's study of learning as a key process of change in two India-based development NGOs provides an important resource in this area (Ebrahim 2003). I will discuss his work in the context my findings in the paragraphs that follow.

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[225] This excerpt also notes that the Bahá'í community is striving to learn how to "maintain . . . a mode of learning in action," "how to ensure that growing numbers participate in the generation and application of relevant knowledge," and "how to devise structures for the systemization of an expanding worldwide experience and for the equitable distribution of the lessons learned" (UHJ 2013a, para. 10).

The Universal House of Justice conceptualizes the process of learning as consisting of action, reflection, study of authoritative Bahá'í guidance, and consultation (UHJ 2010a, para. 32). These actions are iterative and mutually reinforcing. For the BIC, this translates to: (a) both internal (in-office) and external (in the field) *action* at the UN and in international fora; (b) *reflection* on action, involving BIC representatives, staff, delegates, collaborators, members of the Universal House of Justice—as appropriate to each situation; (c) *study of relevant authoritative guidance* from the Universal House of Justice or from the Bahá'í Writings; and (d) *consultation* among those involved to determine the best course of action. The learning process is thus differentiated from a formula-based approach in which the action is pre-determined. Instead, "in the field of service, knowledge is tested, questions arise out of practice, and new levels of understanding are achieved" (UHJ 2010a, para. 9).

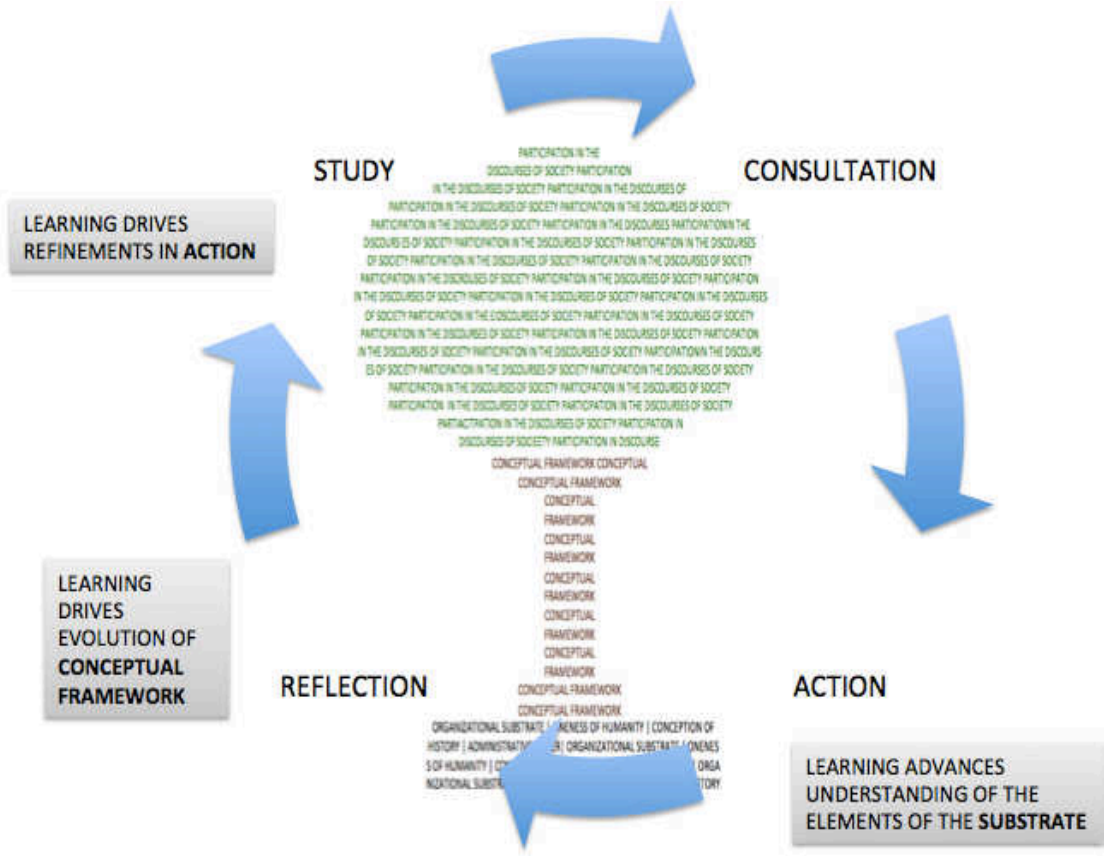
Participation in the discourses of society then, proceeds in a learning mode. The 2014 External Affairs Strategy highlights the organic nature of this process.

> While goals must be set, strategies adopted, and strenuous efforts made to meet defined objectives, the adoption of a posture of learning requires that plans remain amenable to refinement and change and that the work is able to evolve with a degree of agility. In practical terms, this requires [external affairs offices] . . . to be constantly engaged in refining and enriching their reading of social reality and raising their capacity to identify and analyse social spaces in which they can learn with others and make meaningful contributions. (BWC 2014, 7–8)

In Figure 6.2, on the following page, I demonstrate the implications of the learning mode for the substrate, the conceptual framework, and the action of the BIC.

Ebrahim describes this type of learning as "exploratory learning" and—distinct from trial-and-error learning or learning by imitation as a mode that involves experimentation, flexibility and innovation (Ebrahim 2003, 108). Given the sharply accelerated pace of change across many areas of human endeavor during this period—as alluded to in the opening of this chapter—in order to participate effectively and constructively in discourses at the UN, the BIC consciously strives to build its capacity to discern more effectively the nature of global trends, developments, and forces as they bear on the issues of the day.

Figure 6.2 Elements of the BIC's learning approach



Within the context of the learning process set out by the Universal House of Justice, this learning unfolds in light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in the context of actions taken, and is advanced by consultation among those involved. As Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire describes in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, learning engenders critical awareness and analysis of one's reality, which can serve as a basis for empowerment and collective action (Freire 1970).

Another way to theorize the process of change in organizations is in terms of what sociologist Jack Mezirow calls "transformative learning"—as distinct from instrumental or communicative learning (Mezirow 2012). The purpose of transformative learning is to understand how "to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others—to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible,

clear-thinking decision makers" (Mezirow 2000, 8). In his study of two Catholic RNGOs at the UN, Lehmann demonstrates the outcome of a process of organizational learning inside the World Council of Churches (WCC) that occurs in the course of the organization's long-term engagement in the human rights discourse at the UN. He notes a shift in the organization's understanding of human rights—which early on in the WCC-UN relationship was viewed as a secular (and therefore competing) framework to WCC's theological framework for justice. Over time, however, the human rights discourse "was no longer perceived as a discourse external to the WCC. It developed into an integral part of [its] self-description" (Lehmann 2016, 115). Lehmann is not suggesting that the WCC was co-opted by the UN's secular agenda; rather, he observes a shift in the "theological reflections and legitimations" surrounding human rights (Lehmann 2016, 115).

According to Ebrahim, the most important factors affecting learning processes are the "perceptual frames or worldviews that underlie individual or organizational action" (Ebrahim 2003, 112). These frames exert influence on learning by "structuring . . . how (and what) problems are perceived, what sort of information is collected, and how that information is analyzed and interpreted" (Ebrahim 2003, 113). Over time, these learning processes play a role in changing perceptual frames.[226] Ebrahim's study, however, does not fully help us to understand RNGOs as he focuses on organizational history and the institutional environment as the constitutive elements of the worldview. The substrate enables us to apply Ebrahim's insight to religious organizations in order to discern the manner in which a religious rationale shapes organizational processes and behavior.[227]

The learning orientation was also reflected in the types of gatherings initiated by the BIC. We see, during this period, the BIC initiating briefings (by Member States and UN agencies) for the NGO committees on which they serve in order to more effectively

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[226] This is also referred to as double-loop learning (as opposed to single-loop): doing it right versus doing the right thing. Learning is a bit different in this case because it doesn't change the values per se but depends understanding of them (Ebrahim 2003, 109).

[227] This is not to discount the importance of organizational history or institutional environment as these factors are also present for RNGOs. Nonetheless they do not enable us to access the logic inherent in religious systems of knowledge and practice.

inform the work of the committee; inviting UN and civil society experts on various issues to brief BIC representatives; inviting Bahá'ís working at the UN to share their insights with the BIC regarding issues in which it is engaged; and facilitating small group discussions with representatives of UN agencies and civil society in order to study particular UN- of BIC-generated documents as a way of deepening knowledge on a particular topic relevant to the UN agenda. The reflection component of learning was also institutionalized through weekly and quarterly Reflection Meetings during which BIC representatives and staff, rather than simply sharing information about their respective work, would systematically reflect on what they had learned from their work and interactions during the past quarter (e.g. BIC 2010a; BIC 2013b; BIC 2015b).

VI. Participation in Discourses and the Generation of Knowledge

By participating in discourses at the UN and in international fora, the BIC sees itself as a contributor to a collective process of generating and diffusing knowledge about matters of global concern. The substrate-based analysis focuses our attention on the organization's conception of knowledge and the sources thereof. In the 2014 External Affairs Strategy, the Universal House of Justice aligns participation in discourses with activities that "focus the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation on the evolution of thought and the exploration of social reality" (BWC 2014, 1). Thus we can see the intimate relationship that is established between divine revelation, human thought, and the generation of knowledge.

In statements issued during this period, the BIC makes it explicit that it draws on both science and religion in formulating its contributions. In the BIC's address to the 2015 Nishan Forum on World Civilizations in China, for example, the representative described the BIC's work at the UN in the following terms:

> We see ourselves as part of a discourse among the community of nations and seek to contribute to this discourse by offering new ways of approaching issues of global concern, by re-framing the way that certain problems are understood, by identifying assumptions and mental models underlying the understanding of reality and by drawing on insights from the fields of science as well as religion. (BIC 2014b, para. 10)

Integral to the learning process described earlier is the study of authoritative guidance. That is to say, knowledge is generated through a process of reflecting on action *in light of* the Bahá'í Writings. The Universal House of Justice clarifies the perspective on the sources of knowledge by stating that science and religion are:

> two complementary systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances . . . religion without science soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes the tool of crude materialism. (UHJ 2013a, para. 9)

Participation in discourses provides a modality, which engages with both systems of knowledge as they concern themselves with the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The substrate provides the orientation and overarching purpose for the acquisition of knowledge: the advancement of spiritual and material civilization. Knowledge is generated in the process of engagement with ideas—drawn from the fields of science as well as other religions—through a process of action, reflection, study, and consultation.

The modality of participation in discourses also challenges prevailing notions of the divide between religious and secular dimensions of collective life. With an orientation toward contributing to a collective process of generating knowledge, the religion-secular binary becomes less salient. While some believe it is difficult to challenge the binary (e.g. Carrette and Trigeaud 2014), it is nonetheless possible to change the terms of reference in a manner that renders this dichotomy less pronounced. The BIC's orientation toward external affairs during this period suggests that this binary need not *constitute* the way that NGOs think about the world, nor does it need to be a prominent feature thereof.[228] This relates to the very heart of the argument of this thesis: indeed we can think of the substrate as an *epistemological* substrate—a base of knowledge possessed by the organization, which shapes its rationale for actions in the international sphere. Whether that substrate emanates from religious, scientific, or secular sources is

[228] The term "post-secular" has been used by a growing number of scholars to describe an emerging discourse that upholds values traditionally associated with secularism (such as democracy, separation of religious and state institutions, scientific rationality) but also encourages the engagement of religious perspectives and traditions (Habermas 2008).

secondary to the content of the substrate. The key is to acknowledge that such a substrate exists and to be able to study its expression in the world.

Thus, the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge plays a central role in the BIC's approach to social transformation during this period. It is in light of the question of the generation of knowledge—and attention to the means of its generation and the protagonists in this process—that the activities of the BIC during this period can be understood.[229]

While not discussed in detail in this chapter, the structural dimension of the substrate was indeed critical to the operationalization of the seminal goals articulated by the Universal House of Justice: fostering coherence among different areas of activity, nurturing a culture of systematic learning, and reframing the Bahá'í community's understanding of engagement in society in terms of participation in its discourses. The Universal House of Justice described the organic nature of this system by noting that:

> Even as a living organism, [the Administrative Order] has coded within it the capacity to accommodate higher and higher degrees of complexity, in terms of structures and processes, relationships and activities, as it evolves under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. (UHJ 2010a, para 21)

It is the presence of authoritative, adaptive, flexible, and systematic structures and systems that enabled the BIC to unfold its activities along these lines—in a manner that reflected its connectedness and rootedness in the development of the wider Bahá'í community, and that absorbed and diffused knowledge generated in various parts of the Bahá'í system to other relevant parts.

VII. Summary

While this chapter encompasses only the first eight years of an ongoing period, it nonetheless demonstrates distinctive features of the operation of the substrate at the

[229] In its 2010 Ridván message, the Universal House of Justice stresses unequivocally the centrality of this task to the advancement of civilization: "Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization . . . Justice demands universal participation" (UHJ 2010a, para. 29).

level of methodology and practice. During this period, the substrate finds expression in new terms of reference for the BIC: the work of external affairs is now conceived in terms of *participation in the discourses of society*. This expression pushes against scholarship that reads RNGO-UN engagement in terms of behaviors that either display or do not display a religious, or faith-inspired nature or identity. Participation in the discourses of society—and the conception of the generation of knowledge as a key element of human flourishing—fits into neither category. It is neither secular nor religious; rather, it is associated with a different way of knowing and being in the world. It is associated with a substrate that prompts modes of engagement that foster consensus, solidarity, and principled collective deliberation. We discern a shift from the BIC's orientation to "influence" UN processes to an orientation toward participation in an unfolding process by which society generates the knowledge needed to advance human prosperity.

The dimension of the substrate that pertains to the Administrative Order of the Bahá'í community is apparent in the Universal House of Justice's efforts to promote coherence not only within but also among the global Bahá'í community's various areas of endeavor, as the work of external affairs is explicitly related to efforts in the areas of expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í community[230] as well as in various areas of social action, which focus on the improvement of social and material conditions. One of the principal ways in which the Universal House of Justice seeks to foster coherence during this period is by introducing the Bahá'í community to the conception of an evolving conceptual framework: a "matrix that organizes thought and gives shape to activities and which becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates" (UHJ 2013c, 2). The framework that shapes the Bahá'í approach to politics—and most relevant to the work of the BIC—is explicitly articulated for the first time by the Universal House of Justice during this period. The elements of the framework, as shown in Figure 6.2 on page 181, give expression to the substrate in a manner that is more explicit and that

[230] To relate the work of external affairs to expansion and consolidation efforts is not to suggest that the BIC has now become engaged in trying to expand the Bahá'í community through its work at the UN. It is to say that the insights emerging for this area of work—such as means for the generation of knowledge and its systematization, capacity building, and learning—are being used to advance the work in other fields of endeavor, including community growth.

more directly grounds all external affairs endeavor—those undertaken by the BIC and by national offices—in a common epistemology.

The framework is also an expression of the evolutionary, organic dimension of the substrate: it evolves through a process of learning, which the BIC seeks to adopt in all facets of its work during this period. The framework ensures flexibility and capacity for modification on the basis of experience and reflection on experience, while at the same time grounding in the substrate the BIC's engagement with the UN. It demonstrates a flexibility which scholars of RNGOs have failed to grasp—a flexibility that enables an organization to function effectively alongside and in cooperation with other organizational entities without being co-opted by them or marginalizing them. We can see this in the manner in which the BIC contributes to the discourses on gender equality, human rights, and religion (all potentially polarizing): with an approach that engages different actors and ideas in a collaborative endeavor of generating knowledge, advancing understanding, and refining concepts based on reflection on experience. The substrate thus continually and progressively gives rise to modalities that eschew adversarialism in any form, that reveal new implications of the oneness of humanity, that are evolutionary in nature, and that unfold within the system of the Administrative Order.

Chapter 7

Conclusion:
Getting to "Why?"

This thesis sought to answer two questions: (1) How can we understand the internal rationale of organizations, specifically RNGOs, engaging with the UN? (2) How has the BIC's internal rationale shaped its 70-year relationship with the UN? In order to answer these questions, this thesis introduced the concept of the organizational substrate, which provides a theoretical framework to examine the structures of logic underpinning organizational behavior.

I. Key Findings

I have argued that in order to more fully understand the behavior of RNGOs at the UN we must not only consider their outward behavior, which has been the focus of research to date, but also the logic underpinning that behavior—the 'why' that animates organizational life. By studying the internal rationale of a 'religious' NGO, I sought to understand the 'religious' dimension of RNGOs: What is the nature of this dimension? What makes a particular behavior 'religious'? How does this dimension find expression in the UN arena?

To address the first research question, I drew on insights from various macro- and micro-analytical approaches used to study constructs shaping individual and collective behavior, in order to develop a tool to theorize the construction, the structure, and operationalization of RNGOs' rationale for engagement with the UN. This new tool, which I refer to as the organizational substrate, enabled me to study organizational rationale "from the inside out," that is to say, on the terms defined by the organization itself rather than terms introduced by a discipline (such as social science) possessing a different logic and normative commitments. Further, the substrate has enabled me to go beyond the lexicon of "beliefs," "values," and "positions" that is commonly used in the analysis of RNGOs and which suggest a static and fixed conception of religion and the influence it exerts on the life of the organization. The term *substrate,* associated as much with philosophy as with biology and chemistry, implies a generative

epistemological foundation so intrinsic to an organization that it could be thought of as its DNA. It opens the door to a series of questions that address the evolutionary nature of religious thought and expression, both of which are of particular significance to RNGOs, given their association with traditions of thought spanning centuries and millennia.

I have argued that it is not the behavior itself that is religious (after all, so much of what religious and secular NGOs do at the UN is indistinguishable from each other); rather, it is the meaning attached to the actions by its protagonists that renders the actions religious. Further, the sources of knowledge on which an organization draws help us to understand the reasons underlying organizational behavior. The sources of knowledge may be scripture, divine revelation, or authoritative oral tradition; they may also consist of knowledge derived from both revelation and science. Taken together, the meaning-making and epistemological dimensions of organizations comprise a new rationality—a "counter-rationality," to borrow from Wendy Brown—to the prevailing rationality associated with Western liberal democratic conceptions of world order and taken for granted in the current understanding of the subject. By studying the rationality of RNGOs, we uncover distinct teleologies, ontologies, and conceptions of time and society that enrich the way in which we experience, understand, and attempt to re-imagine the social order.

The second question addressed in this thesis concerned the study of the internal rationale shaping the Bahá'í International Community's engagement with the UN. Given the very limited scholarly literature about the Bahá'í Faith, let alone its engagement in the public sphere, this study opens the door to the examination of a young tradition that has secured a reputation as one of the most active, long-standing, and respected actors in the UN community. I posit that one of the reasons for the dearth of scholarship about the Bahá'í community—or the BIC at the UN—may be that the elements that make it most interesting for study—namely its approach to social change in terms of building unity—are not easily discernible using currently established analytical tools. Applying Bahá'í hermeneutics, I identify three constituent elements of the BIC's organizational substrate: (1) an evolutionary view of history; (2) the oneness

of humanity; and (3) the Bahá'í Administrative Order.[231] While individual elements of the BIC's substrate may be a part of other organizational substrates, it is the unique *combination* of the elements of the BIC's substrate that generates a distinct rationale and pattern of RNGO engagement.

In order to study the expression of this substrate, I divided the 70-year history of the BIC's involvement with the UN into four developmental periods, each of which enabled me to analyze a distinct feature of the substrate and its expression. By using a periodized approach, I was able to study the expression of the substrate in the context of various developments in the arenas of international political and of civil society, as well as developments in the worldwide Bahá'í community.

The first period (1945-1970) revealed the salience of the substrate in shaping the meaning that the BIC assigned to the formation of the UN. The recognition of the civilizational significance of the UN, in the context of an emerging global civilization, prompted BIC's association with this nascent global entity. The second period (1970-1986) revealed the pivotal role of authority—embodied by the Universal House of Justice—in elaborating the substrate and guiding its operationalization. The third period (1986-2008), in which the Bahá'í community became better known around the world and in diplomatic circles, demonstrated the role of the substrate in shaping the BIC's conception of peace and the distinct methods it adopted to advance peace-related goals. In the final (and on-going) period (2008-2015), I showed that the substrate found expression in a new frame of reference, namely in terms of the BIC's participation in the prevalent discourses of society. In an environment of accelerating social, technological, political, and environmental upheavals, the substrate was expressed in modalities that fostered unity in diversity, coherence, and the sense of humanity's collective effort to generate and apply knowledge in order to address the pressing issues of the day.

Together, the four periods unfold a distinct pattern of engagement in the international arena, carried out by a global community seeking to give expression to particular

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[231] The governing structure of the Bahá'í community

teleology, ontology, and epistemology rooted in the precepts of the Bahá'í Faith. The historical analysis reveals the actions of what I have referred to as a divine polity that seeks consultative and constructive engagement with the actors and processes within the UN. Further, the organizational substrate introduced in this thesis has offered a way to disentangle the complexities of a 'divine polity' by demonstrating the outworking of a 'religious' rationale in the context of a 'secular' international arena.

II. Broader Implications

In drawing together the importance of the organizational substrate in this thesis, I will conclude by considering the broader implications of this concept for: (1) the conceptualization of religion; (2) questions of methodology in the study of religious organizations: (3) the study of religion at the UN; (4) the role of religion in global civil society; and (5) the study of the Bahá'í community's engagement with society.

1. Conceptions of Religion

As mentioned in the introduction, any study pertaining to religion in the public sphere bears on contemporary debates about the nature of religion, the religious-secular binary, and the changing role of religion in the modern world. As Scott Thomas reminds us: "The conceptualization of religion is not merely a question of theory but one that shapes the kinds of questions that are asked about religion and its operation and expression in human society" (Thomas 2005, 24). Thus, if scholars conceive of religion and religious engagement in the public sphere in normatively Christian terms emerging from a Western intellectual tradition, they will generate a set of questions bounded by the "conditions of possibility" associated with that intellectual tradition. Similarly, religion conceived as a phenomenon in opposition to that which is secular, will give rise to its own distinct set of questions. This binary relationship, in fact, has become so closely associated with the concept of modernity that it constitutes the way that we see, think, and study our world. In this thesis, I argue that the internal logic and rationale of an organization (in this case an RNGO) is more salient to the study of religious agency in the modern world than conceptions of the religious-secular binary. As long as religion and secular modernity are placed at opposite ends of an ideological

spectrum, it will not be possible to discern and appreciate alternative formulations of human progress and flourishing advanced by organizations, such as RNGOs.

What emerges from my research is a new conception of religion. It is not religion as a set of beliefs or values, a worldview, or a set of culturally determined modes of being, thinking, and behaving. The concept that emerges *contains* elements of these but is not *bound* by them. What emerges is an understanding of religion as a system of knowledge and practice—a system that gives rise to a diversity of expressions in the physical and social world. Religion, in this sense, is a system in a similar manner that science is a system of knowledge – a set of principles, procedures/ methods, connected parts forming a coherent whole. We can think of these as complementary systems of knowledge and practice that provide different kinds of insight according to the different ways that we seek to understand the physical and social world.

The substrate begins to reveal the systematic nature of the system of knowledge and meaning that undergirds organizational logic and rationality. The proposition of religion as a knowledge system directly challenges the view that equates religion with superstition or fanaticism, the same view that places religion in opposition to concepts of progress and modernity, or to the secular for that matter. It does not mean that religion is now limited to this definition but, instead, that the concept of the 'system of knowledge' provides a novel framework for exploring the operation of religion within an organizational context. Returning to Byrd's analysis of Quaker patterns of thought in international relations, we can discern the "body of cohesive principles which form the central structure—the invisible skeleton" (Byrd 1960, xv) of this religious movement as it engages in international affairs. Distinct elements of epistemology, ontology, social order, power, among others, constitute a system of knowledge which gives rise to diverse patterns of engagement in the political sphere.

Whether the system is rooted in 'religion' or 'secular' thought is not the central concern; what is salient is the body of insights that can be gleaned from alternative ways of knowing, of seeing, and of being in the world. The organizational substrate enables us to study a tradition on its own terms, in a way that is faithful to the perspective and experience of those who practice it. In this way, it enables the researcher to unearth different forms of rationality, and to move beyond approaches

that have tended to normalize a particular European experience of religion and politics. The substrate provides us with a framework for understanding different ways of knowing the world and of acting on that knowledge.

This finding brings the study of RNGOs into close association with scholarship about epistemic communities, which comprise individuals bound together by a "shared belief or faith in the verity and applicability of particular forms of knowledge or specific truths" (Adler and Haas 1992a, 3), as discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Conceiving of RNGOs in terms of epistemic communities has implications for scholarship grounded in the religious-secular binary, as well as scholarship that examines the "potential for religion and for [faith-based organizations] to fundamentally challenge, from a multiplicity of theological and political standpoints, the way that contemporary society operates, to confront and alter values that drive it" (Cloke 2010, 210). The concept of the RNGO as an expression of an epistemic community challenges arguments that place RNGOs at the UN in stark opposition to a liberal, Western-dominated UN agenda—one that forces the RNGO to choose between co-optation and compromise in its efforts to exert agency in the UN space. A recognition that organizational entities operate on the basis of different systems of knowledge, and of knowing, opens the door to a more nuanced, informed exchange of ideas between entities more aware of the foundations of their interlocutors' reading of society and their place in the world.

A pressing question that remains regards the inference—as noted by Clarke and Jennings, for example—that the more an organization's action are rooted in its religious faith, the more they are associated with exclusivity, proselytizing, and violence (Clarke and Jennings 2008). My findings suggest a different reading of this phenomenon: it is not that the more "religious" an organization is, the more it tends towards socially deviant behavior; rather, we need to look at the substrate of the organization in question and examine it on its own terms. Who determines that such a substrate is "religious"—particularly if it incites violence? The aim is not to begin a debate about what is religious or not, but rather to acknowledge that ideas rooted in religious commitments, even when wholly adhered to by an organization, can remain "incitational of thought

and possibility rather than turning fundamentalist" (Brown 2005, 114). It is those ideas and correlated practices that need to be examined.

The construct of post-secular thought—specifically post-secular approaches in international politics—is helpful in clarifying and describing the paradigm shift that is occurring as we struggle to make sense of the intellectual landscape following the demise of the secularization theory. Post-secular thinking represents attempts to find "a new grammar and modern forms of instrumental rationality . . . that draw on both secular and religious imaginaries" (Mavelli and Petito 2012, 8). This sensibility is evident in the international political sphere, where the flourishing of global civil society (with religious communities richly represented) is pushing against the norms and structures of a world order, which still reflects ideologies now out of step with the needs of an emerging global society. This thesis brings to the fore the "grammar" of the religious imaginary by enabling us to observe its operation in the public sphere. The organizational substrate provides a tool to discern this new grammar and the new forms of rationality with which it is associated.

2. Methodology

My thesis sheds light on the question of methodology in the study of the religious dimension of NGOs active at the UN and of civil society more broadly. The use of the organizational substrate enables us to study religion from the inside, in order to see the world through the lenses of the meaning and significance that shape the behavior and rationale of the organization. It takes the religious seriously—not as the wistful contemplations of a bygone era—but as a system of knowledge and practice, which shapes RNGOs' identity and relationship to the world. The substrate offers, to borrow from Goethe, "a new organ of perception" (Goethe 1988, 39) by means of which we can see what was not previously apparent using other means of analysis. Further, a substrate-based analysis stresses the importance of attending to the particularism of the tradition being studied, so as to mine its ways of knowing and being, and to enrich our understanding of the religious agency in the political sphere.

My aim in introducing the concept of the substrate is to contribute to the repertoire of tools available for the study of religious agency and its expression in the contemporary

world. I do not claim that my theory is more accurate or correct than others; I hope that it will be judged on the basis of its ability to illuminate, to incite thought, to stir imagination, to refine perception, and to broaden the conditions of possibility for research about religion in the modern world.

The substrate, studied over the course of various historical periods, also focuses our attention on the evolutionary dimension of its expression. This is particularly salient for religious entities active at the UN because often they are based on systems of belief dating back hundreds or thousands of years. The substrate enables us to see such a link in an organization like the Order of St. Augustine which, founded in 1244, became accredited to the UN 770 years later, in 2014. What is that foundational, generative moral grounding that brings thousand-year old organizations into association with the foremost international organization of our time? The substrate provides the link between those foundational, enduring moral elements of religious thought and the continually changing and evolving social and materials conditions of the contingent world; it enables us to examine the ongoing negotiation between continuity and flexibility, between integrity (of the tradition) and evolution.

3. Religion at the UN

This thesis builds on the work of scholars who have sought to understand the nature of RNGO engagement with the UN. The organizational substrate helps us to move the analysis beyond the religious-secular category to shed light on the ideational, meaning-making dimensions of religious engagement in this arena. This analytical tool also expands the lexicon used to describe the behavior of RNGOs beyond concepts such as organizational positions, lobbying, advocacy, or proselytizing (the professional terms of engagement) in order to yield a much more nuanced understanding of the epistemological dimensions of organizational behavior from its own inner logic.

Further, the analysis of the concept of influence, so central to understanding NGOs is deepened as we consider the nature of the influence that NGOs wish to exert, and the manner in which they evaluate the influence they have had. We begin to see that the RNGO "project" at the UN is not simply one of lobbying for certain policies or

expressing values or beliefs; but rather one of bringing forward a new way of thinking about the world, the nature of the problems within it, their root causes, and the manner in which these should be addressed. My thesis also contributes to the scholarship about UN-affiliated entities rooted in traditions other than Christianity, continuing the efforts by Kayaoğlu in the field of Muslim NGOs (Kayaoğlu 2011; Kayaoğlu 2012; Kayaoğlu 2014) and Carrette in the field of Hindu and Buddhist NGOs (Carrette 2017).

The substrate sheds light on the different modalities of social change employed by RNGOs. In addition to the more familiar mechanisms for lobbying, advocating, raising awareness, and presenting statements, there is a broader repertoire of modes of social change employed by RNGOs. The substrate enables us to see the different ways in which RNGOs challenge the very assumptions and ideologies shaping contemporary societies and the way in which they address and push back against the influence that these exert on the social imagination.

4. Religion and global civil society

The findings of this thesis also have implications for the scholarship on global civil society—that vast and largely autonomous constellation of groups, associations and networks, which self-organize to promote the betterment of society and within which are subsumed millions of NGOs and RNGOs. Scholarship about global civil society has focused on its "'associative,' 'deliberative,' and 'emancipatory' dimensions" (Palmer 2018, n.p.)—noting its proclivity towards voluntary association, its engagement in discourses on the common good, and its expression of counter-hegemonic values (Palmer 2018, n.p.). My thesis sheds light on the question of epistemological foundations of religiously affiliated and motivated organizations in order to demonstrate the distinctiveness of a rationale that sets them apart from that of the market or of the political arena. In order for that rationale to find expression in the world—to do its work to foster association, engagement in discourse, and challenge the status quo—we must first have a way to study this rationale, to discern its constitutive elements, the nature of its influence on the work of the organization, the way in which it negotiates competing logics and authority structures, and the way in which it finds expression in various sphere of endeavor. The organizational substrate provides the tool

for this analysis. Moreover, the substrate enables these epistemological foundations to be made *explicit*, to be known. Only when they are *known* and consciously translated into action*,* can civil society actors avoid "being unconsciously governed by implicit assumptions or ideologies that are at odds with their own deepest aspirations" (Palmer 2018, n.p.).

In addition to making these foundations explicit, the substrate brings attention to the dynamic and emergent manner in which the foundation finds expression. In my periodized analysis across the span of seven decades, I demonstrate the range of organizational dimensions that are shaped under the influence of the substrate. The element of the oneness of humanity, for example, in the case of the BIC, finds expression in methodologies and approaches that eschew all forms of adversarialism, in a keen attention to avoiding engagement in processes and environments characterized by partisanship, in seeing human flourishing through the lens of building unity rooted in diversity and justice, and in defining terms of BIC-UN engagement in a manner that positions all parties as participants in the collective endeavor of generating knowledge to advance human civilization. Much like human DNA, the substrate is constantly negotiating the organization's capacity to give it expression in the context of particular environmental factors. This awareness attunes us to the unique relationship between integrity (adherence to the substrate) and flexibility (innovation and adaption to environment) that characterizes entities such as RNGOs, whose motivation is rooted in spiritual foundations dating back hundreds—if not thousands—of years, and who are giving expression to these foundations in continually shifting socio-political contexts and in ways that elude the categorization of actions as "religious" or "secular."

5. Scholarship about the Bahá'í Community

While I've alluded to some of the main findings of the research in the paragraphs above, I want to focus on a particular element that the substrate has enabled us to see in the BIC. As was mentioned in the thesis, one reason for the dearth of scholarship about the BIC at the UN may be the very nature of the Bahá'í community's approach to social change. The Bahá'ís strict adherence to the principle of non-engagement in partisan politics prevents them from taking part in more familiar approaches to bringing

about change—such as protest, seeking public office, lobbying, and so on—as these would bring Bahá'ís into an adversarial dynamic that runs counter to the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith. The BIC's organizational substrate finds expression, instead, in myriad configurations, which foster social cohesion even as they seek to reshape the social order. We can view the seventy-year history of the BIC-UN relationship in terms of the progressive embodiment of the substrate. In each period, the expression of the oneness of mankind, in the context of a distinct conception of history and governance, evolves to address the exigencies of the time. In the earlier periods, we read the guidance of Shoghi Effendi regarding non-engagement in partisan politics and the example he set through his correspondence with the UN; we see the expression of oneness in the constitution of early BIC delegations and their strict adherence to the authoritative and governing structures of the Bahá'í community. We can find this expression in the BIC's distinctive consultative mode of operating, in efforts to open the way for greater civil society participation, in the content of the statements and messages to the UN, in the way it strives to bring together disparate voices and perspectives to find common ground on issues of common concern, and in the forging of a new epistemic community which seeks to leaven the processes of generating knowledge that will serve the interests of humanity.

I contend that what we are seeing is what Wendy Brown calls the "post-revolutionary modalities of radical and political social transformation of our time" (2005, 113). They are post-revolutionary because the tools of revolution are configured differently—they are not used to tear down but rather to unite and to build up. The substrate sheds light on the importance of approaches used to further social change—and for the BIC these approaches, in order to adhere to Bahá'í principle, must in themselves be unifying. The substrate helps us to see that the BIC is pursuing a project far more ambitious that what we might attribute to an RNGO or an NGO. It is project rooted both in meeting the exigencies of the day but also in the much longer time frame of building up a new world civilization—a project that involves the empowerment and participation of all the peoples of the world. What we see, then, is a profound challenge to the boundaries and structures of thought, to notions of progress and flourishing, and to the conceptions of relationships that govern the world. It is a challenge that is undertaken with a view to unifying, to achieving consensus, to collective learning and construction. The

organizational substrate enables us to bring into sharp relief this unique logic of engagement. In this thesis, I have endeavored to demonstrate, that knowledge and action require understanding of the organizational substrate of each distinct group and its historical response.

III. Future scholarship

This thesis has taken only the first step toward studying the operation of the organizational substrate in the BIC's seventy-year engagement with the UN. It has opened the door for the study of organizational rationale in other RNGOs as well as religious organizations in other political fora, in order to gain further insight in the nature and expression of the religious impulse in the modern world.

Much more remains to be explored about the BIC. This thesis has focused almost exclusively on the BIC's Office in New York; it has not ventured into the rich history of the BIC's Office in Geneva, whose focus has been primarily on the promotion of human rights and the defense of the persecuted Bahá'í community. Since 2010, BIC Offices have been created in Brussels, Jakarta, and Addis Ababa—a development that is a worthy subject of future scholarship about the engagement of the Bahá'í community in the public sphere.

Future scholarship will also need to address more closely the manner in which organizational substrates reconfigure notions of power; how they reconceptualize the operation, logic, and vehicles of power so as to enrich the lexicon, theoretical grounding, and intellectual climate for exploring notions of power more appropriate to the webs of interdependence that characterize contemporary society. Such scholarship will help us to understand "other orders of power that rival sovereignty" in the ordering of collective life (Brown 2005, 77). In our post-secular, post-revolutionary era, it is my hope that this thesis will stimulate further inquiry into modalities of thought and practice, into new types of polity, that illuminate the path to building a more just global society.

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