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Drops of One Ocean: Globalization, Identity Formation and Hegemony in the Baha'i Communities of Samoa, the Netherlands, Latvia, and Lithuania

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Drops of One Ocean
Globalization, Identity Formation and Hegemony in the Baha'i Communities of Samoa, the
Netherlands, Latvia, and Lithuania

An Honors Thesis
Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology
Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Detmer Yens Kremer

Lewiston, Maine
March 28, 2016

*Leave pake,
Jo koene dizze wurden net lêze.
Ik haw se skreaun yn in taal dy't jo net praten koe, mar ik hoopje dat jo grutsk binne.
Miskien kin immen it foar jo fertale.*

Ik sei 't net faak genôch, mar ik hâld fan dy

(I dedicate my thesis to my grandfather, a man who taught me to work hard and be proud of who I am. A kind man with his own stubborn ideas and sense of right and wrong. A man who taught me to remove the tendrils from vines so our grapes would grow bigger and taste sweeter.)

Acknowledgements

Although this thesis bears my name, it was an endeavor I could have never undertaken by myself. The Baha'is that I met in Samoa, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands took me in and with unparalleled kindness shared their ideas, hopes, and experiences through the stories they shared. I am indebted to every single one of you, and I hope you will enjoy reading my thesis. I do want to take the time to explicitly thank several of you, those of you that have gone out of their way to introduce me to your friends, to host me in your homes, to drive me across your countries, and to translate the languages I did not understand. Thank you Karen Te'o, Galumalemana Steven Percival, Telesia Tuiletufuga, Harry Koree, Jornt de Jong, Tatjana Sokolova, Maris Pavlov, Valentina Poltavets, Raimundas Leugaudas, Agne Pozniakiene, and Pawkar Alvarado.

This thesis reflects only what I believe, and how I have interpreted the stories that were shared with me, it is not an articulation of the individual opinions of Baha'is or the ideology presented by the Faith. These are my thoughts, and they are not intended to be read as facts.

I also want to thank Bates College, for providing academic challenges that have pushed me to consider ideas and thoughts I could have never imagined otherwise. The anthropology department here especially has truly made me feel at home in academia, a place I did not think that would accept me. I want to thank Andrew Hamill '05 and the Hamill Fund for Fieldwork in Anthropology because without this fund I would have never been able to meet the people I did in Latvia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the processes of globalization in different Baha'i communities in Samoa, Latvia, Lithuania and the Netherlands. Traditionally globalization has been defined as a secular force imposing worldwide homogenization from the global-center onto the global-periphery, however in the Baha'i Faith globalization is an essential part of the central goal to materialize a unified world marked by peace and racial, class-based, and gender-based justice infused with monotheistic spirituality. Drawing evidence from interviews with Baha'is and observations of community events and prayer services, and theoretical support from Foucault's concept of authorship and Tsing, Rifkin, and Appiah's theories of globalization, the central argument revolves around how the use of spirituality in Baha'i rhetoric centers human experience in globalization, resulting in tangible examples that defy assumed homogenization. The combination of these diverse theories aid to a conversation demystifying and decolonizing hegemonic globalization discourse and incorporate the ways in which friction between local and global streams of culture produce and reproduce heterogeneous cultural identities and communities.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Learning how to fly.....1
Methodology: On what, where, and how17
History: A sense of place23
Literature Review: A particular kind of universality54
Chapter I: I will obey.....72
Chapter II: From the mouthpiece of god.....78
Chapter III: For fatherland and freedom98
Chapter IV: The smell and sight of flowers.....106
Chapter V: Founded on god127
Chapter VI: The unifying forces of life.....133
Chapter VII: Looking for salvation in the secular age.....151
Conclusion: Across oceans162
Bibliography174

Introduction

learning how to fly

“The world of humanity has two wings – one is woman and the other man. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly”

~ Abdu'l-Baha

We start in a small Frisian town called Nij Beets, located in the Dutch north.

On Sundays church bells would wake me up. I would open my curtains and see the line of cars parked outside the church. I was never part of this – or any – religious community. This immediately placed me in the position of an observer. It seemed to me that religious communities walked a tightrope. The interplay of exclusion and inclusion seemed pivotal to constituting community. Believers always tried to convince me of how inclusive they were and how they found comfort and solace in the accepting arms of divine spirit(s). Exclusion was tied to notions of either poor choices or unfortunate blood. It was clear to me that the politics of *exclusion* were a useful tool to understand the identity of who was *included*. The juxtaposition of the excluded and the included perfectly illustrates who is worthy, and who is not. The virgin/whore dichotomy is a good example of this as virginity is defined exactly by the absence of the acts of the whore. I experienced exclusion firsthand through a combination of identities; my family was not born in Nij Beets, my vegetarianism, my academic pursuits, and the one that garnered the most explicit violent response, my sexuality. The interplay of outsiders and insiders

that shapes religious communities fascinates me and I always wondered if there were exceptions, and what those exceptions might look like.

Before I started doing research, the name ‘Baha’i’ was an unfamiliar term that described an obscure religion I recall once reading about. I knew about the temples, scattered irregularly over the world, but nothing more. The quoted words that open this introduction were the first from the Faith that I read. They were printed on a banner at the temple in Tiapapata, Samoa. Through a School of International Training program I connected with several members of the local Baha’i community and I was quickly taught about the ways and experiences of this religious minority. This quote about the equality of men and women sparked a project that looked at the constructions of gender within the Samoan Baha’i community. Through this research I had conversations about place and culture that required more time than a month-long project could permit and thus I expanded my topic for my thesis. I wanted to examine how widespread communities engaged with the type of globalization defined and promoted by the Baha’i Faith. This contemporary topic allows me to write about transnational movements of culture and contemporary deterritorialized identities.

The choice to focus on a relatively unknown religion was partly situational, but also directly tied to my effort to challenge hegemonic narratives of globalization. Often theories and ethnographies of globalization focus on capitalist driven movements that are defined by a center-periphery approach. The center is a place of power – in general the western world – and the periphery are the places inhabited by black and brown bodies often condescendingly referred to as the ‘Third World.’ To write within similar theoretical perspectives perpetuates unjust distributions of power and sustains divisive borders. It is also important to recognize that globalization in itself is not a new phenomenon. Empires – Roman, Inca, Mughal – have

historically been catalysts of globalization and facilitated the spread of cultural ideas and artifacts. That said, the extreme velocity of the contemporary form of globalization is unprecedented. Nowadays, through wireless internet, cheap flights, and larger groups of people moving further away, the world has increasingly become what is often called “a global village.”¹ In this village, ideas, artifacts, and people travel even faster, and the diverse ways in which those items merge and separate are occurring at increasing speed. Arjun Appadurai writes that this change of pace is important “for the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media.”² The production and reproduction of our diverse and intersecting cultural identities can no longer be tied to a singular place, and thus Appadurai argues that our anthropological work must become polylocal to acknowledge the multitude of sites in which cultures exist. In this thesis I am attempting to embrace the macroethnographic approach Appadurai advocates for and remain committed to decentering the west as the focal point of global cultural production as previous hegemonic globalization theories have done.

The Baha’i Faith lends itself well for this academic process, because it is a religion that is not considered western – it originated in what is now Iran – and has globalization at its core. Velasco writes that “the response [to the religion] was considerable not just in numbers but also in spread”³ during the first days of the Faith, and so immediately it became a cosmopolitan affair. The spread of the religion across many ethnic, religious and class lines and its connections to

¹ Rifkin, I., *Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization: Making sense of Economic and Cultural Upheaval*, Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, USA (2003), pp. 5.

² Appadurai, A., *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA (1996), pp. 54.

³ Velasco, I., “Academic Irrelevance or Disciplinary Blind-Spot? Middle Eastern Studies and the Baha’i Faith Today,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 2 (winter, 2001), pp. 191.

previous religions defied many academic categories and caused a fair amount of confusion. As the Faith has been growing rapidly in recent years, the unwillingness of non-Baha'i scholars to engage with the Faith has become obvious. Velasco comments how peculiar it is that "the transplantation into over 2100 ethnic groups of [the Baha'i Faith], touching as it does on processes of globalization, modernity, tradition, nationalism, and more, [...] has passed virtually unnoticed."⁴ Velasco argues that there are several possibilities why Baha'i Studies have been pushed to the periphery of religious scholarship. Some scholars argue, in Velasco's estimation, that the close relationship to Islam appears to not set it apart as a separate religion but rather as an imitative movement, and others claim the community is too small in size to consider as a subset in religious studies. The main argument seems to be the political position of the Faith in Iran, where Baha'is remain actively persecuted to this day. Potentially scholars fear for the safety of the community they study or the possible backlash for their own careers by engaging in this politically sensitive subject. Ultimately it is unclear, and although the body of literature has substantially grown since Velasco's article, the blind spot remains. The marginalization of Baha'i Studies within academia means there has not been any extensive analysis of the particular ways in which this increasingly influential and popular faith-based tradition structures community and negotiates place. The lack of scholarly familiarity with the Faith combined with the Faith's notions of globalization provides an innovative and tantalizing perspective to both anthropology and religious studies while diversifying globalization discourse.

When Morales and Morales wrote about anthropology that "we studied concepts of pollution and marriage customs and puberty rites, and no one mentioned rape: the fact of it or the

⁴ Ibid, pp. 195.

pain of it,”⁵ the mother and daughter had articulated something I had been struggling with.

Anthropological writers have developed the strange skill to write about people and the most intimate details of their lives, without acknowledging their humanity. I too “can no longer bear to watch silently from behind the camera”⁶ which is why I decided to include creative writing in the form of short stories in my thesis. Although the inclusion of creative writing is not nearly as contested as it was prior to the feminist demands of Ruth Behar, Deborah Gordon and Gloria Anzaldua, I know I cannot include my short stories in this thesis without justifying the particular narrative and examining the importance of polyphony. The disruption of hegemonic patriarchal approaches is an important process and a central component of the purpose of my thesis. This is why I will briefly discuss how creative writing conveys a kind of information that writing that is considered conventional fails to do.

Before I can discuss the merits of creative writing, I must present my definition of ‘conventional’ writing to provide extra depth to my choice of writing style. The writing that historically has been constituted as conventional or legitimate carries political connotations that I do not want to embed in my work. Though not every ‘conventional’ text carries all of these connotations, or all of them in identical ways, I believe that ‘conventional’ writing, broadly defined, is detrimental to both the author and the people authors write about. I will enumerate the most significant reasons why I believe this is the case. **I.** In many ‘conventional’ anthropological texts the author is rendered invisible. Many of these authors apply a passive voice to their work, for example through statements like “research was done in the North of the Netherlands.” This creates a pretense that the text is neutral because a human authorial voice *seems* absent. This

⁵ Levins Morales, A. and Morales, R., “Concepts of Pollution,” from *Getting Home Alive*, by Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, Firebrand Books, Ithaca, USA (1986), pp. 62.

⁶ Behar, R. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that breaks your Heart*, Beacon Press, Boston, USA (1996), pp. 1.

absence universalizes a personal interpretation and allows the author to remain unquestioned. I also think it conceals the positionality of the author and the processes of conducting research. **II.** When authors write ‘conventionally’ they often homogenize groups into monolithic entities reduced to a single name; the Dinka, the Yanomamo, the Salafists. Individuals never seem present or important. This reductionist move effectively dehumanizes groups, removes individual agency, and distinctly makes them other. **III.** Similarly, ‘conventional’ writing often treats people in text as ahistorical and atemporal. The ethnographic present – when an author uses the present to write about a people, for example *the Ainu believe xyz* – is a stylistic device that renders people ahistorical. In this case authors freeze the people they study in time and do not account for the dynamism and fluidity of these communities. It explicitly others people compared to the long tradition of academic inclusion of western history. Particularly returning to our anthropological roots this mechanism was often used to justify colonialism. **IV.** ‘Conventional’ writing often adheres to monovocality. There is a singular flow of narrative that is not interrupted. This is a barrier to challenging that narrative because the singular voice and style universalize the interpretation of the author. It also renders the voices of the people that were worked with invisible. These people lose their voice and agency. This point is particularly hypocritical to the discipline, as we are concerned with the infinite plethora of human expression, yet only legitimize a singular way of closed writing to present our stories. **V.** The inaccessibility associated with ‘conventionally’ dense academic texts shuts out a myriad of audiences and prevents the reciprocity of sharing research with the people that helped and provided the information in the first place. This aids to the author not being questioned as the primary fact-checkers are immediately excluded from engaging with the material. **VI.** The last point I want to make is how ‘conventional’ writing demands emotional detachment. As Morales and Morales

have already pointed out, this dehumanizes the lived experiences of the people we work with. It also dehumanizes ourselves as authors, as by rejecting our personal humanity we hope to attain the ultimately impossible scientific goals of objectivity and truth. However this rejection hurts us and only creates a paper-thin façade of neutrality. Embracing ourselves as people allows us to present our interpretation sincerely, which I believe produces a more equitable and productive scholarly debate.

This is why I believe modes of ‘conventional’ writing fail to humanely convey comprehensive information about humanity and their diverse range of ideas, experiences, and dreams. These modes of writing are deeply tied to the construction of experience and the authority bound to that experience. “The authority of the ethnographic writer is [...] ultimately bound to the kind of story he sets for himself to tell,”⁷ and as ethnographic writers these particular stories are decided through preconceived notions of which authorial lenses and types of texts are deemed important and valid. This is extremely problematic as experience is “not inevitable nor determined, not something that was always there simply waiting to be expressed, not something that will always exist in the form it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment.”⁸ Joan Scott argues that every single experience – whether it is our own or those of the people we write about – occurs in an intricate web of meanings and histories. The ahistorical assumption that certain ideas and experiences are universal fails to understand how and why different experiences came to be, and how these experiences inform our interpretations.

⁷ Marcus, G. E. and Cushman, D., “Ethnographies as Texts,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 11 (1982), pp. 40.

⁸ Scott, J. W., “Experience,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, Routledge, New York, USA (1992), pp. 33.

Relying solely on ‘conventional’ modes of writing obfuscates the ways in which experiences are produced, and naturalizes the ways in which particular identities and histories mold experience. This is particularly visible in the theoretical works of authors like Clifford, Marcus and Cushman. Although these authors argue extensively about the different ways texts are produced and written, the way authority is established through language, and how experience legitimates thought, their work is purely written in the ‘conventional’ modes of writing I have discussed. The consequences are that their work does not provide tangible tools to implement their theory, in part because it renders invisible the privileged identities of the white, heterosexual male authors and ignores the long legacy of creative writing by women of color like Zora Neale Hurston and Ella Cara Deloria/Anpétu Wašté Wiy. The failure to include self-aware writing allowed authors like Clifford to subtract their authorial presence from their words and perpetuate exclusionary and monolithic scholarship. The production of knowledge is deeply entrenched in identity, and as Audre Lorde notes, “imposed silence about any area of our lives is a tool for separation and powerlessness.”⁹ If the narrator perpetuates hegemonic ideologies, ‘conventional’ writing renders invisible these dominant forces. If subaltern work becomes void of particular historical and lived experiences that engage with exclusion and oppression, ‘conventional’ notions of validity and respectability perpetuate the same hegemonic systems. This is why – regardless of identity – I think it is necessary to acknowledge that experience in itself is already an interpretation and to celebrate that theorists acknowledge that “current styles of cultural description are historically limited and are undergoing important metamorphoses.”¹⁰ A way to personally examine these metamorphoses and contribute to this larger ongoing

⁹ Lorde, A., *The Cancer Journals (Special Edition)*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, USA (1997), pp. 7.

¹⁰ Clifford, J., “Introduction: Partial Truths,” from *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, University of California Press, Berkeley, USA (1986), pp. 24.

discussion is to create a polyphonic work inspired by works like the poetic analyses of race, gender and class of Norma Alarcón or the discussion on ethics, medical anthropology and constructions of reality in Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches you and you Fall Down*.

The medium of creative writing refuses to “take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalizes their difference”¹¹ because it seeks to explain how experience is constructed and humanizes the people written about in ways singular ‘conventional’ modes of writing, like the work of Clifford, fail to do. Creative writing achieves this because it centers the infinite complexity of individual and collective personhood and by doing so creates space for personal histories and experiences that elucidate how difference is formed and the ways it impacts people. By removing personhood, whether that be of the author or of the ‘subject,’ an instrumental piece of information that informs the process of creation is silenced. I am convinced that anthropology can fuel positive action. As a young anthropologist I want to be part of what that action could look like, especially when colonial works by authors such as Tylor and Frazer cast dark shadows over the discipline’s past, present and future. With my writing I want to contribute to “the work of creating a more equitable world.”¹² I am including four short stories that are inspired by my personal experiences and interviews. All except one are definitely fiction. The non-fiction short story is about my personal experiences with religion. I created people, experiences, and emotions that do not exist, but are inspired by the people I met and interviewed. Proponents of ‘conventional’ writing often dismiss fiction, because it is not truthful, it is made-up, and thus not appropriate for the academia. However the same reasoning can be applied to the writing of any ethnographic text because

¹¹ Scott, “Experience,” pp. 25.

¹² Wolf, M., *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism and Ethnographic Responsibility*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, USA (1992), pp. 13.

reality can never be captured on paper, tape, or video. There is always something that is missing, and as ethnographers write the interpretations of their interpretations their work becomes an edited fictitious tale often assumed to be truthful and objective. By equating my ‘conventional’ chapters with my short story chapters I embrace this duality and acknowledge this process of fabrication.

The act of creating fictional people and partially fictional stories inspired by real events renders unknown experiences visible without exposing anyone’s identity. This is particularly important because of the relatively small size of Baha’i communities. Many members of the Faith are intimately familiar with each other’s lives. Partially fictional accounts ensure anonymity and, in doing so, safeguard the people who trusted me. Creative writing firmly centers personhood in a discipline that studies people. “The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as a shape-changer, is a *nahual*, a shaman.”¹³ Anzaldua shows there still is power embedded within the process of creative writing, a power similar to what is present in other ‘conventional’ styles of writing that produce a type of knowledge implicated in processes of identity-based power distribution. The difference is found in the consequences of the created work. Anzaldua aims to create a shamanistic experience because her goal as an author is to make the reader weep, scream, cry, raise their fists, and feel. Through her writing she imbues these feelings with the complicated notions of borderlands and *mestizo* and queerness, and Anzaldua deconstructs ideas of hermetic categories and exposes the oppression and liberation woven into language and place. Anzaldua inhabits the borderlands she passionately writes about, but Borofsky – a white, straight man – writes that many anthropologists “standing at the margins of

¹³ Anzaldua, G., *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, USA [1987] (2007), pp. 93.

one culture and speaking for those across the borderlands of difference in another – speaking, that is to say, for those who are deemed ‘different’ from ‘us’ – is not the politically innocent experience it was perhaps once considered to be.”¹⁴ I agree with Borofsky that anthropologists themselves inhabit a specific locus that can be conceived as a borderland, but the anthropological borderlands are of a different nature. They are entered by an intellectual choice made possible through the privilege of having received an education.

Borderlands are also relevant when considering my short stories. Anthropological works utilize temporal borderlands – spaces where anthropologists and the people they work with meet – to translate experience into text. Through this act of translation, the interpretation of the interpretation of the anthropologist can be transported from one place to the next. I use the short stories as borderlands to translate one experience, that of a Baha’i I interviewed, through text into my interpretation. The short stories become a vehicle to cross borderlands with. This is why the emotions Anzaldua evokes have a place in anthropological text, because their power maintains the humanity of the people studied as these texts cross the borderlands.

It is clear I firmly believe in the potentiality of writing creatively, but I also find that academic and creative writing both need to be examined critically and carefully applied to form a powerful and effective body of work. This is why I am extensively writing about the place of creative writing in my thesis. Sometimes it seems that critiques of the power found in ‘conventional’ writing assume that oppressive power is absent in different modes of writing. “The presentation of interpretation and analysis is inseparably bound up with the systematic and vivid representation of a world that seems total and real to the reader,”¹⁵ which is a world

¹⁴ Borofsky, R., Kane, H.K., Obeyesekere, G., Sahlins, M., “CA Forum on Theory in Anthropology: Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins [and comments and reply], *Current Anthropology*, vol. 38, no. 2 (April, 1997), pp. 263.

¹⁵ Marcus and Cushman, “Ethnographies,” pp. 29.

constructed largely by what the author offers the reader. Authorial power does not disappear in the text but rather is transformed, and this transformation does not mean that it escapes the hegemonic notions found in ‘conventional’ writing. A good example is *Euphoria: a Novel* by Lily King. *Euphoria* provides an account of a fictional anthropologist inspired by the life of Margaret Mead. The power of *Euphoria* is that it renders the experiences of the anthropologists visible, and by doing so the particular experiences that supposedly create ‘objective knowledge’ become evident. The process of anthropology is centered in the novel, and this centering allows the author to acknowledge the frustrations and anger and joy of fieldwork and complicate the notions of producing knowledge. *Euphoria* also illustrates how in early anthropology indigenous people were still very much seen as props to white and western anthropologists as opposed to individual human beings. Unfortunately King also perpetuates ethnocentric and colonial notions because extensive knowledge of anthropology is required to understand the complexity of narrative employed in the novel, and that knowledge is not accessible nor available to many. This example illustrates what a possible purpose of writing styles can be, but to retain a level of caution is paramount to avoid of exotifying and sensationalizing narratives.

To continue the engagement with the critiques on creative writing I will elaborate on some of the particular stylistic choices I made in my stories. I have attempted to create narratives that disrupt hegemonic styles of writing and center personhood in ways that form a cohesive whole. This holistic approach, I believe, is necessary to understand the short stories. The interplay of different voices that I incorporated into my thesis are required for a polyphonic work, and thus I use these stories to interpret and present what ‘conventional’ writing could not satisfyingly depict. There are no neutral words, and I choose each word in my stories with a particular purpose, as is the case with my ‘conventional’ writing. However as Fujiwara shows

that in writing “we are often faced with the dilemma of stripping our subjects of their agency and constructing an over-characterization of victimization,”¹⁶ creative writing is no exception. In my attempt to avoid the harmful acts Fujiwara was worried about, I acknowledge that I use a particular lexicon and syntax that creates a specific set of Baha’is that do not exist outside my words. It is important to note that regardless of writing style I would engage in that process. However because creative writing centers personhood, I need to pay more attention to create characters the Baha’is I worked with could identify with. The stories are all based on experiences people shared with me, and it becomes extremely important to not return to the mistakes of creating one-dimensional characters. As Wolf claims, anthropology is inevitably tied up in the process of creating an ‘other,’ and this means that anthropological writers have a responsibility to create an ‘other’ that is as close to reality for its readers. By doing so readers can and will notice difference, but will recognize the mutually intelligible humanity of the audience, the people the text is about, and the grey space between those groups.

The narrative voice is another key aspect of storytelling, and in my stories I choose to use the personal voice. As Wolf points out, “an ethnographer is guided by certain rules of evidence – call them scientific if one must – that are assumed by her readers. Her competence in meeting these standards is another issue. A writer of fiction, however, has another set of rules – all she need do is tell a convincing story. The novelist or short story writer is in total control of the information presented, the attitudes and motives of her characters, and the sequence of events.”¹⁷ I mostly agree with Wolf in this statement, although it seem naïve to assume that any author can ever possess full control over a text. In line with Foucauldian thought and with the concept of

¹⁶ Fujiwara, L., *Mothers without Citizenship: Asian Immigrant Families and the Consequences of Welfare Reform*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA (2008), pp. 70.

¹⁷ Wolf, *Thrice*, pp. 56.

experience provided by Joan Scott, it becomes apparent that readers create a particular experience by engaging with written work. Through this experience readers construct a set of meanings and interpretations formulated by their personal convictions, histories, identities, and thought processes over which the author cannot exert control. By consciously choosing a different authorial identity I am able to break a set of rules I cannot in ‘conventional’ writing. I am allowed to suspend notions of evidence in order to attempt to “extend the scope of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and gives voice to those who have been systematically rendered invisible.”¹⁸ Evidently this does not mean I am free to do what I want because of the restrictions I have placed on myself, for I would fail my ethical code and my purpose of furthering what I consider an equitable world. By intermittingly suspending particular voices I create a space of personal polyphony that captures a dynamism otherwise lost. My thesis includes legitimate interpretations that otherwise would never have been uttered. Wolf uses a similar approach in *A Thrice Told Tale* and utilizes numerous voices to tell different stories with different purposes. She defends herself by stating: “I do not speak for them but about them, even though I occasionally use their voices to tell my story.”¹⁹ She does not claim she becomes the people she writes about, or that she speaks for them, rather she utilizes an authorial tool to convey her interpretation. Similarly, I do not claim to be Baha’i, and when I borrow the voices of the people I worked with and I am writing about, it is not to speak for but rather to speak with to elucidate my own interpretation. If the counterargument to the usage of this voice is that writing like this is unethical, I’d retort by stating that authorial authority is always dangerous. Whenever we write a text, regardless of the perspective assumed by the writer, through a process of reviewing and editing, a particular interpretation of interpretation is produced. Reality nor truth is singular. I am

¹⁸ Fujiwara, *Mothers*, pp. 54.

¹⁹ Wolf, *Thrice*, pp. 11.

not arguing we all lay down our pens out of fear, but to overcome paralysis and make space for a variety of voices in order to have the widest range of interpretations possible.

My final short story is a non-fiction story about myself. If I want to render the experiences of the anthropologist and the anthropologized people visible, I myself have to also exit the shadows. Several factors that happened before and after my fieldwork have been key in formulating my specific interpretations. If I am to relinquish some of my authorial power, I must become vulnerable. I will not center this thesis around me, for it is not an autobiography, but I am omnipresent in these words. My last story is almost a *memento mori* in the sense that it reveals aspects of my life as an author, aspects that expose me as an imperfect and complex person. The process of producing written work has a certain ahistoricity to it, and I refuse to be complicit in any static system. By including a deeply personal short story I humanize myself, and my identity as a person that grows up, feels joy and sorrow, and will eventually die, will not be absent from the text.

To understand the complex ways in which the Baha'i Faith engages both the local and the global I will first provide a historical background of the Faith, as well as a background on the place of religion in general and the Baha'i Faith in particular in Latvia, Lithuania, Samoa and the Netherlands. After discussing my methodology, I will present a theoretical discussion about Foucauldian concepts of authorship and differing approaches to globalization as argued by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, and Ira Rifkin. I will continue with a short story situated in the Netherlands followed by an analysis of the usage of particular quotes from the Baha'i Faith and how these quotes are tied to notions of authorship and foster global community. The next chapter will be a short story narrating fictional experiences in Latvia. The fourth chapter will look at specific cultural practices within the Baha'i community and at the

particular integration of both Baha'i and local ritualized actions. A short story located in Samoa is the fifth chapter. The penultimate chapter combines the internal and external factors discussed in the previous chapters to analyze the particular ways the Baha'i faith creates and demarcates community. This will be followed by a self-reflexive and personal short story that clarifies the particular experience I had as an anthropologist. This will provide a tool to understand how my specific experiences and interpretations came to be. The intricacies of the Baha'i Faith have for a long time been rendered invisible. This occurred because of a variety of reasons ranging from an unwillingness to engage academically with the Faith to a general dismissal of non-dominant faith traditions particularly in globalization discourse, but as the Faith is growing and gaining a louder global voice it is important to understand its significance and to acknowledge the range of ways it complicates and deepens anthropological narratives.

Methodology
on what, where, and how

For my thesis I conducted research in three Baha'i communities in three different locations in the world. I will elaborate on how I was able to gather information from these Baha'i communities and discuss some of the ethical implications of my research and written work. I used traditional anthropological methods as opposed to other disciplinary and interdisciplinary methodologies, a choice I will explain. My methodology is based on participatory observation and qualitative interviewing in three separate fieldwork sites. These sites are Latvia, Lithuania, Samoa, and the Netherlands. I count Latvia and Lithuania as one fieldwork site based on the shared history of these two nations as well as the research I conducted there, which involved the two extremely small Baha'i communities that seemed to overlap significantly in membership and activities. For example half of the people I interviewed at the youth camp in Elniakampis, Lithuania, were Latvian Baha'is.

There are several reasons why I am writing about Latvia, Lithuania, Samoa, and the Netherlands. As I have Dutch citizenship and studied abroad in Samoa, the Netherlands and Samoa were useful as I either had already gathered information or had relatively easy access to it. Latvia and Lithuania stood out because their respective National Spiritual Assemblies were

the only European ones that responded positively to my requests to work with them. It goes to show how often luck serves an essential ingredient to do anthropological research.

However the value of these three locations is not entirely derived solely from a series of fortunate coincidences. The three different sites each have distinct localized histories and particular global positionalities that inform the experiences of the Baha'i communities in these respective places. The differences between these places caused my multi-sited approach to have more depth and breadth concerning the experience of Baha'is. The Netherlands is a country with a colonial past from which it still reaps benefits; it is one of the wealthiest countries on earth and has a relatively strong voice within the European Union – a global economic, cultural, and political powerhouse. Latvia and Lithuania are former members of the USSR. Both these countries received independence relatively recent and face similar ethno-political movements in post-communist spaces. Within the European Union these countries do not hold the same political weight as for example the Netherlands. Samoa is a country that was formerly colonized and received independence after World War II. The country is considered a developing nation. Samoa is navigating post-colonial cultural, political and economic discourse and syncretizing indigenous and other global ethnoscapes. A commonality is that all sites are comparatively small geographically, although vary greatly in population size.

My access to a diverse range of people and events was largely serendipitous or based on perseverance. The first site in which I was able to conduct research was Samoa, where the assistant to the academic director of my study abroad program, organized by the School of International Training (SIT), was a New Zealand Baha'i. In the beginning we had several conversations about how she perceived the tenets of the Faith and her diverse experiences as a Baha'i in Samoa. After I realized I wanted to write my independent study on a topic regarding

the Faith, she introduced me to many people of the Samoan and American Samoan Baha'i communities. I was able to spend several weekends on the temple grounds in Tiapapata and participate in prayer services and children days. The Baha'is I was able to interview here ranged in gender, age, chiefly title, education, and class.

In the Netherlands I contacted the secretary of the Dutch National Spiritual Assembly. With assistance of the Hamill Fund I travelled to The Hague, where the Dutch National Spiritual Assembly is headquartered. I was able to interview the Dutch secretary who provided me with the contact information of various Baha'is in the Netherlands. Because of financial limitations and logistical obstacles I also interviewed several Baha'is via skype and I had the chance to visit some other Baha'is who lived nearby my hometown in Friesland. The latter was especially unexpected as Friesland is one of the more sparsely populated provinces with a relatively marginal Baha'i population.

As I mentioned before, the National Spiritual Assemblies of Latvia and Lithuania were the only ones who replied to my emails requesting help with my research. Perseverance was especially key in this situation, for email exchanges were infrequent and often slightly confusing. After having spent time with the Latvian and Lithuanian Baha'i communities I learned the several reasons for this confusion. The Latvian National Spiritual Assembly needed a middle-woman to translate my inquiries into Russian, and then translate the reply into English. Additionally both National Spiritual Assemblies had to converse with their communities whether or not I was welcome. This significantly slowed down the communication between me and the communities of Latvia and Lithuania, but ensured that the Baha'is I did interview were well-informed and gladly participated. In Riga I was able to interview a variety of Baha'i members based on the contacts of the National Spiritual Assembly's spokesperson. Lithuania was a great

success as I was able to join a youth camp that also had activities for older Baha'is in Elniakampis attended by Baha'is from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and an array of different nations such as Germany, Iran, and Bolivia. Overall I conducted 29 distinct interviews and had many informal conversations and participated in a wide variety of events like prayer circles and discussions of scripture.

I considered the traditional anthropological methods of participatory observation and qualitative interviewing as the most appropriate to gather the information necessary for my project. These methods provide interviewees with the space to explain and elaborate specific ideas, phrases and experiences and share information with me that has more depth and breadth, while simultaneously providing a space to decline to answer or ask for clarification. For me, these benefits outweighed some of the possible limitations, such as a lack of anonymity as there is direct and identifying contact between the anthropologist and the 'other,' and the possibilities of a particular interpretation of my verbal or corporal language skewing the results. Other methods, such as conducting surveys or using other quantitative data are extremely useful in many research projects, however for this particular project those methods fail to capture individual human experiences. The interview renders visible the emotions of the people I worked with, whether those be verbal or non-verbal. The type of story I am trying to tell centers such personhood in this academic endeavor. This is why qualitative anthropological methodology was the tool that best fit this project. Of course this does not mean qualitative research such a participatory observation is perfect, and it is important to recognize and acknowledge its limitations, but in this case it provides the finest ink and the sharpest quill.

It is important to review the ethical implications of my research, especially as I am centering an activist mission in my work. Each person I worked with during my fieldwork was

made explicitly aware of the exact intent of my research and what I would receive in fulfillment of my thesis. The people I interviewed were also aware of the voluntary nature of participation and were provided with several options regarding ending or altering their participation. They could opt not to participate, halt participation during the interview, or decide to not answer certain questions. Additionally all participants were provided with contact information in case any of them changed their mind regarding the information they shared with me. Although the Baha'i communities in this research are not currently persecuted and all participants agreed to have their identity disclosed, I choose to maintain anonymity. As I will return this work to the communities I worked with, I do not want to single out any member of these Baha'i communities to avoid possible conflict depending on their words or my interpretation of them. Lastly, all the interviews in Samoa and most of the interviews in Latvia and Lithuania were conducted in English. The interviews in the Netherlands were conducted by me in Dutch. Several interviews in Latvia and Lithuania were conducted in Russian and Lithuanian with the assistance of a translator.

Reciprocity is an important concept in studies that incorporate qualitative research. I met and interviewed kind and generous people that agreed to share their deeply personal experiences with me, and they allowed me to place them under an intellectual microscope and produce this work. I did not have the funds to pay the people that assisted, hosted, or translated for me, but I assured every single person that my research would return to the Baha'i community and would become accessible to anyone who might have a desire to read it. Many Baha'is I talked to expressed their gratitude for the research, and were excited about the prospect of an academic work incorporating their experiences. Additionally, reciprocity was embedded in my participatory observation as I contributed wherever I could, whether that be discussions, prayer

circles, or chores. I also believe there is a sincere and tangible reciprocity in writing about the Baha'is I talked to as complex and multi-dimensional individuals. Lastly, I asked them to read the final work and not hold back with their comments. The feedback of these diverse Baha'i communities will only enhance future research.

History
a sense of place

The key to a good story are the intimate details, where intimate “means noting details the reader might not see or imagine without your insight.”²⁰ Samoa, the Netherlands, Latvia and Lithuania all have rich histories that imbue the very soil on which these people live their lives with layers of meaning. I will try to not just present you with raw historical data about what, who and when, but I will also try to connect it to the actuality of daily life; the why. This chapter won’t be a dry exposé of assumed historical facts but rather an attempt to increase your understanding of who these people are, or at least how I *perceive* them to be.

Although the Baha’i Faith is present in some capacity in 233 sovereign countries and dependent territories,²¹ its widespreadness has not translated into an archive containing the different histories of how the Faith arrived and grew in vastly different places. Because of this, my main source of information about how Baha’i communities were established came from the interviews I conducted. Sometimes the collection of these histories was relatively easy. One

²⁰ Gutkind, L., *You Can’t Make this Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between*, Da Capo Press/Lifelong Books, Boston, USA (2012), pp. 128.

²¹ Egerton, C., “Humanity’s Coming of Age: A Baha’i View of the Process toward World Peace,” in *Peace on Earth: The Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict Studies*, edited by Thomas Matyók, Mauren Flaherty, Hamdesa Tuso, Jessica Seheni, Sean Byrne, Lexington Books, New York City, USA (2014), pp. 319.

person I interviewed in Lithuania told me she knew for a fact that she was the second person of her country to convert. Sometimes it was more difficult, like in the Netherlands where the community is over a century old. Occasionally I heard ‘facts’ that contradicted other ‘facts,’ but that only goes to show how history is a social construction that only exists in dynamic pluralities.

The Baha’i Faith

In 1844 in Shiraz, Persia, Mirza Ali Muhammad proclaimed himself Bab (Arabic for door) and told his followers he fulfilled an Islamic messianic prophecy and was a forerunner of an even greater prophet.²² The Bab created a new Islam-derived movement with writings that were increasingly mystical and philosophical. Babism grew quickly, and in a few years the new religion amounted to approximately four percent of the Persian population.²³ In 1848 the Bab escaped an increasingly intolerant Isfahan and declared himself *Imam Mahdi* – the promised messianic prophet. This messianic claim dangerously ripped Babism away from existing Islamic traditions, which refused to recognize the Bab. The clerical establishment could not execute the Bab for he had already amassed many followers and martyring him could prove to be dangerous, so he was ridiculed, humiliated, and placed in jail in rural Persia.²⁴ The Bab continued to proselytize and the rift between Babism and Islam grew more pronounced. This development caused Babism to radicalize, especially given that “as the Babi movement expanded, and particularly as it made significant inroads into particular urban populations, it necessarily entered

²² Saiedi, N., *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Bab*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Canada (2008), pp. 1.

²³ Stockman, R. H., *The Baha’i Faith: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Bloomsbury, London, UK (2012), pp. 78.

²⁴ Smith, P., *A Short History of the Baha’i Faith*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, UK and Rockport, USA (1996), pp. 32.

into the complex and frequently violent networks of communal rivalries and partisan politics, in which religious difference might exacerbate existing antagonisms.”²⁵ Smith combines this explanation with the Babi desire to lead a *jihad* that through the recent theological developments was becoming increasingly violent. This atmosphere of militancy produced Babis that committed violent acts in name of their faith throughout Persia and thus the Babis became increasingly suspect. Eventually the religion collapsed and many Babis were killed by the Persian Qajar regime. If it was not for the son of a prominent Babi, this theological tradition might have disappeared completely.

Enter Mirza Husayn Ali, who in 1863 declared himself Baha’u’llah, Arabic for the glory of god.²⁶ He claimed to be the next prophet – or manifestation – of god. In his writing Baha’u’llah noted that manifestations of god arise in places of disunity, and he deemed Persia in the 1860s to be such a place as numerous religious sects fought each other while the Ottoman Empire lurked hungrily behind its borders. During a prison sentence Baha’u’llah received based on his affiliation with the remnants of Babism, god revealed his plans to Baha’u’llah. As he recounts;

For much of the time the heavy weights of my chains and the awful stench of the place kept me awake, but when I did sleep, I felt that a torrent flowed down from my head over my body and every limb was set afire. I then ‘recited what no man could bear to hear.’ I also saw a sweet-voiced heavenly maiden, who informed all in creation that I was the ‘Beauty of God’ and the power of His sovereignty. A voice assured me that God would render me victorious.²⁷

After this prison sentence Baha’u’llah was banished from Persia and moved to the Ottoman city of Baghdad. Baha’u’llah started to reinvigorate Babism, but after a short amount of

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 40.

²⁶ Momen, M., *A Short Introduction to the Baha’i Faith*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, UK and Rockport, USA (1997), pp. 119.

²⁷ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 52.

time retreated to Kurdistan to live as a dervish among Sufi mystics.²⁸ When he returned to Baghdad in 1856 he expanded his previous efforts concerning Babism, but through the followers he attracted and his theological approaches it became clear that Baha'u'llah was the prophet of a new quickly growing faith, which removed itself from the violent history of the Babis. A reason for this popularity was that “unlike the writings of the Bab, most of the writings of Baha'u'llah were readily accessible to ordinary literate Iranians.”²⁹ As the number of followers of Baha'u'llah's new faith grew, he was exiled again as he started posing a threat. Although “[Baha'is] would reject the label of fundamentalism, claiming simply to be true Baha'is,”³⁰ Azali Babis – named after their leader Subh-i Azal – had planted seeds of distrust and suspicion into the Ottoman government because they believed Baha'u'llah had moved too far from Babism. Weary of both groups, the Ottomans sent Subh-i Azal to Famagusta, in what is now Cyprus, and Baha'u'llah to Istanbul, then to Edirne, and finally Akko, in present-day Israel. There, in 1873 Baha'u'llah wrote the *Kitabi Aqdas*, the holiest book of the Baha'i Faith, and passed away in 1892 in the nearby town of Bahji.³¹

Baha'u'llah appointed his eldest son Abdu'l-Baha as his successor. After the Ottoman monarchy was overthrown by the Young Turks and freedom of movement was restored to the Baha'is, Abdu'l-Baha oversaw the initial construction of a shrine for the Bab on Mount Carmel and helped Baha'i communities form what later would become National Spiritual Assemblies.³² Probably Abdu'l-Baha most significant contribution was spreading the Faith beyond the Ottoman Empire to Western countries like the United States. Momen argues that this was a

²⁸ Stockman, *The Baha'i*, pp. 90.

²⁹ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 53.

³⁰ Cole, J.R.I., “Fundamentalism in the Contemporary U.S. Baha'i Community,” *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 43, no.3, (March, 2002), pp. 196.

³¹ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 125.

³² Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 79.

“turning point in the development of the Baha’i Faith. It demonstrated that the Baha’i Faith was capable of appealing to people outside of [...] the Middle East.”³³ The First World War halted many of Abdu’l-Baha’s plans. He returned to Haifa, where he passed away in 1921.

Baha’u’llah’s grandson and Abdu’l-Baha’s son Shoghi Effendi was appointed as the next successor – or Guardian of the Faith.³⁴ During Effendi’s guardianship “there were several episodes of persecution of Baha’i Communities”³⁵ particularly in Iran and the Soviet Union, and the destruction of sacred sites in Iran and Iraq. Effendi realized a new course of action was required in order to safeguard the Faith. Effendi started launching plans to spread the faith more globally, such as the First Seven Year plan, which intended to spread the Faith to every single US State and South American republic, and the Ten Year Crusade to create a Baha’i presence in essentially every country or territory on earth.³⁶ Shoghi Effendi passed away unexpectedly in 1957. The Ten Year Crusade was brought to completion by the Hands of the Cause of God, who had all been appointed by Effendi. Afterwards the Universal House of Justice took over in 1963 as envisaged by Baha’u’llah and after extensive prior planning by Effendi.³⁷

Since 1963 the Universal House of Justice has been the supreme structure governing the Faith, and an essential part of being a Baha’i is obliging the counsels and laws it publishes.³⁸ All of its decisions are derived and inspired by the writings of the prophet and the interpretations of his son and grandson. Danesh clarifies that “when the Universal House of Justice sets out to legislate, therefore, it turns to the writings of Baha’u’llah to reaffirm the ideas of evolution and

³³ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 126.

³⁴ Derkse, R., *What is the Baha’i faith? An introduction for young people*, translated from Dutch by Olive McKinley, George Ronald, Publisher, Oxford, United Kingdom (1987), pp. 132.

³⁵ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 127.

³⁶ Stockman, *The Baha’i*, pp. 145, 150-151.

³⁷ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 128.

³⁸ Buck, C., *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha’i Faith*, State University of New York Press, Albany, USA (1999), pp. 188.

unity that must guide its decisions.”³⁹ Baha’is do not consider the Universal House of Justice in itself divine, but rather that it has paramount authority to guide the Faith. Shoghi Effendi extensively wrote about what he considered to be the ultimate goal and purpose of the institution;

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation – such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.⁴⁰

I will return to the goal of unity later in this thesis, but it is important at this stage to stress the idea that the Universal House of Justice was created with the explicit intent to become the leading institution in the world the Baha’is are creating. The Universal House of Justice consists exclusively of nine men,⁴¹ a strange gender-based exclusionary policy for a religion that actively promotes gender equality. This policy is defended because Baha’is believe that ‘it simply is the will of god.’ This supragovernmental structure was deemed fit by Baha’i leadership because it maintained some monarchical aspects but without the high likelihood of dictatorship and the associated outcomes of war, and it incorporated aspects of western liberal democracy, but was not an exact copy because of the fear that an exact replica would produce the materialism and secularism the Faith tried to avoid.⁴² Kazemzadeh describes this governmental structure of the Faith as following; “we must always remember that our institutions are an unusual and unique combination of theocracy in the best sense of the term with democracy.”⁴³

³⁹ Danesh, R., “Internationalism and Divine Law: A Baha’i Perspective,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2003-2004), pp. 230.

⁴⁰ Warburg, M., “Baha’i: A Religious Approach to Globalization,” *Social Compass*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1999), pp. 50.

⁴¹ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 116.

⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 70-71.

⁴³ Cole, “Fundamentalism,” pp. 201.

The presence of god within the structure is paramount because, to Baha'is, a faithless system is a broken system, and although the members of these structures are elected, the Faith must remain central to their pseudo-democratic endeavors.

The members of the Universal House of Justice are elected by the National Spiritual Assemblies from around the world.⁴⁴ As soon as there are nine Baha'is in a location, they are encouraged to form a Spiritual Assembly. Every nation and territory has their own National Spiritual Assemblies that represent their respective place of origin. These structures regulate and bind together Baha'i communities, especially as there is no priesthood in the Faith. There is no clergy in order to avoid possible hierarchies and abuse of religious interpretations. In the first few years the Universal House of Justice launched ambitious and successful plans to continue spreading the Faith, reestablishing and expanding existing communities, providing new translations, and improving educational opportunities and activities. The Faith created a curriculum called the Ruhi method, which contained several books about the different aspects of the Faith. Using these books was a way to consolidate the Faith for recent converts and increase the knowledge of Baha'is about their own religion.⁴⁵ The Universal House of Justice has also operated through Plans that last three, five, or eight years. Currently it is the Third Five Year plan (2011-2016) which entails "a renewed focus on social action and a new emphasis on public discourse."⁴⁶ This marks a new chapter in the religion because now the focus is slowly shifting away from spreading the message to consolidating communities and pursuing social action.

The Universal House of Justice's main responsibility is furthering the central goal of the Faith – unity. This has often been summarized "as teaching three onenesses: the oneness of god,

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 197.

⁴⁵ Stockman, *The Baha'i*, pp. 193-194.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 203.

of religion and of humanity.”⁴⁷ The oneness of god refers to the monotheistic theological interpretation of the divine as proclaimed by Baha’u’llah and other manifestations of god. The oneness of religion speaks to the central idea of progressive revelation, which means that the divine sent different manifestations of god to earth, each with different messages appropriate for a specific place and time. This means that the prophets of the major world religions – Moses, Abraham, Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster – are considered to have all been sent by the same god. Derkse explains the connections between the prophets Baha’is believe in and the concept of a progressive revelation: “[The prophets’] teachings are in essence the same. The differences depend on the amount of knowledge they have already revealed and the way in which they have explained it. And this is because the messengers of god lived at different times and among different peoples.”⁴⁸ Warburg adds that “the Baha’is firmly believe that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that divine revelation is a continuous and progressive process, and that the great religions of the world represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.”⁴⁹ As there is an awareness of the differences between the prophets, there is also an appreciation that different historical and spatial identities required different methods in which god’s teachings could be revealed, appropriately adopted and comprehensively understood. This is evident in the inclusion of other sacred texts such as the Bhagavad Gita in the Baha’i canon.

The last oneness that is essential to the Faith and its goal is the oneness of humanity. It derives from the conviction that “all human beings are equally the children of god.”⁵⁰ The equality of people is a pillar of Baha’i Faith, and an example of this tenet is gender equality.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 9.

⁴⁸ Derkse, *What is*, pp. 29.

⁴⁹ Warburg, “Baha’i,” pp. 50.

⁵⁰ Smith, *A Short History*, pp.86.

Baha'u'llah writes that "men and women have an equal rank and station before god."⁵¹ Similarly, Baha'is oppose religious, national, racial, classist and political prejudices and hierarchies. Smith argues that this is why "in marked contrast to all forms of religious exclusivism, the Baha'is are bidden to associate with the followers of all religions in friendship and peace."⁵² This has resulted in educational programs and other activities being available to non-Baha'is. Momen outlines the importance of unity for the future Baha'is imagine, writing that "a disunited and fragmented society is one with little progress or development, either of the individual or of society as a whole. The energies of the society are consumed by its divisions and conflicts."⁵³ A fractured society goes directly against the will of god, for as Abdu'l-Baha writes; "the earth has one surface. God has not divided this surface by boundaries and barriers to separate races and peoples"⁵⁴ and thus the goal becomes to create a society that is cohesive and inclusive, a society where unity and diversity are the organizing principles of community.⁵⁵ A key aspect of this transformation are that the oppressive ideas and separating institutions must be replaced with new systems, a process the Faith acknowledges can be disruptive and destabilizing.⁵⁶

Although Holy Wars and *jihads* have been explicitly forbidden by Baha'u'llah,⁵⁷ it by no means signifies that Baha'is are passive. The Faith expects that its practitioners will not just pray for the world as imagined in the writings, but also direct every single act in their life towards fulfilling that goal of a new world. Baha'i sayings like "let deeds, not words, be your adorning," and "the essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds,"⁵⁸ signify the idea of

⁵¹ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 37.

⁵² Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 73.

⁵³ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 36.

⁵⁵ Danesh, "Internationalism," pp. 230.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 233.

⁵⁷ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 67.

⁵⁸ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 19.

action in worship. Danesh calls these continuous attempts to transform society in name of the Faith ‘micro shifts’ and he argues that “micro shifts are contained and contextualized by the revelatory cycle in which they exist and the specific guidance and focus of that revelation.”⁵⁹ According to Danesh, these micro shifts catalyze change to materialize a new era of humanity which is assured through faith and revelation while articulated and distributed through scripture. The Baha’i scholar Miller-Muro said during one of her speeches; “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. Such endeavors are distinguished, then, by their stated purpose to promote the material well-being of the population, in addition to its spiritual welfare.”⁶⁰ Through this brief historic and theological discussion in this chapter I argue that the central truth in the Baha’i Faith is a divinely ordained approach to foster a unified world infused with particular definitions of social justice and with the prerequisite that monotheistic spirituality is embedded in all action.

Samoa

For a long time Samoans were perceived as godless, as “a race of bloodthirsty and treacherous savages”⁶¹ by Westerners. A closer examination of religion and society through the few comprehensive resources available from the pre-colonial and early-colonial time periods provide a different image of a socially and culturally developed civilization. Meleisea argues that

⁵⁹ Danesh, “Internationalism,” pp. 241.

⁶⁰ Miller-Muro, L., “Knowledge into Action: the Baha’i Imperative to Serve Humanity,” the 31st Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture, delivered at the 38th Association of Baha’i Studies-North America Conference in Toronto, Canada (delivered on 07/11/2014), pp. 6.

⁶¹ *Cyclopedia of Samoa (illustrated)*, the, first published by McCarron, Stewart & Co., Sydney, Australia (1907), reprinted by Commercial Printers Ltd., Apia, Western Samoa (1984), pp. 2.

“Samoan [pre-colonial] religion was rich and complex but differed in expression from many other parts of Polynesia,”⁶² and provided Samoans early on with a cohesive and distinct identity. This indigenous faith tradition had no outwardly expressions of religiosity such as temples or idols, although there was great value attached to place. There was a priesthood, which included both men and women⁶³ and a complex spiritual hierarchy of *Atua*, the gods, *Tupua*, the deified ancestral chiefs and *Aitu*, the descendants of gods and other types of spirits⁶⁴ which Tagaloa – who “dwelt in the expanse; he made all things and he was alone (there); not any sky, not any country”⁶⁵ – presided over. Many theologians have argued that because of the hierarchical position of Tagaloa, the ancient religion was monotheistic and that this allowed for a quick absorption of Christian rituals and ideas.

The presence of a spiritual hierarchy was reflected in societal constructions as is evident in the *fa'amatai* – the chiefly system that governed and governs Samoan society. In the hierarchy of Samoan culture the *matai* are at the top of the pyramid, but even in this system there are differences that expose how religion was entwined with culture. There are the *ali'i*, the high chiefs, who have sacred ancestral titles filled with *mana*, sacred power, as opposed to the *tulafale*, the orator chiefs, who have secular titles. Another example is the *feagaiga*, the relationship between brother and sister, where the sister is perceived as sacred and the brother as secular.⁶⁶ In this pre-Christian hierarchical society some women faced institutionalized oppression, while others were on equal footing with the *matai*. Femininity was strictly hierarchized, and the status of women was often tied to those of men. For example the daughter

⁶² Meleisea, M., *Lagaga: a Short History of Western Samoa*, The Samoa History Project, Apia, Western Samoa (1983), pp. 35.

⁶³ *Ibid*, pp. 36.

⁶⁴ *Cyclopedia*, pp. 41.

⁶⁵ Kamu, L., *The Samoan culture and the Christian gospel*, Donna Lou Kamu, Suva, Fiji (1996), pp. 9.

⁶⁶ Meleisea, *Lagaga*, pp. 35.

of a paramount *matai* receives the *taupou* title and was the only person who was allowed to dance the renowned *taualuga*. “It was almost half-matriarchal, half-patriarchal,” explained one Samoan man to me as he attempted to make the complex hierarchical balances of gender in pre-Christian society more tangible. “The things made by women were essential”⁶⁷ as artifacts like the *ie Toga* – finely woven mats made from sennit – were some of the highest valued material goods in Samoan society, providing certain ranks of women with a high social status. These examples show how pre-contact Samoan culture had a myriad of constructed identities, which created a complex system with predetermined divinely ordained roles its inhabitants had to enact. Only a small number of near-mythological characters broke the mold. Aolele – whose name means cloud wanderer – absorbed her brother’s power and defeated the *matai* that were threatening her and became a woman that refused to play the rules she was taught. The centrality of pre-Christian religion shaped much of the culture that is present today. It is striking that their own goddess, Nafanua, prophesied that a new religion would end the rule of the old gods.⁶⁸

Christianity reached Samoa as “the commitment of Christian churches to saving the souls of newly discovered peoples led to the expansion of missionary activity into the new world.”⁶⁹ The first successful missionaries were John Williams and Charles Barff in 1830, and “by 1840 the three main islands of Upolu, Savai’i and Tutuila had been covered with a network of mission stations.”⁷⁰ Conversion was incredibly successful as Christianity and the *fa’amatai* complemented each other. MacPherson and MacPherson illustrate why this combination was central to the acceptance of Christianity; “elites had no interest in the promotion of ideas that

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 34.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 52.

⁶⁹ MacPherson, C. and MacPherson, L., *The warm winds of change: globalization in contemporary Samoa*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, New Zealand (2012), pp. 29.

⁷⁰ *Cyclopedia*, pp. 68.

would have undermined their personal standing, and maintained a balance between a traditional conservatism that protected their status and the adoption of certain ideas that they embodied in the *fa'asamoa* in ways that obscured their origins and, over time, made them seem part of it.”⁷¹ In the absence of the choice whether or not to conform to colonialism, this quote shows how the *matai* retained a level of agency as they adopted the foreign religion and naturalized its place in Samoan culture to legitimize and cement their rule. In the political and cultural landscape of the time, it was an intelligent move to simultaneously appease the threatening and powerful Europeans while maintaining a degree of power. As Samoa is a communal society, and a *matai* rules his family and community, the *matai*'s decision to convert necessitated that his *aiga* – or family – followed. This catalyzed widespread conversion. “Christianity,” Ma’ilo writes, “was so completely embraced in Samoa that it is now seen to be a central institution, and indeed a pillar of village life, and few if any people routinely think of it as an imported ideology.”⁷² Christianity became central to Samoan identity.

Christianity transformed many aspects of society as it became integrated with the previous indigenous religion. It created a focus on the nuclear family, changed the balance of pre-existing social categories, and devalued the power and rank women had in society and firmly placed them in a domestic sphere.⁷³ The Samoan construction of hierarchy was significantly altered in the new Christian society. For the redefined hierarchy placed women considerably lower on the social ladder than men, a move justified by the elite and their interpretations of the bible.

⁷¹ MacPherson and Macpherson, *Warm Winds*, pp. 117.

⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 106.

⁷³ Ma’ilo, M. Rev. Dr., “Religion and culture: the dialectic between Christianity and Samoan culture,” unpublished, pp. 6.

Samoa was the first Pacific island nation to achieve independence from its colonizer, which in Samoa's case was New Zealand – also referred to by its Maori name Aotearoa – and occurred on the first of January, 1963.⁷⁴ Field writes that “in 1961 the United Nations asked the people of Samoa whether they agreed with the new constitution that had been drawn up and whether they would be independent on the basis of it. It was a loaded question but Samoans, who had already formally rejected New Zealand citizenship, voted around 80 percent in favor of independence.”⁷⁵ After independence Samoa had to find ways to reconcile its traditional governmental forms with those expected by the United Nations in the new constitution. A particular point of contestation was the place of the *matai*. What ultimately ended up happening was that the *matai* of a village would form a *fono* – or village council. People could vote for possible members for the parliament out of the *matai* from these *fono*. This decision was applauded for it indigenized democracy in an innovative way. It was also critiqued because the *fa'amatai* has been a hereditary patriarchal system for a long time, and the requirement to hold a *matai* title to enter a *fono* effectively excluded non-indigenous Samoans (particularly descendants of Chinese laborers brought by the Germans) and women. This is evident in the fact that the participation of women in democratic processes is extremely low.⁷⁶

Samoa society is changing again as education has become more widely accessible. Samoans also live all over the world, and they bring new ideas with them when they return to the islands. “The emergence of public critique of mainstream churches,” MacPherson and MacPherson write, “seems to have been gaining momentum and focuses not so much on the

⁷⁴ Field, M., *Black Saturday: New Zealand's Tragic Blunders in Samoa*, Reed Publishing, Auckland, New Zealand/Aotearoa (2006), pp. 10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 201.

⁷⁶ Meleisea, L. M., Meleisea, P. S. and Meleisea E. (Eds.) *Samoa's Journey 1962-2012: Aspects of History*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, New Zealand (2012), pp. 68-71.

theology or organization of churches as on the conduct of some ministers, their families and certain officials.”⁷⁷ These authors argue that Samoans are questioning what the church dictates more publicly and in greater numbers than they did before. The naturalization of Christianity has drastically impacted gender relations in a way that women faced increased gender-based discrimination. Clarke argues that in Samoa “men have on occasion used custom [...] as a pretext for controlling women or denying them rights.”⁷⁸ Pacific women have produced powerful critiques scrutinizing these patriarchal institutions and relationships, as for example the Solomon Islander poet Jully Makini has done in her poem “A Man’s World”;

My brother can sit on the table, I mustn’t
He can say whatever he likes whenever he likes, I must keep quiet.
He can order me around like a slave, I must not back-chat.
He gives me his dirty clothes to wash, I wish he could wash mine!
If he sits on the front steps, I must go around the back door.⁷⁹

In this poem Jully Makini narrates the injustice she experienced because of the assigned gender roles that limit her but grant her male counterpart not just with freedom but with a set of privileges, which is justified by ‘culture.’ The gender discrimination, the louche practices of ministers, and the high financial cost associated with the major denominations has resulted the rise of new denominations and religions in Samoa. However in the atmosphere that was created as a result of the naturalization of Christianity and the cementing of patriarchal power questioning these institutions remains difficult as there “is no space for the village to question the

⁷⁷ MacPherson and MacPherson, *Warm Winds*, pp. 135.

⁷⁸ Clarke, W. C., “Pacific voices, Pacific views: poets as commentators on the contemporary Pacific,” *Study Abroad Samoa PSS Readings: Compiled for spring 2014 by Jackie Fa’asisila*, pp. 1-41.

⁷⁹ Makini, J., “A Man’s World,” in “Pacific voices, Pacific views: poets as commentators on the contemporary Pacific,” by Clarke, W.C., *Study Abroad Samoa PSS Readings: Compiled for spring 2014 by Jackie Fa’asisila*, pp. 16.

dignified authority of the *matai*”⁸⁰ because attempting to do so would not only be considered a personal attack on the *matai* but also on the *fa’asamoa*.

Many of these and other changes are tied to new forms of recent economic participation on a global level. Due to a lack of resources and opportunities in Samoa, many Samoans have gone, temporarily or permanently, to New Zealand, Australia, and the United States in search for more lucrative chances. Large communities have been established in these countries. The Samoan population of New Zealand was actually larger than the Samoan population of Samoa in 2011.⁸¹ This demographic change has placed a tension on Samoans when traditional institutions clash with the institutions Samoans encounter abroad.⁸² Samoa has also become a Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy (MIRAB) economy. Connell argues that this designation applies because in Samoa “remittances constitute some of the highest proportions of the gross national product anywhere in the world.”⁸³ The impact of having transplanted the largest source of revenue for the country overseas has redefined notions of productivity and land. It has created a culture where people are almost expected to leave the, and as the numbers indicate, most do.

The Baha’i Faith reached Samoa during the post-World War II expansion projects started by the Universal House of Justice. Through my interviews I learnt that it was the arrival of Lilian Wyss – an Australian Baha’i – in 1954 that marked the beginning of the Baha’i Faith in Samoa. This process was not without struggle as, similar to other Pacific countries, “[Baha’is] were

⁸⁰ Percival, G. S., “Exploring gender equality issues in Samoa,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Fallen Lizard Productions and Paradigm Documentaries, 2013, 21:32.

⁸¹ Meleisea, Meleisea, and Meleisea, *Samoa’s Journey*, pp. 124.

⁸² Lee, H., “Pacific Migration and Transnationalism: Historical Perspectives,” from *Migration and Transnationalism: Pacific Perspectives*, edited by Steve Tupai Francis and Helen Lee, ANU E press, Canberra, Australia (2009), pp. 30.

⁸³ Connell, “Pacific Islands in the Global Economy: Paradoxes of Migration and Culture,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 31 (2010), pp. 122.

chastised and claimed to have come to ‘destroy the Christian religion.’”⁸⁴ They experienced and occasionally still experience varying degrees of religious discrimination and persecution. The idea of religious discrimination was embedded in the process of establishing and maintaining peace and harmony. In this approach religious diversity was feared because diversity of thought was conflated with societal disruption. It was ironic that because of this ideology people of different religions were “sometimes ostracized, banished, or had their homes burnt down as punishment.”⁸⁵ These obstacles did not stop the growth of the Faith. A major event was the conversion of His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II in 1968, the first reigning monarch in the world to do so.⁸⁶ The Faith continued to grow and “in 1984, a Baha’i House of Worship, also known as the Mother Temple of the Pacific Islands, was completed in Samoa.”⁸⁷ The community in Samoa is expanding steadily and through its projects and work is reaching a significant amount of people. Currently the Baha’i community amounts to about 2% of the population, which is one of the highest per capita rates of Baha’i practitioners in the world.⁸⁸

The Netherlands

Northern Europe in general has a reputation of being relatively secular and the Netherlands fits that trend. Many scholars write about the collective secularization of the country, which has even led one sociologist to describe the country as “one nation without

⁸⁴ Ieuti, T., “The Kiribati Protestant Church and the new religious movements 1860-1985,” from *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*, by Finau, M., Ieuti, T., and Langi, J., University of the South Pacific Press, Suva, Fiji (1992), pp. 101.

⁸⁵ Meleisea, Meleisea, and Meleisea, *Samoa’s Journey*, pp. 81.

⁸⁶ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 150.

⁸⁷ Meleisea, Meleisea, and Meleisea, *Samoa’s Journey*, pp. 84.

⁸⁸ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 150.

god.”⁸⁹ Although the situation is more complex than this claim of mass atheism implies, there is a historical narrative that needs to be told to understand the current religious environment of the Low Countries. The 80-year war (1568-1648) against Catholic Spain created an independent largely Dutch Reformed “federation of principalities”⁹⁰ which had relative religious freedom based on its founding principles and decentralized government. However the independence war was not just a religious conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, as Knippenberg argues that “the [war] also was about juridical and fiscal autonomy.”⁹¹ After independence the Dutch no longer had to abide by Spanish laws and the merchants that fled from Antwerp to Amsterdam during the war ensure that Amsterdam “became the commercial and financial center of Northern Europe, and of European trade with the wider world.”⁹² The Netherlands became a wealthy colonial empire, especially due to the slave and spice trades, and it entered a time nowadays referred to as the Golden Century. This era was known not just for its burgeoning religious freedom and flourishing commerce, but also for its artistic tradition which included Rembrandt van Rijn, Frans Hals, and Johannes Vermeer.

The combination of the rise of the British Empire and Napoleonic conquest reduced the global status and power of the Netherlands. After the Batavian Revolution of 1795 the Netherlands became a centralized and unified Republic, which, after a brief French occupation, became an independent kingdom in 1813. This new kingdom maintained the same centralized political apparatus put in place by the Batavians and the French.⁹³ The constitution adopted in 1815 enshrined freedom of religion as one of the core values of the kingdom, which changed the

⁸⁹ Kennedy, J.C. and Zwemer, J.P., “Religion in the Modern Netherlands and the Problems of Pluralism,” *BMGN/LCHR*, vol. 125, no. 2-3 (July, 2010), pp. 240.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 241.

⁹¹ Knippenberg, H., “The Changing Relationship between State and Church/Religion in the Netherlands,” *GeoJournal*, vol. 67, no. 4 (2006), pp. 318.

⁹² Arblaster, P., *A History of the Low Countries*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, USA (2005), pp. 133.

⁹³ Knippenberg, “Changing Relationship,” 319-320.

status quo. Prior to the 1815 constitution, explicit religious powers governed municipalities and provinces, but now the government removed that religious power to ensure religious freedom. This governmental interference into how one would rule was not always without consequences. The independence of Belgium in 1839, de *afschieding* (separation) of the Dutch Reformed and *Gereformeerde* (literally, re-reformed) Churches, and the emigration of many orthodox Calvinists to the United States are all examples of the friction between the liberal government and its people.⁹⁴ Mijnhardt argues that “throughout most of the twentieth century the Netherlands would continue to be the most religious nation in Europe. Church membership and church attendance were invariably high and Christian parties, who since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1917 dominated national politics, had used their monopoly to ensure the public funding of religious education out of public means and to enshrine Christian morality in the laws of the land.”⁹⁵ The specific interpretation of freedom of religion in the Netherlands allowed for legal structures that made Christian schools legally the same as public schools. Religion had become inextricably linked to government, but the constitution prevented the Netherlands from becoming a *de facto* theocracy.

The missing links between the extremely religious and extremely secular stages of the Netherlands are the processes of *verzuiling* and *ontzuiling*. The process of *verzuiling*, which translates into pillarization, came from prior theological schisms between different Christian denominations. “These schisms assisted the rise of the modern state and the creation of a distinct pillarized political system, where different groups created separate sub-communities encompassing their members’ lives, based around ideological differences, coordinated by the

⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. 320.

⁹⁵ Besamusca, E. and Verheul, J. (Eds.), *Discovering the Dutch: On Culture and Society of the Netherlands*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2010), pp. 117.

national government.⁹⁶ The presence of these religion-based political parties, Watling argues, cemented the centralized government because the most effective way to assure legislative privileges and financial support was through the political system. The creation of faith-based political parties effectively restructured society as public life became regulated through accompanying faith-based organizations, ranging from soccer clubs to labor unions. De Rooy argues that *verzuiling* allowed people to “remain attached to their provincial roots whilst combining their strengths at the national level”⁹⁷ and provided stability in the tumultuous times of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century.

However, as Kennedy and Zwemer note, “Dutch religious history can be characterized by radical shifts in the relationship between society and politics, most notably [...] the shift to a secular or ‘dechristianized’ regime after the 1960s.”⁹⁸ In this time period the process of *ontzuiling* (de-pillarization) started. The causes of the sudden collapse of this highly institutionalized system are complex and disputed, but I find the reasoning put forth by Mijnhardt to be the most convincing. He writes that “from the 1950s onwards the Netherlands once again went through a rapid process of urbanization and industrialization that would transform the country.”⁹⁹ These demographic shifts changed the social landscape of the Netherlands drastically, as the urbanized spaces dispersed notions of individualism and the self from a contained elite to a larger segment of the population. The concepts of individual self-fulfillment clashed with the rather inflexible and collective Church, and caused a rapid decline in attendance. Kennedy and Zwemer claim that “the legalization of abortion, euthanasia and same-

⁹⁶ Watling, T., “Leadership’ or ‘dialogue’? Women, Authority and Religious Change in a Netherlands Community,” *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 63, no. 4 (winter, 2002), pp. 520.

⁹⁷ De Rooy, P., *A Tiny Spot on the Earth: The Political Culture of the Netherlands in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2015), pp. 188-189

⁹⁸ Kennedy and Zwemer, “Religion,” pp. 239.

⁹⁹ Besamusca and Verheul, *Discovering*, pp. 118.

sex marriage were undoubtedly reflections of a society that now conceived of morality in emphatically secular terms.”¹⁰⁰ A more individualistic and secular approach to governance replaced the previous institutionalized religious morality. *Verzuiling* had given way to *ontzuiling*.

During *ontzuiling* the Netherlands drastically changed, as Houtman and Mascini illustrate; “it is difficult to find other countries where the Christian tradition has eroded so rapidly and dramatically during the last few decades.”¹⁰¹ As there is a generational trend of younger people embracing individualism more than older generations, attendance rates continue to drop even further. It has become a vicious cycle of disappearing religiosity. De Graaf and Te Grotenhuis discovered a trend that since the 1970s fewer people attend church and that over 75% of the Dutch population attends church less than once a month in 2005.¹⁰² This trend has only continued, and it brings with it significant changes to the organization of Dutch society. For example Dykstra and Fokkema found that filial ties have weakened because of secularization¹⁰³ as people focus more explicitly on the self. Frisk and Åkerbäck show that there is an increase in non-institutionalized and revivalist spirituality and faith traditions in countries like the Netherlands.¹⁰⁴

The most recent development that is affecting the socio-cultural Dutch landscape is the influx of non-white and non-Christian peoples, specifically Muslims from Morocco, Turkey, and the Moluccan Islands. Kennedy and Zwemer note that “like its neighbors the Dutch have found it

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy and Zwemer, “Religion,” pp. 266.

¹⁰¹ Houtman, D. and Mascini, P., “Why do Churches become Empty. While New Age grows? Secularization and Religious Change in the Netherlands,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Sep., 2002), pp. 455.

¹⁰² De Graaf, N. D. and Te Grotenhuis, M., “Traditional Christian Belief and Belief in the Supernatural: Diverging trends in the Netherlands between 1979 and 2005?” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Dec., 2008), pp. 585.

¹⁰³ Dykstra, P. A. and Fokkema, T., “Norms of Filial Obligation in the Netherlands,” *Population (English Edition, 2002-)*, vol. 67, no. 1 (January-March, 2012), pp. 98-99, 109.

¹⁰⁴ Frisk, L. and Åkerbäck, P., *New Religiosity in Contemporary Sweden: The Dalarna Study in National and International Context*, Equinox Publishing Ltd, Sheffield, UK, Bristol, USA (2015), pp. 168.

difficult to find ‘room’ for Islam in its public space.”¹⁰⁵ Although the Netherlands was a colonial empire and incorporated Muslim-majority lands like Indonesia, it never devised a plan to integrate heterogeneous religious beliefs in its homogenous system. The Netherlands seems only able to tolerate Islam in a colonial relationship, where the ‘other’ religion is subservient to its Protestant master. De Koning writes about the Salafist branch of Islam – which particularly suffers from Islamophobia in the Low Countries – and discusses the Dutch integration policies which assume “idealized Dutch values with regard to secular and sexual freedoms [as] the standard for integration.”¹⁰⁶ An essentialist idea of Dutchness becomes the standard for assimilation, and once the Islamic ‘other’ fails to conform, it enhances cultural separation and Islamophobia. The controversial Ayaan Hirsi Ali summarizes the tension between the Dutch and Islam when she writes about the assassination of Pim Fortuyn, an Islamophobic politician who was shot days before an election that could have made him prime-minister;

The minute I heard about Fortuyn’s murder I found myself thinking again, “oh, Allah, please let it not be a Muslim who did this.” I was not alone. There was a general sense that if Fortuyn’s assassin was a Muslim, hideous things could happen in reprisal: killings, burnings. When we heard that a white animal-rights activist was apparently responsible for the shooting, it seemed as if the whole country let out a collective sigh of relief.¹⁰⁷

Hirsi Ali captures the collective fear from Muslims and non-Muslims alike after the Fortuyn assassination. The anticipation of bursts of more violence expose the contemporary stressful situation within the Netherlands. As “the Netherlands changed from an emigration country to an immigration country”¹⁰⁸ the Dutch – who have always considered tolerance as a defining virtue – are faced with renegotiating public spaces.

¹⁰⁵ Kennedy and Zwemer, “Religion,” pp. 239.

¹⁰⁶ De Koning, M., “How should I live as a ‘True’ Muslim? Regimes of Living among Dutch Muslims in the Salafi Movement,” *Etnofoor*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2013), pp. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Hirsi Ali, A., *Infidel: My Life*, The Free Press, London, UK (2007), pp. 284-285.

¹⁰⁸ Knippenberg, “Changing Relationship,” pp. 325.

Although some Dutch scholars and merchants knew about the Baha’i Faith as early as the mid nineteenth century, the first community settled just before the Second World War. Under the Nazi regime all activities were suspended, but “after the war, American assistance ensured a rapid resumption and extension of Baha’i activity in Western continental Europe. The German Baha’i administration was re-established in 1946-7, and during the Ten Year Crusade (1953-63), New Baha’i National Spiritual Assemblies were established throughout most of Western Europe.”¹⁰⁹ The community has steadily been growing ever since, and has members in every single one of the twelve Dutch provinces.

Latvia and Lithuania

The people of the Baltic nations are proud of their ancient connection to the lands and islands they inhabit on the shores of the salt water often referred to as the Eastern Sea. These people, who claim the ancient Aesti as their ancestors,¹¹⁰ have walked a historical path of conquest, assimilation, independence, and resistance to bring them to the contemporary tripartite place nestled against Russia, Belarus, and Poland. Their long history is often reduced to myths and fairytales, ranging from revolutions against Roman emperors to long-lost Viking cities. It is important to know that the Balts – in my case the Latvians and Lithuanians – are a diverse group of people with complicated histories. Although in a distant past, to comprehend some of the complexities of Latvian and Lithuanian identity I must start around the time that the name of Jesus Christ was proclaimed on these shores.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 140.

¹¹⁰ Lieven, A., *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, Yale University Press, New Haven, USA (1993), pp. 38.

Christianity came to the Baltics in the 13th century and encountered a Pagan tradition that remains relevant to this day, which explains the importance of nature and the image of bears and birds and geometric patterns in the Baltic cultures. Vardys and Sedaitis write that “Lithuanian culture is rife with pagan images and lore rooted in an animistic religion that these forest dwellers were loath to relinquish. The Lithuanian nation adopted Christianity only in 1385, becoming the last Western state to do so after more than a century of often fierce battle.”¹¹¹ Latvians defended their pagan stronghold for an almost equal amount of time. As Vardys and Sedaitis note, the consequence of the relatively late adoption of Christianity for European standards was syncretic “as pagan practices and animistic images were incorporated into Christian ritual.”¹¹² The current importance of pagan and neo-pagan traditions impacts how Latvians and Lithuanians construct their ethnic identity and how these people burrow their roots deep into the Baltic lands. In contemporary Latvia and Lithuania these traditions have been central in revivalist movements but also in mainstream cultural performances like the singing of *dainos* and *dainas*, in Lithuania and Latvia respectively.¹¹³ These pagan ideas inform Latvia and Lithuania today, and are noteworthy to consider when a monotheistic religion like the Baha’i Faith encounters these ancient spirits. Latvia’s and Lithuania’s Pagan heritage and its reluctance to adopt Christianity provide an important cultural framework you, my reader, need to keep in the back of your mind through this section.

In 1939 the Soviet Union installed People’s Assemblies in the Baltic republics, and these puppet governments voted to abandon the relatively young independence previously acquired after WWI. None of these changes lasted long, as the Germans invaded and occupied the Baltic

¹¹¹ Vardys, V. S. and Sedaitis, J. B., *Lithuania: The Rebel Nation*, WestviewPress, Boulder, USA (1997), pp. 1.

¹¹² *Ibid*, pp. 6.

¹¹³ Strmiska, M., “The Music of the Past in Modern Baltic Paganism,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, vol. 8, no. 3 (March, 2005), pp. 48-50.

States starting in June, 1941.¹¹⁴ The occupation was riddled with atrocities as Communists fought Nazis fought Partisans fought Nationalists, and many civilians got caught in the cross-fire. After the Germans retreated many Balts imagined they would regain their independence and so they established new governments, but “by then the Red Army was pouring into the Baltic States, and these provisional governments lasted for only a few days.”¹¹⁵ Many nationalists were hoping that their sovereignty would be restored, but as the west remained silent it was clear that now Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would be part of the Soviet Union.

After annexation, the Soviets initiated a process that aimed to integrate the Balts economically and culturally into the Union. Pabriks and Purs write that “from 1946, the Soviet regime, using the army and the secret police, employed brute force to establish obedience.”¹¹⁶ These violent acts occurred all across the Baltics, and an estimated 300.000 people were deported, many of whom returned after Stalin’s death or the collapse of the Soviet Union, many who never returned at all – buried in unmarked graves in the tundra of Siberia.¹¹⁷ The erasure of thousands of people and the continuous fear instilled in the people of the Baltic Soviet Republics translate in a resentment many Latvians and Lithuanians feel towards their Soviet history.

During the occupation the Soviets started a process of accelerated industrialization. The strategically located ports of Tallinn, Riga, and Klaipeda and the relatively empty rural and forested areas spiked the interest of Moscow. After the huge loss of human capital after World War II and the already sparsely populated coasts, the Soviet Union incentivized laborers from all over its territory to flock to the new industrial centers of the Baltic Soviet Republics. “By 1948,”

¹¹⁴ Lieven, *Baltic Revolution*, pp. 84.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 87.

¹¹⁶ Pabriks, A. and Purs, A., *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, Routledge, London, UK and New York, USA (2001), pp. 31.

¹¹⁷ Vardys and Sedaitis, *Lithuania*, pp. 64.

Pabriks and Purs write, “almost 45% of all industrial workers were not ethnically Latvian. Rapid industrialization had altered the ethnic composition of Latvian society”¹¹⁸ illustrating the influx of largely Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Belarussians to Latvia. Due to this influx, Latvians nearly became an ethnic minority in their country. Before World War II Latvians made up over 76% of the population, whereas in 1989 this had decreased to 52% of the total population, with similar, although less extreme, patterns in Lithuania.¹¹⁹ This influx destabilized a prior cultural equilibrium and was an instrumental part of a larger process of Russification.

The influx of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people was one of the more abrasive methods of Russification, but the Moscow apparatus employed other effective methods to assimilate Latvians and Lithuanians into the Soviet Union. Arvids Pelse, the leader of the Latvian Soviet Republic, prohibited all cultural and nationalist expressions in 1963, and although this upset many Latvians, the recent industrialization of the Baltics had resulted in relative prosperity and thus silenced the opposition.¹²⁰ The enforcement of Russian as a political and cultural language across the Baltics severely diminished the amount of people who speak Latvian as their mother tongue and kept the number of people that learnt the Baltic languages when they migrated to Latvia and Lithuania extremely low. Lieven claims that if it was not for the end of Soviet rule and Russification, “the Baltic languages and cultures might have been damaged beyond repair.”¹²¹ The last tool of Russification I will discuss was the attack on established religion. In Lithuania “religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church, were among those that suffered the most from the social controls.”¹²² Vardys and Sedaitis list many names of

¹¹⁸ Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia*, pp. 32.

¹¹⁹ Clemens Jr., W. C., *The Baltic Transformed: Complexity Theory and European Security*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, USA (2001), pp. 115.

¹²⁰ Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia*, pp. 38.

¹²¹ Lieven, *Baltic Revolution*, pp. 95.

¹²² Vardys and Sedaitis, *Lithuania*, pp. 72.

bishops and other clergy that were murdered, deported, or disappeared. The state seized all property and prohibited any type of religious education, whether within monastic walls or outside of them. The promotion of atheism and the prohibition of religious life were seen as direct attacks on the spiritual and cultural sovereignty of people. The large Russian communities, the politics of Russification and the general economic and political consequences of Soviet rule have left their marks on Lithuania and Latvia, and still affect these countries to this day.

The period when Latvia and Lithuania were a part of the Soviet Union was marked by forced acculturation into a larger Russian cultural and political identity. However this process birthed dissatisfaction and combined with other internal and external issues the Latvian and Lithuanian people started dreaming of their previous sovereignty before boldly claiming independence.

There was a plethora of reasons why the Soviet Union fell apart and why the Balts were disenchanted with the whole communist adventure. Smith highlights three main reasons why these developments of collective Baltic disenchantment could have happened; “the myth of incorporation, the economic viability of republic statehood and the question of cultural self-preservation, all became invaluable nationalist resources, providing bases upon which nationalist leaders could capture the sovereign imaginations of their peoples.”¹²³ The myth of incorporation refers to the historic fabrication that nations like Latvia and Lithuania voluntarily joined the Soviet Union. The fact that the political systems of the Baltic States were not well integrated or acknowledged by the highly centralized and authoritative power of Moscow¹²⁴ fueled the idea of involuntary participation in the Soviet experiment. This was only heightened by the

¹²³ Smith, G., ed., *The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, USA (1994), pp. 132.

¹²⁴ Marples, D. R., *The Collapse of the Soviet Union 1985-1991*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, UK (2004), pp. 5.

environmental disregard of Latvian and Lithuanian communities during the period of industrialization.¹²⁵

Economic viability played a key part in why dreams of independence were able to capture the Baltic imagination. The rapid industrialization made the Baltic States economically powerful and productive, however the profits largely flowed out of Latvia and Lithuania to be redistributed by Moscow. “For many Balts this was particularly galling, given that a centrally-managed regional policy geared towards fiscal redistribution continued to favor the poorer southern republics at the expense of the more economically prosperous.”¹²⁶ The loss of potential wealth to less economically fortunate comrades created resentment. Besides dissatisfaction with the distribution of profit, Marples also notes that “the Baltic states generally enjoyed a higher standard of living than other parts of the Soviet Union and used the lax atmosphere of the Gorbachev years to push for their national rights.”¹²⁷ The Balts were aware of the prosperity that came from their ports, and especially under the relatively liberal reign of Gorbachev, were able to navigate the rules to gain more sovereign rights, particularly regarding cultural and linguistic expression. Gorbachev may have thought this would appease the budding nationalist movements, but it actually galvanized them to not be satisfied with just a taste of the pie.

The last ingredients were what Smith called ‘nationalist resources,’ and especially in Latvia these had become significant because of the extreme influx of Russians, although culturally repressive laws were present in all Baltic States. These policies “did much to heighten concerns over the likely future role of the local languages and cultures reflected in growing dissident activities during the early 1980s connected with issues of linguistic russification.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Kalnins, M., *Latvia: A Short History*, Hurst and Company, London, UK (2015), pp. 173.

¹²⁶ Smith, *Baltic States*, pp. 128.

¹²⁷ Marples, *Collapse*, pp. 52.

¹²⁸ Smith, *Baltic States*, pp. 126.

This heightened concern over the repression of language and other traditions, was paired to the rapid urbanization that caused great concern for the breakdown of values from a largely rural culture.¹²⁹ These two forces combined caused a powerful nationalist reawakening. The grass-roots independence organizations that arose out of the Latvian and Lithuanian people “could draw upon a rich variety of pre-Soviet national symbols, embedded not only in century-long national cultures but also in memories of national statehood” and “ground [their movement] in abstract notions of ‘the people’ and in ‘blood notions’ of genealogical descent, it reflected a desire to obtain, as nearly as possible, a coterminous nation-state.”¹³⁰ The concrete notions and symbols of imagined peoples and histories combined with nativist ideas of who *belonged* to the land cultivated mass-based support aiming to disrupt to Muscovite power exerted over Vilnius and Riga. A good example that illustrates the anger that rallied together the Balts is the following excerpt from a poem by the Latvian poet Imants Ziedonis;

I rooted the linden in –
Ah, Lord, I planted her in the midst of the yard! –
And the linden sprang to the air.
Ah, Lord, Lāčplēsis sprang from the linden,
And the nine fair sons of Koknēsis.
They rooted the linden out –
Ah, Lord, they rooted the linden out of my land.
Uprooted the linden tree –
And set her down –
Ah, Lord, down beyond the sea.¹³¹

The linden tree is an ancient Latvian symbol, and the names in the poem are mythical figures. By using the actual event of the removal of thousands of ancient oak and linden trees to facilitate agricultural collectivization – trees that will die – Ziedonis captures the threat and violence of the destruction of culture that was able to capture the minds of many. This

¹²⁹ Lieven, *Baltic Revolution*, pp. 96.

¹³⁰ Smith, *Baltic States*, pp. 121, 138.

¹³¹ Kalnins, *Latvia*, pp. 173-175.

accumulation of dissatisfaction led to the first Baltic declaration of independence by Lithuania in 1991.

The declarations of independence across the Baltics were monumental events, and initially were efforts that included Russians. While Lithuania had a relatively small Russian population, Latvia's was significantly larger, and Russians in both countries voted in favor of independence during referendums in 1991.¹³² Particularly in Latvia this relatively blissful situation quickly turned sour. "The attitude of Latvians, and the Balts at large, can be described as a social and psychological rejection of everything Russian and consequently everything Soviet,"¹³³ Pabriks and Purs write, and after the nationalist movements and achievement of independence this only intensified. In Latvia harsh citizenship laws excluded Russians from society, ranging from speaking Latvian being a prerequisite for citizenship¹³⁴ to inaccessibility of citizenship based on restrictive quotas and expensive residence permits.¹³⁵ The Latvian identity began to develop around the rejection of the Russian other. It is not surprising that Latvian Russians became disillusioned with the newfound sovereignty of the Baltic States and "that, more than any other nationality, the end of the Soviet empire affected the Russian sense of national identity: [...], for many Russians the abrupt end of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of an intense crisis of identity."¹³⁶ Russians saw their cultural hegemony crumble and felt threatened, resulting in a divisive split in Latvian, and to a lesser extent Lithuanian, society.

Contemporary Latvia and Lithuania have attempted to mitigate many of its initial obstacles through fair elections, more liberal citizenship laws, entry to the European Union and

¹³² Marples, *Collapse*, pp. 53, 55-56.

¹³³ Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia*, pp. 47-48.

¹³⁴ Smith, G. et al, *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK (1998), pp. 3.

¹³⁵ Birgerson, S.M., *After the Break-Up of a Multi-Ethnic Empire: Russia, Successor States, and Eurasian Security*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, USA (2002), pp. 173.

¹³⁶ Smith et al, *Nation Building*, pp. 7.

NATO, and adoption of the Euro as currency. Although a 2012 rejection to make Russian an official language in a Latvian constitutional referendum shows there are still lasting animosities,¹³⁷ the transition of a closed, communist society to a wealthy, capitalist nation-state has been relatively painless in both Latvian and Lithuanian cases.

Latvia and Lithuania – similar to other former Soviet nations – have some of the youngest Baha’i communities. “A subsidiary two-year plan (1990-2) co-ordinated Bahai activity in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union under the new conditions of religious freedom that followed the collapse of the communist regimes there.”¹³⁸ As soon as the Soviet Union collapsed and freedom of religion became the law of the land, Baha’is left from places like Sweden, Canada, and Germany to spread the writings and introduce the faith. Many of the people I interviewed talked about how the growth has been slow, and two years ago the Universal House of Justice announced a new pioneering plan for the Baltic States. This time they hope to gain more traction and make the communities more sustainable.

¹³⁷ Klinins, *Latvia*, pp. 201.

¹³⁸ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 120.

Literature Review
a particular kind of universality

Globalization is an extremely complex process that is constantly redefining the world we live in. This process has been set in motion ever since people ventured out of their homes and encountered people that had a shared humanity yet appeared completely different. Due to significant historical and technological changes globalization is occurring faster than ever and impacts communities in complex ways. It is important to understand these processes of globalization and how they affect our rapidly changing world, because – as Anthony Kwame Appiah phrased it concisely and astutely – “the world grows smaller and the stakes grow larger.”¹³⁹ Globalization can seem, like an all-consuming tidal wave, unstoppable and unfathomable, but this thesis argues that it can perhaps best be understood by means of a polylocal and polyphonic approach. Globalization is central to theological constructions of the Baha’i Faith, and this is why I am using the Baha’i Faith as a lens to understand processes of globalization and the different ways these processes interact with communities in different historical and cultural places.

¹³⁹ Appiah, K. A., *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, USA, London, UK (2006), pp. xx.

It is important to understand exactly what the mechanisms are that the Baha'i Faith uses to construct its own definition of globalization because it will aid to understanding a quickly growing religious community as well as deepen discourse about globalization in general. In this process Baha'is construct their own claim to truth, which is based on the idea that the specific Baha'i approach to globalization is one that will create world peace with social justice and environmentalism as its roots. Foucault and Deleuze provide powerful rhetoric to understand that process of creating truth. Authors such as Errington, Gewertz, Sewell Jr., and Fausto-Sterling illustrate how these theoretical processes have manifested themselves in other aspects of society. I will create theoretical conversations about globalization and attempt to reveal a foundation of how the Baha'i notion of truth might be implemented. The three specific theories I have chosen to bring in discussion with one another are Tsing, Appiah and Rifkin. My thesis will show the different ways in which these theories complement and contrast one another to create a more comprehensive view of explicit faith-based globalization.

Foucault's critical reading of the power embedded in the position of the author is a powerful tool to understand how specific societies construct their claims to truth and with what authority they do so. In "What is an Author," Foucault argues that the author disappears in the space of the written product. The author disappears as the written product presents a specific narrative that is not the author. It is as if the author is separated from the produced work and the power dynamics that come in play by the act of producing work. The false absence of the author obscures how and why a notion of truth is put forth, and this is why "it is not enough [...] to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared."¹⁴⁰ The place of the author, which has disappeared within the produced work, is extremely complex. Baha'u'llah, as the known

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, M., "What is an Author?" Lecture presented to the Societe Francais de Philosophie, 02/22/1970. Translated by Josue V. Harari, pp. 4.

author of Baha'i scripture, is a particularly poignant example that illustrates what it means for the author to have disappeared. The knowledge that Baha'u'llah is the named author seems like the author remains present in the text, however his divine authorial function transcends humanity. Baha'u'llah disappears as an individual with particular positionalities and perspectives, and this process produces and reproduces his claims as objective and truthful. However the power dynamics that are important to consider in the production of written work can be rendered visible when the author, or the humanity of the author, is resurfaced. The author's lenses and positionality are essential to the production of their work. The claims to a personal truth that arise in their work are legitimized as they are presented through the language used. By critically examining those aspects the author can be returned. The author possesses the power to shape an argument and the notions conveyed within that. "The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning"¹⁴¹ as by producing a written work claims to truth are not only created but also dispersed. For these reasons it is important to excavate the author of a text to understand the purpose of these texts. By taking messages in texts for granted, a truth stemming from unknown origins and hidden intentions becomes normalized and considered objective. I witnessed the manifestation of this process in all three Baha'i communities where during all my conversations, whether they be formal or informal, the only writing that was referenced to were Baha'i writings. The singular presence of information renders invisible the origins of texts and elevates them to a level of objectivity as the information is not challenged or diversified.

Foucault writes specifically about the ways in which authors of written texts produce claims to truth, and writers such as Fausto-Sterling show how the power of the author is not limited to the written word, but has far-reaching socio-political consequences. Fausto-Sterling

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 13.

argues that Saartje Bartman, or Sarah Bartmann, was an available body onto which white European scientists inscribed a dehumanizing and racialized truth. In this case her body was used to construct a narrative that legitimized racial differences in which whiteness was superior. It is important to understand that “our knowledge of Sarah Bartmann is a construction, an effort to read between the lines of historical markings written from the viewpoint of a dominant culture.”¹⁴² The hegemonic European culture wrote a specific racialized story that became an acknowledged and accepted truth because certain authors can produce claims to truth that are more powerful than others. The racialized distribution of authorial power is an incarnation of the Foucauldian claim that the power position of an author does not exist in a vacuum. In this example it means a colonial narrative was produced to justify racialized hierarchies and through producing claims to truth the narrative became normalized throughout colonial communities. Fausto-Sterling also demonstrates here the ways in which a Foucauldian sense of power, a power embedded in authorship, impacts society, as the scientists who wrote these pieces were never questioned. Fausto-Sterling applies the theoretical Foucauldian concept and shows how it directly arranged a society and literally constructed the meaning of being human. These authors, and their authority, never required an explicit justification and their presumed absence in their texts exposes how their written words would never be questioned. The white, educated male scientists inhabited an intersection of privileged identities that would never stir any doubt about the validity of their claims. This is why an oppressive and dangerous racist trope that still haunts communities around the world today became easily accepted as fact. Fausto-Sterling’s argument is significant for it illustrates how truth is materialized through authorial writing, and provides an

¹⁴² Fausto-Sterling, A., “Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe, 1815-1817,” in *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, edited by Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, USA (1995), pp. 28.

example of studying the production of truth and its conditions, without necessarily having to embrace that constructed truth.

Several processes are essential to the mechanisms of a movement to construct their claim to a truth. Sewell, Jr. expands this in two ways. Firstly by redefining structure and secondly by using the events at the Bastille that sparked the French Revolution to demonstrate how specific meaning is inscribed onto our spatial and temporal surroundings. These ideas are Foucauldian as they specifically outline how singular truths are produced and reproduced by authors. Sewell, Jr. argues that “a theory of structure that restores human agency to social actors builds the possibility of change into the concept of structure.”¹⁴³ This idea acknowledges the active aspects of a community to construct particular claims to truth. This moves away from ideas of environmental or collective determinism that place human agency outside of structure. Structures become dynamic and are in perpetual motion as opposed to static and frozen in time and space. The Foucauldian importance of this idea is that it explains how members of communities create structures with particular embedded claims to truth, as opposed to the idea that structures are primordial creations. In this definition individuals have the agency to change narrative to imbue specific places and moments with a particular meaning, which challenges the idea that people come to inhabit a preexisting structure over which they are not able to exercise any control. I do want to acknowledge the dialectical relationship present in structure, which is something Sewell, Jr. does not explicitly reference in the specific pieces I choose to use. Although individuals are able to alter and create the structures they encounter in their communities, it is important to include that people are simultaneously also produced by their structural surroundings. I am specifically interested in the ways individuals and communities constitute authors and influence

¹⁴³ Sewell, Jr., W.H., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 98, no. 1 (July, 1992), pp. 1.

the structures that surround them, but it is important to include in this statement that the experiences of producing narrative do not occur in isolation. These claims to truth are “at once always an interpretation *and* in need of interpretation.”¹⁴⁴ The communities and individuals that I consider authors do not produce truth without influences of notions of identity and power constructed previously and externally. Scott powerfully adds a layer of complexity to the whole conversation by pointing out that structures should not be taken for granted, but neither should the authors and their agency. It is not enough to understand who the author is and what the author produced, but also how the author came to be.

Sewell, Jr. contextualizes these abstract ideas through an analysis of the taking of the Bastille on the 14th of July, 1786. This specific event was consciously redefined by specific politicians in order to become the foundation of the French Revolution. Particularly the justification of the violence that occurred at this event is a powerful tool that shows the authorship of the anti-monarchist movement. Prior to the taking of the Bastille violence was abhorred and condemned in resistance movements. Suddenly the deaths of several people had to be explained as necessary and inevitable in order to justify the taking of the Bastille and continue the Revolution as a just and morally superior movement. Similarly, the actual significance of the taking of the Bastille had to be created in order to aid the Revolution and ground the event in historical significance. This process is important “because structures are articulated to other structures, [and] initially localized ruptures always have the potential of bringing about a cascading series of further ruptures that will result in structural transformations.”¹⁴⁵ This is key to the argument Sewell, Jr. is making, because it illustrates the complex narratives of authorship

¹⁴⁴ Scott, “Experience,” pp. 37.

¹⁴⁵ Sewell, Jr., W.H., “Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille,” *Theory and Society*, vol. 25, no.6 (Dec., 1996), pp. 844.

that exist within communities and the people that produce and reproduce structures. It is a continuous cycle in which meaning is inscribed spatially and temporarily and creates lasting consequences that continue to ripple through, indicating the dynamic and fluid nature of structure. Through my project I want to combine both of the approaches of Sewell, Jr. and show how communities are in a perpetual process of writing their structures both in watershed moments and as a perpetually creating and editing author.

The final aspect in the Foucauldian process of writing a claim to truth is illustrated by Errington and Gewertz in their article about the conservation of the Chinese ring-neck pheasant in South Dakota. The narrative constructed by a capitalist framework has created a structure in which the only viable conservation option is seen as when both farmers and birds profit. If farmers have to lose any type of profit in order to save the birds, the plan is not considered. This conversation naturalizes a specific claim to truth. If differing possibilities are continuously and consciously excluded, a singular narrative become normalized. The capitalist authors of the conservation in this example produce a particular truth and through repetition infuse their narrative with power. This is an important process to acknowledge because it is present in all aspects of authorship. There is never a singular truth, rather a tension between several ideas of truth. The presence of unequal power distribution will cause one claim to triumph over others. In this case it is a specific interpretation of conservation, but it can also be applied to the taking of the Bastille or the definition of Sarah Bartmann's body. The establishment of a singular idea often comes at the cost of different and conflicting ideas.

The examples provided by Fausto-Sterling, Sewell, Jr., and Errington and Gewertz are important because they expand the Foucauldian idea of power and authorship beyond the written word to communities that have been directly affected by these authorial actions. These examples

highlight the importance of revealing the authorship of hegemonic structures. The conversation between these writers illustrates the wide variety of ways in which the Foucauldian idea of authorship can manifest. I plan to apply that framework to a global movement in order to understand how a transnational faith tradition legitimizes its narratives.

Separate from Foucault, Clifford Geertz writes that “culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing of network social relations.”¹⁴⁶ Geertz illustrates here that culture, in my case different localized Baha’i cultures, are an expression of a production of truth that I consider Foucauldian. Cultural performance is the physical, spiritual and emotional materialization of authorship. I include this Geertzian approach in my Foucauldian one because it expands notions of authorship to create a more holistic understanding of globalization and the production of knowledge in general. The examples are not used to create clash with Foucault, rather they show how his theory already has been expanded and I aim to tie those diverse interpretations together throughout my thesis into a cohesive mode of understanding of how knowledge is produced.

The conversation about the construction of personal narrative and truth was only the first step of this theoretical discussion. The second step is to understand how Baha’is frame their narratives in a globalizing world and how Baha’is use ideas of authorship to create and redefine local and global structures. In order to understand the ways in which the Baha’i Faith defines its own globalizing truth through a particular theological lens I will provide a brief discussion about some of the ways theorists have discussed globalization. This is an integral aspect of my thesis as “internationalism – implying the establishment of universal peace and global unity – was a core

¹⁴⁶ Geertz, C., “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 59, no. 1 (Feb., 1957), pp. 33.

theme of Baha'u'llah's teachings"¹⁴⁷ and of the current community and religion. Before any insights can be gathered from the particular Baha'i interpretation of globalization, a better understanding of globalization theory is required in order to grasp how constructed claims of truth are dispersed, contested, and maintained. Tsing writes that "it has become increasingly clear that all human cultures are shaped and transformed in long histories of regional-to-global networks of power, trade, and meaning"¹⁴⁸ and this is exactly why it is important to look at a myriad of interpretations of how global processes potentially operate and impact communities.

Rather than seeing globalization as a homogenous force that washes over the world, Tsing argues in favor of specific localized moments in which globalization is created and defined. To her, globalization "is a particular kind of universality: it can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters."¹⁴⁹ Tsing argues that there are several streams or currents around the world, an idea that is heavily inspired by Appadurai's theories on ethnoscapas and the flows of culture around the world. Tsing acknowledges that some of these cultural currents are more powerful than others based on historical configurations, for example the colonial western European and the contemporary American ones, but she does not dismiss the impact of any of them. These streams come together and the encounters that occur because of these convergences are the sites in which globalization happens. For this mechanism to work a plurality of cultures is required and it is actually cultural diversity that "brings a creative friction to global connections."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Danesh, "Internationalism," pp. 210.

¹⁴⁸ Tsing, A. L., *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, USA (2005), pp. 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 1.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp. x.

The friction Tsing describes refers to the specific moments in localized contexts where different global cultural streams meet. The creative power that is harnessed through this friction is responsible for producing and reproducing new global cultures. This friction is, according to Tsing, what drives globalization forward, as if it were its fuel. By regarding these countless processes around the world as globalization, it shows that “global knowledge is neither monolithic nor settled,”¹⁵¹ but in perpetual motion. The power in Tsing’s argument is found in that statement because it incorporates the localized notions of the global. This will be important to my work, as the friction between the Baha’i Faith and several localized communities produce a complex narrative that is both universal within the Faith yet particular to a specific location, for example the community in Latvia which inhabits a different cultural setting than the community in Samoa. However the application of her theory invites me to think critically about her word choice. Does friction contain a negative connotation? Friction is not easy, it is rough, and it is a type of clash. The framing of globalization in such terms does denote realistically the struggles of globalization, but to apply it to the Baha’i Faith the term requires more nuance. The idea of friction also carries a sexual undertone, infusing the word with desire. Within the Faith globalization is considered part of a divine force, and regardless of the precise outcomes, the process is seen as part of plan that moves the world to global peace. In both interpretations the etic word matches how Baha’is perceive friction as a necessary, sometimes difficult. But ultimately desirable component of their theology.

The ideas Appiah puts forth have certain similarities to what Tsing is arguing, as Appiah sees the current world and the state of globalization as something that is often misunderstood and has turned problematic in a lot of discourse. Appiah writes in favor of cosmopolitanism, which

¹⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 13.

he sees as a way to “learn about other people’s situations, and then use our imaginations to walk a while in their moccasins.”¹⁵² He considers cosmopolitanism to be a solution to many of the problems based on unequal power distribution in the world. To Appiah, cosmopolitanism is the tolerance and occasional appreciation of differences. When these differences do collide they have the ability to produce new identities. Appiah’s definition of globalization – which he calls cosmopolitanism – challenges the claim that globalization is accompanied by global homogenization. Appiah argues that the mechanisms of cosmopolitanisms actually threaten homogeneity.¹⁵³

Tsing and Appiah echo one another in parts when critiquing the idea of global homogenization, but a key difference is that for Tsing completely new composite identities arise out of the process of friction whereas for Appiah that is not per se the case. Appiah argues that homogeneity will not occur because globalization allows for the spread of difference, and the encounters with those differences by individuals creates new composite identities. Similar to Tsing, Appiah does not believe in ahistorical globalization, and thus also successfully argues against the idea that homogenous cultures existed prior to engaging with globalization and dispels ideas of cultural purity. It seems that according to him conscious individuals negotiate the aspects of different cultural streams and decide whether or not to participate. The foundation for this movement is an idea of tolerance for Appiah believes that “a creed that disdains the partialities of kinfolk and community may have a past, but it has no future”¹⁵⁴ and that ultimately the only way to move forward is to tolerate difference. Appiah provides an example of this individual process with Siphso, a South African man of Zulu descent, who watches Everybody

¹⁵² Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 63.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 101.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. xviii.

Loves Raymond but navigates the cultural messages espoused through this vehicle of cultural transportation. Appiah writes that “talk of cultural imperialism structuring the consciousnesses of those in the periphery treats Siphon and people like him as *tabulae rasae* on which global capitalism’s moving finger writes its message, leaving behind another homogenized consumer as it moves on. It is deeply condescending. And it isn’t true.”¹⁵⁵ I partially agree with Appiah’s reasoning, especially when he attributes a particular agency to people that traditionally have been forced on the periphery to navigate complex cultural territories to their own benefit. The humanization embedded within that logic is anti-colonial and embraces the possible plurality created by globalization.

It indeed is condescending and problematic to assume that the historical ‘other’ is a mindless drone waiting to be programmed by the capitalist west. However this is also the moment where Appiah seems naïve. Appiah fails to address the dialectical relationship between individual and structure. It is important to recognize the agency people have always had, but which has been ignored, curtailed and policed throughout colonial and neocolonial history and present. This acknowledgment ought to be accompanied by the realization that those same oppressive structures are still in existence and impact individuals and communities in tangible ways. It is true that Siphon can navigate what to accept and reject from *Everybody Loves Raymond*, but he has been deprived from the cultural, economic, and political power to create a show or watch a show that centers different narratives that are not capitalist, white, straight, American, rich, based on historical and contemporary power structures created and perpetuated through colonial and neocolonial authors. It is a reminder of the Foucauldian idea that there is authorial power that decides who has the power to write and, more importantly, who reads it.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 111.

Appiah places much of his rhetoric in a framework that does not tangibly engage with present unequal power distributions. Appiah is correct in arguing against the value judgments placed upon difference, an attitude central in his definition of cosmopolitanism that is deeply tied to unbound individual choice, but mere tolerance of difference will not eradicate previously installed hierarchies of value. Appiah claims that he is “urging that we should learn about people in other places, take an interest in their civilizations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement, but because it will help us get used to one another.”¹⁵⁶ Here it is clear that Appiah fails to understand that dialogue is not enough to eradicate deeply entrenched oppressive systems that have become normalized and are embedded in many arguments, errors, and achievements. Just getting used to one another will not redistribute unequal power relationships. To tie this idea to globalization, *Cosmopolitanism* does not take in account the different ways certain streams of culture are more powerful than others, and it will be interesting to explore whether the Baha’i Faith might provide a solution.

To expand those notions, Appiah continues to question why it might seem that “from our different perspectives, we would be living effectively in different worlds.”¹⁵⁷ Appiah disagrees with the relativist approach in which separate worldviews are contextualized and favors a type of universalism in which differences are acknowledged but commonality is emphasized. Appiah’s focus on individualism clashes with notions of collectivity in the Baha’i Faith, but there are valuable aspects to apply to the Faith from his ideas of cosmopolitanism and the processes of conscious remodeling of identity. The ideas of bringing people together and fostering a tolerance for their differences, which refuses presumed ideas of capitalist global homogenization echo with aspect of the Faith that I will explore further.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 78.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 31.

The majority of times when globalization is discussed it is in a framework in which spirituality is absent and secular thought dominates the conversation.¹⁵⁸ The dominance is made all the more acute in the case of a project that concerns a globalized religious movement. In contrast to Tsing and Appiah, Rifkin seeks to understand processes of globalization through a lens that incorporates what drives certain groups of people to globalize, which he argues often is because of a specific faith tradition. This is extremely important because other theories fail to recognize that “god and religion have a *de facto* presence in the world.”¹⁵⁹ Rifkin argues that “the religious critique of globalization dwells on the intrinsic value of human life, the natural world, and community, but one does not have to be religious, formally or otherwise, to share those concerns.”¹⁶⁰ He emphasizes some of the central aspects of spirituality-focused globalization - the value of human life, the natural world, and community. By understanding how certain faith-based communities center such ideas, Rifkin challenges theories of globalization that do not take these sentiments in account. This “faith in the essential goodness of all people. Faith in the persuasive power of reason. Faith in a unity within seemingly endless human diversity”¹⁶¹ is extremely important as it directly informs the mechanisms in which globalization occurs in faith-based communities. By not explicitly incorporating these notions of faith and spirituality, authors like Tsing and Appiah create an incomplete interpretation of globalization. This is problematic as it effectively excludes several levels of human agency and a variety of ways in which globalization effectively manifests itself. I consider faith and spirituality of extreme importance in my work, as Groody argues, “theology offers reflection on what it means

¹⁵⁸ Matyók, T. and Flaherty, M., “Can People of Faith, and People in Peace and Conflict Studies, Work Together?” in *Peace on Earth: The Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict Studies*, edited by Thomas Matyók, Mauren Flaherty, Hamdesa Tusso, Jessica Seheni, Sean Byrne, Lexington Books, New York City, USA (2014), pp. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 1.

¹⁶⁰ Rifkin, *Spiritual Perspectives*, pp. 9.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 129.

to be authentically human in the world.”¹⁶² To acknowledge and discuss the spirituality that Baha’is describe as essential to their experience validates the personhood and emic ideology of globalization whilst challenging hegemonic secular notions of globalization theory.

Although Rifkin discusses a lens of globalization absent in theorists like Tsing and Appiah, his theory falters because the scope is not able to carry the full weight of globalization. By reducing globalization to a spiritual movement the reality of the ways in which globalization plays out in the world are neglected. The set-up of the book reveals the greatest need why a discussion of Rifkin’s work is most productive when conjoined with other theorists. Each chapter of the book focuses on a different religion, and Rifkin writes that “each chapter is self-contained.”¹⁶³ This approach does not allow for a critical conversation about if spirituality in different religions achieves a similar type of globalization and presupposes an idea that religions can be placed in succinct spaces without being required to engage with the fuzzy and idiosyncratic boundaries between different religions. Rifkin argues about how theology informs Baha’i globalization explicitly, and illustrates how globalization is not seen as a problem, but rather as the catalyst to achieve a prophesized world. The redistribution of unequal power is briefly addressed based on the spiritual nature of the Baha’i concept of social justice, but that discussion is not pushed further than these scriptural statements. Rifkin’s argument is not able to stand alone, but his reasoning shows neither can Tsing’s or Appiah’s arguments. Currently all these theories separately are incomplete.

Globalization is an ever-changing system in which the distribution of power is embedded in its very nature. Through critically reviewing how knowledge is produced and what some of

¹⁶² Groody, D. G., *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, USA (2007), pp. 21.

¹⁶³ Rifkin, *Spiritual Perspectives*, pp. xiv.

the different theoretical approaches to globalization are I have initiated a process of demystification that is key to interpret what and why the Faith might be doing what it does. Michael Dove writes extensively about demystification when he discusses the ways in which colonial discourse has framed colonial Dutch legislation as official and real and Dayak dreams as esoteric and imagined. In his work Dove questions this dichotomy and switches the two bodies of text. Due to a racialized distribution of power, the ineffective agricultural policies of the Dutch always were considered considerate and logical piece of legislation. Dove shows how the Dutch response was rather fantastical and predicated on a fear of losing revenue and power. The Dayak dreams, which have been dismissed as fanciful imaginations, are placed in a different light as Dove argues that these dreams were actually carefully crafted responses to not only translate the contemporary situation into culturally appropriate language, but to also produce a response to and subvert flawed colonial laws that threatened the economic and political autonomy of the Dayak. By applying this process of demystification Dove shows that structures that are in place cannot be taken for granted, whether they be historical or contemporary. Dove provides an interpretation that pushes its readers to deeply question systems that have historically been naturalized in ways that have served certain empowered groups. He was one of the first scholars I read that convinced me that truly nothing is as it appears to be.

Similarly, I aim to demystify the spiritual lens through which the Baha'i Faith imagines globalization. By using a Foucauldian approach of authorship, I hope to illustrate that communities narrate their own claims to truth. Although Foucault expanded his theory beyond the theoretical author in his work *the History of Sexuality*, which discusses different social categories that have been constructed as natural and have been awarded power based on these constructions, I wanted to apply his approach to different authors to illustrate the Foucauldian

point that authorial power exists beyond a singular piece of work. Writers such as Sewell Jr. and Fausto-Sterling powerfully demonstrate that process. In this case that community I consider an author is the Baha'i Faith. By expanding the Foucauldian approach to authorship I aim to show how narrative and power are linked and created. This method provides an improved lens to view what Baha'i globalization entails. Tsing, Appiah and Rifkin all define globalization in different ways and the purpose of my thesis is to bring together these differing idea of globalization. Consequently I want to incorporate valuable lessons from the Baha'i approach in the different ways we think and write about globalization. Globalization is an extremely complex process that shapes the world we live in, but previous views of this as a singular secular process of homogenization are simplistic. The three separate theories I provide in this literature review fall short individually, but collectively have the opportunity to create a new framework of globalization that changes the current conversation. By combining the Foucauldian and globalization lenses I aim to facilitate a conversation that challenges hegemonic contemporary globalization and identity discourse.

Chapter I

I will obey

I

I ride the horizon between the blue of the skies and the green of the grass. This infinity is only interrupted by cows with watery and friendly eyes. The trees sway softly in the background of the rattling of my bike. As I turn onto the main road towards home, the large trees alongside the dark asphalt create an intricate play of shadows and sunrays, interlocking with the minor cracks of the pavement. As I move under the branches an ease envelops me. Sunrays peek through the foliage adding more dimensions to the already complex patterns. The gentle touch of the breeze is a reminder that I am not alone, nor will I ever be.

The smell of the fields is the one of my childhood; of boots stepping into cow shit, of jumping over *sloten*, of counting the colorful hot air balloons that drift away slowly into the distance. All of this is so real I can run my fingers across the seams of these memories. I ride into town and park my bike at our little supermarket. The hyped-up opening was only a few years ago, and everyone still remembers the tears of the grocer, the anger of the baker and the resignation of the butcher as their stores closed. One *gulden* weighs heavy in my pocket, a

gulden I found when walking the empty streets of the nearby town. There are so many more people there, yet no one that I know or recognize. There is something comforting about being alone in a crowd of strangers. The bells softly ring as I enter the small store, the walls lined with cans of tomato soup, mayonnaise and *drop*. I walk straight to my destination. The multicolored collection of candy is field of choices but I know exactly what I came for. I quickly put the *banaantjes*, *zuurballen* and *kaneelkussentjes* in the plastic bag and tie it with one of the bright red bands. Suddenly I notice Jacoba de Wittegiër looking at me. She is two years older and always has something mean to say. “I saw you were not in church last Sunday, but here you are buying candy! Where did you even get that money from? You probably stole it from the church collection a few weeks ago! I thought I saw your sneaky fingers reaching for it! I bet you don’t even believe!” She stares at me coldly and I want to look away but I am not sure how. I feel an intense heat spread though my cheeks as tears begin to well up in my eyes. “Whatever,” she spits out venomously as she leaves the store. I wonder if she would ever understand how I actually feel about our church. Every time I enter the large brick building I do feel god, I truly do, but as soon as *Dominee* Passchaert starts preaching I feel that presence leave. I used to feel at ease in the colorful patterns of light painted on the tiles, but now all I see are the names of people I do not know carved into the stones that line the floors and walls. It was a place that used to be more than just brick and mortar. A place where I knew I could whisper my thoughts and someone would listen. I always try to make eye contact with the old wooden Jesus hanging above the altar. His eyes are downcast, and the small trail of blood from where Longinus stabbed him makes me want to take the fancy handkerchiefs of my father and dab his wound. I want to tell him it will all be alright, that he is not alone even if it might feel so lonely to forever be on that

cross hoisted up, suspended in the air, above all of us. I always look up to him from the pews, but he never looks back.

II

I look at my watch one last time but I know Marianne is not going to show up. The surrounding wire fence casts a darkened latticework across the court. I am about to grab my racket and leave when a young woman appears. She smiles at me and asks “Do you need a partner to play with? My husband had an appointment and had to leave unexpectedly, but if you are up for it, I’d like to play some more.” I shake her hand and introduce myself. Jozefien introduces herself too. She throws the bright yellow ball up in the air and with a soft thud sends it flying. I miss it spectacularly and Jozefien cheers as the ball leaves a small red cloud of dust and bounces away. We continue to play, although neither of us is particularly good. I look over at the time on the old clock to the left and tell Jozefien I need to head home. It turns out we both have to bike in the same direction. She tells me that she teaches at the elementary school in the town over, loves gardening and is the mother of a boy who just said his first word. Jozefien also mentions she is Baha’i. “You’re what?” I ask with more harshness than I intended. She smiles and starts to explain. We agree to play tennis again.

For the entire summer I go out and meet with Jozefien. Slowly but steadily we play less tennis and talk more about her Faith. I tried to talk with my parents about the writings but they do not understand. My mother told some other people she sees in church and at the book club and now I get suspicious glances whenever I go out. Jacoba told me she heard that I worship Satan now, and she said she was not surprised that this is what had become of me. At first all of

this was painful and I could not bear going outside. I would hide away under my blankets and close my eyes. I would pray, but my prayers felt like empty hymns. As Jozefien teaches me more about the Faith, I become more confident in god's message and my place in it. The words and looks still hurt, but I no longer feel angry at other people. I realize they do not understand, and misunderstanding often creates anger. It does not change that they are fellow human beings with their own potential and worth. I knew the presence I had always felt around me was exactly the god Jozefien and the Baha'i Faith spoke about. It was not that I lost Jesus. It was just that god had sent a new messenger I just hadn't met yet.

III

Nino's meow interrupts my thoughts as I finish squeezing a lemon into the ice water. The juice slightly stings the papercut that runs red on my hands. "He is here!" Klaas shouts. I step onto the terrace and a soft breeze cools down the warm day. The boy, younger than I imagined, is talking to Klaas. His shoes are patterned and it seems that he smiles a lot. Nino walks passed me towards him as he demands to be attended to. He crouches down to pet the cat. He notices me and quickly gets up to introduce himself and asks if he can help out in any way. The three of us head out to the back of the garden. The colors of the pillows on our chairs have long since faded from a bright red to a faint orange. The branches, heavy with apples, under which we sit cast an intricate pattern on the grass and the boy's face. He awkwardly places his smartphone on the tray and explains he will be recording the whole conversation. He does not want to make any mistakes when he starts writing months away from now. The questions are about how we became Baha'i, what it means to us and how we see the world. Klaas and I start asking him

questions to try to push him into unknown territories but it is like he is on to us. He patiently answers them and continues right where he left off. We continue like this for a while, and with fond memories I remember my conversations with Jozefien so long ago. “What does it mean to you to be Dutch?” I just laugh a little bit and the sound is quickly carried away by the wind. I have thought about this many times, but now when I have to actually speak, I am not sure what to say. The answer is like smoke, visible but impossible to catch. To be Dutch is to follow strict rules and to be at a loss when those rules are not present. To be Dutch is to always, *always*, be on time. To be Dutch is to drink and use drugs. To be Dutch is to sleep around. To be Dutch means no one, *absolutely no one*, can tell you what to do. Klaas looks at me with a certain playful spark in his eyes. “That means I have never been Dutch” Klaas says. His words hang between us as tangible as the summer warmth. “Have you ever felt Dutch?” the interviewer asks to Klaas. “It is strange, because in some ways I have, but very often I felt like a stranger here. I am not sure if that means that I did not feel Dutch, but it did sometimes make me feel like an outsider” Klaas responds. “Do you feel like you are a part of the Dutch culture?” the interviewer asks me. I am not sure where to start. The idea of being part of the Dutch culture I tried to describe was never something I consciously considered. The people that I knew and loved gave meaning to what I saw, but the idea of this place being an essential part of me feels false. Each time I grasp the frays of it, it unravels and falls apart. It is not that this question is the first time I ever thought about my place here, but I never had to vocalize it to someone other than my husband before. The words and sentences do not come easy. I try to spit them out and in the process the meaning of this kingdom to me becomes clear. The absence of fear of persecution for believing what I believe has been a blessing. I say these things, and the interviewer asks me if it could help to think about which direction I think Dutch society is going. The disintegration of Dutch society

frightens and upsets me. The lack of faith harms the people that I care about. I look up at the boy again. I was born and raised here. I know what it means to be Dutch. It is something I have always been taught. I never felt that what grew in my heart connected with what I saw around me, yet I felt home here. The Baha'i Faith has always given me a purpose, a goal in life. Perhaps my purpose is to be here, and spread the message here. Maybe I can help to return some of that precious spirituality to people that need it most. After all, a new era has only just dawned and work needs to be done everywhere. I have always known what my purpose was as a Baha'i, maybe that is why the location makes sense. It is always surprising how conversations can clarify your ideas. The boy finishes his glass of juice and turns off the recording. "Thank you, for the cookies and drinks and the stories you shared with me." He shakes our hands and motions that his father just arrived. He steps into his father's car and together they drive off over the straight roads amidst endless green meadows. I wonder what he is going to write about us.

Chapter II
from the mouthpiece of god

In Samoa, Latvia, Lithuania and the Netherlands there was an understanding among Baha'is that Baha'u'llah was not in himself a divine deity, but rather someone chosen by god to receive and disperse divine messages. His body a vessel of sacred words, delivering nothing but the truth. The past and future manifestations of the divine are not considered His children as theological decree distances itself from these familial assumptions. This because of the fear of Baha'is that their corpus of beliefs would transform into blasphemous polytheism. Rather these divine manifestations are referred to as the mouthpieces of god. This ascribes an enormous amount of power to the writings of Baha'u'llah and his son, Abdu'l-Baha and grandson, Shoghi Effendi. By focusing on these writings I explore what the global common denominators are for the diverse Baha'i communities around the world.

These writings, similar to other faith-based traditions like Islam and Christianity, are seen as directly derived from god. Like gospels or the Qur'an the act of writing is historically associated with a person, but the author in these cases is constructed as the translator from the divine to the people, rather than the mind out of which these texts originated. The Baha'i writings found in works like the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* are produced and reproduced in order to create an

essential idea of what it means to be Baha'i. Groody notes that "the whole patrimony of the earth and the well-being of the human race depend on how we steer our way through [...] uncharted waters,"¹⁶⁴ and the repetition of specific quotations throughout Baha'i communities around the world are testimonies to how Baha'is chart their route and how individual communities draw from the same source to do so. In particular, several quotes were repeated through my fieldwork ranging from services in the House of Worship in Tiapapata, Samoa to small discussion groups at the youth camp in Elniakampis, Lithuania. After discussing some of these significant quotations I will apply a Foucauldian analysis of authorship to understand how community and identity is constructed through these examples. Through the excavation of the politics of authorship I will demonstrate how the collective Baha'i identity and centralization of authorial power into institutions like the Universal House of Justice are constructed by repeating sacred sentences and holy utterances. Lucy Mair notes that "all messianic religions are in some ways concerned with the distribution of power."¹⁶⁵ The Baha'i Faith explicitly ties this to redistribution of power to groups that have been historically marginalized and silenced on accounts of race, class, and gender. However the language of power in the Faith also attributes tremendous amounts of power to specific Baha'i institutions like the Universal House of Justice. Finally in this chapter I am going to transplant those ideas in a global perspective to understand how these particular piece fits in a larger puzzle, and use the theories of Rifkin, Tsing and Appiah to understand how the power of these quotes manifests itself in Baha'i communities.

Deleuze, in a conversation with Foucault, noted that it is essential to acknowledge that readers must "struggle against the forms of power that transform [the author] into [the work's]"

¹⁶⁴ Groody, *Globalization*, pp. 19.

¹⁶⁵ Fields, K. E., *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, USA (1985), pp. 17.

object and instrument in the sphere of ‘knowledge,’ ‘truth,’ consciousness,’ and ‘discourse.’”¹⁶⁶

This struggle does not mean a piece, or all pieces, of work must be rejected, but rather a difficult approach must be applied to understand how a claim to truth gets constructed and defended. The Baha’i Faith is a good example where there is a claim to truth, one that outlines what the current situation of the world is, where it ought to go, what people’s roles and responsibilities are in these processes and through the writing this claim structures “truth as identity.”¹⁶⁷ Tazi illustrates that particular claims to truth are instrumental to identity formation, and by applying a Foucauldian approach to that process the authorship of sacred texts become essential to understanding how that occurs. These quotations, although originating from a relatively singular source, have been localized and adapted to construct an identity that fits with Baha’i communities around the world. I raise the question of how the prevalence of these quotations and the authorial power embedded in them informs processes of globalization, and to answer that question I as an author will apply a critical lens to my writing process.

The dialectical nature of progressive revelation and appropriate messages for different times and communities is reflected in how the Baha’is view the world. Revelations shape the acts of believers, but the nature and piety of the believers shapes what message they will receive from a new prophet. According to many Baha’is the globe is not just a static place in which we act out our lives, but rather a place where the evolution of global human society is paired with the growth of an individual person. The following quote, by Shoghi Effendi, echoes a cosmology paraphrased by Baha’is in the Netherlands, Samoa and the Baltic states;

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions

¹⁶⁶ Deleuze, G. and Foucault, M., “Intellectuals and Power,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, USA (1977), pp. 208.

¹⁶⁷ Tazi, N., editor, *Keywords: Truth*, Other Press, New York City, USA (2004), pp. 104.

invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth, and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon its ultimate development must depend.¹⁶⁸

The first time I heard these words was before I even considered writing my thesis on the Baha'i Faith. A friendly man in a sleek *lavalava* quoted Shoghi Effendi to explain a religion I had never encountered before. The imagery Shoghi Effendi used of the human body passing through stages of life that are arguably biological or cultural is paired with a vision of the world that is firmly placed on a path towards a certain goal. Although the quotation compares these transitions to evolution, there are marked differences between the Baha'i definition of evolution and the biological one. Shoghi Effendi elaborates this point throughout his writing, but is particularly poignant in the following passage: "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 Baha'u'llah have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society."¹⁶⁹ In the Faith this evolution is predetermined by god, and thus when Baha'is discuss the current stage of adolescence, they are assured by their faith-tradition that it will come to pass and that an era of humanity filled with peace and calm will commence if Baha'is adhere to scripture. This is an accepted truth because this is how it is explicitly written in Baha'i scripture. Miller-Muro, a scholar and Baha'i, writes that "[Baha'is] are armed with the Divine teachings deigned for the specific ill afflicting humanity today,"¹⁷⁰ and grounds the confidence of the Baha'i vision in

¹⁶⁸ Danesh, R., "Hegemony and Revelation: a Baha'i Perspective on World Order," *Religious Studies and Theology*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2010), pp. 127-128.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 131.

¹⁷⁰ Miller-Muro, "Knowledge," pp. 6.

ideas of specific skill sets that are reaffirmed through the quotes that are repeated in services, prayer circles, and in interviews. A Dutch Baha'i told me she found extreme solace in the vision of peace and the assurance that it would come even if it would not be here during her lifetime. She said that "although I know I will never see this new world with my own eyes, my grandchildren, or their grandchildren, will, and that knowledge just makes it all worth it." Briefly she pondered that reality, took a sip of the tea she had just brewed, and continued speaking. "I feel blessed to have been a part of this era, which we call the Dawn, I know that before I move to the next world, I am contributing to humanity to bask in the full sunlight. I know this because Baha'u'llah has given us the tools to do so in his writing."

Not only do Baha'i writings provide the tools to help the world transition to the next stage of maturity, they also provide elaborate descriptions of this vision. There are several quotations that are repeatedly used to illustrate what the future looks like. As he was about to interview the president of Latvia, a Baha'i that I interviewed used his hands to gesture and to add weight to the words he recited to try to show me what was so clear to him. Although different aspects are emphasized by individual Baha'is in the different communities, a general description of a future surfaces, and the following quote by Abdu'l-Baha enumerates the virtues of this new world and captures what currently could be considered the obstacles to materializing it;

The earth will be transformed, and the world of humanity arrayed in tranquility and beauty. Disputes, quarrels, and murders will be replaced by peace, truth, and concord; among the nations, peoples, races, and countries, love and amity will appear. Co-operation and union will be established, and finally war will be entirely suppressed... Universal peace will raise its tent in the center of the earth, and the Blessed Tree of Life will grow and spread to such an extent that it will overshadow the East and the West. Strong and weak, rich and poor, antagonistic sects and hostile nations – which are like the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the lion and calf – will act towards each other with the most complete love, friendship, justice, and equity. The world will be filled with science, with the knowledge of the reality of the mysteries of beings, and with the knowledge of god.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Danesh, "Hegemony," pp. 124.

The different descriptions of dichotomies, such as East and West and rich and poor, are assumed to disappear in this new world, and the hateful bonds between races and countries will be replaced with ones of kindness. Abdu'l-Baha describes an Edenic utopia. A utopia because of the presence of peace and accessibility of knowledge, and Edenic because the entire concept is infused with spirituality, as Baha'u'llah writes “everything that is hath, come to be through his irresistible decree.”¹⁷² Many Baha'is I interviewed echoed this description. A Samoan Baha'i described the main reason why she joined the Faith was the desire to contribute to “establishing a new world on earth” according to the visions and mandates provided by Baha'u'llah. She knew that Baha'u'llah was not the first one to proclaim a new world, but that the world he described in his writing resonated with her heart and spirit like nothing had before. A western-European Baha'i I interviewed in Lithuania explicitly used the analogies of the living animals in the quote of Abdu'l-Baha to describe the purpose of his Faith and the different reasons why it is important to Baha'is to enact scripture and actively move towards a better world as imagined in scripture.

There are a couple of quotes that encapsulate some of the processes that are deemed necessary for Baha'is to achieve this Most Grand Peace. Another quote by Abdu'l-Baha shows some of the powerful rhetoric that centers around the processes of disintegration that are seen as required for humanity to enter the new era;

The call of Baha'u'llah is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. 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? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely

¹⁷² Ibid, pp. 129.

designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the reservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.¹⁷³

Under the loud shrieking and sighing of overused fans a Baha'i who was born and raised in New Zealand flipped through the pages of her copy of Lample's book to show me this exact quotation. She lent me her earmarked and creased copy after I stopped recording our conversation. The crux of Abdu'l-Baha's statement centers on the idea that when cultural ideas perpetuate institutions and structures that counter or are incompatible with the Baha'i vision for the future of humanity, they must disappear. Abdu'l-Baha expands on the notion of disintegration of the current world order, a prerequisite process according to Baha'is, to reintegrate the world in the new era. A Baha'i whose grandfather was the first to convert in her country and I spoke to in Lithuania paraphrased many of these ideas when she said that "practices must be in alliance with the writing and with god, and if they are not then there is not place for them in the future we are working towards to. We must sit and reflect on these practices and consider how they might help us grow, if it doesn't do help us strengthen our community or our relationship with god, we might have to choose practices that align more with our teachings." Although she used gentle language, the same idea of critically regarding the purposes of practices and discarding them if these practices counter the Faith are present in her statement.

The arbiter for what constitutes a proper tradition or ideology in general are the local Baha'is that use the writings of the Faith to determine how to build and sustain their communities. However the power of the Universal House of Justice remains paramount in interpreting the Faith and determining proper course. Adib Taherzadeh writes that there will come "a time when the authority of the Universal House of Justice will have been recognized by

¹⁷³ Lample, P. *Revelation and Social Reality: learning to translate what is written into reality*, Palabra Publications, West Palm Beach, United States (2009), pp. 12.

the nations of the world. At that time the legislature and executive constituting the essential components of the World Order of Baha'u'llah will harmoniously interact. The supreme authority of the Universal House of Justice divinely conferred upon it, will be the guarantor of the unity of the nations and peoples of the world.”¹⁷⁴ Taherzadeh’s writing expands the notion of what the future of the world will look like. The Baha’i Faith, and in particular the institution of the Universal House of Justice, will be placed in an ultimate position to guide the entirety of humanity towards the era envisioned by Baha’u’llah, according the sacred writing. Additionally the quotation illustrates the authority of the Universal House of Justice within the Faith, and the idea of obedience found in Baha’i communities to the writings. “To be a Baha’i, is to believe in the writing/is to follow the mandates found in our texts/is to accept the writings as the ultimate guide towards peace/you must recognize the divinity of Baha’u’llah’s words and accept the guidelines laid out by the Universal House of Justice.” These sentences, frequently spoken and chanted and written and sung by people from all over the world, illustrate the importance of the written word in the Faith.

The last few quotations I briefly want to address negotiate the plurality of identities the Faith encounters as it becomes increasingly global. In its writing the Faith seeks to embody the variety of human expression rather than to amalgamate the whole of humanity into a singular identity. Several quotes by Shoghi Effendi illustrate the metonymic attitude of the Faith towards human difference – “of one tree are all ye the fruit and of one bough the leaves,” “the earth is one country and mankind its citizens,” “let not a man glory in that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind”¹⁷⁵ – all these quotes show an appreciation of difference, but acknowledge the different ways in which difference is part of a larger whole.

¹⁷⁴ Danesh, “Hegemony,” pp. 133.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 128.

Some of them I saw on the giant hand-painted banner during a children's day in the outskirts of Apia and others were embroidered in soft tones on a white background and adorned the walls of the Dutch national office in The Hague. Every leaf is singular and different, yet not too different that its origin branch cannot be located. The following quote by Abdu'l-Baha particularly illustrates the metonymic usage of language in the Faith, and was the quotation I heard paraphrased most often.

Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, color, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm and addeth unto their beauty. How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruit, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when diverse shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the World of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men.¹⁷⁶

The soft-spoken Baha'i from Western Europe who had just showed me a picture of his young daughter, who possessed a darker shade of skin than her father's and was bowing slightly in a bright-pink dress is the first person I see whenever I think of this quotation. "It is a place I am imagining my daughter would be happy in." The imagery of the garden is a powerful one for it directly connects to sacral imagery of Eden, or paradise. This connection provides the metaphor with significant theological resonance, which combined with the beautiful descriptive language has made this quote among the most popular when describing the Baha'i vision for the world. It rejects a homogenization of human expression and experience but rather seeks the divine in the present plurality. Although humanity is one within the garden, it is the diversity that

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 128.

makes the garden beautiful and thrive. The quote narrates how Baha'is view difference and what they imagine a successful location to be for this diversity in their cosmology.

As is evident, these quotations – sometimes quoted directly, sometimes referenced or paraphrased – were repeated again and again. This happened in English, Russian, Dutch, and Lithuanian and in big cities and rural towns. To many Baha'is these quotations signify some central components of their religious identity, particularly when these quotations are connected to ideas about cultural and spiritual selves. The prevalence of these quotations indicate that there is a shared community with an identifiable source of origin. It resonates with the definition of a virtual community envisioned by Elkins. He argues that the internet allows “virtual communities to exist or even thrive in highly dispersed situations previously not very conducive to their persistence.”¹⁷⁷ Elkins locates the creation of a virtual community solely on the World Wide Web, and in the Baha'i Faith virtual meeting grounds are an integral part of the maintenance of the contemporary community. In addition to the spaces of the internet, I have found that the sacred writings of the Faith form virtual communities that connect and streamline a diverse set of marginal communities around the world. The quotations cultivate a shared connection among Baha'is, even if their interpretations differ. Rather than the extremely dispersed and relatively small communities slowly creating their own distinct versions of the Faith and separating into a multitude of Baha'i-derived religions, the shared language and the messages conferred through the quotes foster a cohesive religious community. The question of why these quotations have such abilities remains.

Baha'u'llah, his son Abdu'l-Baha, and his grandson Shoghi Effendi, are the known authors of a majority of these quotations, and are the ones that have largely inspired many of the

¹⁷⁷ Elkins, D.J., “Globalization, Telecommunications, and Virtual Ethnic Communities,” *International Political Science Review/Revue Internationale de Science Politique*, vol. 18, no. 2 (April, 1997), pp. 140.

quotations penned down by Baha’i scholars or spoken out loud by Baha’is around the world. There is a multitude of authors that not only read these texts, but continuously expand them. It is the perfect scenario to apply a Foucauldian analysis. Foucault argues that the “author function exceeds [the author’s] own work”¹⁷⁸ and the Baha’i writings are a clear example of this process. The author creates a certain text, but the text does not remain singular. It spurs a whole body of written and verbal work that recycle and repurpose the original words. In this Foucauldian process the power of the author extends beyond the direct audience of their work, and in the Baha’i Faith this is interesting because the audiences engage with the original text and the body of work derived from writings such as the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* or *The Hidden Words*. Said expands this symbiotic relationship as he engages with self-perpetuating systems constructing an imagined Orient. “There is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by the reader’s experience”¹⁷⁹ Said writes. This dialectical relationship regulates the production and reproduction of these texts and the constructions of truth embedded within them. It is a self-sustaining cycle that deepens the effect of the originator text. Understanding the reach of the author illustrates the importance of understanding the intricacies of authorship.

To analyze the identity of the author is an act that retrieves the creator especially when the creators of texts are often rendered invisible. Foucault – albeit rhetorically – asks “what difference does it make who is speaking?”¹⁸⁰ I think it is an important question to ask and I would argue it makes a world of difference for the different identities inhabited by the author are

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, “What,” pp. 10.

¹⁷⁹ Said, E.W., *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York City, USA (1978), pp. 94.

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, “What,” pp. 14.

the key to understanding why power and truth gravitate towards certain texts and not others. The divine source that sacralized these words credits them with unprecedented power in the communities that attribute truth to them. The fact that Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah is a manifestation of god and that his offspring was divinely enlightened grants these words a power they would not have if for example I wrote them. Not only allowed this divine source the author with the power to create truth, it caused its audiences to perpetuate those exact notions.

Foucault questions this power of the author as he argues that “the author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning.”¹⁸¹ The proliferation of meaning in a physical sense is important, because the spread of Baha'i texts is enormous through translation, library donations, pioneer work, et cetera. Baha'u'llah emphasized the need to spread the message in his writing, but the proliferation of meaning is more than the physical distribution of written work. It is embedded within language, whether that be Baha'u'llah's Persian and Arabic – religious and regional *linguas francas* – or Shoghi Effendi's English. The strategic placement of Baha'u'llah's name into Abdu'l-Baha's and Shoghi Effendi's texts were used to add gravity and validity to their own texts and to become received as being encoded in the same divine truth.¹⁸² That aspect of the analysis focuses on the creator of the text, and speaks to the principle of thrift. Similar to Foucault's work, whenever anyone reads a Baha'i text they need to read another one to expand their understanding and engage with the giant corpus of Baha'i writings. The main goal of this engagement is aiming to understand what Baha'u'llah was trying to convey, and thus every discussion and interpretation returns to Baha'u'llah and his words. The omnipresence and continuous return to Baha'u'llah as the author of these texts cement his power and messages. The author transcends the position of just having written the text and is transformed in the glue that

¹⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 13.

¹⁸² Ibid, pp. 7.

binds the Faith community tightly together. This is only enhanced by limiting discursive spaces as Baha'u'llah dismisses other interpretations and through divine ordinance makes his works superior. This is why in scripture there is a Covenant between god and the Baha'is to accept the writing and its mandates. Momen writes that "interpretative freedom would inevitably lead to doctrinal chaos and the formation of numerous sects based on the interpretations of various individuals if it were not for the existence of a Covenant or spiritual agreement into which each Baha'i enters."¹⁸³ These processes are not only the glue that binds the community together, it is also the tape surrounding them that ensures the community does not fall apart. Additionally it is important to acknowledge the dialectic nature of this scriptural relationship, and to understand how the audience contributes to establishing and dispersing the ideas in these texts, because the particular ideas, whether they be about global unity or progressive revelation, become prophetic truth through the production and reproduction of these texts.

The burden of proof in this scenario is "to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution."¹⁸⁴ In the case of the Baha'i community the collective formation and mobilization of its followers can be found in the texts, however the pages and ink themselves cannot enable a movement of millions. There is more to this process than the author and the physical creation of their work. The most evident example is how "the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses."¹⁸⁵ In the Baha'i Faith authority and jurisprudence is inextricably tied to the writing of Baha'u'llah and his offspring. The writings mandate and justify the power of institutions like the Universal House of Justice.

¹⁸³ Momen, *A Short Introduction*, pp. 77.

¹⁸⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 24.

¹⁸⁵ Foucault, "What," pp. 9.

Foucault argues that this process of legitimation determines the terms and conditions of theological conversations, and aids to the consolidation of the institutional power of the Universal House of Justice and National Spiritual Assemblies. This is significant because it directly impacts the ways communities are governed and creates a generalized pattern of global governance which prevents the Faith from both splintering and dissenting. However as Said noted, the dialectical relationship also allows Baha'is to respond and interpret the texts in localized ways and create routes in which these communities contribute to the larger construction of the Baha'i identity. I want to focus here on the common language used derived from the prophets and standardized and valorized through their writing. It becomes clear here – as Scott argues – that “experience is collective as well as individual.”¹⁸⁶ The usage of language shows that there is a collective experience defined by the author and the institutions and structures that promote its message but that there are also community and individual specific approaches that take distinct approaches and forge unique interpretations, a process on which I will focus in the following chapters. The interplay of written language and community constructs an intricate global web that has strikingly different patterns yet at the heart retains the same architecture.

As Foucault noted, it is not enough to know who the author is, for if we are limited to just that knowledge the actual processes of how texts become objective and the impacts on audiences are glossed over. A striking process that aids to consolidating the Baha'i concept of an objective truth was the singular stream of information I witnessed during my fieldwork in many of these communities. In Lithuania I realized that all the conversations and discussions derived solely from Baha'i writing, and when I checked the Ruhi books and discussion guidelines provided by the Universal House of Justice all works were written and distributed by Baha'is. After my

¹⁸⁶ Scott, “Experience,” pp. 34.

interview in the Baha'i national office of the Netherlands in The Hague I read the titles of the books behind glass in their library and every single book was about the Faith. The singular stream of information was always presented and applied to ideas and situations cross-culturally, I found that this tactic obscured the singularity of the source of information. The impact on audiences is that it produces a literary space solely filled with Baha'i or Baha'i-affiliated texts.

The usage and prevalence of the quotations resonate with some aspects of Appiah's definition of cosmopolitanism, but also complicate some of Appiah's ideas about how globalization through the lens of cosmopolitanism can forge a peaceful world. According to him, "evaluating stories together is one of the central human ways of learning to align our responses to the world."¹⁸⁷ Appiah argues that it is through personal narratives, and the acts of speaking and listening, that humans are brought in contact with one another. Through story telling it creates a connection that allows one to tolerate who historically has been the other. To him, conversation "doesn't have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it's enough that it help people get used to one another."¹⁸⁸

There is an aspect in Appiah's idea of cosmopolitanism that resonate with the Baha'i Faith, which is the acknowledgement that conversation can be a powerful tool to bring together people from all over the world. The main difference is the level of transformation imagined necessary to forge a unified world. According to Appiah transformation is not essential to altering the world, rather a getting used to one another suffices. The Baha'i tradition, as displayed in many of the quotes when imagining a future world, seeks a more transformative break from the present situation and create a new set of beliefs that draw inspiration from prior ideologies but do not hesitate to discard them if they appear to obstruct the Baha'i goals. The

¹⁸⁷ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 29.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 85.

prevalence of the quotations and the singular source of information within the Faith illustrate that. What both approaches fail to incorporate though are the ways in which narratives get constructed and what types of narratives are privileged over others. Appiah does not address the ways in which the stories we bring to the table arrive from historical places and times that imbue perspectives with distributions of power derived from the identities of the story teller. An important piece of the puzzle is understand that every story we tell was not birthed by a vacuum, but rather has a long genealogy. The Baha'i Faith treads this path ambivalently. There is the historical awareness of its theological ideas, and in my interviews many people were aware of the core value of racial equality and the historical trajectories that have created current inequalities. During other formal interviews and informal chats this seemed absent particularly when talking about gender and nationality.

Relativism proposes that there is a multitude of truths. That reality is like a shattered mirror with infinite different reflections and fractions of light. In a pure relativist world a singular truth is as likely to exist as a unicorn. Appiah rejects this notion and does believe there are universal aspects, which according to him catalyze globalization. He claims that difference is in the language and cultural constructions surrounding values, but not the values themselves. These universal values are important because they allow human beings to get used to another for there is something globally normal that everyone can relate to. This does not mean that Appiah thinks these value cannot be contested, but rather that there is a global quality to them. Similarly, Baha'u'llah and his offspring proclaimed through their writings that there is a singular truth for all of humanity. The specificity and level of universality is different in both approaches, as is the distribution of value, but the universal ideas and expected positive outcomes for the world share

similarities. What surfaces is a tension between creating an equal and inclusive world and enforcing a singular politico-religious ideology on a global level.

To better illustrate exactly how Appiah applies to the series of Baha'i quotes the people I interviewed provided me with I will return to Siphon, the South African Zulu who critically watched and navigate the cultural spaces provided by *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and consider how someone like him might respond to these quotes. Siphon, in this case as well Baha'i, according to Appiah would be able to navigate the messages of these quotes, and in a way pick and choose what he identified strongly with, but also be able to reject what would clash with his ideologies. I argue that it is more complicated than that, and that the aspect of free will lies more in the execution of the texts rather than navigating the flux of information itself. If a devout Baha'i reads their sacred texts, they will be convinced of the divine source of the writing, which attributes a type of authorial power to these words. The aspect of sincerely held beliefs is key in analyzing the responses to these texts. This is also the perfect moment for Rifkin to enter the scene, and he writes that essential to the global success of a sacred text there must be "faith in the persuasive power of reason."¹⁸⁹ It speaks to the tension between equality and authority in the Faith, as people who engage with the Baha'i texts as secular writing fall outside of the political community as defined by Baha'u'llah and his family. To understand why Baha'is accept these texts and are animated by them, Rifkin argues that it is not enough to engage with these writings on a secular level, but to address the complexities spirituality bring to the table. As a Baha'i Siphon will engage and navigate Baha'i writing, but because of the faith entrenched in these holy words rejection of any aspect of the writing is not an option. Especially as the writing, as many of these quotes have shown, ask for an acceptance of the divinity of the writing and the

¹⁸⁹ Rifkin, *Spiritual Perspectives*, pp. 129.

institutions it promotes. Rejection would be akin to blasphemy. I believe this is also the reason why so many Baha'is in all of the fieldwork locations provided similar answers to my questions about what it meant to be Baha'i; to accept Baha'u'llah as the latest prophet and his writing as the truth to live by. Appiah reminds us, however, to be extremely careful to attribute passiveness to the audiences of texts; Siphon – whether he is Baha'i or not – is not a mindless robot who succumbs to the written word. Through summer camps and special events, and prayer circles to discussion groups, Baha'is around the world create spaces to engage with the writings and determine what the best ways are to materialize the written messages in their own communities. For example a couple of Dutch Baha'is I interviewed addressed the homophobic stance of the Faith, and explained that although they themselves did not endorse full equality, their levels of acceptance and fostering a safer space contrasted with the other communities I worked with. Rifkin's ideas of spirituality augment Appiah's ideas about the global spread of information and the diverging ways people respond to it.

It is powerful that a globally dispersed body of sacred texts binds together this community, and that its followers engage with the text to ensure the best application of them to their respective communities. Tsing articulates a possible reason why this has been so effective. All writing centers on a similar message, the goal of the Faith to create a new and radically peaceful world. Through the several strategies I just discussed this becomes a universal truth, or as Tsing calls it, an “*axiom of unity*.”¹⁹⁰ Central to this idea are the different ways in which Baha'i communities engage with these texts, as the combination of theories of Appiah and Rifkin have shown.

¹⁹⁰ Tsing, *Friction*, pp. 89.

Tsing would argue that those moments contain friction, because there are several cultural and ideological streams encountering one another. It often seems that hegemonic ideas are broken down in these encounters for localized identities and structures are produced and reproduced, however Tsing writes that “hegemony is made as well as unmade with friction.”¹⁹¹ The sacred texts and the localized attempts to materialize the mandates of Baha’u’llah and his offspring become integrated into the new identities and structures imagined by the diverse Baha’i communities. Although they all remain different, and as the quotes indicate, that difference is embraced, they all weave the same hegemonic narratives into the fabric of their communities. Tsing also argues that in this process of standardizing global knowledge [...] truths that are incompatible are suppressed.”¹⁹² Similar to my critique of Appiah, I doubt that Baha’is would suppress or dismiss any sacred text. In the face of incompatibility, I believe that Baha’is would find new ways to incorporate the beliefs found in the writing, based on a shared spiritual conviction. However it is important to once again note the tension between equality and sole authority when it becomes evident that texts like the Qur’an or the Mahabharata are part of the canon but explicitly placed in a hierarchy in which Baha’u’llah’s writing is paramount. As Appiah writes “fortified with a shared language of value, we can often guide one another, in the cosmopolitan spirit, to shared responses; and when we cannot agree, the understanding that our responses are shaped by some of the same vocabulary can make it easier to agree to disagree.”¹⁹³ The shared foundation in the different Baha’i communities around the world creates unity even if there is difference. In the following chapters I will discuss how the engagement with texts manifests itself in different identities and structures. These global truths and the different ways

¹⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 6.

¹⁹² Ibid, pp. 13.

¹⁹³ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 30.

which communities respond to them show how global knowledge is not static, but perpetually in motion, like the rain or the waves in seas and oceans.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Tsing, *Friction*, pp. 13.

Chapter III
for fatherland and freedom

I

It felt like winter would never come. It was already late January and it had not snowed. The trees were desolate and alone in the brown fields for as far as I could see. The earth would freeze and the ground would become hard as rocks but somehow it just would not snow. Small clouds formed in front of my face, obscuring the approaching bus. With a subdued screech the loud bus with darkened windows stopped in front of our old meeting hall. Its wooden paneling was peeling and the glass in its windows had cracked. Everyone knew of the owls that lived there now and had turned what was the heart of our village into an avian homestead. I reached out to hold her hand but she said it was too cold for that and we had to get on the bus anyway. Lusia, the *zolushka* doll *papachka* got me for my last birthday, was sitting next to me. I was holding her hand tightly, the cool plastic calmed me down as I looked through the window. With some slight resistance from the engine the bus driver set us all in motion. As the bus sped up the familiar houses and farms and apartment blocks and empty roads slowly passed by. As we went faster and faster it all turned into a brown and gray haze. I pressed my face against the cold glass. I tried to will the bus to stop. *Mamachka*. I did not look over to where she was sitting for I feared

if I would turn away from the windows these horizons would never return. *Mamachka*. My breath had fogged up the glass and my eyes started watering as I refused to blink. *Da, dachorochka*. Her warm hands slowly removed my face from the thin barrier separating me from the only world I had ever known. Her hands brought me into her coat and arms and body and hair and particular smell of dirt. They brought me home and I cried. The bus rocked gently and soon I was sound asleep. She woke me up a few times, to make sure I ate some of the *lymmonyk* and *oladyi* she and *babushka* had been preparing before we closed and locked the door of our house one last time. Each time I peeked out of the window before I fell back asleep the landscape was familiar. The land was the same brown, the trees were the same skeletal silhouettes, and even the houses seemed the same. Either they were made out of concrete slabs or faded wood. In this drowsy haze I felt I had barely moved an inch and my heart seemed to not be as upset anymore. When *mamachka* woke me up she whispered that we were almost at our new home. I did not quite understand what she meant by that and I shrugged. I turned to the window and saw the landscape had changed. I was in a strange land and the brown fields were replaced by dense pine tree forests. The Daugava caught the sunlight and like a diamond snake slithered through the landscape to the fragile and elegant churches of saints whose names we would no longer say out loud. We were almost in Riga and it had just started to snow.

II

It had been a confusing few days and I am sure no one really knew what was exactly going on. So many different messages and hopes and dreams and doubts and fears continuously came streaming in from the radios and televisions and neighbors and newspapers. I did not know

where to look because whenever I would look anywhere some new rumor would take root and grow into something unrecognizable that could have been truth just as easily as myth. The sea of thick dark red bands separated with the thin white stripe of the *Latvijas Karogi* waved in the hands of the thousands of people that washed over the city as if the Daugava had flooded. I tried to make my way through the crowd of celebrating bodies that were not exactly sure yet what they celebrated but something had started and nothing could stop it anymore. I knew Lilya would be waiting. The blue skies stretched over the crowded Brivibas Bulvaris, a street so filled with people it would take me forever to cross it. As it got warmer I started to sweat. I felt the salty lines slowly draw marks through the small flags hastily drawn on my cheeks. I checked my watch and I knew I still had time. The sound of the yelling and cheering and singing was overwhelming. It was an endless pulsating mass that drew me in deeper and deeper. I feared the stomping feet would break the earth, but I knew we would still celebrate. Even in this madness people still seemed anxious, or reluctant in a way. If decisions were reversed, armies mobilized and lands invaded, these streets would empty, this town would be deserted. The fear was hidden behind every smile. I was finally nearing the Nativity of Christ Cathedral and could not wait to escape the suffocating flood of people. As I stood on the steps that led towards the sacred sanctuary Lilya was nowhere to be found. I tried to find her friendly smile and kind eyes in the crowd but the faceless and nameless mass of bodies just slowly moved deeper into old town. The minutes passed and Lilya still had not appeared. I waited for two hours. The crowd, ever-growing and ever-moving, did not notice me. I knew something must have happened because Lilya had never been late. I made my way upstream, wading through the mass of bodies and flags. I slowly started going towards Tallinas Iela, the street she had been living on for the past two years in an apartment she was about to be evicted from. The street was deserted except for a

laughing couple clad in Latvian flags strolling down the road, slightly swaying back and forth as they laughed and leaned on each other. I pressed the buzzer so many times I was afraid the button would get stuck. I cupped my hands in front of my mouth and yelled her name to the fourth floor windows. Mrs. Tolstokozhev on the second floor opened her window. All she said was “go to the hospital!”

Lilya had already passed away when I made it to her room. The doctor whose name and face I already forgot told me a car driving twenty kilometers over the speed limit had intercepted her as she was crossing the street. Her body was fighting the internal bleeding for a while but it was a fight she was bound to lose. The doctor let me in her room. The first thing I noticed were the windows and I realized Lilya would never look through them. She would never look at the crowds exclaiming that for the first time in decades they felt free and alive. I tried to avoid seeing her, and as soon as I did I fell to my knees at her bedside. My fingers clutched the starched sheets. Her parents were on their way from Daugavpils and would soon realize that nothing would be the same again. There was nothing I could say. There was no one who was listening. Motionless I ceased to exist. As I laid my head to rest on Lilya’s cold hand, the small flags on my cheeks mixed with my tears. The droplets stained the sheets.

It seemed the next few days were just an endless haze of nothing. I did not notice the major changes that happened. The declaration of independence. The dissolution of the Soviet Union. The announcement that so many of us who supported independence would not receive citizenship. None of it stuck. Lilya’s parents took her body back to Daugavpils and I knew I would never see her bright blue eyes again. I did nothing and I wanted to do nothing. One day Anya held my hands and told me she knew Lilya had always been my closest friend and that my despair made sense, but that Lilya would have wanted me to continue with life even if she could

not. Anya knew about these people, Baha'is she called them, that met and talked about love and community and god. I told her I never believed in god, and that Lilya's death only confirmed my disbelief. If there was a god how could he – or whatever – be so cruel? Anya asked me to just go once. She had been going several times and the conversations made her happier. She started to believe that Baha'u'llah may have been right.

The next night we went to a recently renovated house in Kipsala. A small group of people crowded the living room. Everyone was speaking Russian and welcomed me immediately to join in. The man sitting next me introduced himself as Vasya. I managed to smile and for the first time it did not feel like a betrayal. A woman opened an old green book and started reading from it. The prayers were in Latvian, a language I had never been taught. After she was done another woman started speaking in Russian. She shared a verse from Baha'u'llah that stirred me in way not many words had been able to.

I have awakened in Thy shelter, O my God, and it becometh him that seeketh that shelter to abide within the sanctuary of Thy protection and the Stronghold of Thy defence. Illumine my inner being, O my Lord, with the splendours of the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, even as Thou didst illumine my outer being with the morning light of Thy favour.

All I wanted to do was dismiss these words. To render them empty and meaningless. To put my hands on my ears and shut them out like I had done with everything ever since I saw Lilya lying in bed, forever silent. I wanted to reject these words but I could not. The idea of something sheltering me after all this pain and hardship was a thought too sweet to abandon. I had never believed in god, and I did not think a few nice words would change that, but these words touched me to my core. Slowly hot tears started rolling down my face as people continued to pray. Mostly in Russian, some in Latvian and English. Vasya placed his hand gently on my

shoulder and whispered in my ears that everything was going to be okay. Those words no longer seemed like blatant lies.

III

The old wooden ladle feels comfortable in my hand as I stir the big pot of *aukstā zupa*. In the background I hear Bogdan and Kiril running around. Their screams of joy fill the air and I can't help smiling. I look up as I hear the faint sound of our old doorbell. It reminds me Vasya still has not fixed it, or that he has not yet told the landlord to fix it, either way I sigh and take a mental note to do it myself. After a few minutes Sofia comes in and lifts Kiril into her arms. They both laugh loudly and spin around in the hallway. Vasya puts his large hands on my shoulders and whispers in my ear that he will fix the doorbell that weekend. I know he has promised that the past four weekends, but I close my eyes and rest my head on his shoulders. His smell engulfs me even after all those years. The surface has changed, now infused with the earthy smell of our tiny vegetable plot in the communal garden and the piercing scent of markers Kiril and Bogdan used to decorate our wardrobes, but after all those years the subtle essence still captivates me every single day. The bell rings again, interrupting us. Sofia shouts she'll get it and runs out the door. I confess to Vasya that I am not sure what to expect and that I am a little bit nervous that I will say the wrong things and somehow mess up. He just holds me and assures me it will be fine. He is also not sure what exactly is going to happen.

Sofia opens the door and the American walks in. He is wearing shorts, colorful shoes and a t-shirt. He has dark hair and there is a thin layer of sweat on his forehead. He firmly shakes all of our hands and says something in English that I cannot understand. I just smile back as Sofia

starts translating everything into Russian for us. She tells us that he got lost for a while and was not sure where to go, that the weather has been beautiful, that Riga has been an extremely welcoming place, and that he is actually not American, but Dutch. I urge Sofia to guide us in the living room, for it is unseemly to keep our guest in the narrow and dark hallway. Kiril and Bogdan are sprawled on the dark carpet playing with tiny cars. The floral patterns on the couches entwine and continue on the painted walls, like a beautiful garden year-round. The large windows overlook four other concrete and brick flats that might look exactly like ours, but we know the differences of the Antipins and their beautiful roses on the second floor or the Chilayevs and their expensive lace curtains on the fifth. The Dutchman sits down on the couch and immediately Kiril jumps next to him and in rapid-fire Russian asks countless questions. The Dutchman does not answer but just smiles, and Kiril grows increasingly frustrated and speaks louder. Sofia interrupts him and tells him that the Dutchmen does not speak Russian. As if rehearsed he says *ya ne ponimayu po-russki*. We all burst out laughing. I ask Sofia to ask him if he is hungry, and through translation he says he'd like some water. He assures me I do not have to worry about him or stress myself to make something for him. I nod that I understand. I get up and shoo Kiril out of my way. The voices of Sofia and Vasya are a familiar background static as I cut cake and pour water in the kitchen. There is a small black and white picture of Baha'u'llah that always brings me peace. It always brings a certain silence to the whirlwinds of life.

Back in the living room the American asks why it is that there are more Russians than Latvians in our Baha'i community. I remember what I felt before I knew about Lilya. The emotions in the days leading up to that bold declaration of independence. I felt connected to everyone around me. I would sing *Pūt, Vējiņi* along as loud as I could even if I could not understand the words. When they announced that I was not eligible for Latvian citizenship I

wanted to understand. At first I tried to find excuses, but I knew that my blood was the same as that of Latvians and there were no real reasons to exclude me. I truly believed that independence was what was just for the Latvian people, but I never thought they would say that this land is not my home. I know Riga is my home, even if I was born far away. During the Soviet Union we were united. There were no borders, and now I do not even hold citizenship of the country in which I live. Everything changed so fast and now I barely recognize Latvia. It is strange. I notice we become more Russian within our community, but Bogdan and Kiril speak Latvian better than they do Russian. Bogdan already dreams of going to university in Germany or Sweden and he is barely eleven. Especially in the beginning it was all so sudden and odd. Everyone spoke Russian. It was in many ways so much easier. I remember how easy it was to go to Saint Petersburg and walk the promenades. I just miss it sometimes. I realize I have been rambling for a while and I'm sure what I am saying is not helpful. I stop talking and urge Vasya to say something. We continue to talk for a while about our Faith. We eat some more and share a few laughs. He thanks us, again and again, and leaves. As I wash the dishes I turn and see Baha'u'llah's portrait. Vasya comes in the kitchen and places a kiss softly on the top of my head. I smile as I rinse the plates.

Chapter IV

the smell and sight of flowers

“He kept thinking he’d invited everyone, but then he remembered someone else. *Dear Hummingbird*, he wrote, or *Dear Arctic Fox*, or *Dear Seahorse*,”¹⁹⁵ the Dutch poet and writer Toon Tellegen writes as he introduces us to Squirrel, who has a big birthday party coming up. Squirrel wants not a single animal to feel left out at his party, and thus writes thousands of letters inviting everyone. He places them on the wind and the letters fly away, and

soon the letters started to come down again. They swooped into the river, to the pike and the carp and the stickleback. Others bored their way into the ground, to the mole and the earthworm and the other animals that lived there. Some flew over the woods to the desert, to the camel and the sandfly, and others to the ocean, to the whale and the porpoise and the sea lion and the dolphin.¹⁹⁶

All the animals grew excited, and started crafting their own particular gifts to show how much they loved the Squirrel. Tellegen tells us they made “gifts of wood, gifts of honey, and gifts of air, gifts to eat and gifts to put on your head in wintertime, or on your tail when it was very cold.”¹⁹⁷ Meanwhile the Squirrel baked thousands of cakes and pies and desserts and treats

¹⁹⁵ Tellegen, T., *The Squirrel's Birthday and Other Parties*, translated by Martin Cleaver, Boxer Books, London, UK (2009), pp. 16.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 18.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 29.

for all the animals, each one appropriate for their diet. All the animals gathered and soon “the ground rumbled and shook from their strange steps. All the animals danced. They danced cheerfully and quickly, and occasionally slowly and seriously, and some animals even sobbed as they danced without knowing why, because they were very happy.”¹⁹⁸ In the end the party was a big success and afterwards all the oceans and forests and mountains were quiet because all the animals were sound asleep. I have heard this story many times growing up and it always tugged at my heart strings. It was hopeful and kind. As soon as I started writing my thesis this tale vividly resurfaced.

The enchanted worlds created by Toon Tellegen do more than mesmerize, they illustrate a world of difference that comes together to celebrate and love. The portrayal of the Kingdom of Animalia in Tellegen’s work is a useful entry point from which to engage the different Baha’i communities around the world. As I claimed in *from the mouthpiece of god* The Baha’i writings bind the communities together as Baha’u’llah’s authorial power transcends his words and unifies theological experiences. However the Baha’i community does not aim to become a uniform conglomerate. The Squirrel does not bake a singular type of cake. The quotes referenced in the previous chapter have made clear that there is an awareness and appreciation for diversity. Particularly Abdu’l-Baha’s writings, which compared human diversity to the beauty and vitality of a garden is a powerful one.

However, it is one thing to invite everyone to the party, and quite another to provide each individual with their specially crafted dessert. In this chapter I hope to shed a light on how the Faith bakes cakes and pies. Scott wrote that “we know that difference exists, but we don’t understand it as constituted relationally,”¹⁹⁹ which sums up my aims for this chapter. Difference

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 54.

¹⁹⁹ Scott, “Evidence,” pp. 25.

is acknowledged across the board, but how is it constructed throughout the Baha'i Faith, within the specific Faith communities and in the countries inhabited by Baha'is? These are important questions to consider, because they help us to understand how globalization produces and reproduces new and different cultures. Although globalization impacts all identities, "the construction of collective identities," Scholte writes, "has historically been closely bound with place."²⁰⁰ This is why there are three specific examples from my fieldwork I want to consider in depth: a prayer circle during the youth camp in Elniakampis, the historic funeral procession of His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II often referenced in my interviews, and a regular service in the Baha'i House of Worship in Tiapapata. I will also consider other examples and discussions to gain a better understanding of Baha'i processes of cultural production. I will follow the description of this fieldwork with a discussion on cultural practices and their relevance, and end with the academic trinity of my thesis; Appiah, Tsing, and Rifkin.

I enjoyed attending a service in a Baha'i House of Worship in Samoa. Sitting in the pews under the elegant dome, rising up to a nine-sided panel inscribed with god's name in Arabic, I read the quotes around the wall. All were taken from Baha'u'llah's writing. Besides these writings the walls were plain and white, divided into abstract squares by slender windows reaching for the sky. There were lines of pews made of a light wood, which, I was told, was endemic to Samoa. Next to the entrance overlooking Afiamalu was a small bookshelf filled with Qur'ans, Bibles, Mahabharatas, a variety of Baha'i writings and other scriptural texts written in English, Samoan, and Farsi. I remembered seeing graves in the garden inscribed with Iranian names and I wondered when the last time was when the Farsi prayer books were read. Slowly but steadily more people entered the building through one of the four entrances and made their way

²⁰⁰ Scholte, J. A., "The Geography of Collective Identities in a Globalizing World," *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 3, no. 4 (winter, 1996), pp. 571.

to the pews. It was children's day, so there was an exceptional number of youths that attended the service that day. Not by a long shot were all of them Baha'i. Everyone attending the service was dressed up, which in Samoa means the following: men wear a *lavalava* – a Pacific type of sarong – made out of the same material suits are made out of, and a button down and blazer. The women wore colorful and patterned *puleyasi* – dresses made by using cloth that often have traditional floral or tattoo-inspired prints on them. As the service started, a choir of children sang a Samoan song to praise Baha'u'llah. This was followed by a series of children and teenagers walking up to the front of the congregation and sharing a verse or poem from scripture. Most were either from Baha'u'llah's writing or the bible, with one piece stemming from the Qur'an. After all prayers had been shared the choir sang again. First in English, and lastly in Samoan. We sat for an undetermined time, and pondered the words we had just heard. Afterwards my fellow student and I joined the informal gathering that was happening outside and talked about why we were in Samoa, what we thought of the children's day and Samoa in general, and how beautiful the singing of the children was. Often they would ask us if we were Baha'i, we would always answer the same; "No we are not, but we are very interested in learning more about the Faith." Often the person would smile and assure us that it did not matter how long we took to come to a decision as long as that decision was our own.

Each night in Elniakampis in rural Lithuania after the sun set and we had finished our discussions of Baha'i theology and morality and eaten the dinner cooked by kind volunteers, we would gather in a large circle and present what each different group had learned that day. Every group was defined by country of origin; it was the most convenient option when considering the languages everyone spoke best. There were the Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and English groups. Although I was part of the English group I was able to observe what the other groups

were doing as well. A big part of the presentation were the creative components. Often this meant a big collaborative drawing or a semi-improvised skit. Several times, and in particular, the Latvian and Estonian groups would teach us a traditional folk song. Afterwards they would get us all up on our feet and lock arms and dance the steps some of us had just learned of these traditional choreographies that regained popularity after the fall of the Soviet Union. We danced and laughed for a while, in the background you could hear the jokes and instructions being translated into Polish, Russian, or Lithuanian. We would continue until we all vaguely knew the steps or the words of the song. People would clap and move on the beat, swirling around when we were supposed to. "From the air," one of the Latvian girls said, "it'll look just like of the old Latvian patterns!" The next part of the evening was reserved for prayer. The order changed every night, but several people held their worn prayer books and placed them on their jeans or sweatpants and shared a couple of verses in whichever language they spoke. English, Russian, Polish, French, Spanish, Lithuanian, and German were some of them. There was no translation provided. One of the organizers of the youth camp, a Baha'i from Estonia, would share some closing remarks and grab his guitar. Soon we were all clapping and singing along to the words written by Baha'u'llah a long time ago;

If thy lovest me, turn away from thyself
If thy sleekest my pleasure, regard not thine own
If thy lovest me, turn away from thyself
If thy sleekest my pleasure, regard not thine own
That thou, that thou mayest die in me,
And I may live eternally in thee
That thou, that thou mayest die in me,
And I may live eternally in thee

Afterwards we would linger around, play card games and talk in the respective languages we could speak. Often our conversations returned to theological matters, and how the Baha'is as a whole, or the individual ones I was talking to, imagined changing the world, and how they

would go about it. We talked about how fun the folkdances were, and how we should learn a few steps each night. We would wrap up our conversations, wash the plates we used to finish the leftovers, and headed upstairs to bed.

We now return to Samoa. When His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II – or lovingly called Susuga by many – announced that he was Baha’i it filled the hearts of many followers of the Faith with joy. When Susuga passed away on the eleventh of May in 2007, those hearts were filled with grief. It was not just the Baha’is that mourned the passing of Susuga, but all of Samoa. Susuga had maneuvered Samoa through the process of independence and kept the island nation peaceful whilst democratizing governmental processes. After his passing the entire nation of Samoa entered a time of grief. All flags were lowered to half-mast and for about three days Samoans were urged to wear white and black clothing out of respect for the passing of the paramount *matai*. During the funeral and the processions surrounding it, people were encouraged to wear traditional *lavalava* and *sulu* as well clothes with *elei* patterns – patterns inspired by Samoan tattoos. The mourners adorned themselves with *teuila* – the national flower of Samoa – as they said goodbye to the man who had led their country for decades. Many ancient rituals were revived to honor Susuga’s family, clan, and ancestral village. All villages connected to the title of Malietoa cut palm leaves and ceremoniously lined the roads with them. Hundreds of uniformed men marched Susuga’s body to his final resting place in Tiafau Malae. It was a ceremony of unprecedented magnitude for the relatively recent independent state.

Although Susuga was extremely well-loved by his fellow Baha’is, the ceremony raised a lot of questions in the community. Every single Baha’i I interviewed in Samoa expressed their discontent with how the funeral was conducted. It explicitly emphasized rank and authority and incorporated many *faiifeau* – the Samoan word for Christian priests – and Christian rituals. In the

egalitarian Baha'i Faith there is no priesthood and the presence of chiefly titles is contested. One Baha'i I interviewed told me she thought it was extremely disrespectful to the Faith community he belonged to. She could understand why the country needed it after losing a great leader, but it pained her to see that his wishes were not honored.

In all three of these examples culture is present in a diverse range of ways. Throughout anthropological history so many have struggled through dense theoretical forests to define the slippery catch-all phrase 'culture.' I like how Jahoda paraphrases this conceptual chaos when he writes that "culture consists of symbolic elements that members of a culture *generally believe* to be important to or characteristic of the culture."²⁰¹ This interpretative take resonates with my theoretical approach and strikes a chord with the information the people I interviewed provided me with, although it is important to complicate this definition in regards to unequal power distribution. In the three examples I presented there are particular elements that reflect Baha'i culture, such as the absence of clergy, and others that signify localized identities, such as people wearing *puletasi* or dancing Latvian folkdances. Recalling Foucault, who cautioned us to not repeat the empty affirmation that the author does not exist,²⁰² I aim to find the local authors of the new cultures created when Latvia, Samoa, or the Netherlands meet the Faith. The writings of the Faith do not wish to homogenize humanity, but rather see diversity as a strength to cement world peace. Tazi reminds us that truth is never singular,²⁰³ and the examples I provided and throughout this chapter I aim to show the diverse ways Baha'is created localized cultural truths that are theologically bound together transnationally.

²⁰¹ Jahoda, G., "Critical Reflections on some recent definitions of 'culture,'" *Culture and Psychology*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2012), pp. 296.

²⁰² Foucault, "What is," pp. 4.

²⁰³ Tazi, *Keyword*, pp. 3.

In the Samoan and Latvian communities culture especially carries a heavy weight. After achieving independence from post-colonial and post-communist entities respectively, culture – as Scholte writes – “generally reinforced the position of the nation as the foremost structure of collective identity.”²⁰⁴ The nation-state became a rallying point of ethnic and cultural identity, and institutions like the *fa’asamoa*, were powerful in galvanizing collective ideas of belonging. A Baha’i I interviewed on the temple grounds told me that “as soon as you think of Samoa, you think of *fa’asamoa* and *fa’amatai*, you just can’t separate the two.” Another Baha’i in Latvia told me that “our dances and songs have survived so much, they really are beautiful and show who we are.” To remain part of cultural communities the Faith needs to balance respecting pre-existing institutions whilst simultaneously ensuring that those institutions do not go against Baha’i norms and values. “When I tell them I am Baha’i,” Marijona, a Lithuanian Baha’i, says, “they regard me with suspicion because they think the Faith is some kind of sect. People sometimes give me weird looks.” Marijona’s experience speaks directly to the balance Baha’i communities must uphold. “Churches broadly have a congruence of values with the society in which they operate,” Cole writes, “whereas sects are in a high state of tension with their society.”²⁰⁵ Regardless of whether the Baha’is think of themselves as sectarian, often their host-societies do. If the Faith would reject all indigenous culture, this would create tension and provide people with ammunition to reject the ‘foreign intruder.’ Through accepting and incorporating man cultural systems and beliefs this can be avoided.

Especially the example of Susuga’s funeral shows the tension faced by Baha’i communities in their respective culture communities. “Alternative forms of collective identity,”

²⁰⁴ Scholte, “Geography,” pp. 566.

²⁰⁵ Cole, “Fundamentalism,” pp. 198.

Scholte argues, “often bypass, if not directly challenge, the nationality principle.”²⁰⁶ According to the *fa’asamoa* the funeral was executed exactly according to cultural protocol, yet as my interviews with many Samoan Baha’is show, it directly clashed with the religion Susuga adhered to. Organizing such a grand event uses cultural institutions and icons to strengthen nationalistic collective unity, however it also paradoxically fragments the religiously plural society. The funeral explicitly solidified hierarchical notions of community, His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II clearly was superior to many, if not all. The Baha’is, who construct their community as egalitarian and without ranks or clergy, are excluded from the collectivity of Samoa. As Susuga was a Baha’i himself, this was a particular intrusive act onto the Samoan Baha’i community. However if the community would have advocated for a different ceremony and stepped away from the *fa’asamoa* and Christian influences of the funeral, the community would have directly challenged the cultural status quo and placed themselves opposed from it. The fact that this tension is hard to resolve and emotionally runs deep is evident in the emotions of the people I interviewed, many who told me about their frustration and tears during these events.

Similar tensions became evident through my interview with a Samoan Baha’i I will call Sione. As a child he attended educational programs organized by the community, and as he turned fifteen he declared himself a Baha’i. Sione has successfully been a part of the Samoan National Spiritual Assembly and is the only Baha’i in his family. After the service, during which Sione wore a black *sulu* and a button down with *elei* patterns, he explained to me how he tried to resolve the tension between adhering to the values of the Faith and not confrontationally challenging the *fa’asamoa*;

Being Samoan, I mentioned earlier that my name is just Sione, means I do have chiefly titles. I am a *matai*. That also defines being Samoan. You have family obligations to the ones that entrusted you and appointed you. The beauty of it is you don’t see it as

²⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 566.

having these *matai* titles or being in that position bestows authority on you, but it provides an opportunity to serve your family. There is a Samoan saying that the pathway to a higher status is service. [...] It is a service, but as a leader it is also leading your family to the most prosperous path. Not leading them to unnecessary contributions to *fa'alavelave*. There is an excess being put into family obligations. It works both ways, it is serving them by leading them. I would like to say accompany them actually. We walk together to somewhere prosperous that is beneficial to everyone. I rather use accompany because than whatever we get, we share.

The initial tension is the same as Susuga's funeral procession. What is the place of the *fa'asamoa* in an egalitarian community? Is the culture in which the community originated inherently problematic? Sione is clear that certain aspects definitely are, and as Baha'u'llah noted, those traditions need to be altered, or removed. The *fa'alavelave*, the Samoan ritual of exchanging gifts during noteworthy occasions like funerals and weddings, is a tradition Sione explicitly refers to as needing to change. In recent years *fa'alavelave* have become tools to display a family's wealth by giving extremely large sums of money, emphasizing and magnifying prior notions of hierarchy over those of egalitarianism and redistribution. Unfortunately, for many families *fa'alavelave* have become a financial strain and have increased debt, resentment, and overall poverty. This is illustrated extremely well in the following poem "crucifixion" by Talosaga Tolovae;

You have talked
About your Christ
With a bleeding heart
A face aged with pity
Crucified on the calico sheets
On cool rafters
Of your place of worship
For my sake

But I've seen
My father
Eyes bloodshot
Skin cracked and blackened
By hours of labor in the sun
To keep his children in school

And provide for a family

Still you talked
Of the sacrifice
Your Christ
Made on Golgotha
To earn for us
A one-way ticket
To his place of residence

But I've seen
The black-robed priests
Of your Christ
Crucifying my father
On Sundays
With loaded scripts for his wages
To aid heal your christ's
Injury to his heart²⁰⁷

Tolovae decries the hypocrisy he sees in the words of the priests and the actions of the church, which is significant to the practice of *fa'alavelave* because these ceremonies are often officiated by priests and attended by priests from other villages and demand (according to tradition) high sums of money and large piles of gifts. The tension between lower and middle income classes and the clergy have been rising. Besides engaging with the *fa'alavelave*, Sione also holds a chiefly title, another aspect of the *fa'asamoa* that hierarchizes and distributes power. However Sione has found a way to navigate that hierarchical space and engage with the *matai* title to fulfill his Baha'i responsibilities. Sione distances himself from the explicit leadership qualities attached to the *matai* title and rather focuses on accompanying his family to collective success. He told me this is often very difficult, but he works hard for his family. Sione told me about several times when his family wanted to pay a lot of money to a *faiifeau* to perform certain ritual tasks for the groundbreaking of a new *fale*, but Sione was able to stop the extremely expensive transaction from occurring. This lies at the very root of the *fa'amatai*, but many

²⁰⁷ Meleseia, Meleseia, and Meleseia, *Samoa's Journey*, pp. 93.

Samoans – regardless of religious affiliation – told me that that the *fa'amatai* has been diluted and abused increasingly in recent years.

Sione's interpretation of his *matai* title resonates with a speech given by the Baha'i scholar Miller-Muro; "Irrespective of its scope and scale, 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. Such endeavors are distinguished, then, by their stated purpose to promote the material well-being of the population, in addition to its spiritual welfare."²⁰⁸ The Faith becomes a lens through which to view culture and seek to transform them. Sione resolves the tension of the Samoan post-colonial nation-state project in this instance, and through religious thought justifies his actions. It is the same thing as what happened in Elniakampis with the traditional Latvian folk dance that became central to a religious celebration. It is part of a process Taylor Atkins describes as sacralization, which he uses in his discussion of how jazz became integral to American services as American Baha'is, particularly African Americans in the South, incorporated the music style in their religious experiences. Taylor Atkins argues that "the making sacred – or 'sacralizing' – of certain secular values may be viewed as part of the Baha'i response to modernity."²⁰⁹ Although modernity is a vague and ambiguous term shrouded in colonial idea of what constitutes 'modern,' Taylor Atkins does articulate a possible mechanism the Baha'i Faith uses to encounter difference. Warburg clarifies exactly what kind of response sacralization is by claiming that "religious organizations, faced with the relativization of their moral codes, react in one of the ways: the liberal and conservative option."²¹⁰

Sacralization is a liberal option in the sense that it progressively embraces and incorporates

²⁰⁸ Miller-Muro, "Knowledge," pp. 6.

²⁰⁹ Taylor Atkins, E., "Sacred Swing: The Sacralization of Jazz in the American Baha'i Community," *American Music*, vol. 24, no.4 (winter, 2006), pp. 146.

²¹⁰ Warburg, "Baha'i," pp. 47.

difference, because it does not conservatively reject diverse ideas or practices. A conservative approach would prohibit *matai* titles like the one Sione holds and cause an uproar against the funeral procession, both approaches would isolate the Baha'i community and through that alienation create hostility. It would be a situation that could quickly escalate in disunity, which would be an affront to god.

Sione criticizes the *fa'alavelave* explicitly when he talked to me, and the dismissal of contemporary celebrations led by *faifeau* are part of how the Faith dismisses cultural practices that do not further the goals of the Faith. "Desacralizing," as Taylor calls the opposite of sacralization, "is simply a process of abrogation, the rendering of certain Christian, Islamic, and Babi practices as outdated, incommensurate with the exigencies of modernity, and thus no longer 'sacred' with respect to divine authorization."²¹¹ By regarding prior religious practices, such as the clerical responsibilities and power of the *faifeau*, as no longer sacred according to the divine, the incentive to abandon those practices is heightened as their significance is drained. The reason why this has not caused outrage or sparked schisms was eloquently described by a woman I interviewed in Lithuania; "the practices I was seeing in the church – I was wondering, why should I confess to a priest if he is also just a human being? – and all other things, that somehow were mismatched with the principles. The Faith did not say these were wrong, just that Baha'u'llah showed new practices for the newest message of god. I just moved on." The Faith never dismissed or demonized these religious practices, but rather recognizes them for the purpose they had for a previous manifestation of god and are no longer the rituals and practices god requires.

²¹¹ Taylor Atkins, "Sacred Swing," pp. 146.

An aspect where cultural specificities are used to unify communities are the languages spoken in the communities. During those experiences I heard English, French, Turkish, Spanish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Dutch, Frisian, Samoan, and Farsi. The translation of scripture roots the Baha’i Faith in cultures it did not originate from and allows for understandings impossible without the context of languages people were born and raised speaking. “There is something so beautiful,” Klaas, a Dutch Baha’i, said, “about being able to read and listen to such beautiful prayers in your mother tongue.” Scholte claims that “locality has survived alongside globality,”²¹² and the presence of languages illustrates that really well for the Baha’i Faith. Languages tie people to a place, whether that be the physical surroundings of Samoa, or the cultural identity of Russian-speaking people living in Latvia and Lithuania. Though the presence of these languages and the ease in which they enter sacred spaces the Faith approaches the tension of being a global movement attempting to take root in local places. The Faith relatively lacks territorial grounding, and thus by explicitly incorporating cultural systems the Faith disperses faster. It also creates more sustainable communities. “To this extent,” Scholte writes, “globalization and localization have often unfolded in tandem, although their interconnection in ‘glocalization’ has frequently involved significant frictions.”²¹³ The examples I provided are the sites in which this friction becomes tangible and illustrate that globalization and localization are inextricably linked processes.

The different parts – the local and the global – that create the friction out of which ‘glocalized’ communities are born. This friction resonates with Danesh’s claim that “inter-subjective meanings are primary agents in the construction of new historical structures.”²¹⁴ I take

²¹² Scholte, “Geography,” pp. 578.

²¹³ Ibid, pp. 577.

²¹⁴ Danesh, “Hegemony,” pp. 126.

Danesh's observation to mean that meaning is present in the space between the common denominators of a community, and that when the ideas embedded with them it produces a new system. The redefinition of the *fa'amatai* by Sione and the extended Samoan Baha'i community illustrate this well. Sione's navigation of constructing a new system out of this inter-subjective space is an example of Sewell Jr.'s argument that the primary builders of structures are the very people that inhabit them and that structures are continuously in motion.²¹⁵ McCullen effectively sums up the argument that there is the global stream of culture coming from the Faith that encounters smaller local currents. "Baha'i identity," he argues, "is reflexive in that it is the product of a dialectical relationship between the local and global levels. Their global worldview and concern is directed toward a situated, defined local community."²¹⁶ As they meet localized communities, new cultural structures are created that share a common foundation that links them with other Baha'i communities around the world.

Because of this process, I agree with Appiah when he writes that "people who complain about the homogeneity produced by globalization often fail to notice that globalization is, equally, a threat to homogeneity."²¹⁷ Although there are the plethora of shared connections within the diverse Baha'i communities, my disparate field sites helped me to see the highly localized differences that were created because of the loci in which the interactions between the Faith and other cultures happened. Appiah calls the particular details by which people from the local and global can interact and form community 'points of entry.' According to him these points of entry are not universal ideas, but what the people engaging in the process have in common.²¹⁸ For example a point of entry could be the celebration of music and dance in the

²¹⁵ Sewell, Jr., "Theory," pp. 4.

²¹⁶ Taylor Atkins, "Sacralization," pp. 406.

²¹⁷ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 101.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 97.

Baha'i Faith and the presence of the Latvian folk dance. The shared nature of these two specific ideas create a common ground. Additionally, Appiah adds that "toleration requires a concept of the intolerable,"²¹⁹ which allows a group to define themselves by what they are not or what they do not wish to be. In the case of Latvia, it is the rejection of alcohol. In the Faith alcohol is prohibited, and bitters and beers are a big part of Latvian culture, especially get-togethers of family and friends. Vladimir, a Russian-speaking Latvian Baha'i told me that no matter where he goes or what he does, there is always something alcoholic to drink. The points of entry allow for a connection, whereas the points of clash assure that the community is distinct.

Appiah argues against a sense of universalism and claims that "the universalisms in the name of religion are hardly the only ones that invert the cosmopolitan creed."²²⁰ It is interesting to note that according to Appiah there is a singular type of religion which all Faith-based traditions must adhere to, a claim that severely weakens his overall argument. I do not completely disagree with Appiah, but it requires more nuance to apply to faith-based traditions. Appiah is convinced there is a clash between religiosity and cosmopolitanism because of the assumption that religion prescribes a specific identity that must be adhered to, whereas cosmopolitans prefer to pick and choose and their own leisure. It is true that religion prescribes aspects of identity, but so do other groups of identity. Often it is the choice of the individual whether or not to adhere to those prescriptions and remain a member of the community, which would line up with the cosmopolitan idea of selection. Additionally, often there is limited space in religious communities to navigate identity, and the diverse localized cultures of the different Baha'i communities counter that. Lastly, the selections Baha'is make within their new localized

²¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 144.

²²⁰ Ibid, pp. 144-145.

communities do not create homogenization, a trait Appiah connects to religion,²²¹ and indicates the presence of the cosmopolitan idea of choice. Sione picking the *fa'amatai* from his culture, redefining it, and placing it in a new identity he choose himself, seems to exactly fulfill the requirements of being cosmopolitan as defined by Appiah.

Another example that illustrates the presence of choice extremely well was my interview with Alexei, a Latvian Baha'i whose family had originally come from Belarus. He told me that he was proud of the land in which he lived. "We must protect our culture," he said, "Because I am proud of what we have. I am a patriot." There are three interesting dimensions that allow me to place Appiah's framework in a place where Appiah thought it could not go. Firstly, Alexei choose to be a Baha'i, he was not raised in the Faith but read about it by himself and decided he wanted to be a part of it. He elected to become Baha'i and make that part of his identity. Secondly, he decided to pick and choose aspects of Latvian culture that he enjoys and vowed to protect and include them in his current identity. He is not homogenizing, but actively creating a new localized culture. Thirdly, Alexei is of Belarusian descent, but choses to be a Latvian patriot. His identity thickens with each level and indicates how cosmopolitanism can be present in religious communities. Alexei is interesting, because his process of choice indicates an arguably cosmopolitan movement that changed the identity of many and indicates how fluid identities actually are. Like the majority of the Latvian Baha'i community, Alexei is ethnically Russian, and speaks Russian as his first language, with limited fluency in Latvian. Russians lost most of their power and authority as the Soviet Union collapsed and "it may therefore be not surprising that," Smith, Law, and Wilson write, "more than any other nationality, the end of the Soviet empire affected the Russian sense of national identity: whereas the borderland nations felt

²²¹ Ibid, pp. 145.

that they had finally regained their homelands as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Empire, for many Russians the abrupt end of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of an intense crisis of identity.²²² According to Alexei, this identity crisis caused a lot of uncertainty which made the Faith an appealing option because it provided a new collective identity.

The creation of these communities is a continuous process, and these encounters, as Tsing argues, are essential as “friction is required to keep global power in motion.”²²³ Similar to Sewell Jr.’s argument of structures being in motion, Tsing shows that through friction there is movement in the Baha’i production of localized cultures. Tsing also argues that “friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power.”²²⁴ This argument is key to understanding the purpose of the Faith and its acceptance of prior cultural structures into its religious communities. Although the Faith is coming from a unified global place, it is a marginal theological stream in all countries around the world. There is an unequal power balance the Faith must negotiate. Tsing emphasizes that because of these heterogeneous and unequal encounters creativity becomes essential to successfully forge new cultural structures. Appiah successfully illustrates how individuals navigate the particularities of culture in that process – the Latvian folk dance, the *puletasi* and *sulu* – but Tsing brings the idea of universalisms to the table. She argues that both particularities and universalisms are prerequisites to understand the process of globalization and the friction it creates. Tsing defines universalisms as “hybrid, transient, and involved in constant reformulation through dialogue.”²²⁵ According to her, universalisms are types of knowledge and ideas that resonate cross-culturally. For Baha’is these ideas are a unified world, racial and gender equality, sustainable peace, and

²²² Smith, et al, *Nation-Building*, pp. 7.

²²³ Tsing, *Friction*, pp. 6.

²²⁴ Ibid, pp. 5.

²²⁵ Ibid. pp. 9.

other similar goals. These values are not solely present in the Faith, but have been articulated and dispersed through a wide variety of faith-based and secular ideologies and traditions. Tsing is not arguing that these values are inherent to humanity, but rather that there is a repetition of these values transnationally. By engaging with universalisms Tsing writes that one can “identify knowledge that moves – mobile and mobilizing – across localities and cultures.”²²⁶ It is the fluid universality of these values that allows the Faith to be palatable to new communities, because the ideas are not completely unfamiliar. When Sione explains the *fa'amatai* he focuses on the shared Samoan and Baha'i values of a heteronormative family that prospers and the idea that service is the highest form of secular and theological piety. The similarities create connections that allow for the type of friction that contains a sexual undertone, it is the desirable kind of friction.

It is not that universalisms and particularities are strictly distinct components of how cultures encounter one another and creatively produces new localized identities. Tsing claims that “small details support great visions and the universal is discovered in particularities.”²²⁷ The idiosyncrasies of locally articulated identities are the key to understanding and incorporating shared values. “Universalisms,” Tsing writes, “are indeed local knowledge in the sense that they cannot be understood without the benefit of historically specific cultural assumptions.”²²⁸ This might explain why the Faith does not vehemently oppose cultural structures like the hierarchical *fa'amatai*. The Faith and its practitioners see the commonalities of shared values as a means to link together the particular with the universal. Although Latvian folk dances are rife with Pagan imagery, particularly in the collective patterns formed by the dancers through the ancient yet dynamic choreography, the shared value between the Faith and Latvian cultural attitudes

²²⁶ Ibid, pp. 7.

²²⁷ Ibid, pp. 89.

²²⁸ Ibid, pp. 7.

embodied in *daino* dances are the environmentalist ideas about the human connection to earth and the importance of collective movement. The dynamic universalist idea becomes the common ground where connections are forged through the friction of the particularities.

One of the Russian-speaking Baha'is from Latvia that I interviewed during the youth camp in Elniakampis claimed that he had loved the Faith since day one, because “the principles are essentially the same as those of the Soviet Union, the only difference was that the Soviets had no Faith.” This Baha'i spoke to what the overarching universal value is that connects the different communities around the world and what according to Rifkin would be the central driving force behind globalization; faith in god. “The religious critique of globalization,” Rifkin writes, “dwells on the intrinsic value of human life, the natural world, and community.”²²⁹ To dwell on those values center a different perspective on the world as the essential reason why Baha'is engage with globalization in the way that they do. The positive interactions that forge new local cultures, which form a crucial part of a larger Baha'i mosaic, are based on a same spiritual conviction. However the Baha'is also acknowledge the more negative impacts of globalization, for example the erasure of a Baha'i presence during Susuga's funeral. “For the Baha'i,” Rifkin continues, “the problems associated with globalization are indicative of the present incompleteness of the process of salvation.”²³⁰ The moments when globalization creates a new localized Baha'i culture are celebrated and welcomed. When the Faith is theologically and morally challenged, it is not necessarily seen as a bad thing. These challenges are considered essential parts of the larger process towards a new world as envisioned by Baha'u'llah. Rifkin does not write about the exact logistics of how Baha'is go about globalization – Appiah and Tsing do – but Rifkin is able to articulate the spiritual source of movement.

²²⁹ Rifkin, *Global Perspectives*, pp. 9.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116.

It is clear that in the different Baha’i communities – as Geertz claims about religion in general – the Faith is “somehow the center and source of stress.”²³¹ Although stress has a negative connotation, I believe it to be a powerful creative force in this case. It is important to acknowledge that sometimes there is a difficult clash between the Faith and local cultures. Through those and other positive moments, however new Baha’i cultures are created. There is a disruption of the status quo in these scenarios facilitated by the Faith. “An incongruity,” as Geertz writes, “between the cultural framework of meaning and the patterning of social interaction.”²³² This incongruity is what Tsing calls friction, the frameworks of meaning are the dynamic universal values, and the patterning of social interactions are the particular cultural actions. That entire process is what I witnessed in Elniakampis when the Baha’is danced during our prayer circle and in Tiapapata when the *puletasi*-clad girls sang Samoan songs.

²³¹ Geertz, “Ritual and Social,” pp. 48.

²³² Ibid, pp. 53.

Chapter V

founded on god

I

The smell of *teuila*, *pua taunofu* and *'aute samoa* is overwhelming, their multitude dizzying. I know I need to look up and stop burying my face in the bouquet that I am holding but I am not sure if I am ready yet. My hands are so sweaty that I am afraid the flowers will slide out of my hand so I clasp them tighter. Suddenly I realize that if I hold them too tight they will break and wither before I can walk over and lay them down. My knees quiver slightly under the colorful but slightly suffocating *puleyasi* made for just this occasion. I try to inhale but all that happens is the kaleidoscopic wave of scent that washes over me. Suddenly a powerful sneeze starts coming up and before I can stop it I break the silence over the grass where so many people I know are waiting.

Everyone looks up and stares at me. Before they can all notice the deep red of my cheeks I bury my face back in the bouquet. The tight braids that tie down my black hair start to unravel. My shoes are a size too large, and my toes are slowly coming adrift in the drops of sweat. All I want to do is to throw these smelly flowers away and take my shoes off and run to the big tree in the back. They told me its name several times but I always forget. I just want to climb into its

many branches and nestle myself among the rustling leaves. I wonder if I will be able to climb up into the tree with this stupid *puleyasi* or if it'll rip. From some of the higher branches you can easily see past Vailima, Moto'otua and Lelata all the way to the harbor of Apia. The ocean stretches on infinitely beyond that, to lands with so many different people that I can barely imagine that there are enough names for everyone. To lands with so many buildings I cannot picture the amount of space needed to fit all of that. To the lands I only read about that Baha'u'llah once walked upon. It is so far and distant but I am told it is all there, somewhere.

“Okay girls, now it is your turn.” It feels like my heart just stopped beating. I have to move but my body feels stuck. I fight back with all my might to not have the tears run down my face. “Failalo, look up *fa'amolemole*.” I whisper that I can't, that it is too difficult right now. I hear the boys and girls next to me say that it is typical of me to be too scared. It is not fair of her to say that, but I think she actually might be right. I take a deep breath and smell all the different flowers one more time. As I look up I peer into the most comforting brown eyes I have ever seen, besides the ones of my *tama* and *tina* of course. The light brown skin around them slowly wrinkles as the man smiles. The flowers of the *lei* he wears smell just as strong as mine, and for a brief moment we are enclosed in floral capsule. I know everyone is watching us intently right now. I am not sure what to say so I mutter an apology. “There is nothing to apologize for.” I thank him and try to say his full name and all his titles but I stumble over the pronunciation, even though I practiced so many times. “Just call me Susuga, that is good enough for me.” Again he smiles and offers to hold my hand, which I quickly grab. He smiles and together we walk towards the center of the fields. We reach the place where we were supposed to guide Susuga and all the other important people, where there are a few stones, a ribbon and some mud. “I have to do something right now, but my good friend Hossein will stay with you.” The man smiles at

me and extends his hand. He seems nice and I accept. His skin is the same shade as mine but he does not look like me. Susuga starts to talk and gives what I know is supposed to be a great speech, but I can't really focus on the fancy words. Hossein smiles and stares at the stone blocks. All the people around me have tears in their eyes. They seem so happy. I look at the flowers in my hand and inhale as much air as I can before they lose their smell and wither away.

II

The air conditioning stopped working the previous day and no one had bothered to fix it yet. Or maybe someone did try, but was unsuccessful. I appreciate the new silence in the room birthed by the heat that seeps in from the outside. The only sounds are the slow movements of fans going back and forth, putting stale air in motion. The walls are empty except for a portrait of Baha'u'llah. The shutters are closed in a feeble attempt to block out the sun. Sometimes we can hear the bus loudly come by and everyone will briefly look up. Quickly we resume what we were doing, whether that be reading, preparing, writing, or praying. We wait patiently yet everyone knows he is just extremely late. Again. I read over my notes one more time when everyone looks up from the sound of a car pulling up. A door slams and someone walks slowly towards the front door. Sione walks in the door and calmly looks around. He takes his time as he greets all the other men with titles in the room. He laughs a bit and gives some meaningful looks to the others in the room, including me. I am self-conscious of my pink *puleyasi*, the color of my lipstick and the red hibiscus in my hair. Maybe I should have just let my hair down. Sione makes his way ever so slowly through the room in this stifling heat. Sione finally makes it across and sits down in the center of the large table. He faces every person in the room and briefly looks into

everyone's eyes. I avert his gaze. After a lengthy ceremonial greeting and an elaborate account of how his relatives are doing, Sione opens the assembly meeting.

My point is the third one on the agenda. I see the eight men and one woman who form our National Spiritual Assembly. Six of them hold esteemed titles, while the other two were awarded lower titles when they were elected to the assembly. All of them are over forty. I fight to control my breath, which I notice is slowly becoming faster. When it is my turn, I walk up to the table. As I drop my papers on the floor, the loud thud breaks the silence in the room. Sione bursts out laughing and before I can even say sorry, he laughs again. I finally make it to the stand. I arrange my papers and take one say a final quick prayer. Sione is whispering with two of the other assembly members. Slowly the seconds pass by and he still has not acknowledged that I am waiting for him to formally address me. I push against the rising pressure of my emotions. It feels like there is salt water in my throat that is making it hard to breath. I say two more prayers to calm myself down and focus all my attention on Baha'u'llah's portrait. His kind eyes always calm me down. After what feels like centuries Sione finally speaks. Without any decorum or introduction he simply says "Failalo, why do you want to speak?"

For a brief moment it feels like everything stops. The small droplets of salty sweat stop sliding down my face, the flower in my hair stops withering. All just for one breath, quickly interrupted by Sione. "Well, I don't have all day." I apologize for the delays I have caused and bring to attention a village on the south side of Savaii. The heavy rains of the past few days have caused mudslides to wipe out much of the small village. I tell them that the village has always warmly welcomed Baha'is in their midst and actually several Baha'is call this place their home. I know that the budget of our community is not big, I say, but even a group of volunteers that could help with clearing out the mud and donations of clothes and books would do wonders. I am

about to explain how we could easily manage this undertaking when Sione stands up. “Please return to your seat right now.” I try to explain I am not done yet but Sione tells me again, in a louder voice, to immediately return to my seat. In the Samoan of an orator he begins to speak. “I do not understand what you thought you were doing just know. You intrude this space, you make a mess, you delay this extremely important meeting, and you present an unimportant topic. Of course it is sad what happened in Savaii but if we are supposed to help every village that faces some hardship we would be bankrupt in a day. I cannot believe we gave you any time, or that I am wasting so many words on you right now. I am shocked by your disregard of respect and custom. Must I remind you that you do not hold a title? That you have barely walked enough years on these islands and our planet to start commanding what our community should do? This is outrageous and I will not accept this blatant travesty. How dare you show your face in this room? When I am done, you need to remove yourself.” His words crash like violent waves on my shores. I try to push against the tears but I can no longer stop. One by one hot tears fall down my cheeks, creating an irregular pattern on my scribbled notes. “And now she is crying too? It shows that once more that women are not capable to lead our community.” I get up and quickly walk out the room. Through the doors I exit the small office close to the temple. It is raining so hard I can barely look across the gardens. The pouring rain masks my tears. Its sweetness washes away the salt and drains into the land.

III

The speed of her fingers moving across the keyboard always fascinates me. Telisa only learnt how to use a computer last year, but she is already our fastest typist. She does not seem to

notice me watching her. Her movements are graceful and precise. The pounding of the rain on the roof and the windows silences the soft sound of her typing. The rain has continued for almost four days now. Everyone knows that the rainy season is coming. I pray that this year the cyclones will pass us by without causing any tragedy. Besides the rain it is quiet in the office. I become fixated on its continuous murmur. The soft knocking comes as a surprise. I quickly check the time and realize it is way later than I thought. I get up, straighten my *puletasi* and walk towards the door. In the opening stands a young white man wearing shorts and a t-shirt. His hair is wet and he smiles. "You must be Failalo."

The American and I sit around the circular table drinking hot tea. Telisa puts on her headphones and listens to Celine Dion. In front of him is his laptop on which he looks for the document that hold the questions he wants to ask me. I am still surprised he wanted to talk to me, but if he is convinced I have something important to share, I am glad to help him. "Here there, sorry for keeping you waiting." The English words role out of his mouth with the American accent my children are adopting. After he explains to me what his project is about and what the interview is going to be like he starts to ask me questions about my faith. He asks about the *fa'asamoa* and how our culture exists within our community. These are not unfamiliar topics; often I have pondered on these exact issues with my husband or in our little discussion groups after Sunday services. Then he asks if I know of or have encountered particular experiences where the darker aspects of the *fa'asamoa* surface. My hands start to tremble slightly just thinking back about that day many years ago. I tell the American the story as if it was about another woman from our community. I tell him that about twenty years ago she brought up a point to the National Spiritual Assembly and that she was ridiculed and belittled because she was a woman who dared to speak. It caused quite the controversy, and the community changed

rapidly. People told Sione about the pain he had caused with his words. How his language was directly against the writings. He grew angry and left. I tell the American about how the times have changed. Now almost half of the National Spiritual Assembly are women. I believe there was a reason god brought me before Sione that day, and even though it did hurt me, it changed our community. We continue to talk about the temple, the growing community, the *fa'amatai*, the villages that only allow one religion. He thanks me for the stories and gets ready to interview Telisa. Before I sit down, Telisa briefly rests her hand on my shoulder and softly squeezes it. The American and Telisa start talking. I start checking my email, but I quickly become distracted by the sound of the rain.

Chapter VI

the unifying forces of life

One time I met a woman from Israel who lived next to the Baha'i gardens and the Shrine of the Bab in Haifa. Every day she could see the Baha'is walk up Mount Carmel through the carefully maintained gardens that stretch from Ben Gurion road to the summit. She told me that before the gardens were built in in the 80s and opened to the public in 2001, low income Arab families lived there in old homes. However these families did not own the buildings they lived in. The Faith paid handsomely for the old limestone houses and the Arab families were evicted. "[The Baha'is]," she said, "Have so much money. Imagine if every Baha'i gives one dollar a day. That means they would get ten million dollars a day at least!" I do not know whether what she told me actually happened, but what I do know is that there is not much known about the financial situation of the Faith. I also know that only Baha'is, and no one else, can donate money to the Faith. In the Baha'i information center in Tiapapata there is a poster that explains how the house of worship was funded entirely through donations. I asked a New Zealand Baha'i who had lived in Samoa for many years who the generous donors were. "Just us Baha'is," she said and smiled, "just us." It was the moment where I most explicitly felt a demarcation of us versus them, and I was the 'them.'

Communities define themselves in a wide variety of ways, and one of the ways I find especially interesting is the act of drawing borders. I do not necessarily mean physical borders, but rather the culturally constructed borders that enforce the idea of us versus them. These borders are often crossed and redrawn on a daily basis and thus as an outsider they can be difficult to determine. These borders possess fluidity, and the people who inhabit them do not often fit easily on one side or the other. The fluidity of the Baha'i Faith that translates into shifting ideas of community is presented by Warburg as she writes that "the Baha'is firmly believe that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that divine revelation is a continuous and progressive process, and that the great religions of the world represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society."²³³ The essence of the idea of progressive revelation is that communities constantly change and transform, which indicates that the Faith is also continuously navigating its borders.

Previously I have talked about how different Baha'i communities construct their globalized and localized identities, and now I will discuss how different Baha'i communities attempt to construct an identity based on different concepts of the other that originate from within a variety of Baha'i rhetoric. I will first provide two cases from my fieldwork that discuss how some Baha'i communities are constructed. I will focus on the high rate of cross-cultural relationships in all three communities and the Russian majority in the Latvian Baha'i community. In these communities Baha'is appear to construct themselves as other based on assumed perceptions of the Faith by non-Baha'is. Then I will use Appiah, Rifkin, and Tsing and conjunction with Mohanty and Narayan to discuss the creation of the other within a globalization framework, and I will apply this slightly augmented framework to the intersection of local and

²³³ Warburg, "Baha'is," pp. 50.

global identities in the Baha'i communities of Samoa, the Netherlands, Latvia and Lithuania. In doing so, I will show how the Baha'i also creates a theological other. The purpose of both processes is to explore the agency Baha'is have in creating others, and discuss the hierarchy that is created through these processes.

The borders that separate one community from another are part of cultural structures, and as Sewell Jr. has argued, these structures are authored by the people that inhabit them. Sewell Jr. provides to different scenarios through which I think the Foucauldian idea of authorship becomes visible in society. The first type are the slower changes that morph structures. They are the changes that are like glass – they seems solid but are actually liquids in slow motion. The second type, as Sewel, Jr. writes, shows how often “changes tend to be clustered into relatively intense bursts.”²³⁴ The taking of the Bastille and its consequences on the French Revolution and France as a whole is the example that he uses to illustrate this change. By discussing how seemingly singular events and continuous change – both driven by individuals with agency – keep structures in perpetual motion, Sewell Jr. engages with the complexity in which people engage with *their* structures. Change is a series of multi-dimensional processes that occur simultaneously enacted by multitasking participants. I am using these different overlapping types of structural change to indicate how my two examples show how identity formation is inherently engaging with ideas of difference.

The high rate of cross-cultural couples is the first symptom of structural change I want to take a closer look at. Approximately half of the people I interviewed were in transnational marriages, and many of the friends and family members that they talked about that were also Baha'i had spouses from different countries as well. These connections were often forged in

²³⁴ Sewell Jr., “Historical Events,” pp. 843.

Baha'i settings where different Baha'is from around the world visited sacred sites or worked in the Baha'i World Center in Haifa for a year. For example in Lithuania I met a Baha'i, I will call him Wei, from outside of Europe. Wei married a Lithuanian woman he met while working for the Faith in Israel for a year and together they had three children. At a first glance the Faith does really defy borders through its anti-racist practices, as this cross-cultural example signifies. By marrying across national and racial lines and making this a common and accepted practice, artificial borders are rendered unnatural. The Faith does not explicitly encourage believers like Wei to marry cross-culturally, but based on its idea of oneness there has never been any opposition or obstacle to interracial, transnational, and even interreligious relationships. This is in stark contrast with many other faith-based traditions that have explicitly forbidden these practices during historical and contemporary periods, prohibitions that were justified through divine ordinance.

The high rate of transnational and interracial marriages is extremely powerful as it rejects a common 'us versus them' dichotomy, particularly because the maintenance of difference encoded in the institutionalization and regulation of reproductive rights. However I think the subversion of marriage is complicated by what Wei told me when I asked him if he could express himself culturally in the country he now lived; "it is not possible in the same way I am used to. I am the only [person from my country present here] and I have learnt to adapt to Lithuania. If you don't, they just look at you weirdly." What Wei says here indicates a presence of what I interpret as a perpetuation of difference despite what the Faith may preach. As Wei is the only representative of his culture in this community he is considered 'other.' The only way for Wei to fit in, and to not be looked at weirdly, is to conform to preexisting delineated ideas of cultural acceptability and respectability. Wei experiences difference explicitly because of how he

looks and sounds, but his racial and ethnic difference intersects with his religious difference. A Lithuanian Baha'i I will call Atei told me that "when I first converted I did not tell people I was Baha'i, I know they would find me weird. People do not know the Faith, and when they hear the name they think we are a foreign sect." Katarina, a Russian-speaking Baha'i I met in Riga told me that when she converted her friends staged an intervention. "[My friends] were scared, they thought I had made a mistake and joined a cult! They were so worried about me." All these experiences show how Baha'is are perceived as different based on intersecting identities, and indicate how non-Baha'is 'other' Baha'is. However, as Atei's reluctance to share his Baha'i identity shows, Baha'is themselves participate in the creation of a structure that differentiates them from the assumed 'normal' majority of their respective home countries. Sewell Jr. argues that individuals have agency and shape the structures they inhabit, and thus the structures of difference are not happening to Baha'is. Rather, the Baha'is partake in the steady and continual negotiation of difference. "I understand why [non-Baha'is] find us strange at first," Konstantinas, a Lithuanian Baha'i, told me, "we look differently, our name is foreign, and our faith is different." The acceptance of difference helps Baha'is articulate yet sustain the borders the Faith tries to tear down. I am not implying that cross-cultural relationships do not change anything, rather I argue that the change expected from these relationships is slow, difficult, and can act unexpectedly against the desired goals of the Faith.

The second idea presented by Sewell Jr. focuses on watershed historical moments that though a Foucauldian authorial process shape and alter structures to adhere to the mandates of Baha'u'llah and the Universal House of Justice. In the case of the Latvian and Lithuanian communities this watershed historical moment – that among other consequences caused the majority of the Baha'i community to be Russian-speaking – was the collapse of the Soviet

Union. Alexei, a Latvian Baha'i of Belarussian heritage, claimed that the collapse created a lot of uncertainty within the Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic States. Smith, Law, and Wilson agree with Alexei's statements as they argue that the nationalist Baltic projects and its genealogical rhetoric reduced Russian-speaking citizens to denizens.²³⁵ Birgeron summarizes the consequences of this particular process of identity building as according to her, "Russian speakers were denied citizenship, and naturalization became almost unattainable due to restrictive quotas, residency permits, and language exams that were next to impossible to pass due to a lack of language teaching in the titular language."²³⁶ Birgeron shows what the tangible actions taken were to enforce the construction of cultural identity by the then newly independent Baltic States. As the Russian-speaking majority ethnic make-up of the Latvian community shows, this affected Russian-speaking communities as their sense of identity and belonging was challenged. Although all the Latvian Baha'is I spoke to wanted to diversify the community, a majority of the meetings and services are conducted in Russian. Additionally Baha'i meetings and services becomes a space where many Russian-speaking Baha'is reminisce and romanticize the Soviet past. For example Anastasia, a Russian-speaking Baha'i I interviewed in Elniakampis, told me that "sometimes people think about the Soviet time as wrong, but I do not understand that. Wrong things come from the people. My grandmother was communist, and for her this was high level of development. The words are not bad, they are actually very good, but I understood to keep high standards without faith in god is impossible [sic]." Although Anastasia finds the flaws in the Soviet atheist approach, she upholds that the Soviet Union in general was a positive force. This sentiment was echoed by a majority of Russian-speaking Latvian and Lithuanian Baha'is. As this translates into a community defined by a certain nationalist and political

²³⁵ Smith et al, *Nation-Building*, pp. 94.

²³⁶ Birgeron, *After the Break-up*, pp. 173.

identity, I believe it sets up a relatively strong demarcated community. This example shows how Baha'is create structures that differentiate them based on politico-historical identities as well as religious ones. Although renewed attempts are made to branch out to Latvian-speaking people, the Faith recreates nation-based distinctions which complicates its Latvian recruitment efforts. What is particularly interesting about these structures of difference Baha'is engage in, is the engagement with politico-cultural structures and the conviction that Baha'is adhere to a purer and more successful version of these politico-cultural institutions. The example of the Soviet Union illustrates this well, but so does the redefinition of the *fa'amatai* in Samoa. Sione argued that his interpretation of his *matai* title brings him closer to god and returns the institution to a more authentic state. The participation of Baha'is in this rhetoric explicitly aligns them with Sewell Jr.'s Foucauldian framework of individual authorship in cultural structures. Simultaneously the Baha'is explicitly create an 'us vs. them' paradigm through this rhetoric and directly create a hierarchy, a concept I am going to engage with later in this chapter.

These examples address how Baha'is demarcate their community through pre-existing nationalist frameworks, and illustrate an important us versus them dichotomy. Although those dichotomies are infused with spiritual rhetoric, there are also explicit theological creations of Baha'i versus non-Baha'i paradigms that consolidate the hierarchy I alluded to in the previous paragraph. I have argued that the construction of the us/Baha'i versus them/non-Baha'i paradigm is a multilayered process that begins with constituting difference. The feminist frameworks presented by Narayan and Mohanty articulate the mechanisms in which differentiation occurs. "It is not the center," Mohanty writes, "that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the center."²³⁷ Mohanty engages here with a central tenant from

²³⁷ Mohanty, C. T., "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2*, Vol. 12/13. No. 3 (1984), pp. 353.

Said's work on Orientalism, namely that by defining the other, the self is defined by what the other is not. Mohanty explicitly connects this idea to how colonial discourse has shaped binaries of power and placed women inhabiting the periphery in a powerless and monolithic category that justifies unequal global power distributions.²³⁸ Narayan expands these ideas through applying a modified version of essentialism. She argues that essentialism is applied to both gender and culture, but as theorists attempt to move away from gender essentialism, they replicate essentialist notions of cultural difference. The universal essentialist structures of gender, of 'man' and 'woman', as Narayan writes, "are replaced with culture-specific essentialist structures that depend on totalizing categories such as 'Western' and 'Non-western culture.'"²³⁹ This means categories are differentiated from one another in scope, not in kind. Both essentialisms depict "homogenous groups of heterogeneous people [who are] internally plural,"²⁴⁰ and create entities void of necessary and vital complexity. The combined framework of Mohanty and Narayan provides a mechanism where through essentialist ideas of what it means to be a member of a group demarcate borders and attribute power to whatever is constructed as the center.

A powerful example was when I interviewed two Samoan Baha'i men – both bestowed with relatively high ranking *matai* titles – that I shall call Viliamu and Fetuao. I asked them if they believed there was gender equality in the *fa'asamoa* and this is what they responded;

Viliamu: Absolutely not. It is a thing I can't stand, the way [non-Baha'i Samoans] treat women, or how *matai* treat women. They all sit in the front and women and untitled men sit in the back. In a Baha'i meeting it doesn't matter who sits where. I can sit with youth, children or women. In Samoan culture a situation like that will never happen.
Fetuao: And this is another thing that I can't stand. I work hard with Samoan men, even though they are Baha'is they still have some attitudes towards women and young girls. I can't stand how they treat women and how they talk them. They call the men roosters, and when they all get together they are like roosters. They start talking this

²³⁸ Ibid, pp. 351

²³⁹ Narayan, U., "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism," *Hypatia*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1998) pp. 87.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 88.

high language [the Samoan ceremonial language of *gagana fa'aaloalo*] that not many understand. It is a power game. They talk beyond the normal language that we talk. They are meaningless words, they don't mean anything. No, as long as the culture is here, that will never change.

Viliamu and Fetuao constructed binary categories through a process that resonates with what Mohanty writes, and defined the identities in those categories through an essentialism that echoes Narayan. The categories are Baha'i versus non-Baha'i, and Viliamu and Fetuao have generalizing ideas of what it means to belong to each category and correspondingly how people act. To them, Samoan Baha'is embrace gender equality and foster an egalitarian sense of community, whereas Samoan non-Baha'is perpetuate hierarchical notions of worth based on gender. Especially Fetuao explicitly connects gender inequality as the key defining feature of Samoan non-Baha'is, to their cultural identity – *fa'asamoa* – which is fostered and encouraged in a Christian tradition

Viliamu and Fetuao have strict definitions of what it means to be part of the Samoan culture or to be a member of the Baha'i Faith, however, as Appiah writes, “cultural purity is an oxymoron.”²⁴¹ I agree, and there is no cultural pure way of being, whether the idea of cultural purity is seen as positive – the egalitarian Faith – or negative – the *fa'asamoa*. The brief example illustrates how within the Faith there is a demarcation between Baha'i and non-Baha'i, and I want to place that tension between egalitarianism and difference into the global framework provided by Appiah, Tsing, and Rifkin.

The coming together of all these differences, as Tsing argues, creates and produces new and different localized and globalized identities. Tsing is also aware of the different power distributions at play when those different streams meet and create these new identities. Although Tsing calls this a creative force, she does not argue that all cultural streams participate and

²⁴¹ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 113.

contribute equally. “Friction,” Tsing writes, “reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power.”²⁴² Different streams have different impacts, but the composition of a new identity has power to reshape previous relationships. Tsing continues to write that “hegemony is made as well as unmade with friction.”²⁴³ This is important because friction, and the globalization that drives friction, do not produce a singular algorithm in which power is maintained in historically dominant loci. I consider hegemony to be a multidimensional and multilocal structure continuously redefined by its inhabitants to adapt to dynamic and changing environments and people. I argue that in the example of Viliamu and Fetuao reconfigured hegemony is present. These two *matai* have navigated friction to redefine a cultural institution to become hegemonically compatible with the Faith. When McCullen writes that “Baha’i identity is reflexive in that it is the product of a dialectical relationship between the local and global levels. Their global worldview and concern is directed toward a situated, defined local community,”²⁴⁴ it corresponds with what Tsing argues. The Samoan Baha’is create their community on the intersection of the *fa’asamoa* and the Faith through a dialectical relationship. The Baha’is infuse the redefined *fa’amatai* with hegemonic power in a Samoan context, because it retains cultural ideas about leadership, but aligns the *fa’amatai* with Baha’i scripture. McCullen claims that the Baha’i global worldview is directed towards this local community, and the ideas embedded in this view are continuously augmented with local ideas. This is how Baha’is produce new hegemonic ideologies.

Appiah questions the idea of a universal sense of humanity, and by doing so presents the idea there will always be a plurality of dynamic hegemonies. He does not believe there is a

²⁴² Tsing, *Friction*, pp. 5.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 6.

²⁴⁴ Taylor Atkins, “Sacred Swing,” pp. 406.

shared sense of humanity or collective set of values that every human being innately adheres to, rather Appiah thinks that through globalization we can learn about the values of others and get used to them.²⁴⁵ Appiah does not seek to forge a unified world with a singular collective set of norms and ideas, but a place where we can recognize each other's humanity without necessarily agreeing with it. It seems to me that the Baha'is do seek to implement a singular moral code presented by Baha'u'llah, although they do elect to maintain diversity of individual cultural expressions. This is a key difference between Appiah and the Faith. Appiah even goes as far to claim that "humanity isn't, in the relevant sense, an identity at all."²⁴⁶ This directly opposes what Baha'is say, as the Dutch Baha'i Marijke explained to me, "we are all connected with one another because we are human." To Appiah, the idea of a collective identity based on the fact that we belong to the same species is void of real meaning, whereas in the Faith it is a central reason why a unified world is desired. Seeing these differences it becomes evident why the Baha'is believe that they can create a post-hegemonic new world, because there is presumed to be a viable future where all of humanity would adhere to a singular ideology prescribed by Baha'i scripture. Appiah rejects this idea because he does not believe that a singular ideology would ever fit all of humanity because he argues that there are no universally shared values. If I suspend my agreement with Appiah, I can see the success of the Faith. However because of my agreement with Appiah I see the Baha'i promotion of their ideology as an attempt to create a new overarching global hegemony. The following quote by Shoghi Effendi is especially poignant when regarding the aims and responsibilities of the Faith in regards to the envisioned future of humanity. Effendi writes that in this future there will be

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of

²⁴⁵ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 63.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 98.

both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation – such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.²⁴⁷

This quote illustrates extremely well the tension in the Faith when Baha'is attempt to reconcile an egalitarian future and a totalitarian theocratic regime, and try to prevent what Appiah claims about homogenization and religion from happening. Many Baha'is I interviewed explicitly stated do not want to run the world. “The fact,” a Samoan Baha'i I will name Ma'asina, “that we are not allowed to participate in politics shows that we do not want to take power.” Ma'asina's claim of the Faith as apolitical is in stark contrast with Efendi's quote about guiding the world and a federal system that would enact Baha'i-inspired policies globally. I was not able to find an answer in my interviews of how this contrast was resolved.

Hegemony is perpetuated in the Faith through spiritual discourse and thus I turn to Rifkin to see how he challenges the idea of a demarcated community in a global space, and how the idea of spiritual hegemony fits in my theoretical framework. “The Faith,” Rifkin writes explicitly about the Baha'is, “offers a ‘holistic’ approach that resonates with [a Baha'i's] work in support of creating a global government for managing the rapid change [a Baha'i] believes is in critical need of a controlling force that pays more than lip service to the moral perspective [of the Faith].”²⁴⁸ What Rifkin claims here about the Faith resonates with the tension found when I compared Appiah's ideas to the ones of the Faith. The moral perspective provided by the Faith is central to the formation of the government – basically the Universal House of Justice – that can navigate a collective humanity through the rapid changes brought about by contemporary

²⁴⁷ Warburg, “Baha,i,” pp. 50.

²⁴⁸ Rifkin, *Global Perspectives*, pp. 124.

globalization. Eleanor, a New Zealand Baha'i I interviewed in Samoa, provides an example when she told me that "in every country and culture, what we consider the divine standard or teachings, there will be some aspects that are in alignment with that and there will be some aspects that are not and that causes change. Think of the whole *fa'alavelave* system, how does that promote the generality of the people? Everyone complains about it, no one ever has enough." Eleanor then referenced Shoghi Effendi and texts from the Universal House of Justice to explain how the disappearance of cultural institutions that according to the Faith no longer benefit humanity are a part of globalization and achieving the new world envisioned by Baha'is. I believe it is pretty clear that Rifkin also sees the implementation of a hegemonic ideology as a central endeavor to the Faith.

Although the Baha'is I met are extremely hesitant to call the desired future world order a 'hegemonic Baha'i system,' there are moments where it becomes clear that the ideology of the Faith is hierarchically structured. Allow me to return to Anastasia, who claimed that the Soviet Union had the same ideology as the Faith, but because they were missing god, the Soviets were doomed to fail. This sentiment was echoed by a Dutch Baha'i I will call Marijn who described the United Nations as an ambitious movement, but because the Baha'i teachings were not central and countries placed their secular and nationalist desires first, is also an organization that has not accomplished what according to the Faith it could have. In both of these cases the ideology adhered to by the Faith is compared and contrasted with other similar ideologies, and ultimately are perceived as necessary efforts toward the efforts of building a new world, yet are considered inadequate and do not seem to be eventual building blocks of the final Baha'i hegemony.

The creation, demarcation, and continuation of the community within a hierarchical structure also becomes evident when we look at the institution of marriage in the Faith.

According to Momen, marriage according to the Baha'i norms is a sacred (heteronormative) institution considered the optimal place to raise children socially and spiritually.²⁴⁹ A non-European Baha'i I met in Lithuania whom I will call Fumiko, shared this perspective. Fumiko argued that the Faith was the only contemporary place, both geographically and spiritually, where divorce was not rampant and the sacred values of the institution of marriage were still intact and respected. Fumiko talked about how the children raised in Baha'i families were the closest to the ideal proclaimed by Baha'u'llah. In this example I see a hegemonic idea of family rearing surface, that is hierarchically ranked compared to non-Baha'i situations. The word 'hierarchy' carries a negative connotation in the egalitarian Faith, but I do not think that Baha'is would believe that all hierarchies are wrong. Baha'is preference children raised in married spiritual families above divorce, peace above war, cultural unity over nationalism. As Baha'is from every single field site location told me, the Faith has the tools to fix the world right now, and in that statement is a clear awareness of prioritizing Baha'i hegemony in a hierarchy of ideologies in which the Faith tops the list.

What justifies the legitimacy of the Baha'i hierarchy over all others? How does the Faith establish a hegemonic ideology as the truth compared to the hegemonies that are considered incomplete or inadequate? The example of marriage provided by Momen and Fumiko offers a partial answer to these questions. It is examples like Fumiko's, that Foucault calls markers of truth. Markers of truth, like saying "according to Baha'i scripture heteronormative marriage is the optimal environment for children to grow up in," are inserted in discourses and structures to legitimize authorial ideas.²⁵⁰ Through the discussions of the markers of truth in the Faith I aim to show how Baha'i hegemony operates within my globalization framework.

²⁴⁹ Momen, *Short Introduction*, pp. 29.

²⁵⁰ Foucault, "what is," pp. 7.

Sione, and his discussion of the *fa'amatai*, is a perfect example to illustrate how markers of truth are inserted in discourse surrounding culture. Sione argued that he accepted his *matai* title because he defined the *fa'amatai* as a system of communal support and responsibility that aligned with his definition of duties mandated by the Faith. Sione proves here when Sewell Jr. wrote about restoring the concept of human agency to overarching cultural structures.²⁵¹ I think that because Sione shows how individuals exercise agency in the structures they inhabit. I can extend this example to the argument of the 'us versus them' paradigm and the application of Baha'i hegemony. As Sione claims his understanding of the *fa'amatai* is closer to the Faith and the *fa'asamoa* simultaneously, he distances himself from Samoan non-Baha'is while ranking his ideology higher than the conflicting societal Christian hegemony of Samoa. Although the Baha'is do not denounce the Christian *fa'asamoa*, the conversation clearly defines the Faith as the more accepting, tolerant, equal, and better option. What Tsing calls friction, and what Appiah calls picking and choosing, occurs in this situation and out of those processes a new hegemony arises.

When I interviewed Annelies, a name I choose for a Dutch Baha'i, she told me that "I have studied the writings of Baha'u'llah, and it has become so clear where we are all going, namely a world with one humanity on our planet [sic] and Baha'u'llah provides us with all the tools we need to achieve this. I am extremely happy that I know exactly what I have to do." Similarly to Annelies' statement, a Samoan Baha'i whom I will name Tausa'afia said in response to what it meant to be Baha'i that "to me it is just, to have a view or a vision of the world that it one day will be united and all the religions will be as one. To have that vision. We have guidance from our Universal House of Justice and follow those guidelines. The Baha'is work together to

²⁵¹ Sewell Jr., "A Theory," pp. 1.

achieve the goals to make humanity unite.” The common theme running through my interviews with Annelies and Tausa’afia is that the Faith is considered the appropriate ideology to enact change to realize the Baha’i vision of the world. The current obstacles will cause necessary disintegration of pre-existing institutions and societies to facilitate the reintegration into a new world order.²⁵² These claims of salvation of humanity in the Faith were repeated again, and again, in almost all of my interviews across my fieldwork locations, and confirm the presence of hierarchy. They are replicated in academic literature as well, for example in the quote of Abdu’l-Baha paraphrased by Miller-Muro; “the Faith of God is the sole source of salvation for mankind today. The true cause of the ills of humanity is its disunity. [...] These ills can be cured only through the instrumentality of God’s Faith. There are many well-wishers of mankind who devote their efforts to relief work and charities and to the material well-being of man, but only Baha’is can do the work which God most wants done.”²⁵³

As these examples suggest, the Baha’is seem to see their Faith, as Matyók and Flaherty write, as “the catalyst for all human civilization and progress.”²⁵⁴ The Baha’is have a clear defined vision for the future and how humanity should be governed, but this vision contradicts the Baha’is’ claims that they do not seek political power and do not wish to install themselves as rulers of the world. Hierarchy becomes okay because it contrasts equality and inequality, yet hierarchy is a strange bedfellow of the Faith because of the awkwardness of the presence of hierarchical rhetoric in egalitarianism. By discussing the presence of demarcated communities and the idea of hegemony, I aimed to highlight that complex tension. Although I will continue to

²⁵² Danesh, “Internationalism,” pp. 232.

²⁵³ Miller-Muro, “Knowledge,” pp. 6.

²⁵⁴ Matyók and Flaherty, “People of Faith,” pp. 320.

conclude what I think the significance is of hegemony in the Faith, I wanted to reveal the presence of hegemony in the Faith because of the theological contestation of hegemony.

Chapter VII

looking for salvation in the secular age

I

I have always known what the two places in my town are where people go if they *belong*. The first place is *café de brêge* where I know some dads get cheap beer and greasy fries. One time I stepped inside and I stared into Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis' eyes in an old black-and-white photo. He reminds visitors that Communism thrived in these parts, and according to many, still does. The floor was sticky and the smell of boiling fat sank into my nostrils. The second place is the Dutch Reformed church, a small red brick building with a tiny yellow steeple. Its bells always ring loudly every Sunday morning and wake me up earlier than I would like.

This weekend, though, I am awake well before the bells ring. I spent last night with the Berkema's, because my best friend Jeroen Berkema and I were fighting dragons in ancient forests until it was dark. I called *mem* and asked if it was okay to stay the night and of course it was. We had fries and mayonnaise and *frikandellen* and it was great. Now Jeroen's mother is waking us up very early. At first I am not sure why, but quickly I remember that Jeroen goes to church every Sunday to listen to *dominee* Hertenkamp and sing songs all together with the other families that go to church every Sunday. We never go to church, because *papa* says it is a bunch

of lies and fairytales that add up to hypocrisy and hatred. This is why I go to the *openbare* school and Jeroen to the *Christelijke* one. After our breakfast we pile into the car and drive over to the church. My heart beats fast and I have that funny feeling in my stomach. There is always a long line of cars outside – their tires ruin the grass – and I have always wondered what such a group of people would do inside the small building. I am increasingly excited to find out. It feels like I am being let in on a secret that I am not supposed to know.

We park in front of the *Spar* (we never do groceries there, we go to the *C1000* in Beetsterzwaag) and from there we walk to the church. The bells are still ringing as we enter. I look over my shoulder and can see my house across the meadow that, in the winter, becomes an ice-skating rink. I am not as good as my brothers, I cannot *overstappen*, but I enjoy seeing the small bubbles under the ice as I glide along on the bright red blades tied under my boots. “Come, Detmer” Jeroen’s mother says as she lays her hand on my shoulder and guide me in the brick building with the large pointed windows I have never seen from within.

We are late.

Most of the pews are occupied with familiar faces that stare at us with squinted eyes and pursed lips. The bells stop and in the silence we walk to the only available seats in the back. We continue to pass the staring crowd. Finally we sit down on the wooden benches, our backs straight and butts placed on uncomfortable pressed timber. *Dominee* Hertenkamp walks onto the stage and all the whispering ceases. On the plain white wall behind him hangs a wooden cross. To his left is a small board with some numbers I do not understand. Otherwise the walls are completely empty and white, only interrupted by the tall glass windows that culminate in a sharp point. *Dominee* Hertenkamp starts to speak. His white skin is starting to wrinkle and seems carefully draped around his stern eyes and grey hair. He reads out loud from the bible, sometimes

in Dutch, mostly in Frisian, and will occasionally look over his glasses to make eye contact with the man who lives next to the bridge, or the woman across from Tjitske. His gaze never meets mine.

His words do not register, and as soon as I hear them, I have forgotten them. His monotonous voice continues and is only interrupted by the congregation murmuring *amen* every once in a while. With a light thud he closes the thick black bible and invites the children on stage, but Jeroen's mother whispers to me that I should stay put. I put my hands under my numb butt and the weight on my fingers is comfortable. All the kids who go to the *Christelijke* school get up. They form a crescent moon facing everyone on stage, and start to sing. It is a strange song I have never heard before. Jeroen and all the other kids (some of them walk over from the *Christelijke* school during recess and taunt me) sing about giants with giant noses. Everybody thought these giants were mean and should be killed, but the people who found Jesus knew better. They learnt to love these giants, and they all became friends. After the song finishes the children return to their seat. Jeroen's mother rakes her fingers through his thick blond hair. "Great job," she says. Now all the adults get up and start to sing in grave and sad voices about the happiness they feel because they believe in god. I do not know the words so I look around. Each time someone looks back at me, I quickly turn away. I notice a lot of the people who see me, and sometimes they lean over their mother or father or friend or husband or sister and whisper something while continuing to look at me. The singing continues and it reminds me of that one *Kippenvel* book where there is a cult and they all sing together and I had a nightmare about that they would get me too.

A feeling of uneasiness grows heavy in my stomach as the staring and whispering continues. I do not understand the words of their songs and their rituals are foreign to me. When

the pouch with money comes to our pew I get excited because I think we can take some because of the kindness of the *dominee* and I will only take enough to buy some candy at the *Spar*, but as I am stretching my fingers and reaching into the purple velvet, people around me roll their eyes and Jeroen's mother says that isn't for us, it was so we can give something to the church. She places a few cold coins in my hand and I slowly let them fall into the pouch. I feel like I am in uncharted waters and I crash my boat on every single shallow shoal. I feel ashamed. Ashamed for my foolish behavior and misunderstanding of faith, but mostly I feel ashamed for the Berkema's who brought me here. They are kind and invited me to their space, but it is clear for anyone to see that this is indeed *their* space, and not mine. I did not know the right words for any of the prayers, I did not know when to stand or when to fold my hands. After what feels like hours we finally leave the church, and I make a promise to myself to never go back.

II

Before going to an international school that had a bunch of American and Israeli students, I had only met one Jewish person before in my life. He taught me ancient Greek and some snippets of Hebrew, Russian, and Arabic. One time he came back from Jerusalem and had brought dreidels and yarmulkes. The class joked that he was trying to convert us as we spun the dreidels around and tried to see how far we could lean over before the yarmulkes would fall from our scalps. One day someone called him a *jood*, and I realized for the first time how different his dark brown eyes actually were from our crystal-clear blue ones. I told myself to be kinder to him.

Now I am in college and it turns out that a majority of my friends are Jewish, and I realize it is a religion I know nothing about. I am taking several classes to help me understand

what this ancient tradition actually entails. I'm learning the most from the family of a close friend of mine. I'll call her Nora. Nora's entire family is Jewish and attends a Reconstructionist temple where a lesbian rabbi plays the guitar and sings during service. The entire congregation davens and prays and pays homage to the dead. Afterwards everyone laughs and they feed me tons of food after Kiddush. With big smiles on their faces they ask me if I am actually dating Nora. The rabbi holds my hand and says I am always welcome. It is something that does not seem possible.

This summer I am living with Nora's family and a different nearby synagogue is hosting an event that was organized by several congregations, including 'ours.' We wait patiently under the beautifully carved ceiling composed of intricate wooden paneling which looks like a crossover of Mondrian and the old buildings of Cambridge and Oxford. A dim yellow light shines through the stained glass windows depicting Jewish symbols such as menorahs and dreidels. After we sit down in the chairs lined around the stage as the rings of a tree, an older white man with a yarmulke and a much younger olive-skinned man enter and sit down next to one another on the podium. The white man – who is a rabbi in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank – starts talking about how Israel's existence is divine. The Jews have a sacred right to establish a nation where their ancestors have lived so many years ago. It is a right that literally courses through their veins. The most important places deserve to be under Jewish ownership, and statehood is a valid means to an end. I quickly glance at Nora's parents, they slightly shrug and I whisper "is this guy for real?" Then suddenly the rabbi says "at least that was what I was taught to believe. That this land was ours and that no one else was there." He explains that all his life he was taught to not see the Palestinian people. The lessons worked and the humanity and reality of Palestinians no longer existed for this rabbi. He knew across the barbed wire and

crumbled ruins there were living things, but definitely not people deserving olive branches. This was his truth, until he met the man with the light brown skin and warm smile that was sitting on the cafeteria chair to his right.

The other man is a Palestinian who had his home destroyed several times, who had lost two brothers in the ongoing conflict, who had been imprisoned for non-violent protesting, and who would never befriend an orthodox rabbi. Yet there they are. The Palestinian talks about how there was a small plot of land between an Israeli settlement and Palestinian community that belonged to no one. He shows a few pictures of the brown grass littered with empty cans and an old tire. There he started to have neighborhood get-togethers. Soon it became a place where people from both sides talked and ate and sang around a campfire underneath a sky that stretched from one light-polluting community to another. One day the rabbi visited the small field. It was now clean and the ground was slowly turning light green with new grass. There was a disbelief from both men that soon dissipated as they shared a meal and listened to the voices of new friends joining to sing the night away. Now they travel throughout the middle-east and the world to spread their message of hope. Nora's parents wipe away some tears as they finish and sigh deeply a few times. The oxygen flows out of their lungs into the room filled with the muffled sounds of people leaving. I just sit in silence for a while.

The chair is a little too small, and during the talk I forgot the discomfort I initially felt. I feel too close to the ground, and the upholstery has seen too much traffic. To me, religion had always been a source of strife, and I believed that only through secularization were people able to come together and foster truly open and inclusive communities. I shift slightly on my chair. Hearing the Israeli and Palestinian talk changes that entire idea. Both of their identities are firmly rooted in religion, and both talked about how that had not changed. Rather they explained they

felt closer to a similar god. Theology was central in this endeavor of peace building for a sense of the divine made them understand one another. Without it the whole project would have been unsuccessful. From the concentric circle far removed from the stage my chair is located in I see the two friends laugh and talk to the many gray-haired black-clothed Bostonian Jewry. I can see where the *mechitza* must have been a long time ago, and choose to leave through the door that used to be only accessible to women, whom were not allowed to touch scripture.

III

Last semester a boy broke my heart. It almost feels comical typing those words. I know it was not like the love when David Gray sang *it feels like lightning running through my veins/ every time I look at you*, but his arms did hold me and that should mean something. It is strange how my mind wanders in this near empty library in between empty white walls and carts filled with books waiting to be returned as I type and edit countless pages. While I am trying to be subversive and intellectual and productive and witty and fulfilling the high academic expectations I set for myself, I think about his dark eyes, his thick black hair, his smell of cigarettes and cheap vodka, and how I was not enough. Heartbreak has a strange place in this thesis, mostly because it seems like I should just put it in a personal Pandora's Box that I can open after I have my diploma firmly in my hands and wave to my parents somewhere in the crowd, confused by American ceremony and rapid-fire English. Compartmentalize who you are and place the boxes in the attic. There is no space for them under the fluorescent lights of the library and Foucauldian analyses. Initially that is what I tried to do, but I did not just write this thesis in a vacuum of space and time, and nor could I have if I wanted to. I am writing about my

heartbreak because it is a queer thing for queers to be rejected by the people you fall in love with when in the background society plays the broken record of how you do not deserve to be loved in the first place. I should refrain from speaking for my rainbow-flag waving, boys kissing boys, gender-bending community because I know my petty heartbreak is of no significant matter to the larger issues of our community. Raqqa rooftops and Ohio interstates have taken too many. Neither do I want to reduce my queer experience to the failed romantic endeavor between me and a boy who lit a candle for me in his dorm room. Although I was slightly tipsy I told him to be careful because it was a fire hazard and I could picture the golden flames licking the walls and reducing us to ashes. He told me to shut up as he pressed his lips firmly on mine. If I reduce my queer experience to this unsuccessful encounter between two hopelessly confused college boys it would not make sense to include it in my thesis. It's just that it's easier to tell you about slightly trivial sounding matters than the times they yelled at me, threw stones at me, spat on me, hit me, kicked me, or put me under chloride water until it slowly became pitch black. There is a time for that, just not right now.

I had planned for it to be a more productive tonight, I think as I look at the clock, the only item interrupting the endless eggshell white of these walls arranged in strange 70s architectural shapes and angles. I get up to stretch my legs, and walk to the little stand where the same book is always on display. The large pages are filled with vibrant pages of medieval and renaissance patterns. I see the dark wooden stand at the end of the aisle between shelves of oversized atlases, but the book itself is gone.

Heartbreak matters because it reaffirms the inadequacies I have come to accept and believe about myself. When I started doing research and I found out that the Baha'i Faith – a religion that strongly emphasizes the place of scientific endeavor within religion – opposes my

love and dismissed my heartache, it felt like a betrayal. To science, to preaching love, to the fists that cracked my skin, to the time another boy held my hand at a flea market, to however the divine was defined. After all, this is a largely heteronormative and homophobic world. I had just hoped I had found the one religion that collectively said “we will not just accept who you are, but celebrate every single person in their entirety, because everyone has a spark of divinity lodged in their heart that burns so bright.” It hurt each time I was with Baha’is, because every single one I met was kind and welcomed me with open arms. Our conversations were engaging and meaningful and I cherish those experiences. I continue to write about the Faith because I still want to learn and to understand. Maybe all this is too personal, but maybe honesty is more important than feigned neutrality.

Today I found out that because of my visa status I could be drafted in the United States military.

I continue to stare at my blue screen and scroll through the pages aimlessly. My conceptions of the divine, the infinitely beautiful and messy experiences of humanity, what it means to write and research, and the futility of writing over a hundred of pages only you will read. If I think about who actually ends up writing my work I realize it is a small group. A panel of scholars and the Baha’is I will mail this to. A pretty insignificant audience. Or at least, that is what it sometimes feels like. What surfaces is a moral responsibility to myself, and to use what I learn to improve and expand myself. I picture the scholars that read this chuckling at my undergraduate ruminations and tenderly writing small illegible notes in the margins. It recalls intimacy, a secretive love affair. Only we will know what these pages say. Maybe that is enough.

Back home we boil our potatoes in this platinum high-pressure pan that loudly blows out a column of condensation. “Never touch that,” my *mem* would warn me. The past six years I feel

like I have continuously been boiling, but no one has turned off the gas or loosened the screw, so the steam just has been building up.

Someone coughs a few desks over. *Please be quiet, some people are trying to finish their fucking theses.* Somewhere else there are whispers and huddled laughter. On the days that it rains the whole library smells like a wet dog.

What if one day I was sitting at a café and Failalo from Samoa, Vasilisa from Latvia, and Marijke from the Netherlands walk in and join me for a drink (non-alcoholic of course). What would they say? Would the three of them get along right away, and after reading the stories I wrote about them, would they laugh about what I said. *I saw a picture of that doll recently, and she was actually really creepy.* Would they agree with one another or would they start arguing about what it means to be Baha'i? *It's funny that you wrote that I played tennis, because we actually met at the local pool.* I can picture them recollecting how they encountered the Faith and piece out the similarities and dismiss the differences. *Recently they had to cut down that beautiful tree, it had gotten sick.* I know it is just a fiction, but I wonder if their meeting would confirm the strange fluidity of Baha'i culture. A negotiation of tangible difference and surprising similarity. I would want to ask them what they think of me. Would they kindly smile and tell me that despite my condition god loves me? Would they awkwardly shift in their chairs and cast their eyes to the half-eaten sandwiches and empty cups? Would they defend me and try to find scripture that would affirm me? Either way, at the end I would thank them, and pay for their drinks. All three would insist they would pay for them, but I would say it is the least I could do to thank them for their stories. As we walk out the door we go our separate ways.

At a party a few nights ago I saw the boy again. A friend of mine was dragging a sharp needle drenched in black ink across his skin in drunken lines. He was clenching the fist of one of

his friends, his knuckles protruding from his skin. “That,” one of my friends says as she points at him, “is a pretty clear signal that you won.” I grin and raise my cup of bright blue jungle juice.

“Cheers to that.”

It is 12:46am. The lights turn off automatically. Time to find a desk somewhere else.

Conclusion
across oceans

Dear reader, we started in a small rural town, and have travelled across the world through narrative and discussion, to finally arrive here. These last few pages mark our destination. Here, I will tie together all that I have told you into a purpose of this text, a moral of the story if you will, that I hope will leave you satisfied.

When I was in Samoa I read many different pieces by the Tongan-Fijian writer Epeli Hau'ofa. His work has been extremely influential in Oceania – especially as he was one of the people who popularized that name for the continent. Though his work is relatively unknown outside of the Pacific, his thoughts on community have significantly impacted how I think of our world, as well as how I visualize the global connections found in the Faith. Hau'ofa decolonizes how we think about the Pacific, and the following paragraph illustrates that particularly well;

The idea that the countries of Polynesia and Micronesia are too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy is an economic and geographic deterministic view of a very narrow kind that overlook culture, history and the contemporary process of what may be called world enlargement that is carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean – from east to west and north to south, under the very noses of academic and consultancy experts, regional and international development agencies, bureaucratic planners and their advisers, and customs and immigration officials – making nonsense of all national and economic boundaries, borders that have been defined only recently, crisscrossing an ocean that had been boundless for ages before Captain Cook's apotheosis.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Hau'ofa, E., "Our Sea of Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 151.

Hau'ofa asks his readers to reject the idea that Pacific islands are aid-dependent rocks piercing out of empty oceans. With ease he draws our attention to a long history of Pacific islanders navigating between islands, trading, warring, conquering, and negotiating – from Aotearoa to Rapa Nui. The centuries that span Pacific history provide a narrative of resilience and innovation that, undermined by colonialism and sabotaged still, remains tenaciously distinct. Hau'ofa's words remind me of Velasco's observations about the marginalization of the Baha'i Faith in academic discourse. The wide range of Baha'i communities throughout the world have been dismissed because they were too contemporary, too Islamic, too marginal, and too widespread. Too insignificant. Hau'ofa distinctly directed post-colonial Pacific discourse, and although my thesis will not have the same effect by a long-shot, it is an exercise inspired by his academic efforts.

As I mentioned before, it has been quite the journey, so allow me to briefly summarize what I written so far. I started my section of central chapters with a story, so the humanity of the Baha'is is present right from the start. *I will obey* is about the strange space Baha'is inhabit within their home communities. As often Baha'is were born and raised in their communities and converted to Baha'i Faith later in life, Baha'is inhabit a pronounced insider/outsider space. In *from the mouthpiece of god* I wanted to show how within the Baha'i Faith authorial positions of power are used to create and sustain a claim to truth. In the Faith this claim to truth is defined as having the answer to guide the world towards a unified and peaceful global society. Through a Foucauldian lens I interpreted the writings as more than a way to articulate goals. The writings are a way to present a particular worldview as divine – an approach that renders information objective and truthful. The writings exceed the authorial function of Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha,

and Shoghi Effendi as the writings become the glue that ties together the globally dispersed communities of the Faith.

In *for fatherland and freedom* the insider/outsider tension is also a central theme, however particularly important in that narrative are the complex roles Baha'is occupy in nation-state projects such as Soviet mass-migration and the independence movements of the post-Communist borderlands. With this story I aimed to center a discussion on the place of local histories within global communities, and how the local and global interact and impact the formation of individual and collective identities. In *the smell and sight of flowers* I use Tsing's definition of friction and Rifkin's notes on globalized spirituality to understand how Baha'is navigate their cultural choices, a discussion in which I draw heavily from how Appiah writes about individual choice concerning cultural participation. In that chapter I argue how Baha'is navigate the local and global to create glocalized Baha'i communities. In this discussion I also write how structures are fluid, and how its inhabitants use their agency to modify culture. It is largely a discussion opposing assumed global homogenization, and proving how heterogenization occurs on the sites of friction.

The characters we meet in *founded on god* show a different side of how the Baha'i Faith facilitates the production of new cultural communities. Many of the examples I discussed talk about friction as a creative and imaginative process but, as I wrote earlier, the word friction has many different connotations. One of them is a negative one, of clash. Out of this friction creativity and imagination also springs forth, yet the experience is very different because it is difficult, hard, and confrontational. It is important to include such narratives because an assumption that all meetings of culture are somehow easy would paint a false image of globalization. In my final analysis chapter, *the unifying forces of life*, I extend the conversation to

some of the actual logistics of what it means to envision a new world and to work towards creating it. I wanted to examine the question of how Baha'is delineate their community when they juxtapose themselves with non-Baha'is. To me it seemed that a singular hegemonic approach to world governance and human morality was actively advocated for by Baha'is, both as distinct communities and through scripture, which explores the space of asserting the Faith and tops a positively defined hierarchy of peace over war.

I included my own story to inform you about my personal relationship with spirituality and religion. My positionality has shaped my interpretation significantly. I tried to balance a desire to find a religion that contains a perfect ideology with my cynicism of any institution created on principles of membership. I am aware that my personal life story was not the story I wanted to be central in my work, so I placed it at the end, to give breathing space to my other stories, but before the final pages, so you understand my lens better as we reach our conclusion.

I initially became interested in the Faith because of its expansive dream of a new world. Van Den Hoonaard writes that “the essence of the Baha’i teachings [is] the unity of mankind,”²⁵⁶ and I was immediately drawn to the ideology. The focus on racial and gender equality is part of what makes the Faith effective when it comes to considering healing our fractured world. “Nations,” as Scholte writes, “have been timeless and ‘natural’ only in the imaginations of those who insist, against all contrary evidence, on inventing an immutable primordial community or their sense of security in the modern, international world.”²⁵⁷ The Faith echoes this sentiment, and the deconstruction of the global nation-state project is a process I consider essential to radically altering our world and to make it increasingly inclusive and equitable. I was initially

²⁵⁶ Van den Hoonaard, W. C., “Etching the Idea of ‘Unity in Diversity’ in the Baha’i Community: Popular Opinion and Organizing Principle,” in *Baha’i and Globalization*, edited by Annika Hvithamar, Margit Warburg and Morten Warmind, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, Denmark (2005), pp. 246.

²⁵⁷ Scholte, “Geography,” pp. 568.

engaging with the Baha’i Faith out of an idealist naïveté that in retrospect feels exotifying and essentializing. Throughout my thesis I have aimed to partake in a multilayered dialogue with the Faith. I want to be honest and sincere about my interpretations, but I also want to recognize its positive impact on the world and respect its members. Through its community organizing efforts the Faith has expanded literacy in many different communities, has positively influenced race and gender relations around the world, and through its projects of translation has bolstered the strength of many endangered languages. I highlight these positive developments, because sometimes it seems that in academia scholars get bogged down in proving the flaws and fallacies of everything. However engaging in such a process reduces complex, dynamic, and multifaceted institutions and disheartens readers in unnecessary ways.

Similarly, there are also moments when I have to defend the Faith. MacEoin argues that the Baha’i Faith does not have a particular culture, that it is too young and globally dispersed to have formed a separate cultural identity. He dismisses the idea of a Baha’i culture by focusing on architecture, and writing about how either the buildings are neo-Roman or neo-Greco structures or too few in numbers to be considered architecturally distinct.²⁵⁸ Through this thesis I have sought to show the opposite, and that Baha’i cultures exist in a plurality bound by an overarching Faith yet localized in distinct communities. The friction has produced many new and different cultural idiosyncrasies, ranging from the redefinition of the *fa’amatai* to incorporating the Dutch celebration of Sinterklaas into the Baha’i Nineteen Day feasts. The creation of culture in Baha’i communities provides proof of how globalization does not translate into homogenization. It is important to challenge these assumptions of the Baha’i Faith.

²⁵⁸ MacEoin, D., “Baha’ism: Some Uncertainties about its Role as a Globalizing Religion,” in the Baha’i Community: Popular Opinion and Organizing Principle,” in *Baha’i and Globalization*, edited by Annika Hvithamar, Margit Warburg and Morten Warmind, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, Denmark (2005), pp. 290-291.

Although it is necessary to recognize the positive and affirming sides of the Faith, to simply shy away from criticism or to refuse to challenge the discourse of the Faith would be an academic disservice that reminds me of the following Tellegen poem entitled “a black page;”

I read a black page
In an irresponsible book
A page I would like to turn
One I can spell including mistakes
And equivocal premises.

Pages with dancing letter as black as ink
That each time say something else depending on who reads them

I turn it over, the next page is white and unwritten
I read what could have been there

Now it is too late.²⁵⁹

Though Babi history is shrouded in violence and radical jihadism, nothing that I have encountered in the Baha’i Faith substantiates the idea of a black page in history. However this does not mean that it is a morally pure religion, even when it is presented by its followers as such. As an outsider my perspectives and perceptions are bound to be different. It is difficult to be honest when writing about the potential of how the Faith can inform globalization discourse while simultaneously remaining true to my activist ideals. In the Faith it always seemed that every single person is good, yet that the different systems and structures – especially the secular ones – are not tolerable. A Dutch Baha’i, her name here will be Annemieke, told me that “there are so many unwritten social laws, and so maybe this country seem extremely inclusive, but actually the Netherlands is one of the four countries where religiosity and affinity is the lowest in the world. That is bad.” She continued to criticize the place of religion in Dutch culture, and told me she finds it difficult to reconcile the absence of god with an appreciation of Dutch culture.

²⁵⁹ Tellegen, T., *Minuscule Oorlogen (Niet met het Blote Oog Zichtbaar)*, translated by me, Em. Querido’s Uitgeverij BV, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2004), pp. 15

Annemieke's framing of Dutch secularism as a threat to people illustrated to me a distrust that ultimately would be divisive. This does not mean I think the Faith is dangerous, but rather I aim to do it justice academically by critically engaging with what I learnt.

This is particularly significant when taking a closer look at specific aspects of the Faith. Appiah writes that "toleration requires a concept of the intolerable,"²⁶⁰ and while I witnessed and experienced the immense tolerance present in the Faith, I wondered what the intolerable things were with which this tolerance was juxtaposed. To explore that further I want to briefly return to Fausto-Sterling, who wrote that "human racial difference, while in some sense obvious and therefore 'real,' is in another sense pure fabrication, a story written about the social relations of a particular historical time and then mapped onto available bodies."²⁶¹ Difference, in this argument, is often based on a fabrication that becomes real and produces real consequences for people through social relations and the different ways communities are constructed. I have already written a lot about the communities created through the Faith, and how through a lens of culture these communities are demarcated and sustained. However there are other important lenses to consider when attempting to understand the creation of Baha'i communities and which scriptural approaches justify who is fully included in those communities.

There are two telling examples that illustrate how the Faith engages with difference that I think must be addressed. The first example is tied to queerness, and the identities of LGBT+ Baha'is. Below is an excerpt from an official response from the Universal House of Justice regarding an inquiry about being queer and Baha'i, submitted by a queer Baha'i;

You are, of course, well aware of the explicit Bahá'í standard. Marriage is a union between a man and a woman, and sexual relations are only permissible between husband and wife. These points are laid down in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi and are not subject to change by the Universal House of

²⁶⁰ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 144.

²⁶¹ Fausto-Sterling, "Gender," pp. 21.

Justice. Bahá'u'lláh also prohibits certain sexual acts, including homosexual relations; if such statements are considered by some to be unclear, the unambiguous interpretations provided by Shoghi Effendi constitute a binding exposition of His intent. The Guardian's interpretations, made in his role as the authoritative expounder, clarify the true meaning of the Text and are not derived from the scientific knowledge of the time.²⁶²

In this case, queerness is conflated with loose morality. The very existence of queerness is separated from recent scientific discoveries that diverse sexual orientations and expressions of gendered selves are natural and common. The Faith does not effectively exclude queer individuals, nor does it intend to cause bodily harm. It also does not aim to create an atmosphere where queerness is acceptable as long as queer individuals are not practicing – to borrow a term from Christianity. However the mental toll exclusion, loneliness, and the refusal to extend full human dignity take on queer individuals is part of an ancient homophobia that leads to a variety of health issues, homelessness, second class citizenship, and suicide among many other issues.

The second example is connected to one of the tenants of the Faith: gender equality. The first time I heard about the importance of gender equality in the Faith I was extremely impressed, but a closer examination of how the Faith envisions gender equality seems to entrench culturally constructed differences into naturalist rhetoric. Yumiko, a Baha'i I interviewed in Lithuania, illustrates this well. In response to my commitment to feminism, she said:

Feminism? I have never really understood that actually. Of course I agree with the equality of men and women, but that is not what feminism is asking for, right? It is this idea that men and women are the same, but they are not. There are two genders that are different and should be valued for their difference. Women just are different from men, which is not a bad thing, it is just natural.

We continued to talk about this topic, and Yumiko continued arguing about how gender equality works in a binary system. She doubted the validity of trans* identities, the idea of

²⁶² Snow, N., "Brokenhearted Bahá'is: LGBTs Rejected by Their Faith," The Huffington Post, (published online on 04/23/2015, updated on 02/02/2016,) accessed on 03/16/2016.

gender as a performance, and the abolition of the gender binary. At first I could not exactly formulate why I thought this was deeply problematic, however then I read a piece by Tickner, and she writes that “biological reductionism does not allow for change.”²⁶³ This is key to understanding what it actually means to enact and enforce an essentialist gender binary; it can never create sustainable change. The very system that devalued women and reduced them to a culturally constructed trope is perpetuated. This idea of gender prescribes what masculinity and femininity mean. Such prescriptions are dangerous and I firmly believe that they limit the potential of individual human beings.

I realize my criticism of the Faith might seem harsh and that the force of my criticism stems in part from the passion I feel for these issues. If I adhered to a pure idea of cultural relativism I would try to understand why Baha’is believe this but never engage them with conversations or critique these ideologies. However cultural relativism fails to understand how there have always been long histories of global interaction that have only become more commonplace as globalization has permeated more earthly crevices than ever before. The issues of gender and sexual orientation in the Faith actually remind me of the Ewington and Gewertz article about the demise of the Chinese ring-neck pheasant in South Dakota. According to Ewington and Gewertz, there is a singular narrative in South Dakota that links economic growth to environmental protection. The hegemonic narrative in South Dakotan legislation becomes the one that if agricultural economic growth is halted or declines, it must also be worse for the environment. This is why agriculture does not have to make any concessions to the environment, for concessions would threaten agribusiness. Although there are reputable sources that deny the success of the South Dakotan legislative approach to the protection of the now endangered

²⁶³ Tickner, J. A., *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era*, Columbia University Press, New York, USA (2001), pp. 59.

Chinese ring-neck pheasant, the absence of other narratives solidifies the seemingly objective hegemonic approach of environmentalism. This approach benefits a small group that has significant business investments. This relates to the Faith because, like in South Dakota, the Baha'is have a rather singular source of information stemming from the writings or work derived from the writings, as discussed in *from the mouthpiece of god*. Although plenty academic work refutes the claims made by the Faith concerning gender and sexual orientation, these claims have not yet altered the underlying assumptions of the Faith.

Similarly, I would like to deepen the discussion of hierarchy and hegemony in the Faith. In *the unifying forces of life* I establish the presence of a hierarchy that ranks the approaches and ideologies of the Faith over others. I acknowledge how this is a logical and appropriate move for it places peace over war and oneness over disunity. It is a hierarchy that promotes a certain hegemony that makes sense to Baha'is and myself to actively work towards a better and more inclusive world. The Baha'i scholar Danesh argues that the Faith aims to create a post-hegemonic world, and that it is working towards this goal successfully. "[The Faith] mediates," Danesh writes, "claims of the absolute and universal character of Baha'i law by stressing its social and contextual dimension."²⁶⁴ Danesh means here that although Baha'is believe that the Faith has the ultimate methods to achieve world peace and unity, their approach is not asserted the same globally, but rather tailored to fit local communities. If certain local institutions are antithetical to the Baha'i worldview they will be deconstructed by Baha'is, Danesh argues the post-hegemonic possibilities lie in the fluidity and flexibility of the application of Baha'i laws. Ultimately to Danesh, "it is not a claim to power, but a claim about power including proper uses, manifestations, and limitations, in a truly global society."²⁶⁵ This allows Danesh to imagine a

²⁶⁴ Danesh, "Internationalism," pp. 222.

²⁶⁵ Danesh, "Hegemony," pp. 136.

post-hegemonic world, because it appears that the Baha'is do not wish to control the future world they envision, but rather set the guidelines of how it ought to be ruled. In itself this already seems to be a logical contradiction, but actually there is a direct goal and mechanism to ensure Baha'i rule of the future world. "A time," Taherzadeh writes, "when the authority of the Universal House of Justice will have been recognized by the nations of the world. At that time the legislature and executive constituting the essential components of the World Order of Baha'u'llah will harmoniously interact. The supreme authority of the Universal House of Justice divinely conferred upon it, will be the guarantor of the unity of the nations and peoples of the world."²⁶⁶ Although Danesh claims that the Faith does not intend to claim power and notes that the global governance of the Universal House of Justice would be solely a temporary one,²⁶⁷ the writing nor the scholars provide tangible proof of how power would be relinquished, to whom it would be given, how the divine guidelines would be enforced, and many others uncertainties concerning hegemonic rule in the world envisioned by the Faith. According to Deleuze, any type of global singular system of power will cause its inhabitants to initiate "localized counter-responses, skirmishes, active and occasionally preventive defenses"²⁶⁸ that ultimately would disrupt the hegemony of the Faith enforced by the Universal House of Justice. Although Danesh believes that because of the localized approaches of communities to the Faith can prevent a singular hegemon from arising, he overlooks the powers of overarching institutions like the Universal House of Justice and how their governance has actively steered communities towards abiding by a supragovernmental definition of Baha'i law.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 133.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 136.

²⁶⁸ Deleuze and Foucault, "Intellectuals," pp. 212.

I will repeat myself once more. I am not denouncing the institution, rather I hope to learn from the Faith and inform and improve my own concepts of the world. In a true sense of reciprocity I believe it to be more beneficial to provide honest feedback so that when the Baha'is that I know read my words they will engage and discuss my thoughts.

This offer of engagement echoes what Dove did when he encountered Dutch colonial legislation and Dayak dreams. Most people who had never heard of Baha'is before reacted with amazement and admiration to the Faith. It was not that I wanted to take those feelings away, but provide depth to exactly what the Baha'i Faith does. Of course there is so much more I do not know, but I am able to engage with the Faith beyond a naïve awestruck understanding. Smith notes that the temples are silent teachers of the Faith and its principles,²⁶⁹ and a Samoan Baha'i whom I will name Lanu'ese'ese said the exact same thing. She felt blessed to live in Samoa because of the temple, and believed that its architecture broadcast the messages of Baha'u'llah were for all to see. In my attempt of demystification of the Baha'i Faith I tried to figure out *how* the broadcasting works and *what* gets broadcasted. Appiah wrote that “the world grows smaller and the stakes grow larger.”²⁷⁰ Abdullahi, a Baha'i I met in Lithuania, told me he did not experience borders anymore and truly felt that whenever he entered a place, he was at home. To him, the whole world truly had come to feel like home. As the arbitrary borders that cut our species into nationalistic boxes begin to fade, Abdullahi's feelings about how separate countries are slowly forming one social Pangaea, and the ways that he and other Baha'is actively work to materialize this new world are valuable lessons to recognize and seek to understand.

²⁶⁹ Smith, *A Short History*, pp. 122.

²⁷⁰ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. xx.

There is a beauty in the firm belief of a better future, even if that imagined tomorrow might be imperfect. To realize that destination exists means we are going somewhere. Although we might have to reroute a couple of times, a step closer remains a step closer nonetheless.

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