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Detmer Yens Kremer
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Learning how to fly

The intersectionality of religion, culture and gender of the Samoan Baha'i Community

Detmer Yens Kremer

Advisor: Galumalemana Steven Percival

Academic Director: Jackie Fa'asisila

S.I.T. Samoa, fall 2014

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Abstract

The Samoan Baha'i community balances their multiple identities in a society where they are a minority. Their cultural, religious and gender identities are all essential to their expressions as human beings, and this research aims to explore how Samoan Baha'i reconcile their multiplicity of identities. Information was gathered through a wide range of primary and secondary resources consisting of interviews, other forms of personal communications and participatory observation. An expansion of the notion of intersectionality in a Pacific context contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural change, globalization and social justice. As the Baha'i religion does not believe in continuing national identities many Baha'i do not actively pursue ways which maintain their Samoan identity, especially concerning cultural institutions that clash with core values of the faith. However the foundational values of Baha'i and Samoan culture align and show that the seemingly conflicting identities have been successfully renegotiated.

Key words: Cultural Anthropology, Regional Studies: Oceania, Gender Studies, Religion.

Contact Information

Karen Te'o: 772-5172 or kandp.teo@gmail.com

Galumalemana Steven Percival: 751-9273 or steven.percival@gmail.com

Dr. Akatsuki Takahashi: a.takahashi@unesco.org

James Douglas Lealofie Tamasese: 726-1436 or 770-1716

Dedication

*On one side
The countless minarets pierce the sky
On the other side
Loud church bells shatter the silence
Underneath is
The turquoise Neretva, ever-flowing
Snowflakes land gently in your curly hair
"It is so beautiful"
You whisper
Samia Lee Habli
How can I dedicate anything to anyone else?*

Acknowledgements

Even though this work bears my name, I owe it to all the people that critically reviewed it, that I could ask questions to, that guided me to places and answers I could have never thought of and to the people that encouraged, educated and inspired me.

I would especially want to thank the following people;

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Dedication.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
An Introduction to Flying.....	7
Methodology.....	8
Intersectionality.....	8
Primary Resources and Ethics.....	8
Samoa Culture.....	11
What Was Before.....	11
The Arrival of Christianity.....	12
The Power of Customs.....	14
Baha’i.....	18
A Brief Historical Overview.....	18
Ideals, Principles and Goals.....	20
Gender in the Samoan Baha’i Community.....	22
A Man’s Choice.....	25
A Samoan Baha’i.....	27
Definitions.....	27
A Future for Our Past.....	33
Conclusion.....	35
Bibliography.....	39
Secondary Resources.....	39
Personal Communications.....	40
Glossary of Terms.....	41
Appendix.....	41

*The world of humanity
Has two wings
One is woman and
The other is man.
Not until both wings
Are equally developed
Can the bird fly*

~ Writings from the Baha'i World Faith.

An Introduction to Flying

White floating pearls illuminate an intricate pattern of flowers and palm trees that culminate in the white dome of the Baha'i temple, which elegantly rises to the starry skies. Within this fairytale-like scenery red words on a white banner proclaim a provocative statement about how men and women are each one wing of a bird, and the bird needs both wings to fly. These temple grounds are the center of the Samoan Baha'i community, the focus of this paper, while the quote inspired its topic.

Samoa has always been a relatively homogenous society with clearly defined ethnic and religious majorities, but contemporary developments changed the cultural landscape. An example is the Baha'i faith. The faith is key to the identity of the Samoan Baha'i, however so is their cultural background. This paper seeks to answer how Samoan Baha'i balance the intersectionality of their religious and cultural identities through the lens of gender, a pivotal aspect of identity differently defined in the Baha'i faith than in the Samoan culture. In an increasingly pluralistic society experiences of intersectionality of marginalized groups are powerful tools in order to comprehend cultural change and globalization. The balance Samoan Baha'i have to find exposes how foreign ideas are incorporated and how cultural values and practices survive within a redefined framework. Simultaneously, researching the intersectionality of Samoan Baha'i acknowledges and records their stories.

Firstly this paper will elaborate on the notion of intersectionality and address aspects of methodology. This is followed by a section on Samoan culture while the next section introduces the Baha'i religion and its guiding principles and goals. An analysis of data collected from the Samoan Baha'i community will provide a more statistical perspective while the following section addresses specifically men and their relation to the faith. After that definitions of Samoan culture and the Baha'i faith provided by participants are discussed and Baha'i values are compared and contrasted with the Pacific values outlined in Hau'ofa's article "The Future of Our Past". Deductions from these sections are presented in the conclusion and suggestions for future study are recommended.

Methodology

Intersectionality

A central concept used throughout this research is intersectionality and this term requires a careful explanation, for a proper understanding of this concept is necessary to appreciate this research. Intersectionality is a concept that originated in the cross-over of feminist and African-American thought when African-American women realized they were often forced to choose between their gender and race, even though both identities were and are vital and inseparable. The term intersectionality was coined to represent to plurality of individual identities all humans inherently have and which shape people's experiences. Feminist thinkers like Mohanty have written about how the concept of intersectionality can be applied in post-colonial developing societies. Mohanty notes that "defining Third World Women in terms of their 'problems' [...] in relation to an imagined free white liberal democracy effectively removes them from history, freezing them in time and space" (Mohanty 2003, 49). This is a dichotomy that has been present in much of Western feminist thought and it denies Third World women a sense of agency to change and the dynamism of the institutions surrounding these women. It is important to acknowledge this preconceived notion of monoliths of oppressed culture as one of the objectives I have set for myself is to expand my notion of intersectionality in order to have a more comprehensive and fair sense of social justice that takes in account a wide variety of experiences and perspectives. As Pacific cultures and societies were previously unknown to me this paper provided an opportunity to research the intersectionality of different society than my own while inhabiting the place of that society.

Primary Resources and Ethics

At the third interview that I conducted for this project the interviewee shared a story that caused her to become emotional. As she talked a few tears ran down her cheeks. Moments like this clarify several things. Firstly these moments show how powerful people's experiences are and what an

incredible valuable source of information they are. The added layer of emotion that is often absent in academic work provides another dimension to the information acquired. Secondly it shows how real their stories are. Their emotions are a way to guarantee the validity of personal perspectives and a method to connect and perceive the information in a way that can powerfully influence your work. Lastly it makes people and their stories concrete and tangible. These emotions made me highly aware of the ethics involved when interviewing people. Often interviewees open themselves up to the interviewer in ways that make them vulnerable. In this example there is a caution I have to take in regards to her feelings, additionally there is an aspect of religious intolerance and prejudice in Samoa that forces me to consider what to write and include. Central in all of these dilemmas are the decisions made by the interviewee. Questions concerning privacy, anonymity, discretion and understanding of the process were all asked and answers respected, considered and applied. Afterwards quotes were checked with the people who provided them, to ensure they still stand with what they said and agreed with the context in which I placed what they shared. I must acknowledge that sometimes it was difficult to come to a clear understanding between interviewer and interviewee due to a language barrier, the difficulties of navigating different cultural and religious spaces and the transfer of academic ideas and concepts to sensible questions. However through talking, listening, and sometimes another person, I got to the appropriate answers to my questions.

However invaluable personal experiences are, there is an amount of institutionalized data to acquire. Partially this was done through secondary resources, such as academic articles and documentaries, but other primary resources were also utilized, including some of the lectures attended earlier in the semester. Interviews were also conducted in order to provide a formalized and external perspective on issues of culture and gender. An interview with Dr. Takahashi was conducted prior to the start of the Independent Study Project, but as valuable information was retrieved, the interview was used. Another interview with Isabel Iguanzo Ortiz, a UNESCO representative for women's rights, could

not occur. Because of this hindrance, I was encouraged to find other, reliable resources, as I had to substitute the interview with Iguanzo Ortiz. One example was the inclusion of the *Pasivika: Islands Connected through Heritage* 2014 annual report provided by Dr. Takahashi.

Initially surveys were considered to be an essential aspect of my research, however as the research commenced, doubt arose to what extent surveys would actually be beneficial to the research and I concluded that their value was marginal, or even detrimental, to the specific scope of my research and the objectives I wished to achieve. The research was heading in an anthropological direction, and in anthropological methodology surveys are not utilized as they are deemed to not be the most effective method to extract information from a community appropriate for anthropological theory and thought. In addition to that, people's stories and experiences are central in this project and from those information will be derived. Although this is not impossible for surveys, interviews will provide more comprehensive narratives. Another issue is that it is incredibly difficult to formulate questions that accordingly convey pertinent information. In an interview this is still the case, but one is able to rephrase and clarify, whilst I am absent when a participant takes a survey. In the brief amount of time allocated for this project, I felt that the surveys would lack a representative sample size and that I would not be able to make any sound conclusions based on the results. Lastly, I have gained access to records that show the gender breakdown of the Baha'i National Assembly throughout the years, which are located in the appendix, which will provide a more solid numerical data input that I will analyze.

Other methods with which resources were required were visits to the Baha'i House of Worship in Tiapapata and the Baha'i National Office of Samoa in Lelata. Secondary resources were acquired from the University of the South Pacific, Alafua library, the School of International Training Office library in Alafua and the Baha'i House of Worship in Tiapapata. Through contact with Professor Melinda Plastas at Bates College more theoretical resources concerning intersectionality, cultural essentialism and the power of customs were acquired.

Samoa Culture

What Was Before

For the longest time the Samoan people were perceived as godless, as “a race of bloodthirsty and treacherous savages” (Cyclopedia 1907, 2) by both Westerners and other Pacific peoples. A closer examination of religion and society through the few comprehensive resources available provides a different image of a socially and culturally developed civilization. “Samoa religion was rich and complex but differed in expression from many other parts of Polynesia” (Meleisea 1983, 35) as it 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 women (Meleisea 1983, 36) and a complex spiritual hierarchy of *Atua*, the gods, *Tupua*, the deified ancestral chiefs and *Aitu*, the descendants of gods and other types of spirits (Cyclopedia 1907, 41) which Tagaloa, who “dwelt in the expanse; he made all things and he was alone (there); not any sky, not any country” (Kamu 1996, 9), presided over.

The presence of a spiritual hierarchy was reflected in societal constructions as is evident in the *fa'amatai*. In the hierarchy of Samoan culture the *matai* are 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*, as opposed to the *tulafale*, the orator chiefs, who have secular titles (Toleafoa, 08/09/2014). Another example is the *feagaiga*, the relationship between brother and sister, where the sister is perceived as sacred and the brother as secular (Meleisea 1983, 35). In this pre-Christian hierarchical society some groups of women were oppressed, while others were on equal footing with the *matai*. “It was almost half-matriarchal, half-patriarchal” (Ale, 23/11/2014) Bob

Ale explained as he attempted to make the complex hierarchical balances of gender in pre-Christian society more tangible. “The things made by women were essential” (Meleisea 1983, 34) as things like the *ie Toga* were 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 intersectionality with predetermined divinely ordained roles its inhabitants had to enact with only a small number of near-mythological characters that broke the mold. The centrality of pre-Christian religion shaped much of the culture that is still present today. However their own goddess Nafanua prophesied a new religion which would end the rule of the gods (Meleisea 1983, 52)

The Arrival of Christianity

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” (MacPherson 2012, 29) and it fulfilled Nafanua’s prophesy. The first successful missionaries were John Williams and Charles Barff in 1830, even though previous Christian and semi-Christian attempts had been made (Ma’ilo, 4). “By 1840 the three main islands of Upolu, Savai’i and Tutuila had been covered with a network of mission stations” (Cyclopedia 1907, 68).

Conversion was incredibly successful as “Christianity and the *fa’amatai* became entwined” (Kamu 1996, 42), the following quote by MacPherson and MacPherson illustrates why this was central to the acceptance of Christianity,

“Elites had no interest in the promotion of ideas that 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" (MacPherson 2012, 117).

This quote shows how the ruling elite, or the *matai*, adopted the foreign religion and naturalized its place in Samoan culture to legitimize and cement their power and create a divinely justified hierarchy. In the political and cultural landscape of the time, it was an intelligent move to simultaneously appease the Europeans while maintaining power. Christianity did transform other aspects of society as it easily replaced 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 (Ma'ilo, 6). "I don't believe there are women's rights, and I base that view on the bible" (Percival 2013, 6:46) a farmer explains in the documentary *Exploring gender equality issues in Samoa* showing how internalized the originally foreign values have become. The Samoan construction of hierarchy was significantly altered in the new Christian society for in the redefined version women are placed considerably lower on the social ladder, a move justified by the elite and their interpretations of the bible.

As Samoa is a communal society, and the *matai* rules that community, decisions like conversion are made by him and unquestionably followed by his *aiga*. This not only caused the conversion to be widespread, but also to be rapidly accepted. Right now it is considered that Christianity is Samoa's "cultural birthplace" (Ma'ilo, 5) as "Christianity 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" (MacPherson 2012, 106). These quotes show how central Christianity has become to what many people define as

their cultural and national identity based on what is perceived to have been a voluntarily incorporation of an indigenized version of Christianity.

However due to improved education, accessibility and globalization Samoan society is slowly changing. “The emergence of public critique of mainstream churches seems to have been gaining momentum and focuses not so much on the theology or organization of churches as on the conduct of some ministers, their families and certain officials” (MacPherson 2012, 135) and shows that Samoans are no longer blindly accepting whatever the church dictates which is reflected in the rise of new denominations and religions in Samoa. This is important to discuss as it not necessarily questions the sincerity of belief of Samoans, but rather exposes an awareness and a growing sense of action to the injustices that have plagued several institutions. By challenging the immunity of the religious institutions Samoans empower themselves to collectively be in charge of cultural change as opposed to through a few voices represented in the *fa’amatai*. However the situation is more complex than that, which the following sections about Samoan culture and Samoan Baha’i will reveal.

The Power of Customs

As mentioned before, Christianity is no longer seen as a foreign ideology which seemingly is justified by the idea that Samoans voluntarily accepted a type of Christianity which was distinctly transformed to fit pre-existing Samoan culture. “With Christianity the Samoan understanding of the family has been greatly enriched. The family of god goes beyond the Samoan subscribed understanding; it includes all” (Kamu 1996, 44) is an idea commonly accepted in Samoan culture. Ma’ilo and other Samoan and non-Samoan academics believe that Christianity has enriched the inherent ‘Samoanness’ of its people and enhanced the peaceful collectivity due to shared religious convictions. However these ideas are not convincing enough to cover the oppression and injustices present. The following discussion

is vital to understand how what is constructed as Samoan culture by the ruling elite is extremely difficult to balance with what the Baha'i faith stands for and attempts to grasp an incredibly complex aspect of indigenous post-colonial societies. In addition to this, it is important to demonstrate how a certain religious conviction is not essential to a cultural identity, even though they are connected and are able to influence each other.

The reason why it is important to critically reexamine the place of Christianity within Samoan culture is because assuming a cultural institution is essential creates "homogenous groups of heterogeneous people [who are] internally plural" (Narayan 1998, 88). In Samoa Christianity is often thought of as an inherently Samoan institution, but such "ahistorical essentialist pictures of cultures obscure the degree to which what is seen as constitutive of a particular 'culture'" (Narayan 1998, 94). What happens in such societies is that an assumed core, such as Christianity, is presumed central to identity. Ideologies or criticisms that challenge this status quo are considered a threat and are often marginalized or ignored. Conforming to assumed inherent cultural aspects is considered "a post-colonial protest of 'resisting westernization' and 'preserving national culture'" (Narayan 1998, 91). This naturalizes essentialist notions of culture and halts change. It also places Christianity in the center of Samoan culture which disregards the notion of plurality and consolidates the idea of a religious culture in which persons with differing religious identities are culturally excluded. This is a dangerous precedent for religious and gender-based discrimination.

In Samoa there are several examples in which "men have on occasion used custom, or what are said to be traditional ways, as a pretext for controlling women or denying them rights" (Clarke, 14). Pacific women often have been and are aware of this and do speak up, as the following two poems show. The first is by Jully Makini, a Solomon Islander,

"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”
(Clarke, 16)

In this poem the narrator experiences injustice which is justified by what has previously been defined as culture. The Ni-Vanuatu poet Grace Mera Molisa critiques how culture is used and abused to oppress in her poem ‘custom’,

“Inadvertently,
Misappropriating,
‘Custom’,
Misapplied,
Bastardized,
Murdered,
A Frankenstein,
Corpse,
Conveniently,
Recalled,
To intimidate,
Women,
The timid,
The ignorant,
The weak.”
(Molisa 1983, 24)

The reason these poems were selected were because they represented powerful indigenous voices that showed the discontent of culture being wrongfully utilized. In Samoa this is mainly visible in the political system, where the *matai* rule the family, village and country. “Samoa customary law developed as a means to defend and protect the group (family, village), and gave little, if any, recognition to the individual” (Meleisea 2012, 38) and thus a single person was chosen to voice the opinions and needs of that collective unit. This in itself is not problematic, but after the introduction of Christianity this leadership was cemented in masculinity and Christianity and now “the political domain is considered to belong to men” (Meleisea 2012, 38). As this situation has been naturalized by the ruling elite since the 1830s, the current predominantly conservative society acts out these roles and

emphasizes their centrality to Samoan culture. In the atmosphere that was created as a result there “is no space for the village to question the dignified authority of the *matai*” (Percival 2013, 21:32) because attempting to do so would not only be considered a personal attack on the *matai* but on the *fa’asamoa*.

The results of these social constructions are visibly present in contemporary society.

“Sometimes men hide behind their customs, about how things used to be, and keep women out of the *fono*” (Toleafoa, 08/09/2014) causing the participation of women in Samoan politics to be extremely low, a problematic aspect of society that is very slowly changing. As the *matai*’s decision are authoritative and supreme, religious oppression has become another example of culturally justified injustice. “Too many religions would show a division in the village” (Bryan 2010, 21) is an often heard justification. That the peace and harmony of the country are utmost vital and that religious diversity would cause nothing but disruption. However noting that people of different religions were “sometimes ostracized, banished, or had their homes burnt down as punishment” (Meleisea 2012, 81), it seems that forcing sameness onto people is equally disruptive. An illusion of religious harmony is set up as the entries of other religions, such as the Baha’i faith which condemns hierarchy, could create the possibility of the elite losing its power and privilege. However enforced sameness breeds resentment and discontent and is quite possibly a bigger threat to the harmony of the community.

Culture is a difficult and slippery concept to define and analyze however, as Dr. Takahashi explains, “culture can never be used to oppress women, because that is no longer culture, just oppression. Culture is when people collectively decide what they want to keep and what they want to abandon” (Takahashi, 06/10/2014). This is not the process that has currently been happening in Samoan culture. This is not to say that Samoan culture is inherently oppressive, on the contrary it had ample opportunity to show that it is collective and inclusive, however there is a need to acknowledge how certain core values became central and which voices decided what culture was. Similarly this section does not claim that religious cultures do not exist, rather it claims that religious cultures are to be found

within a larger cultural framework, for example the Samoan Baha'i community or the Samoan Catholic community. It is important to understand these complex aspects for several reasons. Firstly by demonstrating that religiosity is not vital to a culture, aspects that Baha'i embody from Samoan culture can be identified without dismissing the Samoan culture of the Baha'i only based on a different religious conviction. It is also important to understand the places of collective voices that decide what culture is and how it is ever-changing, providing validity to how Samoan Baha'i define their culture. Lastly this part was important as it showed the extraordinary intersectionality of Samoan culture and the intricate framework of politics and history that are important to understand in order to comprehend the current place of the Baha'i community in Samoa and how they express who they are and what aspects of culture carry over.

Baha'i

A Brief Historical Overview

In 1844 Mirza Ali Muhammad proclaimed himself Bab (Arabic for door) and told his followers he was a forerunner of an even greater prophet. This was Mirza Husayn Ali, who in 1863 declared himself Baha'u'llah, Arabic for the glory of god (Ieuti 1992, 99). "The Baha'is teach the doctrine of progressive revelation, which is the evolution of God's manifestation. Adam, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus and Muhammad are manifestations of God" (Ieuti 1992, 105) and Baha'u'llah was the next manifestation.

A manifestation of god arises in places of disunity, and in Iran, where numerous religious sects fought each other, was such a place. Baha'u'llah grew up in a wealthy home, but, together with his wife Navvab, helped the poor and the helpless and soon the couple was known as "the father of the poor and the mother of consolation" (Derkse 1987, 100). During a prison sentence god revealed his plans for Baha'u'llah, and Baha'u'llah accepted his role as a

manifestation of god and he began to preach. As his number of followers grew, he was exiled, to Baghdad, then Constantinople, Adrianople, Akko and finally Haifa. There, in 1873 he wrote the *Kitabi Aqdas*, the holiest book of the Baha'i, and passed away in 1892 (Ieuti 1992, 100).

Abdu'l-Baha, his eldest son, continued his father's work, contributing to the scriptures of the faith and traveling to Europe and North-America to spread the faith. In 1921, Shoghi Effendi succeeded his father Abdu'l-Baha (Derkse 1987, 132). Effendi structured the religion and contributed greatly to the growth of the faith due to his Ten Year Crusade, a project initiated in 1953 to spread the faith to every corner of the world (Derkse 1987, 137). In 1957 Effendi passed away without appointing a successor, thus, as Baha'u'llah's teachings dictated, a Universal House of Justice was founded in Haifa in 1963 (Ieuti 1992, 100). The Baha'i faith is currently, after Christianity, the most globally spread religion (Baha'i Information Center).

During these post-World War II projects to spread the faith, Baha'i reached Samoa. To be exact, in 1954 Lilian Wyss's "arrival marked the beginning of the Baha'i faith in Samoa" (Baha'i Information Center). This process was not without struggle as, similar to other Pacific countries, "[Baha'is] were chastised and claimed to have come to 'destroy the Christian religion'" (Ieuti 1992, 101) and experienced and occasionally still experience varying degrees of religious discrimination and persecution. This did not stop the faith and it quickly took root, with its first indigenous Samoan convert, Saialala Tamasese, in 1957 and a major event was the conversion of His Highness Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II in 1968, the first reigning monarch to do so (Baha'i Information Center). 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" (Meleisea 2012, 84). The community in Samoa continues to grow steadily and through its

projects and work is reaching a significant amount of people. It is important to acknowledge the hardship the religion has faced, even though it has no intention to forcefully convert anyone nor does it seek to remove the Christian presence in Samoa.

Ideals, Principles and Goals

The ideas and principles Baha'i hold dear and attempt to live by shape their experience globally and locally. An awareness of the commitment of Baha'i is necessary as they aspire to have "a life of conscious action" (Te'o, 13/11/2014). It is not merely enough to proclaim oneself as a Baha'i, but rather to shape life surrounding Baha'u'llah's teachings. This is central as Baha'u'llah is considered "a divine teacher who can show [humanity] the only right way to happiness and peace" (Derske 1987, 13).

As mentioned before, Baha'u'llah is considered the most recent manifestation of a monotheistic god that has sent and, according to Baha'i teachings, will continue to send prophets that will convey divine revelations. The prophets of the major world religions are considered to have all been sent by the same god. All the prophets are connected to one another through their teachings, which are considered to all have the same essential message.

"The manifestations of god are in unity because they have all been sent by the same god. Their 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" (Derkse 1987, 29).

This quote adequately explains the connections between the prophets Baha'i believe in and the concept of a progression of monotheistic revelation. As there is an awareness of the differences between the prophets, there is also an appreciation of intersectionality embedded

in the Baha'i faith. Different historical and spatial identities required different methods in which god's teachings could be revealed, appropriately adopted and comprehensively understood.

The essence of the different messages from the different prophets is the unity of mankind, however, as Baha'i are fully aware of, this is currently not present in the world. "The prophets themselves have never been the cause of disunity" (Derkse 1987, 26) but rather the multitude of followers have created arbitrary hierarchies and added imaginary value to them, causing oppression, war and violence. This is why the purpose of Baha'i is "to contribute to the processes of peace in the world by serving humanity and influencing society in ways that can lead to a new civilization" (Te'o, 13/11/2014) and believe that the individual has the responsibility and power to create such positive change.

A pillar of Baha'i is the oneness of humanity and the faith expresses this in its convictions of equality such as gender equality. As Kapeneta Purcell phrased it, "[because of Baha'u'llah I] knew men and women are equal. They are one" (Purcell, 13/11/2014). Similarly, Baha'i oppose religious, national, racial, classist and political prejudices and dichotomies. In order to instill this message of unity in younger generations Baha'i are incredibly involved in education as they believe that this is the only way to ensure that Baha'u'llah's goals can become reality (Tuiletufuga, 13/11/2014). In line with this reasoning, Baha'i greatly respects its youth and considers them the prime catalysts of cultural change. The following quote from Shoghi Effendi effectively illustrates this.

"The present condition of the world – its economic instability, social dissensions, political dissatisfaction and international distrust – should awaken the youth from their slumber and make them inquire what the future is going to bring... They should therefore open their eyes to the existing conditions, study the evil forces that are at play and then with concerted effort arise and bring about the

necessary reforms – reforms that shall contain within their scope the spiritual as well as social and political phases of human life” (Lample 2009, 13-14)

The importance of youth is engrained in the Baha’i community and “youths [...] dedicate themselves to serve the religion full time” (Purcell, 13/11/2014) through community service and education projects.

It is important to reiterate the sense of equality in various aspects of society and the commitment of Baha’i to their religion and its aspirations. By studying the principles, ideas and goals of the faith an unexpected dimension of intersectionality surfaces. The faith acknowledges, and respects, the diversity of humankind and appreciates the multitude of ways in which people have been shaped culturally. It accepts these differences and incorporates them in their methods to achieve a sameness in society. This sameness, however, is not defined as a faceless and nameless crowd, rather it is a humanity in which, regardless of who one is as an individual, people can move around and develop themselves to their full potential and capacity in order to serve their god and faith. As the following sections will show, these ideals are hard to achieve and occasionally other identities, for example a Samoan cultural identity, trouble these notions or aid to the materialization of these cherished goals.

Gender in the Samoan Baha’i Community

One of the ways in which the influence of Samoan culture on the Baha’i faith can be explored is through the composition of the National Assembly, the governing body of the Baha’i community in Samoa which covers independent and American Samoa. It is difficult to acquire data from earlier years as cyclones and a tsunami have flooded the Baha’i National office, destroying many documents, however people’s stories and experiences reveal how the situation used to be. “About twenty years ago the majority of the 38 delegates would have been male *matai* and people did not really consider voting

for anyone else. The *matai* would get up and deliver speech and often be elected based on this speech, it was all very Samoan” (Te’o, 13/11/2014). In this time the National Assembly would have had many similarities with a village *fono*, a governing body dominated by men. As people were new to the faith and its proceedings, Samoans resorted to what they knew and considered the appropriate way of dealing with issues like elections.

In more recent years significant changes have been made and central Baha’i values of inclusion and the appreciation of a diverse range of voices have become more central in the governing bodies, although there are still areas where there is room for improvement. The Baha’i community in Upolu has approximately 706 people as of April 2013 of which women make up slightly more than half. There were 226 women and 213 men that year (Appendix I). In an exemplary Baha’i community this gender composition would reflect in about a 50/50 gender divide with a likely majority of women in the national assembly. In Samoa this consistently has not been the case and for the past four years men have been the majority. In 2010 there were 15 women and 23 men, as were in 2013 (Appendix II and V) while in 2011 there were 13 women and 25 men and in 2012 18 women and 20 men (Appendix III and IV).

Even though these numbers reflect a stark difference with that of national Samoan politics, it is evident that the Baha’i faith in Samoa is still reconciling certain persistent cultural aspects. As Bernadette Tuiletufuga points out, these numbers are consequences from the *fa’amatai*, “Everything has to be done by the decisions of the *matai*, [...] it’s all man, or mostly man. All decisions belong to the father and everyone has to follow those” (Tuiletufuga 20/11/2014). It shows how Samoan Baha’i carry their cultural weight into the Baha’i community, which was to be expected. However there is a lot of change happening, “Nowadays there are often youth in their 20s that are delegates and women are about 40%. Last year a 22 and 24 year old were

elected, that is huge and 10 years ago that probably would have not happened” (Te’o, 13/11/2014).

It is interesting to note that throughout several interviews it became clear that a majority of young women are leading, hosting and organizing the educational programs (Te’o, 13/11/2014, Tuiletufuga, 20/11/2014, Tamasese, 22/11/2014). There is a similar pattern in Samoan culture, where a majority of women are teachers, although in Samoan culture this is not reflected in educational leadership. There is a lot of uncertainty why this is the case and James Douglas Lealofi Tamasese entertained the following idea, “naturally the women are just more involved with [the educational programs] and more interested in it. My mother likes it, for me, it’s just, I don’t find it that interesting. I have been thinking a lot about it and I still really don’t know. If you would ask the men, they probably don’t know why they are not involved” (Tamasese, 22/11/2014). The reasons for the high amount of women could be cultural, but this is speculation and it would be an interesting topic to investigate further.

The Samoan Baha’i community seems to successfully overcome the hurdles that it faces concerning representation and inclusion. The Baha’i faith seeks to create a society that transcends cultural and national identities and ideologies, but as people like Karen Te’o and Galumalemana Steven Percival acknowledge, this is difficult to do especially as people have been conditioned a certain way and one cannot simply discard their cultural baggage. This section addressed a more negative aspect society of Samoan culture that has made its way into the Baha’i community, that of political representation and inclusion. It would be interesting to see how differences of generation, location and class impact factors such as the changing numbers of participation and representation. It can be concluded that the Samoan Baha’i

community is struggling to balance a cultural and religious identity in this specific case. The way they are reconciling this, and it appears to be successful taking the numbers in account, is through education, discussions, empowerment programs and patience.

A Man's Choice

The experiences men have with the Baha'i faith are particularly intriguing as men in Samoan culture are positioned on top of the hierarchy of power and privilege whereas in the Baha'i community they must accept the full equality of all people, including women and youth. Many Baha'i convert because they are "attracted to beauty of the teachings" (Tamasese, 22/11/2014) and find a personal and spiritual truth in the faith. After conversion one declares themselves Baha'i, however this is not where the conversion simply ends. People carry cultural baggage with them and have to study the teachings of the faith in order to grow and reach a better understanding of what the faith and their baggage entails, people are forced to reexamine what their culture taught them. Shoghi Effendi has strong opinions on cultural practices that in any way, shape or form cause oppression, as the following quote illustrates,

"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 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" (Lample 2009, 12).

Shoghi Effendi poses a dilemma for Baha'i in Samoa and all over the world. After conversion are cultural practices and ideologies abandoned entirely? Or do people try to

negotiate the traditions they are brought up with? It also begs the question of if there even is a choice involved, as Bernadette Tuiletufuga explained. “I think it is easy for men to accept the equality of men and women but harder to live it out in their daily lives. It is easy for them to talk about it and know about it but it is actually hard to do it and live it” (Tuiletufuga, 20/11/2014). The concept of gender equality might not be difficult to grasp for Samoan men, but as they have been conditioned differently it might be more challenging to incorporate into daily life.

Especially men with *matai* titles have proven to face challenges about reconciling their cultural and religious identities and accepting core values, such as gender equality, of the Baha’i faith. As Peni Te’o explains and illustrates in the following quote,

“At the national convention there was one man who saw himself as very powerful. He had been away for a long time and had come back to Samoa only recently. His friends remembered his reputation and elected him as the chairman of the National Assembly based on his reputation and title. There were some articulate women present and one spoke up about her opinions and he put her down harshly. It was purely a gender thing. She actually cried. It was four years ago and she still cries sometimes. He has also verbally attacked Karen. I have seen it with my own eyes. It got to a stage that even I became anxious. I can imagine her being upset. I have heard and seen it before. That guy does not really exist anymore and no one really sees him around anymore. The condition of the community was so developed they knew it was wrong. When some men realize they do not get glory from the community they don’t come back. We don’t praise them or their knowledge in a big and showy way. When we don’t feed their ego, they disappear” (Te’o, 23/11/2014).

In Samoan society *matai* hold the main power positions and therefore within the framework of Samoan culture are accustomed to a large amount of respect and reverence and are not used to their ideas being doubted or dismissed, especially by untitled men, women or youth. As the example illustrates it can be difficult for titled men to accept that reality. Moe Gagogo Tamasese explains that in the faith there is no room for chiefly titles as “Abdu’l-Baha, was after Baha’u’llah, the most perfect human being on earth, and he had no titles and he was

wise and served god. That's how I see humankind should be" (Tamasese, 23/11/2014).

However this does not mean that if one struggles with the renegotiation of cultural and religious identities one is dismissed from the faith. "We all have our short comings" Bob Ale explains, "but if these men are Baha'is that accept Baha'u'llah but still hold on to these cultural beliefs it would be very spiritually challenging for them to grow spiritually and full appreciate and embrace the teachings of Baha'u'llah" (Ale, 23/11/2014) but Ale stressed that through studying the writings they could progress on the spiritual journey every Baha'i is on.

Regardless of titles, every Samoan that converts to Baha'i must redefine their cultural identity in order to fit their religious conviction. As Ale explained "why would the humanly made culture change the heavenly made teachings? It should be the other way around" (Ale, 23/11/2014). The teachings of Baha'u'llah agree with that statement as "the aspects of the culture that are in line with the principles of the teachings will remain, and those that are not should gradually change or disappear" (Te'o, 23/11/2014). It seems that gender equality is not a central aspect why men chose to convert to the Baha'i religion, but rather the totality of the teachings of the faith are what draws people. However aspects of these teachings, such as gender equality, cause a clash between culture and religion that encourages the formation of new perspectives. The teachings do not ask for an abandonment of culture and it desires to retain the benefits of local cultures such as the Samoan one, but it also demands a cultural change where that is necessary to adhere to the teachings of the faith.

A Samoan Baha'i

Definitions

One of the most powerful tools through which one can more comprehensively grasp how Samoan Baha'i construct their intersectionality is to simply ask them for their definitions of their multiple identities. All the interviewees provided an idea of what it means to be Samoan or Baha'i, through their own personal perspective. After understanding how Samoan Baha'i define their multiple identities these definitions can be compared and contrasted, through which can be determined how they exactly renegotiate their identity. Specifically concerning their placement of their cultural identity within the framework of their religious identity. It is extremely difficult to pinpoint what an identity really is. Karen Te'o eloquently explains that "there is a huge continuum of versions of being Samoan. There is an ethnicity, but however they live their life or culture fits on a huge continuum. People say that every Samoan is family, church, and culture, but this is not true for every Samoan" (Te'o, 13/11/2014). It is important to acknowledge the amount of diverse voices within the entirety of the Samoan community that all hold their own viewpoints and have their own experiences, but after numerous interviews a few generalizations could be made about how Samoan Baha'i view their culture and religion.

One of the central concepts that continued to resurface was the *fa'amatai* system. "The *matai* has to look after every person in the family and tell them what to do" (Tuiletufuga, 13/11/2014) was the basic concept and idea that underlined the definition of the *matai* system, a person elected by the family to provide and lead the family. However after this definition two differing opinions could be found. Firstly there is a positive perspective, as Ale, a Samoan Baha'i who has been bestowed with two chiefly titles, explains,

"You have family obligations to the ones that entrusted you and appointed you. The beauty of it is you don't see it as having that these *matai* titles or being in that position bestows authority on you, but it provides an opportunity to serve your family. I think it works both ways, it is a service, but as a leader it is also

leading the *aiga* to the most prosperous path. Not leading them to unnecessary contributions to the *fa'alavelave*. There is an excess being put into family obligations. It works both ways, it is serving them by leading them. I would rather say to accompany them. We walk together to somewhere prosperous that is beneficial to everyone. I rather use accompany because then whatever we get we share" (Ale, 23/11/2014).

Ale truly sees the *matai* as wise members of the *aiga* that ought to accompany their family to a more prosperous place that will benefit everyone, and he sees this more as a service than as leadership which is in line with the Samoan idea of *tautua*. When asked if this perspective shared by Ale was infused with the Baha'i teachings he admitted this was the case, but that the nature of the *fa'amatai* aligns with Baha'i values, even if not every *matai* embodies the values Ale has outlined. This is where the more negative interpretation of the *fa'amatai* becomes evident, because there is an appreciation of the foundation but not necessarily of the practice. Te'o, who once refused to accept a *matai* title, explains it as following,

"Some *matai* are the head of their family, and their words and their actions do not go together. Just because he is a *matai* he can tell people what to do and make the decisions for the entire family. A few people decided to call you something else and from tomorrow on you will have more power and authority than anybody else. In the old days you had to serve a family for years and years and when the *matai* could see your service was good he would give you a title. But nowadays anyone can come from overseas and bring money and get titles without serving the *matai* or the village. All of the sudden they get the titles. Now it is like a wholesale, with 40 titles per title. It's like an army. Caring for your community also used to be central, but it is really just your own *aiga* and nobody else. For example there is a nurse, and people are waiting for two hours in the hospital, and one of her relatives will come in and will get treated before the people waiting. This is why I can't stand it" (Te'o, 23/11/2014).

In this quote Te'o expresses an appreciation for the underlying ideals of the *fa'amatai* system, but expresses an extreme discontent about the hierarchical value place on the title and the prioritizing of the personal *aiga* over the wellbeing of the larger community. The sense of having to blindly obey the *matai* and the unease and discomfort associated with that were

shared by many interviewees. The ideals of collectiveness and togetherness were as well described by many as typically Samoan and in a majority of the time were put in a positive light. “I am proud of being Samoan but in the teachings one’s love for the country should be secondary for our love for the whole human race” (Ale, 23/11/2014) is a statement that shows an appreciation of Samoan culture, but because of Baha’u’llah’s teachings the cultural identity is relegated to a position of lesser significance.

There seemed to be more agreement among the interviewees concerning how one would define a Baha’i and these definitions carry significantly less opinionated weight. As mentioned before, Baha’i believe that “service is the highest form of worship, whatever you do for the good of humanity is worshipping god” (Tuiletufuga, 13/11/2014). This means Baha’i dedicate a majority of their time towards the betterment of the community, which means not just their own, but the human community as they are “asked to serve humankind wholeheartedly” (Tamasese, 22/11/2014). Numerous interviewees describe this as having a purpose in life and a direction of where to go.

This purpose can be acted out differently by everyone, according to their capacities, but this purpose is often defined as “societal transformation, to help humanity achieve unity and then peace” (Te’o, 13/11/2014). There is a firm belief that the individual is responsible for the collective harmony and peace. That “whatever actions you do or whatever words you speak or the way you think should, in whatever degree, promote unity” (Ale, 23/11/2014). As the teachings convey that the Baha’i ought to teach people through both words and deed, service such as community work or volunteering are central. In the same line of thought the Baha’i faith acknowledges and values every voice, which “is difficult, before you would stand up high

and look down, now you look up” (Purcell, 13/11/2014). There is an absence of hierarchy and a will to learn continuously and listen to every person, regardless of their race, gender, age, title or lack thereof. Not only is this important to achieve the goal of unity, but it is also a method to spiritually grow as Baha’i believe that following Baha’u’llah’s teaching is a continuous lesson towards god. Taking all these comments in account, a Baha’i person seemed to be defined as someone who shares Baha’u’llah’s vision of a united world and works towards that goal by providing service to humankind whilst simultaneously aiming to constantly grow spiritually.

Even though there are now two rough definitions present, identities cannot be compartmentalized, and especially within intersectional frameworks identities are known to heavily influence and alter one another. As this research focused on the Baha’i side of the discussion, the following will look more closely at exactly how Samoan culture has influenced the Baha’i community. No one thinks that the Samoan culture has challenged the core principles of the Baha’i faith as they have been universally standardized and can easily be referred back to. However there are instances when certain aspects of Samoan culture, especially concerning hierarchy, resurface as Karen Te’o explains,

“The whole *fa’alavelave* system, how does that promote the generality of the people? Everyone complains about it because no one ever has enough. The system is harmful to us. Samoan Baha’i still practice aspects of the *fa’alavelave*. The society still depends on them operating in the village in a Samoan way, while at the same time they seek justice, fairness, moderation of all things, and do not seek after personal gain or status. They are in a very interesting transitional space. These things come to the floor with, for example, funerals: in a traditional Samoan funeral the pastor comes along, does the show and gets heaps of money and food, other pastors attend and also get that. Huge amount of cultural obligation of giving and receiving, and the church system is on top of that. They think the only people who can pray publicly are priests. In Baha’i anyone can do it. When a Baha’i dies, no one needs the priest. The family consults what to do and different individuals will share prayers and what not. We have been through and still are going through an interesting transitional phase. Depending on where

Samoa Baha'i are in the faith, they used to call the national body to let them do the funeral, to replace the *faiifeau* and transfer authority to them, but we are all equal but there is a Samoan tendency towards hierarchy. They think they need a National Assembly member to conduct the funeral, but you really don't need that. Some members would fall for that, show up if they are more important and take pleasure in it. Not the Baha'i way but it was completely understandable" (Te'o, 13/11/2014).

This quote clearly illustrates the cultural baggage Samoan Baha'i carry with them, and during an important event such as a funeral, there is a need to reconstruct a sense of familiarity and of what was deemed proper. However this can clash with the ideology of the Baha'i faith.

Other cases permeate daily life more, as James Douglas Lealofi Tamasese explains,

"Although we have these principles it takes time to fully apply them. It is like an organic process, it just takes time for people to think in that way. [For example] when I was growing up as a teenager, the youth were not allowed to talk in the Baha'i community. In the Baha'i faith we are all equal and everyone that speaks has a valid point to share, but because of the culture, for youth to get up and speak before adults was considered quite disrespectful. In Samoan society it is the older you are the wiser you become so when the youth spoke it was kind of insulting to their wisdom. The youth today are quite different, they have a lot more freedom. And are encouraged to share their views and opinions in the Baha'i community" (Tamasese, 22/11/2014).

Similarly to the previous example, Samoan Baha'i have their cultural baggage and it does influence the way the community conducts itself and occasionally it does result to clashes of the two identities. All interviewees expressed that this is a temporary issue as the community is going through a transitional phase in which the Baha'i values prevail more and more often and adhere to the teachings of Baha'u'llah. It was interesting to see how the two identities overlap, as they are not mutually exclusive nor in a spatial vacuum. Rather they intricately interact and influence one another. Even if the more outwardly expressed Samoan cultural aspects phase out of the community, certain core values and ideas might remain, especially if they align with Baha'i ideologies.

A Future for Our Past

Culture is so much more than outwardly expressed aspects such as the *fa'alavelave*. There are a type of foundational values that transcends certain traditions that are an integral part of a cultural vocabulary and those values need to be acknowledged and discussed, and even though these values are linked to such outward expressions of culture they go beyond such constructs. Due to the timespan of this research it was challenging to extract these values however by studying the Baha'i faith, interviewing numerous people and through Epeli Hau'ofa's article "The Future of Our Past," another important dimension of culture could be included.

One of the central values of Pacific cultures is the "the primacy of group interests over those of the individuals" (Hau'ofa, 156). A sense that the individual identity is overpowered by a sense of collectivity. In Samoan culture such a value has resulted in the *aiga* and the importance of kinship relations. Hau'ofa laments a contemporary "trend towards individualism and the greater atomization of society" (Hau'ofa, 161) as globalization and westernization emphasize the importance of the individual. However this value is incorporated into the Baha'i faith as its followers have "a vision of the world [which] one day will be united and all the religions will be as one" (Tuiletufuga, 20/11/2014). Baha'u'llah's teachings aim for unity of mankind in order to have a harmonious global society that only knows peace. This evidently prioritizes collective ideals over individual desires.

Hau'ofa continues to discuss how "the ideas of sharing and mutual assistance were highly valued" (Hau'ofa, 156). Especially sharing opinions and ideas has been emphasized in the

Baha'i community where every voice is recognized and listened to, but also physical acts of assistance are not uncommon in the Baha'i faith, as Kapeneta Purcell's anecdote illustrates,

During cyclone Evan in 2012, it had only been one year since we were Baha'i. Our entire house flushed away, everything was gone. The National Assembly was very quick to host us and others at the temple grounds. They supported us in everything we needed. They provided us with food and clothes, so we would not be lost. I felt inspired by those things, they provided as much as they could to assure that we would not be lost. We could heal our spirit and achieve the joy we had before the cyclone. After 3 months they provided a building we could rent close to everything we needed. They initially paid for everything until we got back on our feet. They kept calling to make sure that we were okay. It is a big part of Baha'i culture, to show that love. To keep that bond of love and friendship alive and to make sure no one is lost" (Purcell, 13/11/2014).

All the wealth gathered by the community is redistributed in times of need or invested in the local community, regardless of its religious affiliation, through education camps or empowerment programs which are open to all. There is a real cherished connectedness among the Baha'i people that is reminiscent of Samoan culture. In addition, Hau'ofa argues that "care for members of society" (Hau'ofa, 158) is another core concept, and as has been shown the Baha'i not only do this for their own community but the larger community of the Samoan nation state and far beyond its borders.

The limited physical space of land mass that was available to Pacific peoples caused a strong and central "sense for place and for social continuity" (162). Even though the Baha'i community has only been present in Samoa since 1954, such a sense of place is present within the Baha'i community and is embodied by the House of Worship in Tiapapata. Through the quotes, the peacefulness and its openness to all "the temple is like a silent teacher" (Purcell, 13/11/2014) to help people grasp the teachings of Baha'u'llah and his ideals of global unity.

There are many other values worth analyzing but even these examples show a powerful connection between the Samoan culture and the Baha'i faith. It is naïve to assume an explicit link between Baha'u'llah's teachings and Pacific cultures, but even if their historical connections are contemporary it does not take away from the similarities and their implications. Samoan Baha'i were able to retain a core aspect of their cultural identity as their foundation was solid enough to carry the Baha'i structure. This does not marginalize the difficulties and clashes discussed earlier, rather it adds to the multifaceted path of negotiating multiple identities and adds a layer of complexity and positivity. "An increasing number of those who have not emigrated are establishing links that will help to keep the old spirit of Polynesians alive, well into the twenty first century" (Hau'ofa, 169) is the hopeful endnote of Hau'ofa, and it would not be surprising if this old spirit can be kept alive through a most unexpected entity whose roots can be found in a land with deserts.

Conclusion

"It is the Baha'i conviction that you hold on to the good things and get rid of the bad things" (Tamasese, 23/11/2014) Moe Gagogo Tamasese spoke as he concluded his answer toward the end of the interview. It is an answer that captures the essence of what this research has found to be true after wandering a meandering theoretical and anthropological path. Firstly by understanding what intersectionality as a concept means one can grasp the difficult task Samoan Baha'i are faced with. They want to adhere to their teachings but also want to retain the positive aspects of their culture, which immediately adds another challenge of what to define as positive and negative. By providing a historical and cultural context the nature of this challenge becomes more tangible. Through demonstrating that religion and culture are not inherently and necessarily prerequisites of one another and by adding a

feminist lens which critically examines who decides what Samoan culture is and which voices are the loudest, a greater appreciation is gained for the multiplicity of identities and an awareness of the particular difficulties Samoan Baha'i face surfaces.

By analyzing their numbers it becomes clear that Samoan culture is reflected in the Baha'i community, and how could it not simply due to the physical locality of the community. Through further discussions about choices, perceptions about Samoan culture, definitions and people's stories, it becomes clear that the Baha'i have successfully navigated their way through the treacherous waters of renegotiating identities. The Baha'i faith dictates the values and ideologies its believers ought to live by. The people here are more than willing to live by those teachings, however they do have cultural baggage that has to be acknowledged. There are occasions in which this cultural baggage holds back the person as it conflicts with Baha'u'llah's teachings, some of the main examples being the *fa'amatai* and *fa'alavelave* and the Samoan hierarchy attached to those traditions that places significant amounts of value on certain voices while almost completely omitting others. In other cases the Samoan culture can aid the convert to grasp the faith in a way made possible because of the pre-existing Samoan perspective, a powerful example being the care for the community, an idea embodied in *aiga* and the collective and unified nature of Samoan culture.

The way in which this paper attempted to demonstrate the intricately processes of navigating intersectionality in the Samoan Baha'i community sometimes did reflect personal opinions concerning Samoan culture, the Baha'i faith and other issues. It is important to acknowledge this limitation and to convey an awareness of the multifaceted natures of the communities discussed. There are many aspects of Samoan culture that I greatly value and that have had a positive impact on my experience. Specifically the selfless care for loved ones is powerful, awe-inspiring and excellent. Similarly I admire the values of unity of the Baha'i faith, but I must remain critical, and the lack of queer rights in a community that centers itself on equality are a major issue of contention. Another limitation that ought to be

acknowledged is the scope of the intersectionality discussed in this research, for it does not include racial, socio-economic, political or sexuality-based identities. This mainly due to the time and resources available.

It would be an interesting future study to expand the scope of intersectionality and broaden this research. Other noteworthy research topics could be a comparison with other Baha'i communities in small island developing states and their intersectionality. Constructs of freedom of religion in contemporary Samoan society and culture and perceptions of non-Baha'i Samoans of the Baha'i faith are other suggestions for future study.

There are countless ways in which people balance their multiple identities, prioritizing some while neglecting others. The Samoan Baha'i are no exception, and because of their religious conviction they have prioritized their spiritual identity. This is a logical choice as according to Baha'u'llah's teachings, national borders and the identities attached to them are obsolete and obstruct a peaceful global human community. This does not mean that this choice is easy nor is it as black and white as it seems. Because of intersectionality the Samoan Baha'i have created an overarching identity that is distinctively their own but still fits effortlessly into the larger movements of the Baha'i faith and the Samoan culture, attempting to take the best of both worlds.

*The earth is but one country,
And humankind its citizens*

~ Baha'u'llah

*So powerful is
The light of unity
That it can
Illuminate
The whole earth*

~ Inscription found on the interior of the Baha'i House of Worship

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Glossary of Terms

Aiga: The nuclear and extended family.

Aitu: In pre-Christian thought these were largely spirits related to space or descendants from other gods. In Christian Samoan culture they have been redefined as demons.

Ali'i: A high chief.

Atua: In pre-Christian times this referred to the pantheon of polytheistic gods. In Christian Samoan culture it refers to the monotheistic God.

Fa'alavelave: literally: struggle. Large Samoan rituals like funerals, weddings or title ceremonies that require high amounts of gift exchanges.

Fa'amatai: Literally it means 'the way of the chiefs,' and it refers to the indigenous political system of Samoa.

Fa'asamoa: Literally it means 'the Samoan way,' it signifies the Samoan culture and the ways in which it is lived out.

Faifeau: Pastor, priest or minister.

Feagaiga: A covenant as between brother and sister or congregation and pastor.

Fono: A village council of chiefs.

le Toga: Samoan fine mat.

Kitabi Aqdas: Written by Baha'u'llah. It is the sacred scripture of the Baha'i faith.

Mana: Spiritual power, knowledge and/or strength.

Matai: Samoan chiefs that are elected by their respective families. In Samoa multiple people can hold one title.

Tautua: Literally: Service. The concept of service to one's family and community.

Tulafale: An orator chief.

Tupua: Spirits of ancestral chief, worshipped and deified in pre-Christian Samoa.

Appendix

- I. Baha'i Population of Upolu, 2012/2013. Data provided by Karen Te'o from the National Assembly of Samoa.

Data as Of	Children	Junior Youth	Youth	Adult Men	Adult Women	Total Believers
Jul2012	133	44	103	208	221	709
Oct2012	128	47	105	211	224	715
Jan2013	121	48	101	212	226	708
Apr2013	120	43	104	213	226	706

- II. Delegates to the National Assembly, 2013. Data provided by Karen Te'o.

Aaitui Siisiialafa, Afoa Titi Nofogatoa, Alesi Taofiga, Alofa Faapoi Toeta, Auimatagi Bob Ale, Collin Atalua Tanielu Lututu, Edda L.B. Wyberski, Elisaia Leu, Faafouina Pesa, Faleseu Lafu, Feaunati Sigano Fereti, Fina'i Aiono, Ina Su'a, Iupeli Satele Kava, James Tamasese, John Ludgate, Kapeneta Purcell, Karameli Tasele, Katerina Tanuvasa, Khosrow Siisiialafia, Leaitua Taua Fitu, Lemalu Siomia Auvele, Lualua Faranisisi Lafua, Magele Eddie Leota, Malae Lolo Masina Pomale, Pele Fa'aola, Samu Elia, Shirley Esera, Sifou To'omalatai, Sola Kaisara Pulu, Susana Patolo, Taitu'uga Fia Papali'i, Tanupo Telea Fa'atauu'u, Taaia Ieremia, Tenise Viliamu, Toni Futi, Vaosa Sailimalo

Female delegates: 15

Male delegates: 23

- III. Delegates to the National Assembly, 2012. Data provided by Karen Te'o.

Aaitui Siisiialafia, Alesi Taofiga, Alofa Faapoi Toeta, Auimatagi Bob Ale, Aumalii Sione Fifita, Cathy Mapusone, Edda L.B. Wyberski, Elisaia Leu, Faafouina Pesa, Feaunati Sigano Fereti, Fina'i Aiono, Ina Su'a, Iupeli S. Kava, John Ludgate, Kalameli Tasele, Katerina Tanuvasa, Laau Patolo, Leaitua Taua Falefitu, Lemalu Siomia, Magele Eddi Leota, Mahnaz Chang Suaesi, Malae Lolo, Masina Pomale, Meipo Lomiga, Patricia Sataua, Peleiupu Tamasese, Sailimalo Vagauta, Shirley Esera, Siaki Vaueli, Sifou Toomalatai, Sola Kaisara Pulu, Taituuga Fia Papali'i, Tanupo Telea Fa'atauu'u, Taaia Ieremia, Tenise Viliamu, Toetu Toloa, Tunumafono Pene, Vaosa Sailimalo

Female delegates: 18

Male delegates: 20

- IV. Delegates to the National Assembly, 2011. Data provided by Karen Te'o.

Afoa Titi Nofogatoa, Alapeka Vagauta, Aufata Lokeni, Easter Roma, Edda Wyberski, Elisaia Leu, Faafouina Pesa, Faola Pele, Fereidoun Yazdani, Fina'i Aiono, Fuatai Kava, John

Ludgate, Katerina Tanuvasa, La’o Sealiimalietoa, Laau Patolo, Lauano Felagai, Lemalu Siomia, Lualua Farani, Magele Leota, Masina Faamoe, Matalena Tasele, Mosi Pesa, Nasime Moghbelpour, Nofoa Leota, Ruta Sinclair, Sailimalo Vagauta, Sifou Toomalatai, Sola Kaisara, Taituuga Fia Papali’i, Tanupo Telea, Taa Ieremia, Tautai Muga, Tavita Siitia, Telesia Peni, Tenisi Viliamu, Tapa Suaesi, Teuila Leota, Toni Futi

Female delegates: 13

Male delegates: 25

V. Delegates to the National Assembly, 2010. Data provided by Karen Te’o.

Tenisi Viliamu, Fia Papali’i, Fuatai Kava, David Addison, Malae Lolo, Siaki Vaueli, John Ludgate, Matalena Tasele, Kalamele Tasele, Sailimalo Vagauta, Faaola Faumuina, Faatoese Ava, Faafoina Pesa, Masina Poumale, Lauano Felagai, Sola Kaisara, Tanupo Telea, Nofoa Leota, Sigano Feaunati, Fina’i Aiono, Lualua Farani, Sifou Toomalatai, Katerina Tanuvasa, Meipo Lomiga, Taa Ieremia, Manaia Tuitea, Supervisor Auvele, Eddie Leota, Faatamalii Wulf, Mosi Pesa, Lemalu Siomia Auvele, Easter Feilo, Levaula Alaifaiva, Fiaese Tofa, Tupuola Sione Malifa, James Tamasese, Tapa Suaesi, Nasime Moghbelpour

Female delegates: 15

Male delegates: 23