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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Title

Development of Religious Identity among the First Norwegian Converts to the
Baha'i Faith in Terms of Engagement in Civic Activities

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Dedication

To my dearest, Solmaz

Acknowledgment

I thank the all bountiful God for giving me the opportunity to study and enabling me to reach to the end of this journey. It is a time to express my deepest appreciation to those who assisted me in bringing the thesis in its present form.

The utmost love go to all the ten friendly informants who wholeheartedly contributed to the research. Besides, I also must appreciate the other five female and male converts whom I apologize for not taking their views into consideration in the research process. The two males and a female have to be counted out because they were not originally Norwegian. The other two females were excluded as well because one lost her inspiration to further contribute and the other left Norway for a long period of time. A huge thank you to all of them dearly.

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Abstract

This thesis presents an empirical study of how ethnic Norwegian converts to the Baha'i Faith put their Baha'i identities into practice while engaging in civic activities within the local Baha'i community and the society at large. It demonstrates how being, doing, and knowing aspects of the informants' religious identities undergo changes while they involve in activities. It also discusses how the components of the religious identity influence each other. The approach of the thesis is a qualitative one making use of in-depth interviews and mixed questionnaires, which include both definitive and open-ended questions. I employ the snowball sampling technique. The number of respondents totals ten, comprising eight women and two men. I have adopted content analysis as the method to interpret data. In order to carry out the research, I have used a socio-psychological approach. Marcia's psychological study, on the one hand, assists me in dividing religious identity into two general aspects of commitment and exploration. Warburg's (2006) theory on religious identity, on the other hand, helps me to divide each aspects of commitment and exploration into three parts namely; being, doing and knowing. This provides me with a basis for analyzing data.

Depending on what role religion plays in the lives of the interviewees, the translation of religious identity into practice take different forms. This is because religion determines what civic activities the informants are allowed to involve in and what activities they are proscribed to do. In this process, being, doing, and knowing aspects of a religious identity affect each other reciprocally and are affected by social conditions. Activities that the informants are engaged in can have strengthening or weakening effects on identity.

In this study, informants are divided into three groups. The first grouping consists of those who call themselves devoted Baha'is. The second group includes those who feel their Baha'i identities are imperfect, and thirdly are those who assume that religion is merely a part of their private and social lives. The members of the first and the third groups, compared to

the second group, show more tendency to be involved in more formal activities. The second group has less inclined to become involved in politics in comparison the other two. The third group have negatively been affected by Baha`i activities compared to other. However, there is a similarity between the three groupings. Being aspect of the religious commitment plays a more important role in incentivizing majority of the informants for activities of the society compared to knowing.

Table of Contents

Dedication	2
Acknowledgment.....	3
Abstract.....	4
1.0 Chapter One- Thesis Background.....	9
1.1 Research Questions.....	11
1.2 Definition of Concepts.....	12
1.2.1 Religious Identity.....	12
1.2.2 Development.....	13
1.2.3 Civic Activity.....	13
1.3 Reasons to Choose the Topic.....	16
1.4 The Importance of Doing the Research.....	17
1.4.1 Review of Related Researchers and Literature.....	17
1.4.2 Theoretical Approach.....	18
1.4.3 What Knowledge Does Research Produce.....	18
1.4.4 Being an Insider.....	19
1.5 Methodology.....	20
2.0 Chapter Two- Literature.....	21
2.1 Social Identity.....	21
2.2 Religious Identity.....	23
2.3 Warburg and Danish Baha`is.....	23
2.4 McMullen and Baha`is of Atlanta.....	25
2.5 Warburg and McMullen and Their Relations with the Present Study.....	26
2.6 Marcia and Identity.....	27
2.7 Ahjum and Development of Religious Identity.....	29

2.8 Literature on Factors that Influence Findings of the Research.....	31
3.0 Chapter Three-Methodology.....	33
3.1 Research Approach.....	33
3.2 Getting to Know the Informants.....	33
3.3 Sampling Selection.....	34
3.4 Research Process: Data Collection Method.....	34
3.5 Data Analysis.....	39
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	41
3.7 Reliability and Validity.....	43
4.0 Chapter Four-Findings.....	44
4.1 Demography.....	45
4.2 Devoted Baha`is.....	46
4.2.1 Y1.....	46
4.2.2 X7.....	50
4.3 Those Who Believe Religion Embraces Different Aspects of Their Lives.....	54
4.3.1 X1.....	55
4.3.2 X3.....	57
4.3.3 X5.....	60
4.3.4 X6.....	63
4.3.5 X8.....	65
4.4 Those Who Believe Religion Is Merely a Part of Their Lives.....	68
4.4.1 X2.....	69
4.4.2 X4.....	72
4.4.3 Y2.....	76
5.0 Chapter Five-Discussions.....	80

5.1 Being a Baha'i.....	80
5.1.1 Devoted Baha'is.....	80
5.1.2 Those Who Believe Religion Embraces Different Aspects of Their Lives.....	81
5.1.3 Those Who Believe Religion Is Merely a Part of Their Lives.....	81
5.2 Formal and Informal Civic Activities.....	82
5.2.1 Devoted Baha'is.....	82
5.2.2 Those Who Believe Religion Embraces Different Aspects of Their Lives.....	83
5.2.3 Those Who Believe Religion Is Merely a Part of Their Lives.....	84
5.3 Permissible or Proscribed.....	85
5.3.1 Devoted Baha'is.....	86
5.3.2 Those Who Believe Religion Embraces Different Aspects of Their Lives.....	92
5.3.3 Those Who Believe Religion Is Merely a Part of Their Lives.....	93
5.4 Weakening and Proscribed.....	95
5.4.1 Devoted Baha'is	95
5.4.2 Those Who Believe Religion Embraces Different Aspects of Their Lives.....	97
5.4.3 Those Who Believe Religion Is Merely a Part of Their Lives.....	97
6.0 Chapter Six.....	101
6.1 Conclusion.....	101
6.2 Research Limitations.....	101
6.2.1 Methodological Limitations.....	102
6.2.2 Literature.....	104
6.2.3 Suggestions for Further Studies.....	104
Bibliography.....	106

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Thesis Background

This study seeks to explore how the religious identity of some of ethnic Norwegians who have been converted to the Baha'i Faith undergo some changes whenever they engage in civic actions both within the Baha'i community and the society at large. The research is based on in-depth interviews with the research participants being ten Norwegian first-generation Baha'is. A mixed questionnaire is an additional tool which I used.

If a religion wishes to make changes in its surroundings, it has to express its values and structures in such a way that those values can be translated by members into the kind of behavior that would affect reformation of the world (Zahn, 1968). The Baha'i Faith is not an exception. Values, norms, and beliefs that everyone can gain in the process of socialization after conversion are practiced in a socio-cultural context (Bailey, 1991; Rambo, 1993). That is why believer needs to know how it is possible to convert beliefs into an actual world. While

practicing religious identity, some religious or personal values due to their similarities to social values may be socially accepted while some may be faced with criticism. This affects the ways people would identify themselves. Development of identity is very much contingent upon how people delineate similarities and boundaries between themselves and others. Identity is composed of both similarities and differences (Mol, 1979; Jenkins, 1996; Veverka, 2004). In addition to making a sense of personal wholeness and integration in identity, members of different groups try to identify themselves differently to what others do.

In fact, there is a dialectical process between the construction of personal identity and dominant social values. The dialectic comes into the picture when individuals involve themselves in civic actions. In this regard, the role of civic activities in making changes in identities should not be underestimated. That's why the focus of the study will not be, if, but rather how, some of Norwegian Baha'is construct their Baha'i identity while they involve in activities. The changes that occur in identity over the process of being and becoming a Baha'i is of considerable interest in the thesis. Using the term "becoming" side by side with the term "being" is important in my point of view. This is because the formation of identity is not completed solely by belonging to a religious group, rather it is a process which undergoes changes after conversion as well. Identity develops through the course of one's life, as Jenkins (1996) ascertains. The study of identity among the Norwegian converts who had previously been Christian or even irreligious, can be of particular importance for understanding how Norwegian Baha'is convert their beliefs into practice. Understanding how religious beliefs impact activities within a society where religion is delegated to the private sphere can be particularly interesting as well. According to Marianne Nilsen (2015), Norway is one of the Scandinavian countries where defaced image of religion is promoted and traditional religiousness has declined.

The major goal of the thesis can be divided into three sub-goals. The first is to clarify how some Norwegian Baha'is perceive their religious identity. The second goal is to address the ways by which they put into practice their Baha'i identities while they get involved in civic actions in the Norwegian context. In fact, we see how some Norwegian converts externalize their beings and knowing. "As man externalizes himself, he constructs the world into which he externalizes himself (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). This increases knowledge about the types of activities that some Norwegian Baha'is would prefer to get engaged in. And finally, I will explore how civic activities (doing) bring about changes in being and knowing parts of some Norwegians' Baha'i identities.

To respond to these questions, I need to determine the connections between different parts of a religious identity namely; being, knowing, and doing. 'Being' represents the ways through which individuals may identify themselves (Warburg, 2006). 'Knowing' sheds lights on the degree of familiarity of individuals with religious teachings and principles which can affect their decisions and actions (Warburg, 2006). And 'doing' signifies the fact that how they put their religious identity into practice (Ibid). Believers are usually faced with challenges at this level. The challenges may persuade believers to contemplate, to criticize their knowledge, or even to encourage or discourage them to participate in certain types of activities. Making changes in each aspect can cause subsequent changes in other parts of the identity. Religious identity, therefore, can undergo significant changes. The present study will provide some explanations about the changes that some Baha'is may experience in their religious identity while they involve in civic activities within the Norwegian society and within the Baha'i community.

Doing, being, and knowing are the three components of the religious commitment. This means that one cannot belong to a certain faith community unless he or she is willing to be a member of the given group, does something for his or her beliefs, and enhance his or her

religious knowledge. However, religious identity is not merely consisted of the commitment that believers make. It also requires that followers of the faith explore their being, knowing, and doing as they engage in civic activities. This is because they most likely confront some challenges in converting their religious identities into practice. Commitment and exploration, therefore, are the two inseparable components of a religious identity.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The study consists of three research questions as follow:

1. How do some Norwegian converts identify themselves as Baha'is?
2. How do some Norwegian Baha'is put their religious identity into practice while they engage in civic activities within the Baha'i Community and the society at large? In other words, how being and knowing aspects may influence doing part of a Baha'i identity?
3. How do the actions Norwegian converts engage in may influence their Baha'i identities?

To put it more simply, how doing may affect being and knowing aspects of respondents' Baha'i identities?

1.3 The main objectives of the research are to:

- 1) Explore the Baha'i identity of some of the first generation Norwegian Baha'is
- 2) Clarify the way Norwegian Baha'is convert their religious identity into reality while they engage in civic actions, and
- 3) Determine how civic actions affect the informants' perceptions of their religious identities.

1.3 Definition of Concepts

1.3.1 Religious Identity

Religious identity is one of the three key concepts of the present study. Gibson (2008) and Lewis, Macgregor, and Putnam (2013) in their studies on the role of religion in encouraging people to engage in civic activities define religiosity according to both religious belief and behavior. Warburg (2006), on the other hand, uses three concepts of "doing",

“knowing”, and “being” to explain religious identity. Warburg’s definition suits the present research most. This is because the study not only places emphasis on beliefs and actions of some of Norwegian Baha’is, but also their knowledge of the Baha’i Faith.

However, Being, doing, and knowing are the subsets of other two major concepts in studying religious identity namely; commitment and exploration. In fact, each major part of religious identity, in the study, consists of three constituents of being, doing, and knowing. The pattern would be like being aspect of commitment, doing aspect of commitment, knowing aspect of commitment; and being aspect of exploration, doing aspect of exploration, and knowing aspect of exploration. I suppose that the exploration side of religious identity needs to be explained. Exploration in being refers to the redefinition of identity when some changes take place in it. Exploration of doing refers to any new courses of civic actions that the respondents would prefer to involve in. Exploration of knowing also involves wishing of the informants to obtain new religious knowledge.

In terms of analyzing beliefs, I make use of two terms of macro religious beliefs and micro religious beliefs. By macro religious beliefs, I mean the main social Baha’i doctrines such as unity of mankind, necessity of education, equality between sexes, and the elimination of extreme wealth and poverty. In contrast, micro religious beliefs refer to the Baha’i virtues such as respect, tolerance, and the evaluation of deeds.

1.3.2 Development

Religious identity, as aforementioned, consists of two parts of commitment and exploration. Being, doing, and knowing as the subsets of these two parts undergo some changes in the process of socialization. To identify the changes, I use the term development. My operational definition of development is meaningfully close to what Bertram, Roos, and Miedema (2007) offers. Development of religious identity is associated with changes that people feel in respect to exploring new ways of thinking, acting and their commitment to

groups. This concept can be described as “the totality of the gradual change in the content and strength of commitments in relation to the way one looks at life and the amount of exploration in the achievement and change of these commitments” (Bertram et al, 2007: p. 136). I believe that changes do not necessarily bring about coherence in identity. They may influence individual’s identity negatively at least for a short period of time. Therefore, by development, I generally mean changes of all kinds. Moreover, according to what is discussed in the thesis, changes take place in both major aspects of a religious identity namely; commitment and exploration.

1.3.3 Civic Activity

Social scholars have suggested different definitions of civic actions. While Gibson’s (2008) definition of civic activities is limited to volunteerism and political activities, Driskell, Emby, and Lyon (2008) refers to any sorts of activities that connects the life of people with their communities such as engagement in professional associations, charitable organizations, service groups and so forth. Volunteerism and making contributions to the society at large are done with the purpose of improving conditions within the community.

In the article, “New Spirituality and Social Engagement”, Berghuijs, Bakker, and Pieper (2013) utilize the terms pro-social actions and attitudes of solidarity to describe people who are socially engaged. My operational definition of civic actions, however, is really close to what Lewis et al., (2013) call pro-social behavior or even neighborliness. Lewis et al., (2013) believe that civic actions signify every activity that people can do within larger society such as volunteering, informal helping, community involvement and political engagement. As aforementioned, the idea of the development of society is one of the major characteristics of civic activities. The present study takes a step forward and includes religious activities into the definition as well. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, religious beliefs and activities increase the possibility of engaging people in activities (Berghuijs et al, 2013; Hougland and

Christenson, 1983; Levitt, 2008; Lewis, 2013; Lim and Macgregor 2012; Trovao, 2012; Youniss, McLellan, Su, and Yates, 1999). The second point goes back to this idea that many Baha'is tend to share their religious beliefs, which are based on establishing peace, unity, and development of whole society, with their fellowmen. In my opinion, what many Baha'is do in the Baha'i community such as participating in study circles, 19 day feasts, and elections are closely linked to what people usually do for the betterment of society. As the examples illustrated, civic actions are not solely constrained to political activities, but rather it includes various types of actions leading to the development of the community. Even I consider professional career as a formal civic activity.

In the definition of civic activities, I would prefer to make a distinction between formal and informal types of activities. In my opinion, informal civic actions refer to voluntarily and neighborliness activities such as making friendly conversation, doing voluntarily social actions, voting, participating in 19 day feasts, core activities, and reflection meetings. I feel that some Baha'i concepts need to be defined. It should be noted that I define Baha'i terms in accordance with my knowledge of the Faith. 19 day feasts are Baha'i gatherings held in the first day of each Baha'i month. The 19 day feast serves as the basis of the Baha'i community life. This is because 19 day feast is a gathering where all participants have equal chance to raise their voice and become informed of the most recent developments that Baha'is have made in the society. Core activities are parts of the systemic growth program that the Universal House of Justice has founded for the development of communities at both local and national levels at the outset of 21st century. Core activities include four main parts namely; study circles, devotional meetings, children classes, and junior youth empowerment programs. Study circles are gatherings held for the purpose of studying Baha'i teachings, with an emphasis on the well-being of humanity. Devotional meetings are types of gatherings held with the purpose of reading prayers and passages from the Baha'i sacred scriptures without

practicing any ritual. No one has specific roles in these gatherings. Children classes refer to gatherings that are primarily organized for the nourishment of spiritual qualities in children such as truthfulness and generosity. Moral and spiritual empowerment of youth between the ages of 12 and 15 is the main concern of junior youth programs.

On the contrary, formal civic actions present those activities that entail working with religious and social organizations such as being a member of spiritual assemblies, and doing a professional career. There are two types of spiritual assemblies. National Spiritual Assembly refers to the national council body that governs affairs of the Baha'i community life of a state. In contrast, Local Spiritual Assembly refers to elected councils of each local Baha'i community that govern the same community. Another formal administrative post is Auxiliary Board, which refers to a Baha'i institution that appoints counsellors for the purpose of spreading and protecting the Faith.

The last concept in the category of civic actions that I need to define is partisan politics. I define this term from a Baha'i perspective. According to my understandings of Baha'i scriptures, partisan politics refers to any financial support of political parties, give speeches in favor of one party, and participate in political disputes and discourses.

1.4 Reasons to Choose the Topic

There are two main reasons which have incentivized me to choose religious identity as the main concept of the thesis. Firstly, identities in general and development of religious identity, in particular, are interesting issues to study. People need to know each other in social interactions. People are asked about their identity on a regular basis, as Jenkins (1996) acknowledges. When it comes to religious identity, depending on locations where religious believers dwell, they may or may not be asked about their identity. I am asked about my Baha'i identity in Iran, for instance. This is because religion is one of the most salient aspects of Iranians' life that people use to categorize others. If I do not follow the mainstream

tradition within this society, I would be subjected to social exclusion and prosecution by the law. However, Baha'is are not grouped or even excluded by the law in Norway. However, it seems that many Norwegians are skeptical about religion. Let me use the term skeptical rather than secular. Because I would not intend to focus on secularity and religiosity, and it is outside the scope of this thesis. In my point of view, it is really interesting to know how some Norwegian Baha'is practice their identity whenever they engage in civic activities, what challenges they may confront, and how their religious identities are affected by activities in a more or less secularized society.

Another point of interest about the present study is the participants of this research who include first generation Norwegian Baha'is. The thesis could have emphasized those Baha'is who have been grown up in Baha'i families and communities. I consciously decided not to include them, however. This is because I feel that those who criticize their beliefs and try to explore new ideas are worth investigating. Religious conversion is a turning point that might be happening in the life cycle of everyone. It may bring significant changes to his or her identity. Both conversion and social milieu could compel the converts to build and rebuild their identity.

1.5 The Importance of the Research

1.5.1 Review of Related Researches and Literatures

This research is important firstly because as an Iranian Baha'i, would like to make mention of the fact that the study of Baha'is has received little attention in academic circles. There are two empirical studies that have been conducted in Denmark and America by Warburg (2006) and McMullen (2000) respectively. Each has helped me in different ways. Even though Warburg (2006) attempts to emphasize the role of Baha'is in developing their local communities, her study lacks information how their activities may influence their Baha'i identity. However, Warburg's study is very relevant to the present research because, it not

only determines how Danish Baha'is define themselves as Baha'is, but also how they put their religious identities within the Danish Baha'i community and within the society. These two questions are in line with the first and the second research questions. She categorizes some Baha'is of Denmark according to the level of their participation in Baha'i meetings, thus enabling her to make a comparison between socially active Baha'is and inactive Baha'is. Whereas the present study would intend to interpret narratives that Norwegian Baha'is make in terms of practicing their Baha'i identities.

In another study, McMullen (2000) takes a step forward in studying Baha'is of Atlanta by exploring how racial unity activities that some Baha'is involve in influence the Baha'i community of Atlanta. This part of McMullen's study triggers my third research question. However, the information he provides is insufficient in understanding how each individual puts into practice his or her religious identity while they get engaged in activities. Nor McMullen discusses how challenges that Baha'i individuals have met while participating in racial unity activities influence their Baha'i identities. However, this study provides readers with an introductory about how each Norwegian Baha'i informant translate his or her identity into practice and how he or she copes with challenges when he or she get engaged in civic activities.

Another study that is relevant to my third research question has been carried out by Ahjum. Ahjum (2013) adopts Hans Mol's model of studying identity to explore how four overlapping mechanisms of objection, commitment, ritual, and myth sacralize identities of few Muslim women when they get engaged in socio-political activities of the Islamic group of Qibla. Ahjum's research helps me to understand how activities inspire religious identity.

In the following chapter, I explain the studies mentioned above in detail.

1.5.2 Theoretical Approach

In this research, I will adopt a socio-psychological perspective for analyzing data. I combine Warburg's sociological model with James Marcia's psychological model. Marcia points out to two elements of commitment and exploration in studying the development of identity. However, this study looks at the exploration side of identity from a more limited point of view. In this study, exploration refers to looking for new ideas and actions within a certain socio-religious setting. Exploration in Marcia's theory however entails that one looks for alternative religious identity, professional identity, and so on. Each aspects of religious identity consists of three elements of being, doing, and knowing. The exploration of relationship between these aspects of the religious identity is the main goal of the present research.

1.5.3 What Knowledge Does Research Produce?

Also, the research adds value to the study by producing knowledge in the field of social science. Basically, this knowledge is twofold. On the one side, I would explore how some Baha'is perceive their religious identities, how this perception influences the type of civic activities both sexes involve in, and lastly how civic activities may affect being and knowing aspects of their Baha'i identities. I would study what type of civic activities those (1) who call themselves devoted Baha'is, (2) who call themselves imperfect Baha'is and feel that religion embraces their lives as a whole, and (3) who assume that religion is merely a part of their lives would prefer to get engaged in. Moreover, I would explore how civic activities have some effects on being and knowing aspects of Baha'i identity of the aforementioned groups.

1.5.4 Being an Insider

Since I assume that my position as a Baha'i researcher influences me while interpreting the data, it is worth mentioning that I cannot claim to be completely objective. There are two points that I need to mention in this regard. Firstly, the Baha'i Faith, in my understanding, is a dynamic religion. In addition to immutable principles of Baha'u'llah which has been

identified in Kitab Aqdas, Baha'u'llah, himself, has given the Universal House of Justice the authority of interpreting of some social principles as changes take place in the world with the passage of time. This is worth mentioning that the Universal House of Justice is the supreme governing institution of the Baha'i Faith. By sending messages, UHJ helps Baha'is of all over the world not only to have a better understanding of the principles, but also to keep up with the changes occur in the world. Messages can influence the religious identity of Baha'is by transforming their knowledge, which in return might affect their activities. One of the most challenging matters that messages pay much attention to is the ways that Baha'is all over the world can engage in social activities of their respective communities. Politics, unavoidably, comes into play in this sense. Baha'is, however, are strongly prevented from getting involved in partisan political activities. What makes the situation more confusing is that Baha'is who live in Islamic states such as Iran are forbidden from participating in state elections, while western Baha'is feel free to participate in civic elections as long as they do not identify themselves with certain parties. Even though messages of the Universal House of Justice provides Baha'is with necessary guidance how to apply the principle of not involvement in political affairs, the way Baha'is interpret the content of messages influence the types of activities they can involve in and it's extent. Therefore, my Iranian perspective should not be underestimated. This is because it may influence the way I interpret political behavior of the research respondents.

Secondly, the participants in the research are from different age groups. Six out of ten are more than 60, three are middle-aged, and one is the youngest. It is worth noting that all of those who are more than 60 are pensioners. However, two of them, a male and a female, are still socially active in organizations. I suppose that age is a very crucial element in this study because age can influence how Norwegian Baha'is adapt themselves with the most recent knowledge that messages shed light on. Taking these two point into consideration, It can be

concluded that the ways I perceive Norwegian Baha'is may affect the way I interpret the research data.

1.6 Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research method. The in-depth interview is the major method for collecting data, which is followed by giving the participants mixed questionnaires. To analyze data, I make use of the content analysis.

Chapter Two

2. Literature

2.1 Social Identity

The main theme of the present study is religious identity which is one of the sub-categories and definable types of social identity, as Capozza and Brown (2000) express. Since understanding religious identity depends on how people present themselves to others and how they perceive others and their surrounding realities, the study of social identity can therefore be considered as the point of departure. Depending on what social milieu people grow up in, what groups they belong to, what values and norms they would preserve and share with others, and how they do fit with the reality of their surroundings, people provide different responses to the questions “who they are” and “who they are not” (Brewer and Hewstone, 2005; Jenkins, 1996; Postmes, 2010; Wetherell, 2009). In this sense, identity is not something that merely belongs to the person, but rather something that is generated as the result of the interaction between a person and his or her environment. In fact, this is the interplay or even a

dialectic between person`s self-concept and public image that forces him/her to think, feel, and act (Jenkins, 1996; Lindstrom, 2015; Moloney and Walker, 2007).

Summarily, social identity can be defined “as the individual`s knowledge that he or she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him or her of the group membership” (Abrams and Hogg, 1990). The importance of the social construction of self-identity is to the degree that theorists such as Jenkins (1996), Brewer and Hewstone (2005) state that social identity gives meaning to the lives of human beings. Or simply, being a human is possible when men would try to make their self-identity socially involved.

Being embedded in a group usually requires that individuals get to know other members of the group, make commitments and adopt social roles. Ongoing social interaction with people would facilitate the process of socialization through which individuals internalize social norms and values (Jenkins, 1996). Values and norms, which are functional for the life of social groups, would provide guidelines for individual actions. This puts a strain on members to define and redefine their identities (Worchel, 1998). In other words, self-identity is explored as members of the group make commitments to social values and undertake different roles. It seems that being and doing, as identity formation elements, move side by side. In his book “Modernity and Self-Identity”, Anthony Giddens pinpoints to the issue by mentioning that “in doing everyday life, all human beings answer the question of being; they do it by the nature of the activities they carry out” (Giddens, 1991, p: 48).

In addition to Giddens` point of view, it can be said that identity is not something static, but rather dynamic which undergoes some changes over time. While “being” status is criticized, identity begins to “become” again (Jenkins, 1996; Peek, 2005). Psychologically, constructing and reconstructing identity continue to happen over the course of one`s life, as he or she looks for a sense of integrity in his/her identity (Deaux, 1994). All in all it can be said

that commitment and exploration are the two components of identity that reciprocally influence each other.

So far, it is obvious that whenever people are asked about their identity in general, they would talk about their worldviews, attitudes, and probably the ways they convert their beliefs into action. Depending on the types of groups people belong to, their views and courses of actions take different forms. Each social group, including religious, ethnic, and organizational, has its own norms and values that expect members to observe. Sharing common views and beliefs among members of a certain group and putting group's values into practice give members a sense of belonging which in return can result in making boundaries between them and others. Jenkins (1996) and Worchel (1998), however, argue that social identity compasses of both differences and similarities. In other words, even though social groups and their members can be characterized by exclusively maintaining certain values and courses of actions that distinguish them from others, they share common point with others as well. Social identity is not all about differences.

2.2 Religious Identity

Religion is one of the social factors which affects formation and development of identity in a social context (Beyer, 2006; Harrison Oppong, 2013; Peek, 2005; Viser-Vogel, Westerink, Kock, Barnard, and Bakker 2012). Religion is a potential source of values which may give meaning to peoples' lives (Gillespie, 1991; Lewis et al, 2013; Syrjanen, 1984) or enhances social integrity (Bumpers et al., 1989). Even though in the beginning it might be assumed that religion is a personal matter, its impacts on society may convince us that religion can turn into a social phenomenon as well. This is most evident when religious beliefs persuade believers to get involved in actions, as Becker and Dehingra (2001), and Lewis et al., (2013) argue. Religion influences worldviews that religious people would choose for their actions, their friendship ties, the decisions they make, the ways they treat others in

work places, their political views, and so on. This point makes a linkage between religious identity and social identity.

2.3 Warburg and Danish Baha`is

In her study on Danish Baha`is, Warburg (2006) looks at religious identity from a wider perspective. She conceptualizes religious identity through the categorization of the concept of belonging. She argues that belonging to a religious community takes place in three stages namely, “_knowing_”, “_being_”, and “_doing_”. These dimensions are complementary. Knowing refers to participants` worldview which assist them in clarifying eternal questions, rationalizing human destiny, and seeking the universal truths. “Knowing” therefore requires that Baha`is have knowledge of Baha`i scriptures, rules, and traditions which affect their daily lives. “Doing” involves either performing or non-performing actions which is done with the purpose of preserving and confirming collective Baha`i identity. “Being”, on the other hand, signifies deep feelings of being a Baha`i which give Baha`is a sense of belonging to a Baha`i community (Warburg, 2006). It is worth noting that being and knowing sometimes overlap.

Belonging in Warburg`s work is equal to commitment in the present study. I make use of the term commitment instead of belonging. Commitment, therefore, consists of the three components of knowing, being, and doing.

Warburg (2006) intends to study how Danish Baha`is maintain their senses of belonging to the Baha`i community. To achieve this goal, she explores how some Danish Baha`is identify themselves and what they do for their religious identities both within the Baha`i community and within society at large. These two questions are in line with the first and the second research question of the present study. She asks Danish Baha`is what it means to be a Baha`i. To identify themselves, her interviewees mainly emphasize on some Baha`i virtues and some other positive personality traits such as honesty, politeness, loving, and respectfulness. They also place emphasis on some social teachings of the Faith such as unity

and consultation. Warburg would like to know how Danish Baha'is make a boundary between themselves and non-Baha'is as well. She classifies the responses that her interviewees provide to four descriptive attitudes such as "a Baha'i shows tolerance", "a Baha'i is unselfish", "a Baha'i is a good role model" and "a Baha'i should follow the Baha'i laws".

When it comes to activities, Warburg (2006) uses definitive questions to determine if her informants observe Baha'i unchallenged duties such as daily praying, feast, and making a will. Her findings show that women in terms of praying are religiously more active than men. Danish Baha'is participate in activities within the Baha'i community such as participation in 19 day feasts, Baha'i conferences and holy days. When it comes to activities of the society, Warburg's findings show that a small percentage of her interviewees are members of Danish United Nation Associations. A big proportion of her informants are politically active. They are supporters of left wing and centrist parties.

Warburg (2006) is not about to find the possible links between the three components of being, doing, and knowing, what I do in the present study. In fact, she does not pay attention to the changes that may take place in each realm of religious identity while Baha'is engage in social activities. In fact, she does not argue how being and doing aspects of commitment inspire the types of activities that Danish Baha'is get engaged in. However, she, in some cases, determines what aspects of a religious identity are in action the most among Danish Baha'is. She argues that social teachings of the Faith such as unity of mankind encourage Baha'is to get engaged in activities.

2.4 McMullen and Baha'is of Atlanta

In a study which was carried out among Baha'is of Atlanta, McMullen (2000) argues that Baha'i identity is a matter of thinking globally and acting locally. In a large scale, being a Baha'i means to love all humanity, to serve it, and to work for the universal peace (McMullen, 2000). In regards to the matter of lying boundaries, McMullen (2000) argues that those

Baha'is of Atlanta whom he conducted interviews with believe it is this World Order of Baha'u'llah that shall rule over the world in the future. This doctrine makes a difference between them and non-Baha'is. However, as McMullen asserts, some Baha'is of Atlanta are unsure where the boundaries between them and the others should lie. This is because they feel that even those people who take some steps forward for the betterment of society are Baha'is although he or she may not know this.

In his book "The Baha'i, The Religious Construction of a Global Identity, McMullen (2000) begins to discuss how some Baha'is of Atlanta practice their religious identities within the society. He concludes that his research subjects would prefer to engage in those social activities that their principles are similar to what the Baha'i Faith promotes such as racial unity and universal education. This does not mean that he ignores activities that Baha'is do within the Baha'i community such as 19 day feasts. He however neglects to discuss how Baha'is' perception of themselves may influence the type of activities they would prefer to get involved. McMullen also overlooks the matter of studying the changes that may take place in religious identities when Baha'is get involved in activities. His attention mainly draws to the reactions that National Spiritual Assembly shows when Baha'is face challenges while practicing their worldviews in the society. For instance, National Spiritual Assembly of the United States has offered some initiatives to reduce racial conflicts in the fireside meetings where whites protest against the presence of blacks. Nevertheless, he explores how his interviewees feel about participating in political activities. This is in line with the third research question.

In regards to political issues, McMullen (2000) asserts that Baha'is can participate in civic elections and not vote along party lines. Moreover, he clarifies that Baha'is should "refrain from participating in campaigns or running for political offices". His findings however show

that Baha'is of Atlanta are not sure how they can convert their Baha'i belief into action when political issues matter.

Since being socially active reminds Baha'is that they, unavoidably, involve in politics, the matter of engagement in political issues has become one of the most contentious issues among Baha'is in general and Western Baha'i intellectuals in particular, as Warburg (2006) states.

This is notable that political activity is solely a part of what I term civic actions, not all. Civic actions refer to any kinds of formal or informal, voluntary, neighborhood behavior, community helping, and socio-political behavior within Baha'i community and the society at large which is done with the purpose of improving social conditions.

2.5 Warburg and McMullen and Their Relations with the Present Study

As aforementioned, Warburg (2006) does not argue about the possible changes that may take place in the subjects' Baha'i identities as a result of the challenges they face in the path of converting their religious identities in the larger society. She merely discusses the difficulties that the Baha'i World Community has met and the way it handles them. Baha'i individuals are not the matter of question in her study. However, McMullen (2000), to some degree, argues what challenges Baha'is of Atlanta have faced while practicing their religious identities and the way they deal with challenging issues. The issues such as how to make boundaries between themselves and non-Baha'is, how to involve in politics, and how to deal with conflicts occurring in firesides have been challenges that Baha'is of Atlanta have confronted. While Warburg provides the present study with basic analytical considerations which is helpful to answer the three research questions, McMullen's work offers some themes for making some argumentations.

Compared to the present study, neither Warburg (2006) nor McMullen (2000) provide a classification of the respondents' religiousness. Although Warburg provides some theoretical

arguments about liberal and fundamental Baha'is, she does not use this classification to analyze her findings. On contrary, I analyze how identity is practiced among those who feel that religion is everything in their lives and those who believe religion is just a part of their lives.

Breaking up religious identity to three parts of knowing, being, and doing not only facilitates analyzing possible connections between the three, but also determining which part brings about significant changes in Baha'i identity of some Norwegian converts. To trace these changes, I would prefer to place the components of identity as the subset of the two more general themes of commitment and exploration. The one who scientifically studies this categorization of identity is Marcia.

2.6 Marcia and Identity

According to Marcia, commitment and exploration are the two indicators of studying identity development (Bertram et al., 2007; Bell, 2014; Carlsson, 2015; Day, 2013; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012). Exploration, which is an active process, requires that individual questions and weighs identity alternatives to realize which one may suit him or her before making a serious decision in his personal life (Visser-Vogel et al., 2012; Carlsson, 2015). Commitment, on the other hand, involves “making a choice in an identity domain and engaging in significant activities toward the implementation of that choice” (Visser-Vogel, et al., 2012: p. 115).

However, there is a considerable difference between Marcia's description of exploration and my definition of this term. Marcia uses exploration to trace possible fundamental changes that may take place in one's identity over the course of his or her life. For example, the attempts people make to choose their professional careers, as a sign of being independent, is one of those profound changes. Whereas, I look at exploration as a term to study the changes that may occur in possible relations between the three parts of being, knowing, and doing.

Exploration in this term means trying to find new aspects of identity or even possible solutions for managing challenges that one may face. The impacts of these changes on the respondents' Baha'i identity is not that pervasive in comparison to those fundamental changes that Marcia theorizes. This is worth mentioning that Marcia's analyses of the development of identity is not suitable to my analysis. This is the reason I merely adopt two concepts of commitment and exploration from his theory. The diagram below shows the general model of studying the development of religious identity, which is a combination of Warburg and Marcia's theory.

I intend to explore the possible links between different components of this diagram. For instance, to answer the second research question, I look for probable connections between being and knowing aspects of commitment, and their impacts on doing parts of commitment and exploration. Also, to provide some answers to the third research question, I would argue the role of doing aspect of commitment in taking possible changes in not only being and knowing aspects of commitment, but also exploration side of the religious identity.

I assume that this is the right time to share with readers what being, knowing, and doing refer to in this study. Being is divided into three categories namely; qualities (virtues), both personal and religious beliefs, choices and preferences. Doing refers to any types of civic activities that the informants would prefer to get engaged in, and, finally, knowing represents the informant's knowledge of the Faith.

2.7 Ahjum and Development of Religious Identity

Ahjum's (2013) research paper is the most relevant research to the present study. This is because it discusses how religious identity of four Muslim women is developed while they get engaged in socio-political activities of the Islamic movement of Qibla. Ahjum (2013) applies Hans Mol's theory to explore how four overlapping mechanisms of commitment, objection, ritual, and myth influence religious identities of four Muslim women. According to Ahjum,

commitment in Mol's theory refers to the emotional attachment to a certain group. Objection, on the other hand, refers to the worldview that individuals obtain as a result of being attached to a group. While ritual refers to the activities that members of a group involve in, myth provides individuals with "a cross-generational sense of belonging in time".

Findings of Ahjum's study reveals that there are two basic reasons that encourage women to be a member of the Islamic group of Qibla. Firstly, they believe that Qibla provides them with spiritual development. Secondly, they feel that the group provides them with sufficient political skills for combatting social injustice in South Africa. Commitment ties them to the group. When it comes to objection, four women express that Qibla teaches them that there is no difference between religious and secular. They state that their final goal is to make some changes in social conditions. Worldview helps them to make boundaries between themselves and 'the other'. Commitment to a religious movement has shaped women's worldview. Their worldviews, in return, has inspired them to participate in rituals of the Islamic movement. In fact, Qibla has given women this opportunity to participate in classes that are organized by Imams. Classes, in this example, refers to the groups' ritual. Four women become socialized through religious classes. They learn how to actualize virtues such as how to be a good wife. On the other hand, Imams reinforce women's sense of belonging to the group by telling stories. Through narrations women become familiarized with some Islamic characters who have made significant changes in societies of their times.

I would like to claim that commitment in Mol's theory can be equated with being in my study. Objection, on the other hand, can be considered as the mixture of being and knowing. Doing in my study and ritual in Ahjum's (2013) work can be categorized in the same group. There is no substitute for myth in my research. However, if I find some relevant information about narrations in my findings, I will discuss it. In Ahjum's research, we not only see how being and knowing aspect of women's religious identity inspire their activities, but also how

the activities they get engaged in influence their being and knowing aspect of their Islamic identity.

A considerable difference between my research and Ahjum`s (2013) study lies in the definition of the concept of development. Ahjum merely discusses positive changes that religion may make in individuals identity. He, to some degree, overlooks the challenges that individuals may confront in the path of practicing their religious identities and the way they deal with challenges.

Another different point is that Ahjum (2013) mainly focuses on activities that his interviewees do in a religious movement. However, in my study, civic activities refer to the activities that are done within the Baha`i community and within the society at large. To make Ahjum`s research applicable to my study, therefore, I categorize religious activities and activities that are done within the society in the same group. The principles of social activities that some Norwegian Baha`is are get involved in is similar to the principles of the Baha`i Faith.

2.8 Literature on Factors that Influence Findings of the Research

Obviously, every single informant, whether male or female, has possibly his or her own understanding of the Baha`i Faith and its teachings. Their interpretations can possibly affect the types of activities they would prefer to get involved in. Age, education, and professional career are the other three factors that may have some effects on doing aspect of the subjects` Baha`i identity. There are some studies discussing whether or not factors such as belief, education, and professional career influence the types of activities individuals involve in. In spite of this fact that McMullen (2000) and Warburg (2006) does not take heed to the aforementioned factors in their analyses, I take them into consideration in my analysis.

In their pieces of research on ‘Faith and Politics: The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Political Participation’, Driskell, Embry, and Lyon (2008) show the connection between

beliefs and actions. Driskell et al., (2008) argue that even though macro religious beliefs increase the possibility of engagement in direct forms of political issues, virtuous believers are less likely to participate politically. Moreover, its findings show that “individualistic and micro beliefs have no effects on national politics”. Driskell et al., (2008) however refer to Rodney Stark`s theory to show the importance of beliefs rather than rituals in encouraging believers to engage in social activities. In this regard, Stark “suggests that beliefs should be studied more extensively”.

In another study, Houglan and Christenson (1983) discuss that only people who feel that religion embraces different aspects of their lives are influenced most by religious beliefs. They argue that religion in general depoliticizes people. This assumption is also confirmed by Djupe and Grant. Djupe and Grant (2001) claim that education and social skills play much more important role in encouraging individuals to participate in political actions than what religion does.

Houglan and Christenson (1983) discuss the relationship between higher education and the tendency of religious people to be involved in politics. In regards to the issue of practicing religious identity among some American Youths, Gibson (2008) discusses that girls, compared to boys, are more likely to participate in voluntary civic activities. His findings also indicate that those youths who are preoccupied with some jobs show more tendency to engage in civic actions compared to jobless ones.

Houglan and Christenson (1983) argues that participation in organizational activities increases the possibility of participation in political affairs.

Chapter Three

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

The strategy that the present research adopts is based on a qualitative research method. Doing in-depth interviews is the predominant method of data collection for this study. Since qualitative research method is associated with generating grounded theories (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; Marvasti, 2003; Quinn Patton, 2002) I make use of interpretation as the epistemological consideration. “Qualitative inquiry is especially powerful as a source of grounded theory, theory that is inductively generated from fieldwork, that is, theory that emerges from the researcher’s observations and interviews out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy” (Quinn Patton, 2002: P. 11). Additionally, interpretivism is in harmony with the content analysis, a method that I adopt for analyzing participants’ views on the issue of possible changes that take place in their religious identities.

3.2 Getting to Know the Informants

The most significant tool of data collection for this study has been in-depth interviews. After introducing myself to, and becoming acquainted with the first generation Norwegian converts to the Baha'i Faith, I kindly requested their participation in the interviews. Being a Baha'i in itself has not successfully enabled me to fathom the informants' views and perspectives on the issue of identity. Making friendly bonds was a necessity. This intimacy gave me some opportunities to infiltrate the innermost dimensions of the subjects' lives. In his book 'Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction', Heilman (1998) emphasizes on significant role of establishing intimacy with insiders in supplying information about aspects of their lives which cannot be available to pure researchers. Ten out of fourteen Baha'is that I met, were willing to be interviewed. There were, initially, two impediments in my path. First, this was my first time studying abroad and, I was, therefore, unfamiliar with the culture in Norway. Second, I did not know my specific research questions and I was looking for some clues. That's why I read many books and articles and decided to visit Norwegian Baha'is simultaneously by making appointments with them. At the outset, I made informal interviews and I listened to stories of Norwegian Baha'is on the issue of conversion. I gradually built strong friendships. Having found my research questions, I requested the interviewees to participate in formal interviews which were very similar to friendly conversations.

3.3 Sampling Selection

I made use of snowball sampling to choose the research samples. There are two primary explanations for this choice. Firstly, there were no formal statistics available in Baha'i documents that indicated the numbers or residencies of the Baha'i converts in Norway. Secondly, I was a new comer and, therefore, did not know any first generation Norwegian Baha'is. Attending nineteen-day feasts gave me opportunities to get to know these individuals. While making friendly conversation I asked a Norwegian convert woman about any other converts she may know. She introduced some others to me and gave me their

telephone numbers. She, herself, had lost inspiration to contribute to the research after organizing the second meeting. I called the others, however, and spoke to a few Baha'is. I subsequently made appointments with them. I had a mere five people informally interviewed at that time. I was, however, supposed to find ten Norwegian Baha'is. I asked many Baha'is whether they knew any first generation Norwegian Baha'is. Eventually, I found ten and began to conduct interviews.

3.4 Research Process: Data Collection Method and Tools

In-depth interviews were conducted in various settings. The participants freely decided where the interviews were to be conducted. However, I had told them that interviews should be conducted in a peaceful place. It should not be left unmentioned that all respondents agreed to using a voice recorder during the course of the interview. Four out of ten respondents invited me to their flats. Three interviews were made in public libraries. Two interviews were conducted in the Baha'i Center. One of the participants agreed to be interviewed in his working place. Locations were absolutely quiet, which made the record of data unproblematic.

The interviews that I conducted were unstructured. This is because unstructured interviews gave me an opportunity to make in-depth interviews. This, in return, enabled me to gain access to the participants' insights and their interpretations of their experiences. These are the key features of an in-depth interview as ascertained by Charmaz (2006) and Bryman (2012). Marvasti (2003) explains this idea by asserting that "in-depth interviews are founded on the notion that delving into the subject's deeper self produces more authentic data... in-depth interviewers aim to gain access into the hidden perceptions of their subjects" (Marvasti, 2003: P. 21). The research questions have provided a basis for questions of the interviews. During the course of the interviews, I asked the interviewees questions similar to the research

questions. This is because the questions were general and broad, and is an issue that encouraged the respondents to disclose some narratives of their lives.

In the first round, I asked the informants to respond sequentially to these three main questions: 1) who are you as a Baha'i; 2) how do you put your Baha'i identity into practice while you engage in civic actions within the Baha'i community and the society at large; and 3) how the civic actions you engage in influence your religious identity. I also asked one more questions: what challenges you have faced while practicing your Baha'i identity.

The main parts of interviews were allotted to story-telling. The informants portrayed what had happened to their identities through narrations. Narratives have been effective in understanding profound feelings and emotions of the subjects and meanings that they attribute to their personal lives and identities. Human beings give meaning to their lives through narratives (Bell, 2009; Czarniawska, 2004; Peterson, 1996). The significance of narratives is shown by Carlsson (2015), McGuire and Spickard (2001) as well. Carlsson, for instance, believes that "a coherent sense of identity is created through the construction of a life story connecting individuals' memories of past experiences with their present life and imagined future in meaningful ways" (Carlsson, 2015: P. 24). From my point of view, participants' narratives provided me with sufficient data to cover research questions. The aim of gaining rich data was achieved during the course of interviews. According to Bryman (2012), thick description of data is impossible unless the requirement of gaining rich data meets.

To gain more relevant responses to the research questions and to turn the interviews into more approachable conversations, I made use of various types of questions such as follow-up questions, probing questions, direct questions, silence, structuring questions, and interpreting questions. Basically, flexibility helped me to raise some probing and interpreting questions of what interviewees expressed about a certain issue. While interviewees shared their views, I consistently tried not to interrupt them. The more they brought forward thought-provoking

issues, the more enthusiastic I was to ask a number of probing and interpreting questions. I sometimes felt some of the informants distract from the issue under question, and so I paused and allowed them to articulate their views. Thereafter, I began to ask direct questions by repeating and reformulating inquiry.

To gain greater amount of information, I let some respondents ponder about the issue under question for a while during the course of interview, which enabled them to formulate their thoughts, attitudes and experiences. This is because interview questions, specifically the first one which raises the question of religious identity, have been new for the interviewees. Eight out of ten respondents claimed that they had barely or never contemplated their Baha'i identities. This is the reason why they became confused and surprised when I asked them the interview questions.

The next step was to store audible files and transcribe them. After completing each interview, I transferred audible file to a secure drive on my personal laptop. I kept each respondent's information in a separate folder. Transcription has been one of the most challenging steps in the process of collecting data. This is because I had to play audio files back and forth in order to be self-assured that I have recognized both words and sentences appropriately.

Going through lines of the documents was the succeeding phase. It should be mentioned that there was a time-lag between when I made the interviews and the time that was dedicated to reading documents. I did three tasks of conducting the interviews, reading literature, and transcribing audio files consecutively. Overall, sixty five pages were written out of what interviewees expressed. I left some memos at the edge of each line, paragraph, and page.

A couple of factors showed me that the research lacked information. One was the fact that there were some gaps within the available information, or perhaps misunderstandings, especially in case of the second and the third questions. Another factor was that the literature

convinced me that I needed more information to cover the issues under question, religious identity and impact of actions on its fluctuations. As a matter of fact, to get more clear responses from informants I came to the conclusion that some words such as civic actions should be explicitly clarified for the interviewees. I, therefore, organized the second round of interviews. This time, I added more precise explanations on what I mean by the phrase civic action. Unfortunately, there were no more chances for me to revisit some of the informants. They have been busy doing their jobs and other activities. However, because I had gotten to know some of the research informants over time, I had defined research phrases before visiting them.

It should be noted here that all interviews were conducted in English. I spoke to the respondents in English, and all could speak English at a very good level. For this reason I asked them to make the conversations in English. I would like to highlight that one of the informants preferred to have a translator during the course of interviews. She however made efforts to use precise words and phrases. For this purpose, she referred to a Norwegian-English dictionary.

In the second round, I asked the respondents to answer the question of whether they have ever had any conflicts between their religious identities and other identities such as personal and especially national identities while they engage in activities in the society. One of the most controversial questions that was brought forward was if, and to what extent the informants would become involved in political issues.

Shortly after making interviews, transcribing audio files, and leaving memos, I noticed that there were still some gaps within the information at hand. I was wondering if respondents have faced challenges within the Baha'i community itself. Thus, I organized the third round of interviews. Surprisingly, after doing the third round, a couple of informants asked me to

send them back their written documents in order to be assured that the given information was all correct.

Even to keep trace of possible changes in the respondents' thoughts, I made a questionnaire that consisted of the same inquiries as the research questions. They were asked to mention what civic activities they have so far been involved in within both the society and the Baha'i community. The questionnaire could offer respondents an opportunity to stress their views and attitudes in a more relaxed atmosphere, in their homes for instance.

Nevertheless, among the ten questionnaires, five of them were sent back to me. Sending emails was another tool that I made use of. I requested four out of five informants, whom I did not receive any feedback, to answer my questions via email. The fifth one was sick. I preferred not to send an appeal to her. I received responses from four other Norwegian Baha'is. The other two have been very busy, as had been mentioned before.

3.5 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, I utilized the methodology of content analysis. Content analysis assisted me in exploring the meaning of the written words and sentences. Definitely, each document and text is about something, as Bazerman and Prior (2004) assert. The aim of the content analysis is to provide a description and analysis of what message the content reflects (Elo and Kyngas, 2008; Miller and Brewer, 2003).

To begin with, I converted audio files into written documents. In other words, I transcribed recorded voices. This was one of the most challenging and time-consuming phases in doing the research. Leaving notes at the edge of each sentence and paragraph was the following step. These notes have been helpful tools to distinguish different segments of the text. Unitizing is the phrase that Krippendorff (2004) in his book with the title of 'Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology' applies to describe systematic segmentation of themes in a certain document. This was the unitization that assisted me in realizing what

information was adequately available and what data I needed to collect, specifically after doing the first round of interviews. Thereafter, I jotted down different unites of each document in diminutive pieces of papers. I placed papers of each text separately.

Simultaneously, I did theoretical sampling, the concept that Glaser and Strauss (2012) utilize in their writings. Theoretical sampling indicates that mass data should be limited to a certain number of subunits which are representatives of a set of all possible units (Elo and Kyngas, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 2012; Krippendorff, 2004).

The next stage was coding. This consisted of taking a quick look at those pieces of papers to find memos that were comparable. I made attempts to discover appropriate themes for each classification of memos. I situated them within the same group and labeled them with a conceptual code. I also did the same for all the other documents. Thus, I had determined all of the core categories. These categories increase transparency and prevents the development of many futile categories that are not fully developed. Categories can be reflected as a means that are utilized to describe a phenomenon, to enhance understanding, and to generate knowledge, as Elo and Kyngas (2008) ascertain. I also categorized which memos and themes correspond with each research questions. In the meantime, there were some papers that I could not categorize or place in existing categories. I decided, however, to choose a more encompassing theme for each core category which allowed me to include the rest of papers or analyze them disjointedly.

Collectively, there are six key concepts for the first research question; namely, “virtues”, “principles and personal feelings”, “choices and preferences”, “actions”, “beliefs”, and “knowledge of the faith”. It should be noted that there is a different between two concepts of belief and knowledge of the Faith. Knowledge of the Faith, in my words, refers to the ability of individuals to make a meaningful connection between beliefs in a way that it provides them with a plan for action. These concepts help me to understand what aspects of religious identity

are the most important for each informant. This, in return, helps me to understand how being and knowing, as the two aspects of a religious identity, influence the types of activities that the interviewees would prefer to get engaged in.

Depending on the role that religion plays in the lives of the interviewees, I have divided them into three groups of devoted Baha'is, those who believe religion influences all aspects of their lives, and those who feel that religion is merely a part of their lives. This grouping is based on the statements of the interviewees. This provides me with a basis for making comparisons.

For the second research question, I categorize the types of activities that the respondents get involved in to two different groups "formal" and "informal". Formal civic activities, as defined in the first chapter, refers to organizational works and duties. It requires that individual occupies administrative posts. On the other hand, Informal civic activities refer to voluntarily and neighborliness activities such as making friendly conversation, doing voluntarily social actions, voting, participating in 19 day feasts, core activities, and reflection meetings.

To be able to answer the research question that how being and knowing affect doing aspect of religious identity, I have categorized the respondents' responses to two groupings of "permissible" and "proscribed". It determines what types of activities the interviewees are allowed to do or not allowed to do.

While analyzing data, I realized that there are three variables that may influence findings of the research. Age, education, and career are the three variables that the informant have brought forward in their statements over the course of interview. I take these variables into consideration in chapters four and five of the thesis.

Analysis showed that the interviewees provided a twofold response for the third research question. “Weakening” and “strengthening” are the two concepts that I choose to explain feelings of the respondents about the impacts of activities on their Baha`i identities.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In this section, I would like to emphasize some ethical considerations of the study. I classify ethical considerations into three groups. The first group pertains to considerations before and within the course of conducting interviews. Being an insider has had some privileges for me as a researcher. Although I had arranged an interview guide which required obtaining written agreement from the respondents, I orally asked them whether they consented to being interviewed. All of the respondents agreed to this. While introducing myself, I told each individual that I am an English speaker and I do not know Norwegian. They each consented to conducting the interviews in English. In spite of this, a few number of the interviewees, within the course of interviews, told me that they wish they could speak Norwegian in order to stress their beliefs and opinions more accurately. This a matter that could have affected the process of collecting data.

Confidentiality was another important point in the course of research progression. As I mentioned earlier I got to know the first generation Norwegian Baha`is through snowball sampling which means that some of the informants were attentive of other research participants. As a matter of fact, some of the research informants, particularly those with the age of more than sixty, knew each other for many years. I mention this in order to emphasize the fact that a couple of interviewees were curious about knowing the other informants` points of view. As was my responsibility, I informed them that it is my duty as a researcher to keep each of the interviewees` viewpoints clandestine.

The second group of considerations is linked to the distribution of questionnaires, which was done side by side to the interviews. The oral agreement of the respondents to fill out the

questionnaires was another step in taking ethical considerations into account. I sent three requests to the interviewees via e-mail and SMS to see whether they were willing to contribute to this part of the research. I sent out documents to the three via e-mail. I received one complete and an incomplete package. I found the last one reluctant. This is because she stated that if she had time she would fill in the forms. Six requests were given to the informants in person while doing interviews. Two out of six appeals were rejected straightforwardly however. Only one amongst the six agreed to complete the questionnaire, which was not sent back to me despite my following-up. This is because the person was occupied by profession affairs. I did not receive any response from the other respondents who initially assented to participate. I tried to refrain from putting pressure on the informants to filling out the forms. Nonetheless, three out of these six individual voluntarily sent the packages back to me. I deliberately did not send any request to an informant who was gravely ill.

The third group of ethical considerations pertains to what I did after making the interviews. In pursuit of keeping both audio files, transcriptions in protected folders, and analyzing data, I deleted not only both audio files and transcriptions from my laptop, but also I removed all existing audio files in the voice recorder. Besides this, I also fragmented papers that I utilized for analyzing data. Another consideration that I would like to emphasize is connected to the interviewees` consent about the possible disclosure of their identities to other Baha`is who could possibly be intent on reading my document. To be more precise, I assured the respondents that I would, definitely, make use of allonyms in my thesis. However, I notified them all that they might be recognizable by other Baha`is who are familiar with their attitudes and activities that they engage in both within the Baha`i community and the larger society. All of their responses were positive and I got their permission in this respect.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

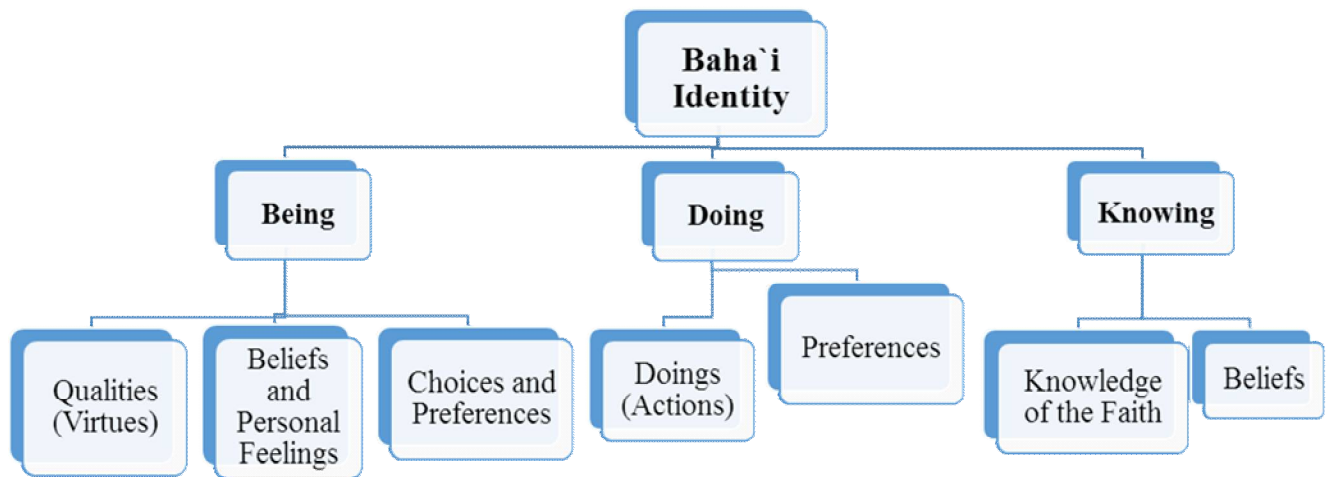
The research is reliable, for I consider my research data to be original. No third party has interfered in the process of collecting and analyzing data other than me. I have copied original data from transcriptions and transferred them to my paper. This is line with the definition that Creswell suggests from reliability. He highlights that “Reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). However, to preserve confidentiality, I have substituted names of places with some other words and phrases. By no means, it has distorted original data. The research is valid as well, for there is a consistency between research questions, research technique and method, data I have collected, and findings. I also adhered to the way I have described data. I agree with Creswell who describes validity as an attempt to assess the "accuracy" of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 206).

Chapter four

4. Findings

In this chapter I present the concepts as they generated from the interviewees` narratives through the process of transcribing data. The concepts are reached at based on research questions.

“Virtues”, “belief and personal feeling”, “choices and preferences”, “activities”, “belief”, and “knowledge of the Faith” are the six concepts that I have chosen to explain firstly what aspects of religious identity are the most salient among the informants and secondly to explore how different aspects of a religious identity inspire each other. In chapter three, I have described how content analysis helped me to create this classification for the first research question. The diagram bellows shows the connection between different components of a religious identity in the thesis.



This chapter is based on the responses that the interviewees have provided over the course of interview. Depending on what role religion plays in the informants' lives, what aspects of religious identity have influenced the respondents the most, what types of career they possess, what academic program they have studied, and how old they are, the responses that the interviewees provide take different forms. Age, education, and career are the three research variables that influence the interviewees' responses. I would prefer to study the interviewees one by one even though I have categorized them according to the role that the Faith has played in their lives.

The findings of this thesis indicates how different aspects of religious identity of the following groups: (1) those who call themselves devoted Baha'is; (2) those who believe being a perfect Baha'i is impossible; and (3) those who feel religion merely embraces a part of their lives and not their entire lives inspire each other when the informants involve in civic activities. I will also determine what aspects of religious identity influences the informants most, and what aspect is influenced most while the subjects involve in civic activities.

One may ask what the difference between the first two groups is. Prior to answering this question I should highlight that religion is a strong source of meaning and identity in both groups. However, there are two different points. Firstly, devoted Baha'is have occupied higher social positions. devoted Baha'is get engage in more formal socio-political activities within the society in comparison to the second group, and eventually, the second group show more commitment to religious virtues and qualities compared to the first one.

“Formal and informal civic activities” are the concepts that I use to determine what types of activities the interviewees do. On the other hand, “permissible” and “proscribed” are the two concepts that are used to determine how being and knowing aspects of religious identity influence dong part of it. Also, the two other concepts of “weakening” and “strengthening” are used for answering the third research question.

Before revealing findings, I will first provide demographic characteristics of the subjects.

4.1 Demography

At the outset and before revealing findings, I wish to refer to the demographical indicators of samples of the study. The overall number of Norwegian converts who have contributed to the present thesis is ten. The proportion of men to women is two to eight. This occurred incidentally, and without any intention. Five out of ten Norwegian converts live in Oslo and the other five reside in the vicinity of Oslo and outskirts. Amongst ten Norwegian converts, four women and a man, in total five, three other converts, two women and a man, and finally the two have converted to the Baha'i Faith in 70`s, 80`s, and the early ages of the 21st century respectively. In terms of religiosity, nine out of ten affirmed that they have been all the member of the Norwegian State Church. Among these nine Baha'is, a male identifies himself as an irreligious even though he had belonged to the State Church before conversion. The last one is a woman who labeled herself as nonreligious with no religious affiliation. When it comes to education, as far as I know, all the informants have got access to higher

education and occupied professional careers. It is worth mentioning that I identify men by the letter Y and women by the letter X with the given numbers. I begin with devoted Baha`is.

4.2. Devoted Baha`is

4.2.1 Y1

Being a Baha`i

Y1, as the one who have studies educational programs, identifies himself as follows:

I am a very devoted Baha`i. I think about the Baha`i whole day... I try to be a whole hearted Baha`i... What attracted me was I think one of the main thing was had a vision for the development of the individual and society... And so I think one of them is unity. How to because I see that the problems all the conflict in world today is lack of unity... I try to use my education for the development and in individual and how is Baha`i education.

Education, development, and unity are the most salient principles that Y1 refers to in order to identify himself as a Baha`i. He also focuses on certain Baha`i virtue such as honesty, hospitality, generosity, and respectfulness.

Feeling differentiated from others is equated to hypocrisy, according to him.

I am in no position to assume that I am different from other people, for me everyone is created in the image of God. If there is any difference between us, it is for God to decide, maybe at the end. To assume that I am different is for me hypocrisy. My work also has been related to the development and the Baha`i. For instance, I have been working with the education most of my life. For many private and public sectors. And also development of work in some parts of the world. But I try to use my knowledge for the development of people.

How Being and Knowing Influence Y1`s Activities

Formal and Informal Activities

Y1 is typically involved in activities of various kinds such as working in numerous private and public sectors that implement developmental initiatives, being a member of the board of a world association, and being a member of a religious discourse. For Y1, civic activities are not only the actions that lead to development, but also those that bring unity to the society. He criticizes politicians for not possessing united thoughts and decisions. He believes that political actors are not concerned about public interests. Instead, they mostly invest in their own political party's interests, he adds. Observing social conflict, on the one hand, and getting access to the Baha'i teachings such as unity and development, on the other hand, have encouraged him to make attempts for the betterment of the society. This is associated with what he does in organizations as a career.

Education, for Y1, has been a pivotal tool in the path of social development. His field of study and his endeavor to develop an educational initiative with the cooperation of an American Baha'i can be considered as the most obvious evidence in this respect. The betterment of society is of particular importance in Y1's personal life. He looks at his endeavors as services that he offers to the society.

Permissible or Proscribed

One of the issues that he faces while practicing his Baha'i identity is the relationship between his national and religious identities. Y1 feels that there is a coexistence between his national identity and his religious identity, even though he criticizes some Norwegian laws. "According to the Baha'i principles, we have to be loyal to the government. And have to be loyal to whatever law that they. When I raise my voice it can be through these forms, these meetings. I can send my opinions". In this case, knowing aspect of commitment in his religious identity affects being and doing aspects. He continues:

I mean as a religious person I can eat traditional food. No problem. I can go skiing. So

I have my own Norwegian identity. So it is not inconsistent with being a Baha'i...

There are many laws in Norway that I am disagreed with. You see that is most of the laws that disagree with. The laws are not obligatory. For instance, there is religious freedom. So, there is no problem. But the Norwegian law for me it is people are drinking people and such these things.

There are some activities that he does not prefer to get engage in as a Norwegian Baha'i. The first is related to the celebration of Christmas. Y1 does not celebrate Christmas himself. Instead, he welcomes the invitation of his relatives who celebrate Christmas. The second pertains to participation in gatherings where alcoholic beverages are consumed. In this regard, he states that "I could not have a job serving alcohol, and produce weapon for instance. I cannot do that. So even if I disagree with many of the Norwegian laws they do not impose me to get involved in these activities. I choose what is suite for me. What is OK for the development of the society". The third issue is connected to the matter of participating in strikes. He stresses that he does not like to participate in strikes.

When it comes to political activities, he says that:

I am in a way involved in politics, not the party politics. What I am doing as a member of the group ..., we working with politics. I mean changing the society. They want to change it. And also in another committee we try to influence the government, the policies against Iran, the work for the resolutions in the United Nations. We are meeting with the minister of the feast and also human right organizations.

According to Y1, teaching the faith is a necessity for a Baha'i life. For him, teaching the Faith is to share views with others without mentioning that these views have their origins in the Baha'i Faith. He shares his understandings of Baha'i writings without mentioning that he inspires from them. In this case, both being and know aspects of commitment are at play. They incentivizes Y1 to spread words of Baha'u'llah.

Impacts of Civic Activities on Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

His participation in social organizations work as an incentive to Y1 to make use of Baha'i principles in group discussions. The discussions, as he believes, reveal different social aspects of principles such as unity in diversity. In group sessions, some would criticize Y1's Baha'i points of view as well. The discussions and the critiques over certain issues encourage him to study Baha'i scripture more carefully. "So, on these feedback gives me an understanding a deeper understanding to what to do to apply the principles of Baha'u'llah... I always try to find the principles what principles guiding the development of what I... because UHJ has given us a guidance for as much as work ".

Activities within the Baha'i community have also encouraged him to increase his knowledge. "Activities have given me a lot of knowledge, insight and understanding of what the Baha'i faith is all about and in this way developed my Baha'i identity a great deal".

Y1's activities within the Baha'i community and the society show that it is knowing aspects of exploration side of his religious identity that is affected most. Being, doing, and knowing aspect of his commitment affect different aspects of exploration side of his religious identity.

4.2.2 X7

Being a Baha'i

Like Y1, X7 is another interviewee who calls herself a devoted Baha'i. "I am devoted. I like to feel that I am doing as good as I think I can. But I now I can do more. I know I can do better". X7 places emphasis on social teachings of the Baha'i Faith such as the importance of education, justice, unity, development, respect, tolerance, honest, humble, inviting, open-minded, optimism, and devoted to identify herself as a Baha'i. She teaches the messages of Baha'u'llah as soon as she finds an opportunity. She, as a teacher, would try to grab the

attention of others by asking philosophical questions, making conversation, and organizing gatherings.

X7 is not sure how the Baha`i Faith has influenced her religious identity. “I cannot say exactly what has been changed after being a Baha`i. I just want to tell about it to everybody so I can be happy and look for the positive at the future as well. The responsibility to share it with other. I have that”. She enjoys being a Baha`i because it has given her an optimistic view of the future. She highlights that although she emotionally suffers from horrible events that are happening in different corners of the world due to war and social conflicts, the belief in the universal peace makes her calm and patient. Parts of X7` s feelings about her religious identity have roots in cultural and religious traditions that were handed down by her mother.

“Well I think as a person I would do these things maybe if I have been a Christian as well. So I do not know if I had been changing in the way. I am thinking of how to help the other people more...From my other she was a Christian and she was always helping people. She was always opened to be there for other people. She whatever it was from looking after the children without just free when she saw that somebody needed some help. She was opened to help.

She believes that she, as a Baha`i, is different from others in a sense that she is optimistic about the future of the world. The establishment of universal peace is an indispensable part of history whether human beings wish or not, she adds. She feels that she is a humankind similar to others. This belief motivates her to do something for the betterment of the society.

How Being and Knowing Affect X7` s Civic Activities

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

She places particular emphasis on the role of education in transforming society. She states that these are children and teenagers who will build the future of Norwegian society. Even though she is retired, she is still active in teaching.

I know that school has very strong influence on the pupil growing up. And what I learn in school will be part of their education. And for me it is important that they learn about equality in the world that they learn about different what should I say societies, about skin color, about religion, and whatever can be united, can be respected.

She has faith in sharing Baha`i worldviews with pupils even though the Baha`i Faith is not listed among the major religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism that students are supposed to study. X7 gives priority to those social principles that can be universally accepted. These teachings include unity of mankind, equality between men and women, unity of religions, and the significance of showing respect to others. She also asks students some philosophical questions about the purpose of our existence in this world. She states that pupils are interested in getting involved in discussions. In return, X7 feels satisfied that these discussions may inspire pupils` minds. Besides, students are most likely to impart the insights they get from discussions with their parents, she expresses.

Compared to the last few decades, X7`s activities within the Baha`i community have decreased. Age has had some impact on this. However, she has been getting involved in different types of activities including participating in 19-day feasts, study circles, organizing junior youth classes, devotional meetings, and being a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly.

In addition to the activities mentioned earlier, X7 has been a member of an apolitical pressure group. She believes that the group is not political. This is the reason I chose the adjective apolitical. "That push the politics. Because they have members that are following and thinking in that way. Is not special political party. They just push politician that are ruling or want to be ruling". This group puts pressure on those political parties that their decisions in terms of education and nature would affect the future of children, she states. One of the

visions she has gotten from the founder of the group is the necessity of sharing surplus belongings with others. She believes that it is a very good idea to give others our stuffs that we do not need any longer. She adds that this is in line with Baha`i ideals as well.

Permissible or Proscribed

To justify her contribution with a pressure group, she states that “membership in trade unions is possible if trade unions are not a member of a particular political party (Hornby, nd). In addition, participating in the strike is legal as long as it is called by a properly constituted authority such as trade union (Ibid).

X7`s is interested in political issues. This is most evident when she expresses that she wishes to be a politician. “Sometimes when I have ideas I know to get these ideas really through I should be working as a politician and sit there in the government. But ... well. I fell hopeless because if you are not a politicians it is difficult to get through with other thoughts”. On the other hand, she criticizes some political decisions and the way politicians treat each other in debates. However, she does not support certain parties. Instead, she goes for a party that its programs is closer to her religious ideals. Moreover, she would prefer to vote for a party that education is its main concern. “Where can I give my vote which one would be the best for the future. And as a teacher I think I mainly go for the teaching part. For the education”.

She is also a member of an educational association. One of the requirements of this membership is to participate in demonstrations that are organized with the purpose of the development of educational system or the promotion of their own status. She is asked to participate in demonstrations even if she would not prefer to do so. Sometimes, strikes act as a tool through which members of an association seeks for more revenue, X7 emphasizes. Although she does not enjoy joining demonstrations, she appreciates earning more money. She feels that it enables her to promote her social strata which is satisfactory for her.

Impacts of Civic Activities on Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

The activities that X7 involves in affect her Baha`i identity in different ways. She talks about the influences of Baha`i activities. For instance, junior youth classes encourage her to provide teenagers with new plans of action in their local community. Additionally, the reactions she has received from the people in the neighborhood have convinced her to modify the techniques she uses in teaching the Faith. In these two examples, doing aspect of her religious commitment influences being and doing aspects of exploration side of her Baha`i identity.

Activities also have helped her to come to this conclusion that Baha`is are not angels. They are human beings like other humans. "In the beginning I thought every Baha'i was like an angel, but then I discovered that we also have our weakness and are not at all perfect, but I have a feeling that we develop and grow together and read and learn the same advices and rules which we accept and try to live after".

X7 believes that there is a coexistence between her religious and national identities. Unlike Y1, X7 follows socio-religious traditions such as celebrating Christmas, participates in demonstrations, and interacts with her friends who drink alcoholic beverages. She states that Christmas makes her family members come together.

Besides, she spends time with her friends who consume alcoholic drinks. X7 believes that these relations give her a chance to teach the Faith. When she feels some social pressure on herself for drinking, she would prefer to talk about the Baha`i principles that ban drinking alcoholic beverages. "I started talking with one of the ladies in ... we had dinner and they had coffee afterwards and start talking and they have jeans to drink alcohol. So she asked me why I do not drink. I said no. Because I do not drink. Because you are driving. Also because I am a Baha`i".

One of the challenging issue for her has been teaching the Faith in a community where people are not that eager to hear about religion. She tries to find solutions however. She cares about her friends` concerns and makes attempts to see which of the teachings offer solutions for those concerns. This gives her an opportunity to invite her friends to devotional meeting.

4.3 Those Who Believe Religion Embraces Different Aspects of Their Lives

Compared to the previous group, members of this group do not call themselves devoted even though Baha`i Faith has played a pivotal role in their personal lives. Similar to the first group, member of this group feel that religion is everything not only a part of their lives. However, unlike the first grouping, Baha`is of this group, except X1, believe that being a perfect Baha`i is impossible.

4.3.1 X1

Being a Baha`i

X1 is the one who feels that religion influences all aspects of her life. "I really like to be called the servant of Baha`u`llah and to find out the service 20 years ago with lots of activities. But the servant today is more waiting to feel what I can do in the situations". Unity of mankind, equality between sexes, the importance of education, and development of physical and spiritual aspects of life, respect, and kindness are some social teachings and virtues that X1 believes in.

X1 believes that there is no difference between her and non-Baha`is. She believes that people are different because of their personalities. She adds that people are one in spirit, but different in physical characteristics.

How Being and Knowing affect Civic Activities of X1

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

In the case of X1, development of spiritual aspects of life is a priority. She is benevolent to others. She would like to show people how to be nice to others. This however does not

mean that she is not concerned about physical aspects of her life. Age and sickness, as she states, does not let her involve in any type of activities she wishes to do. She mentions that she has done what she could do for the betterment of society before illness. At the moment, spirituality is more important for her. To develop her spirituality, she goes to meditation classes. “There are a lots of old women old in my age. They are spiritual seeking. Because when you got to that kind of exercise you want to open up for the spirit and then you are connected to the universe and nature and then conversions easily goes into spiritual issues”.

She used to be a member of LSA of a middle sized town in Norway. She also used to participate in study circles and organize children classes. She has been participating in different Baha`i activities such as 19 day feasts.

X1 has not been afraid of presenting the Baha`i Faith to others. X1 assumes that people living in her neighborhood are enthusiastic to know something about religion in general and the Baha`i Faith in particular. She talks to others about the Faith without imposing her viewpoint on them. Making conversations and social networks are the ways through which she would attempt to show her being to others by being kind and respectful.

X1, as a teacher, has also been eager to talk to some children about religious issues. She used to answer religious inquiries from some kids despite of the reluctance of other Norwegians to do so. She states that religious questions should not be responded in kindergartens. Similar to X7, X1 talks about religious issues in her work place.

Permissible or Proscribed

When it comes to politics, X1 believes that politicians do not take care of refugees. Presently, she is hesitant if she votes any more. Additionally, she remembers that she was once requested to be a member of a group that its goal has been banning the importation of alcoholic beverages to Norway. She disagreed with the offer explaining to members that she is a Baha`i and thus, she cannot work for a political group.

I went to a political meeting in a small town ... That was ten years ago. They are working for no alcohol. They want to help people within the politic not to let alcohol to come not to stores and something. I talked to them. Two ladies came and tell me please come to become a member of this party because we like the way of your thinking. I said no I cannot. Because I am a Baha`i. I am not allowed to. Because if I go here then I am against the other. Because you are not working together with other parties. That`s why politics are not good.

Another point that I would like to make is about the relationship between X1`s religious and national identities. X1 gives priority to her Baha`i identity. Although she feels that there is a consistency between her Baha`i and Norwegian identity, religious identity is more important than national identity for her.

How activities influence Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

When she uses Baha`u`llah words to teach the faith, she feels a sense of strength in her Baha`i identity. "I feel when I really talk from my heart and from more and more of these ideas from Bahauallah is taking part in my way of thinking. Then it is the more I go out of it the stronger it will be".

4.3.2 X3

Being a Baha`i

X3 believes that Baha`i Faith has provided her with a philosophy of life. She highlights that being a Baha`i is not that simple. "Generally, it is difficult to always feel that I am a good Baha`i. Because the society at large do not expect me to with stand from alcohol". For her, being a Baha`i is the matter of practicing religious identity every day and every moment.

The Baha`i religion is a life philosophy just as much as a religion. It is a religion I can live with. You know. Not just have for when you dress up and go to church on

Sunday. You know. It is a Baha'is. Being a Baha'i means I have to change the way I think. You know all the way I have to sort of be conscious of what my actions you know what I did.

Unity of mankind and justice are the two main Baha'i teachings for her. She has found the principle of unity of mankind very much in line with what she used to believe in before conversion. The reason is that she did not enjoy being included in certain social groups whether religious or national. Truthfulness, evaluation of deeds, respectfulness, compromising, tolerance, refraining from backbiting, looking for positive points in others, and optimism are the Baha'i virtues that X3 refers to identify her Baha'i identity.

For X3, national identity is a barrier for unity of mankind. She feels that she is not a Norwegian and she does not belong to a certain territory. Within the Baha'i community, she has made friends who come from different nations. The Baha'i Faith has helped her to embrace a global identity which is in harmony with her personal attitude, she asserts.

Another issue pertains to X3's feelings about non-Baha'is. She believes that there is no difference between her and the others in terms of being a human. However, she expresses that her difference is because of her endeavor in finding the truth.

We are taught in the Baha'i that we are on the same level. I am not worth any more. But I also feel that I am different from my sister and brother. I felt that I did not belong in a group. I was always looking for something. I was searching a lot. And I found that a lot of people did not understand my searching and asking question.

How Being and Knowing Affect Civic Activities of X3

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

According to X3, being a perfect Baha'i is incompatible with cultural aspects of her national identity. By the cultural aspects, she means social pressures for drinking alcoholic beverages for instance. She refers to the concept of 'compromise' in order to unite these two

aspects of her life. She does not compromise with drinking. She can enjoy spending time with her friends and family members without drinking. On the other hand, she compromises with breaking her fast when she is invited by members of family to a meal.

X3 expresses that it is challenging to practice her Baha'i identity within the Baha'i community as well. She feels that it is not that simple to be always nice to other Baha'is and place focus on positive characteristic of others rather than negative one. However, she feels more comfortable to practice her Baha'i identity within the Baha'i community rather than society at large. She has engaged in numerous activities within the Baha'i community ranging from being a member of LSA and undertaking a task in the Baha'i center to participating in Baha'i meetings. However, when it comes to engagement in activities of the larger society, she engages in civic actions such as making conversations with friends.

As a young adult, X3 used to practice her Baha'i identity in her work place as follows: similar to the cases mentioned above, she emphasizes on Baha'i virtues in her social interaction. She used to write the virtues on some cards and to take them to her job. She shares them with her colleagues. On the other hand, she mediates between her colleagues whenever a struggle happens.

At present time, she does barely find any situations to share her religious worldview with others although she believes the most important part of her Baha'i identity is to spread the message of Baha'u'llah. Her friends are not that interested in religious issues. However, she suggests to her old friends that they can meet people who come to Norway from different parts of the world. In addition, she encourages them to leave Norway for the purpose of visiting other parts of the globe.

Permissible or Proscribed

When it comes to the issue of politics, I need to mention that X3 has not been interested in involving in politics whether before conversion or after that. She however participates in

civic have elections time by time. Her political behavior has fluctuated over the course of the past 30 years.

I can still vote but I cannot go to a political party. But I was never interested in that. So that does not really worry me. I would not have done it any way. I mean I would not do that. I sometimes did not vote sometimes I do every four year I suppose to vote. It has happened that I have not voted you know. Has happened. As my religious identity is helped to see or to learn more about the world.

Impacts of Civic Activities on Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

She feels that her activities within the Baha'i community have had some effects on her religious identity. She expresses her views as follows.

To attend nineteen days feast, to attend the holy days, being involved in Baha'i activities like help me to have the identity as a Baha'i by setting by prioritizing time for it. To give myself the time. I am the part of Baha'i community. And that I have to involve myself. Otherwise how I can be feel identity as a Baha'i. Generally, it is difficult to always feel that I am a good Baha'i. Because the society at large do not expect me to with stand from alcohol... we have to work on our prejudice. When I say I feel different I try not to be feel above anybody else. Equal but still different.

She also believes that the responsibility she has undertaken in the Baha'i center has influenced her. "Practical work you know which was good for me. Because it offers me entirely differently. And it made me of course feel good. Because people appreciated what I did and you get because everybody needs to feel appreciated or what they do is count".

4.3.3 X5

Being a Baha'i

X5 is another informant who believes the Baha`i Faith has changed all aspects of her life. For her, religion is not a part of life but entire of it. She even does not call herself a Baha`i. She states that it is not that simple to be a Baha`i. This is because, for her, being a Baha`i means behaving in accordance with all Baha`i standards every moment. Tolerance, refrain from backbiting, optimism, respect, truthfulness, and accountability are the virtues that X5 refers to identify herself as a Baha`i. To show the difficulty of putting Baha`i identity into practice, X5 states that “I think more and more we learn it is more difficult to be a Baha`i. Because it is so do the good things. That is a revolutionary changing all the life we have to struggle. I do not think I am a Baha`i because you never reach. I feel I see clear who to be and who to struggle to be. I do not think I am”.

What attracts her to the Faith are (1) lack of the clergy class; (2) belief in social transformation at grass root level and not political one, and (3) a new perspective that the Faith has given to her to see the world. Amongst the social teachings, she primarily focuses on unity, equality between sexes, social justice, development, and the importance of education. She states that she is different from others because of her Baha`i worldview that has been ‘revolutionary’ for her.

How Being and Knowing inspire Doing

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

X5 has been active within the local Baha`i community and not beyond that. She undertakes some responsibilities in the Baha`i center. Moreover, she participates in 19 day feasts, study circles, and junior youth classes. She wishes to organize both children classes and study circles which enables her to invite some of her non-Baha`i old friends to the meetings and to share the Baha`i worldview with them. She is also a member of the LSA. X5 has recently converted to the Faith, as she states. She would like to make changes in her surroundings. She believes that development of society is not possible through politics. She

adds that social changes occur at grass-root levels. This is the reason that she would prefer to participate in study circles.

When it comes to the issue of civic activities outside of the local community, she makes conversations with her non-Baha'i old friends about the disadvantages of having sex out of marriage. She encourages her friends to try to know their partners' characters before getting marriage. X5 feels that she is different from her friends.

"I have a faith. Most People in my surrounding do not have faith. Or they think they do not have religion. Then I am different. I am quite new Baha'i. These years has been changing me and changing my family and they can see that I am happier and more joyful. Because it gives me a lot. That is why I am different from my surround. So they think it is strange".

Similar to X3, X5 highlights that critical part of her Baha'i identity goes to the ways she treats others. Both X3 and X5 put emphasis on the importance of abstaining from backbiting in social interactions. X5 states how detrimental backbiting can be in social settings. The importance of this teaching has caused her to encourage her husband to practice it in his work place. She expresses that backbiting is like doing a sport in Norway.

Permissible or Proscribed

According to her, there is no inconsistency between her religious and national identities. However, similar to other interviewees, X5 states that drinking alcoholic beverages as a cultural issue disaffirms her religious identity. Shunning from drinking has caused her to miss her friends. They have left her alone. Therefore, she does not feel any social pressure on herself. On the other hand, she emphasizes on sexual matters such as marriage of homosexuals, as another conflicting point. She expresses that homosexuality has been forbidden in Baha'i principles. She believes that even if the culture imposes on her something, she gives priority to her religious identity. The reason she puts forward is that her religious identity cannot go against her national identity. "I think I cannot be responsible for our

governments and of course if the government told me to do something against my identity I have to stand for myself. That is my responsible to follow my conscious if it comes to that... it is a quite peaceful country to live in. it cannot come to that.”

X5 mentions that she has stopped voting after conversion. She merely participates in Baha`i elections. Before conversion, she used to assume that social transformation would only be possible through political decisions. “When I was young I thought we should change the world by politics, but then you have to go to other ways to change the world. That is why I like the Baha`i thinking”. Currently, she refuses to vote in spite of the fact that her family members ask her to vote. She feels that transformation would take place if minds and views change. She adds that Baha`is are not allowed to engage in politics.

How Civic Activities inspire Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

When she is asked about the impacts of activities on her religious identity, she largely emphasizes on the responsibility she undertakes in the Baha`i center. “I think it is a goal mind to work in the Baha`i center. Those scriptures. It is like you are living in an ocean, in writing. So it is important for me. So it worked for me”.

4.3.4 X6

Being a Baha`i

Another informant who believes religion plays an important role in her personal and social life is X6. She believes that the religion determines whether an action or view is wrong or right. For her, religious writings and scripture are the sources of credence. “How I define my religious identity I would say is by trying to act according to what I believe in and I mean trying because it is a process. It is a process to every day. Bring oneself to account... I try to be a better person by reflecting on my actions and by reading the writings so I know what is right and not”. X6 mainly places focus on Baha`i spiritual virtues including trustworthiness,

faithfulness, patience, honesty, and justice. Meanwhile, she points to the principles of unity of mankind and education as social teachings.

X6 believes that there is a coexistence between her Baha'i identity and Norwegian identity in terms of the importance that rest on virtues, especially trustworthiness. She emphasizes that the factor that has guaranteed the stabilization of Norway is trustworthiness. For instance, people do not need to show their tickets while they use means of transportation, she asserts. She believes that she cannot be a good Baha'i unless she respects spiritual qualities.

How Being and Knowing Affect Doing

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

X6 participates in different Baha'i activities such as junior youth programs, children classes, and 19 day feasts. She would try to put into practice virtues such as punctuality, accountability, and patience in junior youth classes. It is virtues, as subset of being aspect, that inspire doing aspect of X6's religious identity.

She teaches the Faith by making conversations. Although she knows that Norwegians are skeptical about religious issues, she feels that they have the same understanding of spiritual qualities as Baha'is do. To eliminate misunderstandings, she states that we need a common terminology.

Permissible or Proscribed

When it comes to politics, she believes that politicians are unable to make significant changes in minds and worldviews. They cannot stop wars and world's conflicts, she adds. Instead, she places focus on developing spiritual characteristics in individuals, which guarantees the social transformation. She clarifies that she does not go for a specific political party. As an alternative, she votes to a person whom she feels is equipped with spiritual

qualities. In her point of view, it is not important who rules the country as long as he or she has internalized spiritual qualities.

You know we as Baha'is are not really supposed to engage in politics. I do not too much about this. But I think we are supposed to vote we are not supposed to vote for like specific parties and things like that. But we can vote if we see that one person has certain qualities that is needed for the community then that can be the person we can vote for.

Impacts of Civic Activities on Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

According to X6, participation in junior youth activities have increased the possibility of learning new skills such as how to be patient at the time of dealing with issues of this age group and how to help them to use their energies in productive actions. She states that teenagers need those people who can trust them. These classes provide X6 with some possibilities to develop some spiritual qualities in her identity.

And I think as a person you know leading these groups of youths is like you have to learn to be patient, you have to learn how talk with them, have to learn all of them as individuals. You have to learn to be the truth friend. You know you cannot say them shut up you know. Be quiet. Really encouraging thing what they could do something that is right.

Furthermore, she indicates that junior youth classes assist her in better understanding of her identity.

4.3.5 X8

Being a Baha'i

The last one in this quintuple group is X8. She identifies herself as a Baha'i but not the perfect one. She believes that being a perfect Baha'i is never reachable. X8 refers to both

social Baha'i teachings and virtues including unity of mankind, harmony between science and religion, the elimination of extreme wealth and poverty, investigation of the truth, focus on positive point of others, optimism, respect, tolerance, openness, and abstaining from backbiting X8 admits that her husband who is a non-Baha'i independent thinker is more Baha'i than herself. The reasons she provides are that he never backbites and he is such a kind and understandable person.

When it comes to the issue of 'us' and 'the other', X8 believes that as a human being there is no difference between her as a Baha'i and others as non-Baha'is. She however believes that Baha'i Faith has given her a positive perspective about the future of the world. There are many people who have not found the Faith so far, she adds. "But the fact that all are human beings. In this sense I am not different at all. We are all human beings. That a yes answer is that thanks to the Baha'i teaching. I have privileged to have a more optimistic view on the future that may have a vision about the better world". She believes that Baha'is are responsible for creating a new pattern of the World Order of Baha'u'llah

How Being and Knowing Influence Doing

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

Even though X8 has recently moved in to a new house in a new region, she would prefer to get to know the people in her neighborhood. Similar to X7, it is important for X8 how to treat others in interactions. She participates in Baha'i gatherings such as 19 day feasts. She also looks for those who organize study circles. Besides, she has decided to organize some after school activities for kids.

The teaching unity of mankind has caused X8 to provide refugees with services in refugee registration centers, she asserts. She does this voluntarily. Even though she cannot speak to refugees due to language barriers, she tries to show her compassion and benevolence to them by offering them breakfast. She feels that she takes care of her children. She

expresses that there are a number of volunteers who would participate in that sorts of activities. Opposing views cause them not to contribute with each other properly, she states. X8 would try to place focus on positive sides of volunteers` behaviors in order to palliate the possible tensions.

So we also try to make a type of unity between the volunteers. To making good relations. Because they have different tasks...And sometimes when it was more than 120 guests or refugees they were slept there during night. We were not enough people to serve them. But it was not a good organizing of the work. And I liked to that we have some types of order when we. So, to be patient and then try to do the best in all the situation.

Additionally, she is enthusiastic to visit house of worship of different religious traditions. She has visited synagogue, Islamic centers, mosques, and church. Even she used to make a speech in a mosque about unity. What motivates her to do this is Abdul Baha`s recommendations. "And another thing is that Abdul Baha he encourages us to visit different houses of worship. He went to the mosque to its very late days as I understand".

Permissible or Proscribed

X8`s political behavior is somehow different from other interviewees when it comes to the issue of elections. She votes for political parties without identifying herself as a supporter of a certain party. She keeps her vote secret. Even her husband does not know which political party she goes for. She, in the discussions, tries to focus on general principles that are not related to programs of any certain political parties.

How Civic Activities influence Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

As a new Baha`i in Oslo, she is surprised that just few numbers of declared Baha`is take part in Baha`i meetings in spite of the fact that hundreds of Baha`is live in Oslo.

For me being new in this town it is a surprise. Where there are 200 declared Baha'is in this town. And when we have these nineteen days feast in the Baha'i center compared with the number of believers. It is very few. To be honest. That is a big challenge that how we can in a friendly way try to increase the participation in both the celebrating nineteen days feast, holydays, and these core activities, and all these devotional meetings, study circles, children classes. I am a bit surprised about the gap between the declared Baha'is and the activity.

She expects Iranian Baha'is in general to speak Norwegian in the Baha'i center. She feels excluded while she observes that Iranian Baha'is speak Persian in the group.

The two other factors that have affected X8's religious identity are lack of a proper consultation in 19 day feasts and absence of time for children to practice their religiosity. She asserts that in spite of the importance of the matter of consultation in Baha'i writings, consultation is not practiced properly in 19 day feasts in Oslo. Moreover, she mentions that a section of feasts should be assigned to children. They need to be socialized in the religious community, she adds.

The issue of immigration of Baha'is to Norway has affected X8's religious identity as well. She used to be a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of her home town. She states that the members of LSA has been from different nations. She has been surprised at how a mixed Baha'i meeting is able to conduct the affairs of the local community. One of the main questions for her has been how to deal with different points of views. She has lost her endurance when other members were talking about their ambitious ideas. What has indeed helped her to increase her tolerance is to believe in the principle of looking at positive aspects in others' opinions, she states.

Participation in holiday gatherings such as Ridvan and birthday of The Bab and Baha'u'llah has affected her religious identity as well.

And also the holidays we have through the year like the birthday of Bab and Baha'u'llah and the declaration and Ridvan period is very important for my identity. One example, one Ridvan we decided that we should try to have one activity on each of twelve day of Ridvan. And we had different activities of praying, meetings in the nature, social gatherings, talks and we were quite few but it was a way of stressing the importance of this very important of celebrating Ridvan.

4.4 Those Who Believe Religion Is Merely Part a of Their Lives

X2, X4, and Y2 are the informants who believe that religion does not embrace different aspects of their personal and social lives. In this section, I would discuss first, how the two respondents feel about their Baha'i identity and secondly, how their feelings and attitudes influence their activities, and eventually, how the activities they engage in may affect their religious identities. The data is all based on the informants' statements.

4.4.1 X2

Being a Baha'i

To identify herself as a Baha'i, X2 refers to some teachings and virtues of the Faith such as unity of mankind, equality between men and women, respect, and tolerance. However, she does not expand her views. She describes her Baha'i identity as follows:

I do not think about religion. But still I think perhaps there is some other things I do not know. I do only do things without thinking about this... But still I do not leave the life the Baha'i life the whole time. I do not follow all the principles all the laws whole the time. I do not think about this. Religion is not the whole life... In one way I do not think in my daily life I do not think I should that and that and that. Because of the religion. I pray every day.

She believes that she could not be that different if she had not converted to the Faith. She was attracted to the Baha'i Faith due to its social teachings. She adds that the fact that she

does not smoke nor drink has nothing to do with religion. Her justification is that she never used to do it even before conversion although she grows up in a Christian family where her parents used to drink and smoke.

X2 does not feel that she is different from others. Religion, for her, is not a source of making boundaries. She believes that friends are friends no matter what religious communities they belong to. “And I do not think about them as the Baha`i friends. I think about they are my friends. I do not make different picture of my friends. Because friends are friends”. X2 however is not sure about this fact that if she is different in the eyes of others or not.

I can divide religious life of X2 into two different periods. Firstly, the time when she has intensively been engaged in activities within the Baha`i community and the society and secondly the time when she has decided to relegate religion to her private sphere. This is deserve mentioning that she has been a Baha`i for almost forty years. In the first period, she undertakes different responsibilities within the community including being a member of NSA, teaching committee, the auxiliary board, and attendant of prayer meetings. Beside these Baha`i activities, she has been busy with her job and studying. During the second period which has started some years ago and lasted so far, her preferences have changed significantly. She is less active in Baha`i activities. She is retired now and she would prefer to spend time on visiting her friends, members of her family and studying religious books.

How Being and Knowing Affect Doing

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

In the first stage of her religiosity, although she gets busy with Baha`i activities, X2 gives priority to her professional identity, she highlights. The job gives her an opportunity to teach the Faith. When she decides to go for a pilgrimage in Haifa, she is requested to make a report of the events taking place there. However, she teaches the Faith by making conversations in

her work place. According to what X2 has stated, she, except studying and working, has not been active in other social activities within the society whether in the first period of religiosity or the second one. Presently, the civic activities that she engages in include visiting friends and relatives, giving money to beggars, and participating in civic elections.

She would prefer to enhance her knowledge of the Faith. She feels that there are so many issues in the Baha`i writing that has still remained unknown for her such as the Baha`i calendar.

I want to know more about the calendar. There is also new questions about the calendar I did not know. So there are many new things in whole time. In one way I do not know what I believe in. I do not now the Baha`i faith in one way. Because it is still because I have not I cannot see that whole the Baha`i Faith. I do not really know what the Baha`i faith really is built on in one way. Because there are so many new aspects coming up and I did not know. And I surprised.

To increase her knowledge of the Faith, she participates in summer schools, visits her Baha`i friends in private sphere in order to talk to them about certain religious issues, and studies religious scriptures. She states that she would not like to ask her religious inquiries in gatherings such as 19 day feasts.

Permissible or Proscribed

When it comes to political issues, we see that X2 participates in civic elections. Similar to X6, she votes for individuals rather than political parties. She follows political agenda of each candidate and goes for one whom she feels is suited best for the political position.

X2 believes that her Baha`i identity is not always consistent with her Norwegian identity. She gives an example of sexual issues. She highlights that some aspect of Norwegian life such as the marriage of homophiles is not acceptable according to Baha`i principles. In this regard,

she tells a story about a friend of her who has to leave the Baha'i community because of his sexual tendencies.

Impacts of Civic Activities on Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

What she recently has experienced in the second part of her religious life has affected her religious identity. She highlights that Baha'i gatherings such as 19 day feasts lack the same spirit as what she used to experience before. Compared to the first stage of her Baha'i life, she is currently reluctant to attend Baha'i gatherings. However, she would prefer to show up in summer schools. To meet some Baha'i friends that she has missed, she sometimes participates in 19 day feasts. Additionally, she would rather not join study circles. She states that some Baha'is would knock the doors to teach the Faith, the action that she feels is not the proper way of spreading the message of Baha'u'llah. On the other hand, she is enthusiastic to organize prayer meetings in her personal house. She would prefer to meet her Baha'i friends in private. X2 believes that private chats with her Baha'i friends about certain matters gives her this chance to obtain new discernments about the Faith.

4.4.2 X4

Being a Baha'i

The second interviewee who believes that her religious identity is merely a part of her life is X4. She asserts that she is a human being prior to being a Baha'i.

First of all, I am a human being. So, being a Baha'i is a part of my identity. It is not my whole identity. But being a Baha'i is not to be something out. The essence for me of being a Baha'i is to develop the virtues of the Baha'i. that would mean to be good and just person, to respect the human world of all the human being, and to thrive every day to be a better person. To bring peace in myself and among others.

Being welcoming, respectful, optimistic, supportive, accountability, and honest are the salient Baha'i qualities she believes in. Amongst the social teachings, what has attracted X4 most are consultation, education, service, and unity of mankind.

When it comes to the matter of 'us' and 'the other', X4 articulates that there is no difference between her as a Baha'i and non-Baha'is. She explains that Baha'is are also human beings as many other humans. She believes that many non-Baha'is are more successful in practicing social principles that the Baha'i Faith promotes than Baha'is. She states that being a Baha'i is not the matter of name, but the matter of action. Even though she has more commonalities with Baha'is than non-Baha'is, she feels that there are still some differences between her and other Baha'is. She explains that every single Baha'i places focus on a salient concept. While, for instance, consultation is one of the most striking Baha'i concepts for her, punctuality is of particular importance for some others. Therefore, she is different from many Baha'is.

How Being and Knowing Inspire Doing

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

For X4, service and unity of mankind are closely linked. She is the one who supports refugees emotionally and financially. She believes that all human beings regardless of their countries of origin are citizens of the world. She provides asylum seekers with proper clothing and food. In addition, she guides them to find their ways out towards the police stations.

And I have helped taking care of them while they wait. Because there are many times to wait. Giving food and clothes and just human contact and information. And that has been a great pleasure and also borrowing them my phone. So, they contact families and that has been important too many. Now I also organize my daughter will go to somewhere to help the refugees come safely offshore with the dingy boats across the ocean.

She states that this is a preventive way of committing crimes in society. Hence, she feels that this is the responsibility of all civilians to get engaged in these types of activities.

She has designed a web page with the purpose of changing social attitudes. There is a group there with some members discussing about both positive and negative consequences of living refugees in Norway. X4 guides discussions and requests the members to respect each other's points of views.

Education of children is another salient teachings that X4 emphasizes on. She states that she makes attempts to teach her children virtues such as showing respect to the environment. She also prays for them and tries to familiarize them with some religious issues. Even though Norwegian culture promotes consumerism, she would prefer to stop encouraging any behavior that increase her children's ambitious desires.

Permissible or Proscribed

There is an intersection between what X4 does in her work place and politics. The importance of this issue lies in the fact that she works in a governmental organization. To do her job efficiently, she needs to analyze politics. She states that abstaining from politics is not that easy in her job. However, she would try to give priority to her Baha'i identity in this respect. She mentions that she used to participate in a political meeting earlier. She has also voted for different political parties except those that do not care about human rights for refugees and asylum seekers (she points to certain parties).

X4 states that generally there is a coexistence between her national and religious identities. There is a great emphasis on ethical issues in Norway as the same as what the Faith promotes, she asserts. The challenges between the two identities reveal when the matter of culture comes to the picture, she states. X4 believes that consumerism is on the rise in the Norway. Another cultural issue is related to sexuality. X4 says that girlfriends are sexually supposed to meet sexual needs of their boyfriends. She adds that this is a big challenge for the

Baha'i youths. She expresses that the Baha'i youth have to make a balance between their religious beliefs and what they practice in the society.

The Way Civic Activities Affect Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

X4 expresses that engagement in affairs of asylum seekers have had some impacts on her attitudes. For instance, she points out to the time when one of the refugees decisively asks her not to call him a refugee. He expects to be called with his name and to be treated as a human, X4 asserts. "One refugee. He told me he said please stop calling me a refugee...It was pretty strong. Because he says I am a good person. You know. It is a quite disrespectful. Right? In Norwegian we like to feel ourselves".

When it comes to the activities within the Baha'i community, X4 places a particular focus on the matter of consultation. X4 expresses that consultation is a key Baha'i concept which is not practiced properly in the 19 day feasts. She says that news of the development of local communities and new decisions of LSA alike are announced in 19 day feast without anyone asking some questions or suggesting new ideas. Even if a person puts forward his or her own view on a certain issue, some participants would say that his or her suggestion goes against what has been stated in religious scriptures, she adds. According to X4, this causes some Baha'is to calm down. However, she usually encourages others to internalize the 'culture of consultation' by asking some questions in the consultation part of 19 day feasts. She believes that "it is a good thing that people can have various ideas that what concepts are important. Because then you can have good reflection, you can have good consultation about things. But if you do not have the culture of consultation combining that then it is difficult. It is difficult to get unity. Because people see that they are not respected".

X4 highlights that one of the consequences of absence of the culture of consultation is that a considerable number of Baha'is do not bring their joy and happiness to the Baha'i

gatherings. According to X4, many Baha'is participate in Baha'i gathering by a habit or duty. Their real self is absent in meetings, she adds. She highlights that this cannot bring about unity among Baha'is. Unlike many Baha'is, she would try to participate in gatherings with utmost delight and enjoyment.

She takes her children to children classes as well. However, she states that her children are mistreated in classes. Therefore, they have refused to participate in children classes. Despite the importance of education of children in the Baha'i Faith, she feels that her children have not been respected well in children classes.

The aforementioned example leads X4 to this idea that Baha'i concepts are not equally important for all Baha'is. For instance, being punctual in meetings is of particular importance for some which is not for her. She affirms that whenever she has been late, she has found the door of the Baha'i center closed. This is another challenge she experiences in the community.

X4 believes that Baha'is are not that perfect as they themselves imagine. High Baha'i standards has given Baha'is a false picture of the reality, she adds. She feels that some Baha'is forget that initially they are human beings. According to X4, some Baha'is tend to judge other Baha'is and non-Baha'is' behavior even though they themselves do not follow the teachings appropriately. She gives an example. In 19 day feasts, those who promote the importance of education of children are those who do not respect children. She gets angry at those who asks her to make the children silent. She believes that not only children, but also adults are emotionally vulnerable.

X4 has also challenged the way some Baha'is treat seekers in Oslo. She expresses that some Baha'is misinterpret religious writing of the Faith such as messages of UHJ in terms of the invitation of seekers to the Baha'i meetings such as 19 day feasts. She ascertains that unlike what some Baha'is assume, recent messages of UHJ shows that Baha'is are allowed to

invite seekers to the Baha'i center. Presently, she feels comfortable to ask her non-Baha'i husband to come to the center.

4.4.3 Y2

Being a Baha'i

Unity of mankind and New World Order of Baha'u'llah are the two most outstanding teachings of the Faith that Y2 puts forward to identify himself as a Baha'i. Moreover, he underlines that belief in Baha'u'llah and his optimistic view about the future of the world are the two more features that he possesses as a Baha'i. Y2 is the first one among the rest who mentions that his tendency to confirm the Faith is due to the fact that he believes that Baha'u'llah is the promises of prophecies of the Jesus Christ. He believes that some of teachings of Christianity such as helping the poor are compatible with his Baha'i identity. He identifies himself as a Baha'i in this way:

Well first of all it is my faith in God and that I have a right at that faith to Baha u Allah and the Baha'i faith and so that is you know the core of my Baha'i identity. But then of course and second it is of course also my life as a Baha'i ... That I am involved in the Baha'i faith in service and of course in family life that add layers to my Baha'i identity.

How Being and Doing Affect Doing

Formal or Informal Civic Activities

Compared to the early years of his confirmation to the Faith, Y2 is less active in the Baha'i activities presently. He used to be a member of LSA, teaching committee, and auxiliary board. Currently, he participates in junior youth activities. Presently, he gives precedence to his professional identity rather than his Baha'i identity.

Y2 translates his Baha'i identity into practice in different ways from supporting colleagues in the working place and showing respect to them to looking tidy and being

focused on his tasks rather than personal affairs in the office. Even though he believes that ethical working standards are so high in Norway, Baha`i principles have, to some degree, inspired him. For instance, he would treat local people nicely while undertaking responsibilities in different nations. According to him, there is no difference between an Iranian, an American, a Norwegian, and so on. Here, he refers to this teaching that ‘the world is one country and mankind its citizen’.

Y2`s enjoys spending time with his colleagues in parties while they drink alcoholic beverages. He also gets in touch with those who have sex outside of marriage. Y2 believes that he cannot prevent his friends from drinking alcoholic beverages or experiencing sex outside marriage. His justification is that they are not Baha`is.

He would not like to be perceived as a professional foreigner. He believes what he does is very much align with the main purpose of the Faith. However, Y2 indicates that his Baha`i identity has not played any role in choosing his professional career. This is because he converted to the Faith shortly after he began to work. Instead, his Baha`i identity reconfirms his choice.

Y2 makes a line between his religious and professional identities. He expresses that work place is not a proper place to teach the Faith. He feels that this is a kind of exploitation of his colleagues` interests. He would try not to answer some questions that his colleagues may ask about the Faith although some of them know him as a Baha`i. He switches the direction of the conversations that may lead to deep religious discussions. He would prefer to follow the instructions of his work place and to perform what administrators ask him to do. This is very important for him to be perceived as a professional.

Permissible or Proscribed

When it comes to politics, Y2 talks about his political tendencies. Even though his profession has intertwined with politics, he does engage in neither political discussions nor

political affairs in his office. He works in the administrative section. However, he participates in civic elections and goes for a certain party that supports his Christian-Baha'i ideals.

Impacts of Civic Activities on Being and Knowing

Weakening or Strengthening

Y2's statement show that he is seriously concerned about how he is perceived in his work place and the society. In spite of the fact that Norway is a liberal country, many Norwegians are afraid of those who do not follow the mainstream such as conservatives and extremists, he asserts. "but then I think on what could be called values I am as a Baha'i I think far more conservative than what is now mainstream in Norway in terms of attitude to alcohol to family values and so forth. I think I am on the more conservative side than both the principles and laws that we have in the Baha'i faith". As a religious man, Y2 is perceived as a conservative. Even when it comes to the contribution he makes with juniors for the purpose of the development of the local community, he highlights that his activities have nothing to do with teaching the Faith.

Y2 stresses that his professional identity has influenced his religious identity in some ways. His profession has helped him to see different types of political orders governing nations. He believes that there are some elements in democratic orders that Baha'i World community can adopt for the establishment of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. In this example, knowing aspect of religious identity is affected by doing part of identity.

On the other hand, his working experiences have convinced him that a peaceful world cannot be established without taking spirituality into consideration. He believes that economic and political solutions, as his experiences have shown, do not eliminate today's world challenges. The only solution to conflicts is spirituality, he asserts.

Chapter Five

5. Discussions: Development of Being, Doing, and Knowing

In this chapter I will discuss the findings between empirical data and theories. Based on the concepts generated from the data, I divide this chapter into four different parts of being a Baha'i, formal and informal civic activities, permissible and proscribed, and finally weakening and strengthening. The first two groups of concepts provide answers for the second research question and the third group focuses on the third research question. I begin with devoted Baha'is. The section of being Baha'i is associated with theories from Warburg (2006) and McMullen (2000).

5.1 Being a Baha'i

5.1.1 Devoted Baha'is

Y1 and X7 place particular importance on some Baha'i social teachings and principles such as unity of mankind, development, and the importance of education. Honesty and respectfulness are the two common virtues that devoted Baha'is refer to in their statements. Compared to Y1, X7 refers to numeral virtues such as, optimism, tolerance, humble, inviting, open-minded, and justice to identify herself. They call themselves devoted Baha'is, as they seriously look for some opportunities to put their Baha'i identities into practice. Findings of

Warburg's (2006) comprehensive study show that honesty and politeness have been the most popular virtues among Danish Baha'is. It seems that being honest is such an important virtue not only among Danish Baha'is, but also among some Norwegian devoted Baha'is.

Findings of the present study also show that devoted Baha'is would not prefer to make a boundary between themselves and non-Baha'is. However, X7, in a part of her statements, mentions that the optimistic view that she has gotten from Baha'i teachings makes a distinction between herself and Non-Baha'is. McMullen (2000) in his study argues that Baha'is of Atlanta are not sure where the boundaries between them and non-Baha'is lie. It seems to me that Norwegian devoted Baha'is uphold altruistic values. The teaching of unity of mankind has caused them to embrace a global identity which is not limited to physical borders.

5.1.2 Those who Believe Religion affects different aspects of their lives

All female interviewees of this group unanimously place particular importance on two social teachings of unity of mankind and equality between sexes. The teaching of justice is affirmed by X3, X5, and X6. The teaching of independent investigation of the truth is upheld by X3 and X5. Harmony between religion and science and elimination of extreme wealth and poverty are the teachings that X8 points to. Each informant, except X1, focuses on numerous Baha'i virtues to identify herself. For instance, optimism, respectfulness, truthfulness, compromising, the evaluation of deeds, and refrain from backbiting are the Baha'i virtues that X3 points to. Optimism and respectfulness are common values among all the female interviewees. Optimism is a virtue that few number of Danish Baha'is in Warburg's (2006) study take into consider. However, respectfulness and truthfulness are supported by a large number of Danish Baha'is.

When it comes to the matter of demarcation, X3, X5, and X6, and X8 make a distinction between themselves and non-Baha'is even though they emphasize on humanistic aspects of

the issue. X1, on the other hand, believes that individuals have different personalities. Interestingly, X1 emphasizes on a non-religious issue. For X3, X5, and X8, optimism is a matter of difference. This finding is on contrary to what McMullen's (2000) findings. This is because he discusses that Baha'is of Atlanta do not know how to use religion to distinct themselves from non-Baha'is.

5.1.3 Those who believe that religion is merely a part of their lives

This group of interviewees primarily place emphasis on social teachings of the Faith. X4, and Y2 unanimously focus on unity of mankind, the importance of education, and development. X2 refers to unity of mankind and equality between sexes. Respectfulness and optimism are the two important virtues among members of this group as well. Y2 enumerates politeness and truthfulness as the two significant ethics in his work place. Politeness is ranked high Warburg's (2006) study. Y2, however, is the only one who points to the virtue of politeness.

It seems that truthfulness, respectfulness, and optimism are the most considerable virtues among all the research informants.

Nor X4, neither X2 distinguish themselves from non-Baha'is. Religion is not an identity marker for them. However, it can be discussed that believe in unity of mankind inspires personal feelings of X4 and X2. There is no data available about this issue from Y2.

5.2 Formal and Informal Activities

In the following section I will discuss what types of civic activities the interviewees get engaged in. I divide civic activities into types of formal and informal.

5.2.1 Devoted Baha'is

Devoted Baha'is, Y1 and X7, are affected by the three teachings of unity of mankind, the importance of education, and development. The interesting point to know is that devoted Baha'is emphasize on those social teachings that they do something for them in the society.

They have engaged in different types of formal and informal civic activities whether within the Baha'i community or within the society. Each of devoted Baha'is enjoys possessing a prestigious career. Y1 cooperates with organizations and associations that their goals are to make social changes. He has been a member of LSA and NSA. He is also active in informal types of Baha'i activities. Similar to Y2, X7 is seriously concerned about educational issues. She also contributes with a pressure group. When it come to the activities within the Baha'i community, X7 participate in informal activities such as junior youth classes, 19 day feasts, and study circles. Being a member of LSA has been the only formal activity that she get engaged in within the Baha'i community.

There is a different point between Y1 and X7. Y1 is mainly concerned about the transformation of the society at macro level (organizational activities). Whereas, X7's activities illustrate that she is worried about making changes at micro level through social interactions. The challenges they have faced in practicing their Baha'i identity are different in nature. While Y1 intends to find some guidelines within the principles which might be useful in dealing with group discussions and enhancing his understanding of principles, X7 gives priority to her personal experience or to make consultation with other members of the Baha'i community in LSA in order to explore more proper ways of teaching in a secular society

There are two issues for discussion. I assume that religious teachings are not the only driving force for action in cases of devoted Baha'is. Education and the programs that devoted Baha'is have studied in university have played some roles as well. Both have studied humanities. I can claim that they are skillful in their fields of work. This is because they have been active in civic activities of the society for nearly three decades. I agree to what Hougland and Christenson (1983) argue. They place emphasis on the importance of education in encouraging individuals to take part in civic activities. Hougland and Christenson (1983) However, I cannot claim that education and skill play more important roles than religious

beliefs in incentivizing individuals, as Djupe and Grant (2001) discuss. Here, I would like to criticize findings of Warburg (2006). According to her, social teachings of the Faith such as unity of mankind have encouraged a small percentage of Danish Baha'is to get engaged in formal activities such as contributing with Danish United Nation Association. I assume that she has overlooked other possible variables such as education and career that may would have had some effects on her research findings.

5.2.2 Those who believe that religion embraces all aspect of their lives

Except X6, all female informants of the group used to possess prestigious careers. They are retired now. Basically, all female interviewees, except X8, have been active within the Baha'i community. All informants participate in different informal activities such as 19 day feasts, holy days, and core activities. Four out of five of these women have been a member of LSA. Civic activities of X1, X3, and X5 are limited to friendly talking and conversations within the society. It should be noted that age and sickness are the factors that has influenced the types of activities that X1 get engaged in. Children classes have enabled X6 to involve in informal activities of within the Baha'i community and the society. It is worth mentioning that participation in core activities increases the possibility of engaging in civic activities of the society. Compared to the rest, X8 has get engaged in voluntary activities of the society. However, voluntary activities is not considered as a formal action.

Here, I can make an argument. Even though the group of women place focus on social teachings such as unity of mankind, education, equality between sexes, justice, and so on, they do not participate in formal activities of the society. In this regard, I disagree with Driskell et al., (2008) who argues that macro religious principles increase the possibility of participation in civic activities. Age, secularism, and lack of sufficient skills to engage in activities of the society are factors that may influence doing aspect of women's religious identity.

I would like to make another argument. In my point of view, social interaction is one of the requirements for involving in friendly conversations or voluntary activities. Engagement in social interactions requires that individuals observe ethical issues such as how to talk and how to behave. It is virtue that can assist people in preserving their social relations. This fact, in my point of view, justifies why female informants

5.2.3 Those Who Believe that Religion Is Merely a Part of Their lives

Compared to X2, X4 and Y2 have occupied professional careers in the society. X2 used to enjoy having a professional career. She is a pensioner now. Both X4 and Y2 give priority to their careers rather their religious identities. Both contribute with socio-political organizations. Unlike Y2 and X2 who used to engage in formal Baha`i activities such as being a member of LSA, NSA, and auxiliary board, X4 have not involved in formal activities within the Baha`i community. Compared to the other two, Y2 has engaged in junior youth activities. However, all the three more or less has participated in informal Baha`i gatherings such as 19 day feast and summer schools. Besides to formal civic activities, X4 has mostly been engaged in informal activities of the society such as supporting refugees.

Initially, it may be assumed that there is a close relationship between pointing to social teachings such as unity of mankind, the importance of education, development, and the formal types of activities that X4 and Y2 have involved in. However, I would like to discuss that education and professional career are the two elements that side by side to social teachings of the Faith have affected doing aspects of X4 and Y2`s religious identities. This finding is not in line with what Warburg (2006) discusses, as according to her, social teachings of the Faith have caused some Danish Baha`is to get engaged in Danish United Nation Association. She underestimates some other factors that may have affected doing aspect of religious commitment of those Danish Baha`is. It should be noted that both X4 and Y2 have studied in social science. I agree with the discussion that is made by Houglund and Christenson (1983).

They place emphasis on the importance of education in encouraging individuals to take part in civic activities. Most evidently, Y2 highlights that he had chosen his professional career before becoming a Baha'i. However, he believes that his Baha'i identity has affected him in one way or another, especially in the case of observing ethical issues in his work place.

5.3 Permissible and Proscribed

In this section, I discuss how being and knowing aspects of the interviewees' religious identity determine the limitations of their activities.

5.3.1 Devoted Baha'is

The first point that I would like to make is related to the issue of coexistence between national and religious identities. According to the teaching of the Faith, Baha'is should show complete obedience to their respective states. Y1 is aware of this teaching. However, he states that whenever he disagree with some policies, he can peacefully raise his voice in the society. Cultural issues are another aspects of national identities. according to Y1's statements, there are three challenging points between his national and religious identities. Firstly, he would not prefer to participate in gatherings where alcoholic beverages are consumed. Instead, he would like to do something positive for the development of the society. Clearly, being and knowing aspects of his religious identity affect doing part of it. It is worth noting that drinking alcoholic beverages have been forbidden in accordance with the Baha'i teachings. However, as far as I know, there is no principle obliging Baha'is to refrain from attending gatherings where there are possibilities for individuals to consume alcohol. Instead, the Faith encourages Baha'is to get touch with people from different walks of life.

Secondly, he would not prefer to celebrate Christmas. Instead, he welcomes the invitation messages of his acquaintances. My experiences in Norway have proven that even though religious beliefs may not be that predominant and although a small percentage of the population are church goers, there is considerable commitment to religious rites, such as the

celebration of Christmas. This seems that Christmas, both socially and culturally, is a part of national and religious identity of many Norwegians. In my point of view, refraining from celebrating Christmas can be interpreted as adhering to the religious belief that “it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Years, and to have their festival gatherings of this nature instead during the Intercalary Days and Naw-Rúz”¹.

In this statement, the term ‘friends’ refers to Baha’is. Shoghi Effendi, the grandson of Abdul Baha and The Guardian of the Faith, has advised Baha’is to try not to follow old religious rites and traditions. The reason lies in the fact that, although according to my understandings of the Baha’i principles, attachment to old traditions have generally caused people to make boundaries between themselves and others. In fact, Baha’i Faith intends to promote an identity that is not limited by physical features such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and so on. The feeling of detachment from some traditions that are basically rooted in cultural issues brings people of the world closer to each other, with the goal being that this is in tune with the main principle of the Faith, ‘unity of humankind’. It is worth mentioning that this religious belief does not mean that Baha’i Faith is dismissive of other cultures and traditions. On the contrary, as Abdul Baha highlights in his will and testament, one of the basic teachings of the Faith is consorting “with all the peoples, kindred and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good-will and friendliness, that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Baha, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindred of the world may give way to the Light of Unity”².

¹. Retrieved from <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/DG/dg-98.html> on June 10, 2017

². Retrieved from <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/jc/BNE/bne-193.html> on June 10, 2017

I assume that as Y1 is an active participator in Baha'i activities such as being a member of National Spiritual Assembly, it is most likely that within his community, he is one of the first to receive messages from the Universal House of Justice. This is because NSA is the receiver of the messages coming from UHJ. Thus, there are many possibilities to increase religious knowledge in NSA. However, it does not necessarily mean that the ones who are not members of assemblies are unaware of these messages. The messages are subsequently circulated in the whole community. This can be concluded that religious principles and beliefs as subsets of both being and knowing of Y1's Baha'i identity considerably affect what activity, here celebration of Christmas, he may choose or prefer to engage in.

Also, a link can be made between being part of his religious identity and tolerance. He expresses less tolerance when it comes to the celebration of Christmas and participation in demonstrations and gatherings where alcoholic beverages are served. He feels that his Baha'i identity is undermined if he himself celebrates Christmas in his private atmosphere. He probably does not keep a Christmas tree in his place either. His deep-seated religious being is possibly shaped by Shoghi Effendi's statement that Baha'is are advised to discontinue observing traditions such as Christmas. Taking this statement into consideration, it can be discussed, from a Baha'i point of view, that the gradual abandoning of old traditions has nothing to do with tolerance, but is instead demonstrative of an intent to forfeit those obstacles that serve as impediments to universal peace. This worldview is in line with the nature of the Baha'i Faith. It is interesting to note that there is no specific ritual or tradition in the Baha'i Faith.

Taking part in demonstrations is also a taboo for Y1. He, seriously and clearly, states that he is averse to being part of groups that protest for their own benefits. His disagreement with protestors can be understood from the point of view that Baha'is are advised to overcome their problems, if any, with the social system legally and peacefully. This recommendation is

supported by another principle that is complete obedience of Baha'is under their respective government (Effendi, Shoghi (nd), p. 56), except those that prevent Baha'is from acting out their spiritual responsibility which is teaching the Faith. Of course, this is not a problem at all in Norway.

Y1's position can also be partially rooted in the Baha'i principle that Baha'is should not engage in partisan politics. Protests and strikes alike can affiliate Baha'is to certain political partisan parties. The worldview that Baha'i Faith provides is that each political party, in today's turbulent world, favors promoting the beliefs of certain social groups and not of all the population (Universal House of Justice, March 31, 1982). From a Baha'i point of view, unity is not achievable unless politics becomes concerned about public interests (Universal House of Justice, January 12, 2003). Being affiliated with one of the parties can be interpreted as undermining the basic principle of the Faith which is unity. However, the Universal House of Justice asks Baha'is to feel free "to participate in efforts and activities, for instance in peaceful rallies, that aim to further laudable objectives such as the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, the protection of the environment, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the safeguarding of human rights" (Universal House of Justice, 22 January, 2010). In the same message, the UHJ alerts Baha'is of possible deviance of groups from their original goal which can lead to violence and schism. Baha'is, at this point, are discouraged to participate in demonstrations.

Apart from the relationship between Y1's national and religious identities, another interesting point is engagement in political issues. Y1 contributes with socio-political organizations. One may ask how a Baha'i can involve in politics, while he or she, according to the Baha'i teachings, is not allowed to engage in politics. Y1 highlights that the organizations that he works for are not political. However, he believes that what he does is a political activity. Putting pressure on socio-political groups and associations is one of the

duties of associations that he works for. He believes that he does not engage in partisan political activities.

Here, I would like to make an argument. Y1 believes that the organizations that he works for are not political. I, however, would argue that how can an organization that works for the development of social conditions may be free from political decisions or actions. I believe that he has been involved in political actions, but not actions of a political partisan nature. To be categorized as political partisan, an action should take at least one of the following forms: supporting political parties financially, giving speeches in favor of one party, and participating in political disputes. By the term 'partisan politics', I suppose that he does not mean one of these activities. However, what makes me doubtful is that he states that he had intensively been interested in politics before he converted to the Faith. I assume that this fact could have had some impacts on what he presently does in organizations. His definition of politics may differ from what I suggest.

Unfortunately, the research lacks sufficient information about the way he refrains from engaging in political affairs. However, there is another issue that should be born in mind. Y1's membership in organizations can be considered as an attempt to contribute with colleagues to produce constructive social changes in society. In its message dated 23 December, 2008, the Universal House of Justice makes a distinction between partisan political activities and the discourse and action done with the purpose of bringing about constructive social changes. UHJ explains that a main purpose of the Baha'i Faith is social transformation. Baha'is are seriously encouraged to do something for the betterment of their societies without being engaged in partisan political issues.

However, I can say that these are religious principles and teachings that determine what types of activities he can engage in and to what extent. The parts of being and knowing of identity allow him to participate in civic election. However, the Baha'i belief that Baha'is are not

permitted to involve in partisan political activities depoliticize him. In short, it can be said that Y1's religious knowing and being are the most salient aspects of his identity when he intends to be involved in socio-political activities.

The relationship between X7's national and religious identities is also interesting. When it comes to the law, X7 criticizes some Norwegian law. However, unlike Y1, X7 participates in Christmas parties, gatherings where alcoholic beverages are used, and contributes with a pressure group. It seems that X7's interpretation of Baha'i writings is completely different. Whether or not she is aware of the Shoghi Effendi's statements that Baha'is should discontinue observing old traditions such as Christmas, it is clear from X7's statements that Christmas plays such an important role in uniting her family unit. In this case, knowing aspect of her religious identity does not affect doing part. Being among friend who drink alcohol gives her an opportunity to teach the Faith. The reason she brings forward for not drinking helps her to spread the message of Baha'u'llah. The most controversial issue is related to her engagement in political activities.

She believes that the pressure group that she contributes with is not political. She believes that it is the individual who finally decides whether the activity he or she gets involved in is classified as political or not. X7's interpretation of her knowing and understanding of her religious belief is in a way that she feels free to be a member of the pressure group on the one hand, and participate in strikes on the other hand. It seems that there is a close link between knowing, religious beliefs, and preferences in X7's Baha'i identity. These elements are in action at the same time. She knows that engagement in partisan politics is prohibited in the Faith. Also, she is aware of this issue that there are some possibilities to involve in politics if she is not affiliated with a certain political party. She however has decided to have commitments with the pressure group.

Her description of the duties of the pressure group shows that the group, in my point of view, is a partisan political one. There can also be a relationship between her Baha'i identity and the role she takes in groups. She as a member contributes to the group with the purpose of sharing her Baha'i views. Association with a pressure group can be interpreted as engagement in a political activity which is banned by the Universal House of Justice and Baha'i writings. Here, I would like to argue that there is a distinction between association within a certain group and the feeling of affiliation with the group. "A point to bear in mind is that as laudable as may be the desire to join in protests against human rights violations, in many instances, the direct involvement of Baha'is in such activities would draw them into political entanglements which would be detrimental to the Cause of God. This is why the principle of association but not affiliation must be upheld as regards organizations such as Amnesty International" (Universal House of Justice, December 2, 1992). I assume that she is probably aware of the issues. However, her personal feelings and her enthusiasm to see and feel universal peace encourage her to engage in politics.

Moreover, it should be noted that she participates in civic elections. She goes for parties that their political programs affirm her religious beliefs.

5.3.2 Those who Believe Religion Embraces All Aspects of Their Lives

Altogether, all female members of the group do not trust politics. Obviously, doing aspect is seriously affected by knowing and being aspects of their religious commitments. Similar to X7, X1 is exposed to be a member of a pressure group. She seriously rejected the offer stating that she is a Baha'i and Baha'is are not allowed to get engaged in politics. She believes that parties does work together. They are not united, she asserts. She even does not quite sure if she participates in civic elections anymore. X3 is not interested in politics as well. However, she has voted time to time. The most interesting example is X5 who believes that Baha'is are not allowed to vote. In this regard, Shoghi Effendi clarifies that Baha'is can vote "without

having to identify themselves with a party or another” (Hornby, nd, p. 1443). I assume that X5’s views are affected by this fact that she is probably not that knowledgeable. Interestingly, she is the one who used to believe in politics before conversion. I assume that keeping religious knowledge up to date strongly influences being and doing parts of Baha’i identity. Political behavior of X6 and X8 are a bit different. X6 states that she votes to spiritual qualities of candidate. However, she would prefer to focus on increasing the possibility of the development of spiritual qualities rather than wasting her time on politics, as she mentions. X8 participates in election. She, however, keeps her vote secret. In fact, she would not prefer to be identified by one of political parties.

It is obvious that X6 and X8 are concerned with unity and social conformity. Neither of them wish that their political actions be the causes of disunity in the society. In fact, they are aware of the consequences of their political actions. However, what has always challenged me as a researcher is (1) what it means that a person goes for a political actor who is characterized by spiritual qualities while he or she affiliates with one of the parties, and (2) what it means that a person supports a political party while he or she knows that supporting a party has been forbidden in Baha’i writings. An interesting point is that knowing part of X6 and X8’s religious commitments influences being and doing aspects of exploration side of their religious identities. This is because their knowing is very much influenced by the way they have interpreted the religious writings.

As we can see, individuals who are exposed to the same religious knowledge think and act differently when it comes to the political issues. This is because they interpret Baha’i writings and scriptures differently.

5.3.3 Those Who Believe that Religion is merely a part of Their Lives

It is worth noting that X4, X2, and Y2 think and act differently when it comes to political issues. All members of the group participate in civic elections. She does not expand her

views. While X4 does not take any political side, X4 and Y2 clearly talk about their preferential parties. It is interesting to know that according to the Baha'i writings, Baha'is are not allowed to take sides in politics.

Both X4 and Y2 work in socio-political organizations. They show different political behavior in their work place. While Y2 works in administrative section of his work place and tries to refrain from engaging in political discussions, X4 analyzes political plans. X4 states that it is not that easy to abstain from political discussions.

Here, I would like to discuss if X4 is more influenced by her religious knowledge or her career. In the message dated December 23, 2008, UHJ clarifies that Baha'i political scientists can generate and apply knowledge in their fields by placing focus on those issues that are political in nature. It seems to me that the knowledge X4 produces would be in tune with the national policy of the state. Therefore, it cannot be a pure political knowledge. Apart from this fact whether or not she has been aware of this belief, her participation in a political meeting can be considered as an illustration that she is personally interested in politics. It is clear that she takes sides in politics. Her career, in a way, has reinforced her political tendencies.

Different political behaviors of the research informants show that there are different types of interpretations from the Baha'i writings. There is no agreement on this challenging issue. As I aforementioned, part of issue is related to understanding of Baha'is from messages. Partly, the reason lies in the fact that engagement of Baha'is in social actions of the society is a new trend. A part of this challenging issue pertains to the fact that how Baha'is can make a line between a political figure and a political party in today's world where social and political issues have been intertwined.

It is worth mentioning that the engagement of Baha'is all over the world in social activities of their societies is a new phenomenon. The most evident is the increasing number of messages that have been sent to Baha'is by UHJ since 2000. Politics is an inseparable part

of social issues in today's world. For this reason, exploration part of religious identity faces considerable challenges. The connection between the three parts of being, doing, and knowing is not set up properly. In my point of view, the importance of knowing part is multifold compared to being and doing. This is because being and doing are influenced by knowing. Studying messages is a fruitful way to boost the religious knowledge.

McMullen (2000) discusses that Baha'is of Atlanta do not know what types of political activities they can involve in and to what extent. In my point of view, a large proportion of my informants know what Faith has asked them to do or not to do. However, I assume that these are personal views or preferences that affect the informants' political behavior.

McMullen (2000) argues that Baha'is of Atlanta would prefer to engage in activities that their principles are similar to the teachings of the Faith. My findings affirm McMullen's (2000) findings. Principles of activities that members of the first and the third groups of my study get engaged in are basically similar to the teachings of the Faith.

Findings show that devoted Baha'is and those who believe that religion is just a part of their lives take political sides. Of course, it should be noted that there is no data available about Y1. Findings of Warburg (2006) also shows that more than half of her interviewees take political sides.

5.4 Weakening or Strengthening

5.4.1 Devoted Baha'is

In this section, I am about to discuss if and how civic activities that the informants are get engaged in influence being and knowing aspects of their religious identities. In fact, this section provides some discussions for the third research question. I use Ahjum's (2013) study to make arguments.

When it comes to the effects that civic actions have had on religious identity of devoted Baha'is, the findings show that being part of religious commitment of all the three devoted

Baha'is has undergone some changes. For instance, reluctance of many Norwegians to talk about religious issues has been frustrating for X7 while teaching the Faith. However, she would try to find out alternative ways of spreading Baha'u'llah words to others. At the time of teaching, she is delighted when she finds some opportunities to take Baha'i worldviews to the classrooms and put them into discussions. In society, even the pressure political group have had affected her personal and religious attitudes. One of the influences is that she would like to share her excess belongings with others who need them. In regard to the Baha'i activities, the core activities she engages in such as junior youth programs make her feel satisfied that she could help youth with practicing their religious beliefs. A few challenges that she has faced within the Baha'i community have never prevented her from participating in Baha'i activities. Besides to being, doing part of the exploration side of the X7's religious identity has been affected. For example, she looks for some alternatives that might be helpful for her to take inactive Baha'is to the Baha'i gatherings

Compared to X1 and X7, it is knowing part of religious commitment and exploration of Y1 that has undergone some more changes than being. In organizational meetings, when his religious beliefs are criticized by others, he would try to study religious writings to obtain a better understanding of principles. However, being aspect (personal beliefs and preferences) of his religious identity has been undergone some changes as well. For instance, he would not like to expose his religious identity whenever he participates in meetings that associations organize. I assume that secularization of Norway can be the main reason in this regard.

As we can see, being and knowing are the two aspects of identity that are affected the most while Y1 and X7 participate in activities. However, doing aspects of X7's religious identity is to some degree influenced as well. In his study, Ahjum (2013) argues how the mechanism of ritual not only affects commitment and objection, but also women's activities in Qibla. It should be noted that example of rituals in Ahjum's study is Islamic classes.

Muslim women feels that their spirituality have developed when they attend Islamic classes. Moreover, they express that their knowledge of Islam and socio-political activities that they can do within the society have been increased. In addition, they have learned how to be good mothers. In the thesis terms, being, knowing, and doing aspects of women`s identity have been affected while they participate in Islamic classes (ritual). Ahjum does not point to the challenges that women may face. Nor does he analyze how challenges may inspire women`s religious identity. In the case of X7, we see that challenges she has met within the Baha`i community have not weaken her religious feelings. However, the challenges that she has met within the society have affected doing and knowing aspects of exploration side of her religious identity. Summarily, activities have strengthen Baha`i identities of Y2 and X7.

5.4.2 The Informants Who Believe Religion Embraces All Aspects of Their Lives

Basically, it is being (feelings) aspect that is influenced the most while members of this group participate in activities. For instance, working with children with disabilities has helped X1 to fortify the belief that human beings are physical and spiritual creatures. Or X3 feel satisfied as she offer services to Baha`is in the Baha`i center. In another example, children classes help X6 to know herself better. Participation in Baha`i gatherings such as holy days strengthen X8`s Baha`i identity. Unlike others, X5 believes that her activities in the Baha`i center have encouraged her to increase her knowledge of the Faith. When it comes to the activities of the society, it is secularism that has suffered all women`s feelings. It also has affected doing aspect of these informants` religious identity. They cannot easily teach the Faith. We observe that activities that the members of this group get engaged in have mostly fortified their Baha`i identities.

Compared to the Ahjum`s (2013) interviewees whose different aspects of religious identity undergo some changes, it is basically being aspect of women`s Baha`i identity that is

affected most when they get engaged in activities. It comes me to the conclusion that different aspects of being, doing, and knowing are not influenced at the same time.

5.4.3 Those who believe Religion Is Merely a Part of Their Lives

Two out of three member of this group are concerned about development of knowing aspects of their Baha'i identities. Y2 believes that his organizational activities have affected his understanding of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. In another example, X2 expresses that her knowledge of the Faith is insufficient. Summer classes and private talking have assisted her in increasing her religious knowledge.

On the other hand it is being aspect of X2 and X4 that is affected most while they engage in Baha'i activities. These influences have been serious in a way that they refrain from participating in Baha'i gatherings. The types of activities that X4 would prefer to engage in within the Baha'i community is very much affected by her doing and being aspects of her Baha'i commitment. The example mentioned above illustrate that she is not interested that much to participate in Baha'i activities. There are two evidences for this claim. Firstly, she feels frustrated of participating in Baha'i gathering due to the challenges she has faced so far. Secondly, she believes that she can still be a Baha'i without participating in Baha'i activities. Unlike X2, knowing aspect of exploration side of X4's Baha'i identity is not that much at play.

I assume that there can be a relationship between being aspect of X4's Baha'i commitment, her field of study and work, and her understanding of religion. As I aforementioned, X4 claims that she is a human being prior to being a Baha'i. Her Baha'i identity is merely a part of her identity. However, the virtues and teachings she believes in influence her activities. For her consultation as a social teaching, is an outstanding concept among the others. To construct a better community, Baha'is need to consult with each other in 19 day feasts where all Baha'is have an equal chance to present their own views on certain

issues. However, some conditions need to be met in consultative meetings. One of most important factors is showing respect to opposing viewpoints. In accordance with X4, this virtue has not been that developed among Baha'is. On the other hand, she assumes that normative religious statements that Baha'is use during the consultation process would prevent them from making a constructive dialogue. Freedom of speech is another necessary condition that X4 refers to running a constructive consultation. In fact, she would like to encourage the participants of the Baha'i meetings not to be afraid of expressing themselves freely, but increase their tolerance by listening to opposing views. X4 has obtained this idea from her field of study. I feel what reinforces this idea is her work place. This is because her field of study is completely in align with the highly prestigious position she has occupied. This should be noted that education and democratic values are the two main themes in her studies and work place.

Obviously, her professional identity and her field of study have, to some degree, influenced being and doing aspects of her religious identity. She is aware of this matter that consultation cannot be proceeded as long as some Baha'is do not know how to respect opposing views. From my understanding, it is necessary to teach some Baha'is how to make a bridge between the religious principles they believe in and democratic values that are essential tools for establishing peace and unity. I assume that she feels a conflict between her professional identity, which she currently gives priority to, and her Baha'i identity. Since she cannot find any opportunity to practice common values of her identities simultaneously in the Baha'i gatherings, she keeps distance from the Baha'i community. However, she believes that her Baha'i identity reflects in her thoughts and actions.

On the other hand, she get angry at those Baha'is who ask her to keep her children quiet in the Baha'i center. She states that her children are mistreated in children classes. For this reason, her children are not reluctant to participate in children classes.

X2 also feel dissatisfied with what happens in the Baha'i center. Being aspect of X2's religious commitment is very much influenced by her activities within the Baha'i community. She feels that recent Baha'i activities lack the same spirit as what she used to experience before. In fact, she does not have the same positive feeling from gatherings as she used to. Moreover, she feels that the Baha'i center is not a proper place to ask religious questions. I assume that X2 feels unsafe for asking her religious questions in the Baha'i meetings. Probably, she is aware of the negative reactions she might receive from other Baha'is. Her preference to organize friendly private meetings with her close Baha'i friends is an evidence to this assumption. This may justify why she is less interested in participating in Baha'i gatherings. Her personal attempt to develop her religious knowing can be another inevitable consequence of this supposition.

Feelings of X4 and X2 show that religious activities have weakened doing aspect of their religious commitments. This goes against to what Ahjum (2013) discusses. His findings show that rituals (activities in the thesis terms) have fortified Muslim women's religious identity.

Chapter Six

This chapter includes of three parts. Conclusion is associated with research limitations and suggestions for further studies.

6.1 Conclusion

The thesis that studies some ethnic first generation Norwegian Baha'is comes to the conclusion that Baha'i identity is put into practice differently because the research interviewees identify themselves in different ways. Depending on what roles Baha'i Faith have played in the lives of the informants, three groups of Baha'is are distinguishable. Firstly, devoted Baha'is. Secondly, those who believe that Baha'i Faith influences different aspects of their lives, and thirdly, those who feel that Baha'i Faith is merely a part of their lives.

Findings show that social teaching, as the subset of being, and knowledge of the Faith, as the subset of knowing, play the most important roles in encouraging or discouraging each group to engage in civic activities within the Baha'i community and within the society at large. For the first and the third group, the importance of social teachings such as development and unity of mankind is associated with the responsibilities that the members of each group undertake in the society. Professional career, as the social identity, and education are the two crucial variables that have reinforced their Baha'i identities. Their professional identities have caused them to be exposed to partisan political issues. Members of these two groups, compared to the second group, get engaged in formal types of activities within the society. When it comes to the impacts of civic activities on identities, it becomes clear the third group have negatively affected by Baha'i activities in comparison to the first group.

Summarily, it can be said that being aspect of religious identity influences and is influenced the most.

Members of the second group (five women) basically place emphasis on virtues, as the subset of being, in identifying themselves as Baha'is. However, it does not mean that they do not point to social teachings. They mostly get engaged in informal types of activities whether within the Baha'i community and within the society. When it comes to political issues, it is knowing aspect of their religious commitment that play the most important role in discouraging women to get engaged in politics. In fact, Baha'i Faith has depoliticized them. When it comes to the influence of activities, it is worth mentioning that it is being aspect of their religious identity that inspire them most.

6.2 Research Limitations

6.2.1 Methodological Limitations

The most challenging part of conducting the research has undoubtedly been language barriers. Even though all the respondents good English, they could all feel more comfortable if there were some possibilities for them to speak in Norwegian. Two out of ten informants placed focus on this point. I could also obtain more accurate information if I could speak Norwegian fluently. To increase the possibility of fully conveying her points of view, one of the informants has asked a translator attend at her place of living at the time of conducting the interview. I could not ask a translator to accompany me because all the interviewees had informed me in advance that they would speak in English.

Another limitation relates to the matter of accessing the informants. It has been simpler to get access to those informants who live in Oslo, compared to those who live in the outskirts. Also, it has been easier to make appointments with those who have been active in more informal types of civic activities. These appointments have helped me to obtain more information. However, I could not make appointments with some of the informants more than

once. This is because they have been busy with their formal civic activities. The research could therefore be lacking in sufficient detail due to the above named obstacles. I have nevertheless tried to get access to a few of them via email. I feel that the lack of sufficient information has, to some degree, decreased the reliability of the research.

Partly, this has placed some pressure on me due to the type of sampling I chose. I used snow sampling technique. Since I have been unfamiliar with the research population, it has been easier for me to find the interviewees by asking some Baha'is if they know any first generation Norwegian Baha'is. Although I have found the informants by chance, their places of dwelling have been somehow close to my living place. The challenges of this type of sampling for the research are essentially demographic. The informants are not the same age. Some are retired and some are still of working age. The age has influenced the findings of the research. Since working principles in Norway and teaching of the Faith are meaningfully overlapped, it has not been that easy to make a line between religious and professional identities while analyzing data. Therefore, there are always some intervening variables that influence findings.

What is more is that being and knowing parts of religious commitment of those who have converted to the Baha'i Faith over the past forty years is not comparable to those who have recently gone through the process of conversion. This has had some effects on research findings as well.

Although the present study has not applied a quantitative research strategy and findings are not supposed to be generalized to the target population, I suppose that the unequal number of male and female informants has possibly affected the findings.

Another methodological limitation is related to the issue of conducting interviews. Even though I have formulated interview questions in advance, I have not applied a pilot study to find the weaknesses and strengths of the questions.

My experiences have convinced me that even though being an insider may lead to a better understanding of the informants' attitudes and views while conducting interviews, the body language that the researcher adopts, whether consciously deciding to do so or not, can impact the interviewees' point of view. For instance, I remember that I sometimes have confirmed and agreed with some points of views during the course of an interview. While X4 expressed her idea about the issue that being a Baha'i is a matter of how we act than what we do, I shook my head as a sign of confirming of the idea. However, I am quite sure that this has happened unintentionally. Even turning a formal interview into an informal conversation may threaten the reliability of the findings. This is because an informal conversation increases the possibility of the intervention by the interviewer into the questioned issue.

6.2.2 Literature

Baha'i studies have been neglected in academia even though the worldwide view that the Baha'i Faith provides may make some significant changes in academic discourses, especially in social science. Theoretical based studies on the Baha'i Faith have outnumbered the empirical studies. Those theoretical based studies, however, have mostly been conducted by Baha'i scholars. The approach that I have adopted in the present empirical research is neither applied by Warburg (2006) nor McMullen (2000). Nevertheless, they have been somehow helpful to me in observing how some Baha'is convert their religious identities into practice in other social settings, such as Denmark and the U.S. The ways Baha'is in general practice their religious views while they engage in civic activities can be of particular importance for those researchers who are interested in studying Baha'is. Its importance lies in the fact that Baha'is have recently tried to socially engage in activities within larger society. Studying the political behavior of Baha'is can be of particular interest in this regard, as the present study shows. I highly recommend academics to draw attention not only to the worldview the Baha'i Faith offers, but also to the ways in which Baha'is put their religious identities into practice.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

The Followings include my suggestions to those who are interested in carrying out empirical qualitative research:

- 1) I suggest that those researchers who do not know the native language of the land in which they carry out their research familiarize themselves with the cultural aspects of the given nation or ask someone, who can speak both the native language and English fluently, to assist him/her in terms of translating.
- 2) To increase reliability, I recommend those researchers who do qualitative research methods to apply homogenous sampling. This type of sampling not only increases the possibility of getting access to the samples, but also allows the researchers to study certain characters of the informants.
- 3) I advise qualitative researchers to, as far as practicable, draw attention to the gender issues while they choose the size of their sample studies.
- 4) I highly recommend the researchers to mix qualitative research methods with quantitative ones. Sometimes, precise and clearly defined questions facilitate the analysis of data. Additionally, it enables researchers to provide readers with more reliable findings. Therefore, in addition to conducting interviews with open-ended questions, researchers can design a questionnaire that also includes definitive questions.
- 5) I suggest that the insiders who decide to conduct interviews try to refrain from showing any confirmative reaction or intervening in the issues under consideration.
- 6) I recommend researchers to operate a pilot study before conducting interviews.

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