

DISSENT AND DISLOCATION: ESSAYS ON CRISIS

by

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Abstract

This thesis presents essays on the concept crisis within educational contexts or contexts of self-formation. The context of the personal quest for formation provides different settings within which historical, psychic, and theological senses of the concept crisis can be seen as interrelated themes in journey literatures. In the first essay, I examine concepts of crisis and understand them as providing contexts for historical change of the world itself. In the second essay, I describe movements for change through dissent or civil disobedience, drawing from the moral crisis of ‘white complacency’ that the sermons and writing of Martin Luther King Jr. respond to. That particular portrayal of crisis, set within the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, reveals an opening for alternative forms of schooling to be reconsidered as their own movements. This is a revisioning of free-schooling as movement and ideology, after the death of compulsory schooling. Quite differently, personal-moral dislocation of diasporic characters, Afro-Asian migrants in particular, is examined to propose internal or affective dimensions of the concept crisis in the third essay. I examine Moyez G. Vassanji’s migrant-minority narratives, in the postcolonial novel, travel-writing and memoir to show dislocated characters who embark on searches for identity and who struggle for intergenerational communication and cultural translation as writers. Finally, the mystic-poet provides an image of reconciling crisis through the theological motif of the quest of heart, the quest of the seeker to be reunited through self-emptying with their beloved-God.

Lay Summary

Crisis is a change that appears in different ways. In this thesis, I present different ways that crisis can appear and how people, like the preacher-activist Martin Luther King Jr., Indo-Anglian novelist M.G. Vassanji, and others, respond to it. The first way I consider crisis is as historical change of the world itself. That change is understood as the death of compulsory schooling. This is the focus of the second essay, which takes dissent to be expressive of crisis. The third way I consider crisis relies on personal experiences of Afro-Asian migrants, or dislocated persons, who are character-types in many stories, and who are searching for themselves and trying to make sense of their pasts. Dislocation is part of the personal quest or journey for self-formation. That quest, in folk poetries, is initiated by the desire or longing for the individual to be reunited with God or their beloved.

Preface

The following thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Neil Rattan Bassan.

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For my family.

Chapter 1: Crisis as change in the context of education

1.1 Introduction: Overview of essays

In this thesis, I present essays on crisis within the context of the education, or self-formation, of people. This will be presented through three essays.

In the first essay, I describe dimensions of the concept crisis within the context of education, which is a personal or human context or setting for crises to be understood. This first essay introduces and describes crisis as an existential-educational concept and details some motivations for this study. The final two essays are applications of some of the conceptualizing done in the first essay. To conclude, in chapter four, I offer some reflections on the essays and return to some of the motivating questions.

In the second essay, chapter two, I consider education after the death of compulsory schooling in a revisioning of free-schooling as ideological movement that emerges from the Civil Rights struggle of the United States 1960s, inspired by a collection of written sermons of the visionary Martin Luther King Jr. This essay picks up on multiple dimensions of the concept crisis: it is both a time of “grave” historical crisis, in King’s words, and also a time of opening up for criticality in relation to moral complacency and degradation (King 1964a). This essay takes dissent to be expressive of crisis, as through dissent I propose that we can see the movement of crisis. The sixties, then, become both a time of crisis as reckoning, an objective historical predicament, and a time for King to lead the installation of crisis to push for justice through changes to the present state of race relations that are dehumanizing.

In the third essay, chapter three, with respect to identity formation of the migrant- or seeker-character, I examine the affective dimensions of transnational and intergenerational identity crisis across geo-cultural boundaries for Afro-Asians. I try to show here the place of crises through migrant-quest narratives and identity articulations. This essay picks up on what I am calling internal or subjective crisis in the lives of migrants, as well as generational crisis in the struggle for intergenerational communication for the life-writer, as well as their hopes of translation that can endure.

All of this requires some preliminary conceptual analyses to begin to describe what the concept crisis means alongside the concept of education (and how it is employed by people) in different contexts. The purpose of the present introductory chapter is to propose preliminary descriptions of the concepts and associations that shape this study.

To provide a first approximation of what crisis means for self-formation, or education, of the person, I want to propose that it describes changing contexts not only within social organizations like common schools, but within the lives of people and on the internal terrain of the person as well. This is simply to say that crises in education, where education provides a human context for self-formation, portray particular crises for people. Just as history as the histories of people is understood from the perspectives of people's making of history, their stories in living and interpreting their conditions, so, too, the question of education is considered within personal contexts for the individual according to their experiences and interpretations. Education, then, as I am understanding it, provides the personal setting for crises to be intelligible. To ask what is alive within the crises in education, then, to put it positively in the form of a question, is to allow that crises make way for analyses of different forms of literature where crises are portrayed and articulated. Crisis as representative of a universal form that the

“structure of human life is able to adopt”, moreover, foregrounds the element of change in the life of the person and in the creation of history (Ortega 1958, 85).

In the essays that follow, I do not provide a systematic treatment of any one concept. I rather try to show through literary examples of dissent and dislocation my extended analyses of and reflections on those examples, how crisis in the life of people may be interrogated along historical, psychic, or theological lines. To begin to do that, I need to employ the essay as its own method. In the essays, I try to describe crises as they appear through the longings of characters, who in some cases find solidarity in dissent or disobedience and in others become dislocated in searching for the whole of themselves. The essay, as being expressive of its own forms, is an attempt on my part, as writer or essayist, to propose something as a trial. According to Karshan in Karshan’s and Murphy’s (2020) *On Essays*, this is something like what Montaigne had in mind when he asserted that the essayist integrates “wisdom of the past [...] into [one’s] being” (34). The essay forms privilege what is interesting over what is perfected; what is experimental, provisional and incomplete over what may be most appropriate or expedient (Karshan & Murphy 2020, 314). This, perhaps at best, is the essayist partaking in their own “passionate apprenticeship”, using their own commentary to bring more life to the traditions they draw from (2020, 35). At the same time, because the essay itself is a trial, it creates waste: as Karshan writes, “the essay expresses error and mess, not clean conclusions”; both in writing and in reading, the essay can be “revelatory” with respect to the shortcomings of the essayist (2020, 40-41). Perhaps this is in part why the essay has such strong associations with the schoolhouse and rudiment: as the essay relies so heavily on the subjectivity and interpretations of the essayist, it may be easily refuted by observers who take contrary views and, therefore, the essayist, as Orwell put it, needs to recognize their own detachment and retiring posture (2020, 236). Against

shy retirement, the essayist also needs to consider their duties of “public engagement” (2020, 224). The essay, its fuel being texts the essayist has most recently read (but perhaps not always digested), is rarely a “solo expedition” (2020, 240). It is still faith in the subjective that tends to separate essays from other, more positivistic forms like the “treatise, sermon, or article” (2020, 235).

1.2 Education as context and question

I find the idea of education intriguing for many reasons. In relation to the concept crisis, education might be seen as the context within or upon which we can find instances of the predicament of history that is crisis as well as how people respond to it. There are many pressing questions to consider in thinking about the relations between education and crisis, such as how should we teach in light of the present environmental crisis, or how the contours of education would shift given the changing dynamics brought about by that crisis, how changes in the world and of the world itself would necessarily impinge on what teachers and students seek to do, like what sorts of questions they might seek to ask.

For me, some of the questions that have emerged are personal and moral ones. They include: (1) what would constitute a radical moral critique of schooling that reconsiders the roles of common schooling participants and that recognizes a crisis of authority in the dominating schooling systems? This first question is taken up in chapter two. And (2) how can I conceive of internal crisis in relation to moral dislocation, and how have those affects been shown in literatures of formation and quest that I most resonate with? This second question is the focus of chapter three. These and similar questions have been initiated by changes I have both witnessed and undergone over the last decade or so working in schools in different capacities and reconsidering my roles there.

In public compulsory schools, I have been a student, a youth basketball coach, a social services worker for non-governmental organizations, childcare worker, beginning teacher, and more recently a teaching assistant in a public school of adult education and in a youth program taking place within that school. In 2015, shortly after I completed my undergraduate studies in Literature at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, I began for the first time the teacher education program at the University of British Columbia. In that program, I encountered some explicitly ‘educational’ questions (mostly questions of schooling), and I found myself unprepared to face those questions in a humble manner in the context of the public school classroom and outside of it. At the time, I assumed the authority of my role as a student-teacher. I spoke down to students who dissented from instruction or ignored it; I did not engage deeply with their asides or questions I deemed superficial. And in so doing I maintained distance between the authority I assumed and the supposed ignorance of the students I was charged with teaching. I became disproportionately frustrated with what I perceived to be their lack of compliance in relation to the amount of time I had put into a particular lesson. None of these things being resolved through my effort alone, I considered teaching in the public system a lost cause, not something I could do or was equipped to do.

In hindsight, what I needed in the common school classroom was to break with the duality of authority and follower, of teacher and student, one who belongs to be installed as the leader and the others who are mere functionaries. To do that, I needed to engage in moral critiques of schooling that I explore in the second chapter. More than this, I needed to break away from an individuated approach to what I was tasked with doing. I needed to consult more with the students and with the other teachers and my peers, as opposed to wielding sheer authority over them. Instead of blaming or judging myself or others, I needed to understand my struggles as a

beginning teacher in the context of my own formation which is ongoing. But my feeling was that I could not in that moment learn much of anything about teaching, perhaps because I had not yet opened myself to the possibilities of growing through any difficulty, of seeing the crisis through to its overcoming. Perhaps I felt too much of a teacher already, and that was in part my error. I felt scarred from the dissolution of 'education' that I felt I was witnessing, with each passing lesson. It soon felt meaningless for me to take on the false teaching authority wearing a suit jacket; in some preliminary ways, this marked the passing of my teacherly authority and set me off in the direction of this study. And so, as I have already said, I sought moral critiques of schooling, dissent from the popular schooling forms, to help me traverse what I saw as the emptiness of education within the school. Education, then, presented its own context, which is my own personal context of struggle and of angst, within the schooling architectures. What I was seeking more fundamentally was a place for myself in the school, or a new understanding of places where I could fit in within the school as a beginning teacher of English literature, but I did not have the requisite patience or temperament at the time to settle myself. This would become, over a longer period of time, a recognition of myself in the context of interlocutors, and in the contexts of other schools, all of whom I now try to engage, join, and organize with.

Later, in 2017, I would begin the Master of Arts program in educational studies, concentrating on society, culture and politics in education. This present program offered me, by comparison to the former, a moral dimension of studies in education which I was seeking and which I needed to better examine my role in my own teaching failures. I believe that it is only quite recently, after having considered such questions at length, that I can begin to articulate my different roles in schools as a participant who can feel far closer to student experiences than I did before. It is curious that in order to become a teacher of students, it seems I had to settle in as a

student of my own students. Some of these underlying questions I continue to articulate in section 4.1, where I return to elaborate on some of these motivations for the present study.

I believe now that education, as categorically distinct from schooling, describes a human context or setting for self-formation, for change that is personally meaningful. Self-formation refers to the cultivation, transformation, or personalization of the individual self, mind, or soul. This sense of education as the context or conditions for self-formation points to the German *Bildung*, which “refers to cultivation of the inner life, [...] the human mind or human soul”, not to the external rewards of training via schooling (Biesta 2002, 345). Of course, how that life could be formed and how it should be directed provide other, social-political questions, but always maintaining a common context for education that is the human subject. This is to say that the concept of *Bildung*, as Gert Biesta (2002), in “*Bildung* and Modernity”, writes in accounting for the history of the concept, also has social-political dimensions to it (345).

As a teaching assistant in a public school of adult education, I need to maintain that that setting for personal change can be nurtured in the school, understanding the school as part of wider communities of relations that the participants find themselves in. This is simply to call attention to the education of people within and beyond the school, in relation to support- and social-workers, sports teams, volunteer initiatives, religious communities, libraries, counsellors, and others. This is not to uncover the blueprint of what education is but rather to point to where it takes place, a human context, and where it is directed, toward change that is personally significant, whether inside or outside the school. Surely it is a vast context, reliant on all the cultural, political and historical contingencies that one risks oversimplifying or oversentimentalizing. Still, I want to hold that education provides an easily ignored place, a setting, wherein what is offered to us by our teachers, in different contexts, emerges from their lives,

from their “personhood that includes flesh, bone, and skin” (Rocha 2020a, 210). This is to say, as Rocha (2020a) writes in “An Existential Dimension of the Syllabus in the Life of a Teacher”, that the context for education involves existential relations, communal relations, including physical bodies, extensive bodies of knowledge and pedagogical relations. In those places of education, from a single life to many bodies and contexts of people, how should we remain faithful to the vast existential dimensions? Wondering about this question, like the questions who we are individually and collectively, Rocha writes, is to “accept their invitation into the abyss of unknowing” (2020a, 207). At the same time, Rocha elsewhere proposes at least preliminary answers that help in tracing an approach one could take in trying to be faithful to existential dimensions of not only the syllabus but its place within education, too. In the 2015 *Folk Phenomenology* Rocha’s existential dimension breaks with the economized and psychologized, social-scientific or schooled, common-sense contexts for education, as it is commonly taken within the academic field of Education (3).

At the same time, education is employed differently and holds contested meanings today in different contexts. Education means something very specific working in a public school or other kind of educational institution today. We inherit and perceive different technical senses of the concept education. What education is can be clearly laid out for us under the institutional eye. In those settings, we can see that accepting the “ideology of Education and its fundamentalist certainties” in the form of compulsory schooling obfuscates education as “perfectly certain” (Rocha, 2015, 70). In reaction to this certainty, we find what Rocha (2015) calls a “pure, postmodern fiction, where nothing is real and everything is constructed by nothing” (70). Locating education between certainty and postmodern nothingness gets at the heart of the question of education itself: for Rocha, here we find the “phenomenological crisis” of education

or, the loss of education itself (2015, 70). In rejecting education that is “fully revealed”, “domesticated, sterilized, disclosed”, Rocha proposes a longing for education in “the hope to become a human person” (2015, 72). Education as a question or mystery becomes “too elusive to measure” and yet all the more desirable facing its own loss (Rocha, 2015, 71).

Two years ago, I started as a teaching assistant in my present school, a public school of adult education. Around this time, I was trying to better understand my role in the school and in the face of my ongoing studies of social, political, cultural and philosophical dimensions of in the field of Education and Educational Studies. The public school on its own, the supposed place for education itself, raises many questions for education and the contexts for education within the schooling political-economy. But the questions do not arise on their own, and it was only after studying that I came to view the school and my work in the environment it provides in a manner that was more open to searching out the questions. In the common schools, it is not that the workers disregard questions, or that they go about their daily work without questions. One continually confronts questions having to do with the efficacy or justification for their preferred educational methods or approaches. Surely these are important questions, like why the use of one approach to evaluation and not another, or why the selection of particular activities or exercises and not others, or why this way of course organization as opposed to another, and many others. Strictly speaking, though, these are concerns having to do with the operations and maintenance of schooling and, therefore, may be divorced from conversation about education itself. Even in the contexts of the schooling systems, I find the second class of questions more arresting.

One pertinent educational question that Rocha (2015) raises with respect to the work of the schoolteacher is “*Who shall we teach?*” (104). Therefore, for Rocha, the questions of education are particularly important for one who wishes to attend to the burdens of teaching, one

who is or hopes to become a teacher. In trying to face those questions repeatedly and obsessively—who shall we teach, or even what is this mystery of education?—one also faces, says Rocha, “the current crisis of disenchanting individualism, the sterilization of the public through the political fiction of the private” (2015, 107).

In my experiences, neither has being a student of various public and private schools over the course of nearly thirty years, including religious schools, colleges and universities, nor working in elementary schools on their own provoked educational questions where education itself is primary. I have rarely been confronted by questions having to do with education in those contexts, perhaps in part due to the nature of my work, or my particular disposition with respect to that work, but that is not to say that the questions cannot be found, or that they are not there, or that they are not worth pursuing. The lack of questions about education perhaps makes it more urgent to articulate those questions in those supposedly educational environments. These are environments wherein the power of questions can open spaces for reconsideration, but also wherein questioning is not always supportive of the schooling system and rather disruptive. Even considering professional training programs for teachers, in programs that are meant to educate teachers on the work of education, education itself rarely is framed as a question, and there is little time to articulate such questions. I think these points show that whatever it is teachers are being trained to do—to teach in schools, to know something about education, to hopefully become educated themselves, even to provide someone else an education or inspire within them the pursuit of education through various means, to manage a classroom or to design a lesson to educate students—it is not clear what these things have to do with education itself as the existential context rather than with schooling. That is, unless we equivocate education with the

processes and machinery of schooling. In the mass compulsory schools education itself is seldom the object of analysis and is rather recognized, if at all, through its absence.

I had not considered education itself in the form of a question until Rocha's 2017 lecture on Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*, part of Rocha's course Educational Theories. Rocha raised distinctions between education and schooling in the context of Illich's text that, when accepted, made it very difficult to think about the common compulsory school as a place of education for people. Since that time, after many other courses and readings, and after reading Rocha's *Folk Phenomenology* of 2015, where he provides reasons and examples of "schoolvation", a salvation narrative of class and economic transcendence for "the Educated", it seemed that education hid within it many mysteries, enduring questions, that had been faded and overtaken by schooling and its moral-legal ideologies (2015, 59).

Being a schooled person myself, having paid service and devotion to the myth of "Education [...] the redeemer", the question performed its own kind of re-enchantment (2015, 59). I had to reconsider what precisely I was doing and how I would like to live in the face of the open question of education, no longer in the comfort of the school. Education as a question provides us, I think, with a far more broad and rich context than the common associations of education with schooling, not to dismiss those contexts out of hand. The re-enchantment or reorientation was around the "cosmic entity" of education, as Rocha (2021) explained in "An Arbitrary Introduction to Philosophy of Education", a guest video-lecture for Youngstown State University: "Education is a wider cosmos within which schooling is a star. [...] The person who doesn't know how to distinguish the milky way from the north star from the cosmos is lost" (Rocha, 2021).

It is one thing to be lost and not know it. It is quite another, I suppose, to be lost and at least have the recognition to accept one's being lost and then find a way out. In some ways, this point explains one dimension of a personal kind of crisis. Being always lost in a state of limbo surely presents its own crisis: one can go on being lost and forever believe one is not lost. On the other hand, being lost and coming to know it provides opportunity to reassert oneself on the correct path, at least for continuation of the narrative of one's life within which one recognizes oneself lost but searching, maybe becoming lost again. This second image presents a strong sense of crisis within the quest narrative of one's life. In this case, the crisis becomes necessary to set off the seeker on a quest to find the correct path once more, or to find a resolution, or reach reunion, or reversal, or even to begin to find themselves. The question of education seems to provide its own opportunity for reorientation, a kind of dissent from the imposition of schooling on education. And so, I think that education as a question implies a kind of crisis for schooling, and it is out of that crisis that I try to maintain hope in reasserting education on a wider path.

Rocha's question "what is education?", the question of "perennial curriculum", challenges the authority of the common schoolteacher by holding them to the higher burden of the question itself as opening possibilities (Rocha 2020b, 30). Facing that question, one has to make sense of what they are really doing, to rediscover education not as schooling but as itself a kind of open predicament. I have tried to think about ways to respond to that nagging question of education itself. Not as a definition but stipulative explication, I want to say that education refers widely to a shared human context of concern or commitment, that it provides the social contexts for the possibilities of personal change as self-formation. Those possibilities need to become aware of what is lacking in order for commitment to be held strong. This approaches what philosopher of education Maxine Greene (1988), in *The Dialectic of Freedom*, takes education to be. Greene

writes that education proceeds from a “hunger” for the “desire to feel with the passion to see” (1988, 23). The hunger is a kind of aching to consider the question of education itself as a personal one (Greene 1988, 124). For Greene, the presence of education as a question involves it necessarily in the “thought” of freedom that moves us to action, as it has moved others and through inquiry launched or inserted them into the world on their searches for freedom (Greene, 1988, 125).

What I have just asserted about education might similarly be applied to the concept crisis on a broader scale: crises are so commonly sanitized and deployed in headlines that crisis has become an amorphous inflated concept without clear definition and without the demand real crises make. Crisis is forgotten when it is so managed away, when we infuse it with management orientation, which is more pressing and pragmatic. Though crises may be common, we may not all perceive them, personally and as historic events, even though the temporary overcoming of them, their management, provides deep significance. But perhaps we seldom think about them as we are in them as significant opportunities to disrupt what is normal, as one is easily overwhelmed by the crises of the world, let alone of different histories of crises. It is perhaps easier and more efficient to simply deal with what is most pressing in terms of what is most manageable. Here, I think the sharpness of the initial question opens crisis up for change, as the question itself is an invitation for dialogue with oneself on the concept. Crisis represents change, simultaneously something unique and yet recurring. Education seems to provide a context for the change, for liberation of people as much as their oppression. Crisis as a form that even the life of the person is able to adopt is invariable, understood as parts of our condition. The life of the human person, its conditions, provides the educational context within which crisis can be seen and heard.

Crisis is a historical, psychic, and theological concept and will be described in relation to the lives of people in schools, outside of them, between boundaries and in movement, through dissent and dislocation. Those contexts of living provide a foreground for education and for change called crisis. In brief, this is how I would try, in a preliminary way, to understand the concept of crisis in relation to the context for self-formation, the context for change that education provides.

1.3 Dimensions of the concept crisis

I will provide an overview of the concept crisis in brief. Then I will explain how I understand it with respect to my purposes in this thesis. There are different dimensions of crisis to consider. The different dimensions of the concept presented will be relevant when offering examples later. Within the context of the different dimensions of crisis, interregnum becomes the underrecognized period of transition between hegemonies, or interruption or intermission of a particular political-ideological regime.

In Richter's translation of Koselleck's (2006) "Crisis", a conceptual history of the concept of crisis is presented. Beginning with the Greek usage and moving into contemporary parlance, Koselleck maps the different senses of crisis as historical-philosophical concept over time. Today, within the last two decades, the concept crisis is most inflated by different forms of media, in the shape of headlines that employ the adjective crisis, as in "crisis-torn", subject crisis as in "crisis of [...]", or to point to vague situations of conflict or unrest (Koselleck 2006, 399). In these and other cases, crisis is not descriptive or analytical but sensationalizing.

Expansion of the meaning of "crisis" came in the seventeenth century, when it seeped into politics, economics, history, and psychology, in the form of metaphor (Koselleck 2006, 358). However, the rarity of its use indicates that it had not yet become a fully formed concept (2006,

361). Once included in national languages—in French in the fourteenth century, and in English and German in the sixteenth century— “crisis” as a medical concept was applied to the “constituent parts” of the political body (2006, 362). Koselleck identifies crisis, only since 1780, as an “expression of a new sense of time which both indicated and intensified the end of an epoch” (2006, 358). This is crisis as temporalization of history or period of transition. The temporal-historical sense can be contrasted with that of the Greeks, who had clear meanings for crisis in the fields of law (judgement, trial, divorce, decision), medicine (judgement of progression of illness), and theology (God as ruler or Last Judge). The Greek concept implied judgement— “choices between stark alternatives”: justice or injustice, life or death, eternal freedom or condemnation to hell (Koselleck 2006, 358). These are “unavoidable [...] and non-negotiable” (Koselleck 2006, 399). The medical meaning, however, remained the primary one for fifteen hundred years, until the early modern period (358). Within this medical context, at the time of crisis it is “determined whether the patient will live or die” (360). That is, a “perfect crisis” is one that “led to a full restoration of health”, whereas “imperfect crisis [...] left open the possibility of relapse” or death (360).

Given its “demand for decisions and choices”, the concept is applied to the events of the French and American revolutions, where it gives the image of the “last judgement” a secular connotation (358). With its implication for decision-making, writes Koselleck, there no longer remain areas of life not “interpreted through” the notion of crisis. At present, and since 1780, as mentioned, ‘crisis’ in historical terms points to a “new sense of time” (358). Only from the “second half of the eighteenth century on” does a generalized experiential notion of crisis become prevalent (371). Considering its medical and theological origins, “crisis” on the one hand refers either to a unique situation or to one that might recur, as in an illness (371). On the

other hand, a crisis refers to a final decision, “analogous to the Last Judgement”, after which “everything will be different” (371). Crisis lurches between two boundaries: it is characterized both by recurrence and absolute uniqueness (371). This, in other words, makes a single “crisis” representative of all human history. As “crisis” envelopes us, it seems to “constantly and permanently” take place (371). In twentieth-century usage, crisis can be understood within “negative theology” as “immanent [and] permanent condition of the world”, wherein the entire human condition is one of continuous crisis, a transitional stage (Koselleck 2006, 398).

Stahl (2019), in an article called “Ruling the Interregnum: Politics and Ideology in Nonhegemonic Times”, operationalizes the Gramscian notion of interregnum to understand “the situation of a capitalist economy without an ideological hegemony” (354). Stahl argues that the “nonhegemonic periods” between stabilities, the times of crises, are underrecognized as products of the collapse of hegemony (333). Gramsci’s interregnum as crisis for Stahl is not only a transition but an overlooked period in itself: a “prolonged period of confusion and political chaos” without hegemonic ideological leadership (2019, 335). Crises are not just punctuated periods that are uncommon, they also refer to political forms, as “organic crises”, the crises of legitimacy for the ruling ideological and political class (2019, 338). Stahl shows that the interregnum periods as “punctuations” amid stability are often substantial historical periods of competition, which may go on for decades before being resolved (2019, 354).

In “When the World Becomes a Problem”, the introduction to *Crisis and Critique*, Cordero (2016) posits crisis as the sort of event which “disturbs the common sense of order” within social life (1). For Cordero, it is the “discontinuity and uncertainty” of crisis that makes it a time “ripe for questioning”, a time wherein what was “conventional”, “justified and functional”, is breached (2016, 1). Questioning being coupled with crisis, the moment of crisis

becomes the moment of critique, which is necessary as a rupture in the social world and an interrogation of its contradictions (2016, 1). In short, Cordero contends that it is the case that both “crisis provokes critique”, that subjective critique requires the objective fissure of crisis, and “critique provokes crisis”, that critique takes shape in the context crisis provides (2016, 2). Elsewhere, in “The Critique of Crisis: From Marx to Beck”, Cordero posits crisis as a “transcendent norm” or “chronic condition” that accounts for nearly all forms of “socio-historical change” (2016, 15). Under modern capitalism, we see the “absorption, multiplication and stabilization of crisis events”, and crisis takes on the character of redundancy and indifference; with another passing day comes another crisis, and all crises seem equally pressing, high intensity situations that demand intervention (2016, 16). The trend today is crisis management by experts of state agencies, to the point where “sociologies of risk and disaster” can be perhaps more fruitfully utilized and with fewer ambiguities (Cordero 2016, 16). For Cordero, the phenomena of crisis speak to the denaturalizing work that crises accomplish: they reorganize or destabilize our “sense of order” (2016, 31). In so doing, crises trigger critique, restructuring institutions and opening “spaces for political innovation” (2016, 33).

1.4 Ortega’s crisis as element of change in historical life

Further dimensions of the concept crisis are outlined by Ortega y Gasset (1958) in, among others, *Man and Crisis*. The book is a study of crisis, or universal predicaments of history and of persons as creators of histories. These are transitory settings for history, in-between periods, exemplified by the time between the flat Middle Ages and the expansive Renaissance, the latter of which represents “great historical crisis” for Ortega (1958, 85). Understanding crisis as predicament of history, for Ortega, does not mean we gather the loose and infinite, empirical facts of what happened. It is rather that history proposes who lived the facts, and therefore not

the facts themselves but interpretation of what kinds of lives have made history up (1958, 17). History, then, becomes a continuous referral back to the lives of authors, interpreters or writers of history, those who live it and give it expression. This is because the reality of facts is found within the “indivisible unity of every life”, which is considered in a context of the same fundamental laws that condition the total living of persons (1958, 17).

José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) was born into a middle-class family near the end of the 19th century (Domínguez 1998). He is known as one of the great twentieth century Spanish-language philosophers, political theorists, educators, essayists, journalists and intellectual leaders of the Spanish republic as a Socialist Republican. He did not write exclusively for other academics or philosophers; his prose is rather plain and direct, expressive of a particularly average vernacular that could be picked up by any Spaniard who may have come across his articles or essays (Westler 2016, 222). His professional-political life and creative pursuits are relevant with respect to my drawing and employment of the concept crisis as element of change and form which the structure of human living can adopt (1958, 85).

Central to Ortega’s work are political contexts of totalitarianism, or fascism, which he experienced with the rise of nationalist sentiment in Europe in the interwar period, and “with the rise to power of Franco” (Westler 2016, 247). Ortega’s was an age of traumatic crises: “two World Wars, a devastating economic crisis” as well as the “bloody Civil War in his native Spain” (Westler 2016, 247). I want to briefly introduce some of that context, more specifically what is Ortega’s examining of it, by linking it to the concept crisis. Ortega can be read as a philosopher of crisis, because in trying to unite Europe amidst its disintegration, amidst its own periods of crises, as a Spaniard (and European) he finds crisis in the idea of Europe itself. Perhaps more foundationally, for Ortega, was the fragmented idea of Spanish identity at the fall

of empire in 1898, Spain being spiritually and geographically marginal with respect to the heart of Europe, Northern Protestant Europe (Westler 2016, 156). To see a united Europe in “appreciation of European plurality”, then, becomes Ortega’s “platform and [...] vehicle” for liberalism (Westler 2016, 159).

In “On Fascism”, part 11 of *Invertebrate Spain*, the English translation of the 1921 *España Invertebrada*, Ortega (1974) tries to gesture in the direction of the “true reality” of the concept of fascism (191). Ortega’s contention is that whatever fascism is, or whatever the word refers to, cannot be found in fascism alone (191). Fascism is not located in what the fascist does, nor in what the fascist says or believes, because in those instances we only find contradiction (as with other human activities) (190). As Ortega writes, what is called fascism appears both as unity of the state as well as its dissolution; the affirmation of authority as well as its total rejection (190). This contradictory condition is not unique to the concept of fascism. In fact, we find the condition as well in the concept of crisis. If we read across some of the aforementioned descriptions as I have outlined them, the crisis appears to be absolutely unique, a product of particular conditions and circumstances, and simultaneously recurring, with roots that can be traced through different ages and in the movements of divergent characters. As historical realities in different contexts of change, the concepts rely on new languages to find expression (192). One characteristic Ortega attributes to fascism in general is that it appears illegitimate (that is, only self-consecrated, virtuous in light of its own violence, or without “juridical basis”) in two ways: the first is that, under fascism, power is seized illegitimately, and secondly that power is exercised illegitimately (195-96). It is against “legitimatism”, an almost mystical legalism, that Ortega conceives of fascism (197). Against fascistic strategy (because fascism is not an end or

“solution” in itself), Ortega argues, what is needed is renewed enthusiasm of the law as a living issue, or peoples’ recognition of the inspirational character of the strength of law (198-99).

Westler (2016), in a dissertation, tries to contextualize Ortega’s politics, as new liberalism or interwar-liberalism, calling for a united Europe, “between ancient and modern liberty” (10). More specifically, what is distinct about Ortega’s political writings, for Westler, is that they are expressive of a “liberalism of generosity”, a liberalism that proposes a new idea of Europe wherein Spain is no longer perceived as marginal, a Spanish liberalism that incorporates “Catholic scholastic philosophical heritage” as well as “new Enlightenment rationalisms” (2016, xv).

In the translator’s preface to Ortega’s (1964) collection of lectures *What is Philosophy?*, first delivered in 1929 in a theatre because of the closing of University of Madrid due to political agitation, Mildred Adams asserts that the vitality of Ortega’s work endures despite delays in translating of his work into English. His work has not been “frayed by time”, Adams writes (1964, 8). Indeed, in Ortega’s work, history itself needs to bend to the “creative and self-determining” capacities of persons, or to the mental activities of persons playing a “constructive role in human experiences” of time (Holmes 2017). History, then, for Ortega, becomes the making of persons and a condition placed upon the subjective person, imprisoning the person, who is forced to think in order to choose, to activate oneself, or to survive, forced to rely on their “initiative and inspiration” or personal “responsibility” (Holmes 2017). Ortega’s individual person is confronted with history as part of one’s circumstances which cannot be chosen, but within which one must choose between possibilities, and within which one faces a predetermined death (Holmes 2017).

Ortega's family was closely connected with the activities of journalism: his mother's family owned the newspaper *El Imparcial* of Madrid, and his father was a journalist and director of that paper (Domínguez 1998). Ortega's life in journalism is linked to his intellectual development and his particular narrative voice (Domínguez 1998). He founded and directed the monthly journal *Revista De Occidente* in 1923 and established the publishing house Calpe to make available Spanish and European classic and contemporary works in cheaper paperbacks (Holmes 2017). Through these and other activities, Ortega helped to foster the creative sensibilities of a generation of young intellectuals known as the "Generation of 1927", people who would resist the dictatorship (Domínguez 1998)

In 1897, after beginning his university studies first in Jesuit University of Deusto and then in Central University of Madrid where he received his doctorate in 1904, Ortega like others was forced to confront the moral and physical degradation, or disease, of Spain and its national conscience (Domínguez 1998; Holmes 2017). This came as a result of a historical set of events, including the end of the Spanish colonial empire with the surrender to the United States the Spanish East Indies, all emerging from the Spanish-American war of 1898 (Domínguez 1998). Ortega's generation, those generations who formed around and after 1898, were known as generations born of disaster: they were marked by these events as historical crises (Holmes 2017). Defeated by the "upstarts of North America", the Spanish people, including a young Ortega, expired an "agony of spirit" (Ortega 1974, 9). Ortega was born into and influenced by the critical, "fiercely negative" character of leading intellectual Spaniards of his time, but he also took on a "questioning and constructive" attitude of his generation (Ortega 1974, 9).

After becoming a professor of metaphysics at the University of Madrid in 1910, Ortega published his first book, *Meditations on Don Quixote*, in 1914. In the same year, he founded the

Spanish Political Education League to carry out regeneration movements. Later, in 1931, Ortega became the center of an intellectual group advocating for the birth of the Second Spanish Republic, “Agupación al Servicio de la República” (“Group in the Service of the Republic”) (Holmes 2017). The group sought to unite the classes under a national banner, under a Republic that could stand between communism and fascism (Holmes 2017). With the birth of the Group in Service of the Republic, along with the new Republic itself, Ortega was elected a member of parliament, becoming one of its intellectual leaders. Ortega self-exiled at the start of the Spanish civil war in 1936 and did not return permanently to Francoist Spain until 1955, the year he died.

In chapter six of *Man and Crisis*, “Change and Crisis”, Ortega posits crisis as the “element of change in historical life” (1958, 85). Change, for Ortega, is life-giving or “vital” (1958, 85). Historical crisis involves, firstly, change in the world and, secondly, change of the world itself (1958, 85). These are two kinds of changes that Ortega proposes, but historical crisis presents a further kind of change. He writes:

[...] historical crisis occurs when the world change which is produced consists in this: the world, the system of convictions belonging to a previous generation, gives way to a vital state in which [one] remains without these convictions, and therefore without a world. [One] returns to a state of not knowing what to do, for the reason that [one] returns to a state of actually not knowing what to think about the world. Therefore the change swells to a crisis and takes on the character of catastrophe. The world change consists of the fact that the world in which [one] was living has collapsed, and, for the moment, of that alone. (1958, 86)

The affective result of historical crisis, of being without one’s convictions, for Ortega, is that “one feels a profound disdain for everything, or almost everything, which was believed yesterday [...]” (1958, 86). This is in part because no positive and genuine convictions have yet replaced the collapsed ones, and one feels disoriented (1958, 86). In the life of the individual as

in the collective life, crisis shows itself as the holding of only “negative convictions” or empty convictions that are insincere, only superficial (1958, 87). Life crisis, then, the person-in-crisis, refers to a state of disorientation wherein one’s overwhelmingly negative convictions about the world leave one without direction and “without effectiveness”, without the world that was (1958, 86).

As a universal state of human being, according to Ortega (1958), crisis affect engenders otherness in one’s self, which is the opposite of centeredness, “genuineness” (91). This is to be outside the self, to be other than oneself, to confuse oneself with surroundings, including the world and including others. For Ortega, this state of things is shameful: we carry opinions and reasons that we have inherited, instead of being in our solitude and coming to agreement with ourselves, we retreat from the “effort it demands; we hide our own selves behind the selves of other people; we disguise ourselves behind society” (92). This can never be a companionship of love, a true society (Ortega 1958, 92). A historical crisis, interestingly, also creates a “collective mentality”, or a “shared identity”, which people organize around as a form of resistance (Holmes 2017).

One affective result of personal crisis, within the context of the education of the person, is alienation of the individual from themselves. To be alienated from oneself is worse than being physically alone, for it is to be alone in a particularly penetrating way. It is to be without one’s sense of self as an individual, to be othered in the narrative of one’s life, to feel a denial of unity between who one is or is becoming and what one is coerced into doing. Not recognizing oneself as themselves, disassociated, perhaps feigning self-integrity, the individual in crisis is alienated in this way, according to Ortega: like the socialized human without individuality, pulled from our life of solitude, it is the human conventionalized, the “complicated, cultivated “I”” (1958, 99).

Such alienation is when people ritually disappear “beneath [their] social role”, like in times of “syndicates, guilds, corporations, states” (1958, 100), perhaps even professions, where all is a strict performance, all is settled, mundane and routine. For Ortega, therefore, it is only “in the naked depths of [one’s] own personal self” where one could be genuine and embark on a true search to “make contact with [oneself]” (1958, 101). Even though the oppressive cultural forms may forbid it, Ortega offers the following:

Culture intervenes between the real world and [one’s] real person. So [one] has no course other than to rise up against that culture, to shake [oneself] free of it, to rid [oneself] of it, to retreat from it, so that [one] may once more face the universe in the live flesh and return to living in very truth. (1958, 101)

In chapter seven, “Truth as Man in Harmony”, Ortega asserts that we can find dignity in finding ourselves, that we can escape “restlessness, the deep *otherness*, which so many modern lives carry in their secret selves” (1958, 111). The inner terrain of the person, where we can see the striving for formation of conscience and of self, offers some dignity, away from the outer impositions. In other words, we can find dignity through our acts of self-formation as a form of resistance. In the common schools, we can understand this in that each schooling participant is already imbued with this dignity, that their searches for personhood are dignified in their own ways, and we should work in schools to substantiate and articulate this not for but with the participants, namely children.

But “salvation” is not so simple, Ortega remarks (1958, 111). Striving to think for oneself, which is some monumental task if we consider our immersion “willy-nilly in the task of living”, is part of our endeavor not to simply have ideas about our surroundings, but to “have them in truth”— to “have our own”, to make them as ours through the pursuit of truth (1958,

112). When we resist being subsumed by that which torments us, if we rather take it as some trial, we take some risk of resisting, even overcoming through the praxis of love, alienation as personal crisis, by exercising our intellects, which are existentially bound, not submitting to a mere life as an intellectual, as if one could live on that intellectuality¹. This is not to make a “play actor of [oneself]”, as Ortega warns against, lurching between insolence and bigotry, but rather to justify our intellects through our ongoing work of creative activities which are inspiring and hopeful (1958, 112). This, for Ortega, means that thinking helps us to be “well-adjusted”, thinking always with a sense of “personal and intimate veracity”, never allowing us to fall into pure dread (1958, 113). For Ortega, then, our destiny is not to be technical, intellectual, or “acute” but to “resolve” one’s life more “loyally and sincerely” (1958, 116). This requires that one does not strip reason “to the bone”, making it the opposite of faith, and instead that logos may remain faithful to intuition in a supplementary kind of way (1958, 116). This is a roundabout way of saying that alienation has to contend with the commitment of love of another or commitment to one’s beloved. This is dissent away from the prison of alienation and toward devotion, which may be construed as the pursuit of truth itself, truth being the foundation for morality. The theme of love in relation to crisis within the personal context of education is picked up most significantly in section 3.5, a concluding section on devotional folk poetics.

All of this, again, is to attempt to center one’s convictions as conceptual activity as necessary elements of our shared destiny in attending to the personal crises of alienation (Ortega, 1958, 113). Where we find alienation may be where the conditions do not prompt self-reflexivity, where there are few positive convictions to be had which would offer resolutions,

¹ Ortega (1958) puts it as follows: “Rationalism, having to think as a rationalist, whether [one] wanted to or not, was [one’s] fate. Will this type of [human], this form of life which lives *on* reason, be definitive? (114).

perhaps only negative convictions. But this is just another way to associate alienation with crisis. Rather, we might associate more closely alienation, its circuitry, as the affective results of the oppressive inhuman systems that engender the non-thinking attitudes. There is some struggle here to think clearly at all, however, to expedite things and to be finished with the crisis as a topic of investigation. But as Ortega describes, the mere “desire to think” differently is not to already think in that desired way (1958, 113).

The point is summed by Ortega by reference to a maxim credited to Leonardo da Vinci, which I have altered to suit the present context: we who cannot do as we desire, let us desire what we can do (1958, 113). Again, it is the activity of our love, the commitment through devotion, that is important, and not its product. So, this is one response to the question of activity under oppression: out of our confused and misplaced desires may emerge feelings of imprisonment that may be overcome through the pursuit of truth, the articulation of a question that speaks to that pursuit. The maxim reminds us that it is also within our natural limitations that we can find solace, that desire can be found again and reaffirmed on the correct path. The congruence within persons which that maxim tries to uphold, some unity between the external and the internal, is exemplified for Ortega by “average man” in the classical and golden ages, who was “encased within himself”, feeling “in accord with himself”, knowing his limitations and on what he may rely in facing the perennial themes, some of which have been briefly drawn or outlined in the present writing as questions and reflections on the roles of individuals under oppression (1958, 115). What upholds the maxim is eros, or love, what encases teaching and the context for it, education itself.

A recent speech of Pope Francis in a December 2020 Address to the Roman Curia explored the relations between the concepts of crisis, conflict and change. In it, Francis asserts that “the health, economic, social and even ecclesial crisis [...] has become a reality experienced by everyone” (Francis 2020). The historical predicament of crisis being referenced is, of course, the present COVID-19 global pandemic-crisis, which is a reality common to all. Through the work of Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, Francis reminds us of the mystery of birth, of newness, which reaffirms faith in or for the world (Francis 2020). For Francis, then, the crisis is not only “a time of trial and testing but also a significant opportunity for conversion and renewed authenticity”, a time of newness (Francis 2020). The crisis appears for Francis as a storm, one that uncovers “false and superfluous certainties” that structure our lives (Francis 2020). What the storm of crisis shows is that we have a “common [...] belonging to one another as brothers and sisters” (Francis 2020). The crisis is also necessary: it creates unease and anxiety, “upset and uncertainty”, a “sifting” that reorganizes our priorities (Francis 2020). The crisis is the time to play one’s part “in the history of salvation” (Francis 2020). The meaning of crisis, for Francis, is as follows. Crisis is universal across all ages of history. Crisis is when decisions need to be made under feelings of indecision and anxiety (Francis 2020). For Francis, it is out of crisis, by crisis, that people “played their part in the history of salvation” (Francis 2020). Francis recalls many biblical figures who show, by being “open to being changed by a crisis”, that in crisis we can be reoriented (Francis 2020).

Francis (2020) shows that conflict can be separated from crisis in a variety of ways I have condensed here. Firstly, the antagonisms as impositions that conflicts seem to inspire should be made distinct from crisis. This points to the rhetorical strategies of using a crisis to exploit greater conflicts and separations. Whether or not conflicts are necessary for us in our conditions,

and whether or not they may be conceived without antagonisms, Francis treats them as real and calls on people to overcome them. Conflicts as such may be seen as tests, problems to be solved, considered in light of the unity of our broader situations that cannot be broken. A particular sort of conflict needs to be proposed, says Francis, as there are conflicts of different types. Conflicts in general should not distort what is true and most enduring; conflicts should not destroy our ties, for instance. For Francis, one must “enter into crisis”, recognizing it as a time of change, to avoid fruitlessness and conflict (Francis 2020). Conflict can be considered within crisis, but in conflict alone we cannot live. Francis cautions against “living in conflict”. Instead, there is a particular “docility” of living in crisis that Francis proposes, and which is opposed to conflict. There is, therefore, a particular acceptance to our conditions or passivity within them that Francis calls for that can be considered in trying to conceptualize of conflict. Moreover, a conflict between relations need not destroy relations, even though crises may involve many conflicts between relations, and even though conflicts can be considered in the wider web of our crisis situations. And this is because conflicts may be engaged with in different ways. Conflicts also always result in and presuppose resolutions. It is perhaps in this positive and literary sense of conflict that it aligns with the generative possibilities of crisis.

1.5 Conclusion

Different dimensions of the concept crisis have been proposed in relation to the human context of living that education describes. In the essays that follow, I try to build from the proposed dimensions to consider renderings of the concept crisis within the personal context of people’s lives, through their movements of dissent and dislocation. What is described here shapes the structure of the essays with respect to the conceptual underpinnings of crisis as existential-educational concept.

As the different dimensions of crisis have shown, crisis is intertwined with the living of persons. Whether we draw attention to its theological dimensions, as in the case of Francis or, perhaps less explicitly, Ortega, or its historical-philosophical, as in the case of Ortega, or a kind of vague disjunctive rupturing that opens possibilities for critique, as in the case of Cordero and which Koselleck describes, or the political-medical usages from the Greeks which denote an in-between period or judgement of prophecy-prognosis, crisis is only intelligible on the unitary plain of the person, what I am understanding as a necessarily educational context.

Education has been asserted as both context and question. Education as question provokes crisis for schooling. Education, as I understand it, might point to a shared human context of concern or commitment. Education may be, therefore, a setting for change that is self-formation; this is change that is personally meaningful for the individual. Like education, crisis is a similarly scattered and sanitized concept. Crisis refers to the element of change that takes shape against the personal backdrop education provides. Considering the historical usages of crisis, crisis seems to maintain some resemblance to its different origin stories, but most often today refers loosely but simultaneously to a particular condition of the world, a predicament of history, an extended period between hegemonies, and what triggers critique. Ortega's notion of crisis, historical crisis, is change of the world itself, not just a change within the world. Ortega's crisis-person, the person in crisis, is comprised (if even only for the time being) of only negative convictions. The alienation that the state of crisis engenders has to contend with commitment of the person to love and to articulate questions. In the same vein, Francis shows that we should be open to enter into crisis and into its sifting movement that reorients us to our true priorities.

Chapter 2: The free-schooling movement in sixties-era dissent

2.1 Introduction

In this essay, I present dissent characteristic of the sixties era as civil disobedience and in the form of free-schooling through the image of the death of compulsory schooling. Common schooling is understood as a continuation of moral complacency with respect to our understanding of the effects of compulsory schooling on the lives of children and their roles as students and student-workers in initiating personal and social change. The crisis of authority of the United States 1960s provides an opening for compulsory schooling to be questioned and through its death reconsidered in the form of free schooling. These are dimensions of crisis that make up the background for the commentary of the essay; that is, the “grave crisis” of nineteen-sixties U.S., “the evils of war and of economic and racial injustice”, or “personal and collective problems that the crisis presents”, as noted by Christian-Baptist preacher and theologian Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) in a collection of written sermons (1964a, 9). The grave crisis King speaks to provokes critique, and the moral critique imposed by King through the black freedom struggle he represents provokes or installs a historical crisis that is destabilizing. I wish to examine parts of King’s writings in order to understand how the seeking of truth, via dissent, in the context of the historical and moral crisis of the times, can be seen in the movements he represents. These are movements for social change that can be described as visionary in relation to the changes they wish to install. Dissent appears as part of the movement in overcoming crisis, which is additionally located in the compulsory schools as a crisis for how education is therein conceived.

I think that the particular character of dissent of the sixties, most notably that character embodied by King, can be helpful today in thinking about what we are doing in schooling and what could be done in its alternative forms. Thinking about alternative forms of schooling becomes its own kind of civil disobedience, considering the stronghold of compulsory, mass schooling on persons, including children, no longer mere things to be acted upon but dignified and with their own agency, desires and abilities.

Why should compulsory schooling be questioned? What is wrong about a child of ten or eleven, or fifteen or sixteen, being grouped with others of similar age, in institutions or factory-like settings that prepare them for adulthood as it is overwhelmingly understood within a capitalistic economy? It is heard commonly, and perhaps generally accepted, that schooling as education prepares young people to compete and work in the world economies, that to invest in our people is to invest in their education in schools and community colleges. This is what the current United States Biden administration argues (United States Office of Press Secretary, 2021). “Any nation that out-educates us is going to out compete us”, the President remarked at a community college in Illinois (United States Office of Press Secretary 2021). He asserts that mass schooling, now presumably extended to community colleges through what he calls “free education”, is what has and will ensure that children, through their schoolteachers, remain “the kite strings that lift our national ambitions aloft”. These sorts of claims and associations represent nothing new. Consider, for example, the “Sputnik shock” of the late 1950s and early 60s, which represented a “total crisis of confidence in the American way of life”, a challenge to American technological and scientific exceptionalism (Boyle 2008, 373). There appears to be a discursive continuity to be drawn here between the political and economic functions of mass education that, in the minds of leadership like Biden and Eisenhower before him, should be

positioned in ways to bolster national security and the image of American empire (Boyle 2008, 379). Put another way, after the Russian launch of Sputnik into the sky, educational reform became tied to “defense of America” through scientific and technical expertise (not the fine arts or humanities) that could rival the industriousness of American enemies (Boyle 2008, 380). At the time, the launch of Sputnik revealed what Boyle (2008) calls a “society-wide crisis mentality” that opened post-war American culture up for critique so that American culture itself, no longer only communism, could be tagged as the enemy (373). This shows that the crisis of American life, as well as the crisis mentality it inspires, are entangled. In order for the crisis mentality to be self-reflexive, the being of America itself has to come under scrutiny. So, again, we see that crisis inspires critique, and that for critique to take hold it relies on a crisis situation. Biden’s recent remarks show that education as it is conceived in schools, as a rhetorical prop, remains useful in comparing national economic images and quelling anxieties that Americans no longer measure up to the rest of the world.

To the contrary, free-schooling does away with this kind of simple exploitation and instrumentalizing of children. Free-schooling as such provides a moral critique of mass schooling and resituates students as initiators of social change. In so doing, the free school creates a crisis of authority for the compulsory school. The former is fueled by democratic and humanistic sensibilities and ideals, and the latter by more purely and explicit economic ones. The changes being sought are, firstly, to reconsider the place of education within the context of schools, without the moral-legal ideologies of mass schooling and, secondly, to reconsider education as a public good and for the student themselves.

Before moving on, I want to make clearer how the dissent embodied by the free schooling movement, dissent of the sixties, applies to crisis, to at least make connections between what I

am proposing and the concept of crisis as it has already been outlined and how it may be further understood. First, my assumption going in is that education as it is overwhelmingly understood within the confines of common compulsory schools is in crisis. I believe this because the idea of education itself does not appear to me to be an open question, or legitimate area of concern, in the context of the compulsory schooling systems or in teacher training. For me, having spent close to three decades in different kinds of schools, many of them compulsory, the question of education only appeared in high scholarship critical of schooling and, even then, in the context of graduate-level seminars, as I explained earlier. But the issue is not only of my particular time in schools, for the modern, compulsory school of the common school era, since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, has retained its essential drive and nature. It is against that driving character, one of uniformity of students and control over their movements in the direction of economic ends (the transformation of the student into laborer), subordination of their desires, that the free school can be articulated as its own moral critique of the dehumanizing of schools. Stanley Aronowitz (2008), a long time labor activist, founder of various alternative schools, and university professor, asserts in *Against Schooling* that the crisis of education in schools represents a “bankruptcy of progressive education” as well as the “demands of mass society” to train workers and (perhaps less so) to create citizens. In a similar vein, when philosopher of education Maxine Greene (2005), in “Teaching in a Moment of Crisis: The Spaces of Imagination”, writes of a crisis of education in schooling, she is pointing precisely to how education is conceived in the common compulsory school. Alongside loss of funding for things like cultural studies, arts, music, literature, and sports, the crisis of education in schools can be seen in the identification of students “by grades and test scores; [...] in accord with a bell curve; [...] [by] extrinsic standards” (2005, 77). If we accept this to be the case in general across

compulsory schooling systems, if we accept that initiation into the ritual of work is the driving function of those systems, then it should follow that the school is in need of moral critique that is seeking expression in a “great campaign” of dissent, quite like the campaigns of visionaries who I recall in this chapter (Greene 2005, 79). The need for such a movement, like the free school movement, is due in large part to the dehumanizing character of the schools themselves, their primary functions in, as Aronowitz puts it, “control and subordination” (2008, 14). Because the period of the 1960s exemplifies different characters of moral and cultural critique via dissent that has resonated and reverberated in many ways, and because it was a period of crisis in and of itself, I am proposing that particular period of time as one to focus on for the purposes of this chapter. It was a time ripe of crises and challenge, and therefore it seems reasonable to me to consider that time period, its particular characters of dissent, to revitalize notions of reform. If one is seeking a moral critique of social stagnation with respect to common schooling, what better time period than the sixties, as that time period (it seems to me) is strongly associated with rebellious attitudes and revolutionary rhetoric.

Dissent, like crisis, is a concept that in many ways may be seen to be sensationalized or glamorized for great rhetorical effect in the context of the common school. In the case of counter-cultural movements, however, dissent is more than refusal of a particular student or teacher to do their work. A strong sense of dissent is more than movement apart between schooling participants, or difference in thinking or feeling between them. For better or for worse, dissent shows its democratic function when engagement of dissent is more than pulling a lever, checking a box, or pressing a button differently than most are doing. This kind of embodiment of dissent, one could call it a grave kind of dissent, is a serious and far more dynamic engagement with civil disobedience. We can recall here Gandhi’s struggle to uphold insistence on truth, or

satyagraha, which is the seeking of truth. It is central to Gandhi's movement and part of what inspires King, too, and which I expand on later. In the schools, this insistence is where dissent from the common schooling ideologies is seen in the reorientation of the free school to the student, whose desires and abilities are seen as central to the movement itself. Those are desires and abilities of persons that the common schools would manipulate in the direction of training for the labor economies. So, to rediscover those desires and abilities, the free school dissents from the common schooling ideology. In the context of the moral-educational crisis of the 1960s, dissent describes the movement to overcome the crisis. The grave dissent I am describing is the moral means in the pursuit of truth. This is truth as an absolute principle, the seeking of which resembles the ultimate sacrifice of oneself that one could make in their lives. When the authority of, for example, moral truth is in crisis, such as in the context of the civil rights movement, dissent is the means, or the movement, in the re-seeking of truth. Here, dissent describes a movement toward truth and as such can be seen as a means to overcoming crisis. To be clear, in this essay, there are to be connections drawn between the free-schooling movement, debates around educational reform and revolution of the 1960s, and particular conceptions of crisis and how it appears through the movement of dissent. It is important that these conceptual connections are established at the outset, for the asides to come can be meandering and, therefore, I will try to reconnect things where needed.

In addition to the aspects of crisis relevant to this chapter I have just mentioned, I have already noted that King refers to a time of grave crisis which provokes critique of the current moral order and, moreover, that the moral critique imposed by King through the black freedom struggle he represents provokes or installs a historical crisis. In other words, there is at least a dual sense of crisis to consider in this essay. Those faces of crisis that King proposes, or senses

of crisis as they relate to what has already been drawn, should be made clear. The first point to make is that the meaning of crisis being appealed to here assumes that the crisis is not only one instance or a one-off period of time. This is to say that the historical crisis of the 1960s, the time of grave crisis, is only one way to propose to apply the concept here. The other sense of crisis is its movement in provoking critique. It is that movement that I think is closely associated to dissent, or which requires dissent to be seen through. The image here is that in the time of crisis, dissent becomes a movement for overcoming the crisis, particularly when dissent reorients us to what is true. Free schooling, as already explained, embodies that movement of dissent because it assumes itself already to be a critique of the established school. It assumes that schools are in the work of dehumanizing persons, and it assumes that dehumanization applied to the human is a mistake. Hence the need for schooling participants to be realigned with what is true, which in this case is humanization, and which demands dissent away from the dehumanizing processes of the schools. And so, the at least dual senses of crisis being offered here with respect to sixties era dissent are as follows. Firstly, the sense of crisis refers to the historical predicament of the sixties themselves, a time for white criticality or the challenging of moral complacency. Secondly, crisis refers to the provoking of critique, and the provocation is aligned with dissent when dissent is foundational to helping overcome a crisis.

2.2 The free-schooling movement, what it proposes and responds to

It might sound strange to think about participants of schooling, primarily young students, children and youth, as initiators of social change, as if they were activists or agitators. Then again, there are present day examples that show children not so much as activists but as people

concerned with finding what is true, the pursuit of truth² itself, and prepared to act and organize in ways that show this as a kind of commitment and deliberate choice to see alternative possibilities. What could this commitment symbolize other than a good, moral education? Consider, for instance, the youth climate marches, occupy wall-street movement, or prison reform or responses to poverty, just to name some recent examples where youth, if they are not foundational, still play their own roles, and some leading roles, in marching and organizing, in pursuing the “life project” of freedom (Greene 1988, 101). Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), leader of the Indian struggle for independence, wrote in the introduction to his autobiography that he writes for children, too; that “whatever is possible for me is possible even for a child”, that the “seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust” (1945, 7). As well, it is particularly within the context of a stultifying mass schooling-consumer culture that students cannot but be seen as agitators if they so much as question what they are truly doing, and what is being done to them, in common schools. And so, in the face of their current realities in schools being coerced into submission, children can become their own initiators of change if they are empowered and affirmed to question and to think about what they are truly doing, where they are going, who they are becoming, and so on, both within and without the state school. At their very best, the free schools would try to empower and affirm students to take part in this kind of questioning.

In *On The Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, first published in 1971, Althusser (2014) shows that the “know-how” schools teach, things like reading, writing, or ‘comprehension’, cannot be extracted from the “ideological subjection”, the embodied “practise” of that ideology (2014, 52). In the compulsory schooling systems, what is

² Under King’s (2021) philosophy of non-violence, nonviolence is “the relentless pursuit of truthful ends by moral means”.

meant to be taught should be considered, then, as a function of “ideologization” (2014, 79). For Althusser, the work of schooling is ideological in that the school does not employ physical force or violence (78). The “legal-moral ideology” of the institution of schooling seems to work all on its own, “without recourse to violence” (2014, 79). This is because schools, whether public, compulsory, or private, rely on reproducing the “politics of the dominant class” (2014, 81). In this view, to get an education and to be educated implies being formally schooled in a very particular way. That manner of schooling, as explained, directs children to become efficient workers. It means in the end to receive the appropriate credentials to verify that one’s education has been completed according to standard and that one can move to the next stage of civic employment as a laborer.

The free-schooling movement presents alternative forms of schooling that reconsider education as its own movement for solidarity with the participants, namely racial and economic minorities, black and brown Americans. In so doing, the free school takes for granted that the ideologization of compulsory schooling needs to be articulated and challenged. I consider schooling in the form of the free-schooling movement which is a kind of schooling fundamentally different from compulsory schooling: this is schooling not for domestication but for freedom, for real choices, and for social change. I understand free-schooling in the light of the 1960s Civil Rights movement to present a vision of dissent for solidarity, or mass civil disobedience, inspired by the sermons and writing of Martin Luther King Jr. Free-schooling is therefore proposed as a social movement for change. I have already mentioned that for that movement for change to take place, what must be installed is a crisis which may be provoked by critique. Moreover, the free school as a social movement for change relies on its conception as a dissenting form of school relative to the compulsory school. The change relies on questioning the

purposes of compulsory schooling and considers its rebirth in alternative and counter-hegemonic forms wherein students and other schooling participants are central and not passive with respect to what the school, now a community, endeavors to do. That doing involves provocation for liberation, a kind of channeling of passions and beliefs for a rebellion that rests on dreams of overcoming struggle, of “love and transformation”, in the context of a new kind of school, the free school (Kozol 1972, 422).

What the free-schooling movement has proposed and historically responded to should be made clear. The Free-schooling movement of 1967-1972 was an anti-authoritarian experiment in schooling. It follows through on the idea that compulsory mass schooling cannot be reformed or radicalized but must be transformed (in some cases even if through gradual reform). It proposed new, independent, alternative and community forms of public education as social organizations for change, centering the desires and abilities of the participants themselves. As a self-contained subculture it risks being relegated to the status of a sect, seemingly detached from the mass streams, and only meaningful on account of its critique. I want to propose that we can still imagine a kind of schooling, like free-schooling, that can be understood within the legacies of schools and of free schools, and as a dislocation of compulsion within the school. Moreover, there are parallels to be drawn between the changes in consciousness brought about in the 1960s by the civil rights movement, a particular kind of dissent, and present responses to the rise of right-wing nationalism and racist or anti-minority sentiment that particular schools may reproduce or become complacent toward. I consider dissent as civil disobedience of the civil rights movement within the broader stream of dissent out of which the free schooling movement emerged. This is to say, again, that dissent is foundational for the free school for two reasons. The first reason that dissent is foundational for the free school is because the very idea of the free

school is made in critique of the common compulsory school. That critique symbolizes or relies on the movement that dissent allow. The movement of dissent is needed to overcome the crisis of education within the schooling confines. The second reason dissent is foundational for the free school is because in dissenting away from the purposes of the common compulsory school, the free school envisions solidarity with the schooling participants themselves, who offer their own dissenting attitudes that the free school can recognize.

Free schooling proposes dissent from complacency, even civil order, and a recommitment to something higher, like justice, for schooling participants. It is, moreover, a movement that tries to (and does) establish possibilities for new worlds for education, and not just education as an adjunct of compulsory schooling but a context where true dialogue, reflection and action can take shape. This can involve a revisioning of education itself. I hope to show that free-schooling, if it can maintain dissent from compulsory schooling as central to its activity, represents commitment to social change. The movement of free-schooling in general, then, poses radical alternatives not only to the dominant mass schooling models but to social organization and relations, its embodiment being a form of praxis.

The movement of free-schooling refers to the particular stream of post-industrial schools, spanning the spectrum of ideologies, part of a freedom movement. Chris Mercogliano was an early teacher at the Albany free school in New York, known to be among the first of its kind, which opened its doors in 1969. It was started by a “local group of civil rights activists”, the Brothers, after a child “asked his mother to teach him at home” (Mercogliano 1998, 29). Like other free schools at the time, it had humble, neighborhood beginnings, taking place in “an inner-city black church in Albany’s South End” (Mercogliano 1998, 31). Near the end of the 1960s when the movement took shape, there was not a unified agenda:

Rather, the general order of the day was stopping the war in Vietnam, completing the work of the civil rights movement—especially eliminating economic roots of racism—and breaking down the increasingly monolithic control of major social institutions such as the public school system. (Mercogliano 1998, p 26)

Though free schools have been called alternative, open, non-schools, experimental and community schools, even hippie schools, the name ‘free school’ is an umbrella term capturing shared aspects of them all, namely that generative possibilities abound when children and adults “choose to associate with one another under the same roof (or sky) in an atmosphere of freedom, personal responsibility, and mutual respect” (Mercogliano 1998, xxi). In Mercogliano’s view, the free school provides a “living and dynamic context” for education; it is a school whose structure is tied to the individuals who make it up, meaning that the communities of individuals who “participate in its unfolding” give the school its own structure (Mercogliano 1998, xxi).

Believing that all children had some capacities to self-govern, and that to coerce them into schooling as a domesticating exercise was at least now subject to moral critique, free-schooling proposed that the creation of personal meaning for participants is tied to their upholding of communal connections (Mercogliano 1998). In *Free Schools, Free People: Education and Democracy after the 1960s* Miller (2002) tries to distinguish free-schooling from “other forms of alternative, progressive, or holistic education” (7). Miller asserts that institutionalized compulsory schooling has “suppressed radical change” and locked itself into a conservative corporatism, unlike other dissenting movements such as the women’s rights movements, wherein “60s-era dissent” has shown lasting effects (even though neither human nor women’s rights have ever fully been achieved) (2002, 1).

The dissent, civil disobedience, of the 1960s provides a backdrop for looking into the emergence of free schooling as a movement. Put another way, free schooling emerged from the character of sixties era dissent. If free schooling truly provides a moral critique of education as it is conceived in the compulsory schools, then some investigation into the dissenting attitudes of the sixties may be helpful. Understanding the leading figures of that particular dissent, their rhetorical approaches and motivations, perhaps, would help in contextualizing the crisis of education during the time period. The dissent of the 60s questioned the deep-rooted faith people of the United States had placed in their institutions of compulsory mass schooling since common schools emerged in the 1830s (2002, 2). Some, like Long (1972), in a dissertation called “The Free School Movement”, assert that the 1960s was a time in which “minorities increased their militancy” in the form of such slogans as “Black Power, Red Power, Brown Power, Women’s Liberation, and Gay Liberation” (1). The character of the questioning, questioning that provoked crisis, threatened the established white order and, extended to the practices of the mass schools and their effectiveness, is evident in many influential works of the time, which Miller notes, including: Postman and Weingartner’s *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969), Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) and *Compulsory Miseducation* (1964), Kozol’s *Free Schools* (1972) and *The Night is Dark and I am Far from Home* (1975), and Dennison’s *The Lives of Children* (1969), among others (4). Moreover, the dissent of the 60s represents responses to a particular existential discomfort, a lingering disillusionment with a “defining myth of American culture—faith in the essential goodness and rightness of the American experiment in democracy” (Miller, 2002, 9). That myth could not contend with the realities of problems and vacancies of hearts in a disintegrated, individuated, “mass consumer culture”, and particularly for the oppressed classes of racialized minorities whose subjugation was written into law (2002, 11).

The United States 60s are associated with alternative, anarchist, romantic, and anti-war movements and attitudes. The civil rights movement symbolized the time as one of white self-doubt, and more generally white criticality, a “rare opening for cultural self-examination” (Miller 2002, 18). There were white peace movements, and opposition to U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asia, the Vietnam war in particular, and Black-liberation movements including Black Power and Black Nationalism, showing that King’s vision of civil disobedience via nonviolence was not the only initiator of change. There were movements and mass counter-cultural forms in general against exploitative, coercive and dehumanizing hypermodern forces of the technocratic state that may not have been motivated by King as leader of the civil rights movement (Miller 2002, 12). There were invisible union organizers, “nameless ones”, who maintained families, taught in schools, artists who attained the freedom of their work, people who sung in choruses, people “yearning beyond” the objectification of their situations (Greene 1988, 94). To put it briefly, the free-school movement was also a response to a general character of dissatisfaction with civil society as it was popularly experienced by the masses. Free-schooling “was a response to the existentially alienating character of the bureaucratic, machine-like system of schooling that had been deliberately organized earlier in the twentieth century” (Miller 2002, 16). Here, I do not mean to combine all these strands of dissenting movements as if they were a perfectly unified mass without infighting or differences. I only list them to give a general impression about kinds of dissenting movements of the United States 60s. I want to ask what can be learned from these cases? These are general dissenting attitudes and overarching characteristics of dissent of the times that need to be reexamined. And yet, within those commonalities there are tensions and divisions and finer details within the varied dissenting movements, which cannot all be spelled out here.

Compulsory schooling within that frame of dissent, so long as it was organized to submit to and confirm a racist, “competitive, consumerist, mass-mentality society”, could not be reformed entirely from within (2002, 46). Free-schooling as I see it rather relied on a coalition between reformers and revolutionaries, that is inside and outside work, to bring about change in these systems of education and in the broader societies. The work of transforming the compulsory school, then, becomes foundational to what free-schooling is, which is a community approach to the old individuated and mechanistic system of control and subordination. But the nineteen-sixties, the time when free-schooling emerged, particularly near the end of the decade, and the time from which it drew inspiration, was also a dark time. Writing in 1969, Kozol (1990) explains that it was a time of “bitterness and rage”, “shock and shame”: murderous war raged in Southeast Asia, in the Vietnamese and Cambodian humanitarian crises; Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Kennedy, and Malcolm X had been assassinated, and civil rights were under renewed attack from many directions (18). King’s sermons and writings of the 60s also attest to a particular darkness, and light overcoming darkness, as we will see. King fought to reach the “promised land of integration”, as he took the racial segregation of the time, problems of race and color prejudice, to be the most significant moral problem confronting U.S. society (Zeigler 2015; Hillis 2013; King 1994). Similarly, the free schooling movement of the 60s was propelled by the somber realization that what is being done to students of compulsory schooling “is deeply connected” to the plights of blacks and other minorities, and similarly to the people of Vietnam. This, then, is perhaps what most succinctly describes free-schooling in terms of its aspirations and intentions: the movement for free-schooling does not see the various crises—moral, political, economic, social-racial— as disconnected abstractions but rather part of a more general and concrete problem. Those crises need to be considered within the context of the unitary plain of

the human subject, and in particular the one who experiences needless suffering, hatred, alienation, disenfranchisement and dislocation. Free-schooling at least attempts to recognize, rediscover and empower that human plain of experience, and it relies on the social-moral critique described that provokes crisis. This begins to answer the question aforementioned: what can we learn from these cases of dissent, civil disobedience, of freeschooling? One thing we can learn or at least propose is that the crises we experience are not individuated or abstracted but deeply related. The concern for free schooling over compulsory schooling then, must be related to the concern for antiwar over war, civil disobedience over complacency, and so on.

‘Free’ in free schools refers to the moral critique that propels the movement: it maintains that compulsory school on account of its objectified, depersonalized and manipulative approach never recognizes the humanity of its participants and rather works upon them through force (Miller 2002, 40). The generational rebellion of the time, that which free-schooling was caught up in, was pushed by students, among others, who “sought open, emotionally authentic, face-to-face relationships [and] rejected technocratic systems” (Miller 2002, 40). According to Miller (2002), they sought “mystery, sensuality, emotion, and immediate experience” (40). Kozol (1972) explains that through the course of “academic labor”, free schools try to “expand the sense of option and the possibilities” for participants to elicit change in their lives and in their societies (418). These are some ways in which free-schools try to counter the complacency of compulsory schools. And it is in that very countering that we can locate crisis, for to counter complacency is to wonder about what kinds of moral principles need to be reasserted, and which of those might be shared in fostering solidarity amongst the schooling participants? Countering of complacency as a form of dissent away from complacency creates a crisis for the compulsory school.

A primary aspect that distinguishes free-schools from other alternative streams of education, as mentioned, is the position of students as forces for creative social change, voices for dissent, and “radical educational critique” within the schools and the wider communities (Miller 2002, 22). Students, like other factions of American society, including religious fundamentalist groups, “free market libertarians to advocates for multiculturalism”, organized in the decade “to redefine education on their terms” (Miller 2002, 171). In “Unpopular Messengers: Student Opposition to the Vietnam War”, Fry (2014) writes that students had a role to play in the dramatic shift in the general moral inclinations of United States persons between 1960 and 1972, when 45 million Americans turned eighteen and college enrollment ballooned (221). It was young people at this time, Fry writes, known as the baby boomers, who questioned the authority of their elders, who were distinguished by their music and dress, who sought knowledge on a broad range of issues, “from the length of one’s hair, to economic injustice, civil rights, and U.S. foreign policy” (2014, 221). Student activism arose on the back of this questioning—critique that provokes crisis— and seeking of truth which could not be contained by the universities or religious institutions, even though they tried “acting in loco parentis” by imposing curfews, mandating the keeping of space between students in public areas, making obligatory church attendance, regulating dress, undergarments or facial hair, all of which added to the feelings of captivity (Fry 2014, 222). The state was aware of and acted against such student movements, in part because the student activists showed great commitment and courage: in some cases including “loss of friends, condemnation and rejection by one’s family, and expulsion from school” as consequences for their public opposition to war (Fry 2014, 225). Even policymakers of the time had children involved in the anti-war movement who kept the atrocities in public view, increasing the urgency to end the war (Fry 2014, 238). Student dissent from the state’s

waging of war was never “uniformly popular or glamorous”: anti-war organizers routinely faced violence and hostility from their prowar opponents who outnumbered them (Fry, 2014, 226). In 1967, for example, only 35 percent of students of the nation identified as opposed to the war (Fry 2014, 227). What these examples show is that dissent from the common schools brings with it new burdens to consider, and those can be an overwhelming price to pay for disobedience. What is implied here, as well, is that a moral crisis takes shape when it becomes too costly for average persons to publicly oppose the state on such issues as foreign policy and war.

In a similar vein, free-schooling ideology tries to empower students to make meaning of their own educations, and in so doing positions students as necessary for the positive “moral vision” of this radical form of education to “[overthrow] the existing social order” (Miller 2002, 173). All of this to say that, in a way, free-schooling requires commitment on part of students to participate, to become student-workers for change in their communities, to be immersed in their own educations, for their own freedoms (2002, 176). Students as such become the free-schooling curriculum, their own communities and needs making up part of that curricular context. This is what Mercogliano has in mind when he asserts that free schools encourage students to be “versatile [...] and independent”, against the mythologies and mass-production of the common school (1998, 20).

Martin Luther King Jr. (1994) similarly held a special place for the youth of the nation, school-aged persons of the U.S., in organizing for social change. In “Speech Before the Youth March for Integrated School”, he remarked that he saw them as the “generation of integration”, that the future of the nation with respect to racial integration was in their hands (21). It was the youth, King (1994) said, who through their marching and organizing showed that they understood that the principles of democracy depend on “complete integration of Negro

Americans” (21). King calls on the youth to become dedicated to the fight for civil rights; it will “enrich your spirit”, he tells them, to love and selflessly help one’s fellow person, and to “make a career of humanity” (1994, 22). King maintains this special role of the youth: to dedicate themselves to civil rights, and in so doing to shape a great nation and world (1994, 22). Here, King’s dissent through commitment becomes a kind of dedication of the person, the young student, to the oppressed.

Free-schooling ideologies arose on the back of American cultural and political upheaval, civil disobedience and dissent, initiated in the 1960s and earlier embodied through the Black freedom struggles. This provides the relevant backdrop for the present discussion about how dissenting solidarities fortified by the free-schooling ideologies may respond to the crises of education, the crises of people in school to be educated and become more themselves. These are crises that are not naturally resolved but that we can attend to through sustained efforts, organization and commitment to the “ideals of participatory democracy, opposition to hierarchy and commercialism, personal authenticity, and political activism” in the context of grassroots coalitions, like free schools (Provenzo 2009). Free-schooling makes it apparent that compulsory schooling as representative of the “conventional character of social facts, norms, and [authorities]” needs to change in such a way that new visions for education, in particular free-schooling, or even quite similarly deschooling, appear as ripe challengers (Cordero 2016, 15). Here, the compulsory school struggles to be reborn as the free-school or an anti-institutional sort of school. This point recalls popular understandings of crisis which maintain that crises reveal opportunities as well as “distress, discontinuity, uncertainty, and acceleration” (Cordero, 2016, 15). The crises in compulsory schooling open education itself up for socio-philosophical critique, and in this way the death of compulsory schooling makes room for potential rebirth. That rebirth

presents opportunities for the legacies of schooling to be revolutionized in the form of free-schooling.

This writing represents attempts at understanding that continual unfolding of histories, some as responses to crises around the contested meanings and purposes of education and particularly in schools by compulsory schooling participants themselves. On account of their experiences, school-teachers and their students know what makes their being in compulsory school seem lifeless, irrelevant and unresponsive. They experience and intuit what spurs the sensation that schooling needs changes so that they may truly have their hands in and make decisions about their educations. They know, in other words, how compulsory schooling provides a disembodied sort of education in which participants are coerced into obedience.

The free school movement should be considered within the general character of the timeframe in which it emerged, but also within the context of present intuitions just described. The 1960s in the United States were a time for renewed commitments to civil rights, amid differing conceptions of “justice, freedom, [...] democracy” and equality; these were times popularly understood to be of underground newspapers, street demonstrations and student-initiated rebellions and sit-ins, esoteric Eastern religious practices, “communal living, hallucinogenic drugs, and [...] intoxicating styles of music”, and the sexual revolution (Miller, 2002, 1). At the same time, it was a decade “also shaped by anti-communism, Cold War ideology”, a time to learn “sobering lessons about white America”, particularly for blacks, some of whom were pushed from reformers to revolutionaries through their struggles in organizing (Hall 2006, p187-8). Growing acknowledgement, firstly, that intellectual resources of the state were being contrived for a dominating American world order, and secondly that “universities increasingly came to serve” militaristic and corporate ends, that knowledge itself was

industrialized, all coalesced to form a cracked foundation (Miller 2002, 13). There, questions could be posed about the purposes and ends of mass schooling that would help to ignite and justify a free-school movement for a redefining of education. And so, free-schooling came about most forcefully at a time of recommitment to new, differing vision for education (Miller 2002, 13). Free-schooling ideology comes from the background of this social critique and establishes itself within a living movement of civil rights. The free-schooling ideologies are “legitimated by the intellectual and moral claims of the civil rights movement” and, as I hope to show, of visionaries like King (Miller 2002, 18).

Most foundationally, the student- and protest-movements of the 60s are exemplified by the broader black civil-rights movements, including their coalitions and collapses (Hall 2006, 189). Singularly this can be seen in the activism of the black “freedom struggle” of the mid-1950s and early 60s (Hall 2006, 187). It can be seen in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), considered by Miller a moderate group, one who did not oppose the Vietnam War until 1969, who fought to overturn “legal sanction for racial segregation”, making civil rights a national political issue in the years to come (Miller 2002, 19). The black freedom struggles of this time preceded the anti-war organizing. But the 60s were also a time in which anti-war and Black, civil-rights sentiments of the age merged. Howard Zinn, via Hall, put it as follows: opposition to the Vietnam war among Black-radical liberationists, like King, came from their prior ‘organizing around dissent’; it came from time in “‘cotton fields, the country roads, the jails of the Deep South’” (Hall 2006, 188). Organizing for solidarity is what unites the anti-war and civil rights movements (Hall 2006, 188). And still, political factionalism and “multi-issuism” separated many blacks activists from the white peace movements, thought to be disconnected from the pressing needs of “‘hunger, poverty, racism [...] exploitation and police

terror” (Hall 2006, 191). The free-school and rebellion movements of the 60s were propelled by the somber realization that what is being done to students of compulsory schooling “is deeply connected” to the plights of blacks and similarly to the people of Vietnam (Miller 2002, 41). Perhaps nowhere were those interconnections articulated more forcefully than in the sermons and lectures of King, who asserted a vision for global justice through disobedience rooted in sacrificial love, and which he was reluctant to translate into the written word, asserting that the sermon represents an oral discourse “directed toward the listening ear” of the congregation and not only the seeing eye (King 1964a, viii).

2.3 A leading figure of 1960s dissent: the preacher-activist King

Zeigler (2015), in *Red Scare Racism and Cold War Black Radicalism*, writes about the anticommunist discourse, known also as “Red Scare” rhetoric, being waged against Martin Luther King Jr.. King’s dissenting vision for black freedom, against the traditions and reactionaries of the segregated South, was painted as “un-American” (Zeigler 2015, 19). King seemed to be only un-American in a strict sense, however: he warned in “The Ethical Demands of Integration”, for example, that the U.S. destroys itself if the “continued oppression of the Negro” were to persist (King 1994, 117). In other words, it seems that King could be construed as un-American if what being American means is to uphold this sense of “anemic democracy” wherein democratization comes at the expense of the Negro and of the state itself (King 1994, 117). King did not support the self-destructive state as it was, because the state itself becomes “artificial hindrance or barrier” to the fulfillment of one’s total capacity through integration, not just desegregation (King 1994, 121). This dissenting intuition against the state is seen as well in the adage “denial of freedom is a denial of life itself” (King 1994, 121). Furthermore, in what sense could King’s vision for dissent and civil disobedience be understood as un-American if his

Christian devotion that propels the vision could be disentangled from the workings of the American state? It seems to me un-American to place one's religious convictions for civil rights above and beyond the arm of the state, for it is King's religious motivation that overrides concerns for being a proud American. The theological basis of human personality is a primary motivator, a principle, for King, whereas the nation could only be united secondarily, assuming its people could be seen in light of their whole personality (Hillis 2013, 176). But even this is a far cry from what billboards painted King to be, a morally deficient communist, intent on "revolutionary overthrow of the United States of behalf of the USSR" (Zeigler, 2015, 30). As Zeigler (2015) shows in a study of anticommunist discourse "as it bears on the black freedom struggle" (20), the U.S. collaborated with institutions to organize Red Scare rhetoric to "keep racial segregation lawful" (196). If the modern state system was pushing racial segregation, and if to support the state is to support the racial segregation it pushes, then King in his dissenting vision, in his radicalism "to shape a new world", becomes reasonably un-American (King 1989, 50). Perhaps it is because of this, King's embodiment of the struggle to change the nation through moral critique, through his vocation, that he was not a popular figure in his own times.

Michael (later Martin) Luther King Jr. was born in 1929 in depression-era Atlanta, Georgia, and into anti-capitalist sentiment (King 2001, 2). Before becoming a Christian minister, he was born into the church, into Ebenezer Baptist church in Atlanta, where his father also served as a minister. In King's auto-biography, he maintains the belief that all people "seeking to be strong", himself included, "combine in [their] character antitheses strongly marked" (2001, 3). One is both "militant and moderate [...] idealistic and realistic", he writes (2001, 3). This belief in the struggle to be a stronger person, in his case a stronger Christian person, can be traced throughout his works. This point also picks up on the theme of crisis as the element of change in

historical life, a particular predicament of history, through which we find the destruction of dualities, of either militant or moderate, of either idealistic or realistic characteristics. At the same time, the moral critique of King at once describes the crisis around race relations and provokes the crisis of authority and complacency he is trying to install.

Let us reconsider in more detail the character of dissent, or civil disobedience, of 1960s United States which is multifaceted but coalesced in the vision of the prophetic Martin Luther King Jr.. That vision is rooted not in his work as an activist or “controversial personality” but in the sermons he professed “as a pastor”, where the Christian sense of love “is the imperative” (King 1964b). I am not able to present this Christian sense of love as it appears through King’s dissent in any exhaustive ways, but I do want to read closely from the first published collection of King’s sermons, *Strength to Love*, wherein Christian love is shown to be primary for civil disobedience. King’s vision within the general character of dissent of the United States 60s preceded the free-school movement and invigorated schooling reform. The dissent characteristic of this decade is infused into the free-schooling ideals, aspirations and related counter-cultural ideologies. These are differing accounts, a general account of dissent and King’s civil disobedience rooted in Christian love, of what was an overarching “Movement” that refers to a particular “surge of political, academic, and cultural dissent during the 60s” (Miller 2002, 31). I will reconsider United States dissident culture in, around and after the 1960s to see how free-school education may embody and empower dissenting solidarities in ways first established by the black freedom struggles that are described in King’s sermons. Those struggles, as I understand them, were articulated by King in his sermons. It is in King’s sermons that Christian love, through dissent, can attend to what he calls the “grave crisis” of his times, and which speak openly to the general character of dissent that King’s sermons also appeal to.

Consider that student and civil rights worker Gwendolyn Patton, formed as a child activist during the Montgomery bus boycott, saw the anti-war, white Peace Movement as inherently racist, albeit anti-imperialist, if it continued to drop the question of race from its action (Hall 2006, 191). For Patton, who started the National Association of Black Students at the University of Texas at El Paso in 1969, education on the issues of race relations as a form of consciousness raising is necessary for radical activism or dissenting movement for self-determination: “no education, no movement”, she says (Benson 2015, 188). The “student-worker”, then, one who tries to take seriously education as a necessary precondition for change, who recognizes within the scholarly ethos they are being initiated into potential for social change, becomes emblematic of consciousness-raising movements for it is the student who shoulders the moral burden of their education³ (Benson 2015, 188). It is intelligence *and* goodness, therefore, “head and heart”, cold analyses and ideal visions, strict pursuit of truth and openness, that is needed for light to overcome darkness (King 1964a, 40) The visionary-teacher and theologian Martin Luther King Jr., chose to “stand between” the complacencies of white America and the despair and “bitterness” of Black Nationalists (King 1963, 5-6). King’s ‘in-between’ position, an extremist position, is relevant in providing an image for crisis in and of itself. This is because crisis creates a chasm between the old and the new, and to stand at the center of the chasm is to be open to the crisis itself when most would not be courageous enough to do so. I think that free-schooling education, that which sees itself already as a force for social change, standing between compulsory schooling and revolutionary deschooling as a destruction of the school, already assumes a similarly dissenting posture that recognizes the abilities of students themselves to

³ King says in his sermon “Love in Action” that the church must never “tire of reminding [people] that they have a moral responsibility to be intelligent” (1964a, 38).

initiate change. Extending these descriptions of the movements, I will try to show that free schooling commits itself to a kind of action that initiates a crisis for compulsory schooling. In doing so, the free-school movement draws from King's character of dissent, which is built on a Christian conception of love, and which was captured by the nonviolent movement for social change he directed from December 1955 to April 4, 1968.

King's civil disobedience will be examined. The character of King's dissenting attitude, as a pioneering leader of the 60s protest movements, is shown in the revolutionary force of civil disobedience. King writes to the white moderate while in solitary confinement after disobeying public demonstration laws in Alabama: let the black person march in public demonstrations, let them "make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall" and try to understand why this is necessary for them (1963, 6). Let "nonviolent direct action", even "creative [extremism]", be the product of deep discontent with injustices, with the evils of segregation, indignity and oppression (King, 1963, 5). For King, the sacredness of solidarity ("brotherhood" in his words) relies on the "constructive, nonviolent tension" provided by a crisis situation (King 1963, 2). As King explains, his hope is that such a crisis situation would be strategically installed by his nonviolent direct action, a form of political organization and activism to force dialogue between black communities and their oppressors, and to bring about the death of injustice (King 1963, 2). Nonviolent direct action offers a bridge to dialogue. It takes disobedience against, or negation of, violence as the first step to solidary relations, even if it requires breaking laws that are dehumanizing, accepting and enduring "[ordeals] of jail" and violence or other punishment without retaliation (King 1963, 2). King's nonviolent direct action draws inspiration from the nonviolent character of dissent of the freedom struggle of Gandhi (whom King refers to as the "greatest Christian of the twentieth century" not a member of a Christian church) (Patel 2013,

274). King's nonviolent direct action relies on analyses to determine injustices, "negotiation", and "self-purification" (King 1963, 1). Direct action follows these steps. It presents Black "bodies as a means of laying [their] case before" the consciousness of the community to respond to calls for justice (1963, 2). In a similar way, the 'bodies' of students themselves make their own cases for liberatory modes of schooling, but only when the participants are understood in a humanizing way.

In calling for such dissent or civil disobedience, King calls for "the highest respect for law", which in turn becomes dissent from civil order or white moderation and complacency (1963, 4). King's nonviolent direct action does not create tensions but only brings into the open or rediscovers tensions "already alive" but ignored (1963, 5). This opening of tensions is dissent from the complacencies of order. It represents hopes for solidarity with "the light of human conscience [...] the air of natural opinion" which needs to "protect" the human dignity of the oppressed (1963, 4-5). This is to say that such dissent symbolizes a greater commitment for solidarity. Through its ideals and commitment to a particular kind of dissent for solidary relations, free-schooling can be read as a continuation of King's legacy: free-schooling is a coalition of similar dissenting attitudes, a stand between dissenting attitudes, which begin in dissent from complacency and which call us to higher demands, not of law or civility but of justice for compulsory schooling participants to be seen as persons who can initiate changes (1963, 5). For King's "creative psalm of brotherhood", of solidarity, it is necessary that the "stagnation" of white complacency be disrupted by human effort and political organization (1963, 5). Free-schooling shares in those ideals in the following ways: free-schooling submits to a unifying vision for society to limit the "fracturing in our schools along lines of race, gender, social class, and religion" (Hillis 2013, 175). This is reminiscent of King's vision for a "beloved

community”, a kind of reconciliation wherein we move from the old into a new age (King 1956). A second point on which free-schooling aligns with King’s dissenting vision against the dehumanization of persons has to do with the universality of “human personality”, an upholding of the dignity, sacredness, and contribution to the whole of humanity of individual persons, including children (Hillis 2013, 173). Solidarity, or “brotherhood”, relies on the creative power of love, its redemptive potential; this is love as an active force, reminiscent of the Greek *agape* (Hillis 2013, p 177).

2.4 Strength and love: mass civil disobedience

Calling for a “reign of freedom and a rule of justice” as he accepted his Nobel Peace Prize in December 1964, King describes the state of race relations in the United states: “only yesterday [...] our children, crying out for brotherhood, were answered with fire hoses, snarling dogs and even death [...] And only yesterday more than 40 houses of worship [...] were bombed or burned because they offered a sanctuary to those who would not accept segregation” (King 1964b). Before the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, before racial discrimination in voting in the United States was prohibited, unprovoked state troopers attacked and drove back nonviolent activists who protested voting rights as they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, “en route to the state capitol in Montgomery” (United States Department of Justice 2017). This came on the heels of the murders of voting-rights activists in the city of Philadelphia in Mississippi which, along with other violent acts, “gained national attention”, and which King recalls in his acceptance speech (United States Department of Justice 2017). Later, after President Johnson signed the Act into law, and after the Watts riots erupted, at the emotional and political peak of the struggle, King provided some of his final impressions of the civil rights movement for freedom in an address called “Impasse in Race Relations” captured

in a collection of his lectures originally published after his death in 1968 *The Trumpet of Conscience* (1989) (Livingston 2020, 700). A key point of King's made in that address, and which is picked up in a study by Livingston (2020), is that "mass civil disobedience", a new method for having white authorities yield to justice, should become the higher law to which "nonviolent protest" needs to submit (King 1989, 15). The point of this new method, for King, is to openly and without violence "dislocate the functioning of a city without destroying it", which is more difficult for authorities to stop than wanton destruction (the latter can be overcome by "superior force") (King 1989, 15). The implications for the free-school, in my mind, are perhaps clear: free-schooling similarly tries to disruptively question the functioning of the compulsory school without totally destroying it. This is to say that dissent does not destroy relations between old and new, but would instead, perhaps, allow us to see how we should reorient ourselves to those initial relations. And within that disruption of questioning, an open act of disobedience, may be an opening of spaces for reorientation to the purposes of education, in the context of free-schooling, for change. Reorienting not only oneself but the masses to new forms of organizing around a transformative education is a response to the evils of compulsory schooling. The student themselves, then, and in King's case "the Negro", through their struggle for liberation, becomes one who horrifies authorities as a product of the dehumanizing conditions bestowed upon them (King 1989, 15).

For King, Christian love is a force against evil. Drawing from the Gandhian conception of *satyagraha*, known in English as "passive resistance", though much close to "truth-seeking" or "insistence of truth", which King understands as a love-force or truth-force, King asserts that nonviolent resistance is a Gandhian method "furnished" by a Christian "spirit and motivation" against social evils (1964a, 183). This is King proposing and embodying an interreligious and

international vision, a calling. As King wrote from the United States upon returning from India, the conflict between colonial powers and the Asian and African peoples, exemplified by Gandhi's freedom struggle, is among "the most momentous and critical struggles of the twentieth century" (1964a, 75). In that struggle for freedom and justice, says King, we see the death of evils, of colonialism and imperialism (1964a, 75). Similarly, in King's United States there is a struggle against evil, against oppression and colonialism, and we are seeing its death (1964a, 75).

It may be helpful at this time to review in brief Gandhi's *satyagraha* in the context of Gandhi's (1945) autobiography *The Story of My Experiment with Truth*, originally published in Gujarati in 1927. Here, in Desai's translation, we find that Gandhi was influenced by the Christian anarchist Leo Tolstoy and the Jain poet and social reformer Rajchandra, also known as Raychand, who became Gandhi's mentor. From Tolstoy, Gandhi took that "the kingdom of God is within you", which overwhelmed Gandhi (1945, 172). Gandhi's appreciation for Christianity was fortified by different interpretations of the Bible, which seemed to support his Hinduism (1945, 172). It was Christians, writes Gandhi, some of them in conflict with each other, that "awakened" in him a particular religious quest (1945, 172). From Raychand, Gandhi gathered much through correspondence while the latter was in South Africa. The maxim that Gandhi carried from Raychand involved a "burning passion for self-realization", symbolized in the adage: "I shall think myself blessed only when I see Him in every one of my daily acts" (1945, 112). When they met initially, Gandhi observed that Raychand, at the time a jeweler, tried to intertwine "godly pursuits" with all aspects of his life, including business—this had a great impact on Gandhi, at that time a "briefless barrister" (1945, 113). Raychand, as a spiritual guide or teacher, became Gandhi's "refuge" during times of "spiritual crisis", as Raychand provided a real example for Gandhi of having "living contact" with spirituality (1945, 113-14).

In chapter ten, “Glimpses of Religion”, Gandhi (1945) writes that Gujarati devotional poetry “gripped [his] mind and heart” (51). His guiding principles are summed by this didactic stanza:

For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal;
For a simple penny pay thou back with gold;
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
Every little service tenfold they reward.
But the truly noble know all [persons] as one,
And return with gladness good for evil done. (1945, 51)

Returning with good for evil done is a principle that motivates Gandhi’s designation of struggle, *satyagraha*, or “passive resistance” in English, which he describes in chapter 26 “The Birth of *Satyagraha*” (1945, 389). *Satya* translates into truth and *agraha* into firmness. Clearly, “passive resistance” is too narrow a phrase in English to describe the weight of something like ‘insistence on truth’, where truth-seeking becomes primary to the struggle that Gandhi exemplifies. As described earlier, insistence on truth can be understood as rooted in dissent if we allow that dissent describes a particular movement that enables the overcoming of moral crisis. For example, the moral crisis enabled by the dehumanizing processes of compulsory schools on the lives of its human participants presents a violation of the very being of those human persons. The dehumanized person presents a false portrayal of the person, and, therefore, must be rejected in the name of the seeking of truth. This is one example which tries to connect this struggle for

insistence on truth to the moral crisis of education in the context of the compulsory school. This is one way in which Gandhi's struggle fits into the narrative picture of the free school as a force for public good and social change.

Like King, Gandhi's dissent is rooted in a religious-moral system that is exemplified through a commitment to truth: "let hundreds like me perish, but let truth prevail", Gandhi writes (1945, 7). "Truth", for Gandhi, is the "sovereign principle", not only truth of words, but truth of thought; not only truth that we can conceive as relative truth, but the Absolute Truth, that is God (1945 6). On their quest for Truth, affirmed as well, according to Gandhi, by Christianity and Islam, both were willing to sacrifice those things most dear to them, including life itself (Gandhi, 1945, 7). Truth, both Absolute Truth and the smaller relative truth, is foundational for injustice to be met with the firmness of what passive resistance has come to embody.

In *Strength to Love*, a collection of his sermons published in 1964, King tries to bring the "Christian message to bear on the social evils" of "economic and racial injustice" (1964a, vii). In other words, King tries to attend to the "grave crisis" of the day through a conception of Christian love. I think there are insights to be drawn from particular sermons of King with respect to the dual nature, the political and social preoccupations and commitments of free-schooling advocates. Those commitments, on part of civil rights activists, anti-war activists, and free-schoolers, can be seen as common in that they all try to speak with and humanize the oppressed in the school and in society.

For King, the person of "tender heart", not only of "tough mind", never "depersonalizes life"; this person rather sees all people, including the oppressed, as people, not as industry or utility or military regiments (1964a, 5). If we extend King's principle here to the schooling

systems of compulsion, “unjust [systems]”, we can see that to “passively accept” such systems is to become complacent; it is to partake in their “evil” (1964a, p6-7). And so, it would seem free-schooling, in opposing the evils of compulsion and segregation, no longer runs with the complacency, the evil, of the schools of old. That kind of insight for change requires not just a tenderness of spirit, to see the participants as persons, but also a toughminded approach to interrogate through analysis a method of fighting and resisting for justice. In the “quest for freedom”, says King, through “nonviolent resistance”, a form of dissent, one combines “tenderheartedness” with “toughmindedness” to guide one’s “action in the present crisis in race relations” (1964a, 7). This imagery recalls, for King, the strength of God’s justice as well as the gentleness of God’s embrace (1964a, 8).

In “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”, King writes:

In spite of the tensions and uncertainties of this period something profoundly meaningful is taking place. Old systems of exploitation and oppression are passing away; new systems of justice and equality are being born. In a real sense this is a great time to be alive. Therefore, I am not yet discouraged about the future. Granted that the easygoing optimism of yesterday is impossible. Granted that we face a world crisis which leaves us standing so often amid the surging murmur of life's restless sea. But every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. It can spell either salvation or doom. In a dark, confused world the Kingdom of God may yet reign in the hearts of men. (1964a, 187)

King’s employment of crisis is relevant here, as there is profound meaning to be drawn from these dark times of instability. Even within the predatory organization of a capitalistic society that compulsory schooling reproduces, there are opportunities as well as dangers to consider. Whatever we face in the present crisis, there are always opportunities simultaneously arising; in the restlessness of our times there is both birth and death to be found. Free-schooling can extend this principle in its reimagining of education in a new form, the free-school. The

1960s presented this critical juncture that King recalls: between the deaths of “exploitation and oppression” and the births of “justice and equality” emerges a movement for Civil Rights out of which free-schooling is realized, however temporary and fragmented (1964a, 187). It is within our “hearts”, King says, that the movement takes shape and where one could attend to the crisis, not exclusively at the level of policy legislation or institutional mandates (1964a, 187). It is that personal sentiment that free-schooling, at its best, could run with to reposition students, now student-workers, as participants in social change who take with them not only a tough-minded approach to social analyses but a tenderness to love, to see love as its own creative force. Patterson (2018) writes that it was studying under the Boston personalist school that gave King the insight that personality was the basis for the covenant of heart relying on personal revelation.

2.5 Covenant of heart and worldly fellowship

Patterson (2018) asserts that King’s beloved community is irreconcilable with “secular democratic theory” because it relies on personal conversion into King’s Christian faith. This relies on a particular and limited conception of conversion. The beloved community as an alternative to the present community also relies on a broader dissent from the current injustices or social evils. That dissent requires “sacrifice of individual interests for the common good” and shows that “King preserved a covenant model of personal responsibility to community and God” (Patterson 2018). For King, according to Patterson, democratic dissent had to obey the moral authority of the church to produce social change (Patterson 2018). Through his “reinterpretations of the Protestant covenant”, Patterson writes, King believed in personal responsibility to achieve community goals (2018). Nonviolent direct action (even though for King it was an expression of sacrificial love) as a means to justice was embraced by student organizations (like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and lives on as an emblematic example of civil

disobedience already in dialogue with democratic forms of organizing (Wright 2010). King's vision, however irreconcilable as it may be with a particular rendering of secular democracy, preaches the "consequences of loving action"—the personal freedom to choose as well as reject God's love— as well as its causes, which was rendered as a universal calling that "transcended" political labels, denominations, and appealed even to nonbelievers (Patterson 2018). There is a central role for dissent from violence as civil disobedience in King's unifying and comprehensive vision, one that can be understood within the characters of dissenting attitudes and movements of the times. Patterson (2018) argues that King champions "divine law mediated by the church", divine monarchy, over "democratic law", and therefore that King proceeds from a language foreign to secular democracy (127). This does not speak to the notion that religious sentiment, in many varieties, is already infused into the functioning and imaginary of the secular democratic state. Nor does it recognize the radical and revolutionary tenor of King's vision—surely such radical social visions would not be reconcilable with the current status quo, and this precisely why King's disobedience represents a wide-ranging social critique and proposes political upheaval against injustice. The secular democratic state had to be transformed; the state as it was could not integrate King's vision for the vision required a personal integration, or conversion. If we take the state-religion to be the natural one, then, of course, any movement away from that becomes irreconcilable with its natural purity. Moreover, King's vision was not only a "national calling" (Patterson 2018, 125) as Patterson portrays it but a more radical worldly calling, a world-wide fellowship that tried to do away with differences of race, class and nation: King writes that "disciplined nonconformists [...] dedicated to justice, peace, and brotherhood" would uphold hope for the world and meet "the demands of the gospel" (1964a, 15). So, while there is no denying King's particular religious commitments, how those commitments are

already in dialogue with other traditions, where we can draw commonalities between traditions, and the unifying character of a strategic dissent in general (through the pursuit of truthful ends by moral means) are aspects of King's ecumenical vision that can still be foregrounded. It is an error, in my mind, a kind of sanitizing of the struggle that the vision attends to, to trivialize it by comparison with the state-religion of complacency—it is precisely that kind of complacency that the struggle needs to be situated against.

Drawing from Miller (2002), Hall (2006), Gandhi, and from King, I have tried to present a partial vision of the character of King's dissenting vision in relation to the conditions for free-schooling. That vision is understood in the context of King's sermons or religious professing to a congregation, and it is within those sermons we find sacrificial love necessary for civil disobedience. As a movement, free-school similarly called for a re-commitment to education as a social movement for solidarity with its participants, and in many respect can be linked to the precepts of King. Free schooling takes as foundational its dissenting position in relation to the compulsion of mass schooling, just as King dissents from the state-religion of complacency. It is clear that free-schooling owes a debt to the black freedom struggles, as free-schooling itself becomes the "practice of civil disobedience", the installation of crises, or the movement of crisis through dissent (Miller 2002, 20). I have presented descriptions of dissent as civil disobedience through King. And so, I have tried to describe what is a vast scene wherein different streams of dissent, different "streams of intellectual influence and activist struggle", feed into overarching dissenting movements or forces against differing conceptions of injustice (Miller 2002, 18). The free-school movement arose on the back of "social, political, and intellectual tensions" that had been boiling for much of the century (Miller 2002, 18). Free-schooling as an anti-institutional expression of dissent calls for a new kind of participation in what was previously known as mass

schooling. But since there are many alternatives to mass compulsory schooling, what free-schooling as a movement proposes can be articulated across many examples. Freedom Schools are one such example. Dissent in the freedom schools is shown to build trust or solidarities across boundaries, particularly for racial and economic minorities. Free-schools as such are the sites of true coalition as opposed to segregation. These are places where strangers become teachers and teachers are severely underqualified by traditional standards of competency.

As a living example, we can consider the aforementioned Albany Free School. As former co-director and “figurehead” Mercogliano (1998) writes in *Making It Up as We Go Along: The Story of the Albany Free School*, today free-schooling is joined by “alternative” and “homeschooling”. The Albany free schools presents a vision for free-schooling that, while it dissents from the compulsion of mass schools, does not see itself explicitly as a broader social movement for change. It is documented in Suchak’s and Root’s documentary film *Free to Learn: A Radical Experiment in Education* (2010). The documentary shows that the free school has strayed far from its ideological beginnings. As a private entity, it is rather cut off from the mainstreams and yet sustains itself from the same, public means. In this school, children are free to learn in some ways because they are free to dissent away from the old ways of compulsory schooling, but the teachers there do see themselves empowering young people to influence the broader societies or attend to injustices, and they reveal as much. In the Albany free school, while there is no need to feign any authoritative appeals to the old organization of compulsion, there is not a comprehensive creative project, or vision for solidarity, at the heart of the activities taking place there. The children themselves, even having become the curriculum, even keeping up the school building by replastering its walls, are not intentionally understood as contributing to their larger communities; it is rather the case that the school still employs an individuated

approach. Here, even though the children really get to ‘feel’ being part of the decision-making processes that in common schools would be administered away from them, they are not seen to be included in and influencing their social contexts. And so, while the Albany free school appears as an attempt at some democratic organization of the school which tries to center the power of its participants, it only does so within the very narrow margins of a whitewashed and sedated conception of education. There remains a disconnect between education as presenting its own setting for formation of the individual, and education as it is conceived in a manner external to the motivations of the individual person. Still, the primary subjects of the Albany free school, on account of their very being organized, as children and as ‘autonomous’ persons, appear to represent a radical departure from the moral-legal ideologies of the compulsory schools that center a faceless conformist production. The ways of old compulsory schooling rely on external judgement and approval wherein ignorance of the pupil is first assumed as a gap that the teacher fills. The Albany free school, by contrast, relies on a sense of standards that for the individual are personally meaningful—this represents the beginning of a free-school that could be something greater with respect to social change. That conception of the personal, however, is never considered within a broader community, a context, for social change, and therefore the person of this particular school never commits themselves through sacrifice to any higher forms of justice, or relationship, for the community. The Albany free school, therefore, provides a ready example of free-schooling that shares much in common with the compulsory schools: it becomes its own entity, interested not in justice or coalition but with maintaining its own significance, feeding from the run-off of the mass systems it tries to counter and critique.

2.6 An approximation of free-schooling ideology in Mississippi freedom schools

What free-schooling proposes has been articulated in relation to a particular vision for dissent in broad strokes. Closer to what was envisioned in this writing early on, we find an example in the Mississippi freedom schools of education working for social change. The example of the Mississippi freedom schools provides an approximation of free-schooling ideology as I have tried to reinterpret and present it here in relation to moral crisis, crisis as predicament of history, and in relation to dissent that enables the overcoming of crisis.

Howard Zinn is the author of *SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee): The New Abolitionists*, and in the mid-sixties taught in a Mississippi freedom school. In the article “Schools in Context: The Mississippi Idea”, Zinn (1964) asserts that “education spells danger to certain people at certain times” (3). Zinn was writing in reference to a triple murder of civil rights workers in the city of Philadelphia in Mississippi who had planned to set up a freedom school at Mount Zion Baptist Church (1964, 3). Zinn maintains that the freedom schools of Mississippi represented a particular “promise” of education for “Negro youngsters” between the ages of 6 and 26 (1964, 3). The classroom of the freedom school was “assembled in church basements or on the streets or in the fields”, altogether without methods for evaluating student progress, without the keeping of attendance records, and without grades (1964, 3). Zinn is careful to not sentimentalize the experiment: because the freedom schools cannot be judged by the ordinary standards of success or failure, one should not champion them too enthusiastically (1964, 3). An account of one freedom school, in Oxford, Mississippi, made the dangerous situation clear for the teachers and students:

“You’ll arrive in Ruleville, in the Delta. It will be 100°, and you’ll be sweaty and dirty. You won’t be able to bathe often or sleep well or eat good food. The first day of school, there may be four teachers and three students. And the local Negro minister will phone to say you can’t use his church basement after all, because his life has been threatened. And the curriculum we’ve drawn up—Negro history and American government—may be something you know only a little about yourself. Well, you’ll knock on doors all day in the hot sun to find students. You’ll meet on someone’s lawn under a tree. You’ll tear up the curriculum and teach what you know.” (1964, 4)

Eventually, enrollment grew through word of mouth to two-thousand, as the teacher-volunteers spread over the state, even though they were told to prepare themselves for “violence, injury, even death” (1964, 4). Some freedom schools were burned down, others were bombed, and others were sensationalized in the headlines, described as intent on teaching people to disobey the law (as if there were no laws higher than state laws) (1964, 5-6). Door-to-door teachers and students went advertising how freedom schools taught civil rights, “Negro history [...] maybe Spanish”, in ways regular schools could not (1964, 5). Teachers stayed in neighborhood black homes, and some students slept in the schools. The teachers of freedom schools had to be nimble, as some acted simultaneously as “principal, janitor, recreation supervisor, and father confessor” (1964, 4). What sorts of teachers would open themselves to these experiences, to work for free in the Mississippi heat and risk far more than they normally might risk? For Zinn, these are teachers of particular enthusiasm and, above all, social conscience (1964, 6). The setting which was created for and by the freedom school community was not merely academic but personal and moral, understood even by the young ones as part of a “universal plea” for education (1964, 6). As Zinn shows through different examples, this was a kind of schooling that pushed students from study to action, whether it was writing letters to the editor of a publication, role playing to consider different arguments, writing and analyzing

literature, or later attending mass rallies, helping to register voters, in general to truly “question things around them for the first time” (1964, 10).

The black Mississippi Freedom Schools were anti-authoritarian and anti-statist movements of the times. They are examples that show quite clearly the dangers as well as the possibilities for dissenting movement in overcoming and responding to moral crisis situations. The freedom schools were schools that “violated all the rules and regulations of educational orthodoxy” (Zinn 1964, 3). Many teachers in the black freedom schools were not formally trained, and they consulted not textbooks for lessons but their lives, “trying to link the daily headlines with the best and deepest of [human] intellectual tradition” (Zinn 1964, 6). The foundational questions posed by the freedom schools are not unlike the initiating dissenting forces of the free-schools: the Mississippi experiment asks can we bring students and teachers together “not through the artificial sieve of certification and examination but on the basis of their common attraction to an exciting social goal?” (1964, 10). Such questions were posed “inside a common cradle of concern” for one another, and so affection inevitably sprang up between the participants (1964, 6). Zinn articulates the primary propositions of the Freedom Schools:

Can we solve the old educational problem of teaching children crucial values, while avoiding a blanket imposition of the teacher's ideas? [...] the educational process cherishes equality, justice, compassion and world [solidarity][...] Is it not possible to create a hunger for those goals through the fiercest argument about whether or not they are worthwhile? [...]

Is there, in the floating, prosperous, nervous American social order of the sixties, a national equivalent to the excitement of the civil rights movement, one strong enough in its pull to create a motivation for learning that even the enticements of monetary success cannot match? Would it be possible to declare boldly that the aim of schools is to find solutions for poverty, for injustice, for race and national hatred, and to turn all educational efforts into a national striving for these solutions? (Zinn 1964, 10)

This is Zinn spelling out the hopes for reorientation to the seeking of truth in the context of a democratic education as its own public good and for justice and social change. The departure from coercion-conformity proposed by freedom schools, those departures as the strivings described by Zinn, coupled with the vision for schools as freedom movements in and of themselves, in my mind, represents a greater commitment to dissent, which itself shows a particular re-commitment, a relationship, to the dissident, that is the person (the student or teacher) who dissents from popular opinion, from popular schooling, in the name of truth, or freedom of the participants. Freedom schools show that through the movement of dissent may emerge possibilities for solidarity building, and that building relies on a kind of questioning of complacency, or the installation of a crisis via critique, to challenge injustice and reaffirm what is true, “in the constant awareness of exclusion, humiliation, and threat” (Greene 1988, 88). Maxine Greene, in “Multiplicities, Pluralities, and a Common World”, chapter four of *The Dialectic of Freedom*, shows that the black freedom struggle and black intellectual tradition of the United States gives expression to the “archetypal predicament of the outsider” (1988, 87). Free-schooling in the shape of freedom schools of Mississippi show an experiment of democratic education, the hopes for an emancipatory public pedagogy, the death of mass school, and the birth of a free school, one that gives expression to struggle and solidarity, to truth-seeking by moral critique and moral means. For King, this kind of dissent away from popular opinion, even the state itself, has to be willing to uphold the pursuit of truth (King 2001, 337). This describes the commitment and calling of King, which he explains through anti-war sentiment infused with his religious faith. In “Beyond Vietnam”, King recalls his early days of ministry of Jesus Christ: he takes from the Pauline adage “Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of minds” that one needs to work even against national

allegiances, or allegiances to the common schooling systems, to affirm truth as revealed by God (King 2001, 337-38).

As Zinn (1964) writes, the freedom schools of Mississippi show that schools of radical flavor “can be created in any community outside the official order” if leaders can remain critical of the suppositions of mass schooling (10). This sort of education, Zinn writes, ought to “be dangerous” so as to be its own social movement for change (1964, 10).

In Jon N. Hale’s (2016) *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*, a history of the Mississippi freedom schools is presented. Segregated schooling of the Deep South of the time, of the Jim Crow system, “governed by hegemonic racial sensibilities [...] was a microcosm of the larger segregated society” and against which freedom schools arose (Hale 2016, 3). Hale shows that the civil rights activists who organized freedom schools did so as part of broader efforts to “register disenfranchised black voters” (2016, 69). More than this, the particular pedagogical and curricular commitments of the schools show that what organizers had in mind was the active inculcation of youth “with a participatory notion of American citizenship” (Hale 2016, 69). The history of schooling in the south is marked by “denial and exclusion” (Hale 2016, 20). The reason for this is that, since the beginning of the schooling system of the northern colonies of the United States in the seventeenth century, enslaved communities were forbidden from learning to read for reading set out a “pathway from slavery to freedom” (Hale 2016, 22). In this context, learning to reading, becoming an educated person, meant learning “though illegal and clandestine means” (Hale 2016, 20). This, in other words, can be understood as learning through a kind of dissent. More importantly, becoming an educated, literate person became part of the struggle for freedom and for citizenship (Hale 2016, 20). The nineteenth-century abolitionist Frederick Douglass exemplifies this struggle to fight for

even a basic literacy The freedom schools were organized accordingly and similar schools built off of generations “passing down transcripts of resistance” became demanded by freed slaves during the start of the Civil War and throughout American history (Hale 2016, 20). As Hale writes, contextualizing the Mississippi freedom schools in this history of resistance shows that this particular kind of schooling against injustice advanced the civil rights activism, even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 which desegregated the southern school system (Hale 2016, 20). Freedom schools as such were interested in the work of resistance, dissent through integration, and the concretization of the promises of democracy—in short, education as the practice of freedom, advancing the civil rights movement (Hale 2016, 34). Education as the practice of freedom, against education as it is conceived in the common compulsory schools, becomes education through dissent from schooling.

2.7 On death of the compulsory school

With all this concern for moving beyond our current situation of compulsory mass schooling, there is a more primary concern for how to attend to the death of school as we know it today. But it should be clear that death of the compulsory school does not entail a total loss or destruction of compulsory school or school in general. After all, the free school is still a kind of school, even though it works actively against the mass, state school of the day. In Rocha’s words, “moving beyond or outside does not entail [...] forgetting” (2020b, 30). As abovementioned, the free school presents a dislocation of compulsion, which opens schooling up to be reconsidered, or more fully remembered, not to “civilize and urbanize” education but to reassert the educational character of the school in the form of a question (for Rocha, “what is education?”) (Rocha 2020b, 34). The history of schooling for disenfranchised persons, namely racial and economic minorities, and slaves, in the United States illustrates the power behind such a

question. In my view, following these strands, dissent from compulsory schooling is not a total upheaval of relations between participants and the school but a kind of recommitment against “miseducation” that we see in the “objectified subject”, the person, of the compulsory school who is dehumanized (Rocha 2020b, 29). Dissent from the compulsory school is not an entire rejection of relations but carries with it understanding, mystery even, from the old school to the new school, where the subject would remain central. This is to note, first, that the compulsory school, the people of the school, cannot be abandoned entirely, as explained by Rocha (2015) in *Folk Phenomenology*, and that to dislocate schooling from its common surroundings is to attempt to “re-enchant education with mystery”, thereby shaking the compulsory school of its “living [death]” (52). Elsewhere, Rocha (2020b) in *The Syllabus as Curriculum*, builds on these assertions to show that even though we might reject the processes and assumptions of the compulsory school by signaling its death and moving to the free school, we still carry on some life of compulsory school or some of its baggage. After all, again, even the free school does not drop the school moniker, even though it is altogether functionally opposed to the operations of the compulsory school. In free-schooling, the death of compulsory school signals a crisis of authority, which provokes critique. The death of compulsory schooling, as Rocha (2015) writes, refers to the particular mood that would set in in this absence of compulsory schooling authority (7). Free-schooling, in questioning the authority of the compulsory school, already prepares itself to fill the void left by that death. The point here is that death, in one sense, needs to be a total transformation: even if afterlife is granted, it is of an entirely different character, being situated on a different stage. So it is for the relations between the ‘old’ compulsory school and the ‘new’ free school. While the compulsory school may live on in many ways after its death, even if it is rebirthed and appears in different forms, it cannot survive its own death. That death, in my mind,

a kind of transformation, is what free-schooling signals when questioning the authority of compulsory schooling, in attending to the death of compulsion in schooling.

2.8 Concluding thoughts: against individuated schooling

I have tried to show that one can understand free-schooling in the light of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, particular forms of unpopular activism, to present a vision of dissent for solidarity with schooling participants, or mass civil disobedience, primarily inspired by the sermons and writing of Martin Luther King Jr.. Free-schooling, therefore, I have proposed as a social movement for change that comes with many risks and uncertainties but is also an expression of the common yearning for freedom. In thinking again about some of the connections I offered between the themes in play in section 2.1, I want to assert again that different senses of crisis have been outlined as requiring the movement of dissent to be overcome. The particular character of dissent I am nesting in the time period of the sixties era, for it is out of that time and that character that free schooling as a re-orienting of participants to education occurred. Therefore, it is from those times, from those dissenting visions and characters, that we can stand to reflect on what we might learn. One thing that we can learn is that the crises situations, historical instances or predicaments and moral crises, crises of hearts, are not altogether unrelated, that death of one schooling regime does not rid us of problems with conceptualizing education nor of the primary setting for the idea of education for the individual to be articulated.

It seems any movement that would obsessively advocate for ‘freedom’ “at the expense” of other values should account for and guard against potential excesses or slides into “madness” (Miller 2002, 32). This is true at a practical level because there are real “dangers associated with

challenging the white establishment”, as has been established (Cordero 2016, 8). Many young students who initiated and continued the civil rights movements did so on the basis of a sustained “critique of modern culture” for a “transformation of consciousness” which the compulsory school could not escape (Miller 2002, 32). This gets to the heart of the free-schooling movement’s ideology: it is a defense of what is authentically human against technocracy, “an onslaught of mechanization, standardization, and routine” (Miller 2002, 33). This makes free-schooling a critique of “liberal reforms of public education” as well, which would not attend to broader questions about the relevance of formal schooling for the education of racial and economic minorities (Miller 2002, 37). So free-schooling is truly a wide ranging and multifaceted moral-social critique more than it is a commentary about schooling proper. The free-schooling movement, then, was in fact representative (through its various instantiations) of the 60s counter-cultural movement that sought “a total transformation of American society”, a movement that can be traced to the beginnings of resistance to the disenfranchisement of slaves (Miller 2002, 39). I think that considering free-schooling as a continuation of the ideals of the civil rights movements of the 60s, shows its family resemblance to something like deschooling, which proceeds from similar critiques not only of schooling but of the organization of larger society, of social relations, and of the place of schooling within those contexts. Free-schooling, like deschooling, also proceeds from the personal critique that maintains that compulsory schooling has personal affective consequences, that it instrumentalizes the person: Peter Marin remarked that, in compulsory schools, it is the “will” of oneself that the student is pushed to relinquish in order that they become sedated, “manipulable and obedient” (Miller 2002, 40). That is a depressing state of things which the free schools on account of their very being are in positions to counter. In place of the rigidity and coldness of the compulsory schools, free-

schooling envisioned a cooperative and encouraging community, which recalls King's beloved community, a unifying context for addressing pressing issues (Miller 2002 42). And so, as I have tried to show, primary to the free-schooling ideology is dissent from the complacency and repression of students under modern, mass compulsory schooling, which is the kind of dissent that engenders crisis. This kind of dissent is necessary for redefining education as a context empowering social change and solidarity with students, their personal experiences, needs and expressions (Miller 2002, 43).

Like the Mississippi freedom schools, the free-school is against an individuated approach to issues of schooling and rather proposes a collective or community approach to solving schooling issues. In the compulsory school, on the other hand, issues of schooling are placed on individual shoulders: the teacher singularly is responsible for teaching their particular classes of students, and likewise students are individually to carry their burdens of learning what is taught and showing and proving what they have learned. This point is articulated by Kristan Accles Morrison in a 2007 book titled *Free School Teaching: A Journey into Radical Progressive Education* (vii). To conclude, I want to engage with Morrison's text to show that, beyond the moral critiques already alluded to and offered, progressive educators offer other, multifaceted examinations of problems with the modern states of compulsory schooling. Articulation of those problems can help in returning to what the free school proposes and why it is important to consider in relation to the crisis of education as education is conceived in the common compulsory schooling systems. This concluding section, then, provides a review of some reasons why continual critiques of compulsory schooling are needed, and how abandoning those critiques only reasserts the crises for education, crises of educational authority within the schools, that I began with.

Morrison asserts that the fundamental issue of schooling reform is the position of the reformer who attempts to “tweak” to solve issues within the school instead of looking more systematically at the compulsory schooling contexts. Morrison calls this flawed approach a “personalized” one, where systemic issues become “personalized” (2007, vii). I instead refer to this approach as an individuated, internalized or disassociated approach where systemic issues are placed on individual shoulders, disassociated from their social contexts. For Morrison, students who within the compulsory schooling systems become “losers” feel that they themselves (or other individuals) are to shoulder the blame for not being gifted enough or “not working hard enough” to meet the demands of compulsory schooling (2007, vii). This can put individual teachers and students at odds, making one responsible for the shortcomings of the other (2007, vii). The individual teacher may find themselves unable to grasp student issues, being armed with the incorrect methods to transform poor students into good, high-performing ones. The student, meanwhile, may see the teacher as the hunter and them the hunted. Outside of schools, parents may internalize the failures of their children, feeling that if only they spent more time collaboratively on schoolwork, the child would fare better in school (2007, vii). The individual voter, similarly, may see ‘failures’ of schools as a product of incompetent administrative leaders (2007, vii). These individuated approaches to issues of compulsory schooling, those that place blame for the failures of schooling on individual shoulders, of schoolboard trustees for instance, fail to recognize the compulsory schooling system in its systemic context (2007, vii). Individuated approaches to schooling are content with judgment and the placing of blame. This is the foreground upon which issues of compulsory schooling within particular societies arise and without which issues of schooling are not properly intelligible. Without a systemic context of compulsory schooling issues, according to Morrison,

one would attempt to address individual aspects within the compulsory schooling system (2007, viii). The thrust of Morrison's argument assumes that we need to conceive of new visions for education (but, as I would add, only after the death of compulsory schooling systems) (2007, viii). This entails a death of the disassociated, internalized or individuated approaches to issues of compulsory schooling, as well.

In signaling the death of compulsory schooling, free-schooling proposes differing visions for the education of the person, including the child who is no longer a mere thing to be manipulated. This kind of education for a person to become more themselves, to become their own force for social change, needs to be made distinct from questions having to do with compulsory or common, state schooling. After considering some consequences of compulsory schooling, the need for the death of schooling as a conceptual tool may be clearer.

The free-schooling ideology helps to show that the terms 'schooling' and 'education' are used loosely, interchangeably, or indiscriminately among policy makers in order to align compulsory schooling with particular training for work in the labor economies. The descriptor 'free' or 'freedom', on the other hand, changes the setting of compulsion fundamentally. Compulsory schooling describes the formal systems that emerge historically as an instrumental-rational mode of social control of mass populations, trainings for initiation into the market economies. Such compulsory schooling is formal in that it is temporally bound, set within a defined framework wherein success and failure are pre-determined, and wherein class cultures and workers in the labor-economies are produced. For John Taylor Gatto in "The Curriculum of the Family", one of the primary functions of schools is to teach young people how to remain perfectly sedated in a continuous present, much like the present media interfaces try to do, or more simply it teaches them "how to obey orders" (2001, 14). By extension, the implication

becomes that the deadening of compulsory schooling has no interest in the education of the person to become themselves and transcend the schooling enclosures to elicit change in their surroundings. Instead, the disciplinary aspects of school are tightly bound with the kind of education installed by the compulsory school.

And yet, there are relevant counter-cultural and dissenting forces already living within the compulsory schools themselves that are articulated alongside and against the school. In *Learning to Labor*, first published in 1978, Paul Willis (2000) describes British compulsory schooling as a site of resistance for “working class, unqualified, disaffected” young boys who in their coming together as “the lads” make up a creative counter-cultural force against the school and its conformism (Willis 2000, 119). My reading of Willis is that the lads are not given special status in the school to transcend it as much as their unique informal grouping is articulated as a counter in its own right whose powers emerge in subtle ways against the dominating school. These students challenge and reject the deep-seated fallacy that “opportunities” are created by compulsory schooling itself, that to be educated by such schooling is to push oneself, as an individual, upward to new openings for the challenging of class structure (2000, 127). Willis tries to show that the schooling of these young boys is at least complicit in legitimizing and reproducing a class society, “class position and privilege” wherein “[refusals] to compete” in the schooling hierarchy, the rat-races of credentialism, become “radical [acts]” (2000, 128). Again, dissent appears at the center of the moral critique and provides bridges for overcoming the moral crisis; this is dissent from credentialism and movement toward more solidary relations. The compulsory schools as such are not concerned with the education of the person but with the filtering and stratification of people into class societies. The informal grouping of the lads presents a pointed case for counter-school culture that penetrates the naturalized schooling

ideologies to uncover the true ‘work’ of school which reflects the social organization of labors, of capitalist production, of the working-class (2000, 146). Primary to his general argument, Willis notes that under “advanced capitalism”, mass compulsory schooling for the state functions to reproduce “the [structures] of society itself”, legitimizing some appearance of its own institutionalized autonomy relative to other social systems (2000, 59). The undercurrent of Willis’ ethnography is an articulation, or more accurately a sustained questioning, of the “legitimacy of school as an institution” (2000, 18) and particularly for working class children whom under the schooling logics become “ignorant”, “awkward”, “disobedient” (2000, 72). For Willis, youth culture partially penetrates the schooling mobility myths, and through that penetration desperate questions are raised about the transition for youth into adulthood. The transition describes the step-by-step training for movement from schoolwork, including homework, to the real-world work of labor. One point to make here is to propose the following: even in compulsory schooling, what are children already doing, how are they organizing in ways, and how might we empower them in their dissenting ways to focus those energies for solidarity? This is where the free or freedom schools become relevant in nurturing those self-governing and dissenting capacities of persons to engender social change, capacities which are already being developed even within the mass schools, albeit covertly.

In sum, critics of free-school education should note that free-schooling emerges from the distinct dissenting attitudes of civil rights activists of the American 1960s. Free-schooling owes a debt to the black freedom schools and student protest movements. But free-schooling is more than a utopian, romantic dream that was the product of historical contingencies. This is because the ideologies of free-schooling, its educational visions, call us to higher concerns for personal meaning, for justice and solidarity that have been articulated. Free-schooling already recognizes

that students on account of their very being pose challenges for the coercion of the compulsory school. Free-schooling as such shows a commitment to the schooling participants, allowing them to be primary to curricula. It is worth noting the ways in which compulsory schooling participants already form counter-cultural forces that are personal and dissenting. And it is always within a spirit of dissent for organizing around solidarities that any conception of free-schools must begin, because free-schools represent forces for social change that recognize the primacy of students as persons. Free-schooling, then, is a creative as well as dissenting force that answers to the alienation of the modern technocratic and predatory-capitalistic state.

I have tried in this essay to present dissent as civil disobedience and in the form of free-schooling. The death of compulsory schooling comes as a result of sustained schooling critique, and it allows us to reconsider the how schooling itself as imposition not only invites rebellion but creates a crisis for the idea of education itself. The death of schooling implies that schooling needs to die in order for education to be something living, rather than the competition-economy that the politicians continue to paint it as. It is the death of schooling that initiates a crisis for schooling to be reconsidered, and it is the moral crisis of the sixties through which free schooling and freedom schooling ideologies emerge and through the pursuit of justice and solidarity coalesce. Rocha warns of messianism via schooling masquerading as education. It is the same kind of messianism of the orator that one needs to guard against in the sermons of the preacher King or the revolutionary Gandhi. It is a good thing, then, that there are mounds of literary-moral substance to back up the rhetoric of both; this is not the mere rhetoric of activism for its own sake, commercialized and toothless. King's world vision, for example, as expressive of the black freedom struggle is more extreme and unpopular, initiating one into the life project of the search for freedom. Free schooling, as it was established by activists, emerges from that struggle for

liberation, seeking to continue the work of the civil rights movement, but it is also born out of the basic desire for a child to be taught by his mother in the context of a home, in a more free atmosphere than the common school allows. The free school movement, then, including the Mississippi freedom schools, has its roots in organizing for social change. King, through his Christian love, that which is sacrificial, understanding, and absolutely common within all persons, shows that the oppression of the Negro, as well as that of children caught in war, was related in a necessary way to the conditions placed upon school children. Truth is at the center of King's faith, and it is commitment to the seeking of truth (recalling Gandhi's *satyagraha*) that motivates the moral critique of King, which at once describes the crisis around race relations and provokes the crisis of authority and complacency he is trying to install to disrupt complacency and order.

Chapter 3: Reconciling internal crisis, and dislocation through diaspora and journey

3.1 Introduction

This essay considers dislocation of the migrant as a point or initiator of internal crisis. I want to say that the internal crisis allows for or provokes dislocation, and that dislocation can carry with it images of crisis through quests and movements across geo-cultural boundaries. The movements are embodied by the migrant and their particular, local affiliations and identity articulations which undergo change. The movements are shown in literary depictions of migrant affiliations to accentuate and at times disturb their hyphenated social-political communal identities. Through dislocation is opened possibilities for new sightlines through hybrid positionalities. Migrant characters are considered as parts of the literary image of dislocation, as it is experienced internally and expressed in different settings, over generations, emerging and reemerging, and “residing in private and/or collective memory” (Malak 1993, 277) . For the migrant, their homeland is at times the ambivalent force of fate. They can be caught between memories of past homes while trying to belong in new ones. Within those stories of constraints, I locate identity-spiritual crises. While there is risk around assuming such in-between positions like fluid movement across ideological boundaries (the neither-Hindu-nor-Muslim Vassanji, for instance) there is also hope expressed through translation, that it offers needed third-views, ‘outsider’ views, or what Rushdie (1991) in *Imaginary Homelands* calls “stereoscopic vision” of the migrant (19). At the same time, however, cultural translation as a fragmentation, a reopening and re-making of boundaries, is threatening to images of purity and it is hardly, if ever, a smooth process of mutual transaction. Evidence for this can be seen in the varied reception of diasporic works: some see the diasporic writer as a savior of tradition, and yet others as infidels or

apostates. In other words, dislocation in the migrant literary imaginary, as it is given expression in different media, has to at least contend with loss. Neither is there a pristine homeland for the migrant to return to; nor it seems is there an idyllic new land to transform into home in one swift motion. In Vassanji's novels, short stories and travel writings it is instead that despite a diasporic, geo-cultural displacement triggering decolonization as a transformation for the individual, the home of old seeks remembrance and is always haunting the possibilities for new life (Ozawa 2019, 84). Within stories of migrant displacement, for the writers as well as their characters, personal-communal identities become difficult things to reconcile.

I understand crisis as an internal state for the migrant. It is sometimes expressed as a spiritual sickness, or a rot. Crisis describes experiences of discontinuity with respect to one's identity, through the movements of the migrant. This is sometimes referred to as 'identity crisis', but I want to show that it sometimes appears as a symptom for the deeper sickness of soul which sets the character on a quest of a different character. Both the sickness and quest are given expression as a kind of longing in different literary or poetic media that I will examine. The image of a deeper dislocation can be located in many literary figures and literatures, and is not limited to English literature of the Afro-Asian diaspora, or to diasporic literatures in general. In my mind, it is instead that English literatures of the various diasporic communities can be housed within the journey literatures.

In this chapter, to begin, I will try to articulate the forces of formation behind the experiences of identity crisis as internal state for "Muslim East African Asians from Tanzania with historical roots in India and Pakistan" transplanted to Canada in M.G. Vassanji's long-short-story *No New Land* (Steiner 2005, 459). I want to see what has pushed people, writers and their characters, on their quests to reclaim and challenge identities and to reconcile their internal

crises. This requires some flexibility in re-reading and re-telling stories of displacement and identity formation, many of them disturbing, across generations.

Along the way I present different portrayals of responses to this internal crisis, what are searches for self-integrity for writers and their characters. In other settings, there are filial tensions around obligations and inheritances that spur the internal crises. The minority-migrant stories explored illustrate the everyday struggles and everyday faith of developing more tolerant and insightful capacities for seeing through study of oneself, which becomes a particular dedication or devotion.

I conclude with reflections on the seeker's quest as a literary motif in devotional folk poetries or hymns. This analysis centers the position of the folk poetry, which takes place both inside and "outside elite languages" and "courtly settings" (Murphy 2018, 245). In this concluding section, I am motivated by the claim that through translation these literatures present their own dislocations across theological or ideological boundaries. Perhaps these are crises of a different but related character. The transplanting of folk hymns has to account for crises as spiritual quest, including loss of dualities, "color, vitality, significance" and meaning (Vassanji 1999, 3). For me, what folk poetries and stories of migration contribute to understandings of internal crisis today is an opportunity for reflection in dialogue with literatures of diaspora and quest literatures more broadly.

3.2 Identity dislocation in Vassanji's diasporic literary journeys

Reading Vassanji requires that we allow some movement to go to different places in different times. It is not a work of deductive theory or proof but a fictional story framed within other stories and based on real histories. In trying to dislocate ourselves and enter into narratives that hold numerous points of overlapping, and at times surprising, historical and mythological

reference, some willingness to move is needed. One reason for this movement, found in the restless character of the writer themselves, is that Vassanji's writing is colored by his personal experiences of dislocation, of living as an East African Indian who migrates to the United States and Canada. Another reason for the movement can be found in the style of the writing itself. As metafictional tales, Vassanji's writings, including novels and travel-journal memoirs, present narratives within larger stories and ancestral histories that blur the lines between fact and fiction, belonging and not belonging. These stories are, of course, fictional, but the experiences, questions and myths those stories rely on and uncover are not. Vassanji's is literature in English of people of the African-Indian diaspora who engage in life-writing through the writing of fictional narratives of characters seeking identities through dislocation and who try to make sense of their fragmented pasts.

There is a further reason to consider movement as a primary theme in Vassanji's stories of dislocation, because it is against perpetual movement that the migrant seeks themselves. The seeking of the person against, in light of Ortega's words (published originally in 1969) in "The Self and the Other", a "state of tumult", against "alteración", "otheration", is the seeking of a particular kind of life-identity wherein one lives "from [oneself], and therefore not from "what is other" than oneself (Ortega 2019, 180).

The multinational Moyez G. Vassanji was born in Nairobi, Kenya, raised in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, migrated to the United States in early adulthood where he studied nuclear physics at MIT, and resides in Toronto, Canada (Moss 2013, 75). He left his work as a physicist at the University of Toronto to become an author, but he maintains that as a writer he only seeks through different methods the same questions of the physicist—these are questions of fundamental physics, questions of absolute truth, 'who am I? What am I?' (Vassanji 2014, 110).

His ancestors migrated from the Indian subcontinent to Africa in the second-half of the nineteenth century (Ozawa 2019, 42). *No New Land* is a story that, like all of Vassanji's work, takes as a point of departure his ancestral displacement, movement and personal-communal struggle between tradition and looming historical change. The historical change represents a crisis wherein our communal way of living is threatened, wherein the world as we know it is disappearing. It is a story of East-West migration, a kind of time-travel, and reflects the personal story of Vassanji as an 'Indo-Anglian' writer's exploration of trans-national identities, diasporic experiences, in the contexts of intertwined territories. For Vassanji, in the context of *No New Land*, place spans Eastern Africa's Ivory Coast (colonial and post-colonial Tanzania), South-East Asia (British-India and "syncretistic" ancient India), and most prominently the luxury and wilderness of a distant-cosmopolitan Canada where a new home is made (Munos 2016).

As Vassanji writes in his travelogue-memoir-historiography of India *A Place Within: Rediscovering India* (2009), the ancestral homeland of a colonial British-India, in particular the western coast state of Gujarat, is a place whose people are of particular significance for the writer Vassanji—he recognizes them as his people even though he was not raised there and is alienated from their present realities (Vassanji 2009, 24).

Gujaratis were "indispensable to colonial expansion", being of a mercantile caste, shrewd, and brave enough to set up shops in small numbers in the most remote corners of East African Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, and Zanzibar (Vassanji 2009, 245). Vassanji's maternal grandfather was born in the same city as the father of the Indian republic, Mohandas (later the venerable or Mahatma) Gandhi, in the port town of Porbandar (2009, 245). Gandhi embodies a young Vassanji's image of Gujarati personality: nonviolent, tolerant, a show of self-effaciveness, and with a sense of humor. But this vision of his people and their place has to contend with the

present realities of hatred, of communalism (as the Hindu-Muslim conflicts are called), that he witnesses on his trip and which alienates him (Vassanji 2009, 246). That violence is part of the naïve homeland, as well, and perhaps explains why it is possible to be simultaneously “immigrant Gujarati father”, “liberal democrat” and “supporter of Hindu fascism” (2009, 246). This tension in part describes the struggle of reconceptualizing the ancestral homeland: the home of migrant-ancestral imaginaries, both that of the writer and his characters, seeks stability between myth and the real, ongoing ruptures of communal violence, politics of bigotry. That kind of fragmentation, in light of Vassanji’s writing, is part of the Indian freedom-struggle story, one that started before Gandhi but which Gandhi sees through to completion. All of this symbolizes the questions that motivate Vassanji’s travels: surely, the Indian subcontinent geographically, itself “the village”, is the ancestral homeland, but “Where Is It?” (2009, 19). Where is that India of memory truly found, how should one identify with it and rediscover it, and how to come back in truth to it, and is that possible? Is the homeland found in the “gaping mouths housing extreme poverty”, in the small, rural huts or “barren yards”, or in the Muslim and Hindu shrines, or in the fears of disease, of contact, of the smell of people that destroys the “North American puritanical cleanliness”; is the homeland found in that shocking exoticism that whizzes by when travelling the country by train (2009, 22-23)? From afar, from the coastline of Dar es Salaam, a child Vassanji “could look north-eastward to India without wishing to live there”; for Asian-Africans, names like “Bombay” were metonyms for a mythical India. The names themselves had a ring of ancestry, “just enough to live by” within small East African towns “that allowed us, and other Indians, to retain wholesome but not static identities” (2009, 342-43). The “open seashore” of Dar stages the “mysterious communion” carried out by its Asians (Vassanji 2014, 4). However, now, being physically dropped into the ancestral homeland,

on a journey within it, it seems even more difficult for Vassanji to spatially locate the mythical homeland, identify and relate to it, and return in truth to it at all. “A Place Within”, the title of the work, seems to attend to these questions of location. Later, in a 2014 memoir-travelogue of East Africa, *And Home Was Kariakoo*, Vassanji asserts that in relating to the homeland or, indeed, in relating to any lands, we need to move beyond a “perpetually poor relation” and remember that there are people on those lands, and there is life (2014, xiv). There is abundance as well as need, there is color and joy, there are complex universes unto themselves (2014, xiv). And there is change, particularly in the context of return or rediscovery after exile or dislocation, not only situations “deserving pity” or the disappointment of outsider insensitivity (2014, xiii). More than this, the homeland is returned to differently for different people, and at different times, as Vassanji writes: through the building of “precious narrative and self-knowledge”, the reconstruction of the homeland, “prompted by nostalgia” and instinct, is its own re-exploration of home itself (2014, 3). To re-explore histories in relation to personal experiences of home is part of the work of the migrant life-writer who is dislocated, who on account of their dislocation can explore opportunities for the retelling of stories of being displaced.

That narrative of displacement even upon return to the homeland may be traced to the beginnings of the Indian independence movement, which is a period known as the Mughal twilight of 1857. There, similarly, we hear of locals being dislocated at home, experiencing that the homeland they knew had shifted right before them. This is during the rise of corporate nationalism as ‘civilizing mission’, an earlier period between hegemonies and of historical crisis, between the colonization and subjugation of Mughal India and the consolidation of the British Raj, the British Crown in India, as a project of empire, for the next ninety years until independence. The shift, a break in the thread of continuity, a kind of crisis, can be noted in the

bloody British takeover of the former Mughal capital, Shahjahanabad, now Old Delhi (Vassanji 2009, 127). It is a period covered in detail by William Dalrymple in several books, notably *The Last Mughal* (2009) and *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (2019), untold stories of colonial oppression, corporate violence and the possibilities for liberation of the overlooked crisis-interregnum period. The possibilities refer to the “groans of birth”, which follow the fall of empire—might this, too, symbolize the homeland? Its foundation is destruction, “blood is in its soil” (Vassanji 2009, 128).

In the western most coastal state Gujarat, the threat of violence pushes Vassanji to reconsider his dress. He recalls having to disguise himself in a turban while travelling with great expectations in the home-state of his ancestors, the birthplace not of his parents but grandparents:

[...] it was always with a little sadness and a tangible nervousness that I would travel in Gujarat, with nightmarish visions of rampaging mobs drunk on violence, of getting caught in a train by such a mob and being asked to prove physically my communal affiliation. And yet, I have always felt a sense of wonderful elation while travelling in India. It has helped that I remain, and indeed feel, communally anonymous and ambiguous, identifiable only by that cipher of my very Gujarati last name. (Vassanji, 2009, 246)

On account of his traditions and history, Vassanji feels anonymous because he positions himself between the “two cultures, two peoples so close to each other, yet so apart” (2009, 247). For Vassanji, the India of ancestral memory is unlike Dar es Salaam on the coast of East Africa, where he grew up “India [...] seemed to do something to the soul; give it a certain ease, a sense of homecoming, quite another kind of nostalgia”—it was a place to be sought intimately and without satisfaction, something that one creates and puts oneself into (Vassanji 2009, 10). The point here is that one cannot accept the “embrace” of the homeland, with all its inconsistencies, and yet “turn away from the violence”—as far as one relates to the homeland and its people, one

must also relate to the violence (2009, 247). Therefore, Vassanji's position here can be interpreted as so long as there is no pure people, there is no pure homeland. "Far away from the watchful eyes of orthodoxy", Vassanji's India of ancestral-mythical memory is syncretistic, relying on an "inclusive system of beliefs", tolerant and flexible: a "combination of mystical and devotional Hinduism and Islam, without a thought to internal contradictions [...]" (2009, 12). Historically, that India is located in the life of Islam within India and more importantly Sufism, the mystical-musical thread of Islam, over 800 years as a living example of pluralism and heterodoxy. The Gujarati Gandhi, who spent many years in South Africa, brought this romantic image of India, a Mother India as an object of worship, closer to Vassanji (2009, 13). It was during his fifteen years outside of India, in South Africa, that Gandhi, "at that time hardly with a political or historical or literary idea", recognized a kind of Indian community dislocated but enduring that could override religion and caste (Naipaul 1991, 7). And with that vision of a pan-Indian "religious-political mission", with that India of great civilization, Gandhi would attempt to make the old truths of syncretism a living reality in the form of a national freedom struggle and independence movement (Naipaul 1991, 7).

By contrast, in V.S. Naipaul, known as one of the greatest English-language writers of the twentieth century, born in Trinidad and Tobago in 1932, we see the legacies of colonialism holding the ancestral homeland not in tension as Vassanji tries to do but in contempt. In his later works, mostly of non-fiction, long after his post-colonial satire exemplified in the fictional *A House for Mr Biswas*, a tribute to his father, it is as if Naipaul looked back with humiliation and defeat, not seeing within himself anything Indian (Dharmic-Islamic) to achieve comparison with Europe, not beauty nor dignity. As French (2008) writes in the authorized biography of Naipaul, out of mind entirely is Trinidad, where in 1845 "the first indentured Indian immigrants docked in

Port of Spain”, at that time an “undeveloped plantation colony” (9). For Naipaul, after much success in the literary industry, the non-western homelands provide a traumatic and blurred backdrop to have insecurities projected onto (Ghosh 2001).

Naipaul studied English at Oxford beginning in 1950, and first visits India in 1962, fifteen years after independence. Compared with Vassanji’s open optimism, Naipaul carries a tragic view of his ancestral homeland. Naipaul (1991) writes twenty-seven years after his first trip in *India: A Million Mutinies Now* that his image of the India from which his ancestors had migrated “was like a neurosis”: it represented great anxiety and fear, it continued the legacies of agricultural poverty, backwardness and impotence that his Hindu-Indian ancestors carried with them and faced in colonial Trinidad working on sugar estates as indentured laborers, slaves by other names, and living in “thatched, mud-walled huts” (Naipaul 1991, 7). Naipaul’s apology for colonialism in India begins with the destitution of his homeland and lives through the desecration he deems necessary for moral, industrial and technological progress. That reasoning follows a known trajectory, as Naipaul’s family faced destitute realities as Hindus in India that they had hoped to improve through their initial migration as indentured laborers. At the time Naipaul was born, legends of the 1930s held that Indians in Trinidad were “poor, mean, rural, heathen, aggressive, ethnically exclusive and illiterate” (French 2008, 13). So, one can see how the hatred becomes internalized, how it seeps into a limited imagination and into the homeland itself, producing its own kind of fissured identity.

Indentured servants worked in various parts of the British Empire, including “Fiji in the Pacific; Mauritius in the Indian Ocean; South Africa, and [...] the Guianas (British Guiana and Dutch Giana) and Trinidad” (Naipaul 1991, 7). For them, the continental view of a unified India lived through their dislocation, their isolated minority positions that allowed them their own

enclave. But within India, Naipaul writes, “the continental idea” of belonging to a singular homeland was meaningless (Naipaul 1991, 8). Perhaps it is in part due to Naipaul’s fear of the homeland, that he performs a kind of self-hatred in some of his non-fiction, most notably his writings on Islam and Non-Arab Islamic peoples—Indian Muslims in particular. As the Arab-Christian Edward Said writes in a review of Naipaul’s *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*, Naipaul’s proclamation that the convert can never be part of the authentic whole, that the non-Arab is never a true Muslim, is “intellectual catastrophe of the first order”, a kind of intellectual neo-colonialism (Said 1998). If accepted, it neglects the rich Indo-Islamic civilization out of hand and disregards the literary productions of the meetings of civilizations—the translating of the Gita into Persian, for one—the work of indigenous saints who were religiously tolerant, and popular south Asian mystical, devotional poets, the Sufis and others. By extension, the view that the dislocated figure must renounce their past, be “doomed to a life of imitation and incompetence” as a mere convert, presents a false colonial destiny for the migrant writer that Naipaul, in some ways tragically, lives out and that his fiction cannot fix (Said, 1998). There is still a consistency of approach that writers can identify with in the pioneering and wounded style of the postcolonial writer Naipaul. I maintain that Naipaul’s vision for (or ignorance of) the dislocated homeland provides a compelling foil to Vassanji’s hope of a syncretistic, Hindu-Muslim hybrid one that is beyond Turk and Hindu (this is in reference to Gilmartin’s and Lawrence’s (2000) edited collection *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamate South Asia*) (Gilmartin and Lawrence 2000).

In *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul* by Patrick French (2008), we find that Naipaul’s disposition with respect to his homeland, his wounded psyche that he projects onto the homeland, what may be understood as something rooted in a kind of crisis of

identity, however much it may have been played off or delayed by the writer, shows itself in the mental collapse of Naipaul's father. Again, we find here generational and filial aspects to crisis that characterizes it as living, internal phenomenon. The collapse or crisis involves the individual straying from filial obligations and communal sensibilities and authority, and facing what are sometimes shocking consequences of individualism cut off from traditional wisdom that cannot always easily be translated through dislocation. Perhaps at worst it is the total rejection of the mythical homeland as related to the present day concerns of migrant writers or diasporic writers.

The crisis of identity that Naipaul's father suffers shows itself in his own tragic, migratory journey, a kind of moral-spiritual decline. The senior Naipaul, Seepersad Naipaul, was born into the "shackles of indenture", his family being sugarcane-cutters (French 2008, 17). But he miraculously escapes agricultural labor by teaching himself to read and write in English, by conquering English itself. He had dreams of becoming a journalist, and these dreams he would achieve in Trinidad as a freelance reporter with a weekly column for the *Trinidad Guardian*, whose editor was a former correspondent for the *London Times* (French 2008, 19). Earlier on, before the *Guardian*, in the *East Indian Weekly*, writing against "race annihilation", Seepersad argued that the outer-self reflected the person within, that to succumb to the wearing of the jacket-tie uniform was to fall into a demoralized and whitewashed, Western Indian identity. And yet, in the "urban setting" of the *Guardian*, in the heart of Port of Spain, Seepersad found himself in a "tie, shirt, and cotton blazer" (French 2008, 19). Before long, the intimacies of the Indian community, their feuds and idiosyncrasies, were being put on display and sensationalized in Seepersad's column, and this was met with disturbed resentment by his fellow Indians (French 2008, 20). What began as complimentary narratives were soon taken as mocking and judgmental

portrayals that betrayed, particularly when Seepersad, professionally obligated, reported on personal troubles and political activities of Indian's (French 2008, 20). Slowly, the columns became contemptuous toward the heart of Hindu's, and it was alleged that Seepersad's critical, social-reformist stance vilified the Hindu deity Kali (French 2008, 20). In an anonymous letter, Seepersad was threatened with death unless he made an animal sacrifice to "appease the wrath of the goddess" (French 2008, 21). Under immense pressure at this time from his wife and her family to make the sacrifice, the modern journalist gives way, humiliated and deeply wounded by his capitulation (French 2008, 22). In 1935, after changes in editorship, Seepersad is let go by the *Trinidad Guardian*. This is his story of madness, of identity in crisis, that in many respects seems to plague the adult writer V.S. Naipaul though in different ways. Both presents characteristics of fragmented identities in search of wider identities that are cut off from their Indian traditional ones. Vido, as he was known as a child, was not marginal in trying on different identities, as French (2008) writes:

It was not rare in Trinidad for people to remake themselves, to change their name or adjust their background. [...] Adrian Cola Rienzi had once been Krishna Deonarine [...] Ganesh Ramsumair [...] would become G. Ramsay Muir [...] Almost nobody knew their real personal history. They might come from West Africa, or Venezuela, or Madeira, or south India, or from some complicated intermingling or ancestry, travels through different places; only in exceptional cases would the family journey be clear. Each community was divided and subdivided. Among Indians there were Hindus, Muslims, and Christians; among the Hindus there were caste divisions [...] At the heart of Trinidad lay the void, the void of dispossession and extermination [...] The spirit of the dispossessed could be felt [...]. (53-4)

The issue, however, is not one of identity formation strictly speaking, but the re-telling of stories of identities dispossessed across generations. These are not only the trials of self-formation through the trying on of different outfits, but of the lingering affective dimensions of

stories of personal crisis. The stories describe how identities are articulated through dislocation or decolonization, or recolonization, which Naipaul struggles with.

In conversation with Edward Said “On Palestinian Identity”, for example, Salman Rushdie (1991) in a similar vein meditates on the creation of migrant homelands and identities in the face of Said’s challenges to belonging and not belonging, what is internal and external struggle (166). The external struggle as a push and pull between Eastern and Western cultures is one thing, but it is the specificity of the “inner dispute or dialectic at the heart of Palestinianness” that through new modes of literature can be articulated, conceptualized and concretized (Rushdie 1991, 183). This takes us back to Vassanji’s meta-narratives and, indeed, literatures in English of Indian or migrant dislocation in general: they are post-colonial, diasporic narratives of the migrant attempting to conquer English, and that risk being eroded if not preserved through new retellings. Rushdie’s reading of Said’s 1989 portrait of broken Palestinian identity, *After the Last Sky*, presents a portrait of identity in crisis similar to Vassanji’s. Perhaps one difference is that for Said, he says outright that there appears no clear “redemptive homeland”— Vassanji seems to be agnostic or ambivalent about it (Rushdie 1991, 174). The migrants of such nations of exile cannot but defy the ordinary rules of citizenship and belonging, and therefore they disturb the literary forms as well: Said shows, says Rushdie, that “it is necessary to work through a kind of chaos or unstable form that will accurately express its essential instability” (Rushdie 1991, 168). Again, in our reading we submit to a movement. Like the Gujarati Vassanji who carries in his memory the vision of a syncretistic, ancestral-mythical India, a particular cultural code that designates him as being from a particular group, so, too, does the Palestinian child of Lebanon, born in a refugee camp and having never been to Palestine, carry “the inflections of Haifa, or Jaffa, in his Lebanese Arabic” (Rushdie 1991, 175). These streams of migrant writing, their

experiences, are testaments to the demand that minority-migrant narratives in all their instability and discontinuity be told and retold. In the context of literature, the “endless temporal motion” of parallel migrant experiences, “in which past, present and future intertwine without any fixed center”, need objective existence against the institutionalized colonial narratives that discredit them (Rushdie 1991, 180).

As Rushdie puts it in his defense of his novel *The Satanic Verses*, a fictional work of magic-realism that affords the author movement in-between binaries, “a fluctuating hybrid identity” (Pervez 2004, 153), through the creative work of literature the migrant not only finds literary renewal but in putting their experiences of dislocation, “disjuncture and metamorphosis” in writing “[derives] a metaphor for all humanity” (Rushdie 1991, 394). This is the migrant writer trying to embrace and rejoice in their own internal crisis of identity, their own “mongrelization”, turning the novel into a self love-song—rather than, in the case of Naipaul, seek a kind of fanatical purity of colonization (Rushdie 1991, 394). Perhaps it is through sympathetic readings of migrant stories in dialogue with one another, those of Vassanji, Naipaul, Rushdie, Said, and others, that readers begin to appreciate them in their dislocation as whole. Rocha (in press) in *Philosophical Research in Education* reminds us that this kind of “sympathetic literary attitude”, which comes as a result of responsibility to a call, and ultimately a choice, turns the eye toward encounter with a human face, in this case the face of the migrant or dislocated person (in press, 140). Rocha compares sympathetic literary attitudes to cynical and fanatical ones, asserting that the sympathetic reader reaffirms a capacity for decency and charity that the fanatic and cynic in their tragic ridicule cannot claim. This in part has been my motivation in trying to read migrant narratives in dialogue with each other in something approaching a sympathetic posture with respect to literature. For Rocha, adoption of a

sympathetic literary attitude provokes a deeper critique denied to the fanatical and cynical reader because the adoption symbolizes the radical act of freedom to choose (in press, 147). This freedom is an opening, exemplified in the work of Maxine Greene—far more than a method for reading or study— for the “unique and primal power of stories” to take hold (Rocha in press, 143).

I read Vassanji’s works in dialogue with his travelogue-memoir *A Place Within: Rediscovering India*. There Vassanji describes his trips to his ancestral homeland intertwined with the historiography of his family, to present different layers, multi-dimensions, of dislocated identities across different journeys. The primary migration in Vassanji’s *No New Land*, for instance, takes shape after the establishment of the republic of Tanzania in the 1960s but relies on earlier movements from British-India to Dar es Salaam and other indentured-labor capitals. To come to know those places requires reading their literatures, the writings of those persons of those fractured lands.

In what follows, I will examine the relations between dislocation and identity-crisis, primarily in *No New Land*, in dialogue with Vassanji’s travelogue-memoir *A Place Within: Rediscovering India*.

First, I will situate Vassanji’s generic commitments with respect to literature of the Indian diaspora. Internal crisis for migrant characters is a theme for many of what have been called literatures of the diaspora. The literatures in question, often literatures of quests more broadly, are written by authors who have moved (not always so simply by choice) from their homelands or places of origin, and whose writing is a reflection on their personal and sometimes generational displacement. They can show struggles for reunion with tradition, or quests

(sometimes many failed ones) for self-fulfillment, searches for identity, through migration and dislocation.

Generically, the quest literatures, or literatures featuring displacement as part of personal journeys, include such classics as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey*, and more recently Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), the memoir *Wild* (2012) by Cheryl Strayed, or Barry Jenkin's 2016 film *Moonlight*. In all cases, the main characters are exiled in some ways from their home societies, they struggle to or are unable to return home, or struggle to find a sense of belonging in places they try to call home. Often there are crises that initiate the journeys, like war, revolution, alienation, personal tragedy, deep longings for safety and stability (a loving and trustworthy father in the case of Huck Finn), meaning or change, or dissatisfaction with the current state of things, something that cannot be shaken but propels movement or escape. In Toni Morrison's 1996's introduction to *The Oxford Mark Twain: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for example, Morrison writes of what propels a child to escape from home and embark on a personal quest. What motivates the singular child to reject filial obligations overlaps with what motivates the dislocated migrant, as well a migrant life-writer, who similarly runs from or tries to make meaning out of their searches for filial piety. We can see that there are different migrant dispositions to consider, different sorts of dislocations of characters in movement that rely on moral or sympathetic intuitions of readers, as Morrison writes:

Although Huck complains bitterly of rules and regulations, I see him to be running not from external control but from external chaos. Nothing in society makes sense; all is in peril. Upper-class, churchgoing, elegantly housed families annihilate themselves in psychotic feud [...]; he sees the public slaughter of a drunk; he hears the vicious plans of murderers on a wrecked steamboat[...]. No wonder that when he is alone, [...] he is so very frightened and frequently suicidal. (1996, 3)

As a white child without a home and who suffers neglect from his father, the only peace that Huck finds, Morrison writes, is in relationship with Jim, a black slave also on the run, who functions as an illicit black father for Huck (1996, 3). It is only within that particular friendship, a kind of healing union outside the normal movement of the world, that Huck finds dislocated, the anxieties of life no longer “within” him but “outside” (Morrison 1996, 3). The “consolation” that the relationship with Jim provides Huck is created by Jim’s “highly vocal affection”, which describes a particular moral vision Huck needs to venture outside of his home (or destroy his home) to find and receive (1996, 3). Jim is Morrison’s answer to the question “what does Huck need to live without terror, melancholy, and suicidal thoughts?” (1996, 3): the slave Jim is the “father-for-free” that not only advises and offers trust but whom Huck can control, without the life-long obligations of a white father (1996, 5-6). In other words, it is loving relationship, a new moral vision against the degradation of the day, that temporarily relieves Huck of his personal crisis. It is only within the possibilities for loving relationship that “terror gives way to pastoral, idyllic, intimate, timelessness minus the hierarchy of age, status or adult control” even though the relationship must be cloaked by secrecy in a blatantly racist society (1996, 3). Huck’s love has to contend with responsibility that he can recognize, even though he controls the slave Jim. I present this brief aside to try to include diasporic literatures within the broader tradition of literatures of quests or journeys, and vice versa. Vassanji’s works then can be seen as contemporary quest narratives just as Twain’s *Adventures* may be considered as a particular story of moral crisis-dislocation or even moral migration.

Migrant characters in the diasporic literatures, in particular English literatures of people of Indian diasporas, are often similarly seen to be running or seeking or embarking on personal

quests. I see Vassanji's works, like those of other diasporic writers, not unlike the other quests narratives: migrant narratives are carrying forward what is a particular sensibility around the possibilities that personal crises can uncover and set into motion in the form of quest. And these are possibilities for in-between positionalities, minority narratives including Huck Finn's, which challenge the dominant views of the day and open new, dangerous sightlines. We find those sensibilities overwhelmingly in the journey or quest narratives of diasporic writers or featuring diasporic characters that disturb boundary markers.

The particular figures I will discuss, however, show their formation through international migration, across languages, religious traditions, generations and other boundaries—not just travel as part of a singular journey but historically forced cultural and religious exile, conversion, millions of cases of indentured labor from all over the Indian Ocean to the other British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, without a return home, in some cases because the literal home was destroyed or through partition disfigured and forgotten. The formation of these people plays out in how they belong in the home and in the world. Consider how Naipaul describes in his Nobel speech of 2001, “Two Worlds”, the conditions of belonging simultaneously to two worlds. While there is much to be gained in that protective hermeticism of the total belonging of home, there is also an impoverished darkness of being so insulated against what is outside:

So as a child I had this sense of two worlds, the world outside that tall corrugated-iron gate, and the world at home – or, at any rate, the world of my grandmother's house. It was a remnant of our caste sense, the thing that excluded and shut out. In Trinidad, where as new arrivals we were a disadvantaged community, that excluding idea was a kind of protection; it enabled us – for the time being, and only for the time being – to live in our own way and according to our own rules, to live in our own fading India. It made for an extraordinary self-centeredness. We looked inwards; we lived out our days; the world outside existed in a kind of darkness; we inquired about nothing. (Naipaul 2001)

For Naipaul, belonging requires a kind of exclusivity, and the loss of belonging limits or destroys the possibilities for cross-cultural or plural identities; it is a defensive posturing or defense mechanism needed for the home culture to endure and upon which self-definition and belonging rely. In Vassanji, we find a similar case and explanation. Vassanji's characters are East-African Indian migrants to Canada in the 1970s who feature prominently across his works and who try to maintain, through similar defensiveness, a consciousness of their homelands which are no more. In order to maintain that consciousness, there is a kind of compartmentalizing that takes place in the individual, which is a sense of division or exclusion that recalls Naipaul's 'inquiring of nothing'. Knowing more or too much may destabilize the enclave by opening the fraternity to outside interference; the eternal-internal home, in other words, relies on a meditative posture, its own strength and force. The defensive posture of abandoning inquiry, for Vassanji, symbolizes the "sin of ignorance" of his youth, which later he has a "desire to make amends for" as an adult returning to his neighborhood of Kariakoo, Tanzania (2014, 107). In *And Home was Kariakoo*, Vassanji's memoir and travelogue of East Africa, he writes that his desire to atone for his past sins of ignorance represents something of a desire between voyeurism, curiosity, and resentment. "[...] Most of us, Africans and Asians", he writes, "had grown up in such insular communities that we did not know how people down the street from us lived or worshipped" (2014, 107). The desire comes up then to understand different anthropologies of prayer or worship, to pluralize religion as different modes of worship (though not necessarily to pluralize the Absolute reality). This is the continual reconstruction of the home in light of what is outside, or it is the small attempts to destroy what differentiates the inside from the outside. The examples may show that belonging to a home, or the construction of the mythical home itself, for the migrant writer, may rely on their particular ignorance of the

complexity of their homes and who else inhabits it. They know their home in such a particular way that makes it idiosyncratic and self-centered, and yet through dislocation the contours of the home can be both narrowed and expanded. There is a dimension of faith in that particular ignorance, too. As ignorance is not knowing, and faith may be to reject knowing to experience the trust of relationship beyond knowing. The personal faith narratives of the migrant writers keep up these images of home; these are narratives intertwined with the everyday living or “everyday faith” inherent to this particular kind of ignorance of what is outside but nearby (Cochrane 2017).

There are many English writers of the East-Indian diaspora whose major works make up a body of English literature of Indians on the move, including Indian-born Canadian Rohinton Mistry’s short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), or the works of ‘world citizens’ Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* (1981), or Anita Rau Badami in *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), or Janice Goveas (2008) in her collection of plays *Margaret in Search of Herself*, among many others.

Focusing on Vassanji’s works, I will describe and analyze the motivating forces of the primary migrant characters, their forces of formation, with respect to differing portraits of identity-spiritual crises. But first to establish what these divergent forces of formation of identity for migrants might amount to.

3.3 Pursuit of history in formation of migrant identity

Self-Identity will be considered in relation to the movement of the migrant along different reorientations to shifting lands and feelings of rootlessness. As Guha (1983) writes, to recognize the migrant, like the peasant, as the “maker” of their own rebellion, through their own vernacular and particular understandings and motivations, is to humanize them, it is to “attribute

a consciousness to [them]” (4). Vassanji presents humanizing portrayals of migrants to show how dislocation brings with it possibilities for transformation within which migrants are pulled and pushed between old and new worlds. It is in this sense that Vassanji through his portrayal of the migrant relies on possibilities for a “syncretistic” experience of dislocation, that it adds just as much to the migrant perspective to be in-between cultures, traditions and homes as it subtracts (Ozawa 2016, 47). And so, to link identity to the personal displacement of the migrant is to attend to their own stories—their own interpretations of their histories and their continual unfolding. This is because to ask who a person is, according to Charles Taylor (1989) in *Sources of Self*, is to make them significant to themselves through self-interpretation in a manner personally significant (34). Here, crisis emerges in the “essential link” between loss of identity and disorientation, or dislocation, when trying to locate the “self in moral space” (Taylor 1989, 27).

In Vassanji’s novels and other writings, there are always central figures who are dislocated, trying to reconstruct themselves in light of their pasts. These are people who, on the one hand, desire to recreate what they remember, but who also face troubles of refusing to not forget. That desire for reconstruction is an obsessive one for Vassanji, who confesses it is “uncontrollable and perhaps vain”, because “to know and record who I am” demands a fascination with one’s history, to study it and take part in it (Ozawa 2016, 45). In this view, the dislocated recognize themselves as characters in their own histories, as players in their own family sagas. But the desire to know who one is in relation to their histories is also a result of a nagging “rootlessness” or homelessness that can be a motivating force for the migrant to firmly embed themselves. These are, after all, displaced persons, families of them, seeking refuge in one sense or another, who must face an inescapable past before them and all around them

(Ozawa 2019). The past provides a shifting context for the liminal crises of the migrant characters: the past is not detached as something 'behind' the dislocated but rather part of the unfolding “fate and identity” of Indian East-Africans (Ozawa 2016). This means that the internal crisis, the spiritual longing or sickness, can be seen as an unfolding of histories to be attended to and understood, to be created, potentially as an opening to hybrid identities, whether through rediscovery of languages, literatures or other artefacts that evoke and speak to the necessary questions. History as such is not a buried relic of the past, part of the long gone distance, to be uncovered to soothe modern worries. It is rather that the past helps to form and even determine the passageways or transitions of migrants into 'new' lands and livelihoods, as the past needs to be recreated. The histories of the migrant, then, as histories of particular peoples, as “immemorial continuities”, can never be entirely “past and gone” (Gaur 2016, 151).

At the same time, the past presents obstacles of translation for the migrant who tries to recreate and recapture the Indian districts of African Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in Toronto, Canada. The new Dar, “however close they tried to make it to the original”, was never the same as the Dar of old (Vassanji 1991, 171). “The spirit, perhaps”, the narrator says, was not quite the same here: “Rushing to mosque after work in your Chevy, through ice and slush, for a ceremony in a school gym”, could never compare with “strolling to your own domed, clock-towered mosque fresh after a bath” (Vassanji 1991, 171). In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha asserts that the “indeterminacy of diasporic identity” presents a secularized crisis or the “heresy” of “hybridity” (Bhabha 1993, 322). For Bhabha (1993), the crisis of “irresolvable, borderline [identities]” appears in this two-fold way: it is both a time of “cultural displacement” and a context for what cannot seem to be translated from old to new (322). Cultural translation performs its own subversion by “opening up a space of discursive contestation” and through

reinterpreting migrant narratives (323). One migrant narrative shows itself through the dreams of survival for the migrant, where translation is possible and therefore to blaspheme is possible (324). At the same time, as Rushdie (1991) recalls, because blasphemy relies on belief, without an affirmative belief, there may be no blasphemy (405).

Let us consider the story of migrant Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist in *No New Land*. He is a shoe-salesperson who moves from Dar es Salaam of the democratic republic of Tanzania, on Western Africa's Ivory Coast, to an apartment-complex suburb of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, called Don Mills. Along with Zera, his wife, and their teenage children Fatima and Hanif, the story is one of the immigrant Nurdin's identity transformation, his personal struggles in coming of age, in 1970s Canada. The drastic changes that the Lalani's face, like other migrants to Canada who try to maintain a mark of respectability in relation to one another, are rooted in a dislocation, and moreover a kind of rootlessness or othering that has to confront the limitations and possibilities for cultural translation. For Nurdin, the tensions are around maintaining a communal identity in a more individuated setting wherein the individual immigrant is lonely (resigned to celibacy, whose wife is "wedded to God"), frightened (without a sense of purpose, disoriented), discriminated against (witness to and victim of racist attacks), undignified (pulled by foreign desires to partake in infidelities and deceptions), insecure (on the outskirts of tradition, with cultural-religious anchors being openly questioned and rejected), and unwanted (by his children and even othered by himself) (Vassanji 1991, 175). Bhabha (1993) contends that this experience expressive of migrant discourse, of being othered even by oneself in relation to oneself, asks how one can "encounter the past" in a way that "continually introduces an otherness or alterity into the present" (226). At the very least, from this we can assert that the migrant never leaves the past but continues to pursue their past and, in encountering cultural

difference, the past performs its own “spatial disjunction” onto the present history of, in this case, the national community of Canada (Bhabha 1993, 228). In the face of this disjunctive otherness, Nurdin is forced to articulate new ways of being that are “not necessarily accumulative, teleological, or dialectical” but “interdisciplinary”, shifting and nimble enough to construct a sense of identity through alterity (Bhabha 1993, 234). Bhabha’s analyses take as a point of departure “the question of agency” for minorities, including the migrant, refugee and diasporic peoples, in the postcolonial and postmodern world (1993, 245). In this context of analysis, the formation and transformation of migrant identity becomes an act of collaboration as much as survival, uncomfortable and disturbing (Bhabha 1993, 251).

Nurdin’s quest seems particular to his generation of Asian-Africans who do not fit into the emerging dominant African nationalism of a post-colonial Tanzania. Those personal struggles for citizenship or identity can be contrasted with what motivated the movement of the prior generation, that of Nurdin’s father, Haji Lalani. What the two generations share, however, is the movement itself, expressed as a kind of yearning for betterment and recognition of lack. To account for Nurdin’s “predicaments”, the narrator tells us, we must “go back in time and begin at a different place”, the place of Haji, who moved from British India to British-German East Africa in 1906 (Vassanji 1991, 9). Both generations, Indians of British India and Indians of Tanzania, sought better qualities of life and in some cases new lives altogether. This shows in a basic way that the migrant’s predicament is an intergenerational one, not totally particular to any one generation but involving intergenerational movement and the possibilities of communication and translation between generations. Vassanji’s writing, then, as diasporic writing, represents the attempt to write across worlds, about shifting people and places whose stories are not always popularly retold.

We might go back in time and begin with the poet and writer Ghalib, “a household word in northern India”, one of the most revered Urdu-language lyric poets (Vassanji 2009, 118). He was personally torn by being witness to political and cultural upheaval and transition: between the passing of the elite Mughal order and the emerging “new hegemonic dispensation” of British rule (Abrol 2020, 184). He may therefore be understood as a poet of crisis. Born in Agra as Mirza Asadullah Khan in 1796 to parents of Turkish ancestry, Vassanji and a companion go searching for his residence while retelling the first battle for independence of 1857, the Uprising or mutiny. This was the first widespread Indian challenge to British supremacy, more accurately the first multinational corporate-military entity known as the British East India Company. Ghalib’s is the poetry of this primary crisis: he wrote “under conditions of extreme personal and historical trauma”, namely the fall of the Mughal empire and the rise of the British East India Company as an anglicized, expansionist, multinational political and military power after the uprising was quelled and savage retribution followed (Goodyear and Raza 2008, 112). The setting of Ghalib is one of “seismic change to the culture of [Delhi] and the politics of the subcontinent as a whole” (Goodyear and Raza 2008, 112). The setting itself is one of monumental shift, of historical crisis. The change started as an uprising of 300 mutinous Indian infantry privates, employes of the Company, and whose aftermath a sorrowful Ghalib recalls: all these things lasted only so long as the king reigned (Dalrymple 2009, 34). The things being lost referred to by the aristocratic Ghalib, poet laureate of Mughal Delhi, are the things of a now-destroyed court culture: high poetry, literary and religious ambition, “Sufi devotions”, and poetic symposia (Dalrymple 2009, 31). What Ghalib would transcribe is what would become “the single most serious armed challenge any Western empire would face, anywhere in the world, in the entire course of the nineteenth century” (Dalrymple 2009, 184). As Vassanji notes, the poet’s

residence is now a small heritage site in Old Delhi, known as the city of poets, or city of djinns, once the walled Mughal capital, and still with the particular Muslim presence of veiled faces not seen in such numbers outside the walls (Vassanji 2009, 118). As Goodyear and Raza (2008) write, Ghalib employs the form of the Urdu *ghazal*, an ode which centered the world of the heart, a form that crisscrosses “the metaphysical and the erotic with no discordance, an aching interplay of desire and loss” (112). More to the point, the poet Ghalib also exemplifies Vassanji’s fluid, syncretistic, and at times amorphous understanding of religious-communal identity. As Dalrymple (2009) writes in *The Last Mughal, The Fall of Delhi, 1857*: it is through the seeking of God within the individual that liberates one “from the restrictions of narrowly orthodox Islam, encouraging the devotee to look beyond the letter of the law to its mystical essence” (Dalrymple 2009, 93). This is Ghalib’s call to the seeker, which initiates the attempt, a quest to see within, to attune oneself to the particular “music of His secrets”, to see through the surface-level personal crises to something deeper (Dalrymple 2009, 93). On this, via Russell’s (1995) translation, Ghalib says:

The object of my worship lies beyond perception’s reach;
For [persons] who see, the Ka’ba is a compass, nothing more. (Russell 1995, 150).

The sentiment here, one carried forward by Vassanji’s similarly syncretistic and reconciliatory vision, is that if the Sufi axiom is true, if God truly “lay within” (within persons and not exclusively within men) and must be “reached less by ritual than by love”, then there is a shared essence among followers of Hinduism and Islam and across Indo-Islamic civilization (Dalrymple 2009, 94). The poet’s pilgrimage is a personal one of transformation, not to be overtaken by the routine activity of ritual. Abrol (2020) recalls that Delhi for centuries upheld a

mythical past, a cultural and political transitory nature, “an aura of sanctity”, at many points in history, with historical remains to prove it (179-80). Through Ghalib’s Old Delhi, I think, we see a particular kind of migration without (as in the case of the migrant) international movement of the individual: “waves of cultural transition actually passed through [Ghalib], his times, his thinking, his personality, and his poetry are witness to that” (Abrol 2020, 182). Here, we see movement passing through the poet, not the poet themselves necessarily in movement; this is a different kind of dislocation. And so, in Ghalib, we see a particular kind of dislocation, change, or movement working through the poet and being infused into their creative effort. The poetry is what gives voices to that particular crisis as internal dislocation.

A different sort of dislocation is offered by Vassanji’s character Nurdin, particularly if we read his ancestral story that is characterized by his father, Haji. As laborer-traders from India, Haji’s generation becomes assimilated into British-German East Africa and helps to build the empire, while Nurdin finds himself on the margins of the post-colonial Tanzanian republic where a nationalistic African identity takes hold. They are a fictionalized portrayal of Gujarati-Ismaili Khojas, called Shamsis, positioned within a sub-sect of Shia Islam. Khoja Ismaili or Indian Ismaili can be used for clarity. While Haji understands his religion as a marker of communal identity, Nurdin’s affiliation to the (not his) religious community is far more ambiguous. It is through a kind of conflicting dissent and opening questioning that Nurdin lives out his religious affiliation in Canada. It can be said that he, like Vassanji, tries to maintain a religious sensibility, something closer to a cultural affiliation which recognizes the penetrating power of devotion, but is nothing close to an orthodox follower. Vassanji’s conception of religious identity is one that harkens to an ancient Indian conception of communal-cultural identity. It is a fundamentally a syncretistic understanding, or dream, of identity itself as something that relies on an

inclusiveness of generations and pluralities of experiences as they are seen between observers of different traditions. Vassanji considers this dream in the face of present communal violence aforementioned, that which is predicated on difference between religious identities, namely the monolithic categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. My reading is that Vassanji's drawing of characters as 'Gujarati-Khojas', Shamsis, is selected over the descriptors 'Indian-Muslims' or 'Hindu-Muslims', because the latter appear "dogmatically exclusive", representative of fundamentalist ideology, not in company with the syncretistic experiences of the Gujarati Khojas (Ozawa 2016, 47). Vassanji's characterizations rely on the unorthodox, mystical movements within sub-sects of Indian Islam. Here, 'unorthodox' may give somewhat of a false impression. To be clear, Vassanji's sub-sect, though "distanced from the mainstream", finally is not separate from the Islamic spectrum but necessarily within the broader Islamic tradition, as it is another "[mode] of being Islamic"(Milani 2017, 118). Extending this kind of logic and sentiment, this is how "thundering Allah" becomes "a form of reposing Vishnu" for Vassanji (Ozawa 2016, 48). Vassanji's ancestors "converted from Hinduism in the fourteenth century", as Shizen Ozawa (2016; 2019) and Amin Malak (1993) explain. "Originally Krishna devotees", though influenced heavily by "Islamic mysticism", Sufism, Vassanji considers Gujarati-Khojas representative of the Indian subcontinent's "syncretistic tradition" and not "historical anomaly", even considering all "internal contradictions" (Ozawa 2016, 48). This descriptive insistence is Vassanji inserting himself into the push and "the pull between old and new" of making 'new' identities in a host culture (Steiner 2005). Through his many writing of migrants characters, Vassanji performs his own reconstructive project. That project in some ways culminates with his rediscovery of India as his ancestral homeland and which is explored in *A Place Within* (2009), a travelogue and tale of unravelling family histories.

Haunted by the authoritative visions and expectations of his father that hang over him, Nurdin is alienated and marginalized in the new, post-colonial republic of Tanzania and even more so in the vast expanse of Canada. His father's communal convictions seem only to serve him in this new world by way of comparison, through a kind of relentless stalking-judgement, against his individual desires. So, to emigrate to 'multicultural' Canada, the land of promise, represents new opportunities, a fresh start at a new identity, and the mysteries of escape into uncharted lands where one could reestablish oneself. The sensation of this particular struggle around inheritances is examined throughout Vassanji's writings, notably as well in his *The Assassin's Song* (2007). It tells the story of Karsan, whose father is the *saheb*, or lord, of an ancient Sufi shrine in Gujarat, and desire as he may to dissent from guardianship of the shrine, Karsan must succeed his father. On account of their birth, these characters have to accept the responsibilities of their ancestral inheritances. In this way, the questions of agency around identity, precisely because they are presented as non-questions for the characters but obligations, ensures that the migrant can never be a mere "ordinary mortal", assimilated as "one among many", "without presupposition" (Vassanji 2007, 184). Such experiences expressive of desires for dislocation illustrates the limitations around abandoning the pursuit of history which, in some cases, has been fated for the individual to follow.

There is no true escape for Nurdin; like Karsan, he remains anchored to his past in a way that makes him, at times, feel helpless and directionless. Torn between East and West, between Tanzania and Toronto, German East Africa and British-India, he submits that he, like all persons, is a creature of his origins (Vassanji 1991, 9). Echoing the words of poet Constantine Cavafy (1975) in "The City", the epigraph to *No New Land*, one experiences the sensation that one wanders and grows old in the same streets without end, even though one may go on searching for

distant shores, for new lands and new seas. Cavafy's poet contends that there is neither new land nor new sea; "the city will always pursue you [...] Don't hope for things elsewhere". The crisis, for Cavafy's poet, is that wasting one's life "here", even in the homeland, means destroying it everywhere in the world. Of his own Dar, Alexandria, Cavafy says that the land is always someone's fate. It is in the land that hearts are buried, where "ruins of [one's] life", like anguished desire, are seen. In this view, because every city has its life stories, its own characters and their histories, there is no difference between "measly backwater" Dar and Alexandria, or even between Dar and Cairo, Bombay or Toronto (Vassanji 2014, 11).

For the migrant like Nurdin and Karsan, that 'here' refers to the ever-present place of the personal internal terrain that is invariable and inescapable. A similar disorienting sentiment can be seen in Vassanji's *Amriika* (1999) epigraph in the form of Walt Whitman's "Facing West from California's Shores": one must always come to "face home again", though one may wander and seek tirelessly against the true home of fate. The point I want to draw here is that as much as identities become refracted by "class and generation", split by migration, or challenged by cultural and political ruptures, there remains a longing for a "defining locale", what Steiner calls a "restorative nostalgic position [...] against contamination and movement" (2005, 480).

Nurdin's, Ghalib's, and indeed Vassanji's histories of migration put self-identity into the stranglehold of fate. Suddenly there becomes no identity to establish for history has already uncovered a posture for identity to assume, which one has been assuming all along, even if that posture is one of movement that has to pass through the individual. The question of identities is therefore a question for the individual to accept or come to terms with. These points are perhaps more explicitly drawn in Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003).

For Haji, a first-generation Asian migrant, the Tanzanian republic itself, first as British-German East Africa, is the land to integrate into the security and uniformity of colonial society. In Haji's case, cultural and religious distinctiveness provides a buffered identity as a kind of enclosure. There is little assimilative pressure to develop a modern sense of self identity for Haji remains, in a sense, in an old world. And so, while for Haji, for whom there is no desire to escape but integrate, Nurdin faces change through more explicit generational conflict. As a longing for unity or the security of sure footing, Nurdin's search is initiated by political upheaval, and elsewhere the appeals of a combative capitalism, unknown luxuries, a kind of radical change or critical juncture. He is both attracted to the promises of hybridity and other luxuries in Canada and threatened by their displays of excess of "bestiality" (See Ojwang (2008) in "'Eat pig and become a beast': Food, Drink and Diaspora in East African Indian Writing"). This describes a context for Nurdin's internal crisis. It is a quest to decolonize by "redefining his relationship" with what he perceives to be his homeland and his ancestral homeland. His context can be differentiated from his father's quest that is of another character, though they share in the jolt and promise of movement. Upon reaching Canada, Nurdin cannot immediately recognize the possibilities for newness, for new articulations of identity, that his personal crisis provides. The crisis of the medieval folk poet, by contrast, as I have tried to show in the example of Ghalib, is carried through recitation and song. It represents openings to better understand and "know my Beloved's mysteries" (Ahmad 2004, 101). Here, crises become evidence for a teleological view of history, which rests on a particular faith in the overcoming or even the reversal of a crisis situation (Ahmad 2004, 101). It represents a courageous kind of faith that fortifies one with the vision to see a crisis through to its end, reversal or reunion. But attempting to resolve the poet's

crisis of longing is through love of God, a submission to the eternal unknown that migration alone cannot disturb.

Nurdin's movements in other ways mirror his father's, the Asian-African Haji, similarly twice-dislocated as a Tanzanian (formerly of the Tanganyika territory, the British share of German East Africa) of Indian origin. Haji moved at sixteen years of age, in 1906, to Tanganyika from India when the German's recruited British Indian subjects "to build the German empire in Africa" (Vassanji 1991, 11). These immigrants were seen as "colonial functionaries" and, as traders, "semi-skilled laborers" (Ozawa 2016, 44). Being noticeably of Asian-Indian descent, Haji and those like him were treated better by the colonialist Germans, British, Belgians, and the Portuguese, than indigenous Africans were. Like other Asians, the Indians kept up a measure of cultural distinctiveness (Ozawa 2019, 86). The Asians were seen as "buffers between white rulers" and the black Africans (Ozawa 2016, 44). Later, after the republic was declared, when mutiny struck and the descendants of slaves sought "bloody revenge" and slaughter in neighboring Zanzibar, with the overthrow of the Arab sultanate there, the Indians would not be spared by the revolution. This bloodshed was part of the uniting of the regions known as Tanganyika and Zanzibar under the name of Tanzania. After Haji's passing, a new era of nationalized cultural identity would be installed. One where Nurdin would find himself out of place, "squeezed [...] out of the newly independent African [country]" (Ozawa 2016, 42). As Bhabha (1993) writes, this divergent dual experience is a product of the "deadly embrace of imperial power" that produces a creeping residue of conflicting identities within the migrant whose desires for a reconstructed selfhood appear as a threat even to themselves (ix).

The young Haji apprenticed at an Indian firm in the "old slave capital Bagamoyo", meaning 'pour your hearts' or more perversely 'relinquish your hopes' (Vassanji 1991, 12). On

the east African coast, it was rivaled by British Kenya's Mombasa. Over the previous fifty years, slaves in the thousands poured into Bagamoya, alongside "sultans, slave traders, ivory merchants, missionaries, explorers, shopkeepers, and moneylenders" across what was known as the Swahili or Ivory Coast (Vassanji 1991, 12). Bagamoya was soon abandoned by the Germans for a neglected village called Dar es Salaam, 'haven of peace', which would become the foundation for a newer European capital. The same was true for Mombasa, which would be left by the British for the railway junction of Nairobi, another of Vassanji's East-African childhood homes. Haji soon became manager of the firm and later a shop-owner. He was a strict moralist who befriended the fathers of the German Catholic Mission as well as the sheikhs of the mosques through theological discussion and debate (Vassanji 1991, 13). Dar was taken by the British soon after war broke out, and before Haji approved a woman in Dar for marriage. Haji Lalani became a prominent citizen of Dar, and his shop a landmark. He was early on a presider of a mosque, and exercised his license over the community just as he frightened his children, in particular his sons. Nurdin "cowered before his father", knowing he would be whipped for misdeeds, not as the Germans whipped offenders with hide of hippo but with a cane (Vassanji 1991, 17). Haji was part of communities of Indian East-Africans who upheld coloniality and reaped the privileges. They "spoke proudly of Churchill" and were reassured by the chimes of Big Ben on the radio (Vassanji 1991, 22-3). Vassanji reveals, in *A Place Within* (2009), upon his first visit to his ancestral homeland, that England, not India, had always been his family's "imperial center as the ultimate cultural anchor" (Ozawa 2016, 43). This is what Ozawa calls "internalized colonial values", and so to rediscover India represents something of a decolonial quest for Vassanji, his own attempt at reconciliation (2016, 43).

By briefly outlining these intertwined histories of crisis and movement, those primarily of Nurdin to the extent that he mirrors Vassanji's, I have tried to show the shifting terrain upon which searches for new spaces are intertwined with crises of the psyche and soul for the migrant. Migrant is understood broadly to include such characters as the poet Ghalib who does not move so much as movement goes through him. Vassanji's ancestral travels, mirrored by Nurdin and father Haji, show the extent to which attempts at personal reconciliation rely on abstracted conceptions of national selfhood filtered through imperial power. As Amin Malak explains, Vassanji as a post-colonial writer contends with divergent affiliations, on top of shifting landscapes, "[manifesting] themselves at emotional, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or political levels" (Malak 1993, 277). I hope that the asides and readings offered give glimpses into dimensions of these internal crises that cannot be removed from the objective predicaments of history that are historical crises.

As a shorter story, *No New Land* stands out as one of Vassanji's slimmer, earlier works (it was his second and least successful novel). It is set primarily in sedated Canadian contexts but dealing with traumatic and colorful experiences of diasporic displacement, the "politics and poetics of diaspora" for the doubly-dislocated migrant Nurdin and his family (Ozawa 2019, 82). Vassanji shows that 'Canadian' stories, too, as stories of migrant identities, can "span histories, generations, and countries"; and Canada is not the desolate, colorless backdrop it is sometimes painted as (Moss 2013, 71). Staging those experiences on a Canadian foreground provides for several awkward scenes of out-of-placeness, of slow and methodical slides into assimilation and against cultural conservation. Consider newly-arrived Gujarati Khojas at their first "party" being treated to a lingerie fashion-show by their ingratiating, "superficially polite", white-Canadian hosts (Malak 1993, 280). "You cannot look too hard, you cannot look away, [Nurdin] thought

uncomfortably to himself” (Vassanji 1991, 55). A scuffle ensues when the Ismailis take the show to be a shameful procession of nakedness. Or consider Nurdin struck by the moral tensions around eating pork sausage. This scene replays Appadurai’s (1981) “gastro-politics” wherein food is its own “biomoral” semiotic device or medium, its own language of worship (509). These instances satirize “radical displacement” or dislocated moralism showing itself in the everyday uncanny arrangements of incongruities (Ojwan 2011, 86). For Nurdin, the move to Canada as a cultural translation marks a point of internal crisis that had long been stewing. That movement competes with the authority of his father's visions which go on living in a penetrating and all-embracing way, through his son’s seeking of tradition on new lands. Haji was evidence for the fact that Gujarati Khoja communal identity can be transplanted and integrated into the empire, that migrants can in fact take their stories with them like luggage. From British-India to German East Africa, to the Tanzanian republic, and then to Canada, it is hoped that a sense of that particular community can be carried forth. Haji’s Africanized-Indian identity rests comfortably in a middle position, between the imperialism of the German-British Empire and African nationalism, and indeed pan-Africanism, of Tanzania. The elder Haji died believing Islamic-India had settled in Dar es Salaam. He perhaps over-confidently maintained a personal link with mother-India even through dislocation. Nurdin, meanwhile, flees the new republic and the turbulence of decolonization (Ozawa2019, 88). Still seeking new land, he uproots his family to live with nearly 250 other migrant families at an apartment complex at Sixty-Nine Rosecliffe Park, Don Mills, on another continent.

Part of Nurdin’s internal crisis can be seen in his reluctance to be able to speak for and find himself—to articulate his identity in a new language— within his diasporic Asian-African community across geo-cultural boundaries, now transplanted, in the ‘new’ land of Canada. He is

initially poorly equipped in Canada to face those living histories, or so he thinks. These are histories which his father represents through relentless “judgement” (Vassanji 1991, 83). In this way, Haji maintains a “real presence”, and authority over Nurdin, crippling him, even in Canada (Vassanji 1991, 83). Nurdin’s longing for true ethnic belonging, a pure and stable identity articulation, is negated by his family’s heterogenous, syncretistic history, one that he cannot shake or even fully perceive, as “somewhat unorthodox, hence insecure” members of a self-contained Islamic sect called Dar Shamsis, the Shamsis of Dar es Salaam (Vassanji 1991, 13).

3.4 Crisis and rot, or spiritual crisis

Drawing from Ozawa’s (2019) examination of identity transformation in *No New Land*, and from Bhabha’s (1993) proposition of “double-lives” of the diasporic, I try to show here how the “borderline conditions” of dislocated characters can lead to deeper “psychic [anxieties]” or what I am calling spiritual crisis as rot (Bhabha 1993, 306). Crisis as rot refers to unattended personal affects of internal crisis that restrict the “fluctuating” capacity for sight or insight, the migrant worldview (Pervez 2004, 153).

In “How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation”, in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1993) writes that there is a particular “space of [...] translation of cultural difference”, a profane, in-between position, that the migrant occupies (321). The space allows for moments of movement “between purity and danger” dramatized in the novel narratives and recognized in life narratives of diasporic writers, “a moment of transition”. Tradition “reinscribed” through the narrative form of the novel, a minority mode of expression, becomes a sort of heresy that dislocates meaning which, for Bhabha, is perhaps best shown through the well-documented, controversial reception to and the

writing of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, which was taken by some to be an act of profanity, or heresy, which Bhabha calls the threat of "hybridity" (1993, 322). The migrant voice in spiritual crisis calls for renegotiation of boundaries, and in adopting new tonalities brings death to the old borders. And, of course, there are many costs associated with that bringing about of death.

In the context of Vassanji's *No New Land*, the migrant Nurdin's spiritual crisis is a problem of perception, a way of looking, of conceptualization, or self-reflection, perhaps approaching a kind of neurosis that cuts the ability to engage with in-between spaces, reminiscent of Naipaul. As Ozawa (2019) rightly points out, Nurdin becomes deadened to the generative possibilities for translation: he is "incapable of perceiving his cross-cultural sensitivity" as its own newness (95). The migrant's personal anxieties linked to their uprootedness in relation to their cultural-religious traditions, are marked by movements along international and intergenerational dislocations, as I have tried to show (Steiner 2005, 462). This is in keeping with Taylor's (1989) suggestion in *Sources of Self* that the different articulations of self as a social entity should be considered in relation to interlocutors (36). In the case of the migrant writers, their interlocutors break geo-cultural limitations of the self-narrative as a purely singular quest, though the self remains unified in a "space of concerns" (Taylor 1989, 51). Another way to put it, as Ortega does, is to say that our interlocutors leave "space" for us, and that our being relies on this space created or left by them (1974, 191). Dislocated or cut off from those interlocutors, as in the case of the migrant Nurdin, or the modern blasphemer novelist who is exiled, the migrant experiences a decline in their capacity for hybrid lines of sight that precipitates internal rot. This is to say simply that even while living doubled lives, in carrying fragmented identities, the migrant's self is unified or seeks a unified point of view through connections that cultural and cross-cultural interlocution maintains. Pervez's (2004) reading of

Bhabha shows that the doubled-self “disturbs both sides of the border” (154) and portrays the migrant identity as always “plural and partial” (Rushdie 1991, 15). This is to say that borderline identities, recognizing their own personal crises, always seem to be engaged in a kind of negotiation, in gain but also potential loss of “moral and cultural footing” via dimensions of assimilation against their will (Ozawa 2019, 95). All of this adds to the migrant worldview that, again, refers to a capacity for sight that is needed to remake boundaries. The disruption caused by the migrant’s movements is blasphemous and transgressive, revealing “contingencies, even the incommensurabilities, involved in the process of social transformation” (Bhabha 1993, 323).

I want to describe further dimensions of what I understand spiritual crisis to be in the context of migrant-minority narratives. In a way, the spiritual crisis in general might refer to the soul in crisis, or the loss of God in one’s life. In another respect, spiritual crisis emerges from attempting to mark out the holy dimensions of living apart from the profane as a matter of one’s conscience, or to ask as Rushdie (1991) does “Is Nothing Sacred?”, which can be a peculiar thing to try to do or to be faced with doing publicly. In response, one might reply that everything is sacred, or reply that it is a question of mutability, that what is sacred changes depending on the historical-political time and place, but this only seems to reassert the crisis which seeks a unified answer. To say the answer moves and shifts is cold and rational; it is little consolation. Having lived in Pakistan, India and England, Rushdie (1991) provides a particular reading of the sacred. He recalls as a child kissing holy books, dictionaries and atlases, comics and novels, and other fallen objects, like bread, whenever they were dropped as an act of apology for disrespect. This gives the impression that all those things were sacred—“food for the body and food for the soul”—that they should be handled with a level of care, that this care should be maintained as a mark of respect, and that this is shown through the ritual of kissing the fallen object (415).

To ask what can remain sacred across boundaries and through dislocations, how sacredness could be protected against profanity, might be even more difficult. How are we to maintain the sacredness of that sacred thing when it has been abused, disfigured, forgotten, transplanted, translated, or reimagined? Books, beloved and sacred for the writer Rushdie, for instance, are not as attractive to others as they are to him (1991, 415). But the books are not mere things to be tossed around and dropped or attacked, they symbolize a particular form, the novel, for example, and way of life, at times a medium of censure, whose meaning, when disregarded, needs to be reasserted by the lover of books (1991, 415). The question then becomes how should the sacredness of something be shared so as to protect it against rot, so that the sacred thing would not waste away? How does the sacred most endure? Rushdie maintains that it is the devotion of the lover who can share the sacredness of books with others, but never through force (1991, 416). It is perhaps best in that context of loving devotion that sacredness may be shared, even extended to the writer who opens “a space of discursive contestation”, subverting the authority of what is sacred when asking, wondering, what is sacred at all (Bhabha 1993, 323). But when that sharing takes a defensive posture of protection, of trying to maintain a level of respect to what is sacred against other interpretations, against any change or question, suddenly there is paralysis that is profane to even the “secular fundamentalist” metropolitan novelist (1991, 416).

Noor Naga (2020), who was born in the U.S., raised in Dubai, and lives in Egypt, in *Washes, Prays*, a collection of poetry that blurs the boundaries between poetry and prose, similarly asks what is sacred. Naga examines what it means to be a faithful Muslim woman, to belong in the correct ways so as to be accepted, but also to love, to desire, and to believe against and beyond what has been determined for her to be sacred. It is a novel in verse about the crisis

of faith of a Muslim woman, one who is lonely and who desires to be a good Muslim and at the same time lover to a married man. For Naga's narrator, "divine precision" causes all crises: "it could be only-you only-now-like-this [...] a javelin hurtles through the ages with your name inscribed in its hollow wooden soul" (Naga 2020, 14). The spiritual or internal crisis as such, in presenting a context within which the sacred can be questioned and deviated from, is a fated dimension of the seeker's quest. And so, it seems in a strange way, the seeker moves away from what is sacred only as part of a broader movement toward their own renewed sense of what is sacred to begin with. Wander as one may, there is no dislocating of fate. The underlying question, then, is how to know what is sacred, if we have not felt what is sacred becoming rotten, if we have not asked ourselves what is truly sacred to us? How can one be sensitive to those seeking in this way, against what they have inherited, one not having similarly sought for themselves?

In continuing this line of questioning, we can consider, for example, social love and love of God, human love and divine love. It is a bracketing of our experience that asks us to make distinctions between what is low and what is high. Perhaps one had never considered such distinctions or what upholds them. The bracketing symbolizes a kind of obstacle that the dislocated person faces in new places where old tradition is without its usual weight and ritualistic intelligibility, integrity or second-nature. This shows a dimension of the spiritual crisis: it describes the affective dimension of a time when what was previously relied on within the home as duty, fidelity, righteousness, observance, the "amalgam of beliefs and practices" rooted in particular and shared (even enforced or taken for granted) social realities—in a word 'religion', a scattered concept—is now seen outside the home to be without the same sort of meaning that once gave it an all-encompassing life (McGuire 2008). It is a time wherein the life

of old can, in fact, be bracketed away, wherein nonbelonging or rejection of tradition becomes in some cases an attractive option and in others a necessity to be accepted for notions of progress and change. One simply can no longer belong in the way one had, no matter one's desires: this religion is a very practical matter, "not sentimental [...] not just fuzzy heart-feels [...] it is a code of law" (Naga 2020, 50). Such religion "stops talking to you", leaves you without knowing how to go on, if you overstep it; there is not a prayer for everything, after all (Naga 2020, 50). At the same time, 'religion' perhaps at its most broad, inclusive and evasive can refer to "self-realization or knowledge of self", truth of the self as the substance of all morality, as Gandhi notes in chapter ten "Glimpses of Religion" in his autobiography (1945, 27). Here, not knowing oneself describes the spiritual crisis, and identity crisis becomes a religious matter to be reconciled. My point here is to outline or propose some anxieties around spiritual crisis that may be provoked by moral dislocation as opposed to geographical.

One might look at the states with deep sadness, because through dislocation it shows a kind of amnesia with respect to one's origins, a place of belonging that may physically be no more but one also that relies on exclusion of other possibilities. At the same time, the migrant clings⁴ to a hope that through the dislocation something can be gained and a new home can be created even through loss. This, in part, I believe, is why the old world, ancient syncretistic India, for instance, as home is an appealing image for someone like Rushdie to articulate in English: the ancestral home must be recreated; that is, in a sense, Bombay in London, like Tanzania in Toronto. Rushdie (1991) was neither raised in a "narrowly Muslim environment" nor an alien Hindu one detached from "Islamic heritage", that home is already in-between worlds (16). He

⁴ Rushdie (1991) asserts that while "It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained" (17).

recalls that he was sold the religion of non-sectarianism, of a 'secular' India, which enables the "talent of non-stop self-regeneration" to flourish (Rushdie 1991, 16). Spiritual crises, then, can be calls for self-regeneration, a kind of ongoing reorientation of the self to the individual. But it requires that the self first becomes strange to the individual, "plural and partial", that one at once belong and not belong (Rushdie 1991, 15). This is continuity of the self being located in hybridity. Amidst a strange problem of belief and nonbelief may the migrant self then struggle to be articulated; this describes the identity crisis in a religious tone. That problem I am calling a spiritual or religious crisis which, without being perceived, when unattended to or unrecognized, descends into a rot.

Internal rot is something that Nurdin experiences and comes to be able to recognize and attend to. At the beginning of chapter 7, Nurdin meditates on the question "When does a man begin to rot?" (Vassanji 1991, 83). In posing the question, he begins to build a response to it and relate to it. In silence he asks it repeatedly to himself. In articulating the question, he initiates a personal discourse within himself. Here, Nurdin is only "vaguely aware" of his own rot and the opportunities it may provide for cross-cultural transformation (Ozawa 2019, 95). He is on the verge of recognizing himself in a disintegrating state and is quick to reproach himself. He meditates in light of "tremors of change" and "new yearnings" hitherto silenced (Vassanji 1991, 128). The question of rot is what initiates this internal dislocation; suddenly the rot inside becomes pursued or rediscovered by the question. The question is significant because it crystalizes in a new language and new setting the underlying conflict between communal-religious identity in the face of the "incorporated dominant identity" (Mohan 2019, 88).

Nurdin's rot, however, is not simply the result of tasting a little pork sausage or beer, which he does, but the accumulative affects of lustful thoughts, of eating from the more

substantial Canadian offerings: including open opportunities for new forms of cruelty, promiscuity, unfaithfulness, “divorces, crimes”, all kinds of bestiality and godlessness, as if there was something sinful in the Canadian air he could not avoid (Vassanji 1991, 136). In the face of his communal values, those traditional Shamsi norms represented by his father Haji, Nurdin finds himself in a state of internal crisis, a sickness of the soul, and is alarmed at who he is becoming and who he has left behind. He is suddenly a person without roots, unable to place himself within his own history. In this new world of fresh desires in Canada, the convictions of Dar are seen as empty. The religious-communal sensibilities of old seem incongruent here and need reconstruction. Guilty, he recalls the demons of hell, how he was told as a child the sinful will “cry in anguish, mercy, mercy” (1991, 142). The question “when does a man begin to rot”, therefore, positions Nurdin on the verge of transformation, on the boundary, and recalls the crisis-person of Ortega (1958). Crisis-person is not only a person struggling through cynicism and negative convictions to release themselves from one vital perspective and preparing themselves for latching onto another, they symbolizes the promise of the modern world itself; that is, the crisis-person attempts to carry on living “in a new style, face to face with another ancient and traditional style” (Ortega 1958, 76). This is crisis in the person, or the internalization of historical crisis.

On the wall of the family apartment is a 1940s portrait of Haji. It stands cutting into Nurdin’s mind. He is normally unable to face Haji directly, the fez-capped head and the bushy eyebrows being a testimony to how much Nurdin had failed by comparison to maintain his communal affiliations (Vassanji 1991, 83). Here, readers can begin to see the character of Nurdin’s identity crisis, which finds its root in a spiritual crisis or crisis of spirit as I have so far described it. It is an identity that struggles to construct itself in the image of that spirit and

against a dead but ‘pure’, communal history that sits, like a watchful eye, over and above any individual dislocations or intentions. Nurdin’s struggle recalls the general migrant condition of the “ambivalent processes of negotiating transcultural identity” (Steiner 2005, 459). The tension is one between the ‘push’ to “seek shelter” in the diasporic migrant community and thus to maintain connections with a modest past and a “breaking away” from history, a ‘pull’, to find new communities that meet the new desires (Steiner 2005, 460).

The Shamsi community provides a buffer against total assimilation, and community as such shows its healing properties. Nurdin’s community is living evidence for the past being present; this is the past being unshakable, its essence translatable and invariable. Community represents the hopes of reconciling internal crisis because the community is never destroyed by movement; though it may be weakened or strengthened it never releases its essential character, which is ultimately accepting of the wounded Nurdin. Both Jamal, ‘the Persian’ to those who knew him, the Lalani’s showy lawyer-friend, and Nanji, a modest lecturer who taught an evening course in Linguistics, knew Nurdin had been “tempted by this devil of a world”—they could see it plainly and through his change in demeanor (Vassanji 1991, 165). After news of Nurdin being spotted after hours at a peep show, they agree to try to “warn him and save his soul”. (Vassanji 1991, 165). Nurdin recognizes his own fall: as well as dissenting from Haji’s teachings, he submits to the image of Haji, too, particularly when he recognizes himself straying from what he knows in his heart to be wrong.

What is ironic but in some ways expected is that a religious leader, known affectionately by the Dar Shamsis as “Missionary”, helps to rid Nurdin of his inferiority complex; he becomes functionally Nurdin’s savior by exorcising Haji’s control over his son (Ozawa 2019, 96). As Ozawa (2019) recalls, there are particular sensibilities around the preserving, accepting and

creation of history that the migrant adopts as a kind of defense mechanism to protect their “disappearing world” while engaging in a new one (98). One need not always face the past with either stoic reverence or existential anguish; there is equal if not greater need for a creative dispensation, an exploratory, inquisitive, or playful sense, when looking back in order to traverse the impending crises of dislocation and their affects. Missionary, the Shamsi’s religious leader, entrenches the past into the hearts of the dislocated community upon reaching Toronto from Tanzania. He brings with him Haji’s old red fez, and in an act of play wears it in front of Nurdin and the family. Jokingly, he asks Nurdin what kind of punishment he deserves (Vassanji 1991, 196). Through Missionary’s simple play, the fez is recognized by Nurdin as the “dead object it was”; Haji’s photograph on the wall is similarly deadened now with blank eyes and a meaningless expression (Vassanji 1991, 197). In this way, Nurdin can recognize the object, either fez or photograph, for what it is: no longer the reference point for his final judgement, an easy out for his inferiority, it becomes real. This is Nurdin reorienting himself in the context of his community, which in this case is a forgiving community that bestows a sense of belonging to show Nurdin his true path and exclude the appeals of new, alternative paths. Vassanji’s narrator captures it: “Before, the past tried to fix you from a distance, and you looked away; but Missionary had brought it across the chasm [...]. Now it was all over you” (Vassanji 1991, 207). Now, with this particular past being made, and having been made concrete, “with this past before you and all around you”, one embarks on a future with past in mind and closer at hand (Vassanji 1991, 207).

The gradual decline of Nurdin’s spirit is captured most prominently in an episode in the fifteenth chapter. Here, at a downtown addictions clinic where he works as an attendant, Nurdin is accused of sexually assaulting a white woman for whom he is caring. It is not immediately

relevant that Nurdin is innocent; he only touched the woman's shoulder out of genuine concern for her, though he was tempted to go further. But his wife and children react by questioning his innocence, even before they know the details of the story. Missionary's arrival around the time of the incident symbolizes a clash of worlds, as well as a time for reckoning. Missionary, as a positive emblem of the old world arrives at an opportune time, when his strength of identity is needed as a reminder to impose itself on Nurdin who feels inadequate and lost.

It would be too simplistic to say the migrant should become a novelist, artist-poet or, if only they were simply writers, then they could tackle these transgressions head on or reach transcendence. No, there is no such privilege to act as a savior or fool-proof ointment beyond the privilege of the acts of contemplation, recollection, perhaps the contexts of education, and not their products. The point is rather that in the context of a loving and ultimately forgiving community, Nurdin comes to find and reassert himself. In the context of that community support—of lawyers, lecturers, religious leaders, family—a necessary space is created wherein he can exorcise his demons of the past and see himself in the world anew.

3.5 Quest of crisis in the texture of the devotional and poetic

To conclude this essay, I examine and reflect on forms of devotional poetry that pick up on the theme of crisis as quest, or spiritual crisis as expressed through longing for reunion with the beloved. It is in keeping with Vassanji's universal religious sensibility, which tries to reject the exclusivity and finality of common religious identifiers, that the poetry be fret with contradiction as well as universality of sentiment that provoke wonder through the simplicity of expression. Devotional folk poetry translated across Indo-Islamic worlds in its varied mystical forms presents a character of submission to internal crisis as part of a quest for "Unity of Love", and so there is a lack already assumed which wonder may fill (Sahlani 2004, 115). Here, I am

specifically speaking to the devotional aspects, the devotional content, of devotional poetries or songs as genre. While devotional folk poetries within Indo-Islamic traditions can refer to a particular corpus, I want to refer generally to the vast multitude of genre that include common devotional content, whether we use such terms as ode, hymn, love-song, even recitation, *bhajan*, *ghazal*, Vassanji's *ginan* or others. My point is that there is a quest having to do with personal crisis within the texture of these devotional works, which are typically short, religious poems or songs intertwined with the daily living of people.

The poet who describes the quest recalls the seeker. The poetry of quests speaks directly to conditions of longing and separation through song, at times describing the quest of the seeker who abandons their quest and becomes lost in their search. The poet's work expressed through song and accompanied by music is its own devotion and a kind of tonic for worshippers, participants, listeners. Across different settings of devotional-Sufi poetry, love poetry of mystics, the poetry is instructive against affliction of the spirit, or the internal crisis described. I see it as an attempt to reconcile the internal crises not by supplying answers but calling the seeker to their quest, reorienting them to their path and doing away with superficialities.

But the seeker is sometimes chosen, as in the case of Vassanji's Karsan Dargawalla, who is "destined to succeed his father as the avatar" of a thirteenth-century Sufi shrine in Vassanji's (2007) *The Assassin's Song*. It is through the quest that a unity of identity is being sought, even though Karsan desires to reject his filial obligations.

This devotional-folk genre assumes an "innermost transcendence" as a theological motif, characterized by the quest of a seeker for the divine (Barua and Khalid 2020). The poetry was not written or recorded but shared through song and oral recitation. There is a sense in which the seeker, lyricist or poet is in a perpetual state of crisis or loss that resonates with a quest for the

“eternal unknown” that is given voice through the poetry (Barua and Khalid 2020, 4). It is always in relation to the Divine that the person and their quest are understood. One particular genre of medieval poetry indigenous to the Punjab region of Northern Indo-Pakistan is the *kafi* of Shah Hussain (1539-99) and in particular Bulleh Shah (1680-1758), among others (Gaur 2016, 141). The *kafi* form is recognizable as a type of ode, between student and master analogized from the soul-Creator relation. These were poet-scholars of the Quran and Islamic Gnosticism, and they spoke for the peoples of the Punjab region, of a particular “indigenous space and soil” with “specificity and sensitivity” (Gaur 2016, 141). As Gaur (2016) writes, these folk literatures as poetry of the people do not accommodate “reductive religious and nationalist orientations”; the folk domain of literature, in this case, rather presents “marginalized layers of [histories]”, enabling new encounters between readers and the folk traditions (145). In part for this reason folk poetries can be regarded with “suspicion and disdain” (Asani 1988, 82). In presenting its own “poetry of history”, these literatures as “counter-hegemonic discourses” rescue the local vernacular, as Gaur (2016) points out. At the same time, as Asani (1989) writes, while “pioneering” Sufi poetry of the folk vernacular of the mid- eighteenth century helped sustain and develop Indic languages, the poet also looked to assimilate a mystical-personal Islam to the Indian environments (83-84). The folk poet as “keeper of folksongs, proverbs and customs”, attempts to translate precepts of their faith, in this case Sufism, through a common language of oral poetry and song.

The devotional folk poet shows crisis through a submission to quest for the divine, and the sentiment of longing is transmitted through forms such as the *kafi* for “universal appeal” across religious doctrines (Asani 1988, 91). Here, I am considering a theological dimension of crisis, as a separation from or break in union with God, which centers the relationship between

soul and Divine. The quest centers one's "relationship with the Divine" (Asani 1988, 91), and one must suffer through transformation to overcome separation and "break through to the Oneness" (Sahlani 2004, 117). Sahlani (2004) helps to show that the mystic-poet of Sufi-pantheism, though a faithful commitment to this quest for union, finds unity even in difference: all experiences of the spiritual are rooted in a single sentiment; and God assumes many names in many languages (121). The Sufi poetry in question tries to break with dualities and instead seek a unity or "Reunion with God" through a pantheistic vision (Ahmad 2004, 9). Sufi-pantheism from the ninth century onward proposes among other things the following, as Sahlani (2004) in an examination of Rumi's transcendental pantheism explains: God and the World are one. This is the One Real Being for all existence; the Universe is co-eternal with God; God is both Immanent, appearing in phenomenal form, as well as Transcendent as Absolute Reality (Ahmad 2004, 116).

Saeed Ahmad, in *Great Sufi Wisdom* (2004), through the words of Sufi poet Mian Mohammad Baksh, asserts that the kafis of Bulleh Shah help to destroy "inner infidelity" (9). Devotional folk poetries of the northern subcontinental region carry a debt to Islam. For Asani (1989), the Sufi message that lives on is the impenetrable "will of God" and that through "transformation of the self", through love of God, one submits. Islamicate civilization, in the form of Arab conquests, since at least the year 711, has been integral to the folk landscapes of the Punjab, a cultural and geopolitical area of northern India and eastern Pakistan (Fowler 2017, 129). Sufi folk literatures challenge reductive religious and nationalistic orientations and emerge from the local vernaculars (Gaur 2016, 145).

Folk literatures in the case of the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century Sufi-poet philosopher Bulleh Shah, for example, is "widely recognized for its universality" (Hussain 2018,

51) of sentiment along “non-conformist, counter-hegemonic, non-sectarian and rebellious” lines (Gaur 2016, 162). Christopher Shackle (2000) puts it as follows: “Sufi lyricists of the later Mughal period” influenced “a diffuse conception of South Asian religious identity” that “transgressed by love” “time and place, creed and class” (57-58). Such a sensibility for transgression is identifiable as well in the modern novelists and writers I have already examined. This quality of crossing boundaries, of course, is a commentary on a “distinctive language of identity”, which always seems to uphold a constant tension within the “generic contours” of the particular texts themselves (Shackle 2000, 58). The point here, for Shackle, is that this folk poetry is evocative of the eternal through its ability to move between “different registers of verse and connotation”, even though it is reliant on particular “cultural geographies” of the Punjab to make those evocations (2000, 57-58). Folk literatures, moreover, propose “alternative or counter [archaeologies] of knowledge” (Gaur 2016, 140). The rebellious-unifying sentiment is embodied by Bulleh Shah himself, who lived in late Mughal autocracy, and who rejects the social code of caste in submitting himself to his spiritual teacher, Shah Inayet, who is of a lower caste than he. The Punjabi literary tradition of which this folk poetry is a part needs to be situated on the peripheries, as the language “was not adopted by any religious tradition as a primary and elite language” (Murphy 2018, 245). This in part adds to the poetry’s wide appeal among Punjabi Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus, considering the religious distinctions that have separated Punjabis across the Indo-Pakistan-Bengali borders since at least 1947 (when partition was made legal) (Murphy 2018, 245).

The folk literatures in question can rely on conceptualizations of crisis internal to the person. The quest for self-formation of the seeker, through reunion with God, depicts one sense of crisis as a longing. Another sense is similar to the migrant sensibility around movement. This

sense of crisis, inspired by Islamic mystic poetry, blurs religious and cultural boundaries through rejection of all dualities.

There is a universality of sentiment with respect to personal quest and reunion in devotional folk poetries. Of concern is how the mystical practice of self-emptying shows itself as a response to the longing for reunion, a personal crisis situation. There is a revolutionary rhetoric of this poetry⁵ that tries to dismantle exclusive and singular conceptions of personal-religious identity, and in this way self-emptying becomes a kind of unifying existential force, an attempt at “Reunion”, at becoming reunited with the beloved-God (Ahmad 2004, 9). For Ahmad, Bulleh Shah’s poetry rejects a duality between the humanity of the person and God, between soul and creator (2004, 8). This rejection of the self provides the condition for the seeker who struggles to be reunited. The image of self-emptying also shows itself through commitment, submission, or covenant with the other. As seen here, it is through commitment or devotion that the lover is freed to dissent from themselves, or is dislocated, and reoriented to their beloved:

There is no bit of ‘I’ left within me, since love for you has overcome me. (Murphy 2018, 248)

The above excerpt of Bulleh Shah’s verse shows a “shared religious imaginary” (Murphy 2018, 247). That capacity for sharing, according to Murphy (2018), is the capacity of poetry to “extend community boundaries”, invite diverse interpretations and open a space for individual autonomy toward love, which the seeker is open to and which passes over the person; devotional love overcomes the seeker (247). I want to conclude with these thoughts on devotional poetries

⁵ In referencing translations of Bulleh (also spelled Bullhe and Bullha) Shah’s poetry, I draw from Ahmad’s (2004) text *Great Sufi Wisdom: Bulleh Shah (1680 - 1752)*, Murphy (2018), and Shackle’s (2000) chapter “Beyond Turk and Hindu: Crossing the Boundaries in Indo-Muslim Romance”. Ahmad provides both Punjabi-Gurmukhi and English translations of the original Punjabi-Shahmukhi (Perso-Arabic) text as well as transliterations.

because the genre strongly symbolizes the themes I have been exploring in this writing: most notably, the challenging of convention through the personal movement for reunion and the remaking of boundaries by re-telling migrant-minority narratives. In the single poetic line, we can notice as well the theme of self-emptying: “I” is no more within me but tied to the acts of journey or quest through devotion. It seems that through the act of devotional love, the self is remade, or that the question of self is no more, and this calls into question the context for self-formation. There are many lyrics of Bulleh Shah that express “timeless and eternal” thematic content around this particular language of identity where not religious but other social categories are the primary point of articulation (Murphy 2018, 247). This crossing of boundaries is apparent in, for example: “I am neither Sunni nor Shia,/ and have taken the path of equanimity towards all”; or “Neither do I cry, nor do I laugh./ I am neither uprooted, nor am I well settled.”; or quite simply, “I am not a Hindu, nor a Muslim” (Murphy 2018, 246). For the folk-seeker character, outside of “courtly and institutional religious contexts”, and beyond religious difference of the early modern period, “I” can both never be contained by such categories nor is who I am ever made up by me or found altogether within me (Murphy 2018, 266).

Like dissent, dislocation presents another sort of movement through which we can recognize what initiates internal crisis, responses to internal crisis, as well as initiation as longing for unification or reunion. Migrant-minority narratives feature characters on the peripheries, in-between boundaries, and life-writers who engage in the dangerous actions around the disturbing and remaking of borders. The migrant identity in relation to the homeland, in some cases the mythical-imaginary homeland, contends with fragmentation and cultural translation as a kind of loss. The loss also enables openings for new sightlines and new possibilities for life on ‘new’ lands. Vassanji’s literary journeys, across his travelogue-memoir, fiction, and other writing,

proposes a religious sensibility or communal identity, rooted in the folk hymn and syncretistic vision, that is more plural-partial and sympathetic than it is fanatical, exclusionary, final or cynical. Moral or spiritual decline for the migrant is overcome or reconciled by community affiliations that encourage self-regeneration, as well as by new attempts to articulate what is sacred and opportunities for self-emptying through the destruction of dualities.

Chapter 4: Reflections on the essays and my positionality

4.1 Seeking of personal questions motivates this study

This thesis is an articulation of some questions that have been seeking expression. In their very articulation I have attempted to attend to them in the context of the expression that is this writing. This writing has responded to myself, to questions and prejudices and problems I have been carrying with me. My responses have shown me that I can, in fact, begin to attend to my own questions and articulate them (but, of course, with lots of help along the way). That assistance has taken the forms of engagements with different literatures, many of them journey literatures, that have tried to employ and provide portrayals of dimensions of the concept crisis. Of course, that engagement has taken place within the context of my current program of study. Reflections on those literatures in the context of my current program of studies and professional work has provided the bones for this study. The divergent portrayals have shown that crises appear in different ways, that they present different appearances that are taken up across different literary, philosophical and religious literatures.

For myself as the essayist, this writing of this thesis provides preliminary opportunities and motivation for a particular kind of healing or therapy. This describes a central purpose for my writing. Attending to questions that I have been carrying and wondering about has its own therapeutic appeal. My writing, as it proceeds from my material conditions as a participant in schooling and an Indo-Anglian person myself, inevitably reflects some of those conditions or speaks to them. Now, in the context of this thesis (its concluding section), I have been able to ask how those conditions reveal themselves, which sorts of prejudices they have enabled, and how I can better choose to respond in my ongoing work beyond the present writing. For me, coming to

greater understanding of the world and my conditions within it is filtered through understanding of the self. In other words, the claim is that understanding of one's conditions is continuous with understanding of the self—that the self is continuous with the natural world. This is to allow that persons are continuous with their material environments, and to think about what this could entail. So, it could be that better understanding of the self, knowledge of self, to the extent that it may be achieved, at least contributes and relies on knowledge of the world environment, and perhaps the reverse may similarly stand. This has been a motivating factor for me in pursuing this study. How I may communicate my personal interpretations of texts in dialogue with one another in ways that are healing and responsive to my own situations and difficulties as a beginning teacher and as a first-generation Indian-Canadian who has questions about identities, then, becomes evocative of its own questions. And as the mark or seed of crisis can appear across the questions, this study has provided the preliminary analysis needed for further investigation and articulation into what may become more pointed conceptualizations of pedagogies of crisis, or different ways that attending to questions of crises necessarily attends to questions of education of persons. Might there be pedagogies of crisis that could be built upon? With respect to the place of judgement in contemporary mass schooling, the experiences of personal crises in teacher education, in overreliance on the schooling and education distinction, might there be space to assert that the varied appearances of crisis have pedagogical outcomes?

One very general insight that I draw here is that if crisis is symbolic of change of the world itself, a historical predicament of the world itself, then it also entails change of the individuals themselves, as well, as being continuous with the world, or being located within the world as parts of it. Those individuals being central to talk about education makes crisis

something to consider as it is carried by persons in their memories, even where crises are never resolved.

The concept of crisis, the sort of malleable and rich concept that it is, invites analyses on historical, psychological, psychic, theological and philosophical lines. The concept provides a vehicle to the expression/articulation of the guiding questions. It is through the writing of this thesis that I have come gradually to refine and tighten the questions around the literary theme of crisis and how I could better relate to it. This begins to describe another motivation for me in pursuing this study: I have tried to make crisis personally significant for me. This is in part why I understand dissent and dislocation as two kinds of movement that flow from crisis or through which we can find portrayals, or appearances, of crisis and ways to respond. Dissent and dislocation, then, become their own sorts of responses to the historical crises that are internalized. This is to say that through dissent or dislocation, one can find dignity in self-formation as a form of resistance that is faithful, or hopeful, and reasonable. This is following chapter seven of Ortega's *Man and Crisis* (which I examine in chapter 1, section 1.3).

Another motivating factor for me has been to respond to my own feelings of disassociation or alienation from my family and from my tradition, the Sikh cultural-religious tradition I was raised in, complete with all of the incommensurabilities between it and the schooled order I was being socialized into. This is in part why I have sympathized with portrayals of figures such as Naipaul, those who have held the ancestral homeland in contempt and been accused of being neocolonialists—they, too, have tried to pick up (sometimes too harshly) on the supposed incommensurabilities between ways of being. Their movements also show the mark of crisis.

This is all to say that I had to come to accept, in a way, who I was— in many ways "a city boy", a "soft Asian"— who I am trying to become, and where I come from—this was not something that had to be sought necessarily, but rather understood so it could be accepted, including the prejudices it had wrought (Vassanji 2006). This is to say that through study, I can come to terms with who I have been, as a child, and later in simple adolescence, and in early adulthood, and where I am going. Hence, I have engaged with literatures and themes that I consider to be symbolic of my understanding of a particular ancient and syncretistic Indian identity (one that is Dharmic-Islamic), one that blurs the boundary markers and challenges reductive and exclusionary visions of the self, through the portrayals of poets and writers that I have provided in the thesis.

Another purpose of this thesis is my attempting to attend to the primary motivating questions of this thesis. This makes the thesis itself aspirational as well as therapeutic in its intent. The first question I try to attend to is what are the affective results or dimensions of a crisis of authority or a crisis of identity for a beginning teacher in the mass schools? And, related to this: how might moral critiques of the mass schooling systems reconsider the roles of schooling participants? The second question I try to attend to in this thesis is how can I conceive of internal crisis as moral dislocation, and how have affective dimensions of crisis been shown in the personal formation stories and quest literatures, or migrant-minority narratives that I have most resonated with?

In the present writing, I have taken the personal questions just mentioned as points of contention and points of departure, as motivators for the study. Part of this study has been to better articulate those questions in ways that would be fruitful. The study itself has provided me with opportunity to articulate those questions, and the questions have all along been the subtext

of the study. The questions at the center of this work emerge from my thinking about dissent and dislocation as descriptions of the movements of people, including myself. The movements are considered in different ways, through different relations to different senses of crisis. The questions ask what is at the heart of the crisis in education as education is understood in the contexts of mass schooling. To put this another way, the question motivating the second chapter seeks a moral critique of schooling, which relies on a crisis of the idea of education itself within the schooled contexts. I relate to that crisis of the idea of education because I have experienced the disillusion of education in the context of schools. Though I have worked and otherwise participated in those contexts in a variety of ways, prior to this study I had not articulated what those contexts could represent and how I could work to better and more intentionally influence them.

In the second chapter, I intend a critique of the purposes of contemporary mass schooling, including the naturalized positions or roles of schooling participants as subservient to the schooling processes that are administered upon them. One of the effects of this submission, I claim, is that there are false characterizations of the self that schooling perpetuates in the individuals (these are people who are being trained to become mass workers, the people of mass societies). My intention in the second chapter is to claim that this, a crisis of education for persons in the mass schools, can be located in the affects of alienation on the individual. In other words, this crisis of education represents a moral misunderstanding of children and other schooling participants in terms of what education as self-formation means to them. Through my critique I try to show that students of free schooling *can* assume active roles in their own formations if we take seriously the claims and founding principles of free-schooling. The roles that free-schoolers can assume are more interested in personal desires of the individual, and

moreover in social change, in questioning one's place in society through critique of the moral degradation of mass culture. Mass schooling, on the other hand, assumes that students need to have their experiences, their educations, filtered through mass schooling administration. This is all to say that the idea of education itself within the mass schools can be said to be in a state of crisis. Crisis is noted in the positioning of the student, in this case a child, relative to the other participants of schooling who together operate upon the child's sense of self in the context of the false political economies, meaningless 'gold-star economies', of the mass schools. The mistaken conceptualization and instrumentalization of the self of the child that mass schooling empowers is where we can locate the self-contradictory notion of 'compulsory education' or formation of the self through force or relinquishing of the child to the state apparatuses. To describe education, which is self-formation, as 'compulsory', in my view, is to present a logically inconsistent picture. In compulsory schooling, the passions of children, their own desires in relation to who and what they are becoming, need to submit to the authority of administrators who employ compulsion. Here, children are not being consulted with and schooling is instead something enacted upon them through sheer force. I use myself as an example, my own experience trying to teach high schoolers, to show that this attitude of domination needs to be at least conceptually challenged for education to have a place in the mass schools. Hence, what I try to show is that the education of the individual in the mass schools seems to be in crisis— that is to say that the very idea of education for the individual itself is in crisis— in the mass schools. What free-schooling ideology proposes, then, is at the very least a smaller stage for the performance of schooling— this is an image of the community school, which imagines a radically different kind of schooling and on a much smaller scale. At the same time, it may also be said that 'free-schooling' is similarly a contradiction in terms, because it remains questionable

how free schooling could truly be. At best, free-schooling promises a kind of education that recognizes the self as its own force for social change; this is a kind of schooling that is responsive to the self in the social world; a kind of schooling that dignifies the individual and empowers them with the skills to seek their own freedom collectively. In order to make claims that would substantiate these sorts of propositions, I rely on moral critiques of mass culture that are most forcefully put forward by free-schooling advocates, like the historian Howard Zinn, activists, and visionaries like M.L. King and Gandhi who put forward mass civil disobedience and truth seeking respectively as radical forms of dissent. In so doing, I try to propose that there is a character of dissent being offered in and around the 1960 in the United States (one that I locate in the free schooling movement, which itself owes a debt to the black freedom struggle) that recognizes in the actions of civil disobedience a moral cause that is of global concern and responds to global crises of person of mass societies.

Crisis might spur the movement of people as much as become visible through the movements of people. Perhaps my authority was in crisis at the front of the classroom in 2016, when I posed as a teacher, and as I witnessed children ignore my instruction. Instead of judge those individual students or reprimand them, I had to reconsider the affects of years of schooling on those students, on their morale and on their particular characters. I had to recognize their humanity, as well as the open questions that recognition would allow. My own crisis of authority, if I may call it that, pushed me away from a narrow and individuated conception of education within the school and toward a more hopeful and personal vision for education. That sense of impending crisis, for me, inspired its own movement as I was left questioning my position in the classroom, including the place of teachers in relation to students.

The minority narratives, whether of free-schoolers, novelists, philosophers, activists or migrants, have framed similar questions in particular ways, and they have helped me to see many ways that crisis has been and continues to be interpreted. Reading those interpretations has provided their own fuel for my articulations. I have resonated with the works here that I have tried to outline and build with. My interpretations and articulations of those questions and of the particular narratives (themselves interpretations) are artefacts unto themselves. My writing, then, which is motivated by personal questions that I am trying to articulate, is not representative of manifestations of crisis in the world here and now. My study has been to explain what those manifestations as narratives mean to me, or to interpret different narrative manifestations of crisis in dialogue with one another, not to study the situations of crises as they appear in the world. Those crises are far more complex than my present study may imply: the meanings of crisis in light of schooling, in alternative forms of schooling, within the contexts of education, and crisis in the formations of cross-border identities, or crisis as expressed in migrant stories in general, or through personal experiences. My writing draws from many sources, but in the core essays themselves I have not inserted myself explicitly into the writing as my own source to reflect on my positionality in relation to this product of writing. I try to do more of that now.

My reading and interpretation are my own, though they have been directed and limited by my particular selection of texts, and within the context of a particular program of study, under various authorities, out of particular socio-economic and cultural conditions, with particular intentions, objectives, prejudices and audiences in mind, and so on. I am not, for example, a migrant or dislocated writer in the same way that Vassanji is; his life story is not mine. I am not the congregation or witness to the sermon of the preacher King; I am not the folk of the folk poetries or the metropolitan novelist; I am not a participant in the Mississippi freedom schools;

nor am I a civil rights activist or organizer of the sixties. Their crises are not mine, though I still relate to them, which is the task of my particular study, which presumes a kind of sensibility that can be translated. Trying to relate to the works I have included, trying to understand them in a way that is meaningful for me, has been part of my task. This task of trying to relate in a more intimate and wider sense with the constituents of education, whether the settings of the schools or the personal settings for formation, is one that helps to refine the motivating questions for this study. Those questions I need to consider now as a participant in schooling and person in the world who can influence change. While I do not take the work that has inspired this writing to be representative of my beliefs, nor perhaps could I in a strict sense, I am sympathetic to it all. Here, what I mean by sympathetic is that I am provoked by the works I have examined in their appeals to what I identify as shared feelings across the works. To be impassioned by those appeals, in the context of putting the works into dialogue with each other, and to give the provocation expression, is to point to the qualities of emotional provocation, or emotional qualities of texts that move me. The works resonate with me and affirm what I am calling a shared sensibility, the hope for common understanding across boundaries and perhaps even through the destruction of boundary markers. In trying to interpret and read across texts, to try to draw a series of related points that are not entirely rhetorical or fleeting, I have tried to relate to these works in personally significant ways and in ways that may be communicated in the context that this thesis, as a collection of essays, provides. I want to now articulate some personal reflections that give the thesis its structure.

My particular choices of texts and my interpretations of them leave many questions open. These are questions I have not explicitly elaborated upon in the present writing. They include: why have I overwhelmingly resonated with the work of male-gendered authors? The dominating

voices have been masculine ones, ones projecting revolutionary rhetorical styles in male voices. Some are the voices of sexual prejudice, or of patriarchal social organization, of naturalized, gendered social hierarchies. All of this alludes to open questions having to do with gender and what it means to me in the context of this study, considering I have drawn from primarily masculine-gendered persons in different positions of power and social-economic privilege: the scholars, authors, revolutionaries, the neo-colonialist and metropolitan novelists. Here I can consider the particular questions and prejudicial answers that my understanding of gender has implied and ignored. A reader may get the impression that the journeys and self-formations presented here, those that I am attuned to most closely, are those of men. A scan of the core texts I most refer to, for example, may give such an impression, with such titles as *Man and Crisis* (not *Persons and Crisis*, and certainly not *Woman and Crisis*). What this shows in some ways is my personal ignorance with respect to my own privilege as a man, one who benefits in overwhelming ways from being raised within a patriarchal social arrangement. As a man, trying to apply the crisis metaphor to my life is representative of the wider literary tradition wherein men could, on account of their social positioning, take on philosophical questions of grand significance, the assumption that every discourse is a personal discourse of intimate significance and of cosmic significance. Men can see themselves as central to their life narratives in this way, whereas non-men cannot or have not been granted the material conditions to transcend the body and take on such an authorial view of things. My own gendered prejudices, therefore, can be seen in my selecting of texts dominated by men, themselves benefitting from their own patriarchal arrangements. By portraying images of men who struggle with transcending the determination of their conditions, I have similarly positioned myself as the one who must choose to act in order to alter my conditions and comprehend them. Clearly, that is a mark of gendered

privilege, and particularly so as a schooling participant in the different settings of public schools. This is all to say that being able to articulate the questions I have, and to draw them out in this drawn-out fashion in this writing, represents its own form of continued gendered privilege that I need to answer to.

Related to open questions of gender is my rendering of freedom. This is another point on which I have remained mostly silent. I noted earlier, in section 2.8, that the question of freedom itself can be spoken to, specifically that the question can be seen in the obsession with freedom in, for example, the revolutionary free-schooling ideologies. The question ‘what sense of freedom am I appealing to in advocating for free schooling?’ can be proposed. What I did not consider in initially gesturing toward that question is that gendered minorities as well as racial minorities have their own experiences and understandings of the pursuit of freedom as a life project. Women in particular have paid different prices for freedom historically than have men. In other words, compared with the attention paid to male-gendered journey narratives, my study has not considered the standpoints of non-men as leading their own life narratives, their own searches and yearnings for freedom in the face of crisis. The claim here is that formation stories of gendered minorities provide their own examples of people writing their own lives as authors. These are also people becoming aware of their own subjectivities and the conditions placed upon them. The different ways they relate to their own “existential commitment[s]”, their own crises, provide their own particular, situated examples and counter examples to mine of people other than men, like women, struggling to choose and choosing to act for freedom (Greene 1974, 65). Having largely been silent on these stories, my study of formation stories along the lines of inquiry that crises provide has been evocative of my own gendered prejudices.

In chapter three of Maxine Greene's *Dialectic of Freedom*, "Reaching from Private to Public: The Work of Women", one question around women and their searches for freedom looms above others: what particular prices have women paid for their freedoms, and what, if anything, have those freedoms guaranteed (1988, 58)? The searches for freedom by women represent their particular "struggle[s] against confinement and constriction"—these are struggles against the narrowing of their spaces within which they can hope to choose alternatives (Greene 1988, 60). Patriarchal social organization, at the very least, narrows the spaces for choices; this is a narrowing of the spaces within which women could choose at all (Greene 1988, 60). This is to say, again, that searches for freedom, that freedom itself, imposes particular prices for women to overwhelmingly pay. The upshot here is that in the context of the open questions having to do with gender and freedom—questions that the present study has been silent on—I have unwittingly presented a narrowed and reductionist conception of the self. That narrowed, male self does not consider the existential pursuit, the "central life task", of seeking freedom for gendered minorities in the subjectivity of their particular situations and histories (Greene 1988, 67). This misguided view of the self represents its own estrangement from the particularities of women, persons who have not been granted "freedom [...] as an endowment" in the ways men have, and in the ways I have (Greene 1988, 72). In short, freedom for women, as presented by Greene, is illusory if not disentangled from escapist notions, like mere "negative freedom", or 'freedom from' (Greene 1988, 72). This is all to say that degrees and qualities of freedom in relation to the particular histories and experiences of gendered minorities need to be considered; there is little hope for talk of generic searches for freedom when spaces for women to "decide", to "join with others", to "share", to "organize", to "demand provision", to move, and to "grow" have so historically been narrowed (Greene 1988, 72).

If I may, a further point about searches for freedom may be relevant here. The point is simply that freedom is relational, that it cannot be reduced to individualistic notions of singular choice, of first-person cause and effect, of freedom from obvious restraint. Though human choice can be situated between living and dying, powers “to act” and “to choose” are located in the social world and given meanings through shared associations (Greene 1988, 76). Here, I have reflected on some of these shared associations, including personal prejudices, as they impinge on social realities, such as gender in general and gendered searches for freedom in their particularities.

4.2 Dissent and dislocation are personally significant

Dissent and dislocation, two concepts that flow from crisis, are personally significant concepts for me. Dissent is relevant in relation to my experiences in the mass schooling systems as a participant: as a student and worker. That experience started in the early 1990s in an urban center of the lower mainland of British Columbia, Canada. As participant in mass schooling there, dissent describes my everyday posture in relation to those systems since adolescence, around the ages of 15 or 16. Since that time, until perhaps most recently, I have strongly associated schooling with feelings of captivity and coercion, with harsh judgement and a paralyzing self-consciousness, which is not altogether representative of a marginal experience. All those I had known closely in my youth, my friends, also rebelled against their schooling in similar and in different ways. We found spaces for ourselves on the outskirts, where we could congregate, before, after, and between classes, and in extracurricular and community spaces that broke with the common confines of the school itself, confines within which we often found ourselves trapped. We took advantage of soft-hearted teachers who let us continually get away,

and we avoided those teacher who were most harsh or policing. Against that desire to rebel, I had my Sikh-communal upbringing, my extended family (and later my parents) having migrated from Northern India since the 1970s. As my upbringing had instilled, we (my siblings and I) tried to be respectful of our schoolteachers as authorities. They were like our parents in a way, and we were told simply to obey them. That particular sensibility can be located more in my years prior to adolescence. In some ways, my cultural and religious upbringing had to succumb to my formation in the context of the school, which was far more extensive and pressing a context. It was drilled into me, as was common for many others and, I suspect, still is, that schooling itself held within it the promises of life success. All one had to do was obey and obtain the required certificates and highest grades, and then the highest paying jobs available. Soon after he arrived, my father apprenticed as an automotive mechanic, and later maintained a home business doing repairs. Before working at the postal service, my mother was a teacher of English back home in Shimla. Their quick assimilation into the working culture of this place gave us an example of what success in the world, via the correct sorts of schooling-training, would inevitably look like.

In my early childhood, I loved school and what it represented for me. As an extension of the home, the school and most of what came with it symbolized a comforting and familiar ritual. It represented much of what I desired as a child: the draw of friendship and endless play, the safety and structure of it all, the security and feeling of acceptance, the low stakes, the ease with which one could show they had grasped some menial tasks and get by. That sense waned, however, as it does for many, during my teens and young adulthood, and later into my undergraduate studies. It was there, in college and in higher studies, that one could break with the play-time routine of compulsory schooling and get to the business of trying to deconstruct the

authorities, including my communal-religious authorities, in a serious way and for the first time. Around the time I began my undergraduate studies in literature, it was suggested to me by a community counselor that I pursue volunteering with local non-profit, non-governmental and social services organizations. Through that volunteer work and later employment, of sports coaching and youth work, which allowed me to work in schools, I thought that teaching in the schools could be something for me to consider as a career.

It is not purely cerebral or academic to assume a posture of challenge in relation to all of the forms of schooling, and schooling in many forms could provide the setting for the cultivation of dissent that is worthwhile for the individual in many ways. I have affection for what those systems of schooling have promised, for what those systems can provide or the conditions they can offer in terms of helping to sharpen one's creative abilities through discipline and allowing some flexibility for dissenting attitudes. In my experiences, there are necessary extra-curricular spaces, around sports teams, recreational clubs and after-school spaces, spaces that make use of the schooling architecture but largely abandon its ideology, where dissent is never marginal to what is going on. Therefore, it has been personally significant for me to examine free schooling as, first, a kind of alternative schooling that responds to the moral crises of complacency of compulsory schooling and, second, which assumes itself as a moral critique of the present dominating attitudes around schooling that oppose alternatives. Free schooling, in this way, is both dissenting from compulsory schooling and flexible to some of the conditions that the student themselves provides. Like the fringe spaces we had carved out for ourselves in our youth, where adults could not catch us, in alleyways and in the gymnasium, the spaces that free schooling seems to provide similarly rely on and embody critique of the established order. The difference is that adults of the free schools seem more compassionate, forgiving and accepting

than those of the common schools. Even in the context of compulsion, the student provides their own conditions, their own personal confines, that free schooling recognizes and uplifts. Those particular subjective conditions of students and of all others in schools are ones I have had to become more sensitive to in order to do meaningful work in schools. That is because it is precisely a crisis for education that common schooling enables. It is the student as worker, then, who has proposed for me a moral crisis in relation to my roles in the mass compulsory schools. This opens space for the schooling participants to organize around and initiate change. This is appealing to me in my present work wherein I meet with students who are seeking more opportunity for responsibility in their lives in schools. Today, working in a school, being in schools as a different kind of participant, I still relate to my feelings of dissent from schooling which are bound up in affection for schooling. It is precisely a moral critique of mass forms of schooling (and in turn a moral articulation of dissent from schooling, moral articulations of the place of people within schooling) that I have been seeking as a student and beginning teacher, as a participant of schooling and now as a student of the history of ideas around schooling. It is perhaps along moral lines, to accept the school in its multiple dimensions and contradictory forms, that one could both love the promises of schooling and be sensitive to the dissenting attitudes that constitute the school. These are some preliminary ways that dissent, in the context of schooling, initiates crisis and that dissent can be central to the overcoming of educational crisis.

This is all to say that believers in the promises of compulsory schooling, myself included, need to become more aware of the limitations of individuated approaches to schooling. This is so because critiques of schooling continue to inspire crises of schooling that destabilize the schooling mythologies that Rocha recalls. The mythologies of schooling need to be opened up to

consider the people being schooled in the context of their communities. Leadership in schools can work in subversive ways to recognize and contest the deadening that the old structures enable, to reorient schooling to its primary characters, many of whom already oppose the way in which it functions. Some of the limitations of compulsory schooling I have examined and presented in chapter two, which takes the free-schooling movement to be expressive of a particular kind of dissent situated in the upholding of truth, which can be seen as a kind of faithfulness or commitment to the person who dissents, the person who installs a crisis for the current complacencies. To ask how schooling could respond to its own crisis of authority is to wonder if there is space in the common schools for the dissenting person, including the child (or student or teacher) who disobeys. Leadership who is sympathetic to and understanding of dissent could help to cultivate those fringe spaces and opportunities for the dissenting persons. That person is the student and the teacher. Understanding that particular person, or the persons more generally, to be at the center of talk about education within the context of schools has been something I have been convinced of in the course of my studies in the last few years. And so, it is out of a desire to examine the potential places for the dissenting person in the school that motivates the second chapter of this study.

Through dislocation, as well, can be seen different dimensions or images of crisis, both in schooling and in the lives of people being schooled into, for example, cynical-nationalistic or colonial narratives against their cultural-religious identities which by comparison appear at odds. That is crisis also seen in the movement of migrants. In relation to identity formation of the migrant, dislocation as expressive of crisis is significant for this writing as it is for my personal history. This provides some background for the topic of the third chapter.

My parents and extended family immigrated to Vancouver, Canada from Punjab (five waters) and Himachal Pradesh, India in the early 1970s. This makes my siblings and I part of generations of first-generation Indo-Canadians, Punjabi and Hindi speaking Sikhs, who grew up in the 1980s, in the case of my siblings, and in the 1990s in the case of my cousins and myself. Along with Punjabi-Hindus and Punjabi-Muslims, the Punjabi-Sikhs have had particular relations to this part of the world since at least the late 19th century. This study, particularly its third chapter, represents some of the different ways in which one could relate to this dual belonging or fragmented sense of identity that, geo-culturally dislocated, can sit lurching between the boundaries of Indian and Canadian. The relating to both Indian and Canadian, for example, with whatever incommensurabilities those categories might carry with them, between the village-agricultural folk and the “parceled geometry” of the western urban space, between the Sikh and the Secular, the Punjabi or Hindi and English or French, the communal and the individual, is expressive of crisis, too, in that it provokes particular critiques of singular and static identity articulations; it is a deadening as well as an opening for opportunity in light of the possibilities for plural sightlines and whole visions (Vassanji 2014, 1). This is why one can say that ‘I am neither Canadian nor Indian’, to put it simply. This in part can explain my interest in dislocation of the migrant or migrant writer being expressive of internal senses of crisis. How those writers, some of them self-professed non-believers, have made sense of their cultural-religious identities resonates with me because of their struggles in articulating in the present who they are becoming against what they are, in a sense, ancestrally destined to become on account of their inheritances. There is a sense in which those inheritances cannot be denied. At the same time, dislocation presents its own rupture that forces reconsideration of what inheritance represents in the first place. There are both possibilities for new conceptualizations of cultural-

religious inheritances, as well as unshakable histories that give the inheritances their weight.

Within that tension I see the migrant narratives expressive of many aspects of the movements of people like my parents and ancestors, people with whom I must relate.

Early on in my life, I associated my own religiosity, or the character of being a religious person, with two attitudes that I witnessed. I want to try to express those attitudes here as they offer some reasons that explain my choice of literatures that I have examined. The first attitude was rooted in a kind of moralism which I overwhelmingly associated with men. The second is a kind of sentimental attitude that is able to understand the character of being religious in the plurality of one's everyday living, not necessarily as part of a sequestered, sacred space cut off from the mainstream of life. It was also through various rituals and recitations that I found the sentimental attitude expressed, most notably by matriarchal figures. In trying to articulate these early associations between living (for example, in a school) and being religious (for example, outside of the school, at home), I have reflected on my life as a child and the initial ways I understood these things, both in the context of the home and that of the world. Here, the world is mostly the world of the school, for as a child that was the extent of the outside for me. The school was always important for me because it is against the shaping of the common schooling, which I started in the form of pre-school around the age of three, that one understands being religious. There were also the Sikh Khalsa schools that I attended, but which in the 1990s and early 2000s were entirely supplementary, additional add-ons to the common schooling ritual. It is in this way that I started to see being religious in a particular way: as against the shaping of the common school, after hours, not at all part of the dominant curricula. These associations, of course, were later challenged in the contexts of higher studies. Through engagement in, for example, undergraduate courses in Asian Studies, English literatures and their diasporas, and in

introductions to the philosophy of religion, the rituals I witnessed as a child took on a different quality. What I earlier referred to as the sentimental attitude I try to see with fresh eyes in the context of common recitation, in the musical threads of the devotional poetic expression that have been passed down and shared with me. Slowly, those things have taken on new significance as I can reconsider what I have seen and heard as a child in relation to my ongoing studies. One thing I have drawn from the recitation and prayer is that they seem to remind me that individuals are not alone, and one needs to retain relations to their past, even if in a moralistic manner, and even if through a religious conception of non-belief, which is what I personally most strongly associate with. This, combined with reevaluation of education in the context of schooling, the topic of chapter two, which is at bottom a reevaluation of all the schooling categories themselves, empowers me to still see the school but somewhat at distance. I could then take up something like philosophy of education, or other literary studies, with renewed enthusiasm and feeling more grounded. No longer feeling emotionally and morally dependent on the limited capacity of the school to provide any moral continuity or concern for its inhabitants as persons, one can look elsewhere in further places.

I first read English literatures of the Indian diaspora in *South Asian Canadian Literature*, an undergraduate course by Summer Pervez offered in 2011. There I saw for the first time, in the context of the academic bubble of English literary studies, the sentimental and moralistic attitudes I associated with religiosity being spelled out in the works of Vassanji and others. Those particular spellings reflected shared associations, even across religious and linguistic boundaries, or shared religious imaginaries. Some of that writing I first encountered now a decade ago has become fuel for the third chapter of this thesis. I have drawn on those texts in this thesis because they represent, for me, the possibilities of migrant life writing to be responsive to

the affects of alienation or cultural-religious dislocation. I have sensed a similar dislocation in my own life, particularly with the passing of elders as the keepers of particular cultural forms. The migrant is not only one who has moved, but one who has been moved by the historical and internal predicament of crisis, and who is continually moving or seeking in their journeys. The texts I have examined in the third chapter represent some re-attunement to this internal crisis or moral dislocation. The novelists pick up on the mystical aspects of their formation, which are seen in the poetic expressions of the seeking of persons. The primary writers I have drawn from, even though some are self-professed non-believers, or atheistic or agnostic with respect to particular conceptions of God, maintain through their non-belief shades of the sentimental and the moralistic. They maintain an explicitly religious association even if through outright rejection or denial. The shades are simply their own renegotiated relations to particular understandings of religiosity, which are housed in their senses of cultural belonging.

It must be noted as well that I cannot claim the same kind of dislocation that my parents and ancestors, as migrants, did. Their movements from small agricultural communities, village lives—outdoor, communal kitchens; multiple generations in a single dwelling, monkeys on iron rooftops; lizards on concrete walls; at the foothills of the Himalayas—to the urban sprawl is not one I can simply analogize. I have been pushed to look into those histories, however, to see what they and many others had endured in their journeys to seek new lands, to find the vibrancy and struggle of that movement. It is not lost on me that it is a mark of privilege to seek the questions I have asked. At the same time, this study represents the mark of my personal needing to know. I have been pushed to consider how I understand myself in relation to the movement of my ancestors, how the affects of dislocation are not entirely specific to one or another generation. Movement to Canada, across religious-cultural and national identities was seen, on the one hand,

to concretize the conditions for belonging, even if through a kind of ghettoizing or the reassertion of borders, or even in through assimilation that still disturbs both sides. Indeed, as Nayar (2012) explains in *The Punjabis in British Columbia*, the partition of the states of Punjab and Bengal that came in 1947 with Indian independence, like the countless dislocations via conquest and invasion before it that Punjab witnessed, in many ways reaffirmed boundary markers that separate Punjabi Muslims into the enclave of (at that time) the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, away from the Sikhs and Hindus and others with whom they share a common, even syncretistic, folk tradition. This is to say that independence, or a supposed freedom, brings with it many additional burdens and challenges for the individual migrant, who reorients themselves to the new boundaries, to again navigate their sense of who they are.

This sort of rediscovery of what may be seen as syncretistic possibilities, part of the imagined homeland, in relation to tradition and identity in the face of personal or internal crisis represents, for me, the promises of reconciliation beyond dislocation. The formations of migrant characters has been outlined by reading works in dialogue with other life writings. The journey writings, migrant or minority narratives of personal quests, show reconciliation to be intertwined with the struggles in imagining or recreating of both home and identity under threat of dislocation.

4.3 The mark of crisis in the questions

The mark of crisis is found in the questions that constitute the human condition (Ortega, 1958, 20). Some of those questions, such as how are we to live in schools, or how might identities endure dislocation, I have outlined and responded to in preliminary ways in this thesis. This is another way to say that crises are found in our need to know. In this way, we are captured

by the question ‘how ought I live?’, which (arguably) is the same as ‘what am I?’ or ‘who am I to be?’. It is precisely those questions that intervene with who we are, questions which demand that we become “irredeemably engaged” with the intellectual tasks of creation and interpretation, which is what Ortega understands to be the tasks of human life against the backdrop of a universe that relies on our convictions (Ortega 1958, 25). In the absence of total or final conviction about one’s belonging, one utilizes the crises around multiple identities to reinterpret oneself. This sentence describes, in my mind, the thrust of this thesis: questions of my personal identity have been the subtext, whether in the context of the school, or in the human setting for formation that I have referred to as education, or through the movements of internal crisis that I have examined in the examples of migrant characters. The particular references to medieval and modern folk poetics, to King’s sermons, Ortega’s historical process, Vassanji’s stories, and many others, are in some ways superfluous by comparison. Surely, a very similar study may have been undertaken by reference to an entirely different set of texts. It is through my particular engagement with those texts, however, putting them into dialogue with one another, that I have tried to articulate visions for crisis, its movements in dissent and dislocation, which for me has been personally significant and instructive.

Crisis is a fluid and flexible metaphorical concept whose historical, psychic and teleological dimensions have opened avenues for study. Instead of analyzing the concept in a systematic way, my essays and reflections have tried to show crisis within different narratives around dissent from compulsion through recommitment and dislocation that is potentially generative for the migrant (broadly conceived) in reconstructing and challenging boundaries. As I mentioned early on, the essay represents a trial, and it proposes a particular taste that comes prior to complete digestion. This is not to dismiss the essays as unserious playthings; quite to the

contrary, the essays, as preliminary explorations, allow me to articulate things that I have gone unnamed, things which have been stewing for some time and have sought expression in this thesis. The essays have allowed me to propose ideas, in their full incompleteness, in order that I can slowly arrange the pieces and think them through in a more strategic way. The essay as such represents a preliminary, though at times shaky, step in the direction of study.

Crisis has also shown itself to be a dangerous concept in that crisis provokes critique and critique inspires crisis, and both situations disturb borders. As mentioned, as a public-school worker, I need to maintain that schooling can provide environments for change and formation that is significant for the individual. My critique of the school cannot destroy the school entirely. Put another way, even after its death, we maintain relations with the school. This in part is because school itself, the idea of what schooling is, necessarily exceeds the boundaries of the common school structure. In thinking about the concept within the personal context of living, I have not rejected the sensationalized accounts of crisis in terms of personal identity; ultimately, I have just presented my own idealized rendering of what crisis in different contexts of formation could mean. The asides and historical exploits, including the poetic ones, have shown themselves to be indulgent and, hopefully, insightful in revisioning what schooling could be as well as the power of the minority stories within dominant or schooled contexts.

The two main essays presented on divergent topics are unified under the theme of crisis. That theme of crisis, in my understanding, has to be positioned within the plain of the human person. I have tried to describe in this writing different scenes wherein unity can be born out of movements that try to install and uncover moral crises; dislocation that precipitates or responds to crisis; or dissent from what is complacent in the face of crisis, as well as the loss that crisis ensures and calls attention to. This is the attempt to find unity through difference or plurality.

The particular portrayals of crisis have been understood as their own historical scenes, of personal, particular struggles and historical change, particular predicaments of history, which are finally intertwined under the common theme of change that crisis represents. The scenes or portrayals, their own appearances of crisis, have described hopes for intergenerational communication, for different kinds of reunion, and for a revisioning of what education in alternative contexts has shown to be and could further become. The socialist-republican philosopher, preacher-activist, migrant, diasporic writer and novelist, and the folk poets offer examples of border-line characters who could blur boundaries and reject dualities. In so doing, they embody and provide a context for a kind of internal crisis that is overcome in a variety of ways and considering different sensibilities for openings that allow movement and change. This symbolizes the promise of crisis, which involves death and the possibilities and anxieties of greater life. Internal crisis further describes a familiar quest in its varied forms that I have tried to give voice to with reference to different characters of dissent and dislocation, what are ultimately different portrayals of the person in crisis or crisis within the person.

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