

A Visual Analysis of Rosey E. Pool's Correspondence Archives. Biographical Data, Intersectionality, and Social Network Analysis.

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of Social Network Analysis (SNA) for individual historians, by focusing on the correspondence archives of Rosey E. Pool (1905-1971). Pool's position in her international network of writers and scholars will be examined through her contacts with Hoyt W. Fuller and Robert Hayden over the period 1966 to 1971. The different positions these three actors held towards The First World Festival of Negro Arts (Dakar, April 1966) will be examined. The Dakar Festival was an important and symbolic event in the transnational Négritude movement.

Using the theories of 'intersectionality' and 'collective identity,' Pool's network will be analysed by focusing on specific religious and personal features that have influenced the dynamics of her network. A deeper insight of this specific period will be provided by performing a *close reading* of key letters and by placing the correspondence in its historical context. At the same time, the use of *distant reading* will be discussed, by dissecting and inspecting a visualisation (made with Gephi) of a database based on Pool's ego-centred network. I will argue that the two approaches of *close* and *distant reading* are inseparable in historical research that makes use of Social Network Analysis.

Keywords: Historical Social Network Analysis (SNA), Correspondence visualisation, Intersectionality

1. Introduction

Rosey E. Pool was born in Amsterdam in 1905, and studied English Literature in Berlin in the 1930s. During the writing of her dissertation, Hitler came to power, and she had to flee. Back in Amsterdam, she worked as a translator and a teacher. In 1943, she was imprisoned at the Westerbork transit camp, but she escaped, and went into hiding. She was one of the few members of her family to survive the Holocaust.

In the 1950s and 1960s, she travelled extensively through the United States as a Fulbright scholar, and worked as a lecturer at black colleges ('Negro colleges') in the Deep South. In 1966, she was the only Dutch jury member of the First World Festival of Negro Arts, held in Dakar, Senegal, from 1 to 24 April 1966 (figure 1). This festival was an important and symbolic event in the transnational Négritude movement.

Through her experiences in the Second World War, she felt a deep connection with African Americans. She experienced herself what it was like to be excluded when she wore the yellow Star of David on her clothes: 'That piece of yellow cotton become my black skin.'¹

This feeling of 'otherness' led her to become a member of the Bahá'í Faith in May 1965. A fundamental teaching in this religion is the concept of unity of humanity - regardless of gender, race, or class (Handal 2007:111). The American poet Robert Hayden, a fellow Bahá'í, once mentioned in a letter to Pool: 'I felt so blessed and so grateful that for us Baha'is it is already one world.'²



Figure 1: The jury of the Dakar Festival 1966. Rosey E. Pool stands in the middle. Source: Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, F010642

2. Research questions

Before and after her travels to various countries as a scholar and lecturer, Pool corresponded with many poets, lecturers, writers and students – most of them African Americans. The metadata derived from this correspondence is configured into a pilot dataset, which will be used here. Around 1500 letters are identified so far, of which 497 are currently processed into a database. Hermeneutics from 'traditional' historical research will be used, in what can be called a *close reading* (Moretti 2005) of a number of important letters. Also, tools and methods derived from Social Network Analysis (Borgatti 2013) will be used for quantitative, empirical research. A visualisation of the text corpus will provide material for a *distant reading* of Pool's network.

The combination of *close* and *distant reading* will provide new insights on the links between individual actors in Pool's network. The limitations of this interdisciplinary research will also be highlighted. This

¹ University of Sussex, Special Collections at The Keep, Rosey Pool Collection, SxMs19/11/1/2 Documentatie Zielen vol soul, 'Mijn zwarte ziel', p. 1

² Sussex, SxMs19/1/1, 1-187, Letter from Robert Hayden to Rosey E. Pool, 12 August 1966.

paper presents a critical approach to the question whether Social Network Analysis is useful when reconstructing networks in biographical research. It also investigates whether this research is doable for individual historians working in small projects.

Based on the correspondence archives and secondary literature, the hypothesis was formulated that Pool was excluded by a number of people in her network in the period 1966 to 1971 - the last five years of her life. The period 1966 to 1968 seems to have been a pivotal moment in (African) American history. With various race riots and violent protests, the sixties entered a new phase coined as the 'end of a dream' by various historians (Marwick 1998:483). These events triggered a period of racial polarity, in which Pool felt she was excluded by many of her African American friends. In her writings, she described how she felt her white skin had become a political factor which made her a *persona non grata*. In June 1968 Pool wrote to an American friend:

'There are strong currents [...] against me and the spirit I evoke, and some people are trying even to disrupt my contacts with one or two students whose writing I have been trying to stimulate and supervise from afar [...]'³

Yet at the same time some identities proved to be more important than others. Religion, and especially the Bahá'í Faith, provided an intimate bonding amongst the persons in Pool's network. The main research question of this paper is therefore: can the influence of intersecting identities in Rosey E. Pool's network be traced using Social Network Analysis? The goal is to attain more insight in the interactions within Pool's network.

3. Theory: Intersectionality & collective identity

The concept of intersectionality will be used to show deeper connections between the different actors. This theory focuses on intersections of social, cultural, gender, and political structures and identities (Crenshaw 1991). The intersections of these axes of power in society help us understand the multiple grounds of identity that shape experiences. Dichotomies of values (white-black; male-female; heterosexual-gay) are the foundations for systems of oppression or discrimination. This theory can be used to analytically capture the multidimensional nature and complexity of experiences of historical actors, by analysing the different layers of oppression, or: the 'interlocking systems of oppression' (Lutz 2011:3). Pool's life story encourages the use of this concept: she lived together with a woman for over 25 years; she was Jewish; white; middle to upper class; female; a Catholic in the 1940s; a Bahá'í follower in the 1960s; and - during her many travels - a foreigner.

The overlap of these identities can cause double jeopardy or even multiple oppressions. At the same time, these identities also provide a ground for bonding with

others through 'collective identity.' Collective identity is the 'shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity' (Taylor, Whittier, 1992:104). This group formation may also be caused by external forces. By deviating from the rest of society, being 'not normal,' a collective identity can be forced through exclusion (Gamson 2015).

The visualisation of Pool's network will show the intersection of individual identities and collective identities. Thereby relevant clusters can be identified within Pool's international network. These intersections may provide clues for a focus on certain clusters, which will be examined by a *close reading* of key letters from her correspondence.

4. Sources and methodology

A large amount of biographical data is available for information on persons in Pool's network. This data is gathered from (a) her correspondence; (b) various biographical dictionaries and biographical sketches in anthologies edited by Rosey E. Pool; and finally (c) obituaries found in (digitised) newspapers.

The primary sources for this research are the letters. This project is a work-in-progress. So far, approximately 1500 letters have been identified, which are derived from public archives and private collections. This material provides a vast amount of information on the various actors in Pool's network.

Since the amount of data is huge and this research is a small project within a PhD research, a focus is needed. The research is deliberately narrowed to letters that were either sent or received by Rosey E. Pool.⁴ Moreover, other media, such as newspaper clippings or visual material, are not included.

This makes the research partial, but not inadequate. The letters show the interaction between Pool and the persons with whom she corresponded. By mapping Pool's correspondence, quite literally an ego-centred network (Borgatti 2013) will be created. By analysing her letters on a meta-level, a *distant reading* (Boot 2008) is provided of Pool's correspondence network as she saw it and how she used it.

However, some precautions should be taken into account when working with correspondence. Letters can provide private and intimate information on both the sender and recipient. More often, however, letters show how the sender likes to present him or herself to the recipient (Boot 2008). The *self-fashioning* in the letters is one of the reasons I have chosen for manually retrieving information from the letters (see next paragraph). Moreover, there is a great variety in Pool's correspondence concerning levels of confidentiality. It

³ Sussex, SxMs19/1/1, 1-119 Rosey E. Pool to Margaret Danner, 26 June 1968.

⁴ Including the correspondence of all historical actors is unfortunately an impossible task. For example, one person in Pool's network is the prominent American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois, whose archive encompasses over 100,000 letters. Processing around 10 letters a day, this would be a long-term project.

includes official documents and private letters, but also funeral cards. Naturally, letters that are lost or destroyed are not included. Pool herself mentioned casually in one letter that her most valuable letters ‘will be preserved for future generations’ in a number of archives.⁵ The preserved letters therefore provide material for the *persona*, the performative construction of one’s identity (Bosch 2012), that Pool presented of herself. But although the *distant reading* can only be partial, SNA remains helpful in gaining more insight in Pool’s international contacts.

One major problem in this project is that historical interpretations need to be simplified in binary terms (‘1’ or ‘0’): letters are either positive or negative; persons are male or female; etc. This empirical, positivistic approach seems almost incompatible with Humanities hermeneutics. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall, for example, has argued that cultural identity is ‘[n]ot an essence but a positioning’ - shaped, positioned and interpreted by discourse (Hall 1990:226). Sociologist Barbara Ponse has stressed identity as a positioning in gay communities as well. Members of gay communities expose and recompose their identity and sexuality differently by continuously adjusting to altering environments (Ponse 1978).

With this in mind, determining the sexual inclination of Pool and the members in her network proves to be highly problematic. For example: Rosey E. Pool lived in Berlin in the 1930s as a married woman, but divorced a couple of years later. From 1948 until her death in 1971, she lived in London with radiologist Ursula ‘Isa’ Isenburg, to whom she referred as her ‘best friend,’ ‘roommate,’ but also ‘vriendin’ (which could be translated as either ‘girlfriend’ or ‘female friend’ – its context is ambiguous). Referring to Pool as ‘homosexual’ or ‘bisexual’ might be a label that she perhaps did not wish to have had.

To discover the sexual inclination of the historical actors proved to be exceptionally challenging in this research. The private (sexual) lives of historical actors often remain hidden, and until the 1970s these private lives were often seen as irrelevant to include in biographies or lemmas in biographical dictionaries (Arthur 2015).

The gap between Humanities and empiricist sciences has lately been a topic of debate amongst scholars. One notable example has been Johanna Drucker, who has pleaded for an intuitive Humanities approach in visualisations (Drucker 2011). In this paper, I try to overcome the reducing of interpretations into a single fact by ‘tagging’ the subjectivity and versatility of letters. By doing this, I agree with Scott Weingart’s notion that we ‘may lose some of the uniquely human information relevant to Humanities research, but what we lose in specificity we gain in rigor’ (Weingart 2011).

The methodology of constructing and analysing

social networks is derived from recent publications (Borgatti 2013) and previous research on network analysis within social movements (Rosenthal et al. 1985).

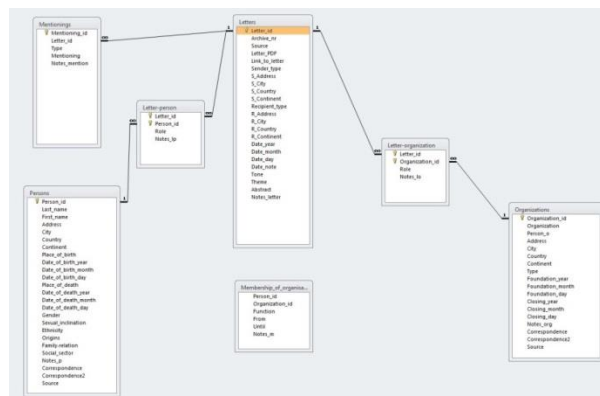


Figure 2: Overview of the relational database. Screenshot from Microsoft Access.

5. Overview of the database

Each one of the letters is read, examined, and metadata is manually typed into a relational database in Microsoft Access (figure 2). A table for ‘Letters’ includes metadata from the letters on sender, recipient, address, country, main topics, and people and organisations that are mentioned. This procedure is quite time-consuming, but it is necessary since a high number of persons are only referred to in the third person, or by their first name or nickname.

Moreover, a separate table for ‘Persons’ is included, with various metadata such as date of birth and death, membership of organisations, religious affiliation(s), gender, ethnicity, and sexual inclination.⁶ These are registered as personal ‘attributes’ of the nodes. Attributes are additional information on nodes, which more or less coincides with ‘identity markers’ in intersectionality theory (Lutz 2011). The attributes will provide clues for intersecting identities. Currently the database encompasses 403 ‘nodes’ (persons), a number that is likely to increase, possibly up to 1000 persons.

One focal point in this research is the religious affiliation of the individuals. Religions are considered ‘organisations’ in this database. In many instances, the conversion of individuals to a certain religion can be precisely dated. A number of persons in the database converted to the Bahá’í Faith at a certain point in their lives (Pool became a Bahá’í in May 1965; Hayden in 1943). These ‘memberships’ can subsequently be compared to other affiliations or ‘memberships’ in a certain point of time.

Statistical information derived from this data set already shows insightful information on Pool’s correspondence archives. Figure 3, for example, shows

⁵ Sussex, SxMs19/1/1, 1-165 Rosey E. Pool to Julia Fields, 9 February 1966.

⁶ For now, it is unfortunately impossible to derive metadata on individuals automatically from online sources, since the information in most entries is insufficient to achieve my goals.

that the majority of the letters date from 1967 and 1968. In these years, 28 per cent of the letters were sent by Pool, while 72 per cent were received. Did Pool not reply to the majority of the letters she received? Or are most letters she sent not kept in the archives? More research is required to answer these questions, which lie beyond the scope of this paper.

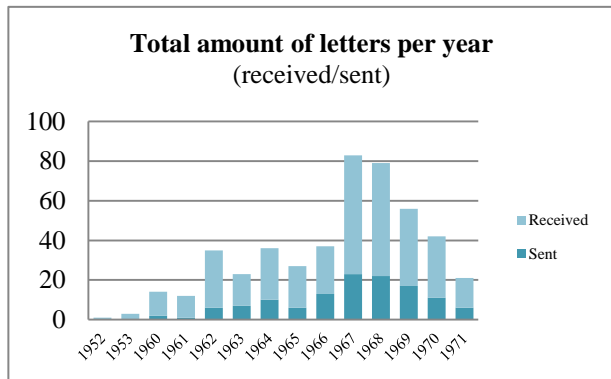


Figure 3: Graph showing amount of letters per year, ordered by sent and received. 94.6% of processed letters are included; dates of other 5.4% unknown.

6. Visualisation using Gephi

The data from the database were imported into Gephi, a tool for network analysis and visualisation (Bastian et al. 2009). Gephi can be used to import, visualise, spatialise, filter, manipulate, and export various types of networks. Since Rosey E. Pool is solely defined as either ‘sender’ or ‘recipient,’ this will lead to an ego-centred network. Figure 4 shows a visualisation of all the nodes within the ego-centred correspondence network, with Rosey E. Pool in the centre.

In this figure, people are represented with ‘nodes’ and the lines (‘edges’) represent the connections the people have maintained through correspondence. The size of the ‘nodes’ and ‘edges’ depends on the amount of interaction they have had with Pool. The design of the nodes has been modified. The red and pink nodes signify the importance of these persons according to the statistical information derived from the database.

Zoomed out visualisations such as these are quite common in Social Network Analysis. However, this visualisation of Pool’s network does not clarify much yet, nor is it very useful for historical research. In this example *distant guessing* would be a more appropriate term rather than *distant reading*. Although the sizes of the nodes and edges can give an indication of the interaction in the network, specific questions will not be answered by looking at the Gephi overview. The next step is therefore to apply a *close reading*, and focus on specific nodes.

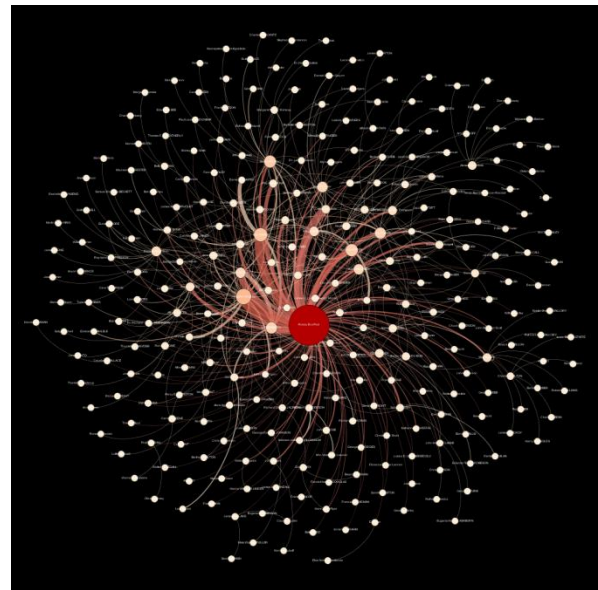


Figure 4: General overview network Rosey E. Pool. Visualised using Gephi.

7. Close reading of three key ‘nodes’

The dataset needs to be analysed further to see what the influence of intersecting identities were in Pool’s network. A selection is made from the dataset, depicted in figure 5. These 26 nodes are the largest nodes from figure 4. Although this visualisation only shows around seven per cent of the total sum of nodes (403 in total), these nodes account for almost 60 per cent of all correspondence.

The nodes are then coloured, depicting three identities in this portion of Pool’s network. The figure remains vague and does not explain much yet. By fine-tuning the visualisation (Lima 2011), the intersecting and overlapping identities become visible, and thereby the foundations for collective identity formation become visible.

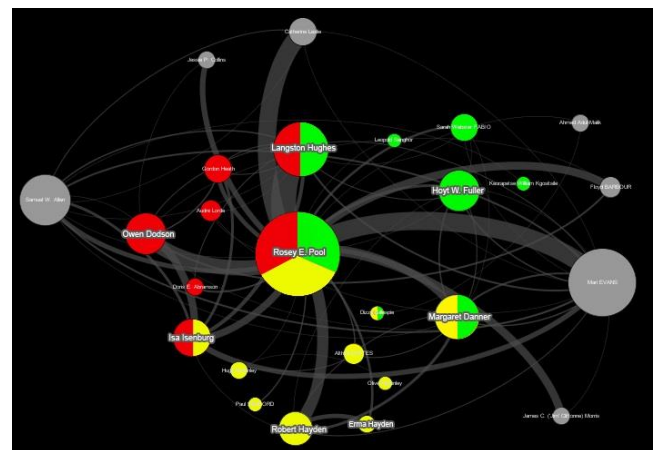


Figure 5: Three attributes combined in separate nodes. Visualised using Gephi.

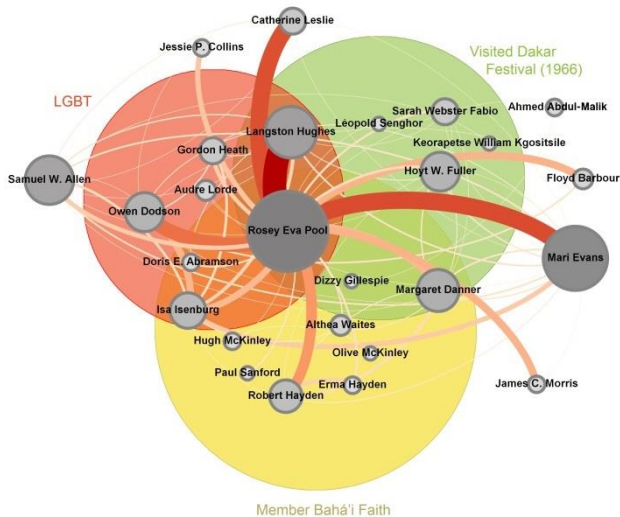


Figure 6: Detail of network Rosey E. Pool. Visualised using Gephi

For now the focus will be on a small number of personal attributes. Three identity markers will be of special interest here: (1, yellow) members of the Bahá'í Faith in Pool's network, and (2, red) persons in her network that are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. (Pool is also placed in this category, bear in mind the objections made in paragraph 4). Finally, (3, green) the people that visited the First World Festival of Negro Arts, held in Dakar. This last attribute is not a social, cultural, or political identity or a gender. Yet, the event was closely interwoven with the Négritude movement that dealt with racism and black emancipation. This symbolic event for the emancipation of African countries possibly provided a foundation for bonding with others, by forming a 'collective identity' of 'Dakar visitors.'

Figure 5 shows that some contacts possess several colours, which makes it hard to grasp collective identities in this group. In figure 6 some key persons are placed in coloured zones, according to their attributes. This is a visualisation of the 'collective identity' of the nodes. The overlap between the different zones shows the intersection of different attributes or identity markers.

For the purpose of this article, Pool fits all three categories. This visualisation gives a clear overview of the multidimensionality of Pool's network that would not have been possible with traditional historical hermeneutics. Yet, the seemingly empirical data that provided the basis for this visualisation has its limitations. I will focus on Pool's relation to the African American poet Robert Hayden (1913-1980) and *Negro Digest* editor Hoyt W. Fuller (1923-1981) in the period 1966 to 1971.

A close reading of key letters and contextualisation of these 'nodes' demonstrates that some attributes can be emphasised more than others. Especially the Bahá'í Faith will be of great significance. For example, Robert Hayden did not go to the Dakar Festival, but his career was greatly influenced by this event. Fuller's influence was wider than we might expect at first sight.

Rosey E. Pool was a jury member of the Dakar Festival. She has indicated that she was personally responsible for Hayden, one of her personal friends, being nominated for the Dakar Grand Prix of 1966 (Pool 1966:43; Pool 1983). He won the prestigious award, which instantly turned him into a famous poet and popular speaker. In a recommendation to the other jury members in early 1966, Pool recommended Hayden by stating that Hayden's star was shining, not only 'among the poets of his race but among English-language poets at large.'⁷ She thereby by-passed the problematic notion whether Robert Hayden excelled as a poet – or as a black poet.

Both Pool and Hayden were followers of the Bahá'í Faith. Pool had officially become a follower in May 1965, only a few months before the Dakar Festival. Pool's statement should be seen within the context of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. One fundamental teaching in this religion is the concept of unity of the world and of humanity: all mankind may become 'as waves of one sea, as leaves and branches of one tree [...].'⁸ The Bahá'í teachings include social ideas on the equality of all human beings - regardless of gender, race or class.

Hayden did not attend the Dakar Festival, because he was busy preparing a lecture for a conference on 'The Image of the Negro in American Literature,' held 22 April 1966 at Fisk University (Nashville, Tennessee). *Negro Digest* quoted Hayden's lecture, in which he stated that he refuted the notion that he was a 'Negro poet.' The popular magazine reported that Hayden said he was 'a poet who happens to be a Negro.' Moreover, he was quoted: 'Let's quit saying we're black writers – writing to black folks – it has been given importance it should not have' (Llorens 1966).

Negro Digest's editor, Hoyt W. Fuller, did visit the Dakar Festival. In the months prior to the event, he became an important promoter of the event through his magazine (Ratcliff 2014:172). Fuller blamed Hayden for not attending the Dakar Festival. Afterwards, *Negro Digest* started (in the eyes of Hayden) a hate campaign against Hayden, for blackness was something that should be celebrated, not something that one should be ashamed of. Hayden's absence in Dakar was seen as evidence that he kept aloof of his race.

This critique should be seen in the context of a period of intensified tensions between African Americans and white Americans. The Dakar Festival already displayed some flaws, heralding the 'end of a dream' of the 1960s that became apparent in the years to come. The year 1966 proved to be a turning-point in American history: this was the year that Stokely Carmichael first coined the term 'Black Power.' (In October 1966 the Black Panther Party was founded.) Hayden's ideas on unity and equality no longer fitted in the new era of race politics.

⁷ Sussex, SxMs19/1/1, 1-193 Rosey E. Pool to the jury of the World Festival of Negro Arts, ca. 1966.

⁸ Sussex, SxMs19/12/4/2, Baha'i Prayers. R.E.P.'s personal copy with manuscript additions, 'Unity', pp. 111-112.

Hayden was highly criticised for his lecture at Fisk, which had caused quite a stir among students and his colleagues. Eventually he even resigned as a professor of English at Fisk University. Throughout his life, he remained undervalued by scholars and literary critics (Conniff 1999:489). In a letter to Rosey E. Pool, dated 25 April 1969, Hayden wrote:

'I know how you must feel nowadays in regard to the "black revolution." I share your feelings, as, again, you certainly know. So much of it has become ugly, ugly and false, and I am appalled by the downright Nazi tactics which the so-called militants are using in the name of freedom. I no longer read *Negro Digest*, because I refuse to support racism, and I am unalterably opposed to any form of regimentation.'⁹

The Bahá'í Faith sustained him in coping with the 'racists' and 'black fascists,' who, according to Hayden, made a distinction solely based on skin colour and promoted separatism.¹⁰ In the spring 1969 he had been appointed professor at the University of Louisville, Kentucky. This was a special occasion, since it was the 'first time the honor has been conferred on one of Us.' In this letter, 'Us' refers to 'Bahá'í's'.

With the knowledge derived from a *close reading* of a small number of letters, the overlapping zones can be interpreted differently. The small selection of Pool's network depicted in figure 6 does not accurately show the influence of Hoyt W. Fuller. His personal involvement in the Dakar Festival and his magazine *Negro Digest* made him a very influential person in this period - far more than the numbers would suggest. Robert Hayden's 'node' is also quite small. Ironically, this was largely due to his fully packed agenda after winning the Dakar Grand Prix of 1966, something he repeatedly apologises about to Pool in his letters to her.

The shared Bahá'í identity of Pool and Hayden was a decisive factor in Hayden's career. The inclusive, all-encompassing nature of the Bahá'í Faith appears to have provided a solid basis for a continued correspondence with Pool in a period of tense race relations in the United States. The shared religion of Pool and Hayden could bridge gaps. The Bahá'í Faith envisions a unity of the world and of humanity and holds the belief that eventually all religions will be one (Hansell 1979:24). To quote Hayden once more: 'for us Baha'is it is already one world.'¹¹

8. Conclusion

This case study aimed to attain more insight in the interactions within the correspondence network of Rosey

E. Pool by focusing on a small number of important nodes. By combining a *distant reading* and *close reading* and using specific theories, Social Network Analysis can be quite useful in biographical research. However, the amount of time spent on SNA should not be underestimated. Before endeavouring a likewise project, historians working in small teams need to define a clear hypothesis or scope in advance.

Yet, certain limitations of Social Network Analysis have not yet been settled. For historians and other scholars from the Humanities, there remains the problem how to register ambiguous, versatile information. This research has not yet included different weight to different types of letters. How much 'credits' would a personal letter get, compared to an official letter, or holiday postcard? Moreover, historical changes over time are not visible in these two-dimensional graphs of historical networks, although process is made in this field (Lemercier 2014).

Although this case study is based upon approximately a third of all available correspondence from and to Rosey E. Pool, the results are promising. This case study shows that the influence of certain collective identities reaches further than others. For now, only a *close reading* will provide this understanding that a *distant reading* lacks.

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⁹ Sussex, SxMs19/1/1, 1-191 Robert Hayden to Rosey E. Pool, 25 April 1969.

¹⁰ Sussex, SxMs19/1/1, 1-189 Robert Hayden to Rosey E. Pool, 18 October 1967.

¹¹ Sussex, SxMs19/1/1, 1-187 Robert Hayden to Rosey E. Pool, 12 August 1966.

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