Arab/Muslim-Jewish Dialogue in Montreal

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ABSTRACT

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Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Arabs, Muslims and Jews, in the context of formal dialogue groups, is a fairly recent phenomenon. In Montreal, for instance, interreligious dialogue between Christians and Jews is over fifty years old, while Muslim-Jewish interreligious dialogue has been taking place for less than a decade, and Arab-Jewish dialogue has been occurring only for the past five years or so. At present, Montreal is home to several such dialogue groups, three of which are examined in this thesis, in an effort to determine: why these groups were initiated; the motives, priorities and goals of leaders and participants; the experiences of participants, and the impact, if any, that the dialogue groups have had on participants and the involved communities. This thesis also investigates the connection between religion and dialogue, in terms of group programming and participants' experience and perspectives, and the relationship between dialogue and political/social activism. Data collected through interviews with dialogue leaders, participants and critics is analyzed with respect to dialogue theory. Finally, an analysis on the role of dialogue in promoting coexistence and conflict resolution is presented.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all my interviewees: members of Muslim-Jewish Dialogue, the Montreal Dialogue Group, Shalom-Salaam, and others. Thank you for sharing your experiences and reflections.

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INTRODUCTION

Interfaith dialogue is the true spiritual adventure of our time.

-Yossi Klein Halevi[1]

This thesis documents an ongoing conversation between Arabs, Muslims and Jews in Montreal. It's one that began fairly recently, inspired by similar longstanding conversations between Christians and Jews. Christian-Jewish dialogue has been going on in Montreal for over fifty years and has helped build and improve relations between the two groups. Efforts have now begun to foster the rapport between Arabs, Muslims and Jews.

Currently, Montreal is a very active scene for Arab/Muslim-Jewish dialogue. There are presently several groups that meet on a regular basis. This study looks at three in particular: the Montreal Dialogue Group, Shalom-Salaam, and Muslim-Jewish Dialogue. The first two groups focus on politics and issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while the third group focuses, up to the present, exclusively on religion.

In this thesis, I attempt to present an initial view of Arab/Muslim-Jewish dialogue as it is happening today, in Montreal. I attempt to answer the following questions: Why is dialogue happening? What are the priorities and goals of dialogue practitioners? How is it affecting the individuals and communities involved? Is it improving relations, or is it just a lot of well-intentioned hot air?

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[1] In David R. Smock, ed, Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002) 7.

In this study, I interview thirty participants from among three dialogue groups to find out what kind of people take part in Muslim/Arab-Jewish dialogue, what motivates them to do so, and what they have gotten out of the experience. I also look at the reception of their efforts by their communities.

I ask specific questions about the relationship between religion and dialogue. Is dialogue compatible with religious belief? Do its practitioners see it as part of their religious practice? What role does religion play in the dialogue groups? What does interfaith dialogue offer in contrast to secular dialogue? What does the growth of and interest in interfaith/intercultural dialogue groups in recent years reveal about the changing role of religion and the ideology of religious groups today? How do the religious communities feel about dialogue efforts between these groups, be they more or less observant? Is dialogue identified with a particular religious stream?

I also attempt to situate the current dialogue efforts within the context of the history of relations between these communities in Montreal, in order to determine whether the onset of Arab-Jewish dialogue represents a unique time in the history of Arab/Muslim-Jewish relations in Montreal.

Is dialogue an effective means of resolving conflict? What part in conflict resolution does dialogue play? Does it belong to a particular stage in the process? What comes afterward, and what is the future of dialogue between these two communities in Montreal? What advantages, if any, does dialogue present compared to other efforts toward social change, such as political activism?

My larger questions are about the role of religion in conflict resolution. How can we use religion as a peacemaking tool? Must religion divide us, or can it bring us

together? Does my belief necessitate the denial of yours? What does the experience of dialogue participants tell us about this?

2. Methodology

My method is primarily anthropological. I spent a year and a half as a participant-observer in three currently-active local dialogue groups: The Montreal Dialogue Group (MDG), Shalom-Salaam (ShS), and Muslim-Jewish Dialogue (MJ). As a participant-observer, I follow the theory of anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, who advocate this method of study. Geertz writes that in order to succeed, the ethnographer must gain intimate knowledge of the 'language' or ideological system of his/her subjects of study, with the idea that being a full participant and not just an observer affords a fuller view than could be had otherwise.[2]

It also allows me to develop relationships with the members of the dialogue groups, establishing some level of trust and confidence. At the same time, I tried not to participate to the extent that I would influence the manner in which the group met or the process they utilized. I tried to be a somewhat unobtrusive participant; a "not too active" member. In this way, I would attend the meetings and speak my opinions in the smaller group discussions, but I would not make presentations or take part in the planning or running of meetings.

Another influential theorist for this study is Pierre Bourdieu, who advocates the practice of what he calls 'reflexive sociology'. This first implies investigating and analyzing one's own spheres of experience, interest and understanding. Moreover, the

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[2] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description" and "Religion as a Cultural System," The Interpretation of Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 3-30, 87-125.

sociologist must study his or her own relationship to and understanding of the subject studied. In "The Practice of Reflexive Sociology," Bourdieu writes that sociologists study subjects out of personal interest, and this personal interest in itself impedes objectivity. In order to reach a greater level of objectivity, the sociologist must deconstruct his or her own ideas and relationship to the subject studied. As Bourdieu writes, as a participant in "the game," as he puts it, (the field of study), one can only achieve, a "partial and reductionist view," while one can acquire an "all-encompassing" view of a game from which one has retired (259). This necessitates objectifying one's own interest in the subject (260). In the conclusion, I discuss my own issues related to this.

My method of gathering information was in attending dialogue group meetings and noting demographic information and general procedure, as well as anything outstanding that happened or comments made by participants. After being a group participant for eight months, I began conducting interviews with participants. In all, I interviewed thirty dialogue group members from among the three groups, across the spectrum of age, ethnicity, background, level of group involvement, etcetera, in order to find out what their experiences of the group(s) have been. I then analyzed the information according to my questions expressed earlier in this introduction: has dialogue been effective in improving relations and changing peoples' views of the other? What role can and does dialogue play in conflict resolution? What role does religion play in dialogue and in conflict resolution. Finally, what comes after dialogue? Is it a limited endeavor or can it continue on; if not, what comes next, and how can the groups progress to the next level?

My findings are compared with the existing scholarship on interfaith/intercultural dialogue by such scholars as Marc Gopin, David R. Smock and others.

This thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter is a review of the pertinent literature. The second chapter outlines the history of the Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities of Montreal and the interactions between them. It is important to distinguish between the Arab and Muslim communities since many Arabs are not Muslim and many Muslims are not Arab. Half of my Arab interviewees from the dialogue groups were of Muslim origin and the other half were of Christian origin.

Chapter Three describes the three dialogue groups studied. Chapter Four profiles the groups' leaders. In Chapter Five, I look at the basis and support to be found for dialogue in the Muslim and Jewish traditions.

Chapter Six, the largest section in this thesis, presents my interview data including extensive quotes from my interviewees. Chapter Seven provides analysis of the data in the previous chapter according to some of the theoreticians surveyed in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Eight, we hear from Arabs and Jews who are critical of or opposed to dialogue groups, including a conversation with members of SPHR (Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights) and an interview with a Jewish peace activist.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis with some personal reflections, and is followed by the appendices. Appendix A presents the questions asked in my interviews. Appendix B contains excerpts from an interfaith Passover *seder* organized by the MDG. Appendix C and D present Nada Sefian's letter of resignation from the co-presidency of the MDG and a discussion of this, respectively.

In order to maintain the privacy and anonymity of my interviewees, no names have been used with the exception of group leaders. For the purposes of anonymity, respondents quoted in Chapter Six are designated only by letters and numbers according to general categories (for example, 'A' for Arab and 'J' for Jew).

CHAPTER 1 - Literature Review

Interfaith and intercultural dialogue between Muslims, Arabs and Jews began fairly recently and has not been extensively documented or studied, which is one of the main reasons why I undertook this project. Most of the books I was able to find on dialogue focused on efforts between Christians and other groups; mostly Christians and Jews. This results from the fact that Christian-Jewish dialogue has been going on for much longer that that between other groups. As Edward Wolkove, the co-leader of Muslim-Jewish Dialogue told me, in Montreal, Christian-Jewish dialogue has been going on for over 50 years, whereas Jewish-Muslim dialogue has been going on for less than a decade. Consequently, there is very little written on Muslim/Arab-Jewish dialogue, and certainly none on the Montreal or Canadian contexts specifically.

Another issue about the literature on Arab/Muslim-Jewish dialogue is that most of the texts I was able to find were written by Jews, with somewhat fewer by Arab or Muslim authors. However, I was able to find and consult scholarship from writers from each of these communities.

The following is an overview of the literature most pertinent to this study.

1. **Gopin, Marc. Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking. Oxford University Press, 2000.**

This book contains one of the more thorough discussions of Muslim/Arab-Jewish dialogue. Gopin is an American rabbi. The book is mainly about the relationship between religion and conflict resolution, and touches on dialogue with some interesting opinions coming from Gopin's own experience as a mediator and Jewish-Arab dialogue

participant. Gopin's opinions about dialogue are interesting, unique and credible as they come out of his extensive experience. However, these reflections occur within his discussion of conflict resolution strategies and practice; he does not treat dialogue as a topic in itself. His arguments about the role of religion in conflict resolution are pertinent to this study.

Gopin argues that conflict resolution theory is generally based on a Western, rational, secular ideology, in which religion is seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. His point is twofold: that religion is an integral part of the identities of the parties of global conflict, and that it must therefore be taken into account and integrated into any successful conflict resolution strategy; and that religion can be a powerful peacemaking tool that should be tapped, because all religions are sources of what he calls 'prosocial values,'(8) that is, that they all promote attitudes in which all life is valued and towards the creation of strong, cohesive and peaceful communities.

Gopin's arguments for why religion must be included in conflict resolution strategies is as follows. First of all, he states that current conflict resolution strategies are insufficient because they fail to take into account the viewpoint of religious people (15). The Western approach, he writes, is typically to fight for the strengthening of the components of a civil society, such as civil rights, with which religious actors may not identify or sympathize. Religious adherents often object to the imposition of the 'secular' moral discourse of international governing bodies such as the United Nations (18). He argues that the religious values and language of the parties must be understood and actively employed in resolution strategies, which can then communicate with people on a

more direct, immediate and intimate level than concepts which have been effective in other contexts but which are foreign to them.

Gopin also points to the need to maintain boundaries and not just focus on commonalities, and that while the Western secular ideal is one of universal values, religious groups use difference as a crucial marker and preserver of group identity (64, 149).

Another strong argument Gopin puts forward for why religion must be integrated into conflict resolution strategies is that it may strongly inform the viewpoints and experiences of participants even if the conflict in which they are mired is not overtly religious in nature. He points out that while other factors may be causing the conflict, such as basic issues of material resources, or economic disenfranchisement, for example, the conflict may still be expressed by the parties in religious terms (14). This opinion was echoed by some of my respondents, as shown in Chapter Seven. Because of this, as Gopin writes, it is necessary to use an intervention strategy that takes the religious identity of participants into account. At the same time, he cautions us not to overlook religion's violent potential, or to overemphasize the role of religion in any given conflict (29).

About Jewish-Muslim dialogue in particular, Gopin writes that while dialogue makes up a major part of the typical Western method of conflict resolution, in his view, it is not well-suited to either the Jewish and Muslim communities. He argues that dialogue as a strategy is foreign to both Judaism and Islam, because both traditions attribute much more significance to behaviour and symbolic acts (performance of ritual) than they do to dialogue or speech (79). As such, he envisions a strategy that would be conscious of the

indigenous customs and practices of both parties, and would incorporate them in ways that make sense to both groups. He suggests that they practice joint acts of charity for a needy third party, an activity that has roots in both traditions, as a potentially more powerful bridge than could be built with words (129, 133). I think there is validity to Gopin's argument, not just for Muslims, Arabs and Jews but for people in general. There is a desire to do more than 'just sit around and talk', and to take concrete actions towards a desired goal, as my respondents indicate (see Chapter Seven). At the same time, I do not agree with the idea that dialogue is not well-suited to the Jewish and Muslim communities, since Jews and Muslims continue to take part in it of their own volition, in the groups I studied as well as in others. Also, the dialogue groups that I studied incorporate more than just talk, as will be discussed in later chapters.

Gopin also criticizes dialogue as a limited strategy that privileges intellectuals and the upper class over other people (43-44). There is some validity to this argument, based on my study of the demographics of the dialogue groups. At the same time, I would argue that it is not necessarily privilege but interest which determines who takes part in dialogue groups.

An interesting concept Gopin raises is that of 'positive cognitive dissonance' – doing something that challenges ingrained notions and patterns of behaviour towards the other, such as helping them instead of fighting them. This shakes up the understanding of those being helped, and forces them to reevaluate their conception of the people who are helping them. (78). Gopin speaks of this in reference to benevolent deeds toward the 'other', but I observed this in the MDG in the form of role-reversal activities which are described in Chapter Seven.

On the whole it's a strongly argued book, from an insider to both the conflict and to the conflict resolution profession. However, Gopin addresses the topic of dialogue within a larger discussion of conflict resolution theory and strategy, and not as a subject in its own right. At the same time, his opinions are valuable to this study, because they stem from much personal experience with dialogue, and contrast with other treatments of the topic of dialogue surveyed herein.

2. **Bretton-Granatoor, Gary M. and Andrea L. Weiss. Shalom/Salaam: A Resource for Jewish-Muslim Dialogue. UAHC Press, 1993.**

This book is cowritten by two rabbis, and published by a Jewish publishing company. It is a collection of articles about dialogue, mostly written by Jews with one article each by a Christian and a Muslim. The second half of the book outlines a program for Jewish-Muslim dialogue that includes textual study, learning about each others' traditions and beliefs, sharing meals and holidays, and visiting one anothers' mosques and synagogues.

I did not find this book to be very helpful because it is lacking in several respects. In his article on lessons learned from Christian-Muslim dialogue, J. Dudley Woodberry states that there is a power inbalance between the two groups, and that this influences the dynamic of the dialogue efforts. To help solve this problem, he says that they should meet in the weaker party's space, in order to help them feel more secure (18). However, this principle seems not to have been practiced in the creation of this book, since it includes essays by five Jews and only one Muslim. There does not appear to have been much effort put into "meeting the Muslims on their own turf" in this respect or in the

creation of the dialogue program, which constitutes the second half of the book. No mention is made of any consultation having been done with Muslims, and no critical evaluation of the program is offered. No mention is given of experiences with this program or lessons learned. It appears quite formulaic and not especially inspiring.

In this respect, the three Montreal groups that I followed are commendable: all were initiated and continue to be run jointly by members of both communities: MDG is led by an Israeli and a Palestinian, and MJ is led by a Muslim and a Jew. I think this is what gives credibility to these groups and a dedicated membership to the fold.

3. **Homolka, Walter and Albert H. Friedlander. <u>The Gate to Perfection: The Idea of Peace in Jewish Thought</u>. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1994.**

This book does not treat dialogue specifically, but critically examines the concept of peace according to the Jewish tradition. It is useful to my study because of the authors' effort to determine what kind of resource traditional Jewish texts can be in the search for religious justification, legitimization and/or support for contemporary peacemaking efforts, such as dialogue. As such, this book helps explore my questions about the role religion can play in both peacemaking and in dialogue, and to help get beyond trite statements such as "we're all children of Abraham" and the like, to examine in-depth what the Jewish traditional texts have to say about living with and relating to 'the other'.

The book contains articles that focus on the different periods in Jewish intellectual history, beginning with the biblical texts, through the rabbinic tradition, and on to the Jewish Enlightenment and modernity.

4. **Magonet, Jonathan. <u>Talking to the Other: Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims</u>. London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2003.**

A professor and rabbi, Magonet has practiced interfaith dialogue for over thirty years. His impetus for writing this book was 9/11/2001, an event which "shattered our understanding throughout the world about how life needs to be conducted between peoples of different religious faiths in this new millennium... it... revealed the depth of our ignorance of one another, and hence the mistrust and often hostility between different faith communities... There is a massive task of education and rethinking that needs to be done alongside the actions taken at least to curtail the power of those who practice terror." (1-2).

His book attempts to address two questions, related to dialogue theory and practice. Firstly, what Judaism can contribute to interfaith dialogue, and secondly, the actual experiences of Jews in dialogue with Christians and Muslims, and what we can learn from the issues that arise within the dialogue process (2). The discussion is based on his personal experience.

In events leading up to the Six-Day War, Magonet and his mentor, Rabbi Lionel Blue hoped that through the three monotheistic religions they could create channels for mutual understanding that would help resolve the political conflict in the Middle East, through their many shared beliefs (6). With this goal, they created the Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe, which "has continued to be effective for over 30 years" (6). There remain two annual Bendorf Conferences, the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Student Conference, and the Jewish-Christian Bible Week (8).

Magonet writes that "Dialogue is the only approach I know that builds trust, mutual respect, friendship and love" (9). My respondents as well as my experience indicate that dialogue is not necessarily the only approach that can accomplish these things, but that it certainly can be effective in doing so.

Magonet discusses the challenges posed by interfaith dialogue to both the Jewish and Muslim traditions and communities (11-13), as I explore in Chapter Five.

He then presents a chapter called "Towards a Jewish-Muslim Dialogue" which gives practical applications to the theory covered in earlier sections of the book.

Magonet writes of four stages of dialogue obstacles (175), which will be examined in Chapter Seven.

5. **Smock, David R., ed. <u>Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding</u>. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002.**

David Smock raises one of the crucial issues in interfaith/intercultural dialogue in his introduction, when he states that the foundations for unity across cultures and religious groups are created through dialogue, with its "stockpiling of trust" and "the creation of relationships that can sustain both agreements and disagreements" (7). Others would argue that while trust and the ability to live with disagreement are valuable, in the issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it's not about agreements and disagreements, but about the recognition and rectification of injustice. This argument is in fact made later in the book in the article by Jaco Cilliers, who writes that in order to be meaningful and productive, dialogue must address the justice issues that underlie the conflict in question (10).

This book contains essays on dialogue theory and practice, including case studies from different parts of the world. Smock breaks down dialogue into five types (7-10), which I outline in Chapter Seven.

This book gives voice to experienced dialogue practitioners in order to make recommendations on how to make dialogue effective and productive (9). This makes the book very strong. It contains a lot of practical advice based on experience, with a focus on experts whose emphasis is not necessarily on dialogue in itself, but on how dialogue can be used as a tool of social change. This is most powerfully articulated by Jaco Cilliers, whose experience is in humanitarian relief, development and peacebuilding projects. Cilliers finds that successful dialogue and cross-community cooperation can provide "a symbolic foundation for peacebuilding efforts" by illustrating that positive cooperation between different groups is possible (48).

Smock notes that religion can be part of the problem in conflict situations, even when religion is not a direct part of the conflict (9). This holds true for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Jaco Cilliers makes several contributions in his article, "Building bridges for interfaith dialogue", most notably in arguing for the necessity of practical action in support of and addition to dialogue (50). See Chapter Eight for more details.

In the section on dialogue case studies, Ronald Young writes of American Jews, Christians and Muslims in the U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East, established in 1987.

Young tells of the issues and obstacles to dialogue faced by each group. Obstacles faced by all groups are:

1) mutually-exclusive goals, which produce pessimism

2) the complexity of the conflict (not black and white)

3)causes participants to confront their deepest fears and prejudices about each other

Young notes issues particular to Jews (66), and Arabs and Muslims (67-68). These will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Young believes that dialogue between American Jews, Arabs and Muslims is important because it keeps alive a common vision of peace, and not only reflects religious imperatives but offers the best prospect of political influence (71).

Smock makes several assertions in his conclusion, namely that interfaith dialogue can help with conflict resolution even when religion is not a central issue in the conflict in question, because it "enables people of faith to live out what most faith traditions consider as a sacred duty to be peacemakers" (127), and that interfaith dialogue has greater potential for deeper and more meaningful engagement than secular dialogue because of "the possibility for spiritual encounter", which in turn may "enhance the participants' commitment to peace work and social change", while the use of sacred texts in dialogue gives it a "deeper level of authenticity" (128).

He identifies principles that help determine the quality of the outcome of the dialogue process (129-130). These are described in Chapter Seven.

Smock writes that while dialogue rarely ends wars, it can aid in the development of a peaceful solution and can contribute to the process of reconciliation in post-conflict periods (131). A conclusion shared by multiple authors in this text is that dialogue efforts that go beyond talk to take on joint projects or activities can be much more powerful than talk alone (131). An example of this are symbolic acts of apology, such as Jews in the

Middle East helping to rebuild Palestinian houses demolished by the IDF, and Arabs mourning Jews killed in political violence. Along with dialogue, such deeds can powerfully transform relationships, Smock concludes (131).

6. Abu-Nimer, Mohammed. "The miracles of transformation through interfaith dialogue: Are you a believer?" Smock 15-32.

Abu-Nimer writes that according to his own research, dialogue participants report that they develop new and more sensitive radars for language of hatred, exclusion and prejudice (15), and others become involved in actions to improve the conditions of their communities. The first statement was articulated by one of my Palestinian respondents, but the second was not evident in any of my interviews.

Abu-Nimer writes that dialogue is not a substitute for social action (15-16). This issue is discussed in Chapter Eight.

Abu-Nimer speaks about both interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and writes that his essay applies to both. However, he stresses the importance and impact of religious dialogue, in that "spirituality allows for change in participants' attitudes" (15-16). He writes that participants make a deeper human connection through their spiritual encounters, and that this becomes the main source for individuals' commitment to social change. Further, this deep sense of motivation that originates from religious identity distinguishes interfaith dialogue from secular dialogue, he writes (17). It is difficult to corroborate or disprove this statement from my findings. I find in the secular dialogue groups people who are also very active in movements for social justice and change, and people in the religious dialogue group who do not participate in social action to any

extent. I would argue that it is not clear-cut, but that there is a strong history of both religiously-based and secular social justice and peace movements.

Abu-Nimer does note that religious convictions can be an impediment to progress as well, in being a source of resistance to change (18). One of the benefits of religious dialogue that he notes is that scriptures and religious texts can provide a foundation and direction for dialogue. However, practitioners must be careful in religious dialogue when dealing with what Abu-Nimer refers to as "primary religious language"; the usage of terms and concepts unique to specific individual religions, such as the Holy Trinity in Christianity. At first, he writes, it is important to focus on secondary, or universal language; ideas and terms that are common to all faiths, such as peace and love (20).

Another advantage of religious dialogue noted by Abu-Nimer is the possibility of creating a common, unique "third culture" through the blending of the rituals or concepts of both groups' faith traditions, or the communal creation of new rituals (18). This occurred in the MDG, which incorporates some religious elements into the activities of the group, namely, around the seasonal holidays of both Islam and Judaism. The Passover seder that I attended, in April 2005, showed elements of the "third culture" described by Abu-Nimer, in the inclusion of new text into the ritual, written specifically for the context of the dialogue group. The new aspects focused on universal and particular concepts, such as the struggle for freedom and justice for all peoples, and the liberation of prisoners, both metaphoric and actual (see excerpts from Seder handout in Appendix B).

Abu-Nimer writes that during the 1990s there was a sharp rise in the amount of research and practice of interreligious peacebuilding efforts (16).

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He notes seven basic principles of effective interfaith/intercultural dialogue (21), which are discussed in the context of my analysis in Chapter Seven.

Abu-Nimer also charts the experience of people in dialogue groups, observing four phases of development (27). See Chapter Seven for further discussion of this.

In summary, Abu-Nimer writes that religious identity is one of the most powerful sources in shaping attitudes and actions in conflict zones, and that the spiritual, moral and ethical components of any religious identity are powerful sources for generating change (29).

7. **Bryant, M. Darrol and Frank Flinn, eds. Interreligious Dialogue: Voices From a New Frontier. New York: Paragon Books, 1989.**

This volume contains a useful section on resources within the different religious traditions for interfaith dialogue. Especially useful for me was Badru Dungu Kateregga's article on the resources for dialogue to be found within Islam. Most of the essays in this book came out of the Assembly of the World's Religions, held in the U.S.A. in 1985.

In their introduction, Bryant and Flinn argue for the novelty of interfaith dialogue; that it signifies "a new day" in the history of religions, who, according to them, lived in hostile isolation from one another up until the late twentieth century (ix). They write that the impetus for dialogue today often results as a response to conflict (ibid.).

Bryant and Flinn write that the modern phenomenon of interfaith dialogue began at the end of the 19th century, with the World's Parliament of Religions, held in 1893 alongside the World's Fair in Chicago (xi). While the movement grew and developed over the course of the 20th century, it did not become widely known either through the

mass media or within the religious traditions that took part (xi). The editors' intention with this book is to bring wider awareness and recognition to the interfaith dialogue movement.

In one section, Ewert H. Cousins argues that interfaith dialogue marks the second of two axial periods of religion that have occurred so far. The first axial period was described by German philosopher Karl Jaspers in the mid-20th century. Jaspers argued that the Axial Period occurred between 800 and 200 B.C.E., when "a striking transformation of spiritual consciousness occurred in Greece, Israel, Persia, India and China, without detectable influence of one area on another", which Jasper terms "the most deep cut dividing line in history", with the beginnings of the current world religions (6). Cousins believes that interfaith dialogue marks the onset of a second axial period. While the first, he writes, produced individual consciousness, the second is producing global consciousness (6).

In his article, 'Transformation Through Religious Dialogue', Pieter de Jong, a Christian, takes on the issue of whether interfaith dialogue is truly possible between members of the three Abrahamic religions, since they all hold mutually-exclusive absolute truths. He asks, "Is a Christian able to be truly open to other faiths if he or she is committed to the Christ as God's decisive revelation?". De Jong's answer is yes, but that dialogue requires a balance between commitment to one's own faith and openness to that of others: "Commitment without openness leads to fanaticism. Openness without commitment ends in relativism". The answer lies in a balance between the two (87-88).

I find Bryant and Flinn's and Cousins' arguments about the novelty of interfaith dialogue and the lack of contact among different religious groups in the past to be

somewhat overstated. At the same time, I think that the current focus on ecumenism does represent something new and indicates a growing priority of many religious groups today.

8. **Hewstone, Miles and Rupert Brown, eds. <u>Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters</u>. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986.**

"The focus of this book is the long-held view that *contact* between members of different groups will improve relations between them", the editors state in their preface (xi). They write that while the 'contact hypothesis' has been the basis for many social initiatives such as integrated schools and housing, studies on the effectiveness of contact between different racial groups have shown it to be sometimes effective in improving relations between different ethnic groups and sometimes not (xi). A better test of the contact hypothesis is that undertaken between groups rather than individuals, the authors write, yielding "a more realistic picture of social-psychological contributions to the reduction of intergroup conflict" (xii). The articles selected examine the contact hypothesis in the context of various conflicts, from Northern Ireland to Israel and Palestine, to South Africa and elsewhere. The editors conclude that intergroup contact can be helpful in improving intergroup relations, but that the traditional contact hypothesis is too narrow (xii).

Findings on what creates productive or favourable intergroup contact are given in the study by Ben-Ari and Amir: when the contact is pleasing or rewarding rather than frustrating, unpleasant or tension-laden; when there is equal status contact between the members of different groups; when the contact is of an intimate rather than a casual nature; when the 'authorities' of each group or the social climate are in favour of and

promote the intergroup contact; and when the members of both groups develop common goals that are higher ranking in importance than the goals of each individual group (7). Unfavourable results were produced when the contact produces competition between the groups; when the contact is unpleasant, involuntary or tension-laden; when members of a group or the group as a whole are in a state of frustration; when the groups have moral or ethnic standards which are objectionable to each other; or when the contact is between a majority and a minority group, when the members of the minority group are of lower status than the members of the majority group (7).

Another important conclusion of many of the studies in this book is that knowledge and understanding of differences as well as similarities between groups is important in reducing prejudice (11). This fits with my findings, since several of my respondents expressed the need to acknowledge and accept differences as well as similarities with the 'other'.

On the topic of measuring attitude change through intergroup contact, the findings again have been mixed. It depends on the "social and institutional support" available in each setting (16-17). The case given is about a study of a mining community in West Virginia. At work, black and white miners worked together harmoniously, sometimes with white miners working under black supervisors. However, outside of work the two groups did not mix, with segregated neighborhoods, restaurants, etc. (16).

Another question for researchers is the influence or spreading of the positive change created in participants of intergroup contact on their respective communities. On this issue, the consensus of researchers is "rather pessimistic", the editors write (17). However, they write that some very positive results have been noted in some cases, such

as in a study of bi-racial housing projects in the USA (17). However, this study concludes that in order to achieve generalized results, special effort to promote positive attitudes outward were necessary. Furthermore, in order for the 'outgroup' to be positively affected, the 'ingroup' member (who had taken part in intergroup contact) had to be perceived within their own group as 'typical' or 'prototypical' of their own group (17-18). In order for change to become generalized, the individuals in intergroup encounter must act not only as individuals but as group members. "All we can expect, if the contact remains on an interpersonal basis, is that a few personal relationships will change but the intergroup situation will remain unaltered" (19).

In order to create real positive change in intergroup relations, the editors argue, more than just contact is necessary. They offer four factors to augment the benefits of contact (23), which will be listed in Chapter Seven.

In sum, Hewstone and Brown conclude that in order for intergroup contact to be truly successful, there must be "more radical social changes" to the conditions underlying the conflict (42). For instance, members of majority groups who enjoy security, power and prestige must learn the value and integrity of other groups, and material changes must happen along with perceptional changes.

In their article, Rachel Ben-Ari and Yehuda Amir chose to focus on intergroup contact between Arab and Jewish youth in Israel because they found that there are more opportunities for youth from these two highly divided groups to meet than there are for adults, and secondly, that it is more strategic to invest in youth because the positive changes produced will provide an investment for the future (45).

The situation of almost complete segregation as in Israel, in which one group is dominated by the other leads to the evolution of negative attitudes and stereotypes about the other (46). However, studies show that a small percentage of both Arabs and Jews hold either completely positive or negative views of the other (47). The summary of the studies shows a growing desire to improve intergroup relations by both sides (47).

Various surveys show a high percentage on both sides of people willing to make contact with the other, a low percentage actually participate in contact initiatives (54). The existing evidence shows that contact can be effective in improving intergroup relations by reducing prejudice, enhancing tolerance and changing attitudes and stereotypes, therefore, it should be exploited in Israel. The authors note however that contact alone is not enough. Also, the surrounding conditions must be correct, or else contact can be counterproductive. They note several problems in contact situations (55), which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

The authors discuss the limitations of the impact of intergroup contact in Israel on the actual conflict situation, but argue that contact at the micro (interpersonal) level can have positive, if indirect effects on the macro (political/societal) level, for the following reasons:

"... if intergroup relations at the micro-level deteriorate, this may create an atmosphere conducive to negative developments at the political macro-level. Likewise, if and when changes do occur in the macro-domain, the earlier changes at the micro-level will make an important contribution to the softening of the transfer from a state of segregation and hostility to a state of coexistence and peace." (57) The authors conclude that educational programs involving the development of new curricula that aim at

facilitating intergroup relations would be a good step. They note that such initiatives were currently underway at the time of writing (1986).

I found the article by Don Foster and Gillian Finchilescu, "Contact in a 'Non-Contact' Society: The Case of South Africa" to be useful because it describes a situation similar to that found in Israel and the Palestinian territories, where the two groups (Arabs and Jews) are very segregated. This study finds that while contact between the groups is "both necessary and desirable to transform the social order", contact in itself is not enough. Social action involving intergroup contact, directed at transforming material, social and ideological conditions affecting both groups, is required for real change to occur (119, 135).

The authors note that contact between the two groups in itself is indeed important, because the lack thereof, in the context of South Africa, "has been used as a central strategy to maintain white dominance" (134). However, they note that it is necessary to reduce the processes of categorization and distinction themselves, and the direct counteraction of received group identities, by consciously developing strategies to transcend and transform given social identities (135). In sum, collective strategies are required in which the two groups collaborate to transform "the very processes of social categorization that constitute the destructive lack of contact" (135).

This of course implies very profound change; change in which dialogue groups can play a role.

9. **Amir Hussain: "Muslims, Pluralism, and Interfaith Dialogue".** <u>Progressive</u>

   <u>Muslims: on Justice, Gender and Pluralism</u>, ed. Omid Safi. Oxford:

   Oneworld Publications, 2003.

The author identifies himself as a Muslim and an academic who has been

involved in interfaith dialogue for over 12 years, at the local, national and international

levels (251).

Hussain argues that interfaith dialogue is very important for Western Muslims.

For an examination of Hussain's perspective as expressed in his above-mentioned essay,

see page 86.

10. **Agbaria, Farhat and Cynthia Cohen. "Working With Groups in Conflict:**

The   **Impact of Power Relations on the Dynamics of the Group". 2000. Brandeis**

   University. 19 July, 2006.

   <http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/Slifka/about/WorkingGroups.pdf>.

This article is very helpful in understanding the power dynamics in Arab-Jewish

dialogue groups. It is especially relevant because the authors' work is based on their

experience as a Palestinian and a Jew who facilitate Palestinian-Israeli dialogue groups.

The article is also very helpful because it provides strategies for effectively dealing with

the inherent power dynamics issues that arise in the dialogue groups.

11. **Rothman, Jay. "Dialogue in Conflict: Past and Future".** <u>The Handbook of</u>

   <u>Interethnic Coexistence</u>, ed. Eugene Weiner. New York: Continuum, 1998.

In this article, Jay Rothman surveys and critiques dialogue methodologies employed between Israelis and Palestinians in the past, and presents his own methodology for Arab-Israeli dialogue based on his study as well as his experience as a dialogue facilitator. Called 'the ARIA methodology', it is a process made up of four phases: antagonism, resonance, invention and action (228-229).

Rothman's approach is very pertinent because it addresses dialogue specifically between Palestinians and Jews, and also because his methodology, in its fourth phase, addresses the need for participants to do concrete action to put in place the ideological and emotional changes they have made over the course of the dialogue process. In the 'action' phase, parties "cooperatively set an agenda for negotiation and/or problem solving" (228), something which many of the theorists studied in this thesis recommend, but which is not often reflected in dialogue group programming, as will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

This volume also contains several other articles that focus on aspects of dialogue and coexistence efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

Summary

There is a high level of consistency and consensus among scholars on interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Many of the authors surveyed expressed similar views on dialogue: that it can be a powerfully transformative tool for social change both on an individual and communal level, and that Arab-Jewish dialogue and dialogue as a whole mark a new era in the history of religious communities. According to some scholars, it is the sign of a new ideology of pluralism and ecumenism.

Another common theme is that while dialogue is an effective tool with great potential to break down barriers between individuals and group and aid in a process of conflict resolution, dialogue alone is not enough. In order to create real and meaningful change, concrete action is needed, whether in the political or social spheres. Indeed, according to my own findings, dialogue participants themselves desire action that concretizes the understandings and changes in consciousness produced in the dialogue groups. This will be discussed in future chapters. In the following chapter, we will look at the background of the Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities of Montreal.

CHAPTER 2 - History of the Arab, Muslim and Jewish Communities of Montreal

and the Relations Among Them

In this chapter, I present some background on the Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities of Montreal. I consolidate and present population statistics from the Canadian census. I also present the small amount of information I was able to find on the history of the relations between these communities in Montreal. I begin with charts of population statistics, and then present short histories of the Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities.

Table 1: Arab Population of Montreal and Canada

Year	Montreal	Canada
1901		2000
1931		10,070
1951	3,622 (Syrians only, QC total)	12,301 (Syrians only)
1971	8,235 (Syrians and Lebanese only, QC total)	26,665 (Syrians and Lebanese only)
1981		75,000
1986		117,250
1991	57,155	194,880 (Pal*: 4,105)
1996	96,240 (Pal: 2,810)	274,205 (Pal: 11,445)
2001	123,580	347,955 (Pal: 14,675)

*Pal = Palestinian

Table 2: Muslim Population of Montreal and Canada

Year	Montreal	Canada
1901	10*	47*
1931	45*	645*
1951		
1961	50	
1971	8380*	33,430*
1981	12,115*	98,165
1991	41,215	253,260
1996		
2001	100,185	579,640
2005	140,000**	

* figures for all of Quebec (Hassan Hamdani).
** estimate by Bashir Hussain, President of the Islamic Congress of Quebec.
Percentage change of Muslim population in Montreal 1991-2001: +143%.
Percentage change of Jewish population in Montreal 1991-2001: -8.2% (Statistics Canada).
N.B. - The category 'Muslims' did not appear in the Canadian Census publications as an identifiable group until 1981. Prior to this, they were lumped into the "Other" category.

Table 3: Jewish population of Montreal and Canada

Year	Montreal	Canada
1901	6,916	16,401
1931	57,736	155,766
1951	80,788	204,836
1971	102,592	276,025
1981		
1991	96,710	369,565
1996	89,905	351,705
2001	88,835	329,995 (Israeli 6,060)

While there is overlap between the Arab and Muslim communities, it is important to maintain their differentiation. While this study mostly focuses on Arab-Jewish relations, one of the three dialogue groups studied is a Muslim-Jewish dialogue group. For that reason, the background information in this chapter is on the Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities of Montreal.

Bashir Hussain, President of the Montreal chapter of the Council of Muslim Communities in Canada (CMCC), provided me with a picture of the Montreal Muslim

community and its history. According to Hussain, Muslims started coming to Montreal in significant numbers in the 1950s, while some had settled in Quebec in the 1930s. Some Muslims from the Middle East settled in the Eastern Townships, near Montreal, in the 1930s and 1940s.

Baha Abu-Laban, in his book A Branch on the Family Tree: The Arabs in Canada, gives a detailed picture of the history of Arab settlement in Canada. I will focus on his description of settlement in Montreal.

Historically, as Abu-Laban relates, Montreal was the Arabs' first major destination in Canada. Many Arabs started as peddlers, ditch diggers, factory workers, or unskilled workers in service jobs, and settled mainly in urban centers. The most enduring Arab communities were established in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa (60).

The Arabs who immigrated to Montreal and to other parts of Canada were by no means predominantly Muslim, especially in the early years. The first Arab immigrants were almost uniquely Christians from Syria and Lebanon. The first came to Montreal from Lebanon in 1882 (Abu-Laban 1). Between 1882 and the Second World War, virtually all Arab immigrants to Canada came from Syria and what is now Lebanon. Immigration almost halted between the world wars because of Canada's highly restrictive immigration policy (ibid. 2). Between 1921-31, for instance, only 74 people of Arab origin were admitted. Post-war, the government was under pressure to liberalize Canada's immigration policy. Changes were made, which favoured Arabs. Further deregulation was made in an effort to reduce discrimination, in 1962 and 1967 (ibid. 56). Hussain points to the introduction of the immigration point system under Prime Minister

Pierre Trudeau in 1967 as the breakthrough that paved the way for a major influx of

Arabs to Canada.

Post-war, more immigrants came from Egypt than from any other Arab state. The

remainder came from Lebanon, and to a lesser degree from Morocco, Syria, Jordan,

Tunisia and other states. Thirty percent of the post war Arab immigrants were Muslim,

whereas the early, pre-war immigrants were almost exclusively Christian (Abu-Laban 2).

Consequently, the post-war Arab immigrants were a much more diverse group, "a mosaic

within the larger Canadian mosaic" (ibid. 79).

Fifty-seven percent of post-war Arab immigrants were from North Africa, and

thus oriented towards the French language more than English. As such, Arab immigrants,

between 1956 and 1974, chose to settle in Quebec more than in any other province (ibid.

67).

Throughout the whole of Arab immigration to Canada, Abu-Laban repeatedly

emphasizes, Muslims comprised only a fraction of the whole (138). In 1980, for instance,

Arab Christians outnumbered Muslims in Canada by three to one (ibid. 139). In 1930, he

writes, there were only 645 Muslims, mostly Arab, in Canada (138). The 1931 Census of

Canada records only 645 Muslims, out of a total of 10,070 Arab-origin Canadians (ibid.

63).

The small size and relatively even geographical spread lead to a slow

development of Muslim institutions in Canada. The first mosque was built in 1938, in

Edmonton, to serve twenty Lebanese Muslim families (ibid. 139). This group then

formed the Arabian Muslim Association. Development did not increase until post-war

times, when the swell in immigration created a pressing need.

Post-war Muslim immigrants formed a diverse group which included Arabs, Pakistanis, and to a lesser degree Indians, Yugoslavs, Albanians, and Bulgarians (ibid.139). Comparing the earlier and later immigrant communities, Abu-Laban notes that post-war Arab immigrants were a much more diverse group not only in terms of their places of origin, but in their socio-economic backgrounds, their educational and occupational backgrounds, as well as their political orientations. The pre-war immigrants, he writes, were mostly poor, and from rural village backgrounds. Many of them were destitute and illiterate. The majority worked as unskilled laborers, peddlers, and shopkeepers (99).

In contrast, the post-war immigrants included a large number of highly-skilled and professional workers (76).

In summary, the two main waves of Arab immigration to Canada occurred around the turn of the twentieth century and in the post-war period, particularly the 1960s. This latter period was by far the largest wave of Arab immigration to Canada (ibid. 79).

Institutional Development

The Arab-Canadians have been a relatively small, heterogeneous, geographically-spread ethnic group which has not yet been able to support certain kinds of ethnic institutions in Canada such as parochial or private schools, but has rather had to integrate with their host society in economic, educational and political spheres (Abu-Laban 128). However, the Arab-Canadian community has developed a variety of religious institutions (both Christian and Muslim) and voluntary associations, and have published a variety of newspapers and journals.

1972 saw the founding of the Council of Muslim Communities of Canada (CMCC). Out of belief in self-help, this group took a national approach to issues facing their community. The CMCC is a member of the Federation of Islamic Associations in the USA and Canada, and works in co-operation with Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) in the USA and Canada. The CMCC publishes a quarterly, *Islam Canada*. Abu-Laban writes that the Islamic publications tend to serve a double purpose of cultural preservation and a facilitation of Muslims' transition into Canadian life (144).

In terms of secular associations, there were numerous formed after both the earlier and later waves of Arab immigration. Development was strongest in Montreal and Toronto (Abu-Laban 147). I will note a few. In 1943, the Canadian-Arab Friendship League was established. Its mandate was to combat racial discrimination and misrepresentation, to defend the image of Arabs, and to advance the Arab viewpoint in Canadian society. This group published a monthly, the Canadian Arab, from 1945 to 1948, with the goal of advancing the Arab viewpoint in Canada and neutralizing Zionist claims. It was sent to Canadian officials. They also created the Canadian-Arab News Service. This group produced a weekly newsletter which was sent free to every newspaper in Canada.

Many organizations were formed post-war (ibid. 148) including Arab Student Associations, and three Palestinian organizations, all in Montreal: the Palestinian-Arab Association, the Association Quebec-Palestine, and the Solidarity Committee with the People of Palestine (ibid. 149). In 1967, the Canadian-Arab Federation was formed. It arose partly as result of the challenge of the Six Day War. Its aim is to coordinate and unify the activities of Arab organizations in Canada, to foster friendly relations and

mutual understanding between Canadian and Arab peoples, to advance and defend Arab rights, and to provide financial assistance to refugees. The group has been very vocal on the question of Palestinian rights (ibid. 150).

The years between 1965 and 1970 saw the birth of four new periodicals: the Middle East Journal (Montreal) in 1966, and the Arab World Review in 1969, both of which are still in publication; the MEJ contains information specific to Montreal (ibid. 153). *Fedayin*, a bimonthly published by the Association Quebec-Palestine, began in 1973 (ibid.154). *Islam Canada* began publication in 1972. In 1974, ARC (Arabic Reinforcement Culture) began in Montreal, and was still active in 1980.

Abu-Laban wrote in 1980 that of the twelve major publications started since 1965, ten were still going, most being sponsored by established organizations (155).

Overall, according to Abu-Laban in 1980, the Arab community's existence as a separate entity was "partial rather than complete" (155). Unfortunately, I was unable to find a more up-to-date study of Arab-Canadian life.

Economic Adaptation

The early Arab immigrants mostly became involved with trade and peddling (ibid. 100). Arabs later became much more diversified in the workforce, eventually entering all sectors of the labour market, with their heaviest influence remaining in free enterprise. In this sphere, Arabs remain very successful, with some of the businesses that began in the early twentieth century still in operation at the time of Abu-Laban's writing in the 1980s (109).

<u>Integration</u>

At the turn of the 20th century, a heavy influx of immigrants in Canada led to fears

of a negative impact on Canada's Anglo-Saxon heritage (Abu-Laban 94). Along with

existing stereotypes, this led to an institutional hierarchy of immigrant acceptability, with

people of non-Western origin facing rising barriers against their admission (ibid.). On the

official level, writes Abu-Laban, Arab immigrants were seen as undesirable and difficult

to assimilate (ibid.).

A liberalization of immigration policy following World War Two enabled

increased immigration by Arabs. However, Abu-Laban notes that negative Arab

stereotypes persist in the media and school textbooks (ibid.). At the same time, Abu-

Laban notes that the federal government's policy of multiculturalism [in 1971, King 273]

has had a positive influence, and that Arab-Canadians feel a strong affinity for Canada

(95).

2. The Montreal Jewish Community

The first Jews settled in Canada, in Halifax, in 1751. Some of these Halifax Jews

held provincial political posts (Rosenburg 30) (all non-Catholics were forbidden in

French Canada throughout the 18th century). The British conquered Quebec in 1759, at

which point there were only around 10 Jews living in Canada (ibid. 28). At this point, the

Jews began to settle in Montreal, as well as other parts of Quebec. Jews served in the War

of 1812. (ibid). In 1831, a legislative act declared "persons professing the Jewish religion

capable of holding any office or place of trust and entitled to the full rights and privileges

of other subjects of His Majesty" (ibid. 30-31). This was 27 years before the Jews

achieved political emancipation in Britain. A Jew served as chief of police in Montreal from 1845-61 (ibid. 30).

By 1860, there were 1,250 Jews in Canada, compared with 180,000 in the USA. By 1960, the Canadian Jewish population had reached 250,000 (over 5 million in the States) (ibid).

Of the 1.2 million Jews who fled Eastern Europe between 1900 and 1910, 67,000 came to Canada (King 74). The main wave of Jewish immigration to Canada occurred between 1905-1916, at which time 123,901 Jews arrived. The Canadian Jewish Congress, which united the scattered communities, was established in 1919.

Between the World Wars, the Jewish communities expanded, developed their economies and became active communally. However, they faced barriers in the outside society in education, commerce and recreation (Smith 19), which continued into the time of World War Two. Ten percent of the Jewish population of Canada (16,883) enlisted and fought for Canada in World War Two. Post war, the Jewish communities consolidated into large urban centers, at which time social barriers began to fall (ibid. 20).

In 1971, according to Polese et al., the Jewish community of Montreal was the most concentrated of any ethnic group, and segregated, a "city within a city". They tended to integrate into the Anglo population. However, the Sephardic Moroccan Francophones integrated into both the Jewish and French milieus (32).

The Jewish community of Montreal grew until 1976, when the Parti Québécois victory of that year effectively stopped its growth, according to Smith. He writes that the P.Q.'s language legislation and its nationalistic focus led to the steady exodus of

Anglophones from Quebec (33), as is reflected in the population figures provided earlier in this chapter.

The First Synagogue

In the late 18th century there were just 15 to 20 Jews in Quebec, who formed a congregation and built a synagogue in 1777 at the corner of Notre Dame and St. Lambert (St. Lawrence) Streets. It was called the Shearith Israel Synagogue, and was the only synagogue in Montreal and Canada for almost 80 years (King 35-36). According to King, this synagogue was the first non-Catholic place of worship in Quebec and helped create the first organized Jewish presence in the city (36). This congregation, also known as the Spanish and Portuguese, is now in its third century. Its synagogue is now on St. Kevin Street in Snowdon (ibid. 39).

Institutional Development

The massive wave of immigration to Canada by the largely destitute Jews of Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century led to the development of "a comprehensive network of human services unparalleled in Canada – the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies" (King 74).

The Jews of Montreal developed all kinds of institutitions, such as mutual-aid societies, to arts institutions and theatres, libraries and newspapers. These are noted by King:

Mutual Aid Societies

- The Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society, which later became the Baron de Hirsch Institute (founded 1863)

- The Montreal Hebrew Free Loan Society (incorporated 1911)

- The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies (established 1917)

- Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (1920)

- Jewish General Hospital (opened 1934)

Educational Intitutions

- The Montreal Hebrew Free School (incorporated 1903)

- Peretz School and Jewish People's Schools (opened 1913-14)

- United Talmud Torahs of Montreal (formed 1917)

- Ecole Maimonide, the first French-language Jewish school in Canada (established 1969)

Newspapers

- The Canadian Jewish Times is created in Montreal, the first Jewish newspaper in Canada (1897)

- The *Keneder Adler* (Canadian Eagle) Yiddish daily (established 1907)

- The Canadian Jewish Chronicle (Montreal, 1914)

- Montreal Edition of Canadian Jewish News (1977)

Other Institutions

- Jewish Public Library (founded 1914)

- Congregation Mogen David, the first francophone synagogue in Canada (Montreal, established 1957)

- The Saidye Bronfman Center for the Arts (opened 1967)

Economic Adaptation

The new immigrants of the early twentieth century came mostly from Imperial Russia, Poland and Romania. They had in common the Yiddish language. They were religious and secular, simple peasants and urban scholars and tradespeople, communists and Zionists and apoliticals.

Many were skilled workers, artisans and tradespeople (King 89). About half of them found work in the growing garment industry. Others were shop-keepers and peddlers (ibid. 90).

The Jews dominated the *shmata* or clothing trade, an industry that thrived at the same time as the wave of mass Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe, beginning in the 1880s. Much of the work took place in sweatshops with 80 hour weeks and terrible working conditions. The *shmata* trade became an important sector of the Quebec economy (ibid. 119-122).

Montreal Jews from the early twentieth century onward were involved in many types of industry and professions. The majority at mid-century were "wage and salary earners engaged in industry, trade and office work, with a substantial number of manufacturers, merchants, and professionals (Rosenberg 35). Mid-century saw a rise in the social and economic status of Canadian Jews (ibid.) Jews were prominent in the liquor, tobacco, fur and leather goods industries (ibid.).

42

Integration

From their earliest presence in Canada, Jews got involved in public affairs, and held public office. For example, in 1849 the first Jew was elected as alderman to Montreal City Council (King 53), and in 1917 a Jewish Member of Parliament was elected (ibid. 143).

At the same time, Jews have faced significant discrimination in Montreal and Canada, particularly during the second third of the twentieth century, as King relates: "Discrimination against Jews, or anti-Semitism, was rampant in Canada, and at its most intense in Quebec throughout the 1930s. While not solely a by-product of the Great Depression, deteriorating economic conditions helped spread the contagion. ... banks, insurance companies, department stores, financial firms, and a variety of other institutions, barred Jews from employment. Jewish doctors couldn't get hospital affiliations. Law firms rarely hired Jews. The universities and professional schools refused to hire Jewish faculty and devised quotas for Jewish students" (King 201-202). King also notes the social barriers for Jews, such as signs restricting "Jews and dogs" from golf clubs and tourist resorts (ibid.).

Jews also faced barriers to immigration to Canada when they needed it most, up to and during the Second World War. As noted earlier, social barriers against Jews began to fall post-World War Two. Jews were instrumental in the fight against discrimination for all minorities:

"Largely through the efforts of the CJC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario enacted laws in the 40s and 50s forbidding discrimination in employment. In 1953 the Federal government passed this as the Fair Employment Practices Act (Rosenberg 39).

Initiatives to promote better relations and understanding between the Jews and the

Quebecois began in the 1970s, as is discussed in the next section.

Arab-Jewish Relations in Montreal in Recent Times

In this section, I briefly describe some of the interactions between the Arab,

Muslim and Jewish communities in recent times. This information was compiled from

my interview data as well as text, newspaper and internet articles.

Very helpfully to this study, Amir Hussain, in his essay "Muslims, Pluralism and

Interfaith Dialogue," zeroes in on the Canadian experience of interfaith dialogue. He

writes that modern attempts at dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims in Canada

began in 1939, when a visiting Indian Sufi spoke both at Canada's first mosque, which

was opened in Edmonton a year earlier, and at a "largely non-Muslim gathering" in

Toronto (258). Hussain also notes that the first public Muslim prayer service in Ottawa in

1963 was held in the basement of a Christian church (259). Hussain writes that "under the

leadership of the United Church of Canada, there have been a number of conferences and

workshops on interfaith dialogue", and that "several useful resources have been

produced" as a result (259). He also notes the founding of the National Christian Muslim

Liaison Committee in 1980, which "has existed as an official vehicle of dialogue" (259).

Up to the 1970s, there were no formal ties between the Muslim and Jewish

communities of Montreal, according to Bashir Hussain. They did not interact on a social

or cultural level, but individual Muslims and Jews interacted in business, according to

Hussain. Many Muslims as well as Arabs started import/export businesses in Montreal,

and had dealings with the Jewish textile businessmen.

Hussain tells the following story as what in his view was the initiation of a real and lasting relationship between the Muslim and Jewish communities of Montreal.

A) The Story of the Construction of the First Mosque in Quebec

The incident that began a more formal liaison between the two communities was the building of Quebec's first mosque, in 1971.

The Muslims, through their organization the Islamic Center of Quebec (ICQ), wanted to build a mosque in Ville St. Laurent (a suburb of Montreal), but their application for a building permit was turned down by the city. At this time, Hussain, who had arrived in Montreal in 1963, was general secretary of the ICQ, and in charge of the construction initiative. At that time, he was working as the Controller in a company. A Jewish man, Harry Engels, was vice president of the company, and Hussain's boss. Engels was also vice president of the Combined Jewish Appeal, a fundraising agency, and was very well connected.

One day, while having lunch together at work, Hussain asked Engels if he knew any of the Ville St. Laurent city officials, and if he could help the ICQ get permission to build their mosque. Engels obliged. He spoke to his friend, Norman Hartenstein, deputy mayor of Ville St. Laurent, saying "If we can build our synagogue, why can't the Muslims build their church?". Hartenstein said he had not been aware of this issue, and that Hussain should give him a call. Hussain went to see him, with the architect and the plans, and within two days, the same man who had refused them permission earlier, now not only granted it but also gave them tips on how to beat the city bylaws.

The construction of this 1000-person capacity mosque, in Hussain's opinion, was the start of a relationship between the Jewish and Muslim communities. It helped to begin building ties. Hussain relates that after the mosque was built, whenever the ICQ needed something for the mosque, they went to Irwin Grundman, a Jewish councillor for Ville St. Laurent, and he helped them.

The Muslims began to invite some of the Jewish officials with whom they had developed relationships and who had helped them negotiate the city bureaucracy to one of the yearly celebration marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, Id al Fitr. The Jews did not at this time invite the Muslims to their religious celebrations, Hussain says.

Relations became formalized under the auspices of the Interfaith Council of Montreal (ICM), established in 1988. The Council of Muslim Communities of Canada (CMCC) was approached to join. At that time, Hussain was the Treasurer. The ICM continues today. Its membership is comprised of two representatives from each of eleven religions.

Hussain and Wolkove became good friends through their contact at the ICM. They were both also members of the World Council of Religions and Peace.

B) Cooperation in Activism for Peace in the Middle East

Arabs and Jews have come together since the 1980s in an effort to advance the cause of peace in the Middle East, according to my respondents, who told me about the following groups. I differentiate between activist groups and dialogue groups, although there is some interlap between the two categories within some of the groups.

1) Regroupement Dialogue Israel-Palestine (RDIP) (1982-1992)

This was the first group in which Arabs and Jews of Montreal came together to express their points of view and to work together for coexistence and peace in the Middle East, according to one of its cofounders, Janet Weinroth. Weinroth says that the group came together in reaction to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. A group of mostly academics jointly bought a large advertisement in the *Montreal Gazette* condemning the invasion. RDIP went on to meet regularly, doing both dialogue and activism. The group also raised funds to support peace and coexistence groups in Israel such as *Ta'ayush* ('Partnership'), a group of Israeli Arabs and Jews who work to end the occupation and to support Palestinian human rights in the occupied territories. RDIP was made up of Arabs, Jews and several concerned French-Canadians. The group felt that "dialogue was the first step" towards ending the war and moving towards peaceful coexistence. There were around 20 active members, with around 12 core members. Weinroth says that they attracted as many as 500 people to conferences they organized at McGill and Concordia. The group's essence was dialogue, she says, but activism became part of the group when some members joined with other groups to protest and demonstrate against Israel's occupation of Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. This group was a prelude to PAJU, says Weinroth, who at age 77 continues to be very active with the latter group.

2) Palestinian and Jewish Unity (2000 –).

According to their website, "PAJU is a human rights organization that explicitly recognizes the right of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to national existence and to live in security. We condemn all violations of human rights. PAJU was co-founded in Montreal by Bruce Katz, a Jewish Canadian and Rezeq Faraj, a Palestinian Canadian who have been friends for more than 25 years. Our group is comprised of Jews, Palestinians

and other Canadians of good conscience who work together to promote peace in the Middle East and to educate the public on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." (http://pajumontreal.org). PAJU organizes a weekly vigil against the occupation outside the Israeli consulate in downtown Montreal.

3) Women in Black Montreal (founded 2002).

This group was founded by, among others, Nada Sefian and Ronit Yarosky, also founders of the Montreal Dialogue Group. Woman in Black "is a women-centered peace group committed to non-violence and affiliated with the Israeli Women in Black movement, which is dedicated to the pursuit of a negotiated settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict leading to a just peace. Men who support the positions and goals of WIB are welcome to join." To this end, Women in Black works in conjunction with other groups to educate the public, demonstrate against the occupation and human-rights abuses in the occupied territories, and support peace work in Israel and Palestine. They also aim to "bridge gaps between Palestinians and Jews". They hold monthly vigils outside the Israeli Consulate in Montreal (http://www.womeninblackmontreal.org).

4) SPHR (Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights)

SPHR was established in 1999 "as a result of a merger between two student organizations based at Concordia and McGill University; the Concordia Centre for Palestinian Human Rights (CCPHR) and the McGill Palestinian Solidarity Committee (PSC). SPHR is a non-profit, student-based organization that advocates on a strong social justice platform to uphold the rights of the Palestinian people in the face of human rights violations and all forms of racism, discrimination, misinformation and

misrepresentation.

Through awareness raising, advocacy work, non-violent direct actions, solidarity building, and the promotion of Palestinian identity, culture and history, SPHR works to support and protect Palestinian human rights both locally and internationally."

SPHR recognizes an "interconnection between the struggle against anti-Semitism and Palestinian human rights," and with it, a focus on educating the public on the "historical and ideological differences between Israeli State policies and the Jewish people."

SPHR is not specifically based on Arab-Jewish collaboration, but it has many Arab, Palestinian and Jewish members who actively collaborate on the group's projects (http://www.sphr.org).

C) Dialogue Groups

As opposed to the activist groups in section B, the following are groups that focus on dialogue specifically, and not political activism.

King mentions a group, Projet Action Rapprochement, and says it was created in 1977 to encourage greater understanding between Jews and non-Jews, the French-speaking majority (293).

1) Amitié judéo-musulmane du Québec (AJMQ)(2003-)

This is a francophone Jewish-Muslim dialogue group. It was started on the impetus of an Algerian Muslim woman interested in creating a dialogue with the Jewish community. Through a connection with a work colleague, she made contact with Victor Goldbloom, one of the group's co-leaders, who described the group to me.

AJMQ is made up of around ten members. Membership is by invitation. They meet every two months. There is fairly equal representation between Muslims and Jews. Their Muslim membership includes a Palestinian, a Jordanian, Algerians and other nationalities. They range in age from 30 to 80 years old. The members also range in terms of their level of religious observance, from low to high. However, Goldbloom states that no one in the group has enquired about anyone else's level of observance.

The group has no written mission statement. Goldbloom described their goals as follows: "to ensure we know each other better and in so doing have greater sensitivity and respect for one another, in order to ensure that we can live together in this society." Goldbloom said also that the dialogue is based on mutual respect and the sharing of Quebec and Canadian values, which he defined as the respect for diversity and differences, and the willingness to sit and talk together as Canadians.

The format of their meetings is that each of the two leaders (a Muslim and a Jew) present a quote from their scriptures (the Qur'an and the Torah, respectively), after which a discussion ensues. The quotations are not chosen to follow any particular theme, but are chosen according to each leader's interest.

They have not yet discussed any controversial issues within the scriptures or traditions, Goldbloom says, although they are moving in that direction. However, they are still in the process of building the necessary level of comfort and mutual trust.

The group does not take political action. They are interested in doing social action, but have not started any projects yet. They did issue a joint statement when an announcer on Radio-Québec made a derogatory remark about Islam. Goldbloom feels

that such statements are more powerful when coming not just from Muslims but from members of other faiths as well.

2) Muslim-Jewish Dialogue founded 1998*

3) Shalom-Salaam founded 2001*

4) Montreal Dialogue Group founded 2003*

*Described in Chapter 3

5) Concordia's Student Dialogue Group

This group is in its nascence – its first two meetings took place in December 2005, and there were several more meetings before the end of the school year.

The group is co-organized and led by Danny Iny, Concordia Hillel's Israel Affairs representative, and Bara Bseiso, president of the Concordia's Arab Student Association (ASA). Iny is a member of the MDG, and started this group in an effort to create a dialogue space that would cater more to the needs and interests of young adults.

The intention is for the group to meet twice a month. In its methodology, mandate and focus it is quite similar to the MDG, with the main difference being the younger demographic target group. There is also the difference in the approach to the concept of dialogue as not being the opposite of debate, but encompassing debate. Iny says they hope to not shy away from healthy argument, but encourage people to express conflicting views and challenge each others' opinions and beliefs.

Thus far, the group does not have a set membership. Participants were solicited through Hillel, the ASA and other student, cultural and political groups.

The group's practice seems to be based on the general approach of the MDG: a presentation is made, so far they have been on "the Narratives of the two sides about

1948", and "the Security Fence / Apartheid Wall". After the presentation, participants break into smaller groups for discussion.

D) Recent events in the relations between the two communities

This section briefly surveys events within the past few years relating to and impacting Arab-Muslim-Jewish relations in Montreal.

In 2002, a riot ensued at Concordia University during a protest over an invited visiting speaker, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Tensions mounted between Arab and Jewish students. The incident made international news headlines. The university administration subsequently placed a ban on all campus activities/discussion related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In 2003, following the Netanyahu debacle, Concordia University launched the *Peace and Conflict Resolution Series*, a program of lectures, film screenings and discussions of conflict resolution situations around the world, organized by faculty and students from various departments. The PCR Series continued throughout the 2005-2006 academic year, after which it was terminated.

In 2004, the United Talmud Torah school library was fire-bombed by an 18-year-old Arab man, who was subsequently sentenced to two years in prison. The man pleaded guilty to starting a fire that destroyed the Jewish school's library. He said it was an emotional reaction to the situation in the Middle East. The defence and the Crown agreed the firebombing was a hate crime ("Man Given...", cbc.ca).

The preceding events demonstrate an escalation in tensions between the Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities in Montreal in recent years, which reflects the escalation of the Arab-Jewish conflict in the Middle East, and specifically the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. This is reflective of the collapse of the recent peace process and the

onset of the Second Intifada. Dialogue groups such as the ones studied in this thesis

emerged within this context, as a response to the rising tensions between the communities

locally as a reflection of unfortunate events abroad.

Summary

Although Montreal's Arab community is much larger than the Jewish one (and

growing at a fast rate), the Jewish community is much older and better organized

institutionally. The Jewish community is in fact probably better organized than most

communities. With its wealth of communal organizations, mutual-aid societies,

philanthropic associations, and cultural institutions such as museums, libraries and

theatres, the Jewish community shows a very strong network of communal identity and

affinity. In contrast, the Montreal Arab community is very young, more heterogeneous

and fragmented, less organized and still in the process of development.

As far as community development goes, Amir Hussain writes that Muslim leaders

in North America look to the Jewish community as a model for institutional development

in both the religious and secular spheres (259).

The Catholic community's development of self-sufficient institutions as a

minority group within largely Protestant North America is also seen by Muslim leaders as

a good model to follow (ibid. 259).

The organizational differences and the level of establishment of the two

communities are among the challenges faced by the local dialogue groups. It is often

easier to find a "Jewish" space to meet in than an Arab or Muslim one, for example. This

issue compounds with the issue of a general power imbalance between the two communities, related to both the institutional differences just mentioned and the power imbalance in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in which the Palestinians continue to be stateless while the Israelis have a state and a military as well as the support of the United States.

Another factor in the imbalance between the two communities is the racial profiling, targeting and general racism faced by Arabs and Muslims post-9/11. Jews and Israelis also experience prejudice against them in Montreal because of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Summary

There have been different types of cooperative efforts and contacts between Montreal's Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities. The first noted from the early period twentieth century onward were business connections, between Arabs and Jews involved in wholesaling and the trade industry. A more formal connection occurred in the 1970s with the Muslim community obtaining help from some Jewish city officials in getting a permit to build Montreal's first mosque.

The 1980s saw the beginning of efforts by the two communities to join together in collaborative projects involving activism on the Arab-Israeli Middle East conflict. Then, in the late 1990s, dialogue groups began to be formed, in which Arabs, Muslims and Jews could come together not necessarily with any political goal, but simply to meet one another, learn more about each other, and build bridges between the two communities, without having to agree on or take any specific political standpoint.

CHAPTER 3 - Dialogue Group Descriptions

1. Muslim-Jewish Dialogue (MJ)

How the group began

MJ officially began in 1998. However, Edward Wolkove, Jewish co-leader of the group, says that a precursor to the group took place in 1991: sparked by the Gulf War, Congregation Beth El, a synagogue in Montreal, organized an educational program on Islam. They invited several local Muslims to participate.

Muslim-Jewish Dialogue was the first and is the longest-running Muslim-Jewish dialogue group in Montreal. It was started in November 1998 by Wolkove, a member of the Canadian Jewish Congress and a former president of its Quebec section, and Bashir Hussain, a member of the Council of Muslim Communities in Canada, and currently president of its Montreal chapter. Wolkove and Hussain are both accountants by profession. They continue to co-lead the group today.

The group has its roots in two other interfaith organizations: Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal, which has been going for over thirty years and in which Wolkove is active, and the Montreal Interfaith Council, established in 1990 through the Christian-based Canadian Center for Ecumenism.

The idea for the group came from Daniel Gal, then the Israeli consul general in Montreal. He came to speak to the Christian-Jewish dialogue group of Montreal about the Mid-East conflict, at Wolkove's invitation, in 1998. Gal had done Muslim-Jewish dialogue work in Jerusalem, and suggested that Wolkove do the same in Montreal.

Wolkove then contacted Hussain, whom he knew from the Montreal Interfaith Council. Hussain responded enthusiastically, and told Wolkove to give him time to find some Muslims to take part. He wanted to choose members carefully, to find moderate people and avoid extremists. He spoke to some imams and lay leaders. Some responded positively, some negatively, and several came on board.

The first meeting took place in October 1998 at Montreal's Reform synagogue, Temple Emmanuel Beth Sholom. Participants included clergy and laypeople from both communities.

<u>Reasons for starting the group</u>:

Their goal was to establish more contact between the two religious groups. There were no open conflicts between the communities at that time, Hussain says, but there was tension. Building confidence between the two communities was very important to them.

Islam and Judaism have too many similarities to ignore, Hussain says, so the idea was, let's discuss them and get to know more about each others' faith. Because of the *intifada*, suicide bombings were happening. "That's why Jewish people were against sitting with us [Muslims]," he told me.

Their purpose is to know each other better, because as Wolkove says, "ignorance breeds prejudice." In his opinion, getting to know one another better, including getting to know the other's religion, creates friendship and trust which can act as a foundation for improved community relations as well as the discussion of more controversial topics such as Middle East politics.

Group Mandate and Focus

In terms of structure, each meeting features a topic in Jewish or Muslim belief and practice. They focus solely on religion, and avoid political discussion. They focus on learning the basic beliefs and traditions of Islam and Judaism. According to Wolkove, they don't have a "Mid-East agenda": "This is not a political forum. We are not here to correct the issues in the Middle East" (Wolkove). Hussain agrees that the group did not start as an attempt to solve the problems of the Middle East or any political issues – if so, he says, they would have encouraged the radicals of both sides to join. They don't have any political goals, he says, because "we can't really know the whole truth of the matters, and we just get into arguments because of our conflicting versions of the truth, neither of which are absolutely true." Instead, "we are trying to find out what the basic similarities and differences are between our two religions. When we have considered all these basic points, then we will come to some of these other points [political discussion]" (Hussain). As such, the leaders' belief is that religious dialogue sets the stage and prepares people for the more controversial political dialogue.

Membership

The group is comprised of both laypeople and clergy. Membership is by invitation only, but "everyone is welcome". They have a mailing list of around thirty, with average attendance between 10-15 people. The group has a loose structure, according to Wolkove; there are no dues, and it is volunteer-run.

Wolkove says there are eight to ten Jewish members who attend regularly, including several rabbis from Reform and Conservative congregations, and several academics. There are six to eight regular Muslim attendees.

In terms of broadening the membership on the Jewish side, Wolkove says that he has tried to involve members of the Orthodox community, with little success. Reform and Conservative rabbis have been involved, Wolkove says, but it has proved to be very hard to get the right wing Orthodox community involved.

The membership of Muslim-Jewish Dialogue is relatively less diverse than that of the other groups studied. It is made up mostly of older men, with two or three female members who attend regularly. There are no regular attendees under the age of 40, and most members are in their 50s or above. Its Muslim members are predominantly non-Arab, and there are no Palestinians in regular attendance.

Practice

The group meets every six to seven weeks in the board room of the Canadian Jewish Congress. They would like to meet also in a Muslim space, but have not yet found an appropriate one. The fact that they meet in the Jewish setting reflects the fact that the Jewish community is older and better established, Hussain and Wolkove say. They are planning to meet in the St. Laurent mosque, which is currently being renovated, as soon as the construction is finished.

The topic of the evening is presented either by a group member or by a guest speaker. Topics that have been covered in past meetings include: Jewish and Muslim

mourning rituals, the meeting of Imams and rabbis for Peace in Brussels in 2004, *zakat*,

or charity, and Jewish and Muslim teachings on Abraham, to name just a few.

They first began discussing their respective stories, in the Torah and Quran, about

Abraham's sacrifice of his son – Isaac in the Jewish tradition; Ishmael in the Muslim

tradition. They discussed this topic for nearly a year, over seven or eight meetings. They

had tremendous discussions and debates during this time, Hussain relates.

Then they discussed the ritual of the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). Hussain showed

a video about it, and gave commentary on it. They discussed the Jewish holidays,

Chanuka and Passover, which Hussain didn't previously know about.

What the leaders say about the group

Wolkove says that any joint action by Jews and Muslims in Montreal is a major

step forward. While Christian-Jewish dialogue has grown over the past 50 years in which

it has been taking place in Montreal, as Wolkove says, Muslim-Jewish dialogue is

relatively new, having been going on for only eight years.

Focus on the Mid-East?

Wolkove insists that their group has no aspirations of affecting relations between

Muslims/Arabs and Jews beyond Montreal. Since their goals are theological and not

political, it makes no difference, says Wolkove, that most of their Muslim members are

not Arab (most are of Pakistani origin).

Other Initiatives

Hussain says that their planned conference will begin a new era in relations between the two groups, and in their dialogue group. All of Canada will know of their existence, he says: "We will invite more people, and discuss in a fair academic way all the problems, slowly and gradually". He says that the conference will be the "first test" of the Muslim-Jewish dialogue group. He expects it to have a big impact. Hussain says that they wanted to do it three years ago but that the tensions in the Middle East caused them to postpone it.

He says that after the conference, they will try to involve some less moderate people, some radicals – to train them to get out from their radical attitude. "When you sit in your own group, you are more radical. When you come into contact with people who challenge your opinions, beliefs and assumptions, you are forced to confront other views."

2. The Montreal Dialogue Group

How the group began

The MDG was started in January 2003 by Nada Sefian, a Palestinian Muslim born in Lebanon, and Ronit Yarosky, a Canadian-Israeli Jew, who served in the Israeli army during the first *intifada* in the late 1980s.

Before starting the Montreal Dialogue Group (MDG), Sefian and Yarosky were both very involved in political activism around the Israel/Palestine conflict as members of several groups. Yarosky had spent a year (2000-2001) in Israel, working in the peace movement. They had both been very active in Montreal activist groups. However, they

were unsatisfied with the groups, finding them to be inflexible and unable/unconcerned to reach out to mainstream Arabs and Jews.

Sefian and Yarosky left the activist groups in question and formed the Montreal chapter of Women in Black, a global anti-occupation lobby group that hold weekly anti-occupation "vigils" outside the Israeli consulate in Montreal. After the group had been active for some time, a group of pro-Zionist activists responded by holding concurrent counter-demonstrations across the street from the Women in Black. Sefian thus encountered 'A', a Jewish pro-Zionist activist, when he crossed the street one day to start a debate with the Women in Black. He got shouted down, but Sefian reached out to him, and engaged him in conversation. They exchanged telephone numbers, and agreed to continue the conversation.

Shortly thereafter, Sefian stopped attending the weekly vigils, finding them to be unproductive. 'A' called her to ask her why he no longer saw her there. He asked if they could meet, and if they could stand under the same banner. They kept in touch. When the dialogue group started, he accepted Sefian's invitation to attend a meeting, and subsequently became a regular member.

Sefian and Yarosky both became disenchanted with Women in Black, because they felt that they were preaching to the converted, and not reaching out beyond the activist community to mainstream Jews and Arabs. They felt that they needed a new approach; one that would help humanize the two communities to one another.

In 2003, under the banner of Women in Black, Sefian and Yarosky organized a talk by Diana Bhuttu, a Palestinian-Canadian lawyer working for the Palestinian Authority, and Israeli peace activist Oren Medicks. Medicks asked Yarosky to organize a

speaking tour for him in local synagogues. He also encouraged her to go in this direction herself; that is, to reach out to the mainstream Jewish community, rather than preaching to the converted.

At around this time, Sefian participated in a drama therapy conflict resolution workshop at Concordia University, in which she was the only Palestinian participant. There, she met Jews with whom she got into stimulating conversation. They promised to each other to continue the dialogue they had begun at the workshop.

Sefian then spoke to Yarosky about it. Yarosky reported that there was also interest from members of the Reconstructionist synagogue, who had asked Yarosky if she could organize a meeting between them and some Palestinians/Arabs.

So, the first meeting was called. In attendance were Sefian, Yarosky, and two Israeli-Canadian women. The second involved another Jewish woman, her husband and friends, and some of Sefian's Palestinian and Arab friends.

At this point the group was informal and unstructured. They didn't yet have a vision or a mandate, but simply wanted to meet with one another. At the first meeting, they told their own personal stories. At the second meeting, they raised political issues as well. There was a lot of reservation as well as frustration, Sefian says. She told me that she and Yarosky were not discouraged by this, because as political activists, they were used to the challenges of political dialogue.

Group Mandate and Focus

The Montreal Dialogue Group is a non-profit organization. It brings together people from the Israeli, Jewish, Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in Montreal.

They aim to promote coexistence through better understanding of one another. Their method is through dialogue involving listening and acceptance of others' beliefs and experiences. Their goal is increased understanding and mutual acceptance; not to change peoples' political beliefs. They aim to humanize the other and to overcome stereotypes, through listening to one another, sharing experiences, personal history, and opinions.

They aim to bring together people from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives from within the two communities, rather than to represent "official" community positions. Their focus is on the individual perspective, rather than the meta-narratives that can be obstacles to understanding, the leaders say.

Coexistence can be achieved through dialogue, according to Sefian, who believes that much can be achieved through providing a safe and non-confrontational forum for interaction and discussion. "When people don't feel like you're trying to convert them, and that they will be listened to, they are more open," she says.

Membership

The group has grown from forty members in 2003 to 60 paid memberships and a mailing list of 300 in 2005. The group's membership is quite diverse, with members of various age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and employment fields. It is made up almost exclusively of laypeople, although occasionally there are members of the clergy involved (such as when rabbis or imams are asked to give presentations at the multifaith meals). The large size of the group allows for a fairly diverse membership. Although older people predominate in the MDG as they do in Muslim-Jewish Dialogue, the MDG also attracts some young people, who attend regularly. It has both Palestinian and Israeli members, as

well as members from other Arab countries, non-Arab Muslims, Arab Christians and Jews. The group also is open to people outside the Jewish and Arab/Muslim communities, and they have a few members from various backgrounds. Membership is open to everyone, and the group leaders hand out pamphlets and solicit membership at public lectures and events related to Mid-East politics.

Practice

The group meets about once a month. Like the Muslim-Jewish Dialogue group, they focus on a specific theme each meeting, with a presentation by either a member or members of the group, or an invited speaker or speakers. Themes are usually politically-based, with some religious/cultural focus occasionally, usually to mark seasonal Muslim and Jewish holidays.

Themes from the past year included media bias, the right of return, suicide bombings, the peace process, the one- versus two-state solution, and two shared religious ceremonies/meals: *iftar* (for Ramadan) and a Passover seder.

Each session is around three hours long. It begins with a presentation, then there is a question and commentary period. Following this, the group breaks up into several smaller groups (of around 7-12 people each), to focus on a discussion question of a more personal nature, directly related to the presentation topic. Guidelines for dialogue versus debate are read out loud by each group moderator.

The discussion goes on for about an hour. Refreshments are served, the group begins to disperse, and many people stay to continue their discussions one-on-one or

more informally. Group members are often so deep in conversation that the YMCA staff must come and kick them out of the building in order to close for the night.

The presentations typically involve some academic-style research and analysis. Presenters draw on scholarly texts, documentary films and television reports, newspaper articles and other sources such as NGOs. However, presentations, depending on the topic and on the presenter, sometimes focus on the presenter's personal experience, such as the sessions on the Holocaust, where survivors come to speak, or on the *Naqba*, when the presenter told his family's story of flight from Palestine.

In the small dialogue group discussion following the presentations, participants are guided into engaging with one another through their personal experience and feelings, rather than engaging in political or historical debate. They are to explore each others' sides as narratives, and not debate about "ultimate truth". They are to recognize the validity of each others' thoughts and feelings. At the same time, they are there to dispel misconceptions on either side and hopefully bring both sides to a more accurate and enlightened view of the other and of the political situation.

At the same time, many members repeatedly try to convince the other side of the truth of their own claims and the falseness of the other's – but this is severely discouraged, as it is seen as something that happens in other forums – it's easy to find an argument if you're looking for one – whereas this is a forum for listening and sharing personal experience, which is perhaps more effective in actually reaching the other and changing minds, according the group leaders.

As far as how the topics are chosen, Sefian says that the programming is based on the questions group members have asked. She says that the program is criticized. "We are not professionals – we are led by our hearts".

What the leaders say about the group

Sefian says that the MDG started as an alternative to the "pro-pro and anti-anti groups". Their mandate was to be moderate. They had the sense that there was interest in a moderate approach from the audiences' response to talks that they had given.

Sefian believes that the success of the group can be attributed to the fact that unlike lobby groups such as those she had been involved with previously, the MDG does not have a political objective. She believes this is what makes people from across the ideological spectrum feel welcome and comfortable enough to participate.

In Israel, she says, there is little contact between Jews and Arabs, and this lack of contact and communication allows them to continually diminish each others' humanity; a situation that is necessary in order to continue with the status quo of conflict.

Both group leaders clearly distance themselves from their representative communities, stating that they are individuals and by no means community leaders. Yarosky says that she does not represent the Jewish community in any way, and is not a member of any of its institutional organizations. This is important to their group's focus on individual identity, perception and experience.

When asked if she hopes the MDG will have an effect on the larger conflict, Sefian replies that they would like it to have a global effect, ideally, but that "we need it here in Montreal, too".

The MDG, unlike some groups which have a fixed membership, is always open to new members and to anyone who wants to drop in. Sefian's mandate is to try to educate as many people as possible, to raise awareness and to create a popular movement for justice and peace. Like in South Africa or Vietnam, she told me, "we need the pressure of the international community in order to bring change". For this reason, they try to reach out to as many people as they can.

Focus on the Mid-East?

The group's main thematic focus is the political issues of Israel/Palestine. At each session, a presentation is made on a topic related to the conflict, such as "The One vs. Two-state solution", "The Right of Return", "What is Zionism". While in the post-presentation small discussion groups, participants talk about these same issues, they are guided by the moderators towards focusing on sharing personal experiences and feelings rather than engaging in political/historical debate.

Topics other than the Israel/Palestine conflict are sometimes covered, for instance, there have been yearly Passover *seders* and Ramadan *iftars* in which presentations are made on the Jewish and Muslim beliefs and customs. This year, the MDG is putting more of a focus on religion by having three sessions devoted to introducing the three religions represented in the membership of the group: Jewish, Muslim and Christian. However, the main focus of the group remains on politics.

Their focus on the Middle East is also shown by their efforts to organize a summer "mission" to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. On this trip, the group would meet with local peace groups and activists in both communities. They were not able to

garner enough interest for their planned trip for the summer of 2005 (for many, the cost was prohibitive), and are hoping to try again in 2006.

Other Initiatives

The MDG has several sub-groups working on various projects, such as the Meeting in the Middle art exhibition of August 2005, and the Circle of Peace mandala project, as well as the aforementioned trip.

3. Shalom/Salaam Montreal

How the Group Began

As Ehab Lotayef, a member of the group, told me, this group got its start in the fall of 2002, among a group of primarily academics. He relates that some disaffected members of the Montreal branch of the Canadian Friends of Peace Now (an Israeli peace group), wanted to meet with Arabs. Lotayef was contacted by his friend, UQAM professor Rashad Antonius, who invited him to become part of the group and to attend their first meeting.

Group Mandate and Focus

According to the group's mission statement, it has three main objectives:

> First, to initiate a friendly discussion among a group of people who believe in the necessity of dialogue, with the aim of increasing our understanding of each others' perceptions, motives, and concerns, and establishing open channels of

communications between the respective communities. Second, to promote this model of dialogue by conducting joint public events (lectures, conferences, etc.) that propose both this model for dialogue, and concrete discussions of various peace proposals. Third, to continue discussions amongst ourselves of various ideas for peace and peace proposals in order to eventually reach a common vision of an acceptable resolution of the conflict.

Besides meeting to exchange views and to build friendly relations,… [we] also hope to organize public events where common views are put forward, and different opinions are expressed and handled in a respectful way.

We hope this will inspire others to overcome the cleavages and antagonisms among communities that share a common public space in Montreal (Shalom-Salaam 1).

Another member says that they feel comfortable going deeper with each other, and that they can go deeper than is possible in the MDG because they have more time to do so: they are beyond just getting to know one another. They discuss politics, and also do educational outreach work in local colleges and universities, where they give talks on dialogue and the Middle East conflict.

Membership

Although they are open to new members, they do not solicit them. The group is made up of mostly older academics and professionals from the Jewish and Arab communities. Attendance at meetings is from 8-15 people and their mailing list includes 30 people.

Practice

This group is a closed group, fairly small, that meets on around a monthly basis. They discuss topics related to the conflict, from the historical to the contemporary, and from major themes such as Zionism, to particular events that happen at a particular moment. Group members take turns moderating and presenting topics.

What the Leaders Say About the Group

Members say that there are no leaders in the group per se, and that they all take organizational roles within the group. Lotayef, for instance, is in charge of the mailing list. In his view, this is preferable to having an official organizational structure such as a board of directors, because it allows the group to focus on its activities and not its ideology or bureaucracy.

Focus on the Middle East?

The group's focus is on the Middle East. They discuss primarily the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also discuss other issues in the Middle East such as the war in Iraq.

Other Initiatives

Members of the group regularly give presentations in high schools, colleges and universities in which they usually team up in pairs (an Arab and a Jew) to present their personal experiences and views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They make around

three or four presentations per semester, at various schools. They aim to show that they can disagree without being hostile, and they promote their dialogue group as a model for others to follow in order to promote mutual understanding and coexistence.

This concludes the survey of the groups studied. In the next chapter, I present profiles of the leaders of each group.

CHAPTER 4 - Dialogue Group Leaders

In this chapter, I profile the leaders of two of the three dialogue groups studied in this thesis: Muslim-Jewish Dialogue (MJ), and the Montreal Dialogue Group (MDG). The third group, Shalom-Salaam, does not have leaders; the members share administrative and other responsibilities and take turns hosting the group. MJ and MDG have so far been very leader-driven groups. The current leaders of both groups are also the founders, except for Nada Sefian, who recently resigned (in April 2006). However, since Sefian was the co-founder and leader of the MDG up until the end of my research on this project, her profile will be included in this chapter despite the fact that she is no longer leading the group.

I chose to profile the group leaders because of their centrality to the existence and continuation of the dialogue groups. They are all enormously dedicated to the task. None of them are paid for this work, and they all give countless hours of their time to it. This chapter provides a look into why they do what they do, how they came to be involved with dialogue, and why they believe in it.

This chapter includes four profiles. First are those of the two co-presidents/ co-founders of MJ, followed by the two co-presidents/co-founders of the MDG.

1. **Edward Wolkove**, Muslim-Jewish Dialogue

Wolkove has been involved with interfaith work in Montreal for over 50 years now. He began in the early 1950s, when he was in his late twenties. At that time he was the treasurer of his synagogue. He remarked that his children's teachers were Christians

and didn't know anything about Judaism. So he invited them to the synagogue and showed them some of the Jewish religious customs. He also invited priests and elders from a nearby Catholic church to visit the synagogue.

Around forty-five years ago, Wolkove joined Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal. He was appointed to this committee by the Canadian Jewish Congress, to be their representative. The Christians were in turn represented by their church leaders. Temple Emanu-El was at the forefront of this group. It met once a month, and had an executive committee. Wolkove has been treasurer of the group for 25 years. Its major yearly functions include: a Holocaust memorial church service, student exchanges (all-day seminars for high school students), guest speakers and speakers from among their own membership.

Jewish members include both clergy and lay leaders. There are three rabbis, from two congregations. From the Christian side, the members are mostly clergy. The group alternates between having a Jewish and a Christian president.

Wolkove is part of the World Conference on Religions for Peace, which has Non-Governmental Organization standing at the United Nations. Wolkove is on the executive committee. This group meets twice a year. It is comprised mostly of Christians, with some Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. They are there as individuals and not as representatives of communal religious or cultural organizations.

Wolkove has been a member of the Interfaith Council of Montreal for fifteen years. The organization itself started in 1990. He represents the Canadian Jewish Congress on that body. There are two representatives from each faith (his partner member is the assistant rabbi of Temple Emanu-El). There are nine member faiths on the council.

They meet once a month. Their goal is to better understand each other. Their program of activities includes having guest speakers, presentations of papers by members, visits to high schools, in which four representatives of each faith speak about their religions. The incident that led to the creation of Muslim-Jewish Dialogue, involving the Interfaith Council of Montreal and a guest speaker invited by Wolkove is related in Chapter Three of this text.

"The point of interfaith dialogue is not to love one another, but to understand one another", Wolkove told me.

When asked about the Jewish community's reception of his dialogue efforts, Wolkove says that it has not always been easy. "People still say that I'm a fool, and that I'm wasting my time," he told me. "I reply with a statement from the *Pirkei Avot* ("The Ethics of the Fathers", a Jewish Talmudic tractate): "It's not for us to finish the task, but neither are we free to desist from it". Wolkove says that change has been made, in that people in the Jewish community were initially more skeptical about dialogue, and that it has become more accepted with time. In fact, the acceptance of the dialogue group by the mainstream Jewish community must be illustrated by the fact that Wolkove was given an award by the Canadian Jewish Congress for his interfaith dialogue activities.

Continuing on the topic of how taking part in dialogue has affected his life, Wolkove says that it has affected the way in which he reacts when he hears people criticize Muslims. Taking part in dialogue, he says, has given him knowledge with which to make his case against racist or prejudiced statements.

2. **Bashir Hussain,** Muslim-Jewish Dialogue

Bashir Hussain is a Muslim who came to Canada from Pakistan in 1963. Like Wolkove, he is an accountant by profession, and also like Wolkove, he is active in his religious community. He served as general secretary of the Islamic Council of Quebec (ICQ), in which he held various positions for twenty-one years. The ICQ is the sole organization to represent Muslims in Quebec, as the official representative under a private bill passed in 1965 in the Quebec National Assembly. Hussain is dissatisfied with the organization of the Muslim community, which he says has no organization parallel to the CJC. There is no Muslim Council of Montreal, he says, and the ICQ is plagued by a lack of strong leadership. Therefore, the Muslim community does not have an official stance on Muslim-Jewish dialogue, unlike the Jewish community, since the CJC endorses it. Hussain continues to be involved with the CMCC, and is currently president of its Quebec Chapter, established in 1972. He was called upon to join the Interfaith Council of Montreal, which began in 1988, as a representative of the Council of Muslim Communities of Canada (in which Hussain was then serving as treasurer). That began his involvement with interfaith dialogue, as well as his friendship with Wolkove.

When asked if he thinks that the dialogue group has had an impact on the larger community, Hussain responds enthusiastically. He says he has seen a strengthening of community ties in times of conflict and crisis. When the Talmud Torah school library was firebombed in the spring of 2004, as discussed in Chapter Two, Hussain gave a press conference, to which all the city's Muslim and Jewish leaders came. Together, they sent out a message of 'zero tolerance' for violence, racism and disrespect.

To Hussain, this incident alone produced a stronger bond between the groups. He says that shortly thereafter, a member of the Canadian Jewish Congress took a bold step in

supporting the rezoning of a mosque in Dollard des Ormeaux (a Montreal suburb). This was the first time the CJC endorsed such a request, Hussain says, and this illustrates the rapprochement that was taking place between the two communities.

He also cites an incident in which a Jewish cemetery was damaged in Quebec City. Hussain says that he made a statement against such destruction and that it appeared in the newspaper. This, to him, can make an impact on how Jews and Muslims see each other, and how the general population sees both groups.

Another example he gives of the dialogue group's impact is the tendency lately in both groups to recognize the other and to seek the other's input, participation and opinions. An example of this, Hussain says, was his invitation by the CJC to speak at their annual conferences, in both 2001 and 2003, about the relations between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Montreal.

Another incident he cites is the effort by the Jewish Defense League, a far-right-wing organization, to open a Montreal office, in 1999 or 2000. They sought the support of the Jewish community, from the dialogue group to Bnai Brith, but none of them supported it. Together, they opposed it, and stopped it. They argued that the PLO would be next to open a local office. This was one of the results of dialogue and good relations, Hussain says.

Hussain is optimistic about Jewish-Muslim relations in general, believing that there is currently a major rapprochement taking place on a global scale. He cites the recent address to the American Jewish Congress by the president of Pakistan as an example.

On the issue of dialogue versus political activism, Hussain says that he doesn't get involved in political activist groups because his priority is on keeping good relations between the communities, rather than on specifically advocating for change. As his examples illustrate, Hussain sees the dialogue group effecting change and having an impact on society. He feels proud of what he sees as the successes of the group in the larger community: the stopping of the Jewish Defense League, the press conferences, the help the Muslim community obtained from the Jews in building mosques… The relationship keeps building as time goes on, Hussain says, emphasizing that the dialogue group has been instrumental in this process.

As far as his own journey in the dialogue group, Hussain says that it has had an impact on him as a person. His view of Jews has changed because of his ongoing participation in the activities of the Jews. This is due to the ties he has established in the group.

3. Nada Sefian, Montreal Dialogue Group

Nada Sefian grew up in Lebanon. Her mother is Lebanese and her father is Palestinian. After getting married, she lived in Saudi Arabia for seven years, then Paris for fifteen years, and now Canada for the past eight years. She has a doctorate from the Sorbonne in Arabic literature and Muslim civilization.

She has been an activist since she was very young. In Beirut, as a university student, she was active in campaigns to raise awareness of the Palestinian cause and motivate people to help in the struggle for Palestinian rights and liberation.

"It was a revolutionary period where people were reading Che Guevara and all

these books about the struggle, about military struggle versus peaceful struggle…

So all these ideas were there, to benefit from. It started my activism."

The civil war was a shocking and formative experience for her, Sefian says:

"It was a shock when the civil war started. It was for me like an eternal breaking

down, because all my life I was opposed to demonizing the other, no matter what

her or his political opinions were. In Lebanon, you have this division between

Muslims and Christians. And I was very much opposed to that, because I felt that

religion is a personal matter. And part of my identity is Lebanese also. So we need

to build our self-determination together, as Muslim Lebanese and as Christian

Lebanese, and there is no difference. And so when the civil war started and I saw

people killing each other, just because he is Christian or he is Muslim, for me it was

a real, real shock."

Sefian experienced being categorized in different ways because of her identity:

"As a Palestinian, I was the demonized person in Lebanon. Yet again, as a Muslim I

was considered part of the majority, the powerful majority. So for me, at a very

early age, I discovered how each one of us can be weak, and can be considered

powerful at the same time. …

I felt [stigma] from a very early age… when I gave my father's name, the answer

was systematic: "oh, yeah, the Palestinian, the refugee". Even at that age, when

they called my father "the Palestinian", or "the refugee", I felt it was derogatory, it

wasn't meant in a nice way. My reaction to that was to run away from their curious

questions and not to want to be stopped again. And afterwards, it has been all the

time the same. A Palestinian was not welcome. Of course, it changed when the Palestinian military struggle started. In Lebanon, the presence was felt in the 70s. The Palestinians were fighting, and were standing for their rights. And when you stand for your rights, somehow people change their opinion about you. When you stand for your rights, they have more respect for you."

Sefian was also involved in dialogue efforts between Palestinians and Christian Phalangists.

"I am half Lebanese and half Palestinian, and that for me was the reason why I was chosen to open a dialogue group. The Christian Phalangist people, they were very opposed to the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. And that was why I was opening this dialogue with the other. I think about it now and I laugh because it's amazing, you know, how things come back. I learned a lot from that experience, which allowed me later on to be able to get involved with 'the other', here in Canada".

"In Lebanon I was politically active; in Saudi Arabia I wasn't because one cannot be, in a country like Saudi Arabia, with the regime they have. But I and my husband were always helping in one way or another, Palestinian people. Our commitment was a whole life commitment. So even when we were not able to be politically active, we were helping people in the camps, sending money, even on an individual basis we were doing that."

Sefian and her husband experienced difficulties in Saudi Arabia:

"You have to always be very careful, as a Palestinian; doubly careful [in Saudi Arabia]. Because first of all it wasn't easy for a Palestinian to take a residence permit there or a work permit."

She also relates how other Palestinians she knew were imprisoned without trial for being suspected members of the Palestinian liberation movement.

"...I never felt a hundred percent safe, because as Palestinians, you always feel like you're under scrutiny."

They were unable to obtain citizenship in either Saudi Arabia or France. "That's why we applied to Canada, because that's the only place that accepts immigrants."

Sefian continued her activist work when she arrived in Canada:

"I'm fairly involved with the Arab/Muslim/Palestinian/Lebanese community, because it's all the same struggle for me... We as Arab/Muslim people, we are also being very much demonized. So my involvement is also to try to raise awareness about Muslims and Arabs amongst the general Canadian society. I help as much as I can with different organizations [such as the Canadian Arab Federation]. I'm not committed to any one organization because I am so busy with the Montreal Dialogue Group."

As in her student activist days, in Canada Sefian again gravitated towards dialogue:

"Even when I was involved in [Montreal activist groups], I think the idea of dialogue was always there. And as a vibrant organization, as the dialogue group is becoming now, it started very early with the encouragement of Ronit and other Jewish people. I used to talk with the Jewish people I met and we didn't agree on everything, but at least we were able to communicate. I used to ask Ronit and other Jewish people their opinion and they used to encourage me to continue. They said it was very important, and that I had to talk to Jewish people. So the idea was there."

4. Ronit Yarosky, Montreal Dialogue Group

Yarosky had a "very Jewish" upbringing in Montreal. Her family moved to Israel when she was 14 years old. She went to high school, and did her army service there. Afterward, she returned to Montreal for university, completing a master's degree in political science at McGill, focusing on the historiographic debates over the history of Israel's 1948 War of Independence.

The first *intifada* started four months after she was drafted into the Israeli army. Yarosky relates that she was very ignorant about the political situation at the time and very prejudiced:

> "I didn't know that there was an occupation going on, even though I was serving in the occupied territories. I didn't understand what the *intifada* was about. At that time, I did not even see Arabs as humans."

Her first inkling that something was wrong came while serving in Bethlehem, she says. Her service there included quashing Palestinian demonstrations against Israel, and this provoked her to look into the issues at stake.

While defending her master's thesis at McGill, Yarosky experienced first-hand the strong ideological battle-ground between the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli camps in Montreal. While some members of the committee gave her good marks, she received an F from a professor who rejected the political views in her paper.

Yarosky returned to Israel for one year in 2000, where she worked in the peace movement, with the organization Windows. She continued her activism in Montreal with PAJU and Women in Black, which she co-founded. Like Sefian, Yarosky became

dissatisfied with the activist groups because she felt like they were always preaching to

the converted and not reaching the people they most needed to reach:

"It was always the same people. We'd work really hard to organize a demonstration

or a speaker, and we always had the same fifty or sixty people show up. Those were

the people who didn't need the dialogue group; we were preaching to the

converted. And there are thousands of people in both communities who we're not

reaching, and those are the ones who need to come out and listen to the other side,

the other story. What can we do to reach those people? We knew that we needed to

implement something that was neutral, that didn't have a political platform, that

wouldn't intimidate people, where they'd feel safe to come and express their

opinions, whatever those opinions were."

Yarosky feels they have reached the people they were trying to reach:

"I think there are a lot of people in the dialogue group, particularly on the Jewish

side, who wouldn't come to Women in Black or to PAJU because they don't

support the political platform that those organizations have, or they simply don't

want to join something that has a very clear or explicit political platform. And I

think we can see that we have members who to my mind are right wing who come

and keep coming…"

Unlike the leaders of Muslim-Jewish Dialogue, Yarosky's vision goes beyond the

Montreal communities:

"I think we all have a dream, but certainly now, we don't have any plans of doing

anything [in Israel/Palestine] because the situation there is so different. People are

really struggling for their livelihood and their life, especially on the Palestinian

side. People just don't have time for stuff like this, it just doesn't even enter into their realm of consciousness at all for the most part, so I think that the political solutions would have to come first there.

Living in Canada I think is what enables us to do this. Being in a society where it's okay for me and Nada to be such great friends, and she can be my neighbor and our kids can get married - that doesn't really happen over there. Because it *can* happen here, and it's normal and accepted and encouraged, it gives space to this kind of initiative to take place. I think it would be great if this kind of movement could move beyond Montreal.

We talk about that sometimes -- that it can expand beyond Montreal into different communities, both Palestinian and Jewish communities, but also other communities can go for it. The Rwandan community has sent out some feelers to us. We've kept our [written] objective quite vague for that reason, so it doesn't limit us to these two particular communities. Maybe one day… there's the French-English issue in Quebec, there's the First Nations-European people in Canada, there's a million and one possibilities that this method could be applied to. …Nada and I are often invited to talk in different places that have nothing to do with this particular conflict, so the people there are coming from the place of another conflict and we hope that they can take some tools away and apply them in their communities, or in their personal life."

I ask her if she feels that what the group is doing here in Montreal can affect negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

"It's a really big leap. I'm saying that dialogue has the power to do that. If the group in Montreal gets to that point, I'll be really happy. It will be really nice on my resume, that I started that. But I think that all these politicians who are sitting and making these deals, they don't know about the other and they don't really care about the other. And they're doing everything only in their self-interest. And that's politics, and I understand that. But the solutions that are found can't be just, and I think in the long term, a lot of them can't be sustainable because they're based on unjust solutions. That's why I think dialogue is so important. I personally think that when we're looking for a solution to a conflict - ways to resolve conflict, especially when the solutions need to be fair and just, if you don't understand the other's perspective, then [the solution] can't be fair. ... At least when it comes time to negotiate a solution, if people who are negotiating understand each other, if there's really a deep understanding [on both sides], then I think a real solution can be found; a fair solution."

Having looked at the dialogue groups and their leaders, we will now look to the Muslim and Jewish traditions and some of their textual and philosophical supports for interfaith/intercultural dialogue.

CHAPTER 5 - Dialogue according to the Muslim and Jewish Traditions

This chapter presents source material from the Muslim and Jewish traditions: the Qur'an, Torah and Talmud and scholarly commentaries, which relates specifically to dialogue. I will include only a cursory look at material that has to do with related topics such as peace, tolerance, coexistence and human equality, since these make up a vast area of thought in both traditions that is beyond the scope of this study.

Since interfaith/intercultural dialogue is a modern phenomenon, there is nothing in the traditional sacred texts of either of the two religious traditions in question that directly addresses it. However, the texts of both traditions contain writings which can and have been used in support of dialogue efforts and initiatives; some of these are quoted by scholars and dialogue practitioners in the texts in Chapter One, and some were brought up by my interviewees. All comprise the basis for what these scholars and my respondents talked about as a religious 'call' or a foundation for dialogue.

It must be noted that in the sacred texts of both traditions, there is material that can be found to support dialogue and coexistence with others, and also material that supports mutual exclusivism and intolerance. Both Amir Hussain (writing about Islam) and Rabbi Marc Gopin note that the Muslim and Jewish scriptures can be used to support either peacemaking or warmaking. As such, writes Gopin, each generation interprets the texts according to their interests and priorities. Because of this, it is up to us, in each generation, to choose either war or peace:

> ...war is a permanent part of the texts of both Islam and Judaism. ... But equally
> embedded in these traditions are the profound prosocial values and the resulting

conflict prevention and resolution strategies that lie embedded in the respective histories of these ethical systems. Which texts, stories or laws gain the upper hand depends on the hermeneutics of the generation, which, in turn, depends upon the subtleties and intricacies of the human relationships of that generation". (85)

This chapter focuses on the passages that support peacemaking and coexistence, rather than exclusivity.

This is by no means an exhaustive study, but provides some background into both traditions and demonstrates how dialogue can be grounded in or approached through the Muslim and Jewish traditions.

I will present mostly materials from the sacred writings of both traditions, with several modern perspectives and scholarly commentaries as well.

The Muslim Tradition

In the Qur'an, God tells Muslims to speak with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), and to focus on their commonalities rather than their differences:

> And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which has come down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)." (29:46)

This quote is in the context of a discussion of how to interact with 'others', being the People of the Book, since they shared the same territory as the early Muslim community

of the prophet Muhammed and his followers. As Amir Hussain writes, Muslims have

always understood and constructed their approach to Islam in a context of pluralism,

since historical Islam began as a minority tradition in a non-Muslim setting (Hussain

258). The Qur'an, he writes, assumes its readers to be familiar with the stories of

Judaism and Christianity (253). Because of this, the Qur'an instructs believers to interact

in a friendly way with Jews and Christians, emphasizing their belief in a common God,

rather than fighting about whose truth is supreme.

According to Badru Kateregga, the call to dialogue is embedded in the mission of

Islam itself. He offers the following quote as proof, which in his opinion indicates that

humans come from a single source, and that human diversity is mandated by God, who

separated people into different nations and groups for a purpose - in order to 'know each

other'. This verse also indicated that no one is intrinsically superior to anyone else, but

that God recognizes humans only through their deeds and not their lineage, religion or

ethnicity:

> O, mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male
>
> and female and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know
>
> each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is
>
> (he who is) the most righteous of you. (Qur'an 49:13, in Bryant and Flinn 112)

Indeed, the Qur'an tells humans not to dispute in matters of religious doctrine

since they all share a common goal despite their outer differences:

> To each among you We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so
>
> willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His Plan is) to test you in
>
> what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is

to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.

(V:51)

The Qur'an also indicates that God mandated and supports diversity, since humans could have been left as one nation or religious group, but were not:

But if your Lord had pleased, he could have made all human beings into one

community of belief. (11:118, in Said and Sharify-Funk 127)

The Qur'an acknowledges religious diversity and advocates tolerance of others:

"To you your religion, and to me mine" (109:6, in ibid.127).

On the topic of reconciliation, the Qur'an instructs Muslims to try to make peace between warring parties in a just manner:

If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between

them... make peace between them with justice, and be fair: for God loves those

who are fair (and just). (49:-10)

The Qur'an stresses the importance of peacemaking, and that one's religious belief should encourage peace and not strife:

And make not God's (name) an excuse in your oaths against doing good, or acting

rightly, or making peace between persons; for God is One who heareth and

knoweth all things. (2:224)

In the Qur'an, "forgiveness and amnesty are viewed as the best reaction to anger and conflict", Abu-Nimer writes (*Nonviolence* 61), giving the following quotes as illustration:

But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and

trust in Allah: for He is the One that heareth and knoweth (all things). (8:61, in ibid.

60)

On initiating peacemaking with one's enemy, and turning enemies into friends:

Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: then will he

between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate!

(41:34)

A Contemporary Muslim Perspective: Amir Hussain

In his essay, "Muslims, Pluralism, and Interfaith Dialogue", Amir Hussain argues

that interfaith dialogue is very important for Western Muslims as Islam is fast becoming

the second largest faith community in a number of European and North American

countries. He writes that it is the responsibility of progressive Muslims to build bridges

and establish working relationships with the larger society (252).

Hussain argues that dialogue with and awareness of other religions has always

been part of the Muslim tradition. Muslims have always understood and constructed their

approach to Islam in a context of pluralism, he argues (258). As he writes, historical

Islam began as a minority tradition in a non-Muslim setting, in which people knew about

various other religions. The Qur'an, for example, assumes its readership to be familiar

with the stories of Judaism and Christianity (253).

However, the fact that Islam arose within some kind of pluralistic context does

not imply that interfaith dialogue is simple and easy for Muslims. One of the challenges

for Muslims in interfaith dialogue according to Hussain is to come to terms with the full range of verses that address the issue of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, since the Qur'an says both positive and negative things about non-Muslims. As such, the Qur'an can be used either to build bridges or to justify mutual exclusivism (254).

Hussain points to a specific verse in the Qur'an which to him illustrates a pluralistic, universalistic vision which encourages people to transcend their differences and learn from each other (255). Hussain also argues that there is an emphasis on social justice in the Qur'an and on siding with the poor, the orphaned, the oppressed. He points to the role played by Muslims in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa (256). Hussain then talks about all the times throughout history in which Muslims, Jews and Christians lived harmoniously in Muslim empires, such as the Abbasid (specifically Baghdad in the 8th and 9th centuries), Spain (8th to 13th centuries) and the Ottoman [13th to 20th centuries] and Mughal [16th to 19th centuries] (257).

Hussain argues that because of the existence of interfaith dialogue in Canada, Canadians know more about Islam than Americans do, and that this has been borne out in his experience (260).

Hussain also notes that unfortunately some North American Muslims are not interested in pluralism and see Islam as the only true religion, exhibiting a "rhetoric of intolerance"(260). He also finds troubling the anti-Muslim rhetoric from Jewish and Christian leaders, on the rise, he says, since 9/11. Tensions are so high in fact that some dialogue efforts have broken down post-9/11, in Los Angeles for instance, where formal Muslim-Jewish dialogue groups suspended their activities (265).

In Hussain's view, North American Muslims are in a position to influence the rest of the Muslim world, with its restrictions on and persecutions of other faith traditions, and he believes it is incumbent upon North American Muslims to commit themselves to pluralism, because they can, and because they should. In his view, this "is part of the vision imparted to us by the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet" (266). Furthermore, they should also work on intrafaith dialogue (between Sunnis and Shiites, for instance). Here in North America, because of the multicultural environment, contact between different groups lessens the intolerance present in more culturally homogeneous societies, and dialogue can help dismantle the stereotypes on both sides. Hussain writes that the Qur'an has a pluralistic vision that should encourage contemporary Muslims to establish cooperative relations with other religious communities (267).

2. Judaism

In the Torah there are many similar passages to those quoted above in the section on Islam, to do with dialogue, peacemaking and coexistence, as is discussed below.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Magonet, dialogue is intrinsic to Judaism, since Jewish tradition is based on precedent, and interfaith dialogue takes place in the first book of the Torah (Genesis) (Magonet 18). The encounter he names is between Abraham and Melchizedek, king of Salem. As Magonet relates, the king of Salem asks his God, El Elyon, to bless Abra(ha)m (17). Abram then swears an oath in the name of "YHWH El Elyon," thus combining Abraham's own name for God, and that of Melchizedek, which to Magonet, indicates that the two figures meet and offer each other mutual support and

blessing in the name of the same God, signaling the possibility of true interfaith dialogue (18).

On the topic of peace, according to David Smock, in the Jewish tradition, "the pursuit of peace is regarded as the foundation of the social order and the highest calling of the individual" (Smock, Perspectives 22). As illustration, he offers an example in the Psalms, which instructs people to "seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:15, in Smock 25). Magonet expresses the same opinion: He quotes the above verse in Hebrew: 'bakkesh shalom v'rod'fehu' and argues that "interfaith dialogue is one of the tools available to us for seeking peace and pursuing it. It is not peripheral to our religious task today, but absolutely central" (Magonet 10).

On a similar note, in Talmudic writings, it is said that the person who turns an enemy into a friend has accomplished the work of God (Avot d'Rabbi Nathan 23, in Smock 26).

Rabbi Jonathan Magonet writes that a starting point for Jews to dialogue with Muslims comes from a general principle related to the way in which Jewish tradition defines how Jews should conduct their relations with other groups in a society. Jews are instructed many times in to do things for the sake of keeping the peace. "In the interests of peace", the Talmud instructs Jews living among other groups to feed the poor of both Jews and non-Jews, visit the sick of both, bury both, comfort the mourners of both, and restore the lost goods of both (Jerusalem Talmud Denmai 4:6, in Magonet 171). Magonet writes that "it is both a matter of enlightened self-interest and a traditional Jewish ideal and goal to seek peace with all members of society" (Magonet 172).

On the topic of dialogue and conflict resolution, Smock writes that there is a

passionate concern within Judaism for arbitration as opposed to only adjudication, which

suggests a concern for trying to resolve underlying conflicts and promote mutual

understanding, healing and reconciliation, rather than simply legislating an end to a

conflict (Smock 26). Smock calls this moving beyond 'pax' to 'shalom' – "the

attainment of true peace with justice" (Smock 62).

As in the Qur'anic passages above, Judaism also mandates treating 'others' and

enemies with kindness:

Deut. 10:19: "Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Exod. 23:5: "If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and

wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him."

While Jewish communities have traditionally focused more on self-preservation

and protection of their ever-threatened traditions than on reaching out towards others,

Gopin writes that this has changed in more recent times. "Some modern Orthodox

formulations of Judaism are astonishingly accepting in principle of gentile religions," he

writes (Gopin 89). Gopin gives several examples of Jewish theologians who have

presented supported interreligious coexistence, including Samuel David Luzzato and

Abraham Heschel (Gopin 91), whose ideas on this topic will be addressed below.

A Modern Perspective: Rabbi Abraham Heschel (1907-1972)

Abraham Heschel is considered one of the greatest Jewish theologians of the

twentieth century. He was a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America

from 1946 to 1972. This is the main seminary of Conservative Judaism.

In his essay, "No Religion Is An Island", Heschel asserts that our survival as a species is increasingly dependent on our ability to join together across religious, ethnic and national divisions, and that our constructed divisions are forever being challenged today whether we like it or not. Heschel asserts that God is above all religions, and transcends all divisions (in Kasimow and Sherwin 13). He writes: "Does not the all-inclusiveness of God contradict the exclusiveness of any particular religion?" (in ibid. 13-14). He quotes from the biblical Book of Ezra to demonstrate the universal relationship of humans and God, independent from particular religions: "God is upon all them for good that seek Him" (Ezra 8:22, in ibid. 16), and "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Ps. 145:18, in ibid. 17). And, similar to the quotes we saw from the Qur'an, Heschel offers some quotes from the Talmud: "The ancient Rabbis proclaim: 'Pious men of all nations have a share in the life to come.'", "I call heaven and earth to witness that the Holy Spirit rests upon each person, Jew or Gentile, man or woman, master or slave, in consonance with his deeds." (in ibid. 18).

This sentiment is affirmed by medieval Jewish theologian Maimonides, Heschel writes (in ibid 19), who asserts that Christianity and Islam are part of God's messianic plan (in ibid. 20-21).

Heschel writes of interreligious cooperation itself: that its purpose is "neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another; to share insights and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures… to search in the wilderness for well-springs of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care for man. What is urgently needed are ways of helping one another in the terrible predicament of here and

now… to cooperate in trying to bring about a resurrection of sensitivity, a revival of

conscience…" (in ibid. 22).

A Contemporary Perspective: Rabbi Jonathan Magonet:

Magonet notes the tensions in the Jewish community vis-à-vis interfaith dialogue,

stemming from a desire to build better relationships with people of different faiths and

cultures, and a fear of the effect of too much interaction with others. He sees in the

Jewish mindset an ingrained anxiety about the group's survival as a unique people, faced

with a history of perpetual minority status and persecution (11). Another major factor

influencing the Jewish perception of dialogue is of course the ongoing crisis in the

Middle East; of the relationship between Israel and its Arab neighbors (11). There is a

sense of vulnerability based on the relative size of the Jewish community: around 16

million globally, compared with hundreds of millions of Christians and Muslims (11).

Magonet sees as many examples of intolerance within the Jewish tradition as

tolerance and goodwill towards others. He notes that interfaith dialogue is the domain

particularly of liberal religious movements, while fundamentalist tendencies within

Judaism, which are averse to liberal values, tend to be antagonistic towards dialogue (19).

CHAPTER 6 – Interview Data

In this chapter, I present the data collected from my interviewees. In all, I did thirty interviews. Twenty-five of my respondents were from the Montreal Dialogue Group (MDG), six were from Shalom-Salaam, four were from Muslim-Jewish Dialogue (MJ), and one had not participated in any dialogue groups. All six of my respondents from Shalom-Salaam were also members of the MDG.

My reason for choosing these numbers was the relative size and level of activity of each group. The MDG is by far the largest group, with a paying membership of sixty people in 2005, a mailing list of 300, and an average of 30-40 people at each meeting. It is also the most active, with regular meetings every month and several additional events throughout the year. It also has a board of directors that meets once a month to plan and organize activities and manage the group. Shalom-Salaam has a mailing list of 25 people and an average of 8-12 people at each meeting. They do not collect dues or have a board of directors, and share the planning and running of the group among the membership. MJ has a mailing list of 30 people and an average attendance of 7-12 people. It has no board, collects no dues, and is co-led by a Muslim and a Jew, as described in Chapter Three.

My method of obtaining interviewees differed from group to group. In the MDG, I issued a formal request at the beginning of several meetings, in which I introduced myself, described my project and asked people to sign a sheet if they were willing to be interviewed. For the other two groups, since they are much smaller, I contacted members who I thought would be most appropriate directly. Some interviewees were recommended to me by others who I interviewed. However, in most cases I was already

on a friendly or familiar basis with my respondents, since I had been attending the meetings of the MDG and MJ regularly for over a year at the time of my interviews. I attended meetings of Shalom-Salaam for a shorter period of time before conducting interviews, but already knew all the members from the MDG.

I made efforts to obtain as broad a representation as possible from all the groups, in terms of demographic factors, such as gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion/religious background, economic and educational background and political orientation. I also strove to obtain a broad sample in terms of people's level of involvement with the groups: their length of time involved in the group(s), and their level of affinity and/or satisfaction with the group(s). For this reason, I interviewed four people from the MDG who had attended meetings only once or twice at the time of the interview. One of these respondents subsequently went on to become a member, while another attended several more meetings and then stopped. The other two respondents had no plans of returning to the group after their initial unsatisfactory experience. I wanted to interview them to make sure that my sample did not only include dialogue enthusiasts, but also people with negative impressions and a strong critique.

My choice to interview more women than men also reflects the make-up of the dialogue groups, in which more women than men take part, especially in the MDG. Shalom-Salaam is fairly even, while MJ has on average more men than women present.

Among my interviewees were the leaders of each group (not applicable to Shalom-Salaam, as discussed above).

The interviews were in person. They took, on average, between an hour and an hour and a half.

Below, I offer the data collected in the interviews, in tables and descriptive analysis. This chapter is broken into five parts:

1 – Demographics

2 – Group History

3 – Personal Motives and Reactions

4 – Results and Problems

5 – Religion and Dialogue

In order to protect the privacy of my respondents, no names are used in this study, except for the occasional quoting of group leaders.

Part One – Demographics

Table 4: Interview Demographics

Total Number (all interviews)	30
Women	19
Men	11
1) Arabs (total)	12
1a) Palestinians	7
Non-Arab Muslims	2
2) Jews	15
2a) Israelis	7
Others (not Arabs, Muslims or Jews)	1
Members or Participants in the MDG*	25
Members of Shalom-Salaam*	6
Members of Muslim-Jewish Dialogue	4

*Some of the respondents are members of both MDG and Shalom-Salaam.

Table 5: MDG

Total Number	25
Women	17
Men	8
Palestinians	7
Non-Palestinian Arabs	4
Non-Arab Muslims	0
Israelis	7
Non-Israeli Jews	6
Others	1

Table 5b: Age

25 and under	1
26-40	5
41-55	12
56 and over	7

Table 6: Shalom-Salaam

Total Number	6
Women	4
Men	2
Palestinians	1
Non-Palestinian Arabs	2
Non-Arab Muslims	0
Israelis	1
Non-Israeli Jews	2
Others	0

Table 6b: Age

25 and under	0
26-40	0
41-55	4
56 and over	2

Table 7: MJ

Total Number	4
Women	1
Men	3
Palestinians	0
Non-Palestinian Arabs	0
Non-Arab Muslims	2
Israelis	0
Non-Israeli Jews	2
Others	0

7b: Age

25 and under	0
26-40	1
41-55	0
56 and over	2

The above tables were provided to show the demographic breakdown of my interviewees and to compare and contrast among the three groups. On the whole, the MDG has the most diversity in its membership, partly because it has by far the largest membership. M-J D has the least diverse membership, as well as the highest average age of members, with most being age 56 or over.

The following tables show a breakdown of further demographic factors for all three dialogue groups as a whole, since there was less diversity between groups on these factors.

Table 8: Years in Canada

Number of Years	0-5	6-10	11-20	21 and over	Whole Life
Arabs (non-Palestinian)	0	0	1	3	0
Palestinians	3	1	3	0	0
Non-Arab Muslims	0	0	0	2	0
Jews (non-Israeli)	0	0	0	4	6
Israelis	1	0	2	4	0
Others	0	0	0	1	0

The MDG is the only group among the three that has Palestinian members who are recent

arrivals in Canada (0-5 years). It is also the group with the most Israeli members, although none of them are recent arrivals in Canada.

Table 9: Education

	Some college	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate
Total	3	14	6	7
Arabs	1	6	2	2
Non-Arab Muslims	0	2	0	0
Jews	2	5	3	5
Others	0	0	1	0

Part Two: Group History

This section examines how long respondents from each group have been involved with the dialogue group(s), their level of involvement, and how they came to be involved.

The table below shows that among my respondents, several who attended meetings of the MDG did not continue their involvement after the initial foray, and several members who attended for a considerable length of time (6-12 months and sometimes longer) discontinued their involvement after that time. My respondents from the other two groups were for the most part long-term and continuous members of these groups.

My respondents from MJ had on average the longest involvement with dialogue groups, since their group is the oldest of the three by far, at eight years and counting. All four respondents have been involved since the group's inception, or close to it. In the other two groups, people's involvement ranged from recent to considerably lengthy, as is shown in the table. Some longstanding members of the MDG only recently became members of Shalom-Salaam.

Table 10: Length of time involved in dialogue groups

	No longer a member	Came only once or twice	New Member (6 months or less)	6-11 months	1-2 years	3-5 years	Over 5 years	Not a member
MDG	2	2	1	1	13	2	4	
Shalom-Salaam					1	4	1	
M-J D							4	
Arabs (non-Pal)					1	3		
Palestinian	2		1		3		1	
Non-Arab Muslim							2	
Christian	2				4		1	
Jewish (non-Israeli)		1	1		1	2	2	1
Israeli		1			4	1	1	
Other					1			

*The figures indicate the total length of time the individuals have been involved in Arab/Muslim-Jewish dialogue groups in their life.

Table 11: Current or past level of involvement with the dialogue group(s)

	Does not take part in dialogue groups	Rarely attend/ Came only once or twice	Occasionally	Regularly	Always or almost always	Organizational role/ Leader
MDG Total		2	2	5	4	12
Shalom-Salaam						6
Muslim-Jewish Dialogue						4
Arabs (non-Palestinian)			1			3
Palestinian			1	3	1	2
Non-Arab Muslim						2
Jews (non-Israeli)	1	1			2	5
Israelis		1	1			4
Others				1		

"Organizational Role" indicates that the individual either regularly organizes group activities, has made at least one presentation to the group, or has hosted at least one group meeting in their home.

Table 12: How did you get involved in Arab/Muslim-Jewish dialogue?

	A dialogue group leader invited me to participate	Heard about it through a friend/ acquaintance	I was looking for a group and found one/ I (co-)created a group	I saw an ad in the paper about a group and decided to join
Arabs (non-Palestinian)	1		1	
Palestinians	5		1	
Non-Arab Muslim	1	1		
Jews (non-Israeli)	1	3	2	1
Israelis	2	4	1	
Others		1		

The above table shows that most of the Palestinians became involved at the request of a group leader, while most people from the other categories got involved through other avenues, usually through their own initiative. This reflects a general high level of reticence and hesitation on the part of Palestinians - as well as non-Palestinian Arabs to a certain extent - to get involved with dialogue groups, as will be discussed later on.

Part Three – Motives and Reactions

Below is a list of my respondents' answers to the question, "What motivated you to get involved in the dialogue group(s)?". Some respondents listed multiple motivations.

a) To get my message out/ to inform people about 'my' side or opinion (4 Palestinians, 1 Arab, 2 Israelis, and 2 Jews).

b) Curiosity, from having heard only/mostly 'our side' of the story; I wanted to hear the 'other side' (4 Palestinians, 2 Arabs, 1 Jew).

c) Belief that it could be helpful/ part of a 'peaceful solution' to the Middle East conflict (2 Palestinians, 1 Israeli, 1 Jew).

d) In order to understand each other better (1 Arab, 3 Jews).

e) Because I had faced discrimination/racism and thought this might help address and alleviate it (1 Palestinian, 1 Arab).

f) To engage in fruitful debate; to have my opinions challenged/tested against those of the 'other' (1 Arab, 1 Jew).

g) In order to discuss the conflict in a safe space that would not jeopardize my relationships with family/friends/coworkers (1 Arab, 1 Israeli, 2 Jews).

h) In order to express my opinion about these issues in an independent, neutral space in which I could be free from criticism or reprimand by my community (1 Israeli, 2 Jews).

i) In order to build a relationship with the 'other'/ improve relations between the two communities (2 Muslims, 2 Jews).

j) Out of concern that the group was biased; I wanted to try to 'even it out': (1 Israeli, 1 Jew).

k) As part of my effort to educate myself (1 Arab, 2 Israelis, 2 Jews, 1 Other).

l) In order to educate others (2 Palestinians, 1 Arab, 2 Israelis, 1 Jew).

m) To meet people from the other community/ 'other side' (1 Palestinian, 1 Israeli).

n) As an activist, to try to reach a broader audience for my message of peace (1 Palestinian, 1 Israeli).

o) In order to 'do something' to help the conflict situation (1 Israeli, 2 Jews).

p) To hear personal stories from people rather than the media's portrayal of the conflict/to connect on a deeper level as human beings (2 Israelis, 1 Jew, 1 Other).

q) Because we are living in a multicultural society, we must try to get along (1 Arab, 1 Muslim).

r) Out of general curiosity (1 Israeli, 1 Jew, 1 Other).

s) My religion calls upon me to dialogue with the 'other' (2 Muslims).

3-1) Did you or do you feel any barriers or hesitations to getting involved with dialogue either from your community or in yourself?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, all seven of my Palestinian respondents indicated that they felt some degree of barriers or hesitations to getting involved with dialogue; most of them to quite a high degree. The second-highest response to this question came from the non-Arab Muslims. Non-Palestinian Arabs experienced barriers to a lesser degree, while Israelis and non-Israeli Jews experienced little to no barriers or hesitations. Some of their comments follow.

A) Palestinians

All of my Palestinian respondents indicated that they felt some kind of hesitation to getting involved with the dialogue group, either because of negative pressure from their family or community, or because of personal concerns. Many had very intense emotional and psychological hurdles that they pushed themselves to overcome in order to become involved in the group(s):

P2: "Oh yeah, my participation was criticized, by my family: 'Why are you getting involved in dialogue? You're wasting your time. Focus on the real things.'

[From others], I got a bit of...not criticism exactly, but I was positioned with other groups: 'Oh, she's the one in the dialogue group.' It says something about you, that

you are willing to get involved in something that others won't. ... I said I can be a

part of many groups and none of them define me exclusively."

P1 (group leader) reported various responses, both positive and negative, from her
community:

"Some people back me up a hundred percent, and they say "You're doing a

wonderful job", and some less. Some of course are opposed... [at the Concordia

dialogue group], a [Palestinian] person came up to me and said "What do you think

you're accomplishing in opening this dialogue with these Zionist people?" and I

told him that I need to open the dialogue with Zionist people. If you consider them

your enemy, well I need to open a dialogue with my enemy – not with my friend.

So I had a big argument with him. ... Some people accuse me of being a sell-out, or

a naïve person. They don't know why I am doing this, why I'm opening [to the

other]. They have no problem talking with Jewish people, but not with Zionists."

Of the three Palestinian respondents who said they felt internal barriers, two

attributed this to a sense of frustration with the dialogue experience, either because of

feeling the denial by others of one's truth, or because it does not seem to be progressing.

One expressed an initial concern that it would be a waste of time.

P3: "From my community, no, I'm free to do what I want. But within myself, yes it

was frustrating. To hear the same events, being seen differently. Like in one of the

sessions, they were showing about the Jenin massacre. And they showed us

different segments of the movie, and each saw it differently. It was shocking to me.

There was this young girl [in the film] who was saying how she felt and what she

saw around her, what she saw with her own eyes. The Jews in the group, they just said, "see, they taught her well what to say". I mean, come on – she's a young kid! Okay, maybe she's more eloquent than others. But she was there, she experienced the massacre. They're trying to deny it? I mean, this frustrates you. ... When I came here, talking to them, talking about myself, my suffering, and trying to listen to the Jews, was a very unusual experience, because there you are, meeting people who are justifying the existence of the State of Israel, wholeheartedly; as much as we wholeheartedly think that this is our land. So it wasn't an easy experience for me at the beginning."

P4: My community? No. Plus I wouldn't care anyway. Myself? Not hesitations in terms of not wanting to go because it was the right or wrong thing, it was more that a couple times I thought, "Is this going to be a waste of time?". And then I think once I got used to the idea that it would be an extremely long process, and that it wasn't the type of exercise where you'd see results right away, then I went a lot more willingly, and I didn't ask myself that question every time."

Two respondents said they hesitated to sit down and talk with 'the enemy':

P5: "I said I would give it a try but I was very hesitant at the beginning because I found it very difficult. This was because it was the first time I have seen Jews and I have sat with them and talked to them. In the Middle East, there aren't any Jews living in the Arab world. Maybe there are – of course there are some living in Morocco and Egypt, but in Jordan, Syria or Lebanon, there are no Jews living there. So we never met them. We meet them when we go to visit Palestine, which is very

rare. The Occupied Territories. And we see only the soldiers, we meet only the people who, believe me, you don't want to meet or see. So to us, the Jews, sorry not the Jews, the Israelis, we always mix them, sorry, to us, the Israelis are the enemy. So we never sat with them, we never lived among them, we never talked to them, so at first I really found it very difficult. At first I told [the group leader], "No way. No way I can sit with them and talk." And then I thought about it that night... [I thought]: I must try, and go there, and sit with them, and talk with them, and see what's their point of view, and exchange ideas. And I never regretted this experience. I really benefited from it a lot."

P6: "It's like what [the Jews] say, that [they] always feel that people are against [them]. The Palestinians are the same way, in certain situations, at least in the Arab countries. [That] made it very difficult for me to come and discuss things with the Jews. Because all along we were brought up that this is our enemy, and our enemy should not be dealt with, and we should definitely not talk to them, and you will be traitors if you do. All those stigmas that we were brought up with.

I had to just break those barriers one after the other until I got myself to do it. I told myself, "I'm going to do it". ... I hate putting prejudices on people. And I think that we're all educated, and adults enough to be able to go over those prejudices. And if we can't do it with our enemies, so to speak, then no peace will ever come to this world. So that's why I forced myself to go. And it was a good experience."

Two respondents said their internal reaction was so strong that it produced physical symptoms of stress:

P6: "Definitely [there were barriers]. Within myself, and from my community. The biggest barrier was myself. I just couldn't get myself to do it. And it was very, very difficult for me to actually go and attend the meetings. I used to get cramps in my stomach, as if I was going to an exam. I used to be very uptight about doing it, not because I had anything against the people there – I didn't know them, and they were all very nice people – it was within myself. It was all that trauma, of having lost our country, having had to be refugees for so many years, and all the traumas that my parents had to go through were passed on to us. And I never realized how much, except when I had to go to that dialogue group. I just couldn't go and face myself talking about my story. I was just too emotional about it at the beginning."

B) Non-Palestinian Arabs

The four Arab respondents indicated similar concerns to those of the Palestinians, but some expressed the opinion that their greater distance from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict makes it easier for them to participate than it is for Palestinians or Arabs who have only recently left the Middle East. Two out of my four non-Palestinian Arab respondents felt no barriers or hesitations whatsoever to getting involved, because of being used to a multicultural environment in Canada:

A1: When I would speak to certain Arabs about [the group], some of them thought it was a great idea, and some of them were cynical... Some Arabs have told me they couldn't be in a dialogue group because they might disagree with people so vehemently, or if someone makes an anti-Arab remark, that they would freak out. Sometimes I do get angry inside but I can be there and see what happens. I'm not

very emotional about the issues because I grew up here, unlike a lot of the other

Arabs in the group, so I'm used to hearing a different point of view."

A4: "We talk to Jews all the time, we work with Jews. What's wrong with Jews? It

never ever entered my mind that I shouldn't talk to a Jew. We're in Canada, we're

not in some god-forsaken country at the other end of the world. We work with all

kinds of people, when you go to your job in the morning, you're going to meet all

kinds of people from all over the world."

A2 felt no internal hesitations to participating, but explained the Arab

community's reluctance in general to get involved. He attributed this to different things:

first, a sense of futility, that dialogue will not achieve meaningful results. Second, as he

explained,

"...some people see it [dialogue] as already giving in. They see that the Palestinians

are in a very weak position, they have been denied their rights, and that dialoguing

means an acceptance of that situation. That's a more important point, and I

personally feel it, but it was never an inhibition to me for participation...".

C) Non-Arab Muslims

For my two non-Arab Muslim respondents, they both said that the community

pressures them very negatively about their participation in dialogue, but both also

expressed a belief that this is currently changing:

M2: Yes, [I experience criticism] from my community, because it is not very open to

have a dialogue with Jewish people particularly, which I do not understand.

Because my religion is very closely linked with Judaism and Christianity. But a common denominator of fear is the unknown, that they have not been in contact with Jews and Christians for a long time, and they have alienated themselves from this society. It's wrong.

Islam first and foremost is a religion of monotheism, belief in one God, and Jews are very close to us, if you look at the books from both sources you'll be surprised. Differences are almost non-existent, but the majority of Muslims don't understand; they have no knowledge. In fact, they don't even have the knowledge of Islam. And that's why we are seeing these very divisive thoughts in the Muslim community, even at the higher level, with educated scholarly people who are running the mosques; they are very much biased. That's why the community is very much against anyone who participates in dialogue.

In my own humble way - I'm a voluntary imam - I try to talk about [dialogue with Jews], but I don't get a very big audience for this subject. They always say, 'let us keep this topic on the side'. They do not talk on these matters.

I do get a lot of criticism. But I think that people will understand this in a matter of two or three years, this whole thing will change and you will see more mosques opening their doors and getting the Jews and Christians to come so that we can have a dialogue. Because it says in the Qur'an that 'you should talk to these people who are close to you in belief'. That is, Jews and Christians, in that order. Then, open the dialogue to the other people: Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, etc."

D) Israelis

Several of the Israelis responded that their hesitation to getting and staying involved stemmed from feeling that the group is biased in favour of the Palestinians. Some also expressed a feeling of alienation from other Jews in the group:

I1: "I became involved to inject, in my assessment, some balance and to really present a more cogent Israeli perspective in the group. Initially I was very disheartened by that dynamic and that really precipitated my becoming less and less involved in the group.

…it wasn't so much the Palestinian perspective, which we more or less expected would be what it is; it's just a lot of these left-leaning Jews and Israelis, who would sell out Israel in a minute, and can only seem to focus on house demolitions and checkpoints, and the tragedy of Palestine, and [the belief that] it's all because of the occupation…[that] were there to be no occupation, then there would be no suicide bombers…"

A similar sentiment was expressed by another Israeli, who said that while she felt no negativity from her community, since she belongs to a very "open, left side of the spectrum" synagogue, but that she held some inner reservations about the perceived lack of neutrality and the pro-Palestinian stance of some of the Jews in the group:

I3: "I think that we're missing the point of dialogue, because a dialogue is about, a person who has a certain opinion, meets their opponent, who has the opposite position, and we call them "the other", of whom we are scared, and they are the unknown, and we demonize them and so on, so the challenge is, meet your other and try to find ways to de-demonize them, to create understanding on the basis of forming more personal relationships, to humanize them. But here, there is no other.

If the Israelis would be more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves, holier

than the Pope, then there is no other, then who is the other?"

Three Israeli respondents had no personal hesitations to getting involved, but have experienced criticism from their community. However, the Israeli leader of the group said that the community is increasingly accepting and receptive as time goes on, as they observe the progress of the group.

I5 explains that she felt both negative reactions from her friends, and personal hesitation, both based on the fear of the experience being very emotionally trying for her:

"I think that the first meeting I attended, some of my close friends were very

nervous when I said I was going. I think for myself, it was fear not of getting to

know Arabs, but of what it would open up, because I had no idea. When you hear

about dialogue, you hope people are talking, but is it going to be fighting and

yelling, is it going to be very emotional? I knew it had to be on some levels, and did

I really want to open myself up to that? How much of this will I be able to

handle?... My concerns were, is this going to be very dramatic and traumatic?"

She also indicates that her friends were worried about negative repercussions on her relationship with the Jewish community in Montreal; worries which she did not allow to impede her participation in the dialogue group:

... it was really interesting that my close friends cautioned me: 'Why are you doing

this? Be careful about doing this. ...Politically this could be bad for you in the

Jewish community'. Because who are these people in the dialogue group? Are they

representing a political platform, and if they are, and you are part of them, then you

will be associated with it as well. And of course, after 9/11, there was a lot of

hysteria around it. Like, what happens if you're part of this group, but they really represent something else, and the connection was made for me that "you're an American citizen, you're an Israeli citizen, be careful" basically. So it was that kind of stuff.

... I continued going [to the dialogue group] and I just didn't tell my friends (laughs). They know now, and there's still a lot of mixed feelings about it. But it's not unsimilar to what [Palestinian group leader] says she's still hearing. So I think, 'okay, it's just peoples' paranoia' or that it's because they are not coming to the dialogue group, and they don't understand, and they're still in that box, let's say."

E) Jews

From the Jewish respondents, we see a much lower level of hesitation to get involved both personally and from the community. Most said they felt no hesitation or barriers at all. However, some indicated significant negative community response, such as J4, who sees the dialogue group as a safe haven in which to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without getting into arguments with her friends and family, and J6. Both speak of the tensions and ostracization to which they've been subject because of their participation in dialogue with Arabs:

J4: "I find it has really divided relationships with people I know. Friends, relatives and people in the Jewish community. People see things as either pro or anti. I've become aware of how intensely emotional this topic is, maybe the most I've ever had to deal with in my life, because I find I have to deal with people who won't speak to me anymore, or end our friendship, because of my involvement with this. I have family

members with whom I can't discuss this. I know people in the synagogue who do not keep in touch anymore or who are very much against it. Friends who don't agree and I avoid discussing it because it can be so intense and emotional and painful. I find some of those conversations so frustrating because they just keep going in circles... ...the dialogue group offers a safe place to have those conversations whereas around a family dinner table, it could get too dangerous and too explosive."

J6: "[My involvement with dialogue has] shown me that both communities have tendencies to be very afraid of dialogue. As a consequence, they exhibit kinds of group behaviours that I find particularly objectionable. I don't think it's my community more than the other community, but this kind of 'you're with us or you're against us' logic, and 'traitorship', I just can't stand all that stuff, and that's what dialogue has given me an opportunity to see in action more. ... You have to deal with taboos of being a traitor. I made a couple of presentations in the synagogue that got me a lot of flak. There's a lot of potential tension until you make up your mind [to not care what others think]."

One of my Jewish respondents who takes part in religious dialogue said that her doubts amounted to questioning whether the project would have significant results, and whether or not she had enough patience to take part in a project whose results might not be seen for decades or even generations.

Summary

Predictably, I found that the amount or level of barriers or hesitations experienced is directly proportionate to the respondents' level of proximity or attachment to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3-2) What was your relationship or level of contact with members of the other community previously? How has that changed through your participation in the dialogue group/s? Have you developed relationships with 'the other'? Has it changed your view of 'the other'?

A) Palestinians

Most of my Palestinian respondents had little to no contact with Jews prior to their participation in the dialogue group(s) and all indicated that their dialogue experience had led them to develop friendships with Jews to different degrees. Some simply had friendly relations with Jews in the dialogue group meetings, while others developed real friendships that continued outside the group. Most indicated that their views of 'the other' had been affected or changed to varying degrees. Some said their view of 'the other' had not changed.

Two Palestinians said that at the MDG, it was their first time meeting sympathetic Jews.

P7, a Palestinian refugee who shortly after our interview received immigrant status in Canada, had no contact with Jews before coming to the group. He said that his relationship to Jews changed in that he found for the first time Jews who were in solidarity with Palestinian concerns:

"Yes, it affected me personally a lot, because I found myself to be not alone. That is to say, a refugee like me, here after 4 years of waiting uselessly, I don't have a country, so I need to find help, from whatever organization, doesn't matter which one, and I knew before that there do exist Jews who are with us, but it's the first time that I saw them.

… I never met them personally before. I knew that they existed, Jews who are helping us, always."

He said he had met some at a rally, but that they had not spoken much.

P3 also said that the group allowed her to meet sympathetic Jews for the first time: "In Palestine I didn't have the chance to meet any, because we were not allowed [into the country at all]." She said that this experience changed her view of Jews. However, she was quick to qualify this by saying that it has not changed her negative view of Zionists, or Jews who live in Israel.

P6 had limited contact with Jews (solely through business) before she joined the dialogue group. She says that she "definitely developed bonds with people" in the group:

"I feel that any two people, if they sit and talk openly and honestly, there is no way that a bond can't develop. Somebody who shows an intention to talk, something is going to connect, and something positive is going to come out of it. So yes, I definitely developed bonds with a lot of them."

She says she does not keep in touch with people from the group, but that they call one another when they hear of an activity of mutual interest.

In terms of changing her perspective on Jews, she, like many of my other Palestinian respondents, is circumspect:

"Has it changed my mind about Israelis? No. Because the suffering is still going on.

... as long as the situation is still suffering suffering suffering, I will still have the

same opinion about Israelis. ... [Because of dialogue], I am now more accepting to

talk to an Israeli. But that's it. This is the only change because since we're still

suffering, I still have the same feelings."

P4 had one very good Jewish friend and some casual acquaintances before joining

the dialogue group. She says that her participation in the group did significantly change

her relationship to Jews, because it helped her to better understand where they are coming

from. She, along with two other Palestinian respondents, said that the MDG helped her

to understand the Jewish attitude towards Israel and specifically the Jewish fear:

"One of the main reasons I wanted to go to the dialogue group was to genuinely...

really understand what I'm going to call paranoia, even though that's a big word –

this fear that I felt many Jews have. ... So a lot of what I felt was really an

understanding of the psyche. And that, I felt, was very helpful in terms of really

bettering dialogue."

As to the experience changing her view of Jews, P4 said that it made her realize that the

Jewish fear was real, and not just a propaganda device as she had previously thought:

"I think this genuine understanding of the psyche of the other, it really helped me to

understand [the Jews] better, and it takes away a bit of the anger."

Understanding this, and the background behind it, moved her quite profoundly,

she says, speaking of her experience at the presentation in the MDG by Holocaust

survivors:

"I just found myself tearing up, even now. I just can't imagine living through that. I can't imagine being a survivor or something like that, and I can understand how it led to people reacting the way they do, and having this horrible fear of this happening again. And I just remember being so moved by that."

P1 said that taking part in dialogue has changed her relationship to Jews as it has deepened her understanding of their psychology, and notably the Jews' fear, as P4 also said.

P2 said that she had a few casual Jewish friends previously, but they were all very left-wing people who shared her views. She says that the dialogue group has not changed this yet, as she "has not yet found a way" to bring this new contact with and understanding with the other into her personal life, something that she hopes to do. It has increased her knowledge and understanding of the Jewish psychic and perspective, as others also said.

Some Palestinians told me that they had developed real friendships with 'the other' through the group. For instance, P5 had no contact with Jews before joining the group. This has now changed:

"I have a few friends now from the Jewish community. We even visit each other and we go for walks. Yes, it has changed. I made some friends. I never had any Jewish friends before."

She also told me that these friendships are based on meaningful exchange of ideas and perspectives, and are not simply superficial contact or avoidance of the issues of importance to them:

"...they listen more to me, and I'm happy that I have the chance to pass them our message, what we believe in, and I also have a chance to hear what they have to say also."

As far as changing her view of Jews, P5 says taking part in dialogue has made her realize their commonalities and common interests:

"...I never had the chance to meet them before... Of course, when I communicated with them, I found that we have many things in common. Especially the mothers, for example. We have many things in common, our worries, our concerns, they are not different. Of course I didn't discover this, but I didn't have the chance to see this before, and now I can see it. By communicating and sitting with them, I can see that we have the same concerns and worries, and we all want peace and we all want peace of mind, peace for our people, we all want the violence to stop."

B) Non-Palestinian Arabs

Three of the four respondents said they had limited (business-only) contact with Jews previously, while the fourth grew up among Jews and had many Jewish friends. Those who had no previous contact with Jews said that they developed friendships as well as changed perspectives of Jews through participating in the group(s).

A1 said that, having grown up as an anglophone in Montreal, she has always been in contact with Jews, and in fact, has more Jewish friends than Arab ones:

"I feel like I know the Jewish community, because if you're an anglophone in Montreal, it's a big part of the community. I go to plays at the Saidye Bronfman

Theatre, I have friends who are Jewish, I'm familiar with some of the culture, so

I'm very much immersed in it."

For her, the dialogue group did not change her relationship to Jews; just her awareness of

the profundity of some Jews' feelings about the Israel-Palestine issue. It has not changed

her view of Jews so much as it has given her a greater understanding of their psychology

and perspective.

A2 said he didn't have any relationships with Jews prior to joining the dialogue

group "that would go beyond cordial or maybe close-ish work relationship." The

dialogue group changed this a lot, he said, as he now has a few real friendships with Jews

from the dialogue groups.

"I never had negative images of Jews, but it's still a big distance between having

cordial respectful relations with people at work, to visiting people in their homes,

talking with them about their personal life and them knowing about your personal

life, finding the connections, the closeness between you."

He mentions that he found similarities in lifestyle and values stemming from

religious similarities as well.

A3 also had limited, business-only type of contacts with Jews previously to

joining dialogue. Now he too feels a sense of real friendship with some of the Jews he has

met in the groups. They do not socialize outside the group, but he says this is more a

function of time constraints than intent. He says the group has changed his view of Jews:

"I think definitely it has changed, looking at the experience. Because I didn't know

much about the Jewish community, a lot of what I knew was really false, now that I

go back and look at it. It was based on perceptions, based on what people say, what

you read in the Arab media. So you always tend to have more negative views than positive, not necessarily on a personal level, but in general. Once you get to know the other community better, first you realize that the community is not as homogenous as you may have tended initially to think. In any community, there is diversity of opinions and diversity of views and characters and some of these views are closer to your own views than those of members of your own community. You realize that you share more in common with some people in the Jewish community than you do with people in the Arabic community. I think this type of realization is important."

The non-Palestinian Arabs mostly had limited contact with Jews before joining the groups. They all feel that dialogue has brought them increased understanding of the Jewish mentality and perspective. However, two out of four feel they have established real friendships with Jews through the groups, and the other two have not.

C) Non-Arab Muslims

Both respondents indicated a profound change in their relationship with Jews through taking part in the dialogue group. Both had limited contact with Jews previously. Both had maintained business relationships with Jews, but their involvement with the group led them to develop real friendships.

D) Israelis

Most of my Israeli respondents had little to no contact with Arabs or Palestinians prior to joining the dialogue group. Most say their relationship with and understanding of 'the other' developed and deepened through their participation in the group. Especially important for some of them was overcoming negative images and stereotypes that they had of Arabs by participating in dialogue. However, even those that say they were free of negative perceptions of Arabs say that their sympathy for and understanding of Arabs deepened through hearing their personal stories in the group and sharing meaningful common activities such as the art project. Many note the development of friendships with Palestinians and Arabs through the dialogue group, ranging from friendly relations in the group, to real friendships, to one romantic relationship that recently became a marriage between an Arab and an Israeli who met at the MDG.

I1 says that he was never hostile towards Palestinians, but that participating in the group made him "more aware of the personal dimensions of the tragedies [suffered by the Palestinian people]."

I2 previously did not have any contact with Palestinians or Arabs. He says dialogue has not changed his view on them, because "I believed before and I believe now, that you don't judge people as a community, you judge people as individuals." However, as for establishing friendships, this has certainly been true for him: "my relationships with individual members of [the Arab] community today are very positive – some of my closest friends in Montreal."

I3's contact with the 'other' was "nil" before joining the dialogue group. Now, she says, she has established friendly relations with Arabs within the group (not without), and enjoys socializing with them during the breaks in dialogue group meetings. As far as changing her view of Arabs, the change has been profound:

"It's a bit embarrassing to talk about this, because I had some kind of stereotypes in my head about what Arabs are. My stereotype was more in line with what we see this week in the violent outbreak in the Middle East [over the Danish cartoons depicting Mohammed with a bomb in his turban]. Wild, out of control, primitive people who have no boundaries and no restraint and no education, crazy, unreliable, not someone you can talk to, not someone who can understand. Not that I met anybody like that! Those were stereotypes I had. Now this experience has dispelled this, because I meet people like myself. People who are smart, educated – well, I would like to believe that I am! (laughs) - kind, conscientious, friendly, self-contained, responsible – people like me, with similar values. So I'm thinking to myself, 'Oh! I didn't get it right! There might be other people like them.' ... For myself, I think I was very ignorant and racist. I think that it's been remedied by exposing myself to the dialogue group and allowing myself to meet the other, and to see for myself that they are not really demons."

I4 says that her perspective has changed deeply:

"Having had the opportunity to talk with the other, not just in this group but before, has changed me enormously. Understanding that there's another side has been something that's just fundamentally changed me. ... it's only through talking to Palestinians and hearing their stories, and their personal accounts and seeing how it

affects their family and their people, from a very personal point of view, that I have been able to change and metamorphosize into the person I am now, because I certainly didn't start out this way [as a pro-Palestinian], that's for sure."

One Israeli group member had limited contact with Arabs before joining the MDG. Now, she has established not only friendships but a romantic relationship with an Arab member of the group:

"getting to know [my partner], his kids getting to know my kids, that kind of stuff, it's sort of a trickle effect. It's slow, but I think it's consistent and it's meaningful. It's not just superficial."

She says also that her perspective on the 'other' has changed, and that dialogue has helped her overcome stereotypes and prejudices:

"I think that it's really brought me to see people just as people. And opened that up for me so that I don't have the same biases or prejudices that were starting to circulate heavily after 9/11 or even after the first or second *intifada*. With those things, it's just like 'No, I'm not listening to this stuff. Let's deal with the issues. These are people! I'm not going to buy all that paranoia'".

I6 had no contact with Arabs before joining the group. Now, she has friendships with them, that she would like to see expand and grow. She notes that taking part in the joint art project, from the dialogue group, allowed her to develop a deeper connection with the 'other':

"It brought what I think happens when you go through an experience together. The experience of preparing for a show together, the experience of learning techniques together, of chatting while we were doing it, of fighting together, arguing together

about the principle of this and the principle of that, in terms of how things were going to be placed, and whatever. It was going through it together, and succeeding, and making this phenomenal show at the end, that gave us all a sense of real accomplishment. …I think for me what binds people together is sharing experiences."

In terms of how her view of Arabs has changed, she says that the change has been subtle but profound:

"I wasn't very prejudiced to start out with, so it's more that it put flesh on the bones, so to speak. Now I know particular Arab and Palestinian people, and so I've learned more about their experience, individual narratives, have started to make me see the conflict and the lived reality in a different way. And that's invaluable. So it's definitely a learning experience. … By virtue of having a particular human face put to Palestinians, transforms things for me. And I think that is one of the main purposes of the group - to humanize the other."

A contrast to the other Israelis' responses was that of I7, who came to the group only twice because she did not find it to be a good experience. Unlike the other Israelis, she has a very high level of contact with Palestinians and Arabs since she works very closely with them. She lives in Israel, where she is a member of Ta'ayush, a joint Palestinian-Israeli group that works together to oppose the Israeli occupation and to fight for the rights of Palestinians through peaceful direct actions. So, coming to the dialogue group did not change her relationship to Arabs at all. In fact, she found the dialogue group to be a step backwards for her in terms of identification with Arabs:

"One of the purposes of this group, Ta'ayush, was to stop defining each other as 'the other'. So I find myself very uncomfortable in dialogue groups, because for me, the Palestinians are not 'the other' and I don't want to be 'the other' for them. Because the main thing we tried to do [in Ta'ayush] is present a different option – the option of doing it together, and not being 'the other' for one another. So I find it very artificial for me to be in these [dialogue] groups."

E) Non-Israeli Jews

Of the eight non-Israeli Jewish respondents who take part in dialogue, seven had little to no contact with Arabs prior to their dialogue experience. The ninth Jewish respondent does not participate in dialogue, and has a high level of interaction with Arabs and Palestinians as an activist. Five out of the eight reported that through dialogue they had made friends with Arabs, with one respondent saying it was too early to tell, since he had just joined the dialogue group. Three respondents said dialogue changed their perspective on 'the other', and three said it did not.

One Jewish participant said that she has developed friendships with Arabs in the dialogue groups, especially with other women, and that these relationships grew while working together on a joint project (the production of a peace concert).

On her view of Arabs, she, as a psychiatrist, has observed changes both in herself and others:

"I think that this is some kind of a medium, like a chemical medium, within which I've seen real changes in peoples' attitudes. And I feel that they are emissaries, each one of us is an emissary to other people in other circumstances. So I think that the fact that you learn that you can talk and dialogue and agree and disagree with

one or more of these people, means that you can transmit to other people the fact that that's possible. And it's possible to change one's points of view. And so I think it's a testing ground through which there will be a ripple effect out into our communities."

Like the previous group member, J4 also reported a change in her own attitude and the development of friendships:

"I guess I did have stereotypes of what the 'other' might be like, through the media, because I didn't have much personal experience, so yes my opinions have changed for sure. Because of the dialogue group, I've developed friendships with people so I've gotten to know them more, and socialize with them, and go to their homes... So yes, it has affected the way that I see Palestinians for sure, and I guess Arabs from other countries as well."

J6 said that although she didn't have any negative stereotypes about Arabs or Muslims, the dialogue group gave her the possibility for deeper and more meaningful exchanges with them than would have been possible elsewhere.

J7 said that she had developed wonderful friendships with Muslims through the interfaith dialogue group, and that this was one of the greatest benefits of the dialogue. She also reported that her perspective on Muslims had changed: "You learn every time. ...I mean, if you're not affected, you're not listening!"

F) Others

My 'other' respondent said that her perspective had been affected insofar as she became much more informed about the Israel-Palestine issue and about the concerns of

all the parties to the conflict, which she knew little about before joining the dialogue group.

Summary

A large majority of all respondents indicated that they had increased contact with 'the other' through the dialogue group(s); that they developed friendships with the 'other', and that their perspective on 'the other' changed through their experience in the group(s).

3-3) What do you get out of your experience in the dialogue group(s)?

A variety of responses were given, most very positive. The most popular responses were:

- Learning more about the other side of the issue; gaining knowledge; gaining understanding of the 'other'

- Getting to hear people's personal experiences; hearing new perspectives

- Getting to know people from the other community, developing friendships and building a common community

- Affecting or changing people's points of view and having my own views affected or changed

- Learning good communication and listening skills

- The sense of being heard; that my opinion matters to others; getting to express myself or 'vent'

Some other responses were:

- Getting over my prejudices

- The feeling of contributing to something positive; of having an impact on the community or potentially so

- A feeling of hope in the face of pessimism

- Having my beliefs and opinions challenged in a productive way

- The social experience; seeing people I've become friends with

- A feeling of empowerment

- The development of a common perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian issue

- A sense of obligation; of the importance of 'at least trying' through this venue, to make a difference

- The feeling of not being alone in my concerns and my perspective

- The realization that my dialogue is not with Arabs, but with other Jews

Several respondents indicated negative outcomes:

- A sense of frustration that people didn't seem to have enough knowledge to debate the issues and failed to go beyond a superficial level of dialogue

- A sense of discouragement; that the group is not balanced and is ineffective

- The sense that people had agendas before coming and were not really listening

Here are a few of the responses:

P5: "I learned a lot from the presentations. I understood the point of view and the feelings of the Jews and Israelis much better.

I like the way we do the dialogue, because before that, when I discussed anything, the political issues, I used to get too emotional, and my voice used to get high, and I felt that, you know when you get too emotional and you raise your voice, you lose your point. So here, I learned how to try to communicate in a better way, and I

started controlling myself to listen more, to analyze and to think more about what am I going to say… you have to be very careful not to pass any wrong messages, not to annoy the other, you have to think more. In the dialogue itself, I learned a lot from it: how to talk, to communicate, and to listen in a better way."

A2: "There's always something new, there's always anticipation for hearing a new point of view or having another discussion."

I2: "Dialogue is all about having your beliefs challenged and having to rationalize and explain what you believe in a way that makes sense to somebody else, and it can be very unsettling, and it's not easy, but that's the cost of doing business."

I6: "Just that witnessing, of different people's experiences and realities, I think is really important and hard work. Not to have to comment on it, not to feel that you need to change it, just that witnessing, I think, is invaluable. To truly be able to listen to what the other person says without thinking "what's my comeback going to be?" is really hard. That is the true meaning of dialogue, I think."

J1: "I intended to stay quiet, I told myself, this is my first meeting, I'm going to go and just listen, but people actually were saying, "well what do you think?" So I couldn't shut up."

On the whole, responses were very positive and indicate that most respondents got a lot out of their dialogue group experience. However, it should be noted that most of my respondents are or have been at one time dedicated members of a dialogue group. There are naturally quite a few people who attended the dialogue group either for a short time or for a longer time and left out of dissatisfaction with the group(s); I tried to include these perspectives by interviewing several of my respondents, for whom this is the case.

3-4) What have been your outstanding dialogue group experiences?

Since many of the respondents mentioned the same events, I will list them one by one. Afterwards I will list other highlights brought up by respondents.

E) The role-reversal activities (MDG)

On several occasions in the MDG, group members were asked to prepare in advance presentations on issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to the 'other' side, meaning, for example, that Jews made presentations deriding Israel's 'Apartheid Wall' while Arabs made presentations supporting the 'Security Fence'. For many group members, both presenters and spectators, this was a very powerful experience. In the words of one spectator (P3), "A Palestinian talked as if she was an Israeli, and an Israeli talked as if he was a Palestinian. And I know that they both said it in the correct way. So I started seeing that we are really understanding each other in the group."

Here are the comments of a group member who took part in the presentation:

I1: The theme [of the presentation] was the Wall or separation barrier that's been

going up between Israel and the Palestinian territories. The group was comprised of

three Jews and Israelis and three Palestinians and Arabs. What was unique or

interesting about this evening was that we had to engage in role reversal. So I was

really there to present the Palestinian position or point of view. And I didn't pull

my punches. I mean I really talked about the injustices and the whole list of

grievances I had against not only Israel but the Jewish community here and how

they continue to blindly support the state of Israel… these were my grievances as a

Palestinian.

We had to make a compelling presentation. I thought I did a fairly good job. In fact,

I was largely commended by people; [an Arab member] was just goading me

onward. She said, "absolutely, you hit the nail right on the head…" It was very

important for me to make Palestinians realize that I'm not only sensitive to, but I

can articulate their beefs and their grievances and their feelings and the hurt and all

those things, and similarly it was important for the Palestinians who took part in

this presentation to project the Israeli perspective, again, convincingly. And I must

say that I was really blown away by [a Palestinian member's] presentation. She did

a fabulous job.

So that particular experience was very positive for me. And these are individuals

that I feel I can relate to and speak to. And they're Palestinians. I can respect their

position".

A2: "One of my outstanding experiences was when I made a presentation defending

the Wall from the Israeli point of view. That was really an outstanding experience

because I sat there and I prepared a file that was quite strong. And I had already

heard many people from the other side express their support of the Wall and I did a

lot of research and I managed to astonish myself on how well-prepared and clear

and straight and solidly prepared I was. I defended a point of view with a little bit

of hypocrisy because I didn't believe what I was saying, but it was very interesting

to see that there is always a second point or another point of view and there are

always arguments you can make for something you don't like, and don't believe in.

But still, that did not change necessarily where I stood, but it was really a strikingly interesting experience."

B) An Israeli member's apology to a Palestinian member for insulting her (MDG)

Several respondents mentioned an Israeli member (X)'s apology to a Palestinian member (Y) for insulting her after she had made her presentation on the legal issues in the Jewish Right of Return as one of their most memorable or impressive moments. Members comment:

> I3: I think that X's apology to Y was in my mind a determining moment. I think it had an impact in the group. I was touched by the fact that he realized that he went out of line. That he stood up and apologized, I think, this was dramatic. And created a model for the group, in the future. ... I think it was a healing process for the group, and a model for how do we treat one another. And also, the fact that our group stood up for their right to be treated with respect. The Israelis who took X aside and said "You can't do this. This is not helpful to the dialogue, you are hurting her feelings", and so on. That the group took responsibility for doing wrong."

> Y: "I remember that. I understood. X, I find, is a very special character. He's maybe the only one who lived in Palestine before it became Israel, and he's the only one who was there for both countries: he was there before 1948, as a Jew in Palestine, and he was there after 1948, as a Jew in Israel. And I told him, when I met him the first time, that's an experience that very few people have. And we don't have anyone that I know of in that group who has that experience. And I remember

thinking, X, you're a wealth of information. You're a wealth of experience that none of us have. If you were to use it in the right way, you could do so much. And so the next time I saw him, when he did make that comment and apologize, what hurt me the most was the fact that I had put a lot of hope in him as someone who might see both sides. And when he did that, it really set me back a lot. And then very quickly I realized that X I think has his own identity issue. ...

I think part of what bothered him is that what I was saying touched a lot of people, and it shed light on things that they know about, and it was almost like a secret that I had just shown everybody. ...when I talk to Jews, now I'm generalizing, but the Jews that were there that didn't know the issues and were surprised, I felt that [he] saw that these people had gained some new knowledge on the issue, and it bothered him. And I'm sure that he just reacted strongly because of that, and it was understandable. I saw where it came from, and that was the end of it.

Did he mean it or not when he apologized? It doesn't matter. I understood why he did it, and that's fine. It shed light on why he exploded. And that to me was just a gut instinct. That's what the dialogue group is for."

C) An Israeli member's presentation on her brother's death in a suicide bombing.

P2: "When Z spoke about her brother. I've never seen somebody close to somebody who died because of a suicide bomber. That had an impact on my life, because I reacted to it, and I actually answered her back that he was a soldier, so you can do nothing about that. And I was torn apart, because I have three brothers, and I love

them, I wouldn't want to imagine anything happening to them. It took me somewhere inside myself. I went to see the art exhibition [Meeting in the Middle] and I saw what she did. It really touched me, the album, if there's anything I can say in the group had an impact on me, this was one of the major ones. Something changed in me as I saw how she related to her brother, and I asked myself to extend my heart to her, which wasn't very easy to do, because I have a problem with the soldiers, I have a problem with the occupation, and yet at the same time, he was a human being, and she's a human being."

D) The dedication of the group leaders (MDG).

P6: "I think what was really outstanding was the organization of Ronit and Nada. Because those people were very very persistent in keeping the dialogue in line during every session, and they taught us and made us think about the difference between dialoguing and debating, which I think I wasn't aware of before. And that in itself was an outstanding effort on their part. Because the individuals themselves in the beginning had difficulty in communicating. And in the end we were all communicating very nicely. So that in itself was an amazing thing."

P2: "I'm always touched by Ronit, the fact that she was a soldier, she knows what she's talking about, takes a stand apart from her family, her community. Who she is and what she's done has had an impact, she's a model for taking a stand. It's difficult to be a Jew and come out of it and be apart from it, to take an independent position."

A4: "Sometimes I'm touched by the dedication of people. I guess it's more difficult for people who are Zionists, or Jews or Israelis... someone like Ronit, for example. I'm touched by the amount of work she does in the group and I'm touched by people like that. Also by the woman whose brother was killed [in a suicide bombing]. You're touched by these people, of course. Their experiences are horrendous, and yet they bear no malice in their hearts – it's wonderful."

E) Seeing people's perspectives and attitudes change over time.

P3: "When I came here, talking to them, talking about myself, my suffering, and trying to listen to the Jews, was a very usual experience, because there you are, meeting people who are justifying the existence of the State of Israel, wholeheartedly; as much as we wholeheartedly think that this is our land. So it wasn't an easy experience for me at the beginning. Slowly I started sitting and chatting with them, and you're not alone in this world, you're living in Montreal, you meet many many Jews as much as you meet many Arabs here, and different nationalities. It's a part of the world that has everything, which is what I like about Montreal – you're not just meeting one kind of people and that's it."

P1: "In this group, I feel that this humanistic approach is becoming deeper and deeper. And when I work with people, I don't feel that this is Jewish and this is Palestinian, and that I'm closer to the Palestinian than the Jewish person. I feel that I'm closer to whatever person I'm closer to. And that's the enrichment."

A2: "Anytime when you hear things you didn't hear before or you say something in front of a Jewish audience for the first time, regarding a current or historical event, or

whatever, every time, it's really a great experience, because it's stepping into an unknown, and you're stepping in with goodwill; you're not going there to offend or to challenge or to have a confrontation, but when you see that people are ready to listen, and sometimes you hear a counter-argument that you've never thought of, all these are wonderful experiences."

A3: "I don't know if I can put it down to an event; it would probably be more general, something that happened over time, and I don't really know when it happened, but certainly my perceptions have changed. When I look at myself, in terms of what my perception is of Israel and of the Jewish community, in general, has certainly changed from 3 or 4 years ago, so I think that's the most important part."

I4: "There was one time when we were going around the circle and talking about fear, when [Palestinian member] suddenly got it… she said that when an Israeli person said that they were scared, she always thought that it was just an excuse to do evil things to Palestinians, and that she really got it now that even though she didn't understand why, 'you guys are really scared'. And that is just huge in my mind, to understand that. It's incomprehensible in my mind, why would an Israeli be so scared? They have the fourth most powerful army in the world, they are technologically so advanced, what do they have to be scared of? They're the occupier. And for her to understand that that fear is real, is very significant.
And I think people like [pro-Zionist Jewish member], who, I don't know if he's changing or growing or opening, but he's coming, I think that's really significant."

F) Other responses

P6: "One thing that struck me was the fact that one of the children of one of the members that came over, I think it was the daughter of [Israeli member]. She came out of interest, I suppose, and I thought that was very interesting because it's showing interest in the new generation about what's happening, and I thought that was pretty optimistic and enlightening, and I liked the way the conversation was happening between her and her father and between us. That openness was pretty remarkable."

P4: "[Beside the role-switching exercise and the Holocaust survivors' presentation mentioned earlier]. When I gave a talk on the Right of Return... what really touched me is the way I felt people were listening. I'd say that was one of the times when people were listening the most. And I thought that was one of the hardest topics, and one of the most controversial, and I was like, "Oh my god, why am I doing this one?" ...

I felt people's reactions, especially on the Jewish side, were – I was very pleased. Not in the sense that I had convinced anyone of anything, but I felt I had shed new light on at least how the Palestinians saw things, and how from an international law perspective and a justice perspective, I brought out some facts about Israeli laws, and there were very few people, either on the Palestinian side or the Israeli side who had known about the laws, what happened. I felt I was able to shed a bit of light on 1948, and a different kind of light, let's put it that way.

And many many people came up, and thanked me -- for the information, whether they agreed on it or not was a different issue – but they thanked me for talking about it, and I think that many of them appreciated the fact that I was trying not to convince

in an aggressive way but just to say, "Here is what happened, from a legal point of view, here's the effects and here's what we see today, due to that." ...that marked me a lot.

I thought that was a tough topic. And there was the man, a professor from Concordia, who also talked about the Right of Return from the Jewish side. I found it was very productive. I thought it was good to talk about very tough issues, just to do it in a respectful and as much as possible objective way, and still give your own personal sense on why it's important to you.

When I think about it, it's the tough issues [that lead to the best or deepest experiences]. It's doing the tough exercises, dealing with the tough issues, that I found stuck in my mind the most."

I5: The first couple of meetings [were the most outstanding] because for me it was all new, and I moved beyond my comfort zone. Meeting someone like Nada and listening to her [was outstanding].

I6: Most of [my most outstanding experiences] have happened when we break into small groups. Hearing different stories, personal narratives and experiences. Understanding things for myself, I guess that's basically why I go to the dialogue group. Because I want to learn things for myself, and having had more insight, from things we have done. The writing experience with Devorah, for example, was pretty mind-blowing to me. And just that opportunity for self-reflection has been, for me, the most giving."

J2: Seeing people's views and ways of communicating change over time.

P5: "Herta [Guttman]'s presentation [on the psychological effect of the conflict on Israeli and Palestinian children] was really special for me because... this subject affects me a lot and means a lot to me. ... Her presentation really touched me."

A1: "For me, speaking out [was my outstanding experience], because I'm not a person who speaks out easily. I'm actually shy and I don't always say what I think, and I think I have in the group... Also, being a moderator one time, and creating a space for people to talk [was outstanding]. And working with people, organizing events, that's been very special."

M2: "I was very happy when once I was invited to the Canadian Jewish Congress to talk to the women. It was very positive. That was where I saw for the first time that the common Jewish people have heard from a Muslim, on cooperation amongst ourselves, and how we should not fear each other but embrace each other. This was my highlight of my dialogue experience. About 100 or 120 Jewish women were there. I would have said 'bring the Muslim women together too, to see how we could enrich each other'! I would definitely encourage people I know to come and participate. The myth that we are opposite to each other or enemies should be broken."

O1: "I guess because of the German context, the Holocaust session [was the most outstanding for me]. I really yearn for that information, in helping my understanding. I need to go and hear more of these people [survivors] because they're dying.

I also found the session on Judaism really enlightening. They were really good speakers and I felt I learned a lot".

Summary

While some respondents pointed to specific incidents as highlights of their dialogue group experience, many said that it was the overall experience over time that was the most impacting element for them. This included making friends and contacts, witnessing the stories and experience of the 'other', exchanging views, and observing changes in their own and others' perspectives.

Part Four: Results and Problems

4-1) Do you find that the dialogue group meetings are productive?

Table 13: Do you find that the dialogue group meetings are productive?

	Yes	Somewhat / Sometimes	No
All groups total	21	12	2
MDG total	14	9	2
Shalom-Salaam total	5	1	
M-J D total	2	2	
Non-Palestinian Arabs	3	1	
Palestinians	6	1	
Non-Arab Muslims	1	1	
Israelis	2	4	1
Non-Israeli Jews	5	2	1
Others		1	

On the whole, respondents find the meetings at least somewhat productive, with Palestinians finding them the most productive and Israelis finding them the least. All agree that it depends a lot on the individual sessions, in terms of both the presentations

and theme of the night, and the people present. A few comments from respondents on this:

> P7: "For me the meetings were productive because I found sympathetic Jews who listened to my story."

> A1: "I think for some people it is and for some it isn't. For me, the purpose is a kind of rapprochement between the two groups, so in that way it's often productive. It makes people think about the issues, so it's productive in that way. And if people feel uncomfortable, that's part of becoming aware of certain issues, about conflict."

> I5: "Sometimes [it's productive](laughs). I think they do a really wonderful job with the amount of people that we have. [The organizers] are trying to meet a lot of needs, and they're trying to cover a lot of ground, and they have the reasons for why they're presenting what they're presenting. But I do see some of the presentations as much stronger and much more informative and just much more meaningful. You come out, and it's just like "wow." And other ones, it's [makes disappointed, frustrated face] nothing (laughs)."

One respondent said she would like to see less attachment to structure and program in the group:

> I6: "Sometimes I walk away tremendously frustrated and feeling that there was too much manipulation by the organization, there was too little space, things went too quickly, I felt more frustrated when I left than when I came because something had started to emerge and a topic had started to develop, and then, "okay, time to break!" Well let's continue it the next time, then! What's the need to have a new topic next time – we haven't even finished this one yet. Let's continue it, so that it's

not so abrupt. So I will walk home not feeling more emotional and riled up and

unsettled than when I came to the meeting. I would like to have more continuity

between the meetings, rather than this program, program obsession."

J7: "I just think it's important. It's right and it's important and I think we need to make

efforts. And it's very easy for me to stay home, I'm incredibly busy and I have so

many projects I'm trying to run at the same time, and I could very easily just go "I

could stay home, or I could do this or that", but it's very important to make efforts

in life and to try to contribute. So again, the doubt is whether this is actually a

contribution or not, whether I'm actually personally worthy or doing anything that

is of benefit; this is always my question, but I keep going because I think it's

important to at least try."

4-2) What are the goals of the dialogue group?

Respondents stated the following goals:

- To meet the other; gain mutual understanding and knowledge.

- To humanize the other; to overcome prejudices and stereotypes.

- To build and improve relations between the two communities in Montreal

- To have a positive impact on the larger society; to serve as a model for other groups in other communities; to serve as a catalyst for greater change.

- To gain 'double empathy'; to become sensitized to the pain and grievances of the other side.

- To exchange ideas civilly and respectfully; to be able to respectfully disagree.

- To judge and test one's own opinions against those of others.

- To moderate our views

- To work together for equality, justice and peace

- To cooperate, help each other and embrace each other, in order to be able to say "he
  is a friend" rather than "he is a Jew/Arab"; to erase boundaries between peoples.

4-3) Is the group achieving its goals?

Table 14: Is the group achieving its goals?

	Yes	Somewhat	No
All groups total	21	12	2
MDG total	14	9	2
Shalom-Salaam total	5	1	
M-J D total	2	2	
Palestinians	2	5	
Arabs (non-Palestinian)	3	1	
Non-Arab Muslims	1	1	
Israelis	3	2	2
Non-Israeli Jews	6	1	1
Others		1	

Opinions were mixed but a large majority of all respondents said that the groups are achieving their goals to some degree. The non-Israeli Jews were the most convinced as to the effectiveness of the groups, with the non-Palestinian Arabs second. Palestinians and Israelis are both more moderate, yet still positive on the whole, in their appraisal.

Interestingly, none of the respondents named 'changing the views of the 'other'' as a goal of the group(s) in which they take part. Several did, however, name 'moderating our views' as a goal. Yet, in their responses to the question of whether or not they felt the group(s) had been achieving its/their goals, many of them stated that they had observed a change in themselves and/or others as the biggest testament to the effectiveness of the group(s). Here are some of the respondents' comments:

A) Palestinians

P3 mentioned the change she observed in a Jewish member who she says was, at the beginning,

> "a pure, pure Zionist. As the sessions went on, he changed his tone, and I like that. He started seeing others, as not "we are the superior people, we are the chosen people of the world", - they have it a lot – and when I discuss with them, I try to show that, I mean, why are you so special compared to the other, to us for example, Palestinians? So he melted, melted – he changed his mind. I could see the difference. Actually this one was the most stubborn one"(laughs). She mentions another Jew, who started to take a strong position, and then he remembered how another Palestinian member had told him about her family's suffering, and by her observation, "he changed his mind and took another route. And this was exactly because of the dialogue group. So maybe it will spread..."

This view is not unanimous, however. P6 did not observe a change in people's perspectives. In addition, along with many others in the MDG, both Arabs and Jews, said that their objectives cannot be met unless they get more Arabs and Palestinians to come to the group, because the group is currently very unbalanced. She says that her personal objectives have been met, but that if people's perspectives are not changing, then the effects are limited:

> "I felt the experience was worth it, and I felt like people were listening, but in the end, I'm not sure there was enough open-mindedness to pursue dialogue long-term. Because everybody came, and were very polite and listening – the techniques of

listening were there, the techniques of dialogue were exercised – fine, there is no problem with that, except that the prejudices in each one's head, and especially on the Jewish part, those prejudices were never moved. They were there, they came with that parameter, those assumptions from the beginning that "we're Jews and we're here to stay and Israel will be here to stay", fine, but they were not willing to move from that perspective. And with that, I think dialogue could be difficult long-term."

Many people expressed the need for the group to evolve and provide new challenges, once people have been coming for a while and have progressed to a certain level.

P4: "Unless it evolves somehow, unless the goals, even, evolve, I think I may find it getting a bit stale because my objectives have been obtained, and now I need a new set of objectives that are a bit more "advanced". ... If the goal is to always get new people and attract more and more people to dialogue and the fact that it's a good idea, then yes, that goal is being fulfilled, if you can continue to attract people. If your goal is to keep the people who started off with you for a very long time, that could be a bit harder."

P1 [group leader]: "Sometimes I do feel that it has achieved some goals. But sometimes when I hear some racist remarks from some people I feel we are still far away. And we still have a lot to do. ... Every day I wake up and think, maybe this was too early. The idea of this dialogue is maybe a bit too early for both people, and maybe if we can do it after 10 years... But again, I think, no, it's very important, and it has to be done. And it has to grow. I really believe in it. And I

believe this is the only way, that we have no other choice; that we as a people have to work together, refuse the logic of wars. And it's a big struggle. Because in my community, to work on this approach, and to not work on a more militaristic approach, is very difficult as well. I mean, how can you oppose this power with only a peaceful resistance approach? It's very difficult."

P2 felt that the group is not effective unless it is striving to have an impact in the larger society, and in Israel and Palestine specifically. "If we don't have an effect from here to there, if what we are doing is just a sound in the wind, for our own egos, to hear each others stories while not having the intention to have an impact and create peace [then it's ineffective]". She suggested that the group make contact and cooperate with dialogue groups in Israel and Palestine.

B) Arabs

Many members said they felt the group had the most impact for people who were the most involved; that is, who took part in organizing activities and doing special projects like the art project. A1 mentioned cooperating to organize a multifaith Passover Seder as an activity that built trust and friendship between them. "Now when I see [the Jewish co-organizer], we're so happy, there's this connection."

A2: "With Shalom-Salaam... we wanted to develop a sort of double empathy. That I might not agree with your goals, but I have to try to understand your suffering; what points hurt you, what things tick you off, what things pain you, what history is painful or difficult for you. So understanding and included with it, if you can reach real empathy for the other, that's even better."

A3 said he had observed changes in both himself and others, and that the changes were more apparent in Shalom-Salaam than in the MDG. However, he says that the changes are small and gradual.

C) Non-Arab Muslims

The two respondents had mixed reactions. One, the group leader, Bashir Hussain, feels that the group is indeed achieving its goals and is having a powerful and positive impact on the larger community.

One way in which he sees an impact is in the strengthening of community ties in times of conflict and crisis. When the Talmud Torah school library was firebombed in the spring of 2004, Hussain gave a press conference, to which all the city's Muslim and Jewish leaders came. Together, they sent out a message of 'Zero Tolerance' for violence, racism and disrespect.

Hussain sees this moment as producing a stronger bond between the groups, shown by the fact that shortly after that particular incident, David Birnbaum, a member of the Canadian Jewish Congress, took a bold step in supporting the rezoning of a mosque in Dollard des Ormeau (a Montreal suburb). This was the first time the CJC endorsed such a request, Hussain says, and this illustrates the rapprochement that was taking place between the two communities. Hussain was also invited to speak at the CJC's annual conferences of 2001 and 2003 about Muslim-Jewish relations in Montreal.

However, the other respondent feels that the group is not reaching its goals because it is not taking the necessary risks. While Hussain's goals are better communal

relations, M2 desires deep dialogue that addresses controversial religious topics, increased social interaction and visits to mosques/synagogues:

> M2: [The level of interaction] is still is not the way I want. The contact we have in this group, the few intellectuals who are sitting in this dialogue, and everyone is saying 'let us not touch this subject, let us not touch that subject, let us deal with our sensitivities and let us not bring any controversial topics and subjects for discussion. It will create a rift between us and the gulf will increase.' And for this reason, we do not discuss many things, and this level of contact remains only at the discussion level. I would have been very happy if people could visit each other. If we don't touch the controversial issues, we cannot have bigger participation and acceptance on both sides. So that is what I was looking forward to – that one day… At this moment, it's not happening: Muslims open the doors of the mosques, and Jews open the doors of their synagogues, and say "Let the Muslims come and discuss with us, those who are interested." And then the alienation, the feeling of opposition will disappear, and they will see a similar kind of person to themselves, with similar interests, intellectually, and want to benefit each other… so if you could do these kinds of activities, it would be better.
>
> At the moment, [the dialogue group] is sort of frozen in time for the last six years, discussing a few subjects, not venturing too far ahead. Just as if you have a small child on a leash. The child is restricted, and cannot go further than you allow."

D) Israelis

The Israelis were mixed in their responses. Three out of seven believe the group is achieving its goals, one said 'somewhat' and two said the group is not achieving its goals. At the same time, it should be noted that the person who expressed some doubt on this point has now become a board member of the MDG and is an energetic group organizer, while one of the people who responded that the MDG is not achieving its goals has just renewed her group membership for another year. So interestingly, even if the Israelis are frustrated with the MDG and unsure of its progress or its achievements, they remain hopeful about its possibilities. Here are some of their comments:

I1 expressed frustration at the slow rate of progess in the group, as "far from what I'd hoped. Meaning in millimeters rather than in meters."

I3 said the impact had been profound, for her, in terms of personal growth, and attaining hope:

"I get some corrections for my own distortions. I learned to develop tolerance for people I thought that I could not be tolerant of. It's a form of bettering myself. ... It's a pleasant surprise. It gives me hope because I think the rest of them [Arabs] in the Middle East are also people like them. So there might be a possibility for peace and coexistence and maybe even better – friendship, and thriving together."

I4 (group leader) agreed that the lack of Arabs in the group is a problem that must be resolved, but she also noted that the group had made an impact in that she has seen people come to new realizations and understandings:

"I think there have been those 'Kodak moments' when the penny drops and you see

it in someone's eyes that they get it, that they get that the reality is not just their

reality; that there are other realities and that those other realities are valid and just

as important to that person as your reality is to you."

I5 said that the group has been effective for her, and that she had even surpassed her

personal goals in attending. However, she felt that the group would be improved by

having a professional moderator or facilitator who would help people feel safe enough to

express themselves more openly and honestly:

"I feel like a lot of times, we're just skimming the surface. I know for myself,

because the issues are so loaded, I like to know that there's someone there leading

it, and it's not just open for everyone to jump and dump, because I think that it can

be very scary. And it can get out of hand that it becomes so emotional that people

are hurt... I think there's also psychological and emotional stuff that if you had a

trained person there they might be able to help people go in deep and yet come out

and feel safe. And that's something that I just don't feel we have. I think a lot of

people hold back a lot of things because we're not set up for that kind of

discussion."

I6 felt that the objectives were not being reached:

"The mission statement in the dialogue group says basically that it's there to build

bridges. Not to underestimate how hard it is to build bridges, but I'm not sure how

much the language it has been organized in, up to now, has built bridges. For me

personally, it's turned me off the dialogue group. I have no more desire to

participate. Unless it changes, and becomes less inflammatory, and more respectful."

However, it is interesting to note that I6 recently signed up for another year of the dialogue group.

I7 also felt the objectives were not being reached, because she felt there was a lack of commitment in the group to creating real change:

"In order to make a dialogue which is meaningful, the two sides really have to...want to do something about it, to get something from the other side. And I didn't feel like it was anywhere close to that, in the two times that I've been. ...I just felt that people wanted to feel comfortable with themselves, but without any commitment, and I don't believe that it does anything when it's like that. Though I guess, humanizing someone who was dehumanized is also important, but it's achieved very quickly."

E) Jews

Most of the non-Israeli Jews felt that the group was achieving its goals, although they too noted the lack of Arab and Palestinian participation as a major problem.

E) Others

O1 felt that there was a tendency in the group, especially on the Arab and Palestinian side, to "get stuck in the victim mentality", and that this presented a major hurdle to progress.

Summary

The majority of respondents feel that the dialogue groups are achieving their goals, at least to some degree. Those who feel that the groups are not achieving their goals cite several reasons which will be explored in the following section.

4-4) What are the problems of the dialogue group and how could they be overcome?

Table 15: What are the problems of the dialogue group?

	Group is biased	Not enough Arabs/Pal-estinians in group	Group caters only to beginners and not enough to people who've been involved for a while	Group isn't having enough impact on/ communi-cation with the larger society	People don't always share their real thoughs/ shy away from contro-versy/are too polite	Lack of commit-ment/parti-cipation by members	Meeting structure is too formal – doesn't allow for enough free contact and discussion
Palestin-ians		4	1	1		1	
Non-Pal. Arabs		2	1		1	1	
Non-Arab Muslims				1	1		
Israelis	2	3	2	1	1	2	1
Non-Israeli Jews	1	4	1	1	2	1	
Others		1					
MDG	3	13	5	2	4	4	1
Shalom-Salaam		2					
MJ				2	1		

The most common response about the MDG was that the group is lacking in

Arabs and Palestinians. This comment was also made but to a lesser extent about

Shalom-Salaam. No respondents from MJ cited this as a problem.

When I first began observing the MDG in the Fall of 2004, there was more of a

Palestinian and Arab presence in the group; there were not necessarily a large number

attending, but there was a small group of dedicated and vocal members who attended

very consistently. After about a year, that group shrunk as people stopped attending due

to lost interest, frustration, other time commitments, or feelings that the group had run its

course for them. Several of my Palestinian respondents told me that they felt the time had

come to move on, because they had reached their goals in terms of connecting and

exchanging with Jews and Israelis, and coming to an understanding of their points of

view, and that the group was no longer stimulating for them. Others simply cited reasons

of being too busy or moving on to other activities.

During her term as founding co-president, from 2003 to Spring 2006, Nada Sefian

devoted incredible energy to recruiting Arabs and Palestinians to the group.The task was

difficult, for all the reasons my respondents indicated; that it was difficult for them to

come and speak to Jews and Israelis in the first place, that their families and communities

were against it, and that many felt it would be a futile endeavour. Sefian relates that some

Arabs judge her harshly for pursuing dialogue.

Sefian said she believes that "Muslim people, especially non-Arabs, are a bit more

open to this kind of dialogue, especially when it touches on religions. Because in Islam,

there is a respect of monotheistic religions. So that makes it easier for a Muslim to open a

dialogue with a Christian or a Jew, because there is mutual respect. In Islam, it's an

obligation. A Muslim doesn't wait for the other person to recognize him, because he is

obliged to recognize Judaism and Christianity, and to respect it also." This opinion was

corroborated by one of my Muslim respondents from MJ. However, he also noted the

difficulties he has in convincing his own (Muslim) community of the merits of dialogue

with Jews.

The Muslim-Jewish Dialogue group has no Palestinian and very few Arab

members, since its only consistently-attending Muslim members are Pakistani. The

leaders don't see this as a problem since the dialogue focuses on religion and not on the

politics of the Middle East. However, they have made efforts to bring Arab religious

leaders to the group, but have not been successful thus far.

Other problems group members noted were specific to particular groups. For the

MDG, members who have been attending for over a year complain that the group

becomes less stimulating and can become redundant for them, and that it does not

accomodate more experienced members but is geared to beginners. A similar complaint

was made by members of Muslim-Jewish Dialogue, that the group is stagnating at a

certain level and is not progressing. But in the case of this group, members say it is

because they are being overly cautious and failing to take the risks necessary to progress

and to keep the group vibrant.

A complaint that comes from the Jewish and Israeli members of the MDG is that

the group is biased towards Palestinians. As one Israeli member explains:

I3: "I feel that the group is not developing in a good direction. That the balance is not

in the right place and that there is a kind of hidden agendas and formal agendas. ...

[The leadership of the group] has the looks of neutrality - there is a Palestinian co-president and an Israeli, Jewish co-president. It looks like a nice balance, but it's not, because the Israeli president is extremely biased in one direction. She's more Palestinian than the Palestinians. So I feel betrayed by my president. Now I think that whatever the president's personal takes on this are, they as leaders have to put this aside for the time that they accepted to be the presidents, and to be leaders of the group. Not to promote their own personal agendas. ... [Self-criticism about Israel] should belong in a dialogue group, and it's okay. But why not leave it to the Palestinians to talk against our government, and we can also express negative feelings if we have them, but this should not be the leadership of the group. The leadership should facilitate [the members' expression]."

As to the Israeli and Jewish members' charge that the group is slanted on the pro-Palestinian side, I think this is a function of the fact that the Jewish members of the executive committee and organizing committee were, up until the recent elections, mostly 'left-wing', and pro-Palestinian. In order to rectify this, people who feel underrepresented must make the effort to get more involved with the organization and direction of the group. This has in fact happened, with several pro-Zionist Jewish and Israeli members now on the executive and organizing committees.

On the whole, there are more 'left-wing' than 'right-wing' Jewish members in the MDG, but that is a function of the type of people who are the most interested in dialogue. As group leaders told me, they don't have control over who joins the group, and they can't exclude someone because they already have their 'quota' of left-wing Jews, for

example. That being said, it would be to the benefit of the group to make efforts to recruit people from across the political spectrum, and especially from the extremes of either side.

One interesting note on this point is that several of my 'left-wing' Jewish respondents told me that by being in the group, they had determined that 'their' dialogue was in fact with other Jews from the other end of the political spectrum, rather than with the Palestinians, whose views on the conflict were more similar to their own. To the more 'right-wing' Jews, this indicates simply an imbalance in that there are more 'left-wing' views in the group than there are 'right-wing'. However, to me it indicates that there is simply a plurality of dialogues occurring concurrently within the MDG: Arab-Jewish, left-wing-right-wing, and Jewish-Jewish. In effect, it indicates that there are more than just 'two sides' to the issue, and that there is a variety of views within each of the communities.

Other problems particular to specific members of the MDG: one member feels the sessions are too structured, and that there should be more time to socialize informally; one member would like to have a professional moderator brought in to guide people in the process of opening up emotionally and speaking their truth respectfully in a safe environment, free of fear of it degenerating into arguments or chaos. One member would like to see the group split up into sub-groups depending on members' specific interests such as political discussion, or social activities. One or two people complained that there is too much politeness; that people sometimes withhold their real opinions. I find that this varies from session to session depending on the members present and the topic, but that people are quite candid most of the time.

In general, and despite their complaints, members expressed a high level satisfaction and affinity with the group, finding it stimulating, provocative and informative.

Members of Shalom-Salaam have a very high degree of satisfaction with the group. As a small, closed group of people more experienced in dialogue and very informed about the issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they find that they can go to a very deep level of discussion. This is not just because of their knowledge of the Middle East issues and dialogue experience, but because it's a closed group, they have achieved a certain level of mutual trust, understanding and comfort with one another that can only come with time. Many of the members are also members of the MDG, and so they are able to make comparisons between the two groups. In the MDG, they experience a dynamism that is particular to groups in which new faces and perspectives are constantly flowing. In Shalom-Salaam, they are able to delve more deeply into specific subjects and give them more time than is possible in a larger group with a floating population. For instance, in Shalom-Salaam they read and discuss books together, examining particular issues in Middle-East politics and culture. There is a higher degree of friendship and affinity between group members since they know each other well and take turns hosting the group meetings in their homes.

As a small, closed group, and the longest-running of the three, having been going on now for eight years, Muslim-Jewish Dialogue shares many similarities with Shalom-Salaam in terms of the levels of friendship and trust established in the group. However, there remains a level of caution in MJ that does not exist in Shalom-Salaam, in that the group continues to shy away from discussing controversial issues, both religious and

political, as my respondents indicated. Respondents expressed frustration with the group

on this point, in that they feel there is too much caution and not enough effort to progress.

One member said that he would like to examine the differences between primary texts of

scripture and its historical interpretation, while another member would like to engage in

political dialogue. Group leaders express desire and intention to move in this direction,

however, the pace at which they are doing so is frustrating to both member respondents.

4-5) How could the group(s) be improved?

Several suggestions were made, and many people offered the same ones. For the

MDG, they were:

- To have more Palestinian and Arab participants

- To create a 'second' level of dialogue for experienced people

- To do peace/social justice work in the larger community in order to have a greater

  impact; to ally with peace groups in the Middle East

- To have more purely social/cultural events in which members can interact on a

  more informal, fun basis

- To have more participation and commitment from members in terms of planning,

  organizing and running events

Here are some of the comments made:

A3: "We need to keep the group dynamic so that we don't fall back in a comfortable

routine. To try to keep on pushing the limits; to take it to the next level. With the

MDG, to get into more in-depth discussions, things that people would not normally

be comfortable with. I think we need to always move people and challenge them,

bring new ideas and new ways of doing things, in order to attract new people and to get people to communicate in different ways."

J2: "I think one of the problems [with the MDG] is that the level of comfort cannot be complete because of the floating population. And I don't see any way of getting around that. I think that people who are very committed and want to persist with dialogue at a "deeper level", should perhaps form splinter groups like Shalom-Salaam and get together on their own, as well as belonging to the central group."

I4 (group leader): "Someone said to me, 'can we have another evening, so that the three presenters who couldn't finish their talks this time could do so?' And I replied, 'sure, let's have it at your house', and they said they couldn't, they were too busy. Well, I'm not having it at my house! So people really want to do things and really want to see things happen, but we need more participation in order for all those great things to take place. We need to train our moderators better. We need a place to have our meetings. We need to have other speakers, better speakers, we need to change the format, we need to have two levels, there are a thousand things we need but we need money and we need people."

For Shalom-Salaam, since there was a greater level of satisfaction there were less comments on how to improve the group. One suggestion was that they take up again their practice of community education and outreach in the form of presentations before college and university students.

In Muslim-Jewish dialogue, the only suggestion made was to begin to breach the difficult and controversial subjects which they have avoided thus far, and which members would like to address. Some members comment:

J7: "Someone just told me today that he heard someone say that interfaith is easy, and

that it's a lot of political niceties... [But] if you're going to be serious about it, you

have to work at it and there are problems that arise. There are misunderstandings

and there are points at which our religions actually cross, and cross each other, and

come to an impasse. And it's important to be able to recognize where that impasse

is. So that we can be honest about it. We can't always say, "Oh look! We have the

same divorce laws! We're best friends!" (laughs) I don't think that's always useful.

We also have to say, "where do we have a real problem with each other?" and be

honest with each other, because if we can't have the hard conversations, we're not

really having a conversation."

M2: "If we don't touch the controversial issues, we cannot have bigger participation

and acceptance on both sides. So that is what I was looking forward to. At this

moment, it's not happening".

Part Five: Religion and Dialogue

5-1) Religion and Level of Practice/Affinity

Table 16: Religion and Level of Practice/Affinity

	Muslim	Christian	Jewish
Total	7	7	15
Level of Observance:			
High	3	0	1
Medium	0	1	4
Low	1	1	3
None	3	5	7
Member of Church/Synagogue, or Attend Mosque Regularly?			
Yes	3	1	7
No	4	6	8

The highest level of religious observance was found, not surprisingly, in MJ, which is an interreligious dialogue group. All four respondents from that group are religiously observant from a moderate to high degree. However, it should be noted that one of the interviewees from that group who has a Jewish background, practices Buddhism rather than Judaism.

The MDG and Shalom-Salaam are both secular dialogue groups, whose members range across the spectrum from complete secularism to a fairly high degree of observance (for Muslims, prayer five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, etc; for Jews, active membership in a synagogue and observance of religious laws and holidays).

5-2) Does religion play a part in your dialogue activity? Do you see it as part of a religious practice? Is it helpful to discuss religion in the dialogue group(s)?

Table 17: Does religion play a part in your dialogue activity? Do you see it as part of a religious practice? Is it helpful to discuss religion in the dialogue group(s)?

	Is there something in your religion that calls upon you to dialogue?		If you are observant, is dialogue part of your religious practice?		Is it helpful to discuss religion in the dialogue group?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Palestinians	2			2	2	3
Arabs	2		1	1	3	1
Muslims	2		1	1	2	
Israelis	3		1		5	1
Jews	4		2		5	2
Others					1	
Total	**13**	**0**	**5**	**4**	**18**	**7**

Just under half of my respondents said there was something in their religion that calls upon them to dialogue. Only five people felt that dialogue is part of their religious practice. A little more than half my respondents felt that it is useful or helpful to discuss religion in the dialogue group(s), while seven people felt that it is not useful.

On the question of whether or not it is helpful to discuss religion in the dialogue group, there were basically two camps that spanned the groups. On the Palestinian and Arab side, those who thought it to be a good idea to discuss religion cited a need to dispel the myths and misinformation about Islam prevalent in North America. Those who thought that religion should not be discussed in the dialogue group gave the reason that religion is not central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to focus on it would confuse the issue or distract from the central political and legal issues of the conflict. This view was shared by some Jewish and Israeli members of the group as well. Many people across the spectrum who supported the idea of religious discussion gave the reason that religion forms the background and basis of many people's identity, and thus in order to understand where they are coming from, it's helpful to understand their religious background as well as other factors focused on in the dialogue groups.

The comments of P2 and I1 summarize the sentiments of the respondents who do not think it is useful to discuss religion in the dialogue group(s):

P2: "I don't think [it's useful to discuss religion]. I think those introductory sessions [on Islam, Judaism and Christianity, in the MDG) are useful for people who don't have a clue. I'm not sure if it's necessary or relevant in the context of the Israelis and Palestinians; it's like trying to understand the relationship between the Croats and the Serbs. Do we need to look at religion, or at the ethnic and political background? People go to religion to make an excuse or to find a reason in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but I don't see it as very connected."

I1: I'm not hostile to [discussing religion]. I just don't think that it has an important role to play in this. On the contrary, I think that it obscures a lot of the issues. I

don't support the greater Israel claim, that says there's some sort of a birthright that's granted to Jews as some sort of an everlasting covenant between them and God. I don't believe in that, and I have very little to say to a Muslim who thinks that the Jews are infidels and if they're not going to convert to Islam, then we have to drive them into the sea.

J7, a member of MJ, believes it is important to separate interreligious and political dialogue:

"The problem isn't about religion. Religion is obviously being added to the puzzle. And I think if you knew the two religious traditions properly, you would know that that's not the fight. The fight's politics, the fight's water, the fight's territory, it's a lot of things. But I don't think it's religion. …you've got very clear political and territorial issues going on in that region and it's important to address those issues. So you can use the interfaith dialogue as an example or use the friendships that have developed and the comfort levels that have developed between Jews and Muslims there and apply it to the conflict in the Middle East but I think that there are other dialogues that need to happen there."

Several members of the MDG, on the other hand, do see the usefulness of discussing religion in the context of the conflict:

P4: "I would ask the hard questions: Does Islam make you go out and become a suicide bomber? Does Judaism make you kick out people from their houses to take over their land? No! Does it say you should return to your homeland? Maybe. But don't tell me it justifies other things. Don't tell me it justifies either side. I think maybe with several sessions, it would come out."

I3: "I think that we might be suspicious of each others' religions. Does the Qur'an really call for jihad, and am I an infidel that has to be done away with? So I think that we should develop a better understanding of each other's religion and I'd like to know how they interpret it. ... And I think that Judaism has been seen for generations to be threatening, to people around. So I think it's incumbent upon us to invite them into our interpretation and our understanding, and our religious identity, and ask whether there is room for the well-being of all of us, together."

I5: "I think a lot of the issues are coloured by religion in a sense, like the law of return, or Jerusalem and the holy sites. So I think it's very important. I don't know how to deal with it (laughs) but it's a huge issue, huge."

Others who are in favour of discussing religion gave the following reasons: dispelling myths/misinformation about the religions; understanding each other better since religion is part of people's identities; religious identity and ritual sharing can be a point of commonality between people of different faiths. Here are a few of the comments:

A1: "Yes, I think it's important to know about peoples' religion... for example, there's a lot of prejudice against Muslims, and people think it's a violent religion, and I think it's important that people are informed. About the session on Islam, I think it was really important for people to see what Islam is according to Muslims, not how the media portrays it, and the same for Judaism. I think it helps people understand each others' backgrounds as well - it's part of people's identity. ...

I remember one time, at a MDG event, a young Palestinian woman introduced herself and said she was a Christian Palestinian. And someone asked her, "when did you convert?" She said "I didn't, we've always been Christian". And I realized that

a lot of people don't realize that Christianity started in the Middle East. So it's made me more aware of [the lack of knowledge about the religions of the Arab world]."

J7: "I'm continually astounded at how little many Jews and Christians and Muslims in [the Middle East] know about each others' religions and how they often assume there's a religious problem when there isn't. Or I get simplistic statements all the time, like, 'Well but their religions are so different'. And I think, 'no they're not, actually, particularly Judaism and Islam. They're similar religions on so many levels'. So there's an educational problem there."

A3: "I really don't care much what religion the person is, but sometimes you have a better understanding of where they're coming from, if they make certain comments you may be able to understand them better so you won't get offended by what they say. It's important to take it into account. Religion certainly plays a big part in how people understand and talk about things, on a conscious or unconscious level."

Several members of the MDG see religion as a powerful point of connection for people, and support the inclusion of shared ritual activities in the dialogue groups:

I2: "[religion is] a source of valuable shared activity that can bring people closer."

I3: "A couple of times we had a *seder* for Passover. It wasn't a traditional *seder* – there was a new text written for this, that was more about tolerance and freedom for everybody and so on. But it was in a traditional format so [the non-Jews in the group] got a feeling for what is it these Jews are doing in their holiday. But there has hardly been any things to match this on the other side. I've never been to a

mosque, never been invited. I'm waiting for the day that we will be invited to a mosque, and be welcome there, and be asked to share in their customs."

J6: "My experience with the women's ecumenical network is it can be [helpful]. People from different religions can connect as believers. There's something that will unite you in dialogue that other people don't have, so that a Jew may have more in common with a Muslim believer than with a non-believing Jew."

5-3) Is there something in your religion that calls upon you to dialogue with the 'other'?

Nearly half of my respondents replied affirmatively to this question. Here are some of their comments:

P1 (group leader): "In Islam, [respect for the 'other'] is an obligation. A Muslim doesn't wait for the other person to recognize him, because he is obliged to recognize Judaism and Christianity, and to respect it also. ... in Islam, there is a respect of monotheistic religions. So that makes it easier for a Muslim to open a dialogue with a Christian or a Jew, because there is mutual respect."

A2: "I don't think that I apply things religiously by saying that Islam says to [dialogue] and so you do it... I guess I look at it more as, these things I know and they formulate my way of thinking, and it comes out in my actions. But I do see a connection... religiously, you shouldn't be judgmental and you shouldn't be formulating points of view based on rumours or hearsay. It's best to always hear from the other person. ...So maybe because of the deeply-rooted presence of religion in my life, it makes me more open to dialogue, to discussion, to debate."

I2: "I think [dialogue] is a guideline for ethical behaviour. I think this is what an

ethical person should be doing. An ethical person should strive to understand better

the details and nuances of what's happening around an issue that's important and

matters to people and that they have a connection with, and has a responsibility to

pass this understanding onto other people. I think this is well-represented in Jewish

thought. I don't think it's a proprietarily Jewish concept, but it's my interpretation

of some of the tradition that I feel a connection with."

I3 notes that there are messages in Jewish text and tradition that support reaching

out to the other, and also texts that contradict this. However, the overriding message is

about brotherhood and peace: "Certainly I see [dialogue] as part of my values and my

culture. Some of it comes from the very fact that I am Jewish, where I think that I learned

to love my fellow men as myself. We also have in the Bible, all kinds of commands to

separate ourselves and to make sure that we are secure and we should kill our enemies

and so on, and protect our borders. That's also in the Bible. But in terms of the humanity,

I feel that this comes from my religion. To reach out. And definitely that peace is way

superior to war."

I6: "What I think characterizes Judaism for me is the concept of *tikkun olam*, which is

the healing and the mending of the world. That's what I mean. I think for me, since

[the Israeli-Palestinian conflict] is an issue close to my heart, for me this is my

responsibility, of how to mend the world. It's to do what I can to dissipate tension

in this microcosm that is the dialogue group."

J1: My conception of Judaism is based on those principles of loving-kindness and justice, compassion, empathy. And so I try to instill that into my life if I can [and the dialogue group plays this role for me].

J4: I think in Judaism we are taught to question and to discuss especially in the Reconstructionist tradition which is what I'm part of. So even though that [wasn't my impetus for coming to the group], I think Judaism really does encourage that.

5-4) Do you see dialogue as part of your religious practice?

Of the nine respondents who said they are somewhat to very observant, five said dialogue is part of their religious practice while four said it is not.

J4: "I see dialogue as part of a spiritual practice of being willing to let go of ideas and beliefs that we've held by really listening to others and really being honest with oneself, looking at one's own beliefs and values… to reflect on that in an honest way.

As far as whether it's affected my connection to my own religion, it's making me reflect more on my Jewish identity which I have always struggled with, because I tend to not really feel Jewish. … I'm walking into this dialogue fully as a Jew - that's one of my roles in being there."

A1: "Yes. I would say it's part of a religious/spiritual practice because I think Christianity like other religions is for peace and part of having a spiritual practice is having compassion for others and understanding someone's motives. One doesn't need to go to church, but if I think of what Christianity means to me, the essence of

it, like the essence of any religion, is peace and dialogue, so I think that my

Christian upbringing has influenced me in this way."

M2: "[Dialogue] is part of the religious practice. Mohammed was a great grandson of

Abraham: he was Semitic. He was preaching Islam to the people of the scriptures:

Jewish, Christian... he was told by God, 'Talk to the People of the Book' - that's a

direct translation – 'and tell them about what is the commonness between you and

us, our heritage is common.' By language and by lineage. We should explore these

for the advantage of cooperation."

P2: "I don't see dialogue as part of a religious practice. But it's a [manifestation of]

the philosophy of Islam. It's the religion of peace; the core of the message is

salaam. So in a way [dialogue is] like a test for applying the principle of peace into

the political context. It's like, how to bring the spiritual wisdom into practical

matters."

Summary

Whether they say they are religious or not, a majority of my respondents feel it to

be helpful to discuss religion in the dialogue groups, for a variety of reasons. Varied

responses were given by religiously observant participants as to whether they see

dialogue as part of their religious practice, with five respondents saying yes and four

saying no. Many respondents, whether religiously observant or not, named aspects of

their religious tradition that they see as a basis or a 'call' to dialogue.

CHAPTER 7 - Theoretical Analysis

In this chapter, I analyze the data collected from my interviews according to the approach and arguments of dialogue theorists. I analyze each group according to the following categories: methodology, group process and progress, elements necessary for effective dialogue, obstacles to effective dialogue, religion and dialogue, and activism and dialogue. Following this, I present a general summary analysis of each group.

David R. Smock,[3] whose work was discussed in Chapter One, breaks down interfaith dialogue groups into five categories (Smock 7-10):

1) The elite leadership model (described by R. Scott Appleby)[4], in which high level religious leaders are convened to speak as advocates for peace, with emphasis on joint action for peace.

2) Elite interfaith bodies that engage in mediation between combatants in an effort to reach peace agreements, as with the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone. These initiatives effectively use religious precepts and rituals in the mediation process.

3) Grassroots efforts, which bring people together to dialogue across religion and community divisions, and to "nurture the development of participants into agents of reconciliation".

4) Interreligious study groups, in which participants come together to share study of their religious texts. They may also study and share their religious rituals, such as in Ramadan *iftar* (break-fast) or a Passover *seder* (ritual meal).

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[3] Smock, David R. *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*. Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2002.
[4] Appleby, R. Scott. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, 223.

5) Groups focusing on dialogue through shared activities of social action. One example given is of interfaith groups that undergo training in conflict resolution or undertake shared "deeds of reconciliation", such as one community assisting the other in a building or social action project (ibid.). This model is advocated in the chapter by Rabbi Marc Gopin, who recommends shared text study, social action and symbolic acts of apology.

All three of the groups in my study fall into the category of grassroots organizations.

1. **Methodology**

1-A) The MDG

The MDG's methodology up to the present has been looser and less defined than what is proposed or recommended by most of the studies I have read. The group's process is largely intuitive. As Sefian told me, "we are not professionals; we are led by our hearts". In this respect, their approach has been guided by personal interest, that is, their own questions and concerns, and the input of the group members, and is continually evolving and developing. At this point, the group's approach is becoming much more formalized and structured. The plan for the MDG's third year session, which will officially begin in the Fall of 2006, is to break the main group into four sub-groups according to members' interests:

1) Creative: This group will take on creative projects such as the production of a Jewish/Arab cookbook.

2) Drama: will explore members' personal stories related to the conflict through drama.

3) Social: will run social activities such as going to see films of interest together.

4) Issues: will examine the political and historical issues surrounding the conflict, through joint study and debate.

This will allow members to focus on the issues and types of activities that they prefer. The group as a whole will also meet to follow the same format as in past years, with a presentation on a pertinent topic followed by group discussion.

The subgroup format encourages greater member participation and implication, since members of each subgroup plan and run their activities themselves.

The MDG incorporates aspects of the type of group advocated by Marc Gopin in pursuing joint activities such as shared religious rituals and art projects. However, it does not fully exemplify the type of group described by Gopin since it has so far not undertaken any social action projects. It aims rather to build bridges across groups, and in so doing, it achieves what R. Scott Appleby describes as the development of participants into "agents of reconciliation".[5]

When comparing the MDG with formal dialogue methodologies such as Jay Rothman's ARIA approach, the group is seen to have a mixed approach that combines what Rothman sees as different phases of the dialogue process into one phase. It might be to the MDG's benefit to use as a guideline a more formal structure, in order to facilitate the comfortable expression of members' concerns, as well as their progress in terms of coming to a common understanding.

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[5] Appleby 188.

Rothman's four phases are (228-229): 1) Antagonism – the two parties state their ethnocentric and exclusionary concerns; 2) Resonance – parties describe their deepest motivations, traumas, hopes and fears about their past and future interactions with the other party, in order to "begin to forge common ground and move beyond blaming". 3) Invention – parties are asked to find the intersections of their underlying concerns, leading to an attempt at creating cooperative solutions to their common problems. 4) Action – an agenda for joint-problem solving and action is set.

While Rothman's formulation appears potentially useful for the MDG, the MDG takes place in Montreal, not Jerusalem, and it is a long-term dialogue project with a floating membership, so such methodologies can be applied in only a limited way. The ARIA method appears to be a very sound approach, because I have observed its first two stages happening naturally within the MDG. The group would benefit from moving towards the third and fourth stages, but they would have to be guided through it by a trained leader such as Rothman. As some of my respondents indicated, the group would benefit from professional facilitation or training.

The MDG makes good use of what Gopin calls 'positive cognitive dissonance' (Gopin 78), discussed in Chapter One, in its role-reversal activities, which many of my respondents described as being their most memorable and affective dialogue group activities.

1-B) Shalom-Salaam

Like the MDG, Shalom-Salaam is an informal group guided and structured according to members' personal interest.

Shalom-Salaam requires different analysis than the MDG because it is a less complicated group, being much smaller and having a fixed membership. Shalom-Salaam has an average of 10-15 people attending rather than the 25-40 at the MDG, and it is a closed group, which means that there aren't new people each time thrown into the mix. Since they have established trust and friendship amongst themselves over the approximately four years that they have been meeting, members say that they now feel free to express themselves without hesitation. Also, they are able to explore themes and ideas in more profundity than is possible at the MDG, because of its bigger population, the difficulty of establishing trust with a floating membership, and the time constraints imposed both by the space in which it meets, which they must vacate by 10 pm each time, and by the nightly program, which includes a formal presentation, question period, and smaller discussion groups when time permits. In contrast, at Shalom-Salaam the conversation ranges much more freely, and they don't necessarily adhere strictly to their agenda.

The drawbacks of Shalom-Salaam are that it is not as dynamic as the MDG. While it is advantageous to be able to explore a given topic in depth, the group lacks the intensity and dynamism brought by having new faces, voices and perspectives each time, as in the MDG. As well, the discussions at Shalom-Salaam tend to be more academic and detached, while at the MDG the members seem more implicated and invested in the issues of the conflict. For example, some of the Palestinians who attend the MDG have been in Canada for only a short time (5 years or less), while during the course of my observation of Shalom-Salaam, there was only one Palestinian member, and two Arab members, who have been in Canada for 15 or more years. In Shalom-Salaam, the

membership is on the whole older and from a higher economic and educational bracket than in the MDG. There is less of a sense of urgency, passion and challenge in the discussions, and the atmosphere is more that of a salon, in which the members are comfortable friends, discussing a subject of mutual interest at leisure.

This is not to belittle the group's achievements or its value. Like the MDG, it appears to foster the development of Appleby's 'agents of reconciliation'; that is, people who develop skills, knowledge and the will to be peacemakers, and affect others outside the group accordingly.

Shalom-Salaam also fulfills the mandate of dialogue groups proposed by Abu-Nimer and Gopin of joint acts of charity or social action in the larger community, by making presentations to school groups. Members of Shalom-Salaam, as discussed previously, demonstrate to the public how dialogue works by their own example: how to respectfully disagree, and how to discuss controversial issues in a productive and respectful way. However, the group has not made any such presentations within the past year.

1-C) Muslim-Jewish Dialogue (MJ)

MJ uses a methodology similar to that of the other two groups, in having a presentation followed by questions and discussion. Like the other two groups, MJ's program is guided by the personal interests of the members.

Since it is an interreligious dialogue group, MJ has focused solely on religion thus far. This can be seen as both a strength and a limitation. It is a strength for the reasons listed in the section below on religious versus non-religious dialogue, in that it focuses on an aspect of the members' identity that is very meaningful to them and is thus a powerful

avenue of sharing and connection among participants. However, it is a weakness in the sense that some group members feel limited by the group's current parameters and would like to be able to discuss other topics in addition to religion.

The group's main strength is their consistency and endurance, having been meeting for eight years now. Their weakness is that the fixed membership and lack of willingness to address controversial topics is causing the group to stagnate, according to my respondents as well as my own observations. Their plan to hold a conference in the Fall of 2006, to which they will invite a larger audience of members of the Jewish and Muslim communities, is a step in the right direction in terms of raising awareness of their activities and efforts in the broader community, and opening the group to more public participation. It is their hope that the conference will bring a new phase to the dialogue group of greater communication with the outside communities, and perhaps bring them up to the level of confidence necessary to broach difficult and controversial topics.

2. Group Process and Progress

2-A) Process

Abu-Nimer delineates the process of participants in dialogue groups. He breaks it down into four phases of development (Smock 27). These phases are influenced by outside factors such as the experience level of participants and the degree of power imbalance between the groups, for example. He writes that some groups stay in the first or second phase for a long time, and may never leave it, while other groups progress rapidly to further stages.

Phase One

- excitement

- exploring individual and group similarities

- idealization of own group

- politeness

- caution

This first phase is accurate based on my own personal experience in the dialogue groups as well as the responses of my interviewees. Because the MDG is an open group with new members arriving at nearly every meeting, the group is always characterized by a higher level of excitement than is present in the other two (closed) groups. There is also more politeness and caution, since participants often have not met before, have not participated in dialogue before, and are uncertain about the group.

Shalom-Salaam and MJ have both long ago moved beyond the characteristics of Abu-Nimer's Phase One, although all groups continuously explore individual and group similarities.

Phase Two

- caution persists

- emphasis on similarities rather than differences, but learning more about differences

- revelation of personal stereotypes

- setting becomes less threatening because of the establishment of personal connections and contacts

- focus on secondary rather than primary religious language

From my observations, caution does persist to varying degrees in all the groups, depending on the people present and the topics being addressed. The more controversial or sensitive the topic, the greater the level of caution, in general. Interestingly, the sessions on the religions of the Middle East (Judaism, Islam and Christianity) in the MDG were characterized by the highest level of politeness and caution observed over the course of my study of that group. Caution persists to a high degree in MJ, respondents noted. Members of Shalom-Salaam told me that they used to be much more cautious when the group began, but that now because of the trust established over time, they can speak their minds more freely.

The revelation of personal stereotypes is most apparent in the MDG and MJ, whose meetings are sometimes punctuated by heated discussions and outbursts from members, when they experience the challenging of their views.

Phase Three

- exploration of differences

- frustration, mistrust, blame, tension; the degree of these depends on the level of trust that has been previously established

As noted above, frustration and tension often result from participants' confrontation in the group with views that contradict or challenge their own. I witnessed this most often in the MDG over the other two groups. One of my respondents expressed her own experience of this, and her uncertainty about what to do with the emotions and thoughts raised:

> I5: "Sometimes it's very very hard. Because you'll hear the Arabs in the group saying things, and you feel especially in the beginning, and depending on the topic, you

feel like you're being attacked, and it's very emotional and visceral. ... Something will happen, and you just shut down because it's too painful. You don't want to know or hear [certain things]. ...as Jewish people, you can feel like you're under attack. You feel really lousy. And so how do you deal with that? I know that I need to hear it, but it's hard."

As Agbaria and Cohen write, such moments as the one described by I5, when properly managed, can be powerfully transformative. If ignored or managed improperly, they can be damaging:

With skillful facilitation, these difficult moments can be transformed into powerful learnings for all of the group participants. If unaddressed within the group however, such feelings must be borne by individual participants in isolation, potentially leading to cycles of guilt and anger, shame and resentment, acknowledgement and denial. (7)

Phase Four

- recognition of the limitations and advantages of dialogue

- feelings of empowerment coming from the ability to connect with others

- new understanding of own group/traditions

- more trusting/less threatened by other

- exploration of alternatives to violence and competition

- search for common activities

- identify resources for peacebuilding in one's own group/community/tradition

- emphasis on action

Almost all of my respondents from all three groups, whose experience of dialogue had been positive, said they had experienced one or more of the above characteristics of Phase Four. Many were wrestling with the first point, the recognition of the limitations and advantages of dialogue. Some were coming to terms with high expectations that were later deemed to have been unrealistic. Many expressed frustration with the slow pace of results, but at the same time showed continuing belief in the possibilities obtainable through dialogue. Most expressed appreciation for new understandings, trust and friendships established in the group. However, the last two points of Phase Four have not been addressed adequately by any of the groups, in my assessment. These points involve recognition of peacebuilding resources within one's own group and working towards positive change in the greater community. As Agbaria and Cohen write, "The intention of any group work is that any changes in the individuals that result from their participation in the group will be taken back into their communities. … Returning to their own communities can be the most difficult moments in this work: it is a challenge for people to hold on to their new behaviours and attitudes. … Often they need support to do this, and the group should continue to offer this support to them" (11). The groups must find ways to support and facilitate the participants' transference of their new understandings beyond the dialogue groups themselves.

In summary, my findings corroborate Abu-Nimer's framework of dialogue group progress. I find aspects of all four phases he proposes present in all three dialogue groups currently. All three groups could benefit from examining Abu-Nimer's framework, in order to better understand and put into perspective their experience as individuals and groups. It could also help them to structure future plans and activities.

2-B) Progress

Abu-Nimer identifies three elements that are necessary for achieving and maintaining possible change in participants' attitudes to the other:

1) alternative cognitive processes through new information and analysis (change in the head)

2) Positive emotional experience in meeting the other through the construction of safe and trusting relationships (change in the heart).

3) Working together on concrete tasks or actions that enforce the positive attitudinal change (change through the hand) (in Smock 17).

All three groups studied fulfill the above elements to differing degrees.

Abu-Nimer's first element is achieved through the presentations made in each group, at each session on a specific theme, either by a group member or by a guest speaker. In the MDG, sometimes the presentations are made on a topic of expertise by the speaker, such as group member and psychiatrist Dr. Herta Guttman's presentation on the psychological effect of the conflict on Israeli and Palestinian children. At other times, creating the presentation involves a research project into a topic that the designated presenter may not be an expert on. This seems to be a conscious effort on the part of the MDG leadership to provide the opportunity for presenters to increase their knowledge on the topic, as much as it is about informing the audience.

The second element is achieved through the sharing of personal stories and experience, both as part of the presentations, and in the discussion period following the presentations. This is practiced and achieved in all three groups.

Abu-Nimer's third element occurs in the MDG and Shalom-Salaam but especially in the MDG, both in the group itself and in the subgroups that have sprung up from it. An example of a subgroup is the 'Meeting in the Middle' art project, which went on throughout the summer of 2005, and culminated in a month-long gallery exhibition. Within the group, it is most visible in the organizing committees for the regular meetings and for the special events such as the Passover *seder* and the annual Concert for Peace. The MDG intends to increase these types of dialogue group offshoots in order to accomodate and target the various specific needs and interests of the members, which they have come to recognize through the past two years of experience as a group.

Shalom-Salaam achieves the 'change in the heart' to a certain degree through its school presentations mentioned in Section One of this chapter.

MJ achieves the 'change through the hand' by taking a stand against racism in the larger community, and by supporting projects in both the Muslim and Jewish communities, as discussed by group co-leader Bashir Hussain in Chapter Four.

All three groups might benefit from developing, expanding and increasing their social action and community outreach activities.

3) Basic Principles of Effective Dialogue

Smock notes basic principles of effective interfaith/intercultural dialogue (21). I will reproduce them one at a time here and discuss them in the context of the three groups.

1) symmetric arrangements in process and design

- addresses the imbalance of power that exists outside the dialogue room, through location, timing, set-up, etc.

- provides sense of security through selection of a neutral site.

This is something that all three groups are sensitive to, but that it is not always easy or possible to fully achieve. For instance, MJ always meets in non-neutral territory, at the Canadian Jewish Congress, simply because the space is available and free of cost. They have hoped and planned to meet at the Islamic Center of Quebec in Ville St. Laurent for the past year, however, they are currently waiting for its renovations to be completed.

One serious complaint lodged against the MDG from members of both the Arab and Jewish communities is that the group does not achieve the requirements listed in the points above in terms of symmetry in programming and addressing the imbalance of power between the two groups. Efforts must continue to be made in this direction. From my observations, an effort is being made but the task is not easy. At the same time, complaints on this point are lodged at the Board of Directors from both sides, so that in itself indicates that they have achieved at least a certain level of balance.

Jonathan Magonet also writes that it is of key importance to establish a "level ground" for the encounter, and that it is the responsibility of the more powerful partner to ensure that appropriate conditions are created (174).

2) selection of appropriate participants

- co-led by the members of both/all the participating groups

- equality of knowledge of different clergy involved

- level of commitment, qualifications and background of participants are crucial to the success of dialogue

This point poses problems for the MDG, who struggle to get and maintain Palestinian and Arab involvement in the group, both at the organizational (leadership) and regular participant levels. Group leaders complain of a lack of commitment in time and energy of group members, and too heavy of an onus on a small group of organizers to make it all happen. For this reason, the group's current restructuring into smaller offshoot groups appears to be a positive step in getting all the members more involved in conceiving of, planning and running the group's activities.

Shalom-Salaam also requires more Palestinian and Arab presence to have a numerical balance. The group is less hierarchical than the MDG however, with more equal participation by all members since they all take turns making presentations and hosting the meetings.

MJ in general maintains a fairly even balance between Jewish and Muslim attendees. However, one respondent complained about a lack of religious knowledge in some of the participants involved, which in his view impeded a deeper and more meaningful level of dialogue from taking place.

3) examination of both similarities and differences

- don't simply create an artificial harmony by looking at the similarities between the two groups; examine the "tough" issues in primary religious terminology, such as *jihad* and choseness, leading the members to their own critical evaluation of their own belief system.

The MDG and Shalom-Salaam both succeed very well on this point in that they make a point of discussing the most difficult and controversial issues as well as fostering good relations through social interaction. According to my respondents, MJ should work on tackling difficult topics and moving beyond simple good relations; these relations need to be put to the test in order for the group to move forward, they say (see Chapter Six).

4) collaborative task

- make the dialogue effort amount to more than just talk

- this is important because participants often want to see "concrete results" of their participation in dialogue, or ask "what will this effort produce?"

- could be building something, funding a youth club, going to a protest, etc.

The MDG has been very successful on this front with last summer's 'Meeting in the Middle' Art project. MJ has made public statements against racism and collaborated in anti-racism initiatives. Such activities could be taken on by all the groups on a regular basis.

5) flexible process of interaction

- not locked into one model of structure or practice

- respond to surrounding context and outside events

The MDG is currently undergoing major changes in order to best address the evolving needs of participants. Shalom-Salaam tends to be quite flexible because they are accountable only to their own small group, and changes in the agenda can be proposed and accepted in the course of a meeting. MJ seems to be locked into its format right now and members say they could benefit from a change of formula as discussed previously.

6) healing, acknowledgment of collective and individual injuries

- involves self-examination: asking the question "when were your religious [or group, or personal] values violated by your group?"

This is a very important point that from my own observations, none of the three groups are currently addressing. Farhat Agbaria and Cynthia Cohen, in their article "Working With Groups in Conflict: The Impact of Power Relations on the Dynamics of the Group", also stress the importance of self-examination within each of the two group partners in dialogue. Within their own groups, the authors write, "participants are often more able to acknowledge differences among themselves and work with their different perspectives and opinions" (10). This could also be helpful in terms of the self-examination and acknowledgment of wrongdoing advocated by Smock, above.

7) intrareligious/intragroup preparation and forums

- prior to interfaith/intercultural dialogue, each group should meet with their own members and explore their stand on issues, in order to locate points of unity and acknowledge points of diversity, choose a method of dialogue, and set criteria for

success. Abu-Nimer writes that intrareligious/cultural meetings and groups can be even more effective in peacebuilding than interfaith dialogue meetings (in Smock 25). This is especially relevant for the Jewish members of the MDG. One of the main points of contention among the more right-wing members of the group is that the left-wing Jews do not constitute real dialogue partners for the Arabs because they already agree with them. My left-wing Jewish respondents all said that they had noticed that their main need for dialogue was with right-wing Jews; the ones with whom they disagree the most strongly. For me, this indicates that the dialogue group is not necessarily just about two 'sides'. There are multiple levels of dialogue going on at once, and this is not a detriment to the group but rather attests to its complexity. This notion could be explored in a session of the group, for example, or in the individual sub-group meetings advocated by Agbaria and Cohen, above.

In his conclusion, Smock identifies principles that help determine the quality of the outcome of the dialogue process (129-130), some of which are similar to those of Abu-Nimer discussed earlier in this section. They are as follows:

- it needs to have a clear purpose

This is necessary so that the dialogue is goal-oriented and participants have an idea of what to expect and what to strive for.

- the right participants must be selected: those who are sincerely committed to peace and who are good listeners; who are ready to hear the stories and convictions of the other; who are well-positioned to influence their own communities outside of the dialogue group

In the above point, Smock articulates the opinion of leaders of MJ and Shalom-Salaam, whose group is by invitation only. Both groups make an effort to exclude extremists and focus on moderate views. The MDG, on the other hand, is open to all, and the leaders in fact encourage people with extreme views to come to the group, in order to expose them to different perspectives that they might not come across in their own communities.

- smaller groups tend to be more productive than larger ones

Sefian echoed Smock's point, above, after resigning from the MDG. Her assessment was that the group had grown too large to function effectively. Indeed, many respondents in the MDG said that their most powerful experiences in the group had occurred when they broke into smaller dialogue groups. In my assessment, a balance must be struck in each group between the diversity and dynamism made possible within a larger group, and the depth and intimacy afforded by a smaller group.

- intrafaith/intragroup dialogue is also important

This point was discussed earlier in this chapter.

- imbalances in power among the groups must be addressed

Sefian's assessment of the MDG post-resignation was that the group had failed to address the imbalances in power between the two parties within the group, and that this had contributed to a lack of confidence in and comfort with the group by the Arab participants. This opinion is corroborated by the research of Agbaria and Cohen: "In some instances where facilitators fail to address the dynamics of power, we have noticed that those with less power simply withdraw their energy from the group. They might avoid attending sessions, or remain emotionally aloof while physically present. This kind

of withdrawal clearly reflects a sense of powerlessness, and inevitably undermines the work of the group" (7).

From my observation, there is more of an imbalance in sheer numbers rather than a power imbalance in the MDG. However, it could be argued that a numerical imbalance leads inevitably to a power imbalance to some degree. Yarosky acknowledged this to be the case, when she said that "if there are 50 people present and 40 of them are Jews and only ten of them are Arabs, there will be more Jewish voices heard than Arab voices...". The MDG is currently striving to overcome its numerical imbalance, which may in itself address the power dynamics problems in the group.

- both similarities and differences must be explored

From my observation, this occurs in all three groups.

- time must be devoted to healing and acknowledging collective and individual injuries; telling and listening to personal stories of suffering

This occurs most often in the MDG, and in my experience, such sessions constitute the backbone of the MDG experience. According to my respondents, sessions in which participants get to tell and hear personal stories of suffering are among their most profoundly affecting dialogue group experiences.

- misperceptions and stereotypes must be addressed

This also occurs frequently in the MDG.

- dialogue must aim to build relationships between individuals and communities over time

This is best exemplified by MJ, mostly because it is by far the longest-running of the three groups at over eight years, but also because of the ties the group has forged between the Muslim and Jewish communities of Montreal.

- each side must recognize their own sins and shortcomings

From my observations, this is something that participants on both sides desire greatly to see from the 'other', but are very reluctant to do themselves.

- apology and forgiveness are important

As noted in Chapter Six, many respondents from the MDG noted an instance in which an Israeli member apologized to a Palestinian member as one of their most memorable and affective moments in the dialogue group, and one that exemplified the power of the dialogue group in facilitating mutual recognition, respect and healing.

- the process should seek to achieve greater consensus about divisive issues

This has occurred most visibly in Shalom-Salaam, where members note that there has been significant rapprochement between the members on divisive issues, to the extent that they often agree on points that would have been controversial at an earlier period of the group's existence.

- dialogue must go beyond building relationships, to address the political, structural and justice issues underlying the conflict

Some respondents complained that the MDG and MJ are not fulfilling this need adequately.

- dialogue can teach participants conflict resolution skills

Some members of the MDG noted that they developed better communication skills through participating in the group, which can help with conflict resolution. However,

here Smock is referring to members being formally trained in conflict resolution, which may be something for the groups to explore.

- it is helpful to identify the peacebuilding resources within participants' faith and cultural traditions

I did not observe this happening very much in any of the three groups. Rabbi Jonathan Magonet agrees with Smock; he writes that dialogue between Muslims and Jews should "jointly promote the moral and ethical codes that underpin our two traditions" (176). For Magonet, this means engaging together in the national struggle against racism in general, and working together as Jews, Arabs and Muslims through special interest groups to promote our common concerns. He advocates more communication and participation in each others' communities, from contributing to each others' newspapers to joint media-monitoring (176-177). MJ fulfills this to some degree, in making public statements against racism and prejudice in their community in response to specific events, such as the Talmud Torah firebombing.

Hewstone and Brown list four factors that augment the benefits of intergroup contact (23-27):

1) **Superordinate goals**: This term is defined as a goal which neither group can attain on its own and which supercedes other goals each group may have. One is not enough; a series of cumulative superordinate goals has been found to be necessary. More positive results were noted when the roles of the two groups in fulfilling the goal were distinct and separate, rather than similar. Thus, it is most effective to take care to maintain rather than blur intergroup distinctiveness.

The MDG has superordinate goals in the production of special projects and events such as the annual Peace Concert, which members work together to organize and run.

2) **Cooperation**: Studies have shown that cooperation can have very effective results in improving intergroup relationships.

Again, this occurs in the planning and running of special projects and events.

3) **Cross-cutting categories**: When individuals owe loyalty or allegiance to more than one group, there is less conflict on the whole between the groups. This can be exploited in intergroup contact sessions. The example given is that people can identify with their ethnic group, their gender group, their occupational group, etc.

The benefits of this factor was noted by one of my Palestinian respondents, who said that one of the things that led her to start to identify with and to trust some of the Jewish women in the group was the fact that in talking to one another, they realized their common concerns as mothers.

4) **Manipulation of 'expectation states'**: The operating principle is that efforts should be made to dismantle preconceptions and expectations by equal distribution of power in the group, in spite of the possible unequal distribution of power outside the group. In this way, those not normally in leadership positions can take the fore and those who usually lead must adopt a lower profile role.

Again, this is an issue of properly handling the power dynamics of the group, as is discussed by Agbaria and Cohen, and by Sefian in regards to the MDG.

3-B) On the need for more than just talk: a) joint acts of apology and reconciliation, b) social action

A conclusion shared by many of the scholars examined in this study as well as some of my respondents is that dialogue efforts that go beyond talk to take on joint projects or activities can be much more powerful than talk alone. Smock argues that groups should take on symbolic acts of apology, such as Jews helping to rebuild Palestinian houses demolished by the IDF, and Arabs mourning Jews killed in political violence. Along with dialogue, such deeds can powerfully transform relationships, Smock concludes (131).

Marc Gopin takes a similar position, in writing that dialogue between Arabs and Jews should incorporate 'symbolic actions' rather than just talking alone, since in his view both cultures focus more on deeds than on words (79). As such, the MDG fits Gopin's ideal in that it incorporates shared activities and rituals (although not charity or social action-oriented, as he recommends, thus far) along with regular dialogue.

To Jaco Cilliers, whose article is discussed in Chapter One, dialogue itself cannot be valuable unless it is followed with concrete action to transform the situation of injustice underlying the conflict. "Ideally," he writes, "interfaith dialogue should be supported through peacebuilding efforts that focus on how the parties can transform the conflicts" (in Smock 50). Dialogue groups, he says, must address the situations of injustice between the parties, who first have to acknowledge the injustice issues internally, before meeting with the other party, and identify the conceptual supports for peacemaking from within their own traditions (in ibid 51). They must address the underlying causes of the conflict, and establish a comprehensive plan for both short and

long-term transformation, cooperation and relationships with the other; to establish what Lederach terms an "infrastructure of peace" (quoted in Smock 57).

In sum, Cilliers writes that by including in the dialogue process elements from conflict transformation and peacebuilding theory and practice, groups can significantly increase their chances of making their dialogue constructive (in ibid. 58).

This is similar to the views articulated by Sefian after her resignation from the MDG, as stated in Annex Three. Sefian said that the fruits of dialogue would be lost if they were not taken back into the families and communities of the dialogue participants. This argument is also made by Agbaria and Cohen. Ideally, Sefian said, those who had been affected by their dialogue experience would work to address the issues of the conflict outside the dialogue group.

My research supports the above scholars' assertions. From my respondents' comments, as well as the activist respondents' criticism of dialogue groups, I found that it is very important for all the groups to take a more active and visible role in the community at large, by taking on or participating in social action projects and more community education and outreach. This can contribute to members' sense of achieving tangible results and making a visible contribution to their society and communities as a group. Also, as Agbaria and Cohen note (11), it helps people actualize and concretize the new understandings and views that they have developed in the dialogue group, which promotes the sustainability of the changes participants have undergone, as well as the spreading of this changed mentality to others.

4) Dialogue obstacles

Ben-Ari and Amir note several conditions that can stand in the way of productive intergroup contact, which are very pertinent to this discussion:

1) lack of clear, specific and short-term goals (as opposed to long-range, utopian goals).

2) lack of focus in programming: too much variation in programming or too much material being covered can lead to a superficial level of contact that fails to deepen.

3) lack of continuity: a large proportion of contacts are one-time events that do not allow for the necessary process of evolution and development to occur.

4) not enough care is taken to preparing participants prior to contact, to help determine their initial attitudes when meeting the other.

5) not establishing sufficient levels of trust before dealing with explosive issues.

The authors discuss the limitations of the impact of intergroup contact in Israel on the actual conflict situation, but argue that contact at the micro (interpersonal) level can have positive, if indirect effects on the macro (political/societal) level (55).

Jonathan Magonet also writes about dialogue obstacles, which he divides into several stages (175). The first stage involves the problem that the participants may still be talking to "the folks back home" (their communities) rather than to their dialogue partner: "they fear they may be seen as betraying their own community, so have to present all the issues that have divided them in the past. If the partner reacts similarly things may end up worse than before the dialogue began" (175). One of my Palestinian respondents voiced this very concern, saying that when she first started coming to the group, she felt the need to be very confrontational in an effort to not betray her community by sympathizing with or being too accepting of the Jews in the group: "I was there to be confrontational,

making sure people heard me, because there weren't many Palestinians, only me sometimes. ... I would know what the Palestinians would say if they were there, so I would say it, as a representative of that group, and I was antagonizing people, I knew that".

The second phase involves meeting as 'people' rather than as representatives of their communities, and beginning to forge mutual trust, respect and friendship (175). The same Palestinian respondent in fact expresses a journey from the first to second phases:

"I asked myself, 'if I want to really contribute, how can I do so in a way that is real and authentic?'. So I started experimenting in the group. I said, 'let's try saying the truth [expressing my own personal feelings]'. So we had this [writing] exercise. I decided not to hide anything, to answer very honestly. I was the only Palestinian in my group. And they [the other group members] were shocked. All of a sudden a space opened up, I was being seen in a new way. ... I know I can stand in front of people and point a finger, and tell them what their government has being doing, and yet if I put that on the side, what is another option that I can do? I wanted to get out of this [polarization] of your view and my view. The politicians can talk about the peace process... but if you sit with a human being and you start really talking and really connecting, without necessarily going into the rights and wrongs, even though that's a huge part of it, it's a humanizing experience".

The third stage involves trying to convince their own communities that the dialogue is legitimate and that it has achieved things of value. This is essential, writes Magonet. According to my respondents, there is reluctance to do so because dialogue

participants often face criticism and negativity from their communities about their participation in dialogue with the 'other'.

Magonet notes several other factors that are critical to successful dialogue. It is of key importance to establish a "level ground" for the encounter, he writes. It is the responsibility of the more powerful partner to ensure that appropriate conditions are created (175).

Also important is the ability for each group to be self-critical. However, Magonet writes that it is the responsibility of the more powerful or secure group to make the first step in this regard (174).

Dialogue should "jointly promote the moral and ethical codes that underpin our two traditions" (174). For Magonet, this means engaging together in the national struggle against racism in general, and working together as Jews, Arabs and Muslims through special interest groups to promote our common concerns. He advocates more communication and participation in each others' communities, from contributing to each others' newspapers to joint media-monitoring (176-177).

According to Ronald Young, Jews have to confront the other side of the often-idealized story of Israel's creation. They must face the moral issues of Israel's nascence (in Smock 66).

Arabs and Muslims face entirely different obstacles to getting involved with dialogue, according to Young. In his view, they are wary of getting involved with dialogue at all, because their communities are still in the process of gaining public recognition and acceptance. There is a fear that taking a stand on an issue of great

controversy, in which public opinion is predominantly against them, will be counterproductive in terms of integrating and being accepted into American society (66).

Other reasons not to get involved with dialogue with Jews is that it brings up painful personal history; that it is hard to be sympathetic to Jewish concerns when Palestinians are still suffering from oppression by the Israelis; and wariness of voicing any self-criticism for fear of furthering the negative view of Arabs and Muslims that predominates in the U.S. (67-68).

5) Religion and Dialogue

No peace among the nations

Without peace among the religions.

No peace among the religions

Without dialogue between the religions.

No dialogue between the religions

Without investigation of the foundations of the religions.

-Hans Kung[6]

I was curious to find out if the advantages or strengths of religious dialogue over non-religious, that are proposed by several of the dialogue theorists examined in Chapter One, were accurate. According to my respondents as well as my own observations of the groups, they apply to the groups studied.

In the MDG, I found that the shared ritual activities such as the interfaith Passover seder and the Ramadan iftar were very popular and appreciated by the attendees. It was

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[6] Quoted in Magonet 19.

partly because these events allow people to socialize more informally than in the dialogue group sessions, but also because of the sharing of activities that have deep meaning and significance for some people in the group, and that are a significant part of their identity. These activities can also be a source of beauty and pride for the people to whom the traditions belong, and a source of understanding and respect for the 'outsiders' welcomed in to share the traditions.

Religious dialogue is also important because of the point that Gopin mentions: that religion can be a peacemaking tool based on the 'prosocial values' found within religious texts and traditions (Gopin 8). This was corroborated by my respondents, many of whom indicated that they felt their religions supported dialogue through such things as calling upon us as human beings to treat all human beings with respect, and to seek peace above all things.[7]

Another writer who sees specific advantages of religious dialogue over non-religious is David Smock. Smock makes several strong assertions on this point. First, that interfaith dialogue can help with conflict resolution even when religion is not a central issue in the conflict in question, because it "enables people of faith to live out what most faith traditions consider as a sacred duty to be peacemakers" (Smock 127). This point was also articulated by many of my respondents, whose statements in the previous chapter show the connections they make between the moral and ethical imperatives of their religious traditions and their participation in dialogue.

Smock also argues that interfaith dialogue has greater potential for deeper and more meaningful engagement than secular dialogue because of "the possibility for spiritual encounter", which in turn may "enhance the participants' commitment to peace

work and social change", while the use of sacred texts in dialogue gives it a "deeper level of authenticity" (128). I feel that I can't make definitive judgements on this from my limited study of dialogue groups. I found that the 'religious' activities in the MDG did provide a setting conducive to meaningful and positive social interactions, and some of my respondents listed them as among their most impressive or memorable dialogue group activities. However, I do not know whether my respondents' religious background has anything to do with their commitment to peace work and social change. It is true for the religious members, but there are secular members who are equally committed to social and political transformation.

As for Smock's assertion that the use of sacred texts gives the dialogue a 'deeper level of authenticity', I think this is true for participants who are religious themselves only. My respondents in the Muslim-Jewish dialogue group would agree with it, as well as the religiously observant members of Shalom-Salaam and the MDG. However, almost all my respondents from the MDG felt that the non-religious dialogue of their group took place on a very authentic, genuine level. Many cited the presentations of the intimate life-experience of other members as very transformative and powerfully affective experiences.

Another advantage of religious dialogue noted by Abu-Nimer is the possibility of creating a common, unique "third culture" through the blending of the rituals or concepts of both groups' faith traditions, or the communal creation of new rituals (in Smock 18). This occurred in the MDG, which incorporates some religious elements into the activities of the group, namely, around the seasonal holidays of both Islam and Judaism. The Passover seder that I attended, in April 2005, showed elements of the "third culture"

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[7] See section on Religion and Dialogue in Chapter 7.

described by Abu-Nimer, in the inclusion of new text into the ritual, written specifically for the context of the dialogue group. The new aspects focused on universal and particular concepts, such as the struggle for freedom and justice for all peoples, and the liberation of prisoners, both metaphoric and actual.[8]

Abu-Nimer writes that religious identity is one of the most powerful sources in shaping attitudes and actions in conflict zones, and that the spiritual, moral and ethical components of any religious identity are powerful sources for generating change (in Smock 29). Gopin, as well as some of my respondents, also note that religion, while not a central issue of some political battles such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, still affect the situation because the conflict gets articulated in religious terminology and ideology by the people involved.[9]

6) Activism and Dialogue

Abu-Nimer writes that dialogue is not a substitute for social action (in Smock 15). This was one of the points of contention articulated by my respondents who opposed dialogue. These respondents were all activists, who see dialogue as ineffectual at best and a distraction from more important work towards achieving justice and peace in Israel and Palestine.

Abu-Nimer echoes what my respondents told me, in writing that dialoguers are often accused of giving up the fight against injustice (in Smock 15). Abu-Nimer's argument is against the presumption that dialogue is supposed to be the be-all and end-all of peacemaking efforts. He acknowledges the importance of social action. "Protest and

[8] See Seder handout in Appendix B.
[9] See Gopin 14 and my Chapter 7, section on Religion and Dialogue.

resistance to oppression are still needed for social and political change to occur," he writes. "However, dialogue provides an additional path on which to accomplish such changes" (ibid., 16).

One of my respondents who makes both dialogue and activism a big part of his life articulated this same opinion. His thoughts on the importance and value of both dialogue and activism are detailed in Chapter Eight.

Summary

Each of the three groups is structured according to their needs and intentions, which vary from group to group. According to my observations, periodic self-evaluation is very important. Groups must assess whether or not their structure and methodology is meeting their current needs, as they evolve and progress.

At this point, in the MDG for instance, they are undergoing considerable restructuring, based on separating the group into sub-groups according to people's specific areas of interest. Group leaders had noticed a problematic level of passivity by the members of the group, many of whom had also complained that the group was not addressing their own needs and concerns. The smaller group divisions have encouraged members to take a more active role in conceiving of, developing and organizing their group's program.

MJ is a closed group, but they appear to have the intent of broadening their horizons and widening their impact, with their plan to hold a conference this Fall (2006). While it will not be open to the public per se, the group will invite over 100 people from the Jewish and Muslim communities to come and hear about the dialogue group and the building of relations between the two communities.

Shalom-Salaam continues on in a salon-type atmosphere of comfortable friends. At some point last year, members tell me, interest seemed to be waning and it was proposed that the group suspend its activities. However, there was such an outcry from some members that the group has continued on.

All three groups want to have an impact on the larger community. All three have made positive steps in this direction. The MDG does so with its interfaith celebrations, its annual Peace Concerts, the art exhibit and the public speeches by group leaders in universities and schools. Shalom-Salaam has also made presentations in universities and colleges which may be taken up again in future. MJ's press statements and contribution to anti-racism campaigns, as well as the planned conference, are examples of their community outreach efforts.

All three groups have been led 'by the heart', that is, by non-professional dialoguers who are guided by personal interest rather than dialogue theory. However, it is interesting to see that all three groups have successfully incorporated many of the elements advocated by dialogue specialists in the studies examined in this chapter, to varying degrees.

CHAPTER 8 - Opposition to Dialogue Groups

During my study of dialogue groups, I came across individuals from both the Jewish and Arab communities who were either very critical of or opposed to Arab-Jewish dialogue groups. These individuals happened to all be members of activist groups PAJU and SPHR (described in Chapter 2); groups in which Palestinians, Arabs, Jews and others join together to work on a common political and legal platform (defense of Palestinian human rights and an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories), doing activism and education for this cause.

Since these are people with a high level of knowledge and implication in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the issues surrounding it, I was very interested to find out why they are opposed to or critical of dialogue efforts. I interviewed a Jewish member of PAJU and heard from several Palestinian members of SPHR. Below, I offer their arguments against dialogue initiatives, and the responses by dialogue leaders and participants, including one dialogue participant who is also very active in Palestinian solidarity work.

1) Palestinian opposition

A good example and summary of Palestinian opposition to dialogue was provided to me by some members of SPHR who attended the inaugural meeting of a student dialogue group at Concordia on November 20th, 2005. I will explain what happened in the meeting, and provide a summary and quotes from my conversation with SPHR members following the meeting.

The Concordia dialogue group was organized by members of Hillel (Jewish student association) and the ASA (Arab Student Association). The SPHR members present requested to all assembled that before starting the dialogue, all present would sign a document that they had produced, which stated:

> "We, the undersigned, do hereby recognize that international law, such as but not limited to the Fourth Geneva Convention and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, applies equally to all people including Palestinian and Israeli people. We acknowledge that the recognition of these laws constitutes the basis for a productive and meaningful dialogue in the hopes of conflict resolution and mutual understanding."

Much heated discussion ensued, and the group refused to sign the document as a condition for dialogue. The dialogue then took place, with some SPHR members staying participating, and others leaving partway through.

The SPHR members argued that productive, meaningful and respectful dialogue requires a foundation, and that this foundation must be the recognition by all dialogue partners of the full equal humanity and equal rights of all peoples. As one respondent said before the group,

> "The point is, we want to recognize that everybody here is a human being, and that the Geneva Convention and the UN Declaration of Human Rights applies to everyone, with no exception, period. That's the only thing that makes me an equal human being in this world, legally. So once you acknowledge that, then we can move forward. We can dialogue about everything: the different narratives, for example, once we have this framework, that we are all equal human beings that

have equal rights. If we cannot agree to this, I am not willing to negotiate or dialogue about my humanity. I have to first be acknowledged as an equal human being who has full equal rights, and then we can discuss everything else. So if people are not willing to sign this paper, then I am willing to leave, and I believe you'll have no Palestinians left in this room."

A large majority of the people in the room expressed support for the principle and concerns expressed in the document, that is, of recognizing one another as fully equal before dialoguing. However, the majority were unwilling to sign a document that would place a precondition on the dialogue. Some individuals argued that dialogue should be open to and encourage everyone to participate, regardless of their beliefs or views. In fact, to dialogue organizers such as Nada Sefian, who was present that night, those with extreme and prejudiced views should be greatly encouraged to participate, in order for them to widen their perspective and become sensitized to the common humanity and equality of the 'other'. According to the results of my study, this has in fact occurred within the groups, as my respondents attested.

However, this was only one among a variety of arguments presented against signing the document as a precondition to dialogue. Organizers argued that the international laws and conventions listed in the document were controversial and much more complex than what was presented in the document, and as such could not form a precondition for dialogue. Furthermore, an organizer said, "it is not fair for us [as cultural associations and organizers] to take a stand one way or the other on an issue that's contentious to people that are here to talk about it. And we certainly can't ask anyone else to sign this."

SPHR members said that to come and dialogue with people who don't see you as an equal is on the one hand, demeaning and insulting, and on the other hand, counterproductive: instead of moving towards common understanding and joint problem-solving, we are regressing in history to a time before the equality of all humans was formally recognized. As one respondent asked me:

> "Would you, knowing that a person is completely sexist, be willing to sit and prove to him your basic rights, or would you find it insulting to be even arguing these basic points? We passed through this, sexism, 50 years ago - we don't need to go back there. Or Black people arguing that they are equal. A discussion like that is going to lead you nowhere because we are going back in history. Why are we going back in history?"

The response to this point that I received from the leaders of the MDG was that while it is unfortunate that some people are prejudiced and don't recognize the equal humanity and rights of the 'other', this is a reality that must be faced, and that such people can be encouraged to learn to see the 'other' as equal by meeting and dialoguing with them. The data from my interviews indicates that this is the case - people's views do change through participating in dialogue.

However, the other argument of the SPHR members against dialogue was that even if it does work in humanizing the 'other', it is still a waste of time because the process is too slow, and the situation of suffering and the violation of the human rights of Palestinians is too acute to sit around and talk; more concrete action must be taken. This point is valid. The results of dialogue are slow to come and sometimes difficult to see, as respondents from the dialogue groups said. This does not negate the value of

dialogue groups, but rather indicates that it is not suitable for everyone, or for goals of a certain type. For activists such as the SPHR respondents, dialogue seems like 'just sitting around and talking while people are dying'.

The SPHR respondents did not condemn dialogue efforts outright; they did express recognition of dialogue's potential value. However, for them, dialogue is productive when it is about concrete, joint problem-solving in terms of coming up with a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and not about simply humanizing the 'other'. Dialogue must be goal-oriented and focus on concrete results. As one respondent put it:

"It should be a given that we're equal human beings to the Israelis. We should be talking about other stuff, like 'what is the solution'. Through this base [of recognition of international law and human rights], what is the solution to solving the occupation, bringing an end to it, rather than whether we are equal human beings or not."

Another respondent said:

"Yes, there is value in having a dialogue group, if the purpose is to achieve a result at the end, that is very important. Based on principles, then it's great. If dialogue is just to sit and listen to the other person's opinion, I think it's a waste of time because I already know the other person's perspective. Both groups already know what the other thinks.

I spoke to the professor who made a presentation [at the Concordia dialogue session], and his perspective was that everyone is entitled to their own narrative, and that their narrative is right. Which is wrong! Me having to listen to this narrative, and accept it, and not argue about it, … the way that they presented it is

that *this* is dialogue, that you should not try to argue and convince the other side. Well then why the hell am I here? If I'm not trying to convince the other side, then why am I here?...

For us, the narratives are not the most pressing issue. The most pressing issue is bringing an end to the occupation, and recognition by the occupier that the occupation is problematic; that it goes against international law, the declaration of human rights, and against the 4th Geneva Convention. So it's an issue of priorities. It's very easy for this professor, who is sitting in Canada, and who is not connected to the Palestinian struggle, to come and dialogue and discuss, but it's not the same when you are a Palestinian."

Other SPHR members who attended that particular dialogue session had problems with the way it was organized in general. Some objected to the fact that the presentation of the Palestinian narrative was made by an Egyptian rather than by a Palestinian. They also objected to what they saw as a denial of the inherent power imbalance between the two sides, in presenting each side's narrative as equally valid and true, and each side's suffering as equal. This, they say, is a denial of the actual situation in Israel/Palestine, of occupier and occupied, oppressor and oppressed. As one SPHR activist said,

"It's like asking a concentration camp inmate to come and dialogue with his Nazi jailer, to see his common humanity and to sympathize with his suffering."

In sum, the individuals whose perspectives I have just presented are all Palestinian and either immigrants themselves to Canada, or first-generation Canadians. Their level of identification with and implication in the conflict in question is very high.

They are all very passionate and goal-oriented on this issue. They are also all young; in their early 20s to early 30s. What this suggests to me is that the higher one's personal interest or stake in the conflict is, the more difficult it is to either value or participate in dialogue on this topic, either because of a belief in the inherent flaws of the endeavor, a lack of belief in the value of dialogue itself, or because it seems too slow a process when one's interests and goals are very pressing. It is in fact much easier for me, as a Canadian Jew, to dialogue with Palestinians, than it is for the Israelis in the MDG whose perspectives I heard. And this was equally true with my Palestinian respondents.

As the youngest of the SPHR respondents, an 18-year-old respondent said, "My experience with dialogue was that it was nice; you feel like you're sitting around having a conversation, but you don't feel like you're accomplishing anything.You're just listening to people and talking, and that's it – there's no point; we're not arriving to a common point or a common opinion, so we didn't accomplish anything. I'm glad that I'm out of there, for good."

Another respondent said: "I don't want to waste this much time and energy on [dialogue], because there are more important things, like getting the general public to acknowledge the occupation."

2) Jewish opposition

I interviewed a Jewish member of PAJU (Palestinians and Jews United, explained in Chapter 2). J8 is a secular Jew, who does not identify with the Jewish community at all: "...the only people that I am involved with, because we're Jewish, is people who are anti-Zionist, in activist groups..."

J8 has never taken part in a formal dialogue group. She has quite a high level of contact with Palestinians and Arabs through her activism, from student SPHR activists to older refugees whose deportation she fights to stop. J8 has also spent months on several occasions doing humanitarian work in the Palestinian territories.

The issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, like many of my dialogue group respondents, a big part of her life:

> "It's very close to me. I think what has been done to the Palestinians is a grave injustice and I think it's because I'm Jewish that I feel implicated and I want to do my little bit, whatever I can, to educate people who are here about it, and demonstrate and all kinds of educating things that we do. I feel it's a very big part of my life, and it's also a big emotional part."

Many of her reservations about or objections to dialogue, listed below, are the same as were expressed by the Palestinian SPHR members presented earlier in this chapter.

1) It would be a "waste of time" to try to convince the Jewish community of her anti-Zionist views, which she does not think is possible: "It's just not worthwhile for me to address the Jewish community and try to change them. If we had time, yes, but people are dying every day. ... It just takes so long to change people's minds."

2) It does not appeal to her as a format because she likes to be "more activist and militant".

3) The power imbalance between Jews and Palestinians in the real world is duplicated in the dialogue group, with the Zionist Jews dominating the group. She mentioned two

incidents in the MDG in which some Jewish members of the group tried to prevent Jewish speakers critical of Israel from making presentations to the group.

4) Even good people abuse the dialogue group by using it as a way to ease their consciences without "really facing" the conflict; that is, acknowledging the suffering of the Palestinians because of the occupation and working to end it.

5) She is already sensitized to the 'other'; she doesn't need to humanize them, and she is already aware of their narrative and perspective.

6) Grassroots initiatives to bring together common people from the two sides have limited value and impact. What is required is an institutional-level, political solution: "Politics is politics and countries are not people. And ideologies like Zionism, they're not people, they act in political ways... I see [dialogue having value] in families, the personal realm or on the job... But [this conflict] is a political problem, and nothing but political will, a real will to peace and justice will solve it."

J8 sees her activism as a manifestation of Jewish values, as opposed to the actions of the State of Israel, whose very existence, she says, goes against Jewish belief and tradition:

> "...the really religious [Jewish] groups like the Neturei Karta, who reject Zionism, interpret it that the idea of a state is meant more metaphorically, that it pertains to the whole world, and the Jews are supposed to be a light unto other people. I'm not religious, but I think it's very destructive of real Jewish values like... 'Do unto others...' ... That's why I say to me they're not Jews, they're Israelis. To me, Jews don't have a country."

3) Response from Dialogue Group Leaders (MDG)

On the question of the futility of trying to convince Zionist Jews of their point of view, Ronit Yarosky responded that it can in fact have an impact because the Jewish lobby is very powerful and if you can shift somewhat the Jewish opinion, you can have a very powerful political effect. As she said,

> "When you look at all the Jewish communities in the diaspora, who are voting for their governements, and those government, especially in the US, are pretty much dictating policy in the Middle East, if all the Jewish people in the United States tomorrow all of a sudden became very pro-Palestinian, and all of a sudden thought like me, I think the situation would change. ...people wouldn't be lobbying if it didn't have an effect.

> The Jewish lobby wouldn't be strong as it is, and it wouldn't be such an effective machine, if it didn't have an effect. And Jews are not going to lobby for Palestinians if they don't see them as human beings, and if they don't see their cause as just, and so saying we're wasting our time with these people... if all the Jews in Montreal thought the Palestinians were worth advocating for, they'd pressure their community leaders to do it."

Nada Sefian responds to the criticism against dialoguing with ignorant or prejudiced people:

> "My only answer to these [SPHR activists] is that I believe strongly that the Palestinian cause is also on a moral level: it's about injustice. So for me, I have no problem talking about the injustice that has been done to the Palestinians in the past and that is being done now. I take it as a chance to speak, to [educate] these people.

What the activists are waiting for is to get a result. I don't like to ask these people, "you know I've told you the truth now, so come with me." I find it immoral to ask this. It's not up to me, it's up to them, to their conscience. Because I've been confronted with this, many a time from Jewish people, who told me and still tell me, "What do you want from us? What is your agenda? Do you want to change us?" And I keep telling them, "You know what? This is not up to me. If you think that you want to change, it's up to you. If you don't want to change, you will always be my friend. My message to you is a message of shared humanity, and not an obligation to do something. Even a Palestinian: how can I oblige him to stand for the rights of Palestinians? There are many, many Arabs and Palestinians who don't do anything. And I can't oblige them. It's up to them, to their conscience. So it's the same with a Canadian, with a Jew."

Both leaders state that mutual recognition as equals is crucial to ending the conflict, and in fact that resolution depends upon it. For this reason, working towards mutual empathy and recognition in the dialogue group is essential work in obtaining a just ending to the conflict. As Yarosky says: "The conflict will not continue the moment the Israelis feel the Palestinians are equal to them in humanity. It can't continue after that recognition takes place!"

On the criticism that dialogue is a dead-end unless it is working towards a political goal or agenda, Sefian disagrees, on the grounds that changing people's views is a precursor to broad public support for change. Her argument is that if the group had a platform or agenda, many of the people who can benefit most from coming to a dialogue group would be turned off from coming. Yarosky echoes this sentiment, and states:

"...we have members who to my mind are right wing who come and keep coming."

As for the problem of talking to people who don't recognize you as an equal, Sefian responds that dialogue is a challenging process, but that it can and does change people's views:

"I can feel their [the activists'] frustration. But if we will stay at this stage of frustration, and not opening a dialogue with someone like A [a Zionist Jew in the MDG]... We are human beings, after all. I will be influenced and he will be influenced, and this goes both ways. I have learned a lot from my Jewish counterparts. ...the contact with the other on the human level, you learn a lot. And so I'm not expecting from A who supports strongly the State of Israel, to change from one side to the other, and I want him to continue to support the State of Israel. But let him support a state that is better, a state that recognizes the human rights of the other.

...you're dealing with human beings, not chemical matter, and maybe A, who's like this today, will be different tomorrow. Maybe he'll change, and become a great supporter of two democratic states. I mean, everything is liable to change.

...this is a very subtle, long-term movement, and it goes very very far. It's very easy to go to demonstrations, write a letter, send it to the MP – this is activism that I have done. But it is limited. But here you are dealing with more. Take someone like [she names three Israeli members of the dialogue group]. These people, they had never had the chance of meeting with Arab, Muslim people before. I am sure that these people have changed, changed the way they look at us. And I'm sure, for many Arab people in the group, they have changed also in the way they look at

Jewish and Israeli people. ... Those who keep coming, we get very positive comments from them. And they keep saying that they are learning a lot. Whether they are Muslims, Christians or Jewish people. And that's why you see these people coming again and again and again."

On the subject of the denial of the power imbalance that exists between Israelis and Palestinians because of the situation of occupier/occupied, etcetera, Sefian responds: "As a human being, you have to empathize with the other. I think especially in our case, as Jews and Palestinians, with a history of past suffering, we need to understand this suffering, we need to know about it, we need to empathize on both sides, not only on one side, and without this, we can't continue. I can't be here, a Palestinian, who denies the suffering of the Jewish people, who denies the Holocaust, who denies the past suffering, I cannot continue, I cannot make an evolution in things if I don't empathize with my partner, even with my oppressor. I have to understand his past history.

I feel the same way about it that I felt in Lebanon, when I had these discussions. I felt that these Christians at that time, they had the power, they were the oppressors. But nevertheless, I felt real, deep empathy towards these people because I understood and I felt their real fear. And this is very difficult – it's very psychologically demanding. It's too demanding for many people."

Yarosky agrees, and gives herself as an example of someone whose views have been profoundly changed through dialogue. She also challenges the idea that dialogue is less effective than activism in achieving meaningful change:

"I try to communicate as much as I can, as a Jewish person, how this kind of dialogue has made me very much pro-Palestinian. At the same time, it didn't make me anti-Israel. You can be both, I think, pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian. But I wasn't pro-Palestinian before. And it's only through talking to Palestinians and hearing their stories and their personal accounts, from a very personal point of view, that I have been able to change and metamorphosize into the person I am now, because I certainly didn't start out this way, that's for sure.

I think the Jewish people who aren't going to stand in the Friday vigil outside the Israeli consulate (and that's the vast majority of Jewish people), this is the most important thing to my mind that Palestinians can do to forward their cause. And it's the same thing for the Israelis. Often, Palestinians don't understand or believe that Israelis are scared. They say 'what are you talking about - you have the fourth largest army in the world, so why are you scared, it's all in your heads'... but Israelis are really scared, whether it's based on reality or not, they're really scared. And so having this kind of interaction is the most important thing that we can do.

... In order [to change the minds of people] who think like I used to think, the SPHR is not going to help, it's not going to do it. The lobbying is not going to do it. The signs and the demonstrations and the breaking windows at Concordia is for sure not going to do it. And I think all those things, in fact probably often times have the opposite effect.

Putting a Jewish person in front of a Palestinian person and letting them talk to one another, letting them understand that the other person is a human being, and that person's father came from Haifa, or Ashkelon, or wherever, and that this key

that they're holding is not just some propaganda tool, but that it's the actual key to their parents' house that someone else is now living in… that's what's going to change people's opinions. And I agree that it's awful. It's awful that that conversation, about proving that they're equal human beings, has to take place. But it does need to take place."

4) Response from an activist/dialogue participant

One of my respondents, A2, is both a longtime Palestinian rights activist and a longtime participant in Arab-Jewish dialogue groups. It could be argued that he, as an Egyptian who has been in Canada for over 15 years, is much less implicated in the conflict, and that this makes it easier for him to defend and value dialogue than it is for a Palestinian and especially one who has only recently left the Middle East to live in Canada. At the same time, A2 is very active on this cause, writing and making public presentations on the situation in the Palestinian territories, organizing demonstrations and public events to expose the Palestinian problem to the public, and lobbying politicians. Because of his implication in this issue, his defense of both dialogue and activism is a valuable contribution to this study.

A2 sees no conflict or contradiction between the two spheres of activity, that of activism and dialogue, because he says that they each provide him with specific things:

"Both are extremely different experiences. One of them, I am working for a cause that I believe is a good cause and I'm trying to achieve it. The other one, the cause is to understand the other, and to show the society that the only way is not to get at

each other's throat; that there are other ways to advance the issue as a whole

without converting the other to your point of view.

> So understanding the other, working with the other, being more confident in
>
> yourself by knowing the other's arguments and how to debate it without losing your
>
> composure; all of these things are on more of a personal level that is very different
>
> from going out and lobbying against Canada's support for Israel, for example."

A2 argues that taking part in dialogue is the best way to change people's prejudiced

views:

> "Your presence with them, your interaction with them on a human level, is the best
>
> way to convince [the 'other'] that you're a human being. So it's very true that
>
> maybe – nobody ever told it to me to my face – maybe after meeting with
>
> somebody for two years, if he or she did think that I'm a lesser human being in any
>
> way, consciously or subconsciously, or that Arabs are savages or whatever,
>
> however you want to put it, that must have changed. And that's [progress]."

On the question of whether dialogue can have any impact on the larger society, A2

responds in the same vein as the leaders of the MDG, earlier in this section:

> "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one conflict in my mind that is absolutely not
>
> regional. It is very much international. The support that Israel gets from abroad is
>
> [essential] to its existence. If you have a chance to make people in the Jewish
>
> community see the righteousness of your cause, then you've achieved something.
>
> People are discouraged that the change is one individual at a time. But even when I
>
> go to a demonstration downtown, I try to tell people that the goal of being here is
>
> not to say what we want to say, but it's to get somebody to understand what we're

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saying. Otherwise we're just going there for self-gratification. So I guess it's the same thing [in the dialogue group]."

He acknowledges that dialogue is not for everyone, but that it is valuable for some people, and thus that it deserves support even from people who don't want to take part:

"I think that opposing [dialogue] totally – and I give myself as an example – is not the right thing, because here I am: many of the people in the Palestinian and activist community know me personally, and they know that now, three years [since I began my involvement in dialogue], I'm still as much an activist as I was before. And these are very radical people, they see me first-hand.

I can only speak about myself and my experience. Maybe for other people it would have been different; maybe other people would have been "sucked in" to the dialogue group and believed that dialogue is an alternative to a solution, because as long as we are dialoguing, then there is no need to work for a solution: "Ah, it's solved! – we're here, together!". No. That's something I was very conscious of, from the beginning. It was on my mind, I did discuss it from the very first... I told [the friend who got me to participate in dialogue]: 'dialogue is not an alternative for a solution.' Dialogue has its own advantages, gratifications and benefits to me as an individual. There is no reason to be against it. If somebody tells me "it's not my style, I can't do it", okay, fine – to each his own."

A2 also contests the idea that dialogue involves giving in or softening to the other side:

"...listening to the other will not change you like, "Poof! – Impact", and you will be a different person tomorrow. It will actually help you be more rooted in your beliefs, in what you do, in your understanding of the issue as a whole."

In sum, to A2, both his activism and his dialogue activities are important and meaningful in their own way, and he sees no contradiction between the two spheres.

Summary

According to my informants, dialogue can achieve meaningful results but it is not for everyone. It appears that the more intimately one is connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the more difficult it is for one to want to dialogue, and to do the dialogue itself.

For people with a direct connection to the conflict, dialogue is not easy. There are many challenges in it such as those mentioned by the SPHR activists above, which they stated as reasons why they would not participate in dialogue:

- The lack of a base of recognition of all dialogue participants as being equals

- The equalization of the suffering of the two sides; a lack of recognition of the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians

- Having to listen to the pain of/ sympathize with one's oppressor

- Lack of confidence in dialogue's ability to achieve meaningful results

- The slowness of the process and the lack of immediate, visible results

- Other things are more important, like political lobbying and public education

- Not everyone's style/taste

My respondents from the dialogue groups who are very closely connected to the conflict named all of these problems or challenges as well. However, they continued to take part in dialogue - some are still active members of the MDG – so to them, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks or difficulties. This is not to belittle the concerns of the

dialogue critics, but only to suggest that dialogue is appropriate or beneficial for some and not for others.

For some of the activists I heard from, dialogue may be redundant. Since many of them work closely with members of the 'other' community and have friendships with them, there is no need to 'humanize' each other. Also, because they tend to be very informed about the conflict, they don't need a dialogue group in order to educate themselves about the background or issues involved. These two functions are the most immediate and outwardly visible and appreciable achievements of the dialogue group, and were mentioned frequently by my respondents as signs that the dialogue group was working well and achieving its goals.

For these activists, however, dialogue would need to be on a more sophisticated level, at which the results are less visible or obvious and a long-term involvement is required. This is the level which some respondents such as P4 noted, at which she came to understand what she called the Jewish fear, and could sympathize with the Israelis. This did not make her any less firm in her perspective as a Palestinian, but brought her a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the mentality of the 'other'. In her goal-oriented view, this kind of understanding of both sides' fears and mindset is very helpful in terms of finding and determining a solution to the conflict that will be successful, in that it will accommodate people's deep needs and concerns on both sides.

CHAPTER 9 - Conclusion

This study attempts to thoroughly understand and assess participants' experiences in dialogue groups. While it does incorporate dialogue theory, it primarily focuses on participants' personal experiences within the groups, to look at how dialogue has impacted their lives.

The study was motivated by my personal interest in Arab-Jewish dialogue, as a Jew. Without my personal engagement with the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I don't think I would have taken on this project in the first place. At the same time, my being a Jew with a high level of emotional engagement with this issue perhaps complicated the study. I raised this issue in my introduction, with reference to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of reflexive sociology. With Bourdieu in mind, I attempted to deconstruct my relationship to the group as a scholar, a Jew and an individual.

As a Jew, my position within the groups as a participant-observer was coloured by my identification with one of the dialogue parties over the other. I knew in a very personal way what it was like to be a Jew in the group, but I could only understand the Arab and Palestinian experience through my respondents. At the same time, one of the conclusions of this study is that there are more than two 'sides' in each of the dialogue groups. Rather, there are multiple perspectives within both the Arab and Jewish sides, and the groups involve intra-Jewish, Muslim and Arab dialogue as much as they involve dialogue between these different groups, although this fact is not always acknowledged or addressed in the groups. My personal experience as well as that of my respondents confirms this. To say that the groups are made up of only two sides is a

misrepresentation, and one that is sometimes made by participants themselves.
Sometimes there is resistance to acknowledging diversity within one's own 'camp'. Some
members of the MDG have complained about some members attempting to speak on
behalf of 'the Israelis' in the group, for instance. This indicates a need for intra-group
dialogue, the acknowledgement of intragroup diversity, and the respect for it within the
dialogue group meetings.

The dialogue experience was, for me, very personally affecting. My interest in the
groups came from a deep concern about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a feeling of
implication in it and a responsibility to try to understanding it as thoroughly as possible,
including the perspectives of people on the 'other' side. Like most of my respondents, I
had had little contact with the 'other' before I joined the groups and had a certain amount
of trepidation about meeting them, which had to do mostly with fear of being regarded as
'the enemy' or simply as a Jew, rather than as an individual. At the same time, I was very
eager to meet Palestinians and hear their personal stories and perspectives.

I participated in the groups over the course of two dialogue 'seasons', from the
Fall of 2004 to the Spring of 2005, and from the Fall of 2005 to the Spring of 2006. After
that point, my research continues, while this particular study has ended.

In the first season, I experienced, among other things, many of the characteristics
of Abu-Nimer's first and second phases of dialogue group participation: nervousness,
excitement at meeting the 'other', new understanding of the 'other's' perspective as well
as that of my own group, self-questioning, a breaking down of assumptions and
stereotypes about the other, and a feeling of empowerment resulting from all of the

above. My participation in the groups led me to read more and think more about the conflict.

Taking part in the group was often a very emotional experience for me, and it was sometimes hard to step back and try to analyze what was going on, because I felt too implicated. At the MDG, I often hesitated to speak up, both out of shyness and fear of being judged, but also as part of my effort to be more of an observer than a participant, for the sake of my research. Outside the MDG, I often did not feel capable of answering people's questions about my experience in the group because I myself was still in the process of trying to understand it. After two seasons as a participant-observer studying the dialogue groups, I still wasn't sure how to respond when people asked me if I thought the dialogue groups were effective and what they were achieving. It was only after sifting through my interview data that the picture began to emerge, and to develop quite clearly.

Yes, I can say confidently now, the dialogue groups are changing people's lives. From allowing people from the Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities to come in contact with each other and meet in a non-superficial way; to be able to discuss meaningful issues with one another in a safe environment, to have guidelines for dialogue that emphasize listening, non-judgment and compassion; to be able to share personal histories, opinions and feelings that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to share; to learn more, through the presentations, on the issues relevant to the conflict; to have productive and often heated yet mostly respectful debate; all are things the dialogue groups have achieved.

Participants have made friends, improved their communication skills, gained understanding of and respect for the 'other', broken down stereotypes and negative

images of the 'other', had their assumptions challenged and sometimes dismantled, gained knowledge about the issues of the conflict, and been stimulated and inspired by the group presentations and discussions.

Group leaders point out the community ties that have been fostered, established and reinforced through the dialogue groups. From joint press releases and responses to local and international events, to presentations before university and community groups, to joint anti-racism tasks forces and mutual-aid for development projects, the groups have initiated or contributed to the betterment of relations between the individuals and communities involved, and provided a foundation for more cooperation in the future.

Why are people coming to dialogue? There are many different reasons, as discussed in Chapter Six. Predominantly people come to make their voices heard and to listen to the voices of others. Why do they want to share their stories and opinions? Motives vary. From a desire to educate others or to be educated; to hear perspectives they would not otherwise get the chance to hear; to meet people they wouldn't otherwise meet; to have their views challenged. Some attend out of simple curiosity. People also come out of a desire to feel like they are 'doing something' about the conflict, in whatever way they can.

I think that in a general sense, dialogue seems to show the human impulse to 'do something'; to try to improve a difficult situation. A feeling of helplessness can overcome people when confronted with so much bad news from abroad. Taking part in the group can function as catharsis and counteract the sense of passivity. This does not necessarily imply the easing of consciences accompanied by inaction that dialogue critics in Chapter Eight as well as Sefian in her letter of resignation have charged, although it may be for

some. Dialogue may also be an avenue for people who do not feel comfortable taking part in political activism to demonstrate their desire for peace, coexistence and a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It demonstrates a desire and a willingness on the part of participants to educate themselves about the issues surrounding the conflict and to discuss them with others who might not share their views, but who care about the issues at stake. However, dialogue theorists as well as practitioners stress that dialogue without practical action cannot result in meaningful change at the political/institutional level.

At the same time, political activism is not the only avenue of practical action. Edward Wolkove gave me an example of how his participation in the dialogue group has helped him to create change. Now, when people make derogatory remarks about Islam, he has the knowledge with which to contradict them and to educate them. "Before, I wouldn't have been able to do that," Wolkove said.

As for the role of religion in dialogue, members of the religious dialogue group as well as around half my respondents from the secular dialogue groups believe that it has a meaningful role to play in dialogue. From offering a point of identification and connection between believers from different faiths, to providing ethical guidelines that encourage dialogue with and respect for others, to providing venues for shared meaningful activity in the form of religious rituals, or simply providing an avenue for learning about each other's background and perspective, religion can be incorporated into dialogue between Arabs and Jews in a fruitful way.

The majority of my respondents who are not religious themselves or who do not see religion as connected to the conflict still place importance on learning about other

people's religious backgrounds in order to understand them, and their perspectives, more

fully. Some respondents do see a connection, if indirect, between the conflict and religion

and believe it to be important to explore the tough issues and questions that link the

conflict to the religions in question, such as the relationship between Islam and suicide

bombings, and the concept in Judaism of 'God-given' rights to land, as examples given

by one of my Palestinian respondents.

Dialogue reveals something about the changing role of religion and the ideology

of religious groups, in Montreal, Canada and perhaps the world today. There is increasing

emphasis on ecumenism and acceptance/recognition of other faiths. Indeed, there is more

pressure on religious leaders and communities to recognize and accept other religions, as

our worlds increasingly converge and the threat of global terrorism is felt. We see more

and more efforts to bring religious leaders and practitioners from different faiths together,

to break down the boundaries that exist in the absence of communication. An example is

the recent and landmark First International Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace,

which took place in Brussels in January 2005.

I think this also represents a new and unique time in the history of the relations

between the Muslim, Arab and Jewish communities in Montreal. Their relationship has

been little to nonexistent in the past, but shockwaves of the tensions in the Middle East

have been felt locally, especially within the past few years with such incidents as the

Netanyahu debacle at Concordia University in September 2002 and the firebombing of

the Talmud Torah school in April 2004. The dialogue groups emerged within this

context. They represent an effort to deal with the local manifestations of the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, as well as an effort towards rapprochement in a general sense. They

help people deal with the conflict at home and abroad by giving them a space in which to come together and discuss it in a structured, secure and moderated space. As group leaders told me, it is their hope that the models they have created can also serve other communities in need of dialogue.

Dialogue groups have their limitations and their problems, but they do offer people ways of interacting that do not exist elsewhere, and provide those who do not feel comfortable in activist groups or groups with a particular political agenda with a means of meaningful contact with and learning about the 'other'.

One of the problems with dialogue, as articulated by my respondents as well as from my own observations, is that it is a gradual process that is slow to show results. But, respondents indicate that progress has indeed been made. At this stage in the MDG, for instance, some respondents feel that the group has reached a certain level unprofessionally, and that professional guidance could help them reach the next level. Respondents hunger for deeper dialogue that continues to challenge them.

Is dialogue an effective means of resolving conflict? This remains to be seen. It is certainly a tool of personal transformation, in helping people to overcome prejudice, racism and stereotypes, but the change is slow and individual. Conflict resolution involves large groups of people and governments, which dialogue groups do not directly affect. A lot more than just dialogue is needed to transform conflict situations, as was discussed in Chapter Seven, but dialogue certainly can play an important role in educating and sensitizing members of both communities to the needs, concerns and interests of the other group; elements which are essential to successful, equitable and just

negotiations. In this respect, dialogue should be taking place at an institutional level, and should precede governmental negotiations between conflicted parties.

People are being affected by dialogue, but to varying degrees depending on the individual. Some individuals found that their views and opinions of the 'other' changed profoundly, and others did not see any change at all in either themselves or others. However, most of my respondents indicated that they had changed to some degree through their contact with the 'other' and their experience in the dialogue group(s), and many indicated that they had witnessed changes in others.

Some participants are dedicated to dialogue and are committed to it; others find it useful or interesting for a certain length of time and then they move on.

It must be said that the benefits of dialogue have been gained by dedicated members who have attended consistently for some length of time. Certain respondents who attended only once or twice reported that they did not gain anything from the experience and would not return to the group. It really depends on the individual and on the night, as my respondents indicated.

Personally, I found that the first year (2004-2005) of the MDG was the most fulfilling of the two years I have seen. By my own observation, this was because there was a core group of dedicated and vocal Palestinian participants. During that year, I got to hear many of their personal stories and opinions. Meetings were often charged with passion and emotion. That year included my personal highlight of all the dialogue group meetings I attended, in all three groups: the session in which we heard from and met with Palestinian refugees facing deportation, and heard a presentation from the leader of Montreal's Coalition Against the Deportation of Palestinian Refugees, about the issues

faced by Palestinian refugees in the Canadian immigration system. Everyone in attendance was very moved by the experience of meeting and hearing the stories of refugees. It was a topic that I had been very ignorant about previously.

This past year of the MDG I found to be less effective. This was both because of the lack of Palestinian and Arab presence in the group, and some internal political debates that were impeding the progress of the group. Currently undergoing a major transition in its structure, methodology and leadership, the MDG is reinventing itself for its third season and leaders say they are building on past experience and lessons learned.

Shalom-Salaam has a high level of satisfaction from its members. However, I find the group less dynamic than the MDG because of its fixed membership, its lack of Palestinians and Arabs and people with more recent life experience in the Middle East, as well as the fact that many of the member are scholars and present a rather detached, impersonal stance of the topics being discussed, rather than the emotionally-charged first-hand experience that often characterizes dialogue in the MDG.

Muslim-Jewish Dialogue has made important inroads to interfaith cooperation and goodwill between Muslims and Jews in Montreal. Their conference, planned for the Fall, will help publicize the group and bring their activities more into the public. However, members complain that they are failing to move forward in the dialogue and that they must take the risk of broaching difficult and controversial topics in order to stay relevant and keep progressing.

In terms of the future of Arab/Muslim-Jewish dialogue in Montreal, I forsee the continual development of community ties between the groups involved. The potential and interest also exist for making links with dialogue and peace groups in the Middle East. As

discussed earlier, I believe that it is very important for all the groups to increase their visibility and participation in community development and social action projects, in order to apply the psychological and social gains of the dialogue group in society, and in so doing, to both solidify the change in consciousness of the individuals involved, and to widen the group's impact in general.

Focusing on the political issues of a conflict, we often ignore the communication issues that are imbedded within it. There is also a need to communicate effectively about the conflict. Communication too often takes place through military factions and government officials, who do not always represent their constituents, and whom their constituents often feel thoroughly alienated from.

Dialogue represents an impulse to 'take matters into one's own hands' to pursue on a personal level the changes one would like to see on a larger scale. Dialogue is a grassroots effort to actualize these goals outside of a political or institutional framework. For some, it is a direct action to sow the seeds of peace by creating better mutual understanding, which can hopefully contribute to a resolution.

People have witnessed time and again the failure of military solutions to conflict and are looking for a better way. Outer space has been explored and war has permeated the history of humanity. In my view, it is human relations which are the next frontier. The unexplored realm is peace: how to get along in a world in which no one can remain insulated anymore, whether culturally, religiously or otherwise. Canadian society, and Montreal as a representative microcosm, is a perfect example of this. Faced with our differences and our geographical integration, how will we devise ways in which to truly get along? This is the effort in which dialogue plays a part. It involves the creation of a

structure of coexistence; a way in which to become not just sharers of territory but good neighbors.

Dialogue is not just the spiritual adventure of our time, as Hans Kung said, but also the cultural adventure of our time. It is the mark of a globalized world; one in which we are constantly confronted with our 'other' or 'others', and a world in which civil wars become global both because of geographical diasporas and the international media, both institutional and independent, which allows people, more than ever before, to be aware of and in touch with what is going on across the globe.

As for the future of dialogue between these communities in Montreal, Arab-Jewish and Muslim-Jewish dialogue is still in its early stages here. Muslim-Jewish dialogue has been taking place longer than Arab-Jewish, with the group discussed in this study approaching a decade of activity. Formal Arab-Jewish dialogue has been happening for only the past five years or so. While the dialogue groups are becoming increasingly known and accepted by the participant communities, the groups still have a long way to go in both gaining mainstream attention and acceptance. Group leaders attest that this is indeed happening over time. "The communities are watching," as one leader told me.

Personally, I have gained a lot from my experience and have seen my perspective on the conflict shift and evolve. I've become sensitized to issues I was unaware of previously. I take an academic as well as a personal interest in the groups, and will continue to participate in them after this study ends. I am curious to see what the future will bring to all three groups.

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Appendix A - Interview Questions

The same set of questions was used for both dialogue group leaders and participants, with some additional questions for group leaders. A third list of questions was asked to my interviewees who do not take part in dialogue.

Questions for participants

A) Demographic info

1. Age:

2. Gender:

3. Nationality:

4. Country of Birth:

5. Parents country of birth:

6. Other countries lived in (for over 1 year):

7. How long have you lived in Montreal and in Canada?

8. Religion:

9. Level of religious observance: (secular, somewhat, fairly, very).

10. Are you a member of an organized religious community – which one?

11. What is your level of participation in your community?

   (Palestinian/Arab/Muslim/Jewish/Israeli/Other)

12. Level of education:

B) Longer questions:

13. How often do you attend dialogue group meetings: (new member, stopped attending, seldom, occasionally, regularly, always or almost always)

14. How long have you been involved, in what capacity, and with what groups?

15. How did you get involved in dialogue and what motivated you?

16. Did you or do you feel any barriers or hesitations to getting involved with dialogue either from your community or in yourself?

17. What was your relationship or level of contact with members of the other community previously?

18. How has that changed through your participation in the dialogue group/s? Have you developed relationships with the other?

19. What is your degree of connection to the issues at stake in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

20. How informed do you keep on the issues? (what do you read, etc.)

21. How would you characterize yourself politically? (left, right, etc.)

22. For Jews: are you a Zionist and how would you define that term?

23. How does religion inform what you do in the group? Do you see dialogue as part of your religious practice?

24. Do you see religion as a tool for dialogue? Is it helpful and/or relevant to discuss religion in the dialogue group?

25. What do you feel to be the goals with dialogue and is the group achieving them?

26. If you are a regular, what keeps you coming to meetings? What do you get out of it?

27. Has taking part in dialogue affected how you see the "other", and if so, how?

28. Has taking part in dialogue affected how you see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and if so, how?

29. Has taking part in dialogue affected how you see yourself and your own community, and if so, how?

30. Are you politically active on this issue?

31. Has dialogue affected the level of your own political action on the issue?

32. Do you feel comfortable expressing yourself in the group?

33. Do you feel heard?

34. Are the meetings productive?

35. Are your beliefs and/or opinions challenged in the group?

36. What have been your outstanding experiences in the dialogue group?

37. Do you see any problems with the dialogue group/s? How could dialogue groups be improved? What could be done better?

Questions for non-participants

1. Have you been involved in formal Muslim/Arab-Jewish dialogue, and in what capacity? With which group/s?

2. For how long were you involved?

3. Why did you stop?

4. Why do you think dialogue is not a good idea? What were your experiences?

5. What would you see as a better approach?

6. Is dialogue an inherently faulty method of rapprochement, or how could it be improved?

7. Would you recommend dialogue for anyone? Is it appropriate for certain people, and not others?

8. What kind of other groups are you involved in?

9. How can we best engage with the other, and with the other's narratives? Is it important to engage in the narratives? What about in personal experience?

10. Are you politically active, and in what capacity?

Additional Questions for group leaders

1. How did both communities respond to your efforts? How is it now, compared to when it started?

2. How has your group evolved over the years? Has your process changed?

3. What has the group achieved? Has it achieved its goals? How has it affected the communities? Has it had an impact beyond the group?

4. Do you see dialogue as part of a larger conflict resolution strategy, or a larger goal?

5. How has the participation been from the religious communities?

6. How does your group compare to political groups? What does dialogue offer that isn't found elsewhere?

7. Where do you see the group going in the future, and dialogue in general?

Appendix B - Excerpts from MDG Seder Handout 2005

From 'Seder of the Children of Abraham': a Haggadah compiled by Carmela Aigen, for the use of the MDG.

Page 1: "Welcome to our Passover Seder.

The first Pesach [Passover] was celebrated 3,000 years ago when the People of Israel liberated themselves from the oppression of the Egyptian slavemasters and began their march toward freedom. We honor all people who have struggled or are struggling for their freedom as we share the aspirations of our liberated ancestors.

At this point in our history we feel that it is crucial for our survival to hear not only our own pain and vision but the pain of the Palestinians, the people with whom we so urgently need to effect reconciliation. We admit that it will be hard for us as Jews to hear of their anguish and suffering, yet it is in fact in our own self interest to open ourselves to listen, however hard it may be.

Listening to their story in no way negates our own – our claim and our vision remain legitimate, central to our identity and survival.

Pesach is our festival of freedom. At times we may be slaves to our own suffering, unable to call forth the strength needed to listen to the other. We hope that we can join together in this Seder to listen to both stories – ours and theirs."

Page 2: "Kiddush [prayer over the wine].

The First Cup, The Cup of Security.

'A person who does not own a piece of land is not a secure person' – Talmud.

And, we might add, in the land of one's heritage.

We raise this first cup of wine in acknowledgment of the legitimate desires of each

people to lead a secure life – a life free from fear – secure in the knowledge that they

have a land, a land from which they cannot be driven.

We conduct this seder in the belief that the security is attainable.

'They shall sit every person under their vine and fig tree and no one shall make them

afraid.' – Micah 4:4."

APPENDIX C - Nada Sefian's Letter of Resignation from the MDG and the MDG Board's Response

The following is a reprint of a letter sent to the MDG listserv by Sefian on April 18, 2006, and read out by her at the group meeting later that day. Following Sefian's letter is the MDG Board's response, as published on their listserv on April 27, 2006.

1. Sefian's letter

"Many members as well as non-members are contacting me to ask about the reasons for my resignation.

While I am writing these words, I received one more phone call from an Arab Lebanese who said that he was told that the reasons for my resignation were:

1- That I am aggressive.

2- That I attack the State of Israel.

I feel that it is my duty to speak for myself in order to refute accusations and dispel any misconceptions or miscomprehensions.

I am not resigning from dialogue, but from an organization that in its zeal to build itself, is sacrificing its real essence, i.e. Dialogue.

Just a quick response to the two accusations: I am more than honored to be accused of attacking injustice, oppression and human rights abuses in all its symbols, be it a state, an organization, or an individual.

As for being aggressive: yes I am very aggressive in pursuing my way for peace

and justice for both peoples alike: Israelis and Palestinians. I am aggressive in speaking

truth to power not hindered by those who try to smother my voice.

In my analyses I will be objective guided by my commitment to speak the truth. My goal

is to allow us to learn from our mistakes. Build a solid ground for a real dialogue:

Dialogue between two peoples in conflict is about learning and Listening to one another.

Dialogue is not an easy process: many of us are subjected to enormous pressures by those

who seek to silence the weak voice of Dialogue. Many feel challenged by new facts, new

realities that might dismantle a whole structure of life-long acquired myths.

I will concentrate on two main issues:

1- Silencing the voice of the other, using pressure and lobbying inside the group.

2- Arab presence or better Arab absence in the group.

Ronit (co-president) and the Israeli group:

Four Israeli members met with Ronit at the beginning of last year. They accused her of

being pro-Palestinian; they claimed that as a leader of the group she should represent "her

people"; Nada as the Palestinian leader can represent her people. Notice here how the

"them" and "us" is being used as in a battlefield.

This year we had a similar session with the same people, where we had to sit, for

at least two long hours, and listen to criticism about almost everything from day one until

now. Carmela (Israeli), who is a board member, was taking part in the criticism as well.

As we, the four executives, decided beforehand to listen to the agony of the four

members, the session ended without being able to answer any of these accusations. This,

in my opinion, defies the whole purpose of dialogue.

Silencing the voices of the other:

Session on Zionism: We were only nine Arab people, 4 of us, including myself, were participating. Yet we were not given enough time to speak. The overall presence was around 70, if I am not mistaken. I wrote an e-mail to the executive board about this.

Tali's incident: Lives Of Palestinians under Occupation

For our last session, "Lives of Palestinians under Occupation", I invited a guest speaker who is an Israeli activist for peace. She lives in Tel-Aviv. She takes Israelis to see the wall, and the harm that is being done to Palestinians .She is here with the McGill ME program. This woman turned to be the same person who stood and said, "I am an anti-Zionist Israeli I can see that there is an imbalance of power in this room".

Carmela, in the next board meeting, said that she would not come if this "anti-Zionist" is invited to speak.

In Israel it seems, people can speak out, but in Montreal they are pressured to silence.

A board member telephoned the McGill ME program to invite Palestinian fellows to come and speak about their lives under occupation. A responsible there did not give them permission to come and express themselves. Our board member then took the initiative to ask our guest speaker Tali (anti-Zionist) to cancel her talk at MDG. For me this is very disturbing. How can someone decide on behalf of his "fellows" on whether it is appropriate for them to speak, without asking them? How in order for us to be a "respectable organization" we shut our eyes on what in my belief is an intrusion on the right of a person to express himself freely. Why can't Tali, who is part of the McGill ME

program, choose for herself when and where to speak as a free person living in a free

society? How can we in MDG go against what we are preaching in our mandate:

"connect, share, listen etc..."'? (Look at our brochure).

These are questions that touch the very principles of free thought and democracy.

Another explanation that I was given is that if we go against the will of this person in

charge of this McGill ME program, he could destroy our organization.

So we kneel to power, exclude the other; eliminate his voice to preserve our

organization. The temple becomes more important than God.

Silencing Tali's voice means that many of us would lose a great opportunity of

meeting someone who crossed the physical and psychological barriers of hate and

demonization, in order to extend a loving hand to the other side.

Arab Presence:

Anyone who understands the nature of any conflict understands that there is an imbalance

of power between those who feel that they are being victimized now and those who are

related (directly or indirectly) to the victimizer. A victim is usually not ready to sit with

his victimizer and socialize. Besides, many were hesitant to join because for them there

is no problem between Arab/Muslim peoples and the Jewish people. The problem started

with the creation of the state of Israel and the continuous dispossession of the

Palestinians.

I invited Palestinians/Arabs/Muslim people to meet with Jewish people from the

to engage in an authentic sincere dialogue without any conditions. For example, many of

our Jewish members do not even recognize the brutality of the Israeli occupation,

do not see that there is an occupation at all. It was a diversified group of Arab/Muslim people who participated in every activity. They were interested in this dialogue, provided that this dialogue be honest: not monitored nor controlled. They were eager to pursue it to a deeper level of mutual understanding allowing for a double empathy.

Once in the group, Palestinians/Arab/Muslims felt that they are under constant attack:

1- Their Palestinian identity is challenged (you are nomads from the Arab world).

2- Their leaders ""lack political straightness""

3- The Arab-Muslim World is a demographic threat for Israel.

4- You teach hate to your children at schools.

5- You don't value life as we do.

6- Muslim religion is a violent religion.

7- Our invited guest speaker, XXXXXX , said that he "did not feel with the Palestinian suffering.""

These are only few drops from the sea of racist talk that Arabs and Muslims had to endure.

Whether in the small or the big group, Arabs/Muslims were not given enough time to respond to questions, accusations, propaganda, or to give a different interpretation of historical facts. I have raised this issue before and suggested that they should be given the floor often enough in order to create a more beneficial dialogue.

In the session ""lives under occupation"" a Jewish woman stood up and read an article full of lies and propaganda against Muslim/Arabs. This offended deeply the few Arabs who were present in the room. They told me later "if this is what you call dialogue we prefer debate."

These incidents and others gave the Arabs/Muslims the impression that they were invited only to be insulted and humiliated; that this dialogue was not meant to show the humanity of the other side but to score a winning point; that there was an orchestrated tribal defense of the state of Israel, be it right or wrong. Of course, this does not apply to all, but unfortunately the voices of Jewish dissent were rarely heard inside the group, they were being silenced.

In the past years, I have worked hard in order to bring more Arab people to our group. I have arranged separate meetings with them to convince them of the importance of listening to the voice of the other side. They came and left without any hope. They chose to invest their time and energy in a more positive way.

The few who still come are those who have a long experience with dialogue. They are firm believers in the power of dialogue in dispersing inherited stereotypes of racism, of prejudgment and prejudices.

At this very moment, with my resignation, we have only one person from Arab origin sitting on our board: does he represent the whole Arab/Muslim community?

What is wanted now is to ask ourselves, on both sides, a basic, question and to answer it with honesty: What do we want to achieve from this dialogue?

Do we want to boast about knowing/meeting a person from the other side?

Does it relieve our conscience to sit and talk with the other side without any real commitment to peace and justice?

Do we want to build an organization in order to create some job opportunities for some or to provide some prestige for others?

Do we want to continue to sing and dance for peace while children are being killed in our name?

Or do we really want to open an honest dialogue, learn from each other, learn about each other and above all respect and recognize the humanity of the other?

In order for this Dialogue to be effective we need to attract, not a few marginal people in the Arab/Muslim community, but a wider variety which can give a better representation of this community. The absence of parity in the meetings means a failure in the methods of reach out, a failure in the ways the subjects and discussions are handled.

Good energy, a great deal of good will should be directed towards a sincere Dialogue, a spontaneous one, coming from a grass root level, responding to their aspirations. Building an organization that does not answer to this is a futile exercise. It is not by intimidating, suppressing, or accusing the other that we can achieve this in the future.

Nada Sefian"

2. The MDG Board's Response

"Following Nada's resignation, we received a few letters and comments – some sympathizing with Nada's decision and others disillusioned by her actions.

We believe that a direct response to Nada's accusations is counterproductive. After all, any one who has attended any of our meetings or follows the events in the Middle East is aware that there are multiple perspectives to each story. Although we

recognize that some events could have been handled better, it is important to keep in mind that as co-founder and co-president Nada was involved in all key decisions made by the Montreal Dialogue Group since its inception.

Like any other organization, we too felt subject to the pressures from special interest groups and individuals. We recognized these incidents and the board unanimously approved a policy that preserves the objectiveness and integrity of the MDG and minimizes pressures by these special interest groups and individuals. Moreover, to ensure complete transparency and be accountable to our members, summaries of the board meetings will be published on our upcoming web site.

Within any young organization, mistakes and disagreements are bound to occur. Our ability to learn from such incidents and rise above personal issues is the key to our success. The MDG is not a one-person show. Quite a number of members have volunteered hundreds of hours in organizing, promoting and facilitating events. We organized peace concerts, multi-faith meals, art projects, as well as tens of dialogue and information sessions. We are developing a web site, formulating alliances with like-minded organizations and individuals and developing an outreach program.

Although our impact is not always easily recognized and can be downplayed by skeptics – the proof is within each one of us. How our attitudes towards each other and our communities have and continue to change, the friendships that we have formed, and our willingness to challenge myths and stereotypes are all testimony of what dialogue can achieve.

We are not an Arab organization, nor a Jewish organization. Our mission is to promote understanding and communication between the two communities. Our members

come from all backgrounds and walks of life and share a common desire to connect with the other. To ensure that the concerns and issues of our diverse communities are fully represented and addressed, the MDG board has always had and will continue to have a balanced representation from various communities. Once it was realized that imbalance may result from both the resignation of Nada, and the appointment of the three recently nominated board members, the board once again unanimously approved the addition of two new board positions. All members are encouraged to nominate themselves or other members for the board or co-president position.

It is unfortunate that Nada has decided to resign; however as indicated in a recent announcement, the MDG is entering a new and exciting stage. We will soon be entering our third year. We also expect to have charitable status by the summer – a huge milestone for any non-profit organization. We have over 300 people on our mailing list and over 60 paid members. We were the recipients of the 2005 YMCA Canada Peace Medal. The Board is looking at ways of re- structuring to better fit the needs of our members. We recently received a generous grant for a Community Outreach Project to reach out into the Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities in Montreal, to further promote tolerance, understanding and empathy while catering to the diverse needs of our members. Our website will soon be up and running and we have an exciting volunteer program in place.

Once again, we would like to remind our members that, despite the recent events, together we have accomplished a great deal over the past two years and the future outlook is very promising. We encourage our members not to be discouraged by these events, but to see them as an opportunity to learn and grow. -- The MDG Board".

Appendix D – Discussion of Sefian's Resignation

The recent resignation of Nada Sefian from her position as co-president of the MDG in April 2006 came as a shock to many members.

Sefian had co-founded the group in 2003 and had been one of its co-presidents, main organizers and champions throughout its two years of existence. As a Palestinian, Sefian's presence and advocacy on behalf of the group gave it legitimacy and credibility. As a charismatic and energetic person, Sefian successfully worked to draw new people to the group, in particular Palestinians and Arabs, and encouraged them to keep attending.

Along with the Israeli co-president, Ronit Yarosky, Sefian often spoke about dialogue and about the MDG before university and community audiences. Both women have worked extremely hard and devoted countless hours to promoting the group and keeping it running, all as volunteers.

With Sefian's resignation as co-president and her withdrawal from the group, the MDG is going into its third year in search of a new Arab co-president. The group is undergoing other major changes, as the MDG Board of Directors announced at their first annual general meeting in May 2006.

First of all, the group has now obtained charitable organization status. This means they can issue tax receipts for donations, which will greatly increase their fundraising abilities. They have also received a government grant to put towards community outreach and recruitment. With these achievements, the group is developing into a more formal, institutional entity.

Sefian sent out a letter of resignation to the group on the day of a group meeting, April 18, 2006. She read out her letter before the group that evening. I have included it here because of its analysis and assessment of the dialogue group, which it will be useful to discuss.

Sefian's problems with the group were centered around the issue of balance between Arabs and Jews. The major problem with the group, as my respondents also indicated, is the lack of Arab presence and participation. This imbalance in terms of simple numbers means that there are more Jews than Arabs in the group, more Jews speaking, less Arab presence and voices, and a sense of discomfort and lack of ease as well as some alienation by the Arabs who are present. Sefian also found that the Arabs in the group faced racist and prejudiced remarks from the Jews. All these factors contributed, she said, to the difficulty in attracting Arabs to the group, and keeping them coming.

Her letter of resignation also noted some undemocratic decisions that had recently taken place within the board of directors. Finally, Sefian articulated a discomfort with the direction in which the group is moving, in terms of growth, institutionalization and bureaucracy.

I interviewed Sefian about her resignation and her experience in the dialogue group. The following is a summary of our conversation.

Sefian says that overall, Arabs were dissatisfied with the group for all the reasons listed above. She notes that some came on her encouragement for a whole year, and had a good experience, but felt they had gone as far as they could with the MDG after that time.

This past year, she says, was always a struggle: "we were having less and less Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims in the group. I even started recruiting some Algerians, Tunisians, Lebanese – they stopped coming because they were dissatisfied. [An Arab woman] came to one or two sessions and stopped. When I resigned she wasn't surprised, because she told me she never felt at home in the group and she felt that we [Arabs] are not equally represented, and we don't have the same opportunity to represent ourselves."

Sefian emphasizes that she and the other leaders of the group are not professionals, and that the group was an 'experiment'. She is uncomfortable with how big the group has grown. Sefian remains hopeful about dialogue but now believes it has to be done in a smaller group with professional facilitation. Professional facilitators or moderators would help the group deal properly with the power dynamics of the two parties to the conflict within the group, as well as the cultural differences of the participants, so that all participants would feel more comfortable being there and expressing themselves, she told me.

Equally important, Sefian says, is training for group members in communication/dialogue skills as well as in avoidance of racism/discrimination. This would help to sensitize participants to these crucial issues and encourage a more respectful and comfortable dialogue for all.

Sefian also commented on the necessity for people who had participated in or 'graduated' from the dialogue group to take their new understanding and sensitivity back to their own communities: "The purpose of dialogue is to deal with iniquity. Without this, the group remains marginal. It fails to fulfill its purpose, and it cannot remain strong. Even to take the new understandings to [our] own families – this is the influence! It is a

small ripple that will spread. But my disappointment was that after a few years of experience, I felt that many of these people who came did not change [and/or did not bring this changed perspective back to their own communities]."

At the same time, Sefian does note that many participants were very affected by the dialogue group, both Jews and Arabs:

"People have told me that the group influenced and changed them. Especially on the Jewish side. It's true, they said they have changed their biases. … A big change took place in the Arab constituents. Some of them had never met a Jew before in their life. They came and befriended them. Some of them didn't believe in the Holocaust and denied it. They came to the group and started to feel, when they heard the stories and met the survivors. They changed their stories. And we need this to be taken back to the larger community. This new understanding. It's true to the other side as well. People told me that even though their stance is still very pro-Israeli, they have nevertheless changed, because of the group."

But, she said, participants must manifest this change in their lives and communities, beyond the dialogue group, in order for the group to be productive and fulfill its mission.

In sum, as Sefian told me, the group needs "professional moderators, smaller groups, and more Arab/Palestinian presence."

Sefian remains devoted to the idea of dialogue, in a small-group, grassroots, and professionally-facilitated form.

"I still believe in dialogue. I will not stop dialogue. But I don't want to do it as an organization, as an institution."

I also interviewed Ronit Yarosky, the Israeli co-president of the MDG. She says that Sefian's departure was unfortunate, but she is optimistic about the future of the dialogue group.

I asked her about how the group plans to attract more Arabs to the group. She said they are still in the process of determining how the outreach program will function. Yarosky disagrees with the idea of a power imbalance problem within the group:

"I think everyone was always given space to speak. If you have fifty people, forty of whom are Jewish and ten of whom are Arab, you still have to give everybody their turn to speak. You can't say, 'okay, we're going to have a quota of Arab speakers to make up the imbalance'."

As for the issue of racism, Yarosky says that it was not one-sided, but that insensitive and prejudiced remarks came from both Jews and Arabs in the group.

I asked Yarosky if the group plans on engaging a professional facilitator to moderate the group, or to train members in moderation, and she said that it is something they are considering, but that the interest and participation of members is necessary:

"This was on the agenda at our last board meeting - we did discuss it. One of our board members has identified an organization in the States and to start, she has purchased copies of a manual that we're going to read.

We're aware of the problems but we're limited in funds and also in members' interest. We offered some training sessions for moderators this past year, four times, and people didn't come. So it's very difficult, when people are complaining but they don't want to take the lead."

In Yarosky's view, the fact that Palestinians and Arabs have not been coming to the group in large numbers is more due to the fact that the results of dialogue are slow in coming and not immediately visible and that people are skeptical about what the group can achieve. "There's also an element of people coming from places where it's dangerous to get involved politically", she said.

Yarosky said that increasing Arab membership is a "huge priority" and she is confident that they will succeed in this respect. She said that in fact it is already happening, leading up to the dialogue group's third year session. Yarosky also emphasized that in terms of representation on the board of directors, they maintain an even split of five Jews and four Arabs.

With all the changes the group is currently undergoing, it will be interesting to see what its third year will bring.