

# Grassroots dialogue in Israel and Palestine - participants' perceived value and effect



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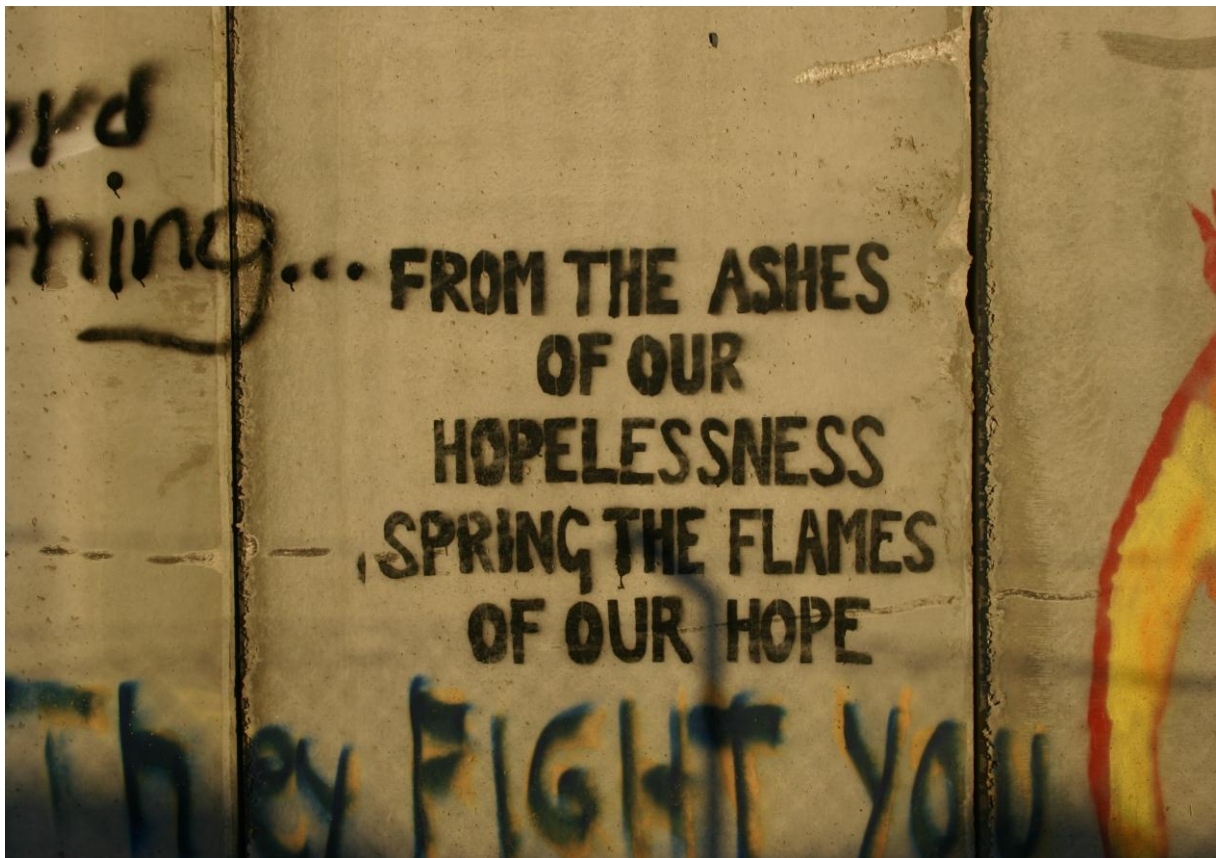




# Grassroots Reconciliation in Palestine and Israel

- Participants' perceived value and effect of dialogue

By Karine Ness Jørgensen



Master thesis submitted to  
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**Declaration**

I, Karine Ness Jørgensen, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....





## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to investigate participants' perceived value and effect of grassroots level dialogue facilitated between Israelis and Palestinians. The fieldwork was conducted in Israel and Palestine from October to December 2009. During the fieldwork 24 qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out with 13 Israeli and 11 Palestinian participants. The interviewees were associated with five different dialogue groups. Each dialogue group varied in contents, structures as well as types of people associated.

This thesis argues that diplomacy and negotiations at the political level alone will fail to solve the deep-rooted Israeli and Palestinian conflict. In order to secure a sustainable peace, a bottom-up process of change must occur, which addresses the psychological barriers that contribute to deepen the division between the two sides. However, conducting grassroots dialogue in an ongoing violent conflict is challenging, especially with regards for the asymmetrical power relation between the conflicting groups, where one side is occupied (Palestine) and the other side is being the occupier (Israel). Different realities often result in different motivations and expectations of the dialogue meetings, which in turn can cause significant challenges and in worst cases make the divide even greater. For this reason several scholars argue that grassroots dialogue is not fruitful until after the occupation has ended.

Thesis findings indicate that all of the interviewed participants experienced a significant personal value from dialogue. The majority expressed that dialogue have been effective in adjusting their negative stereotypes and prejudice of one another, and have contributed to the recognition of the others as human beings. Findings also indicate that dialogue helps to build a shared reality between the participants, where both peoples are included in the vision of a peaceful solution for the region. This is what reconciliation is aiming for, and one may therefore claim that reconciliation actually happens in small ways. Another finding presented in this thesis is that participants are frustrated due to dialogue's limited impact on the political situation. Israeli and Palestinian grassroots dialogue groups have existed for many years, but the positive effect on a personal level has not yet succeeded to generalize

to the macro level of the whole society. This thesis suggests several reasons for why it has not yet happened; limited ability to embrace a broader spectrum of people, as well as limited/absent cooperation between the grassroots and the political level in both societies are discussed.

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Shukran ktir  
Toda  
Thank you

## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

BB	Breaking Barriers
EAPPI	Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel
FD	Failed Dialogue Group
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IEA	Interfaith Encounter Association
IF	Israeli Female
IM	Israeli Male
MOPE	Minds of Peace Experiment
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
PACBI	The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel
PCFF	Parents Circle Bereaved Family Forum
PF	Palestinian Female
PM	Palestinian Male
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RCT	Realistic Conflict Theory
SIT	Social-Identity Theory

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# **1. Introduction**

The Palestinian – Israeli conflict has been at the center of the world’s attention for more than a century. Despite the many attempts for peaceful resolution it still remains unresolved. The conflict is described as intractable, deep-rooted, long lasting, and it has caused extensive psychological and material costs to both sides. It is colored by an endless act of hostility and violence, which have had destructive consequences for both the Palestinian and Israeli societies. Almost every single family on both sides has experienced suffering and loss due to the harsh violence. While destructive conflicts generate great amounts of pain and suffering, they also give seed to groups that are trying to end the conflict in a peaceful way. While working as an international volunteer in Palestine in 2007, I had the privilege become acquainted with several courageous peace activists that work for grassroots dialogue between the two peoples, despite the seemingly hopeless situation. They became a real inspiration and gave me hope that an Israeli and Palestinian peace one day might be possible. It also made me curious in finding out more about grassroots dialogue as an approach to reconciliation between deeply segregated societies.

## **1.1. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to examine different groups that employ grassroots dialogue methods to foster reconciliation through increased empathy and understanding between the two civil societies. The reasons for choosing this subject is to gain a deeper understanding of how dialogue as a reconciliation method can succeed (or fail) to unite people in an ongoing violent conflict.

There is a common belief that traditional diplomacy among political leaders alone will fail to solve intractable conflicts. In order to solve such conflicts, multilayered methods must be taken in use that also address the psychological barriers that contribute to the deep division of the conflicting parts. Such barriers might be visible through mutual prejudice and dehumanization of one another. It might also be visible in the development of contradicting historical narratives, which describes the conflict in such ways that it neglects the other side’s perceptive, and in some cases neglect their very right of existence. There is therefore



reason to believe that a bottom-up process of change in relations must occur in order to ensure a sustainable peace, and not only impose peace agreements in a top-down fashion. Dialogue is a reconciliation tool that aims to replace hostile attitudes and bring people closer together. However, such grassroots dialogue has existed between Israelis and Palestinians for several generations without any obvious effect on the conflict. So does really grassroots dialogue have any effect in improving the relations between segregated societies, and does it really help solving the overall conflict?

## **1.2. Problem statement and objectives**

The problem statement of this thesis is:

*To gain a greater understanding of participants' perceived value and effect by grassroots level dialogue in Israel and Palestine.*

An illustration of the problem statement is performed through an analysis of 24 semi-structured interviews of Israeli and Palestinian participants in dialogue groups. This is supported by as much attendance and observation as possible in the different dialogue groups. The thesis will look at the different motives, experiences and perceptions of the participants that take part in grassroots dialogue. Through their viewpoints the thesis is attempting to gain a better understanding of whether dialogue actually does make a difference in the relations between the conflicting sides. It also attempts to find out whether participants perceive that grassroots dialogue can have any significant effect on the road to peace. This thesis is formulated into two different research objectives, which are defined as follows:

*Objective I: To understand participants' self-declared motivations for becoming involved in grassroots dialogue.*

*Objective II: To understand how the participants experience the value and effect from participation in grassroots level dialogue. - It will focus on two different areas, one is*

*the impact it might have for the participants on a personal level, and the other is the effect it might have on the outside political reality.*

This thesis is distinctive from other research that has been performed on similar topics. While there are many papers on single-case dialogue, there is less research to be found comparing participants from multiple sets of dialogue groups. I have therefore chosen to include participants from five different dialogue groups that vary in structure, content and in the types of people connected to them. While some of the groups are political, others steer away from political differences and rather focus on things that the two peoples have in common. One of the groups is based on youth, while another is a pure women's group. Some of the encounters are short-term workshops, while others are based on long-term commitment. Receiving experience from several approaches will hopefully provide a broader picture of the different perceptions and aspirations that exist towards the use of grassroots dialogue as a reconciliation tool.

### **1.3. Structure of the thesis**

The following will give a short outline of the thesis in order to make the reader familiar with the main issues. *Chapter 2* presents the theoretical framework, where the most essential concepts are defined. This includes concepts concerning intractable conflicts, social identity and its relation to conflict, reconciliation, as well as grassroots level dialogue. *Chapter 3* gives a historical background of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict through presenting the most essential opposing historical narratives that have been developed during the conflict. *Chapter 4* describes the methods that I have used in my research, and the reasons behind my choices. *Chapter 5* gives a deeper description of the five dialogue groups and their goals and contents. It also gives a description of the 24 interviewed participants that have been chosen for the research. Chapters 6 and 7 present and discuss the findings in relation to the theories. *Chapter 6* gives a presentation on participants' prior stereotypes and hence their motivation for becoming involved in dialogue. *Chapter 7* presents and discusses the participants' perception of the value and effect of grassroots dialogue. *Chapter 8* summarizes the main findings and presents some concluding remarks.

## **2. Conceptual foundation**

This chapter presents a theoretical framework for the thesis by defining and discussing several relevant concepts. Of these, intractable conflict, social identity and structural asymmetry form the basis. The concept of reconciliation is also discussed, as well as the use of grassroots dialogue and its different contents.

### **2.1. Intractable conflict**

Conflict is an integrated part of every human interaction. It has the potential to break out if individuals or groups are in position of opposing interest and goals (Bar-Tal 2000). Some conflicts are resolved constructively through negotiations, while others seem to elude resolution and take a more destructive path. The latter kind can be referred to as protracted, intractable and deep-rooted (Coleman 2006). Intractable conflicts are common in today's society and can occur between individuals, groups or nations (Coleman 2006). Some of the key characteristics of intractable conflicts are that they persist for long periods of time, have a high level of violence, as well as resisting all effort of constructive resolution (Coleman 2006). Every aspect in social life is affected, and both sides have a perception that it is a struggle for their survival (Handelman 2011). It is often perceived as a zero-sum game in the sense that both sides believe that what the opponent gains, they will lose (Crocker et al. 2005). Another key characteristic of intractable conflicts is their internal nature, in the sense that conflicting groups are often geographically very close (Lederach 2004). Members of the groups therefore often have direct experiences of violence. In addition, it may contribute to a higher degree of fear and animosity to know that the enemy lives next door and not on the other side of the globe (Lederach 2004). As time passes, a prolonged and violent confrontation can have a major influence on the psychological dimensions of the society members that are involved (Bar-Tal & Teichman 2005). People that live under such harsh environments often struggle with stress and can be exposed to both material and human exhaustion (Bar-Tal & Teichman 2005). It is not an unusual tendency that members of each society construct their respective reality based on distrust, animosity, and de-legitimization of the opponent (Bar-Tal & Nets-Zehngut 2007). The high level of violence often reinforces the deep-rooted animosity. After a while it is therefore common that psychological features

drive and sustain the conflict more than substantive issues. As Lederach argues: “ (...) cycle of violence and counter violence becomes the cause of perpetuating the conflict, especially where groups have experienced mutual animosity for decades, if not generations” (Lederach 2004: 15). The following will therefore consider the dimensions of social psychology and the role of social identity in intractable conflicts.

## **2.2. Social identity**

In several sociological discourses there is often defined a separation between the individual identity and the social identity (Jenkins 1996). This thesis is based on the assumption that the relationship between these types of identities is to a great degree interlinked, in the sense that the selfhood is only meaningful in the connection with the social world. One definition of the term social identity is provided by Richard Jenkins, who writes: “ *It refers to the ways in which individuals and collectives are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectives*” (Jenkins 1996 : 4). When placing oneself and others into different social categories it becomes easier to navigate in the myriads of impressions people daily receive from the social environment. It is common for individuals to establish memberships to a multiple set of social categories (Sen 2006). Examples of such can be religion, gender, age, nationality and ethnicity. It can also be teacher, father, or a student. When people ask about who you are, it is a tendency that people answer based on a specific group belonging. Such as “I am a Palestinian”, or “I am a teacher”. Such boundaries between outsiders and insiders may traditionally have been perceived more or less as fixed entities. However, according to the post-modernistic notion, these boundaries are to a great degree socially constructed, and also something that can be deconstructed as a natural process in life (Jenkins 1996). It is only when a collective of individuals share the idea that they are members of a social group, together with an emotional attachment to that specific membership, a social category can exist (Ashmore et al. 2001). The social-identity theory (SIT) presented by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (Tajfel & Turner 1986) is of relevance for understanding people’s urge for such group formation. It claims that a positive self-image is a natural part of human life, and a major part of our sense of ourselves, anchored in the groups to which we belong. For the individual’s self-esteem it is therefore necessary with social comparisons where the in-group is more favorable than the out-group.

Shared *societal beliefs* can be regarded as an important factor for social identities to exist (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). Societal beliefs are defined as multiple sets of convictions and ideals shared by the group members (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). Several scholars have used different terms for these beliefs that are shared by identity groups, such as societal beliefs, group beliefs systems, collective narratives and collective memories (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). Societal beliefs include among others shared history, language, myths, narratives, and group goals (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). These shared beliefs may create more confidence and a sense of similarity and unity among the members, and hence contribute to the development of a shared social identity.

### 2.2.1. Identity and violence

Incompatibilities between social identities do not necessarily develop into violent conflicts. Groups with different sets of political views or religions can, and often do, live together peacefully (Fisher 2006). However, in some contexts it can be a source of violence, and the following will outline some factors that can contribute to a hostile and conflicting relationship between different identity groups.

The relationship between conflict and identity is considered as mutual and complex. On one hand, elements related to identity can collide and cause conflict, while on the other hand intense conflict spanning over several decades can have a great effect on group identity. There is often a separation between identity conflicts and material conflicts. A material conflict can be defined as disputes *“over ‘real’ material assets such as territory, water, oil, border, security, and the like”* (Auerbach 2010: 99). Conflict over identity, on the other hand, can be referred to as a conflict where one or both sides regard the other’s social identity as a threat to its own existence (Auerbach 2010). Some examples of such may be national and religious identities. According to realistic-conflict theory (RCT) there is a tendency that an identity conflict begins with a real material conflict of interests (Fisher 1990). When a material conflict spans over an extensive period of time it is a great risk for it to develop into an identity conflict, -which is considered as much harder to resolve. *“What can begin as a competition between two groups over scarce resources may later be transformed into a*

*conflict over whose social identity is more legitimate or worthy*" (Nadler 2004: 21). On the other hand, social identity alone might be the main cause for violent conflicts (Maalouf 1999). This can happen when a group's societal beliefs and the chances for successfully reaching the group's goals are perceived as threatened by the existence of another group. When bargaining over these issues is considered in zero-sum term, identity alone is regarded as a real interest of conflict, just as much as the conflict over scarce resources.

#### 2.2.1.1. *Societal beliefs around dehumanization and victimhood*

Stereotypes can be defined as generalizations people make about the characteristics of all members of a group (Bar-Tal & Teichman 2005). This is a societal phenomenon in any society, and they can be both positive and negative. However, in times of conflict, such generalizations are often problematic in the sense that they are colored by the harsh reality. The societal beliefs concerning the counterpart are often based on severe negative, incomplete and simplified stereotypes that easily lead to prejudice, discrimination and in the worst cases dehumanization of the other (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). According to Amin Maloof (1999) it is a tendency that identity conflicts not only lead to simplified generalizations of out-group, but also to a simplified sense of in-group. If e.g. followers of a religion feel that their ideology is threatened, it is a tendency for them to experience that their religious identity will dominate over other less threatened parts of their personality. He claims that this is a dangerous tendency. People who share the same opinion can seek together and develop an intolerant and biased view towards out-groups. *"If they experience that the other constitutes a threat against their origin, faith or nation, they can feel that everything that can be done to erase this threat as absolute legitimate"* (Maalouf 1999: 31). The Indian professor Amartya Sen supports this view. He claims: *"a fostered sense of one identity of one group of people can be made into a powerful weapon to brutalize another"* (Sen 2006: 1).

According to Neil Caplan there is another societal belief that often develops in times of conflict and may serve as an obstacle to peace, which is societal belief around victimhood. *"It is the set of competing, ingrained, and mutually exclusive self-images many (...) have of themselves as the victim of the other party's aggressiveness and hostility"* (Caplan 1999: 64). This societal belief is often problematic due to the fact that it can give a sense of feeling that

one is morally excused from the responsibility for what is going on in the conflict. Another obstacle may be that a self-concept of being a victim may also contribute to reduce the potentiality for empathy toward the other.

#### *2.2.1.2. Palestine and Israel – example of an intractable conflict*

The Palestinian Israeli conflict serves as a classical example of a contemporary intractable conflict. They live as neighbors and are locked into long-standing cycles of hostile interaction that have lasted for many centuries (Handelman 2011). The conflict is perceived as both identity-based as well as centered around material interests (Auerbach 2010). On one hand it can be perceived as a struggle over territory, resources and political control. On the other hand it can be related to social identity, in the sense that both groups experience a threat towards their group existence. The conflict is according to Herbert Kelman (2001) perceived in zero-sum terms, not only in terms of territory, but also in relations to social existence. Both sides tend to think that the other can ensure their social identity and rights only at the expense of their own identity and rights (Kelman 2001). Acknowledging the other's identity and rights might then be equal to risking the identity and the national existence of one's own group. As a result of the harsh conflict it has been established several sets of negative societal beliefs on both sides, where some of them contribute to negatively stereotyping and dehumanizing the opponent (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). The beliefs often focus on the cruelty, violence, and the other sides' lack of concern for human life. Both groups have also developed a mutual sense of victimhood, where they both believe that the conflict was initiated and maintained by the other side (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). Such societal beliefs are widely spread and shared in a variety of channels, such as TV, radio, Internet, books, films, and in school curriculums. They have according to Daniel Bar-Tal become a part of the ethos of both societies, and are an important contribution to people's social identities (Bar-Tal et al. 2004).

### **2.3. The aspect of asymmetry in intractable conflicts**

What often lacks in the social psychological approach to intractable conflict is the element of asymmetry. Significant numbers of intractable conflicts are characterized by deep asymmetries, which according to Oliver Rahmsbotham (2010) can lead to great challenges

for finding peaceful solutions. He defines asymmetric conflicts as “*conflict parties that are unequal in power, either quantitatively (e.g. strong vs. weak states) or qualitatively (e.g. state vs. non-state actors) or both*” (Ramsbotham 2010: 86). Gallo & Marzano (2009) makes a distinction between three types of asymmetrical conflicts: power asymmetry, strategic asymmetry and structural asymmetry. Structural asymmetry is regarded as relative common in intractable conflicts, and exists when “*there is a strong imbalance in status*” between the conflicting parties (Gallo & Marzano 2009). Strong imbalance in power might also occur at the same time as structural asymmetry, and the conflict is often about trying to change the structure of relations between the opponents (Gallo & Marzano 2009). While the dominated party is fighting to change it, the dominator is often trying to avoid any change. In their article they use decolonization conflicts as an example of structural asymmetric conflicts, with focus on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

There can be made a distinction between the subjective (perceptual) and objective (material) definitions of conflicts (Dudouet 2005). In terms of asymmetric power balance between the conflicting parties, one may direct focus to both the objective reality of power relations, as well as the perceptual view held by the actors. The Israeli and Palestinian conflict is considered as a structural asymmetrical power conflict. It is a classical example of a conflict where the two sides are unequal in situation or in power (Nasser et al. 2011). It is a great imbalance between the two sides in both the military, political and economic sphere. The Israeli side has among others a large-scale military power with the economic, political as well as military support from the USA. The other side, the Palestinians, have no access to the same military equipment; instead they use other strategies, such as rocket attacks and suicide bombing for conducting their operations. However, by a perceptual view both sides do more or less perceive themselves as the victims in the conflict. The mainstream Israeli representation of the conflict view Israel as the weakest part vis-à-vis the Arab world, which they believe is surrounding their small state trying to force them into the sea. However, in most imbalance conflicts, such as the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, it might be a tendency that the powerful part is less homogenous than the weaker part in their solidarity with their collective group. Not all Israeli members embrace the mainstream representation and do take a clear distance from the Israeli leadership. A more in depth description of the characteristics to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict is performed in chapter 3, through a



presentation of some of the perceptual opposing historical narratives that have been developed through several decades of violent actions.

The complex nature of an asymmetric intractable identity-conflict that is perceived in zero-sum terms is often challenging to resolve (Kelman 2001) (Gallo & Marzano 2009). The conflicting issues often become a matter of life and death for both sides. Reaching agreements around division of a piece of land might often feel like giving up own groups' rights and identity. Solutions based on compromises are then often very hard to achieve. Even when specific issues in conflict are settled, these agreements may not lead to steady peace between the two parties unless they have created a new relationship based on acceptance and respect for each other's social identities. When a conflict also involves great difference in power balance there is reason to assume that it will make the resolution even harder, due to the fact that one must also work to reduce the power imbalance between the opponents. It is reason to believe that these conflicts need a multifaceted resolution-approach that considers the conflict from various directions, dimensions and angles simultaneously.

#### **2.4. Reconciliation**

A multifaceted resolution approach that is widely embraced is reconciliation, and is, according to Oliver Ramsbotham (2005) the very heart of peacebuilding. The concept of reconciliation is an ambitious one with a wide range of definitions. Generally it can be referred to as the formation of a genuine and lasting peaceful relationship between societies that are involved in intractable conflicts, which have lasted for several decades, and that are colored by extensive violence (Ramsbotham et al. 2005). When such conflicts are allowed to endure for many years there are great danger for, as already outlined, an accumulation of animosity, development of severs negative stereotypes and prejudice. This again, can be incorporated into the ethos of the society. Attempts to end such conflicts often involve negotiation around incompatible goals, which according to Bar Tal is defined as a conflict mediating or resolution process (Bar-Tal 2000). However, resolution over conflicting goals can only be seen as a part of a long-term reconciliation process. In addition there must be a complementary bottom-up process with the development of a new psychological repertoire,

rooted in “...*mutual trust and acceptance, cooperation and consideration of mutual needs...*”(Bar-Tal 2000: 351). A reconciliation process therefore seeks to improve the humanitarian relationship between the conflicting parts. With the belief that relationship is both the basis of intractable conflicts, but also its long time solution the reconciliation process will focus on human relationships instead of separation (Lederach 2004). The Palestinian and Israeli conflict might be a classical example. A long lasting peace did not occur after the signing of the Oslo accords in the 1990s, which can be an indication of the need for a deeper social transformation (Doubilet 2007).

#### 2.4.1. Three stages for reconciliation-Top, Middle, Grass-Root

A greater recognition to multilayered peacebuilding can be illustrated by the work of John Paul Lederach (2004). Through his position as a professor in peacebuilding he claims that peace and reconciliation must contain more than a one-dimensional intervention between the top-political elites of the conflicting parties. Due to the multilayered picture of an intractable conflict, a rather comprehensive approach addressing both the visible but also the underlying structures that causes conflict must be applied. Lederach claims that a comprehensive approach needs to involve the entire population affected on both sides in order to succeed. This includes political and non-political actors at the top and grassroots level (Ramsbotham et al. 2005). Lederach uses a pyramid to illustrate various levels of peacebuilding. The apex, level one, is the narrowest level, containing the top political and military leaders. At this level he focuses on high-level negotiations, diplomacy, military, and political solutions (Lederach 2004). The middle range level, level two, consists of regional political actors, such as leaders in health and education sectors. They are far more numerous than level one actor, and are connected to both top and grassroots levels. Their networks of relationships are often cross cutting multiple identity divisions within a conflict. The grassroots level, level three, is the level that involves the masses of the society. Refugee populations, displaced people, elderly, teenagers, and teachers are within this level. Within the two lowest levels of his triangle he stresses the importance of creating people-to-people programs in order to promote contact between societal actors. Amongst several activities described to promote this contact, is the use of grassroots dialogue. Actors in the different

levels of Lederach's pyramid might often have different definitions of reconciliation. Politicians that have the responsibility for the top-down processes are often looking for short-term and measurable results, as they need to maintain their voters. The bottom-up activists, or academics, are usually more interested in long-term processes that can be more challenging to measure. With his pyramid Lederach points out that peacebuilding is not an area limited to one level of society, but that all levels are interconnected and mutually dependent. Grassroots peace builders will often find it hard doing their work if not at least some steps at the political top level is being taken. On the other side, political solutions will lead nowhere if not being attended by the reconstruction in society.

This multilayered view of peacebuilding is supported by the work of Harold H. Saunder (Saunder 2001). Similar to Lederach he stresses the need for establishing processes within the societies that help people overcome the divided lines that fuel the continuation of the conflict. Saunder argues that signing an agreement between policymakers does not automatically make negative constructions within communities to disappear. In order to change the hostile attitudes against the other, he also stresses the importance of a bottom up process of change in relations. This, he claims, can be done through a "Public Peace Process", which is built around sustained dialogue in which citizens are empowered to change their societies.

## **2.5. The Dialogue Approach**

Over several decades several techniques for building relationships between conflicting groups at grassroots level have been developed. Sustained face-to-face dialogue is an essential component of many of them. Dialogue is by Harold Saunders defined as "*a systematic, prolonged dialogue among small groups of representative citizens committed to changing conflictual relationships (..)*" (Saunder 2001: 12). In general, dialogue can be described as a conversation between two or more people with different sets of opinions. It is more structured than an informal conversation, but it is less structured than formal mediation or negotiation. It has a purpose, destination and product. The aim is not to reverse each other, but only to exchange views (Nordhelle 2006). Each side gets the opportunity to express them and listen to the other. Through this process they get the

chance to experience and emphasize with the views, feelings and values of the counterpart (Nordhelle 2006). Ideally, this can contribute to break down negative stereotypes on both sides. By meeting those who are regarded as enemies and perceiving them as human beings may structurally change the perception of the other and may challenge the discourse of hate. Not only can participants be transformed, but also those of the people around them, such as children and other community members when sharing their experiences. According to Sylvia Hurtado (2001) dialogue must be perceived as a process, rather than an event. This is due to the fact that it often requires a long-term commitment in order to develop new and broader understandings and insight.

Dialogue encounters between Israeli and Palestinians civilians go all the way back to the late 1950s (Abu-Nimer 1999). Interactive problem solving workshops, psychological workshops, track-two-diplomacy, supplemental diplomacy, multi-track diplomacy and interactive conflict resolution are some examples of the many variations to dialogue that have been applied. The dialogue encounters vary greatly, but still there can according to Mohammed Abu-Nimer (1999) be drawn into two major patterns:

- Dialogue based on *human-relations traditions*
- Dialogue based on *conflict-resolution traditions*.

### ***Human-relation tradition***

The human-relation tradition emerged after the Second World War and is based on Contact Hypothesis Theory, outlined in Gordon Allport's book the "*The nature of Prejudice*" (Abu-Nimer 1999). The main belief in the 1950s was that bringing hostile groups together could be an effective means of reducing prejudice and improve inter-group relations (Doubilet 2007). It is rooted on the idea that the only thing people in a conflict need are a chance to get to know each other. Upon deeper knowledge of each other they will discover that beneath the surface of their group-belongings is a common and deeper identity, the identity of a human being (Nadler 2004). This idea forms the basis of several social programs around the world, such as ethnically integrated schools and racially mixed neighborhoods. In the setting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it has, and still does, create the foundation for several dialogue encounters. One example of such can be the Psychological/ Interpersonal Approach (Suleiman 2004b). Encounters based on the human-relation tradition do vary in many ways,

still there are some general characteristics that can be drawn (Halabi & Sonnenschein 2004). One characteristic is that encounters based on the human-relation tradition emphasize *commonalities* between the members, and are often shunting problematic political issues. The groups often emphasize cultural and religious commonalities such as food-traditions, hobbies, religion, and culture. Such as we both like to eat hummus, we both like to read the same types of books, or both religions have fasting as part of their rituals (the Muslim fast on Ramadan and the Jewish fast on Yom Kippur). Similar to the contact hypotheses this framework assumes that the roots of prejudice lay in the lack of normalized inter-group contact (Halabi & Sonnenschein 2004). These types of encounters will therefore provide such contact, and having participants reduce their stereotypes by discovering that the other side consists of individuals with needs, and dreams just like them (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). Another characteristic is that the relation is often on an *interpersonal* level, which refers to the extent that people relate to each other on an individual basis (Doubilet 2007). The individual is in focus, rather than the group belonging. The assumption here is that hatred can be reduced only when you are cut off from your group attachments, and rather focus on pure personal contacts.

### ***Conflict- resolution tradition***

A series of critiques toward encounters based on the human-relation tradition has led to the development of other approaches, such as encounters based on a the conflict-resolution principles (Abu-Nimer 1999). Oliver Ramsbotham (2005) defines conflict resolution to be a transformation of institutions and discourses that reproduce violence. It must therefore be a transforming change in all underlying causes, behavior, and perceptions of the conflicting parties in order to create peace. According to Ronald Fisher (1997) is the role of a third party outmost central in conflict resolution. This is supported by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, which claims that a conflict resolution must entail “...*the use of collaborative problem solving in a situation where a neutral third party helps the disputants engage in conciliation, facilitation, and/or mediation...*” (Abu-Nimer 1999: 13).

Dialogue accounts based on conflict-resolution tradition focus on the *differences/conflicting issues* rather than the commonalities (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). There is an assumption that there is a basis in reality for the conflict between the two groups and that resolving it

requires a search for ways to build bridges between the conflicting goals. Representatives of this school of thought outline that there must be room to openly confront the political and emotional issues directly linked to the conflict, rather than oppressing them as seen in the human- relations tradition (Halabi & Sonnenschein 2004). Another characteristic is the use of *intergroup interaction* (Doubilet 2007). Intergroup interaction involves participants relating to each other via their group memberships, rather than representing themselves as individuals. An individual always speaks as a representative of his/her own group. The view is that the encounter will be useful and will reduce stereotypes not when the group identity of the participant is being minimized, but rather when it is encouraged and when the interaction that takes place are primary of a group nature. According to this approach, one may generalize from the personal experience in the encounter to the external reality as it is lived outside the dialogue group.

The contemporary encounters between Israeli and Palestinians are influenced by the conflict-resolution tradition in different ways. One example of such is the public-peace ensembles that consists of short-term political workshops (Handelman 2011). Grassroots participants from the two sides represent their respective group's interests, and are sitting around a mediation table. It can be regarded as a preparation for a real official Palestinian-Israeli assembly. Encounters can also consist of a mixture between both tradition (Doubilet 2007). One can for example steer away from conflicting issues, influenced by human-relation traditions, where an example can be to plant a beautiful garden together. Instead of dividing the tasks between individuals, it is rather divided between the two group-identities, related to the conflict resolution. Such as the Palestinians participants are planting olive trees and the Israeli participants are the diggers. The goal of planting a garden requires the cooperation of both groups, and the focus on categorization level is more likely to facilitate generalization of new attitudes to the group as whole. It is not "Fatima", but "Palestinians" that are doing an excellent job in planting trees, and it is not Mikal but the Israeli that are good diggers.

### 2.5.1. A critique towards the use of dialogue in asymmetrical conflicts

A general critique towards the dialogue models that are described above is that they in many cases fail to address the asymmetric power relation that often exists between the conflicting sides. While the conflict-resolution tradition to some degree addresses the different power relation between the parties, the human-relation approach is consciously avoiding this issue. Oliver Ramsbotham (2010) argues that conducting dialogue that fail in addressing the structural nature of asymmetry is perceived as more of a hindrance than of help. This is due to the fact that it is a great risk that it will only reinforce the position of the powerful part, the side that often want the situation to preserve more or less at it is. The Israeli author Rabah Halabi (2011) argues in similar terms as Oliver Ramsbotham. He claims that several dialogue encounters between Israelis and Palestinians fail in addressing the history of oppression between the dominator (Israel) and the dominated (Palestinians). He proposes that if one should conduct dialogue encounters between Israelis and Palestinians it must succeed to address the *history of oppression* between the two asymmetrical sides, rather than having facilitators who, according to his article, only see conflict resolution as group dynamics between small groups of people in a more “here and now” situation. If encounters take place it must mainly be the needs of the oppressed and occupied groups that must be heard. As he writes: *“The Palestinians must be able to make their voices heard in these encounters, even if muffled, as if from the depth of a dungeon. The Jews must be able to cope with their colonial concepts and with racism (...)”* (Halabi 2011: 307).

Other critical voices, such as the Palestinian researcher Nassif Mu’allem, argue that one must exclude any form for dialogue as long as the occupation is still going on (Hanafi 2007). Until the power relations are equalized one must rather focus on unilateral capacity building. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) is arguing in similar terms, referring to the case of South Africa where dialogue and reconciliation was taken in use only *after* the end of apartheid (PACBI 2011). Sari Hanafi argues that cooperation might be an attempt on the Israeli side to escape their responsibility. She is quoted: *“While the Western and Israeli media focus their attention on these types of program, the number of settlers has increased three times since the launching of the peace process”* (Hanafi 2007: 78). The Palestinian literature critic Edward Said proposes a similar criticism claiming that dialogue will only be of relevance after Palestinians have achieved their legitimized and national rights: *“There is still military occupation, people are being*

*killed, imprisoned and denied their rights on daily basis, so only when there has been an end to occupation and we are on a reasonably equal footing with the Israelis can we begin to talk seriously about cooperation” (Ramsbotham et al. 2005: 295).*

#### *2.5.1.1. Normalization “tabi’a”*

Avoidance of the other is something that is deeply incorporated into both Palestinian and Israeli repertoire. It is physically visible in the Israeli building-constructions, such as the separation/apartheid wall, the strictly divided transportations systems and the myriad of checkpoints placed on the West Bank (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). Invisibly it is deeply incorporated in societal codes and is often referred to as normalization, or in Arabic “tabi’a”. Normalization can be defined as the process of building open relations with the other side (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). Especially Palestinians stigmatizes voluntary social contact with the enemy as negative, and something one must try to avoid, because it may help maintaining the state of occupation. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) argues that *“dialogue, if it occurs outside the resistance framework (...) becomes dialogue for the sake of dialogue, which is a form of normalization that hinders the struggle to end injustice” (PACBI 2011).*



### 3. Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of conflict

This chapter will try to give some characteristics to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. This will be done by presenting some of the opposing collective narratives that have been developed through several decades of violent actions.

A common tendency of an intractable conflict is the evolvement of shared societal beliefs that are often referred to as narratives. These narratives tend to give a sense of uniqueness and meaning to the conflicting groups. Jerome Bruner defines a collective narrative as a: (...) *sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community's collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity*" (Bar-Tal & Salomon 2006: 20). In the Israeli Palestinian conflict, where peace has been nonexistent for generations, several sets of collective narratives have been developed, deeply rooted in fear and insecurity of the other side (Bar-Tal & Salomon 2006). The narratives tend to be based upon historical memories of the conflict, and may or may not be historically true. The historical narratives are often presented in a way that gives support for own group's continued existence and social identity, while neglecting the opponents' right to exist, or at least situating them in a very negative light. Therefore, a single historical event often contains multiple and opposing narratives based on which side that tells the story. Each perspective often places its own experience in the foreground, while neglecting the other side. According to Daniel Bar-Tal (2004) there are specifically three narrating beliefs that are in direct opposition to each other in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. These are:

- 1) Societal beliefs about the just nature of one's goal
- 2) Creating a negative image of the opponent, and
- 3) Victimization.

Both groups feel that they are the rightful owner of the land; each side claims that it has been suffering the most, and each side regards the other side as a terrorist state that is not interested in peace (Bar-Tal et al. 2004).

Not all people within each society embrace or identify themselves with the collective narratives. There are diversities in the sets of opinions and beliefs among both Israelis and Palestinians. These diversities might contribute to challenge the contemporary collective belief-systems that are coloring the public agenda. However, this paper will focus on the narratives that are broadly shared within each society. They can be regarded as dominant, and are repeatedly found in the public agenda featured on TV, radio, school- curriculums, and in newspapers (Bar-Tal et al. 2004).

In the following, some of the central opposing historical narratives that exist within the Israeli and Palestinian societies will be presented.

- 1) The foundational myth
- 2) The war of 1948
- 3) Right to return
- 4) Israeli use of violence
- 5) Palestinian use of violence
- 6) Narrating peace

### **3.1. The foundational myth**

The historical connection to the territory is one of the main foundations of legitimacy for both groups, something that penetrate deep into the past (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). The Israeli foundational myth is based on the argumentation that the Jewish population has more than 3000 years of history (Jawad 2006). The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people, and a land they were forcibly exiled from. As stated in the Torah, the Jewish people have been given the Promised Land through a contract with God, and are therefore fully entitled to this land (Reiter 2010). In the traditional Israeli perspective there are no Palestinians, only Arabs who lived in the British Mandate that later became Israel part of modern Israel. According to the narrative the land was almost completely emptied during the period of the Jewish Diaspora and was just (...)” *waiting to be redeemed by the Zionist modernizer*” (Jawad 2006: 73). This myth of ‘a land without people’ is dominant in much of

the Israeli history and their nation building. During the years with conflict this narrative has been widely spread in the state education in Israel. A study conducted on geography textbooks between 1882 and 1989 done by Yoram Bar-Gal can exemplify this (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). Bar-Gal argues that the textbooks describe that Israeli care more about the country than the Arabs, and that they have made the desert into a flourishing land. The books also expresses that the Arabs neglect the same country and do not cultivate the land (Bar-Tal et al. 2004).

Similar sets of justifications are being used on the Palestinian side. They consider themselves as the native people of the land, due to the fact that they have been living on this territory since the beginning of documented history (Kimmerling & Migdal 2003). They consider themselves as a nation distinctive from other Arab nations, a melting pot of different cultures, religions and tribes (Jawad 2006). The Palestinian identity has not, as often stated by the Israeli, been shaped as a reaction towards the Jewish national movement (Kimmerling & Migdal 2003). As Saleh Abdel Jawad is stating: *"(...) before the appearance of Zionist movement, a local national identity was in process of formation"*. (Jawad 2006: 74). The Jewish presence in this territory on the other hand has (...) *"only been marginal even in biblical times and was absent for 2000 years"* (Jawad 2006: 74). Jews are a religious group, and they are not a nation. They do not constitute a single nation with an identity of its own. Both groups have later revised this view, and to this day there is a sort of acceptance on both sides of the other's national identity.

### **3.2. The war of 1948**

Another dominant narrative within both the Israeli and Palestinian identities is the motivation and reason for the war of 1948 and its aftermath (Jawad 2006). In order to fully understand the Israeli narrative of the war of 1948, one must include the tragedy of the Holocaust. The Jewish history shows that they have been consistently subjects of what can be referred to as anti-Semitism (Jones 2011). They were uniquely stigmatized within the European social hierarchy, and through their long history they have suffered from persecution and prejudice in nearly every place they have lived (Jones 2011). The most tragic suffering of the Jewish people was the systematic genocide of millions of European

Jews by the Nazis during World War 2, later referred to as the Holocaust, meaning the Catastrophe (Jones 2011). This happened while the world remained apathetic, and it is reason to believe that this in combination with the collective traumas of the past can have contributed to the feeling of a siege mentality. The Holocaust made it clear that it was a need for a territorial solution for the Jewish people (Auerbach 2010). This together with other factors contributed to the UN resolution to partition of Palestine in 1947 (Pappe 1994). While the Zionist movement accepted the United Nations partition-plan, the Arab side rejected it and instantly went to war against it. A common belief within the Israeli society is that if this had not happened, the UN partitioning would still be in place and the Palestinians would have had their Palestinian state. Many Israelis consider the following War of Independence a defensive one where all surrounding Arabic nations were trying to destroy their new nation by attacking it (Bar-Tal & Salomon 2006). Against all odds the few Jews overcame the overwhelming power of the Arabic enemies, and finally after a long history of humiliation and discrimination, they secured the Jews their long wanted homeland (Caplan 1999). As a contrast to the Israeli War of Independence, the 1948 war stands out for the Palestinian people as al-Nakba, meaning the Catastrophe (Hammack 2006). A common belief among Palestinians is that Holocaust was a catastrophic event, but it does not legitimize the right of the Jews to establish a state at the expense of the Palestinian people. In addition, it does not excuse the violence Israel is directing towards them. By creating a Jewish state within the heart of Palestine, the 1948 war was unavoidable because the Zionists were trying to build an exclusively Jewish state on the Palestinian. The years around 1948 were colored by severe violence and chaos. Zionist armies used terror and massacres to carry out the expulsion of Palestinians during the 1948 war (Rouhana 2006). Thousands of Palestinians were killed, and around 750.000 inhabitants were forced to leave their towns and villages (Rouhana 2006). Palestinian homes, and in several cases entire villages, were demolished or taken over by the Israelis. Palestinians were forced to move to the surrounding Arab countries and in what is currently known as Gaza and the West Bank. According to (Jawad 2006) the 1948 war also had a direct impact on the capacity of Palestinians to write their own historical narrative. More than 400 Palestinian population centers were destroyed, many of them represented the main cultural and intellectual centers of the Palestinian society (Jawad 2006). Several important libraries were demolished and major written heritages vanished. Al-Nakba therefore has a double

meaning: First, it represents the demolition of societies for most of the Palestinian population. Second, it represents the vanishing of urban centers, which again led to weakened the development of a Palestinian collective memory (Jawad 2006).

### **3.3. Right to return**

The Palestinian identity is highly connected to their experiences as refugees developed in the aftermath of 1948 (Caplan 1999). The Palestinians did not share a faith of disaster, which to a great extent separated them from the surrounding Arab countries. To this day Israeli laws still prevent Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and villages (Rouhana 2006). Around 70 percent of Palestinians are refugees; there are nearly 4 million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, and many more worldwide (Masalha 2003). For the Palestinians a resolution to the conflict cannot be accepted without addressing the refugees rights and needs (Masalha 2003). A cornerstone of the Palestinian refugees struggle for acceptance is the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of December 1948 stating that *“refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date”* (Masalha 2003: 70). Many of the refugees are living in refugee camps in surrounding Arab countries, and with the exception of Jordan they are not permitted to gain citizenships. Many still hold the keys to homes they were driven from, a key that together with the painful story is passed on from generation to generation. What also generates significant anger among many Palestinians is the Israeli Law of Return (Prior 2001). This law allows Jews from all around the world to be accepted as citizens of Israel. These are people who have never lived in Israel, while the Palestinians are refused to return to their villages and homes. For Palestinians this is a clear evidence of the fact that Israel wants to eliminate Palestinians from the territory.

Since 1948 the Israeli narrative towards the Palestinian refugees has been colored by denial (Rouhana 2006). The right of return is a privilege that is reserved for Jews returning from 2000 years of exile, and not for the Palestinians. It is common among many of the Israelis to refuse to accept their responsibility for the refugees; instead they hold the view that it is rather the responsibility of the Arab countries. It is something the Arab nations have refused to acknowledge, with the exception of Jordan. According to the book of Simon Perez (1993)

the right of return for Palestinian refugees is an unacceptable claim. If accepted, it would wipe out the national character of the state of Israel, turning the Jewish majority into a minority (Masalha 2003). Some compensation has been discussed, but neither the left nor right wings of political Israel accept the Palestinians right to return. If so, it should at least be within the context of a Jewish state.

### **3.4. Israeli use of violence**

From the Palestinian point of view, Israel is a violent and militaristic regime- some even claims a terrorist state - that are stealing more and more of the little land that is left for the Palestinian people. The war of 1948 was only the first of several wars between Israel, Palestine, and the surrounding Arab countries. One of them was the Six Day War in 1967. It changed the map radically, leading to the Israeli occupation of Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem. From then and to this day the relationship between Israel and Palestine is based on a relationship between the occupier and the occupied. Israel has gained strategic control over major parts over the Palestinian territories, and for each day that goes by they are expanding the area with illegal settlements. According to B'tselem, the Israeli information Center for human rights in the OPT, did the numbers of settlers increase with 4, 9 percent in 2010 (B'Tselem 2011). Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) completely controls Palestinian civilians with checkpoints and roadblocks. Security wall - by many Palestinians referred to as Apartheid wall- penetrate the Palestinian landscape (Ingdal & Simonsen 2005). This has a negative effect on the Palestinian daily life. Basic activities such as going to school or visiting family-members can involve great challenges, and often lead to humiliation and violence in confrontation with Israeli settlers or soldiers at the different check points (Ingdal & Simonsen 2005). Every Palestinian knows a family member whose home has been demolished or olive trees has been uprooted. Many Palestinians have a family member that has been killed, wounded, or died due to lack of medical care. The several decades with humiliation and fear have most certainly sharpened the Palestinian prejudice toward Israel, which again has led to deepening the conflict.

Israel, on the other hand, claims that their use of military power is outmost necessary for their ability to survive. As the Jewish historian David Biale put it: *"Hatred of Jews remains a*

*problem unresolved. Instead of sovereignty turning the Jews into a nation like all others, the Jewish state becomes a new expression of the separation between the Jews and the rest of the world (...)*" (Caplan 1999: 70). Israel has developed narrative of 'national security, which has been constructed around the representation of Israel as a 'nation under siege' surrounded by enemies that are threatening to throw the entire population into the sea (Sharoni 1994). The strongly settled security narrative is among other based on the memory of Holocaust, with a cry of never experiencing a Holocaust again (Caplan 1999). In addition is the narrative reinforced by the many wars that have been fought between Israel and the Arabic countries, as well as the Palestinian suicide and rockets attacks on Israeli civilians (Caplan 1999). The narrative often given in media and public sphere is that it is the Palestinians who start the violent acts, which forces them to defend themselves. The senior adviser to former Israeli Prime minister Ariel Sharon is quoted: *"Israel is a democratic island in an ocean of Arabic tyranny, and we have the right to self-protection"* (Ingdal & Simonsen 2005: 41). The narrative of national security is penetrating deep into every level of the society, and the IDF has become one of the most important institutions in the country (Givol et al. 2004). The military service is compulsory by law for both men (3 years) and women (2 years) (Givol et al. 2004). The military is present in the Israeli educational system, starting already in the primary school, where children learn about important battles. In high schools the real preparation for the army-service starts, where combat soldiers are visiting classes and teach about the benefits of joining the combat-service (Givol et al. 2004). Military check points, and also the construction of to what Israel refers to as the separation wall is by the several hold claimed as only a reaction to terrorism (Ingdal & Simonsen 2005). However, Israeli presence in the OPT is something that causes division within the Israeli society. A common belief within the political left is that Zionism has done enough damage, and the illegal settlers must withdrawal from at least some parts of the West Bank (Bar-On 2006). Such an approach is unacceptable to many of the Israeli Right, and from this perspective building settlements is not referred to as an occupation (Bar-On 2006). The Promised Land by God consists of the whole area from the Mediterranean Sea in the West to the Jordanian River in the east. Many Jews therefore perceives it as their religious duty to build communities in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) (Bar-On 2006).

### **3.5. Palestinian use of violence**

Suicide bombings and the rocket attacks by Palestinians on Israeli citizens are, according to Israel, one of the central causes of the contemporary conflict. The violent actions show how many Palestinians are terrorists with the aim of eliminate Jews from the territory (Bar-Tal et al. 2004). The general Israeli view is that Palestinians have no desire for peace (Bar-Tal & Salomon 2006). The slogan commonly used for Palestinians suicide attacks is “I seek death if Jews die with me” (Berko 2007). Destruction of the Jewish people is what they are aiming for, and no division is made between innocent and guilty, between children, women or men (Berko 2007). These attacks on innocent people are by the Israeli society perceived as immoral, and they have created a deep fear among the Israeli citizens of being killed on open streets (Ingdal & Simonsen 2005). Many Israelis have also lost friends and relatives as victims to the conflict. The Palestinians, on the other hand, are divided in the morality of the suicide bombings. In the light of hopelessness and despair, the suicide bombers are often referred to as freedom fighters; the only weapon left to fight for a homeland against the strong Israeli army (Berko 2007). Palestinians feel powerless to the daily humiliation and with their infrastructure being severely damaged and the economy torn to shreds, many Palestinians believe that there is nothing else left to do.

### **3.6. Narrating peace**

A well-established narrative coloring the public agendas of both sides is that there is no one to talk to on the other side about the question of peace. As a consequence, there is little hope for any peace negotiation between the two sides. According to Bruce E. Wexler (2007) this narrative more or less belongs to the conservative groups of people in both societies, including the extremists. Wexler claims that the extremists are in minority compared to the moderates, but still they are dictating the political agenda and public thinking. Israelis with an extremist attitude usually belong to the radicalized right side of politics (Bland 2003). They are deeply religious, and include many of the Jewish settlers living on the West Bank. On the Palestinian side, people with an extremist attitude usually belong to the militant Islamic party Hamas (Bland 2003). The question about peace is to a high degree on minds of the extremists, even so, it is a peace that does not include both peoples. Their way of defining peace can be referred to as the Greater Israel and the



Greater Palestine, where both visions include a rejection of the other (Bland 2003). For the most part Israeli extremists picture a homeland that consists of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Only Jews are allowed to live in these areas. They are going to live there in peace and in an environment of non-violence, free from any anti-Semitic attacks (Bland 2003). Similarly, Palestinian extremist groups are fighting for a Palestinian state that goes all the way from Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea (Bland 2003). Only Palestinian people will live in this area, including those that had to escape during the wars of 1948 and 1967 (Bland 2003).

The moderates, on the other hand, endorse a peace plan that includes both people (Wexler 2007). On the Israeli side many of them belong to the left side of politics. They are often moderate secular Jews, and are commonly referred to as 'leftists' (Kimmerling 2008). On the Palestinian side, the moderate Palestinians have more democratic aspirations than the militant Islamism represented by Hamas, and usually belong to the secular nationalist movement, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Kimmerling 2008). In opposite to the extremists' narrative of peace the moderates have a future vision that consists of both peoples living side by side in two separate states (Bland 2003). There are several variations of this idea, but the state of Palestine is most often based on the borders of 1967 with a swap of up to *"4% equally valuable land to accommodate settlers and the security concerns"* (Bland 2003: 8). Despite the fact that the moderates are in majority on both sides, it is still the peace plan of the extremists that *"set the agenda and control the terms of discussion, thinking and relating"* (Wexler 2007: 337).

## **4. Methodology**

This chapter will discuss the research strategy together with the various research methods that form the basis for this thesis. It will also give the reader insight into the process of the conducted fieldwork, together with challenges and limitations alongside it. In the end of the chapter I will outline some ethical considerations that is considered as relevant for the research.

### **4.1. A Qualitative Research Strategy**

The aim for this research is to investigate the perceived value and effect grassroots level dialogue groups have for its participants. The hope is to gain insight into the participants' thoughts, opinions and reasons for their choices. A qualitative research strategy is therefore considered to match the nature of this research in a best possible way. According to Brymann (2004) a qualitative research emphasizes words rather than quantifications and views the way in which individuals interpret their social world. It is a strategy that is well suited if the researcher's goal is to probe beneath the surface appearance. The data collection methods for a qualitative research are conducted in a natural setting (Bryman 2004). Books and articles can only give limited information about insight in human relations, and about their deeper perceptions and thoughts. In order to understand how the social world is functioning, firsthand participation is therefore needed (Silverman 2006). The closeness to the people being investigated is considered as important in order to be able to see the world with their eyes. It was therefore clear from the beginning that a fieldwork had to be conducted for gaining insight in what personal significance the dialogue groups have for its members. Therefore the decision was made to go to Israel and Palestine for two months to provide empirical data with relation to the scope of the thesis. It felt important to engage in the natural setting of the participants by attending dialogue sessions, and by conducting interviews in settings comfortable to them.

#### **4.1.1. Epistemological and ontological traditions**

A research strategy is not a purely neutral tool. According to Brymann (2004) it can be closely tied to the researcher's view on how the social reality should be studied. The

researcher's considerations around epistemology and ontology will among other have a great impact on a research. Therefore there is necessary to outline what philosophical traditions this thesis is influenced by.

*Epistemology:* There is a division within academics about the question on what should be regarded as acceptable knowledge. Some academics claim that the social world should be studied according to the same principles as natural science, which is known as positivism (Bryman 2004). This thesis, however, is based on the contrasting epistemology termed interpretivism. This position emphasizes that research on the social world should not only be aware on simply quantifying what actually happens is social phenomena, but also provide an interpretation in terms of how the people involved understand their own experience (Bryman 2004). This can be connected to the research questions in the sense that I want to collect an in depth understanding in terms of how participants involved in dialogue perceive their participation. The interpretive perspective have most certain had an impact on how research questions are formulated, and on how fieldwork and the analysis of data have been conducted.

*Ontology:* The next question concerns the ontological position to science, which for this research can be regarded as constructionist. Constructionism is a position that asserts social phenomena as something indeterminate instead of definitive (Bryman 2004). This thesis assumes that a society is not pre-given, but instead constituted through interaction by the people that live in it. On one hand societies are continuously subject to adjustments by their social actors. On the other hand people shape their perceptions of the world through among others what kind of society, religion or gender they are connected to. In other words, what an individual believes is truth depends to some degree on his self-image. This thesis assumes that Israelis and Palestinians perceive the truth about their own group, the other group as well as the conflict differently; all dependent on which side they belong to.

## 4.2. Case-study design

Research design can be defined as a framework for collecting and analyzing data (Bryman 2004). This thesis is based on a case-study design. It is a commonly used design tool within

social sciences, especially when the researcher wants get an in-depth understanding of relatively small numbers of individuals, groups, or events (Patton 2002). It matches the aim of this research, which is to understand the complex issues and experiences around grassroots level dialogue. In this research the various *participants* connected to grassroots dialogue is the case, and the aim is to provide an in depth view of how they experience the encounters. By selecting dialogue encounters between a particular group of people - Israeli and Palestinian participants - I have chosen to look at grassroots dialogue limited to only one geographical area. It is therefore difficult to generalize empirical data from a case study in the sense that the findings are limited to the case itself. However, according to Patton (2002): "*Cases (e.g. people, groups, organizations, communities, culture, events) are selected because they are informational rich and (...) aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to the population*" (Patton 2002: 40).

The aim of this case-study is to look at several types of dialogue groups where each group represents different types and traditions. There were especially three diverse qualities that I wanted to embrace into this study. The first component concerns the representation of voices from both non-political as well as political groups. In addition there was a wish to include people that have been involved in a non-functional dialogue group. The last component was to have a balance between young and old participants, as well as men and women. This is due to the fact that they might view society as well as dialogue differently. The study ended up having five different dialogue groups. An in depth description of each group, and also the interviewed participants is presented in chapter 5.

### **4.3. Entering the field**

The research-material for this thesis was gathered between October 20 and December 26. 2009. From the very beginning the decision was made to only focus on dialogue groups between Israeli and Palestinians living on the West Bank, and not from the Gaza strip. This was due to practical reasons such as the consideration of the scope of the thesis. In addition it is also easier to access West Bank than the Gaza strip, due to the strict control-regime that one must go through in order to enter Gaza. Doing research on joint dialogue between Israeli and Palestinians means facing the contrasts between two very different worlds.

Geographically they are very close, but the way of living seems worlds apart. To be as neutral as possible the decision was made to live in East Jerusalem at Mount of Olives, and from this position travel between the West Bank and Israel. This is due to the fact that it gave me as much input as possible from both cultures rather than having a major influence from only one, which most probably would have been the case if I had either lived in Israel or West Bank. Instead of renting a car, I decided to use public transportation, or driving with members of different dialogue groups. This was due to the fact that good conversations could occur during the travel, such as fruitful discussions with random people on the bus/taxi-drivers. It also gave me a chance to get to know the participants better when driving with them.

#### 4.3.1. Using snowball method as sampling method

Entry into the field started several months before the fieldwork was conducted. Sending an amount of emails and taking several phone calls to different groups ended with no response. It was only after arriving in Jerusalem that I started to receive positive responses. Due to the difficulty of getting in contact with dialogue groups the solution fell on using a snowball sampling method. This is a technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances (Bryman 2004). By establishing contact with one subject you get help with generating leads for additional subjects. The challenge with this sampling method might be that the sample often recruits people from same group and with one specific type of qualification. Having focus on involving participants from different dialogue groups based on different strategies hopefully helped reducing this risk. At the same time this thesis is based on a qualitative research approach where there is less weight on having samples of representatives that are valid for the whole population.

It turned out that the dialogue groups are to a great degree interlinked in Israel and Palestine. After first getting a foothold inside the dialogue network, it was easy to make contact with people that were willing to be interviewed. During interviews, and during attendances in dialogue meetings, there were often people who knew of people in other dialogue groups, whom I could contact, or other dialogue events that I could attend. After being involved in this dialogue network for some time good contacts were established, and I often got contacted if something was happening.

#### **4.4. Research Methods**

There are several research methods for gathering data in a qualitative research, where the most commonly used are participant observations, qualitative interviews, focus groups, discourse and conversations analysis and analysis of texts and documents (Bryman 2004). The major emphasis for this research is on qualitative interviews of participants that are part of different dialogue groups. However, the aim is to support the interviews by observing/being involved in as many dialogue meetings as possible. Using several methods is regarded as common in qualitative research, and something that is often encouraged to do (Bailey 2007). This is due to the fact that the different methods can complement each other. On one hand can an observed behavior be clarified in an interview, while on the other hand can the spoken word be better understood through observation.

##### **4.4.1. Semi-structured Interviews**

A qualitative interview can be defined as a conversation with a specific structure and purpose (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). This is a preferable data collection method if the researcher seeks greater understanding of how people perceive their world, and also to the different meanings they attach to it. Face to face interaction with respondents provides a unique opportunity to penetrate deeply into the topics and explore the complexity and richness of the participants' values, experiences and challenges (Bryman 2004). Qualitative interviews were therefore a natural choice of method. There exist several forms of interviews, such as unstructured, structured and semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). This thesis is based on the latter ones. What characterizes a semi-structured interview is the flexibility of it. The major topics and questions are more or less defined in advanced; however the order of raising them differs from interview to interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

From the beginning the decision was made to only interview people that spoke English. This is due to the fact that using a translator for long conversations with several sensitive questions could become a challenge. There was a risk that having a third person translating could damage the confidence between the participant and the researcher, and limit and/or

change the information given. The wish and purpose of the interviews was to make the setting relaxed, and try to have as flowing conversation as possible. It is reason to believe that it might be easier to achieve this with a direct conversation was in a language I know. The interviews were held either at the participant's home, or at a café suggested by the participants. This was done in an attempt to make the participants more comfortable with the situation, and hopefully making the relationship between the participants and the researcher less unequal. If the conversation found place at a café, the participants were asked in advance to reflect upon the consequences of having other people around. Almost all of the home-visits included a meal with the participants and his/her family. These home-visits were more time demanding, but also more preferable. It enabled me to get to know the participants better, and often other relevant topics were raised during the meal. It was also interesting to ask other family members about their opinions, values and interests around dialogue, and whether they supported it or not.

#### *4.4.1.1. Interview guide*

Before each interview an interview guide was prepared and specifically adjusted to each of the settings. The guideline was taken in use during the meetings to make sure that the main subjects were discussed. The following only illustrates a rough outline of the topics:

- 1) Motivations for joining dialogue group
- 2) How long have they been involved?
- 3) Has the participation changed his/her view about the conflict?
- 4) Has the participation changed his/her view about the other (Israeli/Palestinians)?
- 5) If he/she believes grassroots dialogue can change/end the conflict?
- 6) What other factors must be taken into consideration in order to end the conflict
- 7) Challenges about dialogue
- 8) Does he/she still believe in dialogue, or has the optimism waned after being involved? (Is the optimism strengthened?)
- 9) Reactions from family/ friends
- 10) Participants' reflections around the structure of this specific dialogue group.

Short-term vs. long-term/ Politically vs. non-politically/ Women group vs. mixed groups/ Programs conducted abroad vs. groups conducted inside the conflicting area.

The order of the questions varied from each interview. I tried actively to listen to what the participants were saying, and additional questions were often asked during the interviews. There was given space for the participants to talk about other topics that were important to them. It was important that the participants were involved in shaping the interviews, and deciding how deep they wanted to go into each of the topics. The interviews lasted between one to three hours. The reason for this time difference was that home visits were more time demanding than the ones that were conducted at cafés. Some were also more talkative than others, and the time available also differed from person to person. After each interview the conversation was briefly reflected upon. New themes and questions sometimes occurred, which was added to the interview guide before the next interview session.

According to Bryman (2004) it is preferable to use a tape recorder when conducting interviews. All of the participants were asked and they gave their consents to use the recorder. Therefore the device was taken in use for all of the interviews, except one, where the recorder did not work. For this interview key words were written down during the conversation, and a detailed text was produced as accurate as possible the same evening. It is acknowledged that a tape recorder may influence the participants' answers. Bryman is arguing: *"the use of a tape recorder might disconcert respondents, who become self conscious or alarmed at the prospect of their words being preserved"* (Bryman 2004: 330). However, it seemed like the tape recorder had little effect on how freely they were speaking compared to before and after the recorder was turned on. There are many advantages to using a recorder. One of them is that it gives the researcher the possibility to pay full attention to what is being said, rather than using time on writing down sentences (Bryman 2004). The researcher can then rather focus on following up what is being said with additional questions. Having recorded the interviews was also helpful in the sense that one could go back listening to the interviews when writing up the findings. It also helped clearing



up some misunderstandings. All of the interviews were transcribed. The quotes from transcriptions that are used in this thesis have in some occasions been marginally adjusted in order to clarify the structure of the sentences.

#### 4.4.2. Attendance and Observations

The interviews were supported by as much attendance in different dialogue meetings as possible. This is due to the fact that one can observe participants' internal relationship and actions in it's natural environment (Thagaard 2006). I wanted to observe the relationships between the participants, especially the dynamic that took place between Israeli and Palestinian participants. There are many aspects of observation as a tool of data collection in social research. One of the distinctions "*concerns the extent to which the observer will be a participant in the setting being studied*" (Patton 2002: 265). There exists two apexes in observations, where one is to be completely immersed in the actions in the field, and the other is to be completely separated from the activities. I wanted to move somewhere in between the two choices, which is referred to as being participant observer. Being a participant observer means that the researcher participates in the ongoing activities, but at the same time "*members of the social setting are aware of the researcher's status as a researcher*" (Bryman 2004: 301). I engaged to some extent during the meetings, and mingled with the participants during meals and during coffee brakes. It was an excellent opportunity to get to know more people. I was then able to conduct informal conversations among others around the scope of the research, and it also made me able to schedule new interviews. On the other hand I tried always to be aware of my role as a researcher.

Patton (2002) argues that observational data must include points such as the setting, the activities, the people who participated and the meaning behind the activities. These points were always in my consciousness when joining the dialogue meetings. Quick thoughts, questions and observations were written down in a notebook during meetings. Afterwards the notes were as fast as possible reviewed and a more detailed text about the experiences was formulated. Every evening I also wrote down thoughts and experiences that had happened during the day. This diary was separated from the observations notes that were taken during the dialogue meetings and the interviews.

During the fieldwork period, I aimed to take part in activities in three out of five dialogue groups. The two other groups were impossible to reach, due to the fact that one of them no longer exists, and the other one is a summer camp conducted in Germany. The more detailed description of the participation is outlined in chapter 5. In addition I took part in several others activities that were perceived as relevant for the thesis. One of the activities was a whole day with joint olive harvest in a Palestinian village on the OPT. During olive season an Israeli peace movement gives Palestinian farmers a hand with their harvest, and protect them as best they can against the Israeli soldiers. I had the opportunity to join one of the tours, and the bus trip together with the hours spent on the field opened up for long conversations with both Israeli and Palestinians around the political situation as well as the topic of my research. In addition I also worked as a volunteer for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), where I was used as a substitute while the people working in one of the placements were on a course. I spent three days in Yanoun, a Palestinian village placed in the north of the West Bank. I also divided my days as equal as possible between time spent in Israeli cities such as Haifa and Tel Aviv, and time spent at the West Bank, such as Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Nablus. I took many bus rides both in Israel and in the West Bank, and passed through many checkpoints and Israeli security checks. This I believe gave me a more in-depth knowledge on the meaning of the military occupation for both Israeli and Palestinian communities, and an overall understanding of the situation for the Israeli Palestinian dialogue groups.

#### **4.5. Data Analysis**

There are several ways of analyzing participants' accounts about their perceptions and experiences. This can among others be done through the use of narrative analysis, grounded theory, or a qualitative thematic analysis (Bryman 2004). This research is based on the latter analysis approach; however it might consist of elements that are similar to the other analysis methods that are mentioned above. Thematic analysis is a method that searches across a data set, such as across a numbers of interviews, in order to identify repeated patterns, themes, concepts and meanings (Braun & Clarke 2006). According to Bailey (2007) the analysis process is something that must happen simultaneously with the data collection,

and not only after the fieldwork is finished. During the fieldwork I was therefore aware of how the received information could be interpreted, and on how/if narratives were answering research questions. These reflections have been written in the field notes and were useful in later stages of the analysis process. I also started to look for meanings through listening to the recorded conversations as quickly as possible. This was often done on the bus trip back home. It enabled me to discover new and important issues that were not yet considered, which could be asked in the future interviews.

#### 4.5.1. Transcribing

In a thematic analysis it is necessary that the researcher is familiar with the data in order for the analysis to be as insightful as possible (Braun & Clarke 2006). Therefore, after leaving the field, the decision was made on transcribing all interviews into written text. The process was time demanding, due to the fact that everything was written word by word. However, listening to the conversations over again was useful in the sense that I experienced the feelings and the mood that developed during the different interviews one more time. This time the focus was only directed in listening, instead of using energy in preparing additional questions. To experience the interviews over again helped me look at them in new ways, and hence made me able to discover new patterns and bigger lines. I believe that I during this process developed a more in-depth understanding of the data.

#### 4.5.2. Coding

After transcribing the interviews, the texts were printed out and re-read one more time. They were coded manually by highlighting aspects in the data that had a potential to form basis of repeated patterns. The coding was done with different colored pens, one color dedicated for each pattern. I coded for as many potential themes as possible, where some became a pattern while other did not. The different colored themes were then enumerated in a document. Taking advice from Braun and Clarke (2006). I included relevant surrounding data, in order to not lose the context it was taken from. In each theme I included relevant quotes from different participants that captured its essence. Throughout the process I wrote down where the different quotes were taken from, so I easily could locate back to them. I continuously compared what was being said during interviews with the field notes taken from the participants' observation. After gaining deep insight into the material I

started to sum it up into one document. I began with the aspects that had captured my attention the most, and worked systematically through the whole material. This gave me a foundation to compare and to withdraw experiences and perceptions that were similar to one another, and also experiences and perceptions that differed from one another. In the discussion I have with purpose choose to include a great amount of quotes from the research interviews that capture the essence of the point that I am trying to demonstrate. While doing this I have in some occasions corrected basic spelling mistakes in order to increase the readability of the quotations. This process led to the result of seven different themes and a various numbers of sub-themes, which is outlined and discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

#### 4.5.3. The relation between primary and secondary data

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) one can in a thematic analysis choose to code in several different ways, all depends on whether the themes are going to be data driven (inductive) or theory driven (deductive). In this research, themes and patterns have derived from both fields, as the gathering of theory and data have been a continuous and parallel process. The topic of the thesis has been of interest for a long period of time, and I have therefore entered the fieldwork, and later the analysis process, with a theoretical foundation gained from various range of literature. There were some specific questions based on this theoretical foundation that I wanted to find out during the analyzing of the data. At the same time I was trying to be open for other patterns of interests that was not connected to the research questions. During the interviews I was, as already mentioned, letting the participants guide the interview in directions felt important for them, and new themes often occurred during that process. There has been a constant comparison between the empirical data and relevant theories in the sense that new themes and hence more theories are added after the analysis began in order to give more background to the findings. It also gave me deeper insight into aspects raised by the participants that in advanced was new to me, and after studying it through theory became more understandable and also meaningful to the thesis. One example might be the word 'normalization', a concept raised by almost all of the participants. The concept was new and

in the beginning hard to grasp, and it ended up being very meaningful and have great importance for the research.

#### **4.6. Challenges and limitations to qualitative research**

Whenever doing a research one might face several challenges on the way. It can concern the quality and the trustworthiness of research, but it can also concern some practical challenges. This research faced them both, which in the following will be outlined.

##### **4.6.1. The researcher's impact on the interview setting**

In a qualitative research effort the most common tool for gaining data is the researcher him/herself. This might cause several implications. One major criticism is that the researcher's presence may affect how the participants behave and respond. According to Ervin Goffman (1971) an interview setting can be compared with a theatrical performance, where the actors –in this case the participants- adjust their expressions to the audience listening, which in this case is the researcher. People might easily be affected by what they believe the audience wants to hear, in order to be perceived in a good light. Therefore one might believe that some values and opinions easily can be over-communicated, while others again are under-communicated. During the interview such performances have most probably taken place, however this is difficult to find out unless the researcher spends enough time with the participants in order to get access "backstage" (Goffman 1971). The timeframe for this fieldwork was limited. However, despite the time shortage I made an effort to meet the participants that were interviewed several times and in different social contexts. The majority of the people that were interviewed I managed to meet both in a dialogue setting as well as in the individual interview setting. For some of the people that I interviewed I also had the opportunity to spend time with them at home together with their family. Meeting the participants in different settings might have increased the chances of getting familiar with the more informal sides of the participants as well. In addition to this I always tried to create as comfortable an atmosphere during the interviews as possible. As already outlined I let the participants decide where to meet, and made an effort of being as humble and genuinely interested in each of the participants unique stories. Sensitive questions were being raised, and for some of the participants this was emotionally difficult

to talk about. I consciously avoided expressing my personal views, in order not to influence what kinds of experiences and opinions the interviewees felt comfortable expressing.

Another aspect that must be taken into considerations is the researcher's gender, age and culturally belonging, which also might have an impact on the interview setting (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). My status as a young woman from Scandinavia may to some degree have colored the interview situation. This was especially apparent in some of the interviews that were conducted with the Israeli participants, which repeatedly had a need to defend themselves and give explanations for why Israel is acting the way they are doing. They are most probably used to face criticism from international solidarity groups, which as a young woman from Norway they might have felt that I was representing, and therefore wanted to over communicate the message that Israel is not an evil country. All interaction also takes place in a gendered context. Studies have shown that participants sometimes provide different information dependent on whether the researcher is of the same or opposite sex (Silverman 2000). Due to this I tried my best to recruit a gender-balanced group of participants for this research study. However, I did not feel that the interviews that were conducted with male participants differed from the ones that were conducted with the females. All participants, despite their gender, were communicative and willing to provide answers to all the questions that were given.

#### 4.6.2. Objectivity

Another major criticism to qualitative research is the subjective character of the collected data, which can challenge the reliability of the study. Reliability can be understood with the study's ability to be reproduced if conducted by another researcher at a different time (Bryman 2004). For this to be possible the findings should not be biased and influenced by the opinions, feelings and personality of the researcher. However, the question is whether complete objectivity is feasible and wanted in a qualitative study based on fieldwork. This specific research was not aiming to generate an objective truth, but rather to extract the participant's reflections and perceptions around dialogue encounters. According to Bailey (2007: 184) *"recognizing the subjective nature of field research, they replace objectivity and value neutrality with conformability, which requires that findings be supported by data"*. In order to make others able to confirm the produced results I have made sure that the

findings are supported by the data. I have also to a great extent used participants' own words when coding the data as an effort to maintain their voices in the analysis.

In addition I have made a great effort in being aware of, and keeping a critical distance to own personal bias. A common phenomenon for all people is that they use previous experiences to make sense of new ones, and therefore it is impossible for a researcher to be totally neutral when listening to participants. Most certainly I have developed a personal and political bias to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, not at least during a three months stay at the West Bank on behalf of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) in 2007. It gave me an insight into the great difficulties the Palestinian people are exposed to as a consequence of the Israeli military occupation. While living in a Palestinian village, and spending many hours at military checkpoints also gave me the opportunity to listen to a great number of Palestinian people, and hence their stereotypes, narratives and judgments to the conflict. This has most certainly given me a personal attachment to the conflict, and a genuine empathy with the Palestinian people. Therefore it was necessary to reflect upon my personal and political bias to the conflict, before, during, and also after the fieldwork was conducted, in order to limit the impact the bias could have on the data. During the fieldwork I was conscious about being as open minded and curious as possible to all people on both side of the conflict. I believe that by encouraging the participants to explain their reflections and showing interest in their unique experiences they have been able to bring up topics that they perceived as important. I tried my very best to respect and be as humble as possible to the multiple truths revealed to me during the interviews and through participant observation, regardless of whether it was similar with my own views. I also put a great effort in spending a lot of time in Israel, meeting as many Israeli people as possible, which I believe gave me a more balanced view of the conflict. I was therefore able to experience how the conflict is affecting –if so in a very different way- the Israeli people as well, and experienced how the people on that side of the conflict also are emotionally suffering and do live under stressful circumstances.

#### 4.6.3. Language barriers

In addition there is a practical challenge that might have limited the research, which is the challenge concerning language barrier. As already outlined, the collections of people were limited to those who in addition to their mother tongue speak fluent English. This was due to the fact that using an interpreter for such time demanding and sensitive interviews might lead to errors, misunderstandings and also many ethical dilemmas. This automatically made a limitation on what type of people that I could interview. Especially elderly Palestinian women that speak fluent English were challenging to find, and I was only able to gather one for this research. In addition, several of the dialogue meetings were only conducted in Arabic and Hebrew, and not translated into English. For these sessions I therefore needed a participant to translate what was being said. Several points of relevance may then have been lost in translation.

#### 4.6.4. Generalization of the research

A research is considered to have a high degree of generalization if the findings can be transferred to an external context (Bryman 2004). The aim for this specific research was not to develop empirical generalized information that can be transferred to a wider population, but to rather get an in-depth understanding of the lives of a limited number of participants. However, while the experiences and opinions expressed by the participants are unique for them and their situation, one might say that the findings may be applicable to similar places where dialogue is used as a method to reconciliation in an ongoing intractable conflict.

### **4.7. Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are important in all stages of a research process, from the planning phase and all the way to the publishing of the thesis. Bryman (2004) argues that there are particularly three ethical areas that the researcher must have in mind when conducting a research. One of them is *Informal Consent*, which stresses the importance of giving participants as detailed information about the project as possible. The participants were informed about the aim and purpose of the research study, as well as how the information given was going to be used. Positive as well as negative effects of attaining the study were



outlined, and they were given a chance to withdraw from the research at any time during the interview, or before it was used in the research. In the end of each interview it was made room for participants to raise questions, which also gave them an opportunity to ask me about implications of the research. The second area concerns *Confidentiality*. Names and location related to participants was kept anonymous, and the audio files as well as the transcribed interviews were kept on a private computer. I also made sure that the information that was written in the field notes could not be traced back to the participants that were involved. The participants were well informed that their identity would be protected, among others that I would not use their names in the written records of my research. Some of the interviewed Palestinian participants made it very clear that this was something they perceived as important, referring to the implications it might cause due to issues concerning normalization. However, the majority of the participants were relaxed about the area of confidentiality, due to the fact that they are trying to be as visible as possible in media with their specific message concerning the importance of using dialogue as a tool for reconciliation. The last point concerns the *Consequences*. The author must reflect over the benefits and the consequences the research might have for the participants. The research must not be followed through if there are reasons to believe that the negative consequences are greater than the benefits for the participants involved. What I found challenging was that the participants gave their valuable time and energy to provide me with data, while I did not have the opportunity to give much back to the people interviewed. Through use of semi-structured interviews it is a potentiality for the evolvement of in depth conversations, were participants share sensitive and personal information, which might contribute to the feeling of being used at the end of an interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2008). This was something that I had in mind when conducting the interviews. They were clearly informed that they did not have to answer all the questions if they did not feel like it. I also tried my very best to let the participants feel that they were actively listened to, and that they had the opportunity to raise issues felt important to them. By letting them speak freely, several of the participants expressed that they discovered new insights and perspectives that they never had considered before. Few of the participants also expressed that they found it therapeutically valuable to talk about the traumatic experiences in life, such as loosing someone closely related.

## 5. Overview of dialogue groups and participants

The focus of this thesis is on dialogue encounters that are conducted between Jewish and secular Israeli citizens on the one side, and Muslim and Christian Palestinians from the Palestinian Occupied Territories OPT (West Bank and East Jerusalem) on the other. The first part of this chapter will give a presentation of the five dialogue groups that are chosen for this research, with main focus on their contents and goals. Major part of the gained information is based on what has been revealed by the interviewed participants during the interviews. This is supplemented with information found on the Internet. The second part of the chapter will give a general presentation of the 24 interviewed participants in relations to age, gender, geographical location, as well as religious and political background.

### 5.1. Overview of the different dialogue groups

Name of group	Short name	Comment
Parents Circle Family Forum	PCFF	A group of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families
Breaking Barriers	BB	Two weeks workshop that is conducted in Germany, between Israeli and Palestinian youths
Interfaith Encounter Association	IEA	Long-term religious dialogue between Israeli settlers and Palestinians living next to the settlement
Minds of peace experiment	MOPE	Political short-term workshop, which lasted for two days
Failed Dialogue Group	FD	Women's group that was active between 1988 until 2000.

Table 1: Overview of dialogue groups

### 5.1.1. Parents Circle - Family Forum (PCFF)

The Parents Circle Bereaved Families Forum (PCFF) is a Palestinian-Israeli organization for people that have lost immediate family members due to the violence in the region. Yihak Frankenwall and Roni Hirschenson were the founders of the group in 1995 (PCFF 2012). Today it consists of more than 500 bereaved families, evenly split between the two sides of the conflict. People belonging to the group believe that they are all human beings, and despite their religious and culturally differences they are all bearing the same pain that comes after loosing a family- member. Members of PCFF have chosen to convert the feelings of anger and despair, into energies of hope and action, with the belief that reconciliation is the solution of the problem, and not revenge (PCFF 2012). Therefore there is reason to assume that their basis can be related to the human-relation approach. Members refer to their organization as non-political; instead of addressing political issues they attempt to show the human side of the story. They believe that the reconciliation process must be established by the people and for the people, apart from any political and national process (PCFF 2012). On the other hand, PCFF can be regarded as political, in the sense that their aim is to put substantial pressure on the leaderships in the region, in order to reestablish the peace process. The forum meets approximately once a month. They hold activities for the members within the forum, but are at the same time doing a lot of work for reaching people outside the group in both communities. This is done through lectures in high schools, media, art exhibitions, and through dialogue with all kinds of groups willing to listen. In 2006 the Forum established a pure Women's group (PCFF 2012). This happened as a reaction to the fact that it was challenging to make the Palestinian women visible in the PCFF, and having their voices heard. This was due to the fact that they often were sat to take care of their children, while the men represented the family. In 2009 the PCFF Women's group arranged an event called "Neighbors-Bereaved Women creating reconciliation". It consisted of a two-day event held at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque in December. The event held sessions where Israelis were able to listen to Palestinians' personal narratives. In addition they arranged a sale fair where handcrafts prepared by the Palestinians and Israeli group-members could be bought. Many months of meeting and preparations between the Palestinian and Israeli women were behind this event.

As part of the fieldwork for the thesis I was able to observe several of these planning meetings prior the exhibition. I also attended the two days exhibition in Tel Aviv. Six participants were interviewed from PCFF, three Israeli and three Palestinians. Five of them were women from the PCFF's Women's group, due to the fact that this was the group I used most time with.

### 5.1.2. Breaking Barriers (BB)

The Breaking Barriers initiative was founded in 2002. It consists of a two-week summer camp for young Israeli and Palestinians between the ages of 18 to 32. It is conducted abroad, in Germany. The general belief is that the circle of violence can be stopped through building mutual interests, solidarity and trust between individuals of the two societies. Inspired by the conflict-resolution tradition the discussions touch directly on the core issues of the conflict. They believe that the meeting will not fit the emotions of the participants, and hence it will not be honest if avoiding or bypassing the conflicting issues. If friendships are created during the two weeks it is good, but that is not their main goal. However, inspired by the human-relations approach, they want the young people to meet on an interpersonal level and not be representing any groups or movements. One aim of the program is that the participants will organize themselves and continue meeting and working for peace in their region after the camp ends. Each summer two seminar-groups are conducted. One is for men and women and the other is for women only. Each seminar group consists of three smaller groups. Each group consists of 20 participants evenly split between Israeli and Palestinians. In addition there is one facilitator from each side of the conflict. During the two weeks they live, eat, and have sessions together. The seminar has a strict structure containing three main parts. The first part lasts for three days and has a framework of activities related to the personal level, such as ice breaking activities. The second part takes place over the next three days and deals with the collective identity and historical narrative of Palestine and Israel. In the third part the different aspects and issues related to the conflict are discussed.

Altogether six people were interviewed from the BB initiative, evenly divided between Israeli and Palestinians. Two of the participants interviewed were facilitators, one Israeli and one Palestinian. All six of them were young women.

### 5.1.3. Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA)

The interfaith Encounter Association is a combination of Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze, and is an umbrella association that arranges small meetings around the region based on conversations around religious traditions (IEA 2012). One such meeting is the interfaith dialogue that finds place between Palestinians from a village on the West Bank, and Israeli Jews living in the neighboring Israeli settlement. In 2009 they had ten members. The group is referred to as a non-political initiative. They avoid political discussions, which they believe will make it easier for all sorts of people to join. As similar to the human- relation approach they believe that the roots of prejudice lay in the absence of normalized inter-group contact. The group is attempting to find a common ground through cross-cultural study on common themes in Islam and Judaism. They believe that religion should be the source of the solution of the conflict, rather than being a cause of the problem, due to the fact that they have a lot in common. They meet approximately once a month, every second time in the Palestinian village and every second time in the Israeli Settlement. The meetings are conducted at their homes, and they always end the sessions by eating a meal together. For each session they have chosen a topic to discuss related to religion. A member from each group has prepared a speech, and after the speech they have an open discussion where everybody can ask questions and raise their meanings.

As part of the field work I had the privilege to attend two sessions; one in the Palestinian village and the other in the Israeli settlement. In addition one of the Israeli members invited me to join of their family dinners, which I thankfully accepted. I was able to interview three people from this group, two Israeli women and one Palestinian man.

#### 5.1.4. Minds of Peace Experiment (MOPE)

MOPE is a series of exercises in peace making and conflict resolution. As stated on their homepage their ultimate goal is to: *“create the social conditions for peace in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by grassroots effort to involve the public in the peacemaking “* (MOPE 2012). The group finds its basis in the conflict-resolution tradition, conducting political workshops for ordinary Israeli and Palestinian people. It is a simulation game, where unofficial representatives, such as teachers and hairdressers replace the politicians. MOPE is meant to provoke a public debate over central conflicting issues, and the aim is that throughout the workshop they will reach some imaginable solutions. It can be regarded as a preparation for a real official Palestinian-Israeli public assembly. Participants were relating to each other via their group membership, which is colored by the intergroup interaction model.

November 20-21, 2009 a two-day program of MOPE was conducted in Beit Jalla, Bethlehem, at Mount Everest Hotel. It consisted of a delegation of six Palestinian and five Israeli participants that unofficially represented the two people. One Israeli and one Palestinian facilitated the talk. In addition there were an audience of approximately 20 Palestinians, Israeli and internationals listening to what was being said around the table. Each day consisted of five sessions, each lasting for two hours. Throughout the closing minutes of each session they opened up for question from the audience. The two delegations discussed the following issues:

- Border and security
- Jerusalem
- Refugees

During the two days almost all of the participants and audience shared meals together, and some also stayed the night at the hotel. This opened up for informal conversations that didn't always include political issues.

As part of my fieldwork I attended the two-days workshop as an audience, and did also spend the night at the Mount Everest Hotel. I shared a room with one of the Palestinian woman that sat in the panel. During the workshop weekend I had the opportunity to get to know the eleven people in the delegation. Five of them, three Palestinians men, one Israeli

woman, and one Israeli man were willing to later be interviewed. Additionally I had the opportunity to interview the Israeli facilitator and the creator of the workshop, and one Israeli man from the audience.

#### 5.1.5. The “failed” dialogue group (FD)

In addition to the four dialogue encounters mentioned above, an Israeli and a Palestinian from a previous women’s group were interviewed. It is a group that no longer exists. This dialogue initiative started in 1988 and lasted for 12 years. The group broke down, due to the difficulties that followed by the second Intifada. They met approximately every second week and the meetings were held both at the Palestinian and Israeli homes. It was a core group that went on for twelve years, and a lot of other women that came and left during the period of time. The group was mainly influenced by both the human-relation tradition. They believed that the hatred and prejudice between the groups existed as a result of the lack of knowledge of one another. If only enough people from both sides could meet, and realize that “the other” side consists of human beings just like ourselves, peace would eventually come. It was a loose structure over the meetings containing no professional facilitators, and all issues concerning both peoples were discussed. This included to great extent political issues. During the twelve years of existence deep personal friendship evolved between several members. Some of the Palestinian and Israeli women still meet, and they occasionally call each other. There were several factors that contributed to the group’s breakdown, among others were the physical difficulties in meeting after the Intifada. Another factor mentioned by the Palestinian woman was the emotional difficulties that occurred with the Intifada. The Palestinian felt humiliated, which made it impossible for them to continue the meetings. Several of the Palestinian participants also felt betrayed by the Israeli women, in the sense that they didn’t support them enough during the second Intifada.

Due to the fact that this group no longer exist it was difficult to recruit participants for in depth interviews. However, I managed to get in contact with two of the women, one Palestinian and one Israeli.

## 5.2. The participants

The following table 2 is an illustration of interviewed participants in terms of their connection to the different dialogue groups. Names have been changed and age is excluded in order to protect the interviewees' confidentiality.

Interview	Pseudonym	Belonging	Sex	Dialogue group
1	Kefaya	Palestinian	Female	PCFF
2	Ali	Palestinian	Male	PCFF
3	Sara	Palestinian	Female	PCFF
4	Hannah	Israeli	Female	PCFF
5	Miriam	Israeli	Female	PCFF
6	Elisheba	Israeli	Female	PCFF
7	Mona	Palestinian	Female	BB
8	Zeina	Palestinian	Female	BB
9	Hadas	Israeli	Female	BB
10	Maria	Israeli	Female	BB
11	Rachel (Facilitator)	Israeli	Female	BB
12	Noor (Facilitator)	Palestinian	Female	BB
13	Vivian	Israeli	Female	IEA
14	Beth	Israeli	Female	IEA
15	Rashid	Palestinian	Male	IEA
16	Omar	Palestinian	Male	MOPE
17	Ilias	Palestinian	Male	MOPE
18	Mahmod	Palestinian	Male	MOPE
19	Lina	Israeli	Female	MOPE
20	Daniel	Israeli	Male	MOPE
21	Michael	Israeli	Male	MOPE
22	Jacob (Facilitator)	Israeli	Male	MOPE
23	Ariell	Israeli	Female	FD
24	Hanin	Palestinian	Female	FD

Table 2: Participants interviewed

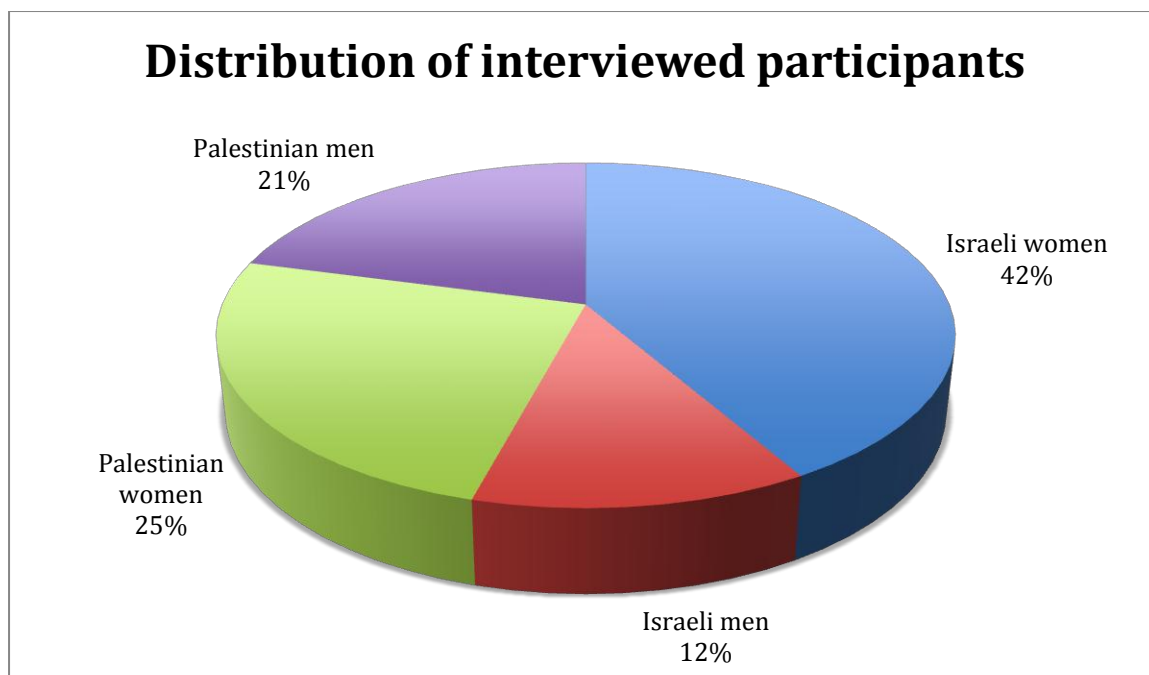
I recruited a sample of 24 participants for in-depth conversations. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality the presentation of the people involved is done on a more general basis. This is due to the fact that the Israeli and Palestinian peace community is small and interlinked. Therefore there might be a risk that participants will be recognized if age, profession, geographical locations, as well as the name of the dialogue groups are presented simultaneously.



The participants chosen for the interviews signify a non-representative sample of Israeli and Palestinian participants (Bryman 2004). As already outlined in the methodology, all of them are fluent English speakers. English skills often suggest a high level of educational achievement, and since I was only able to interview English-speaking people, the ones with less educational background were largely left out for this research. Especially elderly uneducated Palestinian women were difficult to recruit. The majorities of the participants were either students or were holding professions such as lawyers, teachers, social workers, or were working in different human rights organizations and joint activities. Another similar factor that characterizes the chosen group, which distinguishes them from the general Israeli and Palestinian population, is that they all encompass an interest and motivation to pursue dialogue in the sense that they have volunteered to join. However, given the qualitative nature of the research, the use of a non-representative sample is not necessarily problematic, as the intent is not to generalize to the entire populations of Palestine and Israel. However, the sample does to some extent reflect a diversity of Palestinians and Israeli in terms of geographic localization, gender, age, and also religious and political background. This will be further elaborated in the following.

#### 5.2.1. Gender

An effort was made to recruit both men and women for this research. This is due to the fact men and women often perceive peace and war in diverse and gendered ways (Sharoni 1994). Therefore it was preferable to receive voices from both perspectives, due to the fact that they might perceive the dialogue encounters in unlike ways. Here is an overview of the interviewed participants in terms of gender:



**Figure 1: Distribution of interviewed participants across gender and social identity.**

It turned out that it was easier to recruit Israeli women for the research than Israeli men. This might have something to do with the fact that it exists a powerful environment of women's of peace groups within the Israeli society (Moore 2011). Several of them are initiated by women who ideologically are secular Jews and on the left side of politics, which opposes the occupation and have decided to act for peace, justice and nonviolence (Moore 2011). The Israeli women were also very visible in the joint programs that this research is based on, and they were overrepresented in numbers compared to the Israeli men in the mixed groups. However, on the Palestinian side it was the opposite. In the gender blended groups there were more Palestinian men than women present, and in the IEA no Palestinian women were present at all. This might have something to do with the firmly established gendered roles that exist in Palestine - especially in the Palestinian villages- were the women are often restricted to homemaking, while the men usually are the ones that represent the families outwards (Hammack 2011). As already outlined this was one of the reasons for why PCFF decided to establish a women's group. This research managed to get voices from all holds, however the balance is somehow uneven with the favor of the women.

### 5.2.2. Age

When choosing dialogue groups as well as interviewing participants I was aware of the fact that I wanted to integrate a wide specter of age within the research. This is due to the fact that elderly and younger participants might also perceive the dialogue encounters different. Therefore the participants ranged in age from 20 to 76 years, which the following table illustrates.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Palestinian female</b>	<b>Palestinian male</b>	<b>Israeli female</b>	<b>Israeli male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>20-30</b>	4		1	1	<b>6</b>
<b>30-40</b>		3	3	1	<b>7</b>
<b>40-50</b>	1		3	1	<b>5</b>
<b>50-60</b>	1	1	1		<b>3</b>
<b>60-70</b>			1		<b>1</b>
<b>70-80</b>		1	1		<b>2</b>

Table 3: Age distribution of interviewed participants

Due to the age difference, the participants' experience from dialogue groups also varied. Some of the participants -especially the elderly Israeli women - have been attached to dialogue encounters for more than ten years, while other again – especially the younger participants - had only been a member of a dialogue program for more or less a year.

### 5.2.3. Religious and political background

Before I entered the field I was of the opinion that there is often people belonging to the more moderate side of religious and political spectrum that seek to join dialogue groups. This assumption turned out to be right, however there were some exceptions.

On the Palestinian side the majority stated that they were Muslims, which do mirror the general religious statistics in the OPT. The Muslims do also outnumber the Christians substantially among the Palestinian participants in the dialogue groups that this research is based on. Only one of the interviewed Palestinian women did belong to the Christian minority. Not all of the Palestinians wanted to reveal their political belonging, and some did

also express that they did not engage into politics at all, due to the fact that they have lost faith in them. However, the majority of the Palestinian participants that revealed their political background belonged to the more moderate side of the political spectrum of the politics, mainly through the secular Fatah movement that rules the West Bank. Three of the Palestinian participants that were interviewed had spent some time of their lives behind Israeli bars due to their political activities in Fatah, where one of them had spent all together 18 years of his life in prison. This thesis did not manage to find people that belong to the more militant side of the politics, Hamas. One reason might be that most people that belong to this political position do rarely engage in joint activities.

On the Israeli side I had the opportunity to interview participants with a wider range of politically and ideological background. The majority of the Israeli participants stated that they belong to the left wing political ideology in Israel. Most of the Israeli on the left wing do call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories (Hammack 2011). The majority of them – especially among the younger Israeli participants - stated that they also belonged to the religious secular divide, which will say that religion did not have a significant role in their lives. However, there were also some “leftist” -especially among the elderly women - that stated that Judaism were outmost important for them. They were highly attached to their religion and to the Jewish land, but still they were arguing for an independent Palestinian state in the OPT. In addition I had the opportunity to interview five Israeli participants that stated that they belonged to the more right wing government’s policies, primarily due to the security concerns. They perceived themselves as more religious than the other interviewed participants. Two of them lived in an Israeli settlement on the West Bank and one of them stated that she came from a conservative Orthodox Jewish family.

#### 5.2.4. Geographical locations

There was substantial geographical diversity of where and how the Palestinian and Israeli participants live. On the Palestinian side this research brought me to people located from north to south on the West Bank as well as East Jerusalem. Some of the participants came from smaller villages such as Beit Omar, while others lived in a refugee camp located close

to Bethlehem. Other participants again lived in bigger cities such as Ramallah, Nablus, East Jerusalem and Hebron. Growing up in a small village is quite different from that of someone who has for example spent their whole life in downtown Ramallah. Participants that are attached to the smaller villages most often come from a social life that is relatively more conservative than what is being found in many of the bigger cities (Hammack 2011). On the Israeli side the participants that were interviewed for this research were spread between cities such as Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jaffa, West Jerusalem and to an Israeli settlement that is located on the West Bank. It is reasonable to believe that to live in an Israeli settlement is very different from living in cosmopolitan Tel Aviv. The people connected to the settlement are most often more conservative Jews, while Tel Aviv contains multiple sets of lifestyles and religious belonging. An additional factor is that several of the interview participants also were born in other places in the world, and had later immigrated to Israel, mainly due to religious reasons. The countries were United States, Canada and Mexico.

## **6. Findings and Discussion Part 1: Perceived motivations and approaches to dialogue**

In the two following chapters I will present and discuss the data collected during the two months of fieldwork in Palestine and Israel. I will discuss dialogue as perceived from the perspective of the participants; how do they experience dialogue and how do they measure the value and effect of it. The discussion will concentrate on seven different themes divided between two chapters. It will be supported by a great amount of quotations from the conducted interviews. When quoting I will use their given pseudonyms. After the pseudonym follows one of together four codes that contains gender, identity and the name of the associated dialogue group:

- Palestinian Female: PF/ The short name of the group
- Palestinian Male: PM/ The short name of the group
- Israeli Female: IF/ The short name of the group
- Israeli Male: IM/ The short name of the group

This chapter will present and discuss the participants' perceptions around three different themes:

- 1) The infrastructure of avoidance
- 2) Motivations for becoming involved in dialogue
- 3) Participant's preference to the different structures of the encounters – politics versus the harmony model.

### **6.1. The infrastructure of avoidance**

There is a great disharmony between grassroots dialogue and the realities of the intractable conflict in Israel and Palestine (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). Violence and grievance are an integrated part of their daily lives, especially on the Palestinian side. The physical infrastructure with the separation wall, the divided road systems, as well as myriads of checkpoints and roadblocks hinder the peoples to have any normal interactions with the other side. Instead, they are exposed to a biased public agenda, such as media and school

curriculums that most often give a monolithic and negative view about the other side. Therefore, despite the fact that most of the people in dialogue are likely to have had few if any “normal” interactions with people from the other side, they never start an encounter from scratch (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). It is reason to believe that they have been colored by the mainstream generalizations that color the publics on both sides, and hence are entering the encounters with some set of psychological barriers and negative beliefs about one another. The next session will present some findings of prior stereotypes that participants perceived they were in position of before they became involved in dialogue.

### 6.1.1. Perceived stereotypes about the other prior to dialogue

Below is a table listing the most commonly found societal beliefs about the other side, prior to dialogue, as reported in the interviews. In several cases the same participant expressed more than one of the societal beliefs.

<b>Israeli prior societal beliefs</b>	<b>Occurrences:</b>
“Thought of them all as terrorists”	<b>4</b>
“We have the right to protect ourselves against the enemy”	<b>5</b>
“Thought that all they want to do is to throw us into the sea”	<b>2</b>
“Thought of the Palestinians as uneducated”	<b>3</b>
“Have never had nothing against them, and have always believed in Palestinian rights”	<b>6</b>

**Table 4: Israeli societal beliefs prior to entering dialogue**

<b>Palestinian societal beliefs</b>	<b>Occurrences:</b>
“Thought of them as killers”	<b>4</b>
“Thought that I am the one that suffers, not them”	<b>6</b>
“Thought that we want to throw them into the sea”	<b>4</b>
“Have always believed that Israeli are just as human as us. It is the military occupation that is wrong, not the people”	<b>3</b>

**Table 5: Palestinian societal beliefs prior to entering dialogue**

Findings from interviews indicate several repeated patterns of negative societal beliefs on both sides. What can be generalized from table 4 and 5 is that several of them fit into two of the shared societal beliefs that often are found in intractable conflicts, and serve as a

psychological justification for the deep division, which are *Victimization* and *Dehumanization* (Bar-Tal & Nets-Zehngut 2007). On the Palestinian side, the negative beliefs were mostly expressed by those who had grown up in refugee camps or in villages surrounded by Israeli settlements and checkpoints. Their previous regular contacts with Israeli were only with soldiers at the checkpoints and with the settlers. On the Israeli side, the most loaded negative stereotypes were mainly expressed by participants coming from a right wing political environment. Especially the two Israeli settlers claimed that they experienced a great amount of fear and hostility before they started to have contact with the other side.

The first time I spent the time with them (Palestinians) was an encounter weekend with 25 Palestinian youths from Nablus. It was very scary for me, because all people are telling you that they are all terrorists and they all want to kill you and throw you into the sea. And the people that is committing most of the terrorists attacks are young men, and this was who I was meeting and it was really scary seeing the 25 young potential terrorists like facing me and coming to sit next to me and talking to me, and, oh my god, this was really frightening (...). (Vivian IF/IEA)

Several of the Palestinian participants claimed their victimhood by among others referring to the Nakba in 1948 and the many years with Israeli occupation. Israelis often referred to the deep-rooted fear they had for Palestinian terrorists attacks.

The Palestinian society taught me how to hate and how to fight the Israeli. It also taught me to worry about that I am a refugee, that I live under occupation, and that I am suffering every day because of them. (...) And so the other side (Israeli) they build their society on the fear, that all the Palestinians are terrorists, and that we will throw them all into the sea (...). (Ali PM/ PCFF)

In addition, the participants repeatedly mentioned that they were holding a prior image of the other side as killers and terrorists, which can be classified as *dehumanization*. As indicated in the conceptual chapter, it is common in an intractable conflict to make the other side less human in order to make it easier to legitimize violent actions towards each other.

The following two examples from the findings illustrate this. Michael IM/MOPE expressed: “(...) The main stereotype that I had was the image of Arabs as being uneducated (...) It is about stereotypes of course, like we used to say that Arabs are cruel, Arabs kill, and they are uneducated and small heads (...)”. Palestinian Sara PF/PCFF stated: “They (Israeli) only knew



*us as killers, and only picture I knew from them are solders that are destroying and attack and kill, and I didn't really see the other side as humans (..)"*.

However, as seen in Table 4 and Table 5, there were participants from both sides that had positions of less prior dominant fear and negative beliefs about the others. What they had in common was that they had either been exposed to normal interaction with the other side through their parents – two of the three Palestinian participants have family that have had Israeli business relations -, or they came from a “leftist” home that are fighting against the occupation. The latter occurred mostly on the Israeli side. An Israeli example is Hannah IF from PCFF. She is quoted: *“My view of Palestinians was not changed after I joined the PCFF, because I have always believed into human rights, and in the left wing. (...) My parents have always been working active for peace, and when my sibling died they became even more active”*. Mona PF/BB can serve as examples on the Palestinian side:

My father had job in business were he deals with Israeli all the time through his business, so for me not a bad idea to deal with Israeli. But for Palestinians in the group that have not had relations through business, I saw that they cannot connect with Israeli, it was hard for them to deal with them directly, so for me I went there I made friends from them, and we went out together in Germany.

To sum it up, participants with no experiences of interaction with the other side had greater negative stereotypes prior to dialogue than the people that have had some form of normal interactions prior to meetings. It is reason to believe that participants had already had a chance to challenge and modify the mainstream negative societal beliefs through the influence by their family members, and through some sort of normal contact with the other side. This supports what is being stated in the contact hypotheses; that the roots of hatred and prejudice comes from the absence of normalized contact between the two sides (Doubilet 2007).

### 6.1.2. Normalization

A tendency in intractable conflicts is that voluntarily contacts with the enemy, such as dialogue, are perceived as ineffective and often socially unacceptable. The barrier of entering dialogue encounters are often perceived as high, and most people therefore

remain socially distant. For the participants interviewed as part of this thesis, it was clear that the Palestinian participants perceived entering dialogue as more challenging than what it was perceived by the Israeli participants. It has most probably coherence with the imbalance in power between the two sides. As outlined in the theoretical foundation, Israelis and Palestinians face very diverse realities; with one side being the occupier and the other side being occupied. Palestinians are living under the rule of the Israeli forces, with restricted freedom of movement, curfews, and checkpoints. Many also face a daily fear of shooting, killing and house demolitions. The injustice of occupation has created a severe stigmatization of voluntary social contact with the other side. Palestinians who support dialogue efforts therefore often pay a high price in their occupied communities. While it is inconvenient for the Israeli to be in dialogue it is, according to Ilias PM/MOPE, directly dangerous for many Palestinians. Many of them fear for their lives, families, professions and property. Omar PM/ MOPE serves as an example of this, in the sense that he has experienced loss of customers to his business after joining dialogue. Due to this he has faced great economical difficulties. He also expressed that many of the: *"(...) people in my society think that I am very crazy when they hear that I am sleeping with the Israeli in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem under the same roof, and some of them won't even speak with me now."* Another Palestinian participant that has experienced punishment for his attendance in dialogue was Rashid PM/ IEA. He lost many friends at the University after he organized an academic student project between Israeli and Palestinian students, and is quoted: *"When I came back (after the dialogue seminar) I found out that the big highlight was that Rashid is bringing Palestinian youth to be brainwashed and to sit with the enemy. (...) Many cut the friendship with me then, because they considered me as the enemy. And I felt very ashamed"*.

Ilias PM/MOPE argued that many more Palestinians actually want to interact with the other side, but they resist in fear of the negative reactions and consequences from their peers. As seen in chapter 2 there is a tendency that violent conflicts create unified societal beliefs that strictly define how members should think, feel and behave towards the other, as well as towards each other. These shared societal beliefs often give members of a society a sense of security and belonging. It is therefore reason to believe that many people agree to attitudes and reasoning that they do not actually believe in, due to the wish of gaining acceptance from their society.

Interaction with the other side was expressed as less problematic for the Israeli participants, where like-minded family and friends mainly surrounded them.

No I have not faced much negative reactions, no, not really, but I think most of my friends are left wing (...) and most of them believe that solution is peace, and giving settlement back, but most of the people feel that they don't have to do something about the conflict, they do believe in dialogue, but like we have our lives like we are living in a bubble, and they don't see any reason for why they must be active for peace (**Hannah IF/ PCFF**).

What the above quotes illustrate is a more passive attitude towards dialogue rather than the aggressive attitude expressed by the Palestinians. This might again be connected to the different realities of the conflict, where there is easier for the Israelis to create a distinctive separation between their day-to-day-lives and the conflict. However, it is reason to believe that the Israeli leftists also meet tough criticism from several holds in their society, some even being perceived as traitors. This became visible when I attended one of the regular demonstrations composed by the peace-group Women in Black. It is a group that is constituted of Israeli women of all ages, which are against the Israeli occupation in the OPT (Moore 2011). Every Friday they demonstrate in a roundabout in West Jerusalem (the Israeli part of Jerusalem), with signs that say, "stop the occupation". The feedback from the Israeli people passing by was outmost harsh and critical, several people yelled and tended to be aggressive. However, the Israeli settlers experienced similar negative and harsh reactions from their society, as what was being expressed by the Palestinian participants. This can be seen in relation to the fact that Israeli connected to the settlements are often more to the extreme political right (Hammack 2011). The Israeli women referred to judgments similar to what was expressed by the majority of the Palestinians. They stated:

I think I was very scared of people reactions (...) the community I live in is in general very right wing in Likhud, and even more right wing. So it is very black and white, Jews and Arabs. So I felt that I was making waves for me to do something that was kind of against that, and I think I didn't dare telling my husband about that in the beginning. And also my children, I was kind of embarrassed over for them as well" (**Beth IF/IEA**).

*"People thought I was crazy, they said that they could be friends with you for 20 years and then they will take a knife and they will kill you (...) it was scary to hear that"* (Vivian IF/ IEA).

Vivian also explained how she received many threats by email from her peers when they found out that she was inviting Palestinians to her house. It is therefore reason to believe that they paid a higher price for walking against the general consensus towards dialogue than what was experienced by the other Israeli participants.

To conclude, there exists an infrastructure of social exclusion on both sides. Challenges concerning social exclusion were expressed more as a challenge by the Palestinian participants, however it was visible on the Israeli side as well. When risking facing negative reactions from the society one may assume that the decision of entering dialogue is not an easy choice to make. There may therefore be strong motivational factors behind their decisions of becoming involved in dialogue groups, in order to make participants willing to risk the stigmatization they might be exposed to by friends, family and the overall society.

## **6.2. Motivations for becoming involved in dialogue**

All of the interviewed participants had willingly chosen to be involved in dialogue. The majority of them had received an invitation from a friend or by a family member that was already involved. A few others had actively looked for it themselves, and hence found information about dialogue programs in newspapers or on the Internet. There were several factors that contributed to the decision to join. Both sides repeatedly expressed some unified motivational factors for joining dialogue. However, there is also a clear motivational distinction between Israeli and Palestinian participants. The following outlines the common motivations among the 24 interviewed participants, starting first with a presentation of the motivations that were shared by both sides, followed by a section that looks at the separating ones.

### **6.2.1. Unified motivations**

The most common motivations shared by both groups were:

- *The need to create a better future in the region*
- *The need to correct negative images about own group held by the other side*
- *Motivated by curiosity and the possibility to travel abroad*

The majorities of Israeli and Palestinian participants described the greatest motivation to be rooted in the responsibility to *create a better future in the region*. The price of being in war had for many become so high that they were motivated to do something about it. Several explicitly mentioned that they felt obliged to create a better future for their children. This was especially dominant among those participants that had lost a close family member or friend due to the violent conflict.

The guy founded it, he was interviewed in the paper and the minute I heard him talk that minute I knew that this is the place that I want to be, you know, it was I have lost my son, but I hadn't lost my sanity, it must be people that know a different way of just hating or being angry, it just had to be (...) We have to change this terrible reality and, solving the conflict is a two ways of course (...) peace also has to come with inner change if seeing the other side as human and not enemy (**Elisheba IF/PCFF**).

I want to keep my children alive, my children are so expensive. I am a mother. I wanted to join dialogue because I want to keep them. I don't want my daughter to have the same experience to lose her brother, because it will destroy her forever. So we have to stop to fight and start talking (**Sara PF/PCFF**).

In addition to changing the harsh reality, several participants on both sides were motivated by the need to *correct negative stereotypes* of their own group held by the others. The Palestinians were motivated to show that they are not all terrorists, and the Israeli participants were eager after showing that there are other Israeli people than the extreme settlers and violent soldiers on the checkpoints. The third motivation shared by both sides was *curiosity*. On the Palestinian side it was both directed to the curiosity of traveling abroad as well as to the curiosity of meeting the other side. Three Palestinians mentioned this, and they were all in the twenties, or had been in the twenties that time the workshop took place. Zeina PF/BB is quoted: *"Somebody asked me for going, and in the beginning I did not think about it seriously, I was just interested to see, and OK, we are going to have fun, it is a trip to Europe*. Mona PF/BB claimed: *"The factors that made me join..hm....Maybe because it was in another country and I was curious and I wanted to go and see"*. For many Palestinians there can be a challenge to travel abroad due to the limitation of movements, difficulties in receiving a visa, as well as widespread poverty in the region. When receiving an opportunity to go abroad it might then for many Palestinians be tempting accept. On the Israeli side the curiosity was mainly directed to the interest of meeting the other side, in

order to fulfill limitation of knowledge to the conflict. Five Israeli participants fit into this category, examples of their attitudes follows in the quotes below:

I was very curious to find out more about the conflict. I have a very good friend that is very left, and then I have my husband that is also very close to me and he works in the military, and through both of them I saw different perspective about the war in Gaza, and now I was curious to find out more about what was my own opinions about the conflict (**Hadas IF/BB**).

I think that I kind of had a feeling that I didn't have the whole story that it was a lot of stuff going on with the Palestinians that I was sort of kind of responsible for because it was my government and my country, but I had not really looked at them in the face to see what was going on, and I knew that I was going to learn stories and things that was going to make me very uncomfortable. But it was more important for me to know and deal with the knowledge instead of not knowing and going around thinking that everything is fine (**Beth IF/IEA**).

### 6.2.2. Different realities create different motivations

Despite several similarities in motivations, the findings also indicated a clear separation between the two sides, which again can be rooted in the different realities. It is basically two patterns:

- Palestinians: *Educate the Israeli about injustices related to the Israeli occupation*
- Israelis: *Evolve personal friendship*

A great amount of Palestinian participants indicated that they were motivated by the fact that dialogue represent a platform were they can educate the other side on the perceived injustices related to the military occupations that dominate their lives. A few even described dialogue as another kind of war, where they were fighting with words rather than with weapons. The majority of the Palestinian participants that fronted this view had for a time been politically active and tried to improve the situation by arranging political demonstrations. Three of the Palestinian participants explained that they had even spent some time in prison due to their political engagement in Fatah. In the end they had realized that a more efficient alternative to political demonstration and activism was rather personal face-to-face meetings with the other side. Two quotations will in the following exemplify this:

The last time I was in prison I started to think what will happen to the next generation, what will happen to my sons? How can we can stop it, and solve the problem. It made me start thinking in

another direction. (...). Dialogue is another kind of war. I went to enter this relation to fight. I am trying to convince the Israeli people that sit in front of me that we have to stop this conflict (**Ali PM/MOPE**).

Before I talked to the Israeli and sending them my message by stones during Intifada, you know, but now I rather tell them about my feelings and sending the Israeli a special message through dialogue. The best way of sending the message is by face-to-face talking without army or newspapers or TV (**Ilias PM/MOPE**).

The Palestinian focus on wanting to educate the opponents about their misery may be related to the fact that Palestinians face little institutional support (Jad 2011). While the majority of Israelis are in position of among others a strong military army and laws that favor their interests, the Palestinians do not have such institutions that can prevent the abuse (Doubilet 2007). Palestinians must therefore base their struggle to a higher degree on grassroots level activities, where dialogue work can be regarded as one of them. These encounters therefore represent a forum where they can struggle for their rights. When no one else can fight for their justice, they have to do it themselves. One example might be Ali PM/ PCFF that is quoted: *“Dialogue is not a kind of normalization but resistance, struggle, freedom fighter. It is about that we want to show the human side of the conflict”*.

This fighting spirit was less dominant among the Israeli participants that were interviewed. They were rather motivated by psychosocial dimensions with dialogue, in the sense that they were much more eager to listen and to learn from the stories of the Palestinians, as well as to evolve *personal friendships* with the other side. The majority of the Israeli that expressed this point of view perceived themselves as leftists, which for many years have been fighting to end the Israeli occupation. Now they wanted to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people through being involved in dialogue.

The activists started in my head, I talked about justice and I knew that everybody deserve the freedom, it was slogans that I really believed in, but I didn't really understand what it meant or felt in the stomach. (...) I wanted the Palestinians to change from symbols that I am fighting for to personal human beings that I really care for. Wanted to have a chance to meet people down to earth. I was very curious (**Rachel IF/ BB**)

The urge for making personal friendships might have a relation to the fact that several Israelis feel ashamed over many of the actions taken by the Israeli government. It may be that they dislike their Israeli identity as being an occupier, an identity they do not want to be

connected to. Elisheba (IF/PCFF) is quoted: *“Sometimes I am overnice, because I just want them to have a good feeling about Israeli. I feel like I have all the Israeli guilt on my shoulders, you know, that I have to make up for all the terrible things that we do in the country (...).”* She took a clear distance from Israel as being an oppressing power, however at the same time she felt very connected to the country. Repeatedly she expressed her belonging to the region, and the wish to ensure that Israel remains a country for Jewish people alongside with the existence of a Palestinian state. The dilemma of hating and at the same being highly attached to the country was something that was reflected upon among several of the Israeli participants. As Beth IF/IEA was expressing:

I do believe this is a Jewish land, it is very clear from the Bible that this is the Jewish land and it is a holy place, but I also believe that the Jews have the responsibility to not be oppressors, because we have been oppressed for so many centuries, so I don't know how to fit that together, I just cant figure that out.

What Beth described was the transformation from being an oppressed minority to becoming the occupying power and the oppressor, which she found very difficult and disappointing.

It is reason to assume that one of the motivating factors for being related to dialogue is therefore the wish of transforming Israel into a country one can be proud of, and hence escape the feeling of guilt.

The different expectations to the dialogue groups created a dilemma for several of the Israeli participants, especially the one connected to BB. Two of the interviewed Israeli women from BB experienced to be met with an expectation by the Palestinian participants to only listen to the other side's oppression and misery, and the expectation to voice their criticism of the Israeli occupation on the OPT. However, the Israeli participants expressed that they also needed to talk about their frustration and pain connected to the conflict. They also have a background of persecution, as well as pain and insecurity connected to Palestinians' suicide bombings and rockets attacks, which they needed the other side to hear. An example can be Maria IF/BB:

In all the seminars we tried to say why we are here. We tried to proof that we also have a place here. Like in the beginning when we talked and introduced our selves. The Israeli used to say, we come here to listen because I know my part, and the Palestinians said that they only came to tell us



what is happening in the West Bank, but you cannot do two weeks with only listening. We also want to talk.

The difference in motivation and expectation connected to the asymmetry might easily be a source to misunderstandings and frustrations between Israeli and Palestinian participants. The Israeli and Palestinian BB facilitator especially reflected this upon, and uttered this as one of the main challenges to the workshop.

Most of the left winged oriented who have some experience with activism; some of them come because they want to meet Palestinians and make friends. Palestinians don't necessarily want that, and sometimes they say that we are mainly and not at all here to be friends. (..)The asymmetry is very difficult because not everybody sees it. Some Israeli become very defensive when you want to reflect on the power relations and asymmetry because they don't experience the daily life for Palestinians (**Rachel IF/BB**).

The Palestinian facilitator Noor PF/ BB outlined similar challenges. She referred to a fight that happened between an Israeli and Palestinian girl in the very first evening of the seminar: *"The Palestinian said that I am coming here only to tell you what is happening and I don't want to talk to you. That of course hurt the Israeli girl, and she said you are coming here to meet Israeli, so why don't you want to talk to me. So they burst into tears and they yelled and it was unbelievable"*.

As seen in the conceptual foundation several explain the structural asymmetry between the conflicting groups as one of the main challenges to dialogue. Critics claim that the different motivations and expectations to the encounters have the potential to lead the two sides further apart instead of closer together. Sari Hanafi (2007) refers to several encounters with limited success, due to failed ability to address the different side's motivations and expectations. One of them was a joint meeting that took place between Israeli and Palestinian teachers in 1996. *"While the meeting started warmly, it finished in violence between the two groups, with Palestinians feeling that no common ground had been reached with the counterparts"* (Hanafi 2007: 75). She concludes the article by questioning the current form in which the dialogue programs are conducted. She believes that in order to succeed they must pay attention to the imbalanced reality, or else will especially not the Palestinians expectations be met. The dialogue groups chosen for this research vary greatly

in both structure and content. Some do pay attention to this imbalance, while others do not. This will be further discussed in the following paragraph.

### **6.3. Different contents to dialogue: *Harmony model vs. politics***

As seen in section 5.1, is the ultimate goal for all of the dialogue groups to end the ongoing violence between Israel and Palestine. However, the content that each of the dialogue groups use for reaching this goal differs. As seen in the theoretical foundation some of the groups are influenced by the human-relation traditions, while others are influenced by the conflict-resolution traditions. Dialogue groups are often not leaning towards only one end of the two traditions, but might involve factors from them both. However, it is visible in the groups' goals and activities that one of the structures is favored over the other. The greatest difference between the two models is to which degree it perceives if one should pay attention to the imbalance of power between the two sides, by including political discussions on issues directly related to the conflict. The first tradition tries to a great degree to blurry the differences by rather emphasize common interests between the conflicting sides. PCFF and IEA more or less fit into this tradition. Others who sympathize with the conflict-resolution tradition claim that to blurry the difference can create difficulties for many Palestinians participants and make them a struggle during the sessions. One must rather deal with the inevitable asymmetry by being aware of it and put it in the open. The dissonance between Israeli and Palestinians must rather be expressed not repressed in order to have a genuine dialogue. As seen in section 5.1 BB, MOPE and to some degree FD fit under this tradition.

The following will discuss the great variation in opinions between the interviewed members on which type of content that creates a most genuine and successful dialogue. The following table illustrates the three major differences in perceptions of the dialogical contents.

Participants preferred content of the encounters	Palestinians	Israeli
Focus on political issues related to the conflict	7	4
Focus on commonalities rather than their political differences		1
Focus on commonalities rather than political differences. However, when a solid relationship is built, there will be room for political discussions	4	8

Table 6: Preferred structure of encounters

### 6.3.1. Commonalities should be in focus, not the differences

The majority of the participants related to the human-relation traditions in IEA, and PCFF stated that excluding political talks in the temporary encounters did not mean that they will exclude it in the future. A common answer was that in order to be able to talk politics they first have to establish a solid relationship, which only happens when difficult issues are shunted aside and the focus is placed mainly on their commonalities. Two examples can illustrate this:

You have to forget about all the anger and all the blame and leave it outside, and come with a clean heart and brain in order to talk in sense, and that is what the PCFF is, you know, and there have to be a lot of trust being built up first before really you can go into negotiation. And for many of them now there is trust and then they can even be a bit angry at each other, you know, (...) and yes, I think we have to talk more. Ready to talk politics now, and I think we should (**Elisheba IF/PCFF**).

In the beginning I felt ashamed when starting to dialogue with settlers, but after deciding that the focus will be on religion then it didn't feel that anymore, because then we focus on something that are same on both side. But politically it will be hard, because we consider the settlement to be our land. Focusing on religion will not say that it will never involve political dialogue one day. We are only starting it, and the only thing that works in the beginning is secondary discussions. The extreme they will not discuss or negotiate, but they can sit down and then the next step will maybe be to negotiate. It is a process. The goal is that the religious dialogue will change the settler minds, and then we can make political discussions in the future (**Rashid PM/IEA**).

This stands in opposition to what is argued in the article "The Peace Builders Paradox", written by (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007) that claims that shunting away political issues does not lead to the establishment of a solid relationship, but rather hinders the establishment of genuine trust and relationship among the members: "...because the elephant in the room syndrome persists until the issue is tackled" (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007: 60). However, as

Rashid PM/MOPE further emphasized was that in order to reach a wider specter of the population, including the right wings of both sides, it is impossible to begin the encounters with politics, due to the fact that they are so distant from each other in their perceptions around conflict and peace.

I think the extreme can sit together. Like me, I am not right or extreme, but still it was very hard to meet Israeli in the beginning. But I took the first step, and now it is very easy. The extreme need this first step without political discussions, first they will only sit down with the other side, and then the next step will maybe be to discuss. It is a process.

Among all the interviewed participants it was only Vivian IF/ IEA that stated that she was against all types of political discussions, also in the future. Politics is something that she claimed should be left for the politicians and not the average people. As she stated: *“I found the political groups to be too angry and wanted to destroy, and focusing so much on the occupation and give that too much attention to it and it just won't work, because then you don't see the other side and it is not balanced”*. Her insistence of separating religious and political discussions may be a way of escaping internal guilt. It is reason to believe that she was being defensive because she knows that the settlement she is living in is by many being regarded as illegal, and it may therefore feel uncomfortable to touch on such topics. As she was stating:

Anybody should have the chance to live anywhere, it is only the government that tells me that this is over the green line so I don't believe in that (...). I feel very strong that where I am living is morally ok but not politically ok, but I don't want or will be politically correct, because if I was that I wouldn't be having contact with Palestinians (..).

However, it is reason to believe that the attempts of excluding politics from dialogue encounters may be challenging, if not impossible, in an ongoing conflict. It was obvious that the Palestinians in the dialogue groups connected to the human-relation approach had, despite the non political design, an urge for touching on political issues, by among others showing the Jewish participants the cost of occupations in the territories. This became visible in what was being expressed in the interviews, and also during the fieldwork participations in the dialogue meetings in PCFF and IEA. While the dialogue sessions were purely centralized towards non-political talks, the unofficial discussions before and after the meetings were touching on political topics. One example can be the question of bringing

Palestinians to Israel or to the Israeli settlement, which alone touches on highly political aspects. The Palestinians always have to apply to the Israeli government for permission, and cross Israeli military checkpoints in order to reach to the meetings. Some times they never show up due to the difficulties, or are coming several hours too late, which creates frustrations and exhaustions among the Palestinian members. It is reason to believe that for Palestinians living under occupation everything is in a way about politics. It does not matter what issues that are being raised; it all comes back to politics. Rashid PM/ IEA serves as an example to this. Despite the fact that IEA is purely religious and not political he was stating:

We are in war, not with weapons but with thinking. (...) I believe we need to give them (Israeli) proof (...) so my job is to bring them (Israeli) here to show them Check Points, the Wall and explain them about permits conditions, how it takes many hours to get it and how you have to write applications to go to hospital. Settlers believe it and they always cry, and feel ashamed that they are Israeli, and some say that they are so disappointed about their government.

### 6.3.2. Dealing with the differences

On the other hand BB, MOPE and to some extent the FD is/were a site for political discussions, much inspired by the conflict-resolution approach. The majority of the participants related to these dialogue groups argued that the encounters must consist of more than only a place where stereotypes are shattered and you are able to recognize each other as human beings. If dialogue groups should be effective they must also challenge the power asymmetries created by the occupation. While the human-relations approach is concerned that by confronting the asymmetrical power relations could result in polarizing the groups even further, several of the people interviewed in MOPE and BB stated that they were afraid of the opposite. A soft religious and cultural gateway to political discussions is according to the Israeli facilitator for MOPE, Jacob IF/ MOPE, not preferable. The conflicting issues must start sooner rather than later for the dialogue to be based on real feelings among the participants. He claimed that by creating a micro cosmos of equality and harmony that does not represent the conflicting reality, and by not addressing the two groups real feelings, might lead to a polarization and an escalation of negative attitudes between the opponents, rather than building trust between them. This is due to the fact that the daily grievance experienced by the Palestinian participants and also to some extent

by the Israeli participants does not find a proper way of being aired during the encounters.

Jacob IF/ MOPE is quoted:

In the political workshop we eat and are friendly and we don't want to go back to the negotiation, but there is no short cuts. Think about it as a student that wants to finish the assignment. As much as he wants to postpone it, the bigger the problem will be. You have to face it and discuss it, you cannot choose the easy way.

According to Nimer and Lazarus (2007) it is common that people use public opinions when they discuss politics, argumentations that often are deeply interpreted through years with intractable conflict. An interesting observation I did during the attendance in the political workshop MOPE is that even the Israelis and Palestinians that have worked and respected each other in less political dialogue encounters for a long time, turned back to their interpreted collective narratives when they started to discuss political issues. An example is Lina IF/MOPE and Omar PM/ MOPE. In addition to being two of the delegates in MOPE they had for several years joined another dialogue group together, and had therefore known each other for a long period of time. They experienced the political workshop in two very different ways. Omar perceived the political workshop as fruitful, while Lina perceived it as dysfunctional. Omar is quoted:

The political dialogue good, much better than the other dialogue I have been involved in. Here we talked about serious issues, such as Jerusalem, security borders, settlements, and all of these points are serious. This kind of dialogue is better. To build trust between each other and bla bla, that is for children. It isn't working (...).

Lina, on the other hand, felt she was taking several steps back instead of forward in their relationships. She was surprised to see that Omar's attitude became much more polarized. She is quoted: *"I was amazed because Omar is normally speaking in less drastically words, and here he comes and talks like he did in the beginning. Why? Because you are talking in front of people, and are afraid to compromise about this and this?"* Later on in the interview she stated:

It was very hard and very disappointed, very much. Nothing result, and I wasted the whole weekend for nothing. We didn't achieve anything. To discuss the hard core about the borders was very difficult. (...) Doesn't say that they (political workshops) does not work in general, but they didn't work for us.

It is reason to believe that Omar and Lina had very different expectations to the political workshop. For Omar it might have been much rooted in his overall motivations with dialogue, which is to teach the other side about their situation in the occupied territories. Omar therefore seemed satisfied with his opportunity to address issues related to the occupation, no matter outcome. Lina, on the other hand, anticipated that they would come to some political agreements, which did not happen. Instead she experienced that her Palestinian friend became more polarized and monolithic in his view.

A heated discussion rooted in collective narratives is common in an early stage of political encounters (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). Each side struggles to justify its version of history that they have been taught through years with intractable conflict. Abu-Nimer and Lazarus further outline that such heated blame games can push participants out of their comfort zones, and deepen the dialogue, as a group often needs a breakdown in order to have a breakthrough (Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007). This is due to the fact that they after a while usually try to justify their stories of victimizations with *personal stories* that have happened to them and their family, where “*Soft voices and tears replace the cacophony of the blame game*”(Abu-Nimer & Lazarus 2007: 29). It may be reason to believe that if the political workshop had lasted for more than a weekend the outcome in MOPE may have turned out differently. They may have reached the point of breakdown, but not the breakthrough in their political discussions. A research conducted on grassroots dialogue by Moaz, Steinberg and Bar-On (2002) supports this argumentation. They were surprised to find out that the moments of true dialogue and empathy in the encounters paradoxically emerged through the dynamics of confrontations.

In conclusion, there is a great diversity among the interviewed participants on what type of content they perceived as being most efficient. The division occurred first of all between participants involved in groups that were related to human-relation approach, and participants involved in groups related to the conflict-resolution approach. However, findings indicated another division rooted in the divergent needs among the Israeli and Palestinian participants, where Palestinians –also the participants connected to the human-relation approach- had a stronger need to talk politics than what the Israeli participants had.

## **7. Findings and Discussion part II: The perceived value and effect by dialogue encounters**

A question repeatedly asked regarding dialogue in intractable conflicts, is the actual effect that it has on changing the psychological, social and the overall political situation. There is a gap, not only between groups, but also between members within groups in terms of what they believe they have accomplished with dialogue. When I raised this question during interviews, the answers varied. On one hand participants were filled with success and hope, but on the other hand they were filled with frustration. The following chapter will present and discuss the participant's perceptions around this subject. It is divided into four sections. The first concerns the perceived effect dialogue has on an individual level, and the second is related to the perceived effect they have on the overall political situation. The third section aims to explain the challenges and limitations to dialogue, where the last section presents and discusses participants' future outlook on peace.

### **7.3 The personal value of being together**

As described in 6.2, the majority of the participants explained that a strong initial motivation for getting involved in dialogue is the responsibility to change the conflicting reality. However, the majority of the participants mentioned that the greatest strength of grassroots dialogue is that participants get the opportunity to empathize with the opposite's views and feelings. All of the interviewed participants expressed that they experienced some form of personal benefit in their change of perceptions towards the other group, or they had experienced changes in the attitudes of their opponents. This is in line with the conception that dialogue groups has a positive effect on reducing negative and hostile attitude among the participants, and lead the two sides closer together (Maoz 2000). The perceived personal transformation varied among the interviewed participants. Some stated the transformations as being related to specific topics connected to the conflict, while others articulated it as deep and meaningful, and for some, life changing transformations.



### 7.1.1. Personal life-changing transformations

The participants in PCFF were the ones that most often expressed the deeper life-changing transformations. As previously described; PCFF is influenced by the human-relation approach; suggesting that individuals change their negative attitudes towards another group when they get the chance to discover that the others are human beings with feelings similar to their own. PCFF is focusing on the feeling of bereavement shared by people that have lost a beloved family member due to the conflict, a universal pain that cut across the conflicting lines. All of the participants interviewed from PCFF explained the first meeting as an emotional and meaningful experience. Some even referred to it as a life-changing moment. In the dialogue sessions they are revealing personal stories; how they lost their beloved ones and the pain related to that loss. Two examples can illustrate this:

I saw them just as criminals with weapons, but when I saw them like human like me everything changed. I don't know exactly how I changed, I was like shocked to hear the stories about humans in front of me. They want to kill us, want to live alone in this area that was my previous idea. After that when I met them as normal people without weapons and soldier-clothes without seeing that blood I don't know, everything changed. (...). I started to listen to the Jewish mothers and that moment something changed. I don't know exactly, when I hear the women speak about the children it was so difficult for me. I don't know how but I started to cry and after when one of them were finish speaking I was going and hug her. I don't know why but I told her that I have lost my grandmother and now you are my new grandmother. This woman was shocked, and she hugged me in a strong way, and that moment I really felt that she was my new grandmother and now we visit each other and call each other a lot on the phone. I love her **(Kefaya PF/ PCFF)**.

In the very first session that I joined we were sitting together Israeli and Palestinian in a circle and each told why they came to the Forum. Lost a mom, mother or a brother. Very heavy and everybody cried all the time. The outcome was that I realized that the pain is the same, and I realized that this could be something very meaningful for me. (...) The first Palestinian woman that I met in the Forum, you know, she took me in, and we are very good friends ever since, very, very good friends **(Miriam IF/PCFF)**.

Above quotes describe a moment where stereotypes were being reduced, and trust and empathy was created with the other side. One reason for the sudden change can be that the main focus is on their painful personal experiences in losing someone closely related, something people can relate to and feel empathy towards despite their political disagreements. Such stories told by the other side can help reveal that they also are in position of pain, sorrow, and fear just like themselves. Another factor for the sudden

personal transformation may be that PCFF is for many of the members just as much a therapeutically group as well as a reconciliation group. Members therefore often benefit from the group in several ways, due to the fact that within the group they find peer people. Despite all of their differences they find comfort and support by people that understand their pain, which is an understanding that they often do not find among people within their own societies who have not experienced such loss. As Miriam IF/PCFF further expressed:

You know, after my son was killed I just wanted to symbolically go into a kind of bed, cover my head and stay there forever. I think PCFF has strengthened my core of life. You can come out. Like if you come out in the forum your son will be there, you know. (..) It is a way of keeping my connection with him.

### 7.1.2. New insight on the similarities between Islam and Judaism

The religious dialogue group IEA is as already described based on the human-relation tradition, in the sense that they are focusing on commonalities between Judaism and Islam. However, participants that were interviewed from this group did not express the same immediate and deep change as seen in PCFF. However, there were some changes in perceptions, which have rather happened gradually. One example is Beth IF/IEA, which had to dwell for a little while over the question on whether she believed that her perceptions towards Palestinians had changed. After a little pause she answered:

Yes, I think so. I can judge that after how I react to the Arabic workers that are rebuilding my house. Like before I went to this group I had a very strong feeling that when I hear Arabic language I felt that it was threatening, ugly and hostile to me. It was unconscious, but it was how I felt, and I don't feel like that anymore. Now I try to understand what they say. (...). I now have a positive experience with the Arabic language, with people that I like speaking it, and when I hear the workers speaking it doesn't feel so threatening.

Another example can be Vivian IF/IEA that explained: *"I am always surprised of how similar Muslim is to Jewish religion, I keep discovering new things and I always saying wow this is the same as our, and that happen every time"*.

On the question of whether personal friendship has developed between Beth IF/IEA and other Palestinian participants in the group her immediate answer was no, due to the fact that she did not feel secure enough. In PCFF, on the other hand, several of the members described the evolvement of deep friendships between the Israeli and Palestinian members.

This happened especially between the members that share a common language. There can be several reasons for the different effects members of PCFF and IEA experienced. One reason can be that IEA uses cross-cultural learning method, rather than personal stories based on deep emotions as in PCFF. The cross-cultural learning method is an exchange of basic information on issues such as Islamic and Jewish feasts, religious traditions, and family habits (Suleiman 2004a). The goal is that a new understanding of the others' cultural traditions will bring members of the two groups closer together. Discussing cultural and religious traditions may not necessarily lead to the exchange of personal and intimate feelings. One can be a member of the group without extraditing one self, as they to a great extent are doing in PCFF. Another reason may be that the people involved in IEA have a different personal characteristic than people in PCFF. What is special with the religious dialogue groups is that it is between Jewish settlers and Palestinians living in a village next to the settlement. It could be that they are more polarized to each other than what the people in PCFF are. As previously outlined, Jewish settlers are often more to the extreme political right, and have a more dominant religious view, than other Israelis. If this is not the reality about the Jewish settlers in the dialogical program, they are at least surrounded by people in their neighborhood that most likely are more conservative in their way of thinking. Several of the Palestinians members have families that have experienced loss of property due to the establishment of that particular settlement. They have therefore a reason to be angrier with this specific group of Israeli people. It may therefore make them more susceptible to engage in dialogical interaction with each other. Due to their starting-point, bringing Jewish settlers and neighboring Palestinians together in an encounter can therefore be regarded as an accomplishment by itself.

There is another possible explanation to why the personal relationships between the participants have developed in different ways. In addition to the factors explained above, one can also supply the factor of time. According to the contact hypotheses, a positive relation between the two sides will increase if contact happens over longer period of time (Allport 1979). While several of the members interviewed in PCFF had been members for many years, the IEA had only existed for two years. This may indicate that if the members of IEA continue to meet over a long period of time the relation between the members may be

strengthened, and a deeper change in perception, and also the evolvement of deeper friendship can occur.

### 7.1.3. New understanding around topics related to the conflict

As outlined in 5.1, MOPE and BB can be linked to the conflict-resolution traditions where participants are supposed to relate to each other based on their group belonging and not as individuals. The goal is to bridge the conflicting differences and develop a belief that a common dream for the future is possible. The question is to which degree an atmosphere often characterized by anger and frustration are pushing people further away from each other, or whether it actually create a positive change of perceptions. Observations performed at MOPE's two-day political workshop discovered that the atmosphere was more intense and angrier than what was observed in the meetings with PCFF and IEA. On several occasions people left the room, started to cry, and shouted loudly at each other. Participants that were interviewed from BB explained a similar type of atmosphere during the two-week workshop in Germany. Both Israeli and Palestinian participants in MOPE were repeatedly trying to prove that they were right, and were often using historical, and cultural arguments to legitimize their perspective. When political disagreements and conflicting interests are discussed, one may to a great extent expect such reactions. As Nimer & Lazarus (2007) describe in the article "The Peace builders Paradox"; the Israeli and Palestinian encounters are marked by interruptions, contradiction, and competition to convey each side's narrative of victimhood. Despite the harsh atmosphere, the interviewed participants expressed several positive changes in their perceptions about the other. Worth noting is that the majority of the delegation from MOPE were already a member other dialogue networks, which might have meant that they already are in a position of more moderate attitudes towards the out-group before joining the political workshop. The majority of the members in BB, on the other hand, described the two weeks workshop to be their first time in dialogue with the other side.

Changes in perceptions expressed by the participants were more directed to specific conflicting topics, which is in line with the result that the conflict-resolution tradition is

aiming for. It is reason to believe that this happened when they were exposed to the other's perspectives in the conflict. As seen in the findings, several of the interviewed participants in BB were surprised to find out that not all members of the opposing side are united in their extremist attitudes; instead there is a great variation of ideas and opinions. As Mona PF/ BB expressed: *"I met an ex soldier and he started to talk to me about his experience in life. He told me that they are going to the army obligatory, that Israel decide for them. I didn't know that, just thought they went because they wanted"*. Zeina PF/ BB on the other hand found it interesting to hear that there actually were soldiers trying to act and treat Palestinians nicely at the checkpoints. She is quoted: *"I found many of them having member of family in the military, and they told us how they in the left party made it easier and less violent for the Palestinians. And it made me change the view about these people"*.

As previously outlined, a common tendency in intractable conflicts is that both parties create their own collective memories, each representing a black and white picture that portrays their own society in a positive light, and at the same time delegitimizes their opponents (Bar-Tal & Nets-Zehngut 2007). By being exposed to new information from the other part, such as exemplified in the quotes of Zeina and Mona, participants may realize that the picture is not as black and white as they previously believed. Another example of such is Daniel IM/MOPE that stated: *"I could after the political workshop understand more clearly why they don't trust us, especially the people that have been in prison. I have always understood why we don't trust them, but now I can see why they don't trust us; they have reasons that are legitimate"*.

Other findings indicate that some of the participants realized that Israeli and Palestinians to some extent have needs and goals that are mutually inclusive instead of exclusive.

I think that the biggest change for me was new understanding about the wall, and not to just accept the wall. (...) My main conclusion is that today it is good to have the separation wall, good in an ironically way. We have not have any terrorist's attacks in three years, no busses have exploded (..) On the other hand they are clogged up over there, and what today is seen as a solution will in 20 years be even worse than it is today, in my eyes, Because the aggression and the frustration develops to be even more extreme (...). That was the main thing that I learnt in the seminar (**Hadas IF/BB**)

It may seem like that Hadas to some degree realized that the Israeli society couldn't solve its security issues without giving Palestinians their freedom. These issues are to a great extent interlinked. It is reason to believe that this was something she realized after being exposed to Palestinian stories over how difficult their lives are due to the separation wall.

#### 7.1.4. Dialogue confirmed their prior views

Some participants, mainly on the Israeli side with the exception of the Palestinian facilitator Noor PF/ BB, could not refer to any bigger changes in perceptions about the other side, due to the fact that they already knew *“that the other side is just as human as us”* Noor PF/BB. These participants were the same people that had a background were parents already had some form of relationship with the other side, either through peace activities (Israeli side) or through business relations (Palestinian side). As outlined in section 6.2 their previous perceptions about the others were already modified, and no bigger changes in perceptions had therefore occurred. One might say that the Israeli participants had to some extent already embraced the Palestinian narrative prior to dialogue and were fighting on their behalf. What they referred as a change was that the conflict got a face due to the fact that they now know people they care about and worry about.

It wasn't changed because I was always left wing and I was always into believing into Human Rights (...) but what was changed was the personal relationship. You could always believe in the Palestinians as a word, that they have rights, but then when you meet them it is different. Then when you meet them they have faces, they have voices and they have names. And you meet them and they have their own stories and they have their own personal lives and I think what was changed was the personal feelings towards them (**Hannah IF/PCFF**).

#### 7.1.5. “They have changed, not me”

The last pattern of personal change concerns the participants that claimed that the other side has changed, and not themselves. There were mainly the Palestinian men that expressed this point of view, however Mona PF/BB was also eager to explain how much the other side had changed. The majority of the participants that stated this were the same people that saw dialogue as a platform to educate the other side about the situation in the OPT. Therefore one might say that motivation and outcome of change is directly linked to each other. An example is Ilias PM/MOPE. On the question on whether he believes dialogue

has changed his view about the other side he answered: *"Of course, yes. (...). Many of them have changed their minds"*. I asked "...but in which way have you changed?" He replied:

I think all of them have learned about our situation in the camp, in the villages and in the city. We showed them some pictures in the first meeting and it was the first time for them to see it (...) and especially when they visited me and visited other Palestinians, then they saw it with their own eyes. Here they learned and heard from my wife, they smoke agila (water pipe), and they ate with us.

Later I asked the same question. He answered: *"No, not now, but maybe in the future"*.

According to the Palestinian historian Salma Khadra Jayyusi (1999) is the Palestinian people very much attached to their nation, village and brotherhood. When Palestinians think of themselves it is a common trend to think of "us", the people that have been terrorized, tortured and abandoned from the world. Further on she argues that the Palestinians are very much linked to the plight of preserving their own identity and to continue the struggle of liberating their land (Jayyusi 1999). It is reason to assume that it is difficult, and not preferable, to turn against this collective identity based on collective struggle. However, if they can define dialogue as another way of resistance they are in a better position to legitimize their involvement in dialogue, to themselves, and also to the fellow people within the society. This is in line with what Abu-Nimer and Lazarus (2007) argue; that being a part of dialogue groups can serve as a meaningful contribution to their community if they can refer to changes in the Israeli attitudes. If not, it may be regarded as a betrayal of their national identity to be involved in such groups. In a way it offers them a protection against criticism. As Mona PF/BB stated during her interview:

When I meet Israeli I believe that I don't betray my people, but that I'm dealing with them. It is not acceptable for my people that I meet them, but when I discuss with them and when I can tell them that we have change some of their ideas, and that dialogue is helpful and that it is working, then some of them are accepting it, it is ok (...).

By referring to changes in attitudes and opinions among the Israelis is therefore a way of acknowledging that dialogue is useful and valuable. It might be that they also have experienced changes in own perceptions, however due to the group spirit of resistance, their focus was much more directed on expressing the changes that have happened with the other side. This may also be one of the reasons for why the word resistance was

repeatedly used by all of the interviewed Palestinian men. Instead of using weapons they claimed they were fighting by the power of communication.

#### 7.1.6. The symbolic value of dialogue

As described above, all the interviewed participants referred to some achievement and positive outcome at a personal level. It is therefore reasonable to assume that many of the participants do experience a significant personal value of dialogue. Some participants even claimed that just the fact that they manage to meet under such harsh circumstances has a great success and value in itself. Daniel IF/ MOPE is quoted: *“The success is in fact that dialogue is happening, that you bring people together to talk and to get human relations between each other and an understanding in where the both side come from”*. In addition, the positive changes that they have experienced during the sessions might help the participants dealing with the difficult reality, in the sense that they can see some results of their work. The majority of the participants on both sides claimed that they see no options beside dialogue, and they therefore continue their efforts despite the ongoing cycle of violence. Ali PM/PCFF claimed: *“There is no alternative way to dialogue. Or the alternative is obvious, keep killing each other, keeping the violence, and keep losing our lives, our minds, and our future”*. An Israeli example is Elisheba IF/PCFF that stated:

There is no alternative other than dialogue; you can never give up that idea now when they are my friends. If I had not known them it would be easier, but now I could never abandon them, knowing that they will be left to such disgusting lives, my consciousness will never ever allow it. And it helps me as well getting up in the morning knowing that I am doing my bit and not sitting back in the corner doing nothing. Who the hell am I to talk if I do nothing about it?

What she expressed was similar to many of the other Israeli responses. They described that the personal friendship with Palestinians have given them a greater responsibility to try to do something with the situation. As the Israeli facilitator Rachel IF/BB stated: *“Occupation relies on objectifying people, and then you also don’t care about people. If you don’t become emotionally involved in something you don’t give a fuck about it”*. Dialogue is a platform where the Israelis at least feel that they are doing a little bit, which might help them to feel little less guilty about the pain and injustice the Israeli occupation are causing the Palestinian people.



In addition, there might be a greater symbolic value of dialogue, which is not necessarily discovered and expressed by the participants, for example through giving a positive impact on their peers. If the participants in dialogue groups communicate positive attitudes towards such interactions, it is possible that this may contribute to the reduction of hostile attitudes and fear towards the other within their family and closest social network. As an effect of the great stigmatization of such joint activities some people might fear communicating what they are doing. Mona PF/BB for instance was telling many of her friends that she was joining a women conference, and not a joint workshop with Israelis. However, findings on prior stereotypes and motivations might indicate the opposite. As seen previously, the majority of the participants with less negative stereotypes about the other prior to meetings have had one or several positive role models in their lives. In addition, when doing family visits during interviews I occasionally had the opportunity to talk to other family members. Some of the children had followed in their parents' footsteps, and could refer to dialogue workshops for children and youths in which they had participated. In addition, the majority of the participants stated that they had started with dialogue as a result of an invitation received from friends or other family members. This might be an indication of that to some degree such ripple effects are actually taking place. Several of the interviewed participants did also mention women as an important component of dialogue, explicitly for this purpose. They claimed that mothers do –especially in the more traditional societies - have an important effect on their children. As Kefaya outlined during her interview:

You know, the women are mothers of the home and teachers in the schools, so the women can do a lot of things. So if you are a mother and you have kids, and if you tell your kids good things about the other they will love him and be good, but opposite, they will hate me. So I think that the women are the main person in changing.

Reaching out to the women can therefore be a way of reaching into the families.

## **7.2. Perceived effectiveness on the political context**

As seen described in 6.2, the majority claimed to have higher hopes for the dialogue groups, other than changing perceptions on a personal level. As already outlined they also want to

influence the overall political reality in their region. Due to the fact that the conflicting reality still is unchanged, a few therefore felt that the dialogue encounters had little effect other than on a personal level.

<b>The effect of dialogue on the outside political situation</b>	<b>Palestinian</b>	<b>Israeli</b>
Dialogue has an effect on a personal level, but cannot change the overall political situation	2	3
Dialogue has the potential of having an effect on a personal level as well as on the outside political reality.	9	10

**Table 7: The effect of dialogue on the outside political situation**

As shown in Table 7, only five of the participants had a hope to see the contribution of grassroots dialogue as a means to end the conflict. Instead they expressed disappointment with the reduced ability they experience that they have to change the overall political reality. They believe that the conflict needs to be resolved by the politicians, as well as by the international environment. Grassroots dialogue is not going to contribute to that, even if their overall personal experience with dialogue was positive. Mahmoud PM/MOPE exemplifies, claiming that the conflict can only be solved by the government, and not by the people. *“They decide, not us”*. When I asked him if he believed that grassroots dialogue in some way can influence the government, he answered: *“no, absolutely not”*. When asked why he then committed to dialogue if he does not believe it can help solving the conflict, he answered: *“(…) My mission is to protect my homeland and serve my people (…) We can with the work convince soldiers to be with good behavior at the check point and road blocks”*. His mission with dialogue is therefore not to end the conflict, but to try to create it less painful for the Palestinian people, by making the occupation more human. This was also articulated among the Palestinian and Israeli woman connected to the “failed dialogue group”. Ariell IF/FD argued:

We wanted to go beyond. We wanted to achieve something big, we wanted to change Israeli mind and say look they are our neighbors, (...) It is very nice to sit together and talk and how is your child, and bla bla you know, but it would not come any closer to a solution. (...). I think we were very naive. We thought that if we could only bring a lot of Israeli into Palestinian families they could feel hospitality and stop being afraid, and it didn’t happened. Like we thought that if we could only bring

hundreds of people and they will just continue by themselves, and then it eventually will be thousands of these groups and meetings, but the small scale didn't get large.

She expressed that the Israelis in the group were still willing to meet, and it was eventually the Palestinian women that decided to stop the meetings. She is further quoted:

We have trust and friendship in the group, but we are not capable in doing anything that is meaningful. I think that the dialogue stopped when the Palestinian found out that they should do something more meaningful with their time. That talking to us was very nice, but not useful, it would not get them any state.

This point of view was supported by Hanin PF/FD, which realized that she rather wanted to use her time in trying to strengthen the Palestinian people, instead of continue with dialogue. She was frustrated about the victimhood and the violence of her society and found it extremely hard to sustain the confidence in dialogue. One of the obstacles concerned the normalization and the challenges with the increased level of resistance to joint meetings after the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000. The other factor was related to the fact that she had realized that it was much more effective to continue the struggle for peace on unilateral level. She expressed that there exist so many fractions and tensions between different groups in Palestine, especially between Hamas and Fatah. If peace will eventually come they have to strengthen the Palestinian side of the population that seek territorial compromise with Israel, and hence weaken the side that is fighting for a Greater Palestine. This, she expressed, was much more efficient, than to sit and talk and make friends with the other side.

### **7.3. Challenges and improvement to dialogue**

While some were skeptical about grassroots dialogue's ability to change the political reality, the Table 7 indicates that the majority claimed that this is possible under certain conditions. There are some structural reasons for grassroots dialogue having limited impact on the political situation. Despite the difficult reality, they had not given up hope in dialogue, and referred to some conditions that they were trying to improve in order to achieve a more efficient dialogue encounter. There were some obstacles that repeatedly were being

expressed in many of the interviews to be the reasons for the limited impact dialogue has on the outside political context. These are discussed in the following sections.

### 7.3.1. Increase the number of people

The majority of the participants claimed that the dialogue groups had failed to change the political reality, due to the fact that they have still not reached a significant number of participants. If they only can expose more people to dialogue, more will change their view about the other, and hence ideally place pressure on the government. If enough people get involved, the government will no longer have any choice than to listen to the grassroots. The quantity of people protesting from below may therefore be considered as a very important factor. As Hannah IF/ PCFF is quoted:

There are many interests to keep the conflict going, and that is only why we don't have peace yet. Like such as in Irland and Apartheid in South Africa. Like there eventually enough people screamed that they couldn't live like that anymore. It took several years, but it came down and the governments couldn't keep their interests anymore, because people were screaming. But until then it was very easy to keep the conflict going, and I think here is the same (...).

Another example may be Mona (PM/ BB) saying: *"I cannot say that the dialogue was very successful, but we cannot say that it was nothing. For me I look more positive, and I think that if it would have just be more of these groups, then the generations coming after me will be much more open"*.

This is in line with what Saunder addresses in his multilayered approach of peacebuilding, the public peace process (Saunder 2001). As described in chapter 2, the empowerment of changing their community from below were addressed as outmost necessary. However, several of the participants also added cooperation between the grassroots and the leaders as an important factor. Two of the Israeli women in PCFF were very eager to express that despite the mass of the grassroots level activities they will never have the power to squeeze their leaders into any negotiation. What they can do is to prepare the ground for peace, but in the end they will need strong leaders with some specific qualities.

For things to really change I think that the two people need those kind of leaders who can do it, it is not enough with the grass-root. You will need leadership who will not be popular (...). The conflict is just going on and no one is brave enough to stop it. We need tremendously brave leaders, and we

don't have that today. (...). Peace need good leaders, brave, but also the grassroots. It is a to-ways system. Even you can have people like Nelson Mandela, but if people aren't ready then you are stuck (...) (Miriam/PCFF).

This can be in line with Lederach's pyramid that points out that peacebuilding is not an arena limited to only one level of society, but that all levels are interconnected and mutually dependent (Lederach 2004). What Lederach also points to in the apex, level one of his pyramid, is the importance of reaching a great variation of different types of societal actors in the society. This leads to the next critical point that was addressed by several over the participants, which is the selection bias.

### 7.3.2. Selection bias

Dialogue groups may be regarded to a great degree as self-selected. As outlined above the participants had received an invitation to join dialogue encounters from family, friends, or they had found the encounters through a website. An issue that might be rising from this is the question about balance. Dialogue may then quickly become a tool for those who are already willing to meet. The issue about self-selection is by Cursch, Visser and Johnson (2004) raised as one of the challenges behind the lacking effect of dialogue encounters that were conducted in Northern Ireland. They expressed that this should be seen in connection to the fact that encounters did not reach the more extreme members of the society, which were the ones that most likely would have benefited the most from participation. Several of the interviewed participants did raise the issue about not reaching the more extreme people on both sides, claiming that this may be regarded as one of the greatest challenges. Rashid PM/IEA is quoted:

We are surely not successful in bringing people from Palestinian extreme Hamas right now. I am trying, but I have only success with people from left from like Fattah movement, but extreme Jihad Hamas, I think that they believe in dialogue but not between people to people but between leader to leader. (..) Next year I will focus more on right people. I think that they can and must sit together (...).

On the other hand, Cass R. Sustein argues in the book "Going to Extremes" (2009) that bringing people from sharply opposing views may increase, rather than reduce the polarization. This is due to the fact that dialogue needs participants that are willing to open up to one another, instead of holding on to their hatred and anger. Further on he claims

that one must first reduce the conflict before dialogue can have the ability to reach a wider specter of people. Several interviewed participants mentioned that one way of reaching a wider specter of people is to work with the younger generation, through among others obligatory dialogue meetings in school. This was especially something that was repeatedly mentioned by the interviewed participants from the PCFF. Ali PM/PCFF is quoted:

When they are 16 and 17 years old everyone will think about how to fight the Israeli, how to become a suicide bomber, because of the occupation. Other side how to become a soldier, to secure my state and build it, and kill the Palestinians.

PCFF is already facilitating public dialogue activities in high schools. Two forum representatives, one Israeli and one Palestinian, are visiting different classrooms in Israel, East Jerusalem and West Bank. There they are talking to students about the possibility of peace and reconciliation, through their own personal narratives. Ali claimed that these types of dialogue meetings might be the most important work that the PCFF is doing, due to the fact that here they are reaching a wide specter of youth that often have great variations of backgrounds and ideologies. High school lectures may be the first meeting they have with the personal narrative of the other side. As a counter voice to the work of Cass R. Sustein, Ali claims that everyone actually can be able to sit together and listen and talk, also the more extremist people. The question is rather on *how* the dialogue is conducted:

Ok I can tell you that I can sit in the classroom in Israel, and say that you took my land and you killed my father and I have been in jail because of you and put all the blame on them, but that is no kind of dialogue. But I can be in a different way. I can start to say that I want to tell you my personal story of what actually happened to me. (...). We don't teach them about the occupation, because when you rather tell them the personal story it is like different. You have to be clever, you have to play and deal with the minds and take people on a personal journey with you. This works all the time.

Hannah IF/PCFF can serve as another example:

I think the lectures are very important because kids have stereotypes and if like teacher will speak to them about it someone will say that they doesn't have personal stories and the stereotypes will just grow, and I think that the lectures they hear a very personal story. Many kids in the end have the same opinions, but even they can listen to the topic just because this are bereaved parents that have lost someone very close and they have dignity for this. PCFF is admired and respected, because they lost people that gave something to the country. So children still with all the stereotypes they can sit and they can listen to the bereaved parents talking, and because of that they also have to do it with the Palestinians as well. And suddenly they see a Palestinian that has a name, sit on a chair just like

the Israeli, and has his own story about losing someone, and suddenly maybe they can relate to him. He is a human being.

PCFF may be in a unique position of facilitating public lectures in classrooms, due to the fact that people seem to have more respect for people in bereavement. While PCFF is able to conduct such meetings it might be more difficult for other dialogue groups to do the same. First of all it is reason to believe that it will be more difficult to get the permission to conduct such lectures in the classrooms, and it might also be harder to make the students listening. Anyhow, PCFF reaches around 20.000 Israeli and Palestinian students every year (PCFF 2012). This may contribute to some changes in perceptions among people that normally would not have taken part in dialogue.

### 7.3.3. Creating continuity despite the violence on the ground

The Israeli and Palestinian conflict is colored by endless circles of violence on the ground, which has according to Bassiouni (2003) a severe negative impact on the spirit of cooperation among the participants in dialogue. In his article he is using the violence connected to the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000 as an example, claiming that it led to great despair and increased dehumanization on both sides, with severe loss of hope and confidence about the other part (Bassiouni 2003). Many Palestinians felt forsaken by the fact that their Israeli partners remained silent, while many Israeli felt betrayed by the Palestinian suicide attacks (Wurfel 2003). The dilemma of performing dialogue in an ongoing violent conflict was reflected upon by several of the interviewed participants. Several claimed that they occasionally did question whether or not they should continue with dialogue. One example is the failed dialogue group that broke down after the escalation of violence caused by the Al Aqsa Intifada. Hanin PF/FD stated that she and also the other Palestinians in the group felt betrayed and humiliated by the Israeli, and eventually they could not continue to meet. She claimed, *"It is too hard with dialogue when you are not proud and strong anymore, and when the Israeli humiliates us"*. This cause of event reflects how trust and cooperation in an ongoing conflict is very hard to sustain.

The Gaza war in January 2009 was also something that was repeatedly mentioned as an event that had caused obstacles for several of the dialogue groups in Israel and Palestine.

Michael IM/MOPE is quoted:

During the war we couldn't meet, it was so hard. The Israeli turned totally pro Israel, saying that peace will come only after the Palestinian women will care more about their children than to kill Israeli. I got furious when they said that, and some other in the group also got furious, but this is something that happened in the group. Like one of them said that we cannot meet in the war, but later. To meet now will be ridiculous hypocrites.

This is an example of a tendency that often occurs in times of conflict. As described in section 2.2, people tend to develop stronger group memberships when there is time of insecurity and violence. This is due to the fact that when people fear that their own group's security is under greater threat it is a tendency to withdraw into safe in-groups. Under violent threats, such as seen in the Gaza war, it is possible that the differences between the in and out groups may again be overstated, and hence societal beliefs around victimization and dehumanization may find new grounding. Even members of PCFF mentioned that the war in Gaza troubled their dialogue interactions, even if their relationships are by many of the members being expressed as deep and emotional. This was more dominant among the Palestinian members than by the Israeli members, which again may have relation to the asymmetrical power relation. Kefaya PM/PCFF is quoted:

You know, the most difficult moment was during the war in Gaza. That time we cannot accept each other. While we were working we were doing a lot to achieve something, and then came the war. That time we faced a lot of problems, then also my mother did not accept to meet Israeli, and most other women didn't accept that we met and did something.

Yet, in the midst of ongoing violence members of PCFF continue to meet even after the setback of the Gaza war in 2009, and the members expressed it as that they do not have any other alternatives than to continue their work.

The discussion around the use of violence was to some extent two folded. All of the participants stated that violence does not lead to peace, and should be stopped on both sides. However, when talking about the Gaza war in 2009 and the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000 some of the interviewed participants on both sides did -to some extent-withdraw back to



the more mainstream narrative regarding violence. This was especially visible amongst the participants in BB. All of the Palestinians stated that the rockets attacks and suicide attacks are something that they do not support, however on the other hand some of them argued that they understand why it is happening. The Palestinian violence is only a consequence of the Israeli occupation and the pessimism around the possibilities of having a better future.

Palestinians who die are in our eyes looked at as Martyrs, because they have died for something good, they die for their country. We tried to tell them that Muslims who die as Martyr they go to heaven, but the Israeli were very angry saying that they were only terrorists. But some of the Martyrs are really heroes for us. We cannot say that all Martyrs are terrorists because first of all we are defending our country. We cannot sit down and do nothing. It is like when you are eating something, you cannot say ok take it. You fight for it. **(Mona PF/BB)**.

On the Israeli side they were all against the Israeli military violence directed towards the Palestinians. However, many of them stressed the fact that the Israelis have grown a deep fear for being killed by bombs and rocket attacks, and they wanted the Palestinians to realize how the impact of terrorism has on the their public. Majority of the Israeli participants did not support the security fences and the military checkpoints. However, as the situation was right now, some of them did not see any other solution to the Palestinian violence.

I think that Israeli that live here and are growing up here have seen so many bombs in Tel Aviv and I know people that have been killed and injured, so I think that everybody develop this genuinely fear from terrorists and from Arabs. You can go on the bus and you can see someone entering the bus and they look like Arabs and you don't know if he is going to blow himself up. Therefore I have this fear of getting killed, that someone will kill me from the street **(Hannah IF/PCFF)**.

#### 7.3.4. Long-term commitment

The length of the five dialogue groups varied widely, all from weekend workshops (MOPE), weekly meetings of two weeks (BB), to a more long-term commitment for more than a year (PCFF, FD and IEA). From several holds there is a preference a more long-term commitment, rather than short-term meetings (Hurtado & Schoem 2001). This is due to the fact that dialogue must be regarded as a process rather than an event. It is only over an extended period of time that participants are able to build trusting relationships, which may survive the outside pressure of stigmatization towards dialogue. Several of the participants of BB

expressed frustration over the lack of long-term commitment to the program. This was especially visible among three of the participants that had BB as their only dialogue experience. As Zeina PF/BB expressed:

The problem begins when you come back. You have plans, you want to work for peace (..) but by the time everything is going away, I don't know why... you will be with people that tells you, no it is not right and you discover that it will be very hard to be friends (..) you are in a conflict with yourselves, whether to be with them, or not. The reality here is really hard.

The Israeli participant Hadas IF/BB expressed a similar challenge: *"You come back and it is weird because you think that you made so many steps forward and you see that everything here is the same"*. The quotes do to some degree confirm the argumentation given by Sylvi Hurtado (2001) that there are no shortcuts to the benefit of long-term engagement and commitment. The collective narratives that refuse dialogue are as previously outlined very strong, especially on the Palestinians side, and one might assume that it is constantly being reinforced by the conflict. This is also the conclusion of Phillip Hammack's work on narratives by Israeli and Palestinian youths where he claims that the identity categorization quickly can be eradicated by the structural reality of conflict (Hammack 2011).

Changes in attitudes demand time, and only after a short-term dialogue the ripple effect to the wider society might therefore be limited. There is reason to believe that many participants do not have a social network at home supporting dialogue, and there is also a danger of returning to their prior views after a period of time. However, a counter voice might be the fact that two of the Palestinian participants that have been engaged in dialogue for many years actually started with a short-term commitment in an abroad workshop. They claimed that they joined the seminar out of curiosity and possible to travel abroad, and ended up being very engaged in dialogue. For the participants in BB it is fair to assume that if given a chance to join another dialogue encounter in the future, the positive experience from BB might make it easier for them to participate in new challenges.

## 7.4. Future outlook – participants imagining peace

All of the participants had reflected upon their perception on approaches to promote peace and had a clear preference on how the best way to live together should be. Some were connected to a two-state solution, while others were arguing for a one-state solution. This will be discussed in following sections.

### 7.4.1. Two states for two people

Two states for two peoples has for a period of time been the suggested solution for those who seek a peace that includes both peoples. This was also an agreed upon issue by the majority of the interviewed participants. This solution addresses the needs of both sides, where Palestine represents a homeland for the Palestinian people, and Israel represents a homeland of the Jewish people. In order to make it possible, almost all of them mentioned that they have to make an end to the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian territories.

However, the two Israeli participants living in the Israeli settlement were more reluctant about calling it an occupation. They felt that they had a right to live on this territory in the sense that they have a deep spiritual connection to the region. *“I don’t feel that I am taking Arab territory by living here, because it wasn’t like that we tore down houses or anything. It was just deserts”* (Beth IF/IEA). However, all except two of the Israeli participants, expressed their condemnations to the Israeli occupation in OPT, and wanted to make an end to it. The Palestinian participants also saw this as the only options for a future peace to find place: *“I tell them many times, we accept you as a state. We ask you to give back what you occupied from us, and let us build an independent state beside you. We don’t say what we said in the past, like we want to throw you to the sea (...)”* (Ilias PM/MOPE).

When asked what the separation of the two states should be like, most of the participants were unclear. Several participants on both sides had no answer to the question claiming that it is the responsibility of the politicians and not the people to agree on this. However, preference suggested by four of the Palestinian participants was to turn back to the exact 1967 border, and to make a fair division of Jerusalem. Others again, both Palestinians and Israeli, said that sticking exactly to the 1967 border is not realistic. Some exchange of land must be done, and three Israeli participants especially referred to some of the highly

populated Israeli settlements on the West Bank. However, both Mahmoud PM/MOPE and Ali PM/PCFF were skeptical to this, because they were afraid of what kind of impact this will have for them, due to the fact that two of the largest settlements are separating the West Bank from East Jerusalem. Mahmoud argued that it is an obstacle for a future exchange explaining: *“Cannot change land, especially not around Jerusalem. (...) Male Adumim settlement and Gush Shalom settlement will separate Jerusalem from the West Bank. (...). How we can build our state with these settlers and settlements?”* The Israeli participant Michael IM/MOPE argued that the compromises of land must be something Palestinians are going to gain from, while Israel on the other hand has to suffer:

Israel has to give up a lot, because in the eyes of Palestinians, the Israeli will always be the oppressor and the attacker (...). I don't think that they can reconcile with themselves of what have happened unless they see that we pay a huge price. (...) It must come from the Israeli (..) If it comes as a pressure from the Palestinians it is not going to play the role. It should be an offer.

The separation wall was also mentioned as an obstacle to a future two-state solution. Several of the Palestinians stated clearly that the separation wall, roadblocks and the checkpoints within the West Bank must be removed in order to build a sustainable state. Rashid PM/IEA is quoted:

People born now see the wall, see the Check Points, see that Jerusalem is Israeli area, and maybe this generation will never visit Jerusalem. That will feed back badly. It will create a new hate-generation. I always say to the Israeli in the meetings that it is the wall that create Palestinians hating Israeli. First step is to end the occupation, tear down the wall and all the Check Points. And then build trust. That is it! Then you will see something new.

The majority of the Israeli on the other hand were skeptical to this. On one hand they could see how the checkpoints and the separation wall create great problems for the average Palestinian. On the other hand they fear for their own security if totally removing it. Almost all of them were willing to adjust it back to the 1967 border, or move it to a negotiated border, but not totally remove it. As Hadas IF/ BB was saying:

The last thing I want is terrorist attacks. I have two kids to be in danger, very egoistic from my point of view. I don't want the wall, it is horrible in all objectives, but there is right now no other solution to stop the terrorist attacks. I believe that the separation-wall will go down one day. I am optimistic. Of course it has to go to the green line, or maybe it doesn't have to be exact. (...) And yes I do believe

it should be a border, maybe a wall. Even in Mexico there is a wall, but not like this. Not a wall that goes into little houses. (...).

#### 7.4.2. Skepticism towards a two-state solution

However, there existed skepticism towards a two-state solution between five of the participants, based on two different explanations. The Israeli settlers stating that the Holy Land cannot be divided into a political two-state solution addressed one of the explanations. They must rather seek peaceful existence in one single peace of land. As Vivian IF/IEA argued: *“This can be a safe place for Jews and be a Jewish Homeland, but it can also be a Palestinian Homeland, it can be like both at the same time. It is not anything wrong to have a homeland for both countries (...)”*. The other reason given for their lacking trust in a two-state solution was related to the changes on the ground, such as the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements on the West Bank, their economic dependence, security issues as well as geographical issues. These together with other factors had made a two-state solution practically impossible. Instead they must rather be discussing a bi-national state. It occurred mostly on the Israeli side, but also one Palestinian participant showed this skepticism. Ali PM/ PCFF stated:

No chance we can do a two-state solution. Things on the ground are so hard. The water, the electric, economic, it will be so hard for the Palestinians to do a state. And then it is the right of return of the refugees. It is 7 million refugees, what can we do with them when they still are refugees. It is a small land. How can we do two states? Maybe we can make two states now, and after 50 years make it together. Or maybe we can call it Israelistinian.

Ariell IF/FD expressed similar skepticism. She also believes that the practical challenges to a two-state solution are too substantial for it to actually be working in practice. However, two states was something she ideally preferred: *“You have what is preferable and what is realistic. What is preferable is to have a two-state solution, but I feel we have created a situation where it is impossible for us. All the settlers living there, I don’t think it is practical, but it is preferable, because both sides really wants it”*. The Israeli facilitator Jacob IM/MOPE explained how the only realistic solution must be based on cooperation between the two people, due to the fact that a complete separation will turn into a disaster:

I cannot force you to marry me with peaceful means if you don't want to marry me. One state is then not an option. Two states is not an option either, because that is a complete divorce. Impossible. The only thing that will work is two cooperative states. But the reality is that we have to move very fast, because the settlers they are dictating the terms on the ground, it will in the end be impossible to evacuate them and the 2 states will then not be an option anymore.

#### 7.4.3. There are people to talk to on the other side

The findings above outline different ways of approaching peace, some based on a one-state solution and others on a two-state solution. However, despite the differences in how to pursue peace, they all expressed the wish to live non-violently with both people present in the territory. This is opposite to the two peaceful visions explained in chapter 3, which represents a mirroring victory of one side over the other. There are people on both sides that still believe that the land belong to them exclusively, where the one side can only win if the other side loses, which is often referred to as a zero-sum struggle. As seen in the above findings, this was not the case among the participants interviewed for this research. In various ways they aired options were both sides live together peacefully. This might serve as a positive contribution for the participants involved, in the sense that they meet people on the other side expressing the same wishes as them. Several of the interviewed participants described this as a positive discovery, due to the fact that they often are being told otherwise by their society. Miriam IF/PCFF can serve as an example saying:

People say there is no one to talk to and I can say that well, there is 200 Palestinians that you can talk to, and I have met and I have spoken to these people and you see wonderful Palestinian women that love you dearly and they want something different than war. It has changed me because I know that there are definitely people on every side in every conflict and if you want you can find them that will think the same as you.

The participants interviewed for this research have developed a language of common ground, where there is made room for both people in their hopes for the future. According to Bruce E. Wexler does in fact 75% of the Israeli and Palestinian population support a peace where both people are included (Wexler 2007). However, the problem is that there is often the extremist minority that is winning the war by serving the public with ideas of violence, hatred and mutual denial of the other side's identity (Wexler 2007). It is reason to believe that the extremists are controlling the terms of thinking and discussions. A central part of the conflict is about mistrust to the other side, a mistrust that is often not based on facts

but rather on myths. The question is how can the people that do believe in peace that includes both people -such as the participants interviewed for this thesis - translate their voice into a genuine public opinion, so that it is not the extremists that set the agenda for peace, but rather the moderates.

## 8. Conclusions

This thesis has portrayed how Israeli and Palestinian participants perceive the value and effect of grassroots level dialogue. The discussion was based on findings received from participants belonging to five different groups. Some were influenced by the human-relations tradition, while others were influenced by conflict-resolution tradition. Groups also varied in timeframe, and in what type of people that were connected to them. Answers given from the participants gave a double-sided picture of the effectiveness of dialogue that was both pessimistic as well as optimistic. On one hand they could refer to an effect on the personal level, while on the other hand experiences of disappointment was addressed due to the unchangeable reality of intractable conflict.

Conducting grassroots dialogue in an ongoing violent conflict has both physical as well as psychological barriers. What makes dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian participants even harder is the structural asymmetry that exists between them, where one side is the occupier and the other side is being occupied. Different realities often result in different motivations and expectations by dialogue, which was also the case for the participants interviewed as part of this research. There existed great differences among participants' perceptions around whether one should discuss the difficult conflicting issues that separate the two peoples, or whether to steer away from them and rather focus on creating an atmosphere of equality based on their commonalities. Due to the asymmetry more Palestinian than Israelis expressed the need for political discussions, or more specifically to articulate how they are suffering due to the Israeli occupation. There is reason to believe that if dialogue is to be an effective tool for structural change, one must recognize the various needs and concerns that the different participants are carrying, and especially from the weaker part. Ignoring the needs and living conditions of participating Palestinians in comparison to Israelis might create frustrations and also reduce Palestinians ability to gain support for their attendance in dialogue among people in their own societies.

All interviewed participants proclaimed a positive value of dialogue, among others by gaining greater knowledge around conflicting topics, and/or by developing deep and meaningful friendship with the other side. What seemed to be a merging tendency was that



they all appreciated the positive value of finding people on the other side that were embracing the same wish for the future. They all want to live side by side in peace, a peace that includes and respects both people. In this sense one might conclude that reconciliation actually does happen in small ways.

On the other hand there were expressed frustrations to dialogue and its limited impact on the political reality. At the heart of this research is the assumption that a resolution of intractable conflicts can only be effective through multilayered efforts that addresses both peace agreements at the state level as well as the psychosocial dimensions that adjust negative stereotypes and prejudice among people at the grassroots. Theories on intractable conflict suggest that ordinary people play an important role in the overall structural transformation of the conflict. Israeli and Palestinian grassroots dialogue groups have existed for many years, but the positive effect on a personal level has not yet succeeded to generalize to the macro level of the whole society. However, participants suggested several reasons for why it has not yet happened, such as the limited ability to embrace a broader specter of people in both societies. Another factor is that grassroots dialogue is very much dependent on whether the political structures on the macro level is ready for reconciliation. At this moment participants claim that the politicians and the civil society are working against each other instead of together. The effect grassroots dialogue has on the political situation might at this moment seem small. However, this does not mean that dialogue cannot have a great impact on the Israeli and Palestinian political reality in the future.

Many of the courageous people interviewed for this research continue year after year their effort of reaching out to the other side in the conflict, in order to mobilize the two peoples for a sustainable peace. This is done despite the endless circle of violence in region, and that for sure gives glimmer of hope.

### **8.1. Limitations and avenues for further research**

Due to the scope of this thesis and the limitations of the empirical data, many questions regarding dialogue groups and its value and effect are left unanswered. An area that needs further investigation is a more narrow focus on the *limits* of the effectiveness of

reconciliation-aimed dialogues that are conducted in a situation of conflict. In light of this it might be valuable to suggest further research on three different topics.

First of all it would be valuable to conduct similar research studies in other geographic areas where there exist intractable conflicts over identities, and where grassroots dialogue has been taken in use. Another valuable area for further investigation is to generate more knowledge on the perceptions of ordinary people not involved in dialogue. This also includes the perceptions of people that consciously stigmatize voluntary social contact, in order to better understand their reasons. The last suggestion is to compare grassroots dialogue with peace processes taken on the state level. This thesis has only attempted to look at dialogue setting from the viewpoint of the grassroots. However - as outlined by many of the interviewed participants- the grassroots is very dependent on the actions taken by the policymakers. Therefore it would be interesting to conduct further research on the interaction between grassroots and their leadership in order to get a better insight into how these two levels are/ or are not cooperating. This may give the researcher a better understanding of the possibilities for more efficient ways of cooperation at different levels in order to achieve a sustainable peace in the region.

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