

Creating a new “we”

*A qualitative study of interreligious dialogue
among young adults in Lebanon*

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1 Introduction

1.1 Approach

Interreligious dialogue is in this thesis exemplified by four different dialogue organizations¹ actively involved in interreligious dialogue at the Lebanese grass-roots level. Three of them are located in Beirut and one in Tyre in South Lebanon. In the autumn of 2010, I conducted empirical field work in Lebanon which lasted for almost four months. By conducting qualitative interviews with the leaders of, and some of the participants in, the four organizations, I obtained an interview material which allowed me to examine the descriptions given by young adults engaged in interreligious dialogue, concerning their views on and experiences with the topic. The analytical approach used in this thesis is a thematic analysis. The themes extracted are chosen on the basis of the interview material.

1.2 Thematic focus and research questions

The overall topic of this thesis is *interreligious dialogue among young adults² in Lebanon*. The starting point was a wish to learn more about what young adults think about interreligious dialogue and its potential contributions in a religiously pluralistic society like the Lebanese. What do the tense political situation and the conflict-ridden history have to say for interreligious dialogue in Lebanon? Can dialogue help to improve relations between members of different religious groups in this context? On the basis of this, three research questions have been developed which will be discussed in the following analysis.

My research questions are as follows:

- How do the informants interpret the significance of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon?

¹ I have chosen not to name the organizations due to ethical considerations which will be discussed further in chapter 2. Instead they are referred to as organization A, B, C and D.

² Within the definition of young adults I include persons in the age group of 20-30 years old. My selection of informants will be further discussed in chapter 2.

- What role does interreligious dialogue and the NGOs³ constitute in the informants' lives?
- How do the informants express their views on the relation between interreligious dialogue and politics in Lebanon?

Interreligious dialogue and dialogue in general, are concepts which are increasingly used in the world today. The frequent use of the concept has made it vague and difficult to define. This thesis, however, is not an attempt at a theoretical approach to define the term of interreligious dialogue, but rather to explore the topic in a societal perspective. Because the study is based on qualitative interviews, it is my informants' experiences and expressed thoughts that form the basis for the analysis. It is not an attempt at a complete political analysis, even though politics is one of the topics referred to.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 follows. It covers my material, method and ethical considerations. In this chapter, my informants are presented. I also discuss the choice of method, my analytical approach and the ethical considerations I have made in the course of writing this thesis. In chapter 3, I describe and discuss the theoretical frameworks I will use in the following analysis. The main emphasis is placed on the theories I use the most; intergroup theories, dialogue theories and theories concerning relational space. In addition, I explain some less frequently used theories that deal with politics, knowledge and history. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 constitute the analytical sections of this thesis. They are thematically structured as follows: Chapter 4 consists of an analysis of how the informants describe interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. Using theories of contact, dialogue and relational space, I argue that the informants see dialogue in a very practical perspective. Chapter 5 consists of an analysis of the role interreligious dialogue and the NGOs constitute in the lives of the informants. Using theories of categorization, I argue that the NGOs become retreats from the labeling and categorization experienced by the informants in the society in general. Chapter 6 consists of an analysis of the relation between interreligious dialogue and politics in Lebanon. Using theories of arena and process approaches to politics I argue that the informants distance

³ Non-governmental organization

themselves from the political sphere. Chapter 7 includes a concluding summary where my findings are presented and discussed.

1.4 Lebanese history and context

In order to understand the relationship between the religious communities in Lebanon today, it is essential to have insight into the contextual circumstances which my informants and the four NGOs operate. I will give a short review of some of the most significant historical events in Lebanon's modern history. These events have been selected on the basis of how my informants weighed them in the interviews. In addition, I will give an outline of the current social context and an overview of the position interreligious dialogue has in Lebanon today.

Review of some significant events in Lebanese modern history

The French Mandate, Lebanon's independence and the National Pact

Lebanon was demarcated in 1920 as a part of the Allies' division of the Middle Eastern parts of the former Ottoman Empire after the 1st World War (Traboulsi 2007:75). The French mandate was introduced, which entailed a divide and conquer method of governing. The French delegated the most powerful positions to Christians over Muslims in the country, especially singling out the Maronite Christians (Traboulsi 2007:90-91). In 1943, Lebanon became independent after being under French mandate for 23 years. The political system, which lasted until 1990 and the end of the Civil War, was established. The National Pact, an unwritten agreement between the Maronite and the Sunni communities, reached before the independence from France in 1943, was the basis of the political system. It stated that the positions within the new Lebanese Parliament and government were going to be allocated on the 1932 census that recorded 51% Christians and 49% Muslims. To this day, the census has not been officially updated. At the time of the census the Maronite community was rated as the largest confession at 29%, the Sunnis followed at 22% and the Shiites at 20%. Accordingly, the presidency was given to the Maronites, the premiership to the Sunnis and the parliamentary speakership to the Shiites. In the Parliament, the seats were allocated six Christians to every five Muslims, the same for the governmental positions (Blanford 2006:15).

This system was bound to produce problems between the different communities. With every little change in the demographic balance, the group that increases will probably wish for more power according to the new proportions. There is a wide agreement among both scholars and politicians that the Lebanese demography has undergone substantial changes since the 1930s. Some independent efforts to estimate the demographics indicate that the Muslim population is now up to about 60-65%. However, there has not been any new census after 1932 and the Lebanese government has adopted a policy where they refuse to perform a new one, in order to avoid conflict (Faour 2007:909-911).

The civil war and its aftermath

The unjust distribution of power, described above, contributed to escalate the conflict situation in 1975. The civil war in Lebanon, lasting from 1975 to 1990, was made up by different wars and of different actors. The war saw successive rounds of violent conflicts that pitted Lebanese and foreign militias and armies against each other in changing alliances. What the Lebanese call the civil war, or the Christian-Palestinian war, lasted from April 1975 to October 1976. Tensions had built up alongside the number of Palestinian refugees, and many Lebanese Muslims had sympathy for the mostly Sunni Muslim group. They had aspirations for greater influence for their religious group. The Maronites feared that the absorption of so many Muslim refugees would disrupt the balance of power and lead to a Muslim advantage. The two sides in this war were made up by the National Movement containing several leftist groups and led by the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt and PLO on one side, against Pierre Gemayel's Phalange party and other Christian militias on the other. PLO's increased involvement in the fighting led to the involvement of outside parties, mainly Syria and Israel. (Traboulsi 2007:187). Syria entered the scene on the Christian side in 1976, when they were close to defeat. They wanted to ensure that Israel did not intervene before them and would be able to launch attacks on Damascus from Lebanon. After 1976, the fragile stability was threatened by various violent actions over the next few years. But it was not until 1982 that the country would break out into war again. This time it was Israel that invaded Lebanon. Ariel Sharon's plan was to drive Syria out of the country and crush the PLO (Blanford 2006:19-22).

The civil war ended in 1990, fifteen years after it began. Peace was reached through a national reconciliation accord called the Ta'if Accord. This was the most important political agreement since the National Pact of 1943, and it called for the phased abolition of the political confessional system. However, it did not set any timeframe for it. One of the reasons for the civil war was the favoritism of the Christians in the power sharing agreement from 1943. With the Ta'if Accord, the seats in the Parliament and the Government became more equitably distributed. The ratio was now 50-50 between Christians and Muslims. The Maronite president, who until now had the greatest amount of power in the government, got some of his executive powers transferred to the Sunni prime minister and the Shiite speaker of parliament. This effectively produced a troika system comprising the three most powerful positions in the state (Blanford 2006:36-37).

After the Civil War ended, the focus on the future (*al-mustqbal*) was overriding in the Lebanese public. According to the Lebanese sociologist Samir Khalaf, the country had "a collective civil war amnesia" (cited in Volk 2008:293). Everything concerned with the war and the past was greatly downplayed, while the present and future were strongly highlighted. The slogan "no victor, no vanquished" describes the decision that none of the political and military players in the war was regarded as winners or imposed the burden of being the loser. A new 1991 amnesty law meant that most of the former militia leaders avoided persecution and could participate in the political life with a clean slate. Many of them were even included in the new government. Volk uses the term "state-sponsored forgetfulness" to describe this notion (Volk 2008:293).

The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri

When Lebanon was still recovering from the damages of the Civil War, on the 14th of February 2005, the former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, was killed by a car bomb near the waterfront in Beirut. Hariri was a multi-millionaire, who, after the Civil War, invested a huge amount of money in the reconstruction work needed in the country. This earned him many supporters among the population. Shortly after the murder, the blame was put on Syria and a major political crisis ensued. Hariri's funeral generated the presence of tens of thousands of people. It was not only a funeral; it was also a demonstration against Syrian presence in Lebanon (Blanford 2006:147). The demonstrations kept coming, causing the government to

collapse. The Lebanese and the international pressure on Syria led to their withdrawal from the country in April 2005 (Blanford 2006:155-156, 159). However, in the wake of Hariri's assassination, two wings emerged in the political landscape. On the 8th of March 2005, mostly Shiites who supported Hizbullah and Amal, but also some Christian members of parties who supported Syria, gathered in a huge pro-Syria rally. It was answered on the 14th of March by an even larger demonstration organized by people taking sides against Syria, mainly Sunnis, Christians and Druze (Blanford 2006:160-161). Out of this, two alliances were created: The March 8 alliance and the March 14 alliance. However, the 2005 election resulted in a coalition government which crossed the boundaries of these alliances (Blanford 2006:168-169).

Heightened tension between Sunnis and Shiites

After the civil war ended in 1990, all of the militias were demilitarized except Hizbullah. They kept their arms because of their status as a resistance group against Israel. May 7th 2008 was the date Hizbullah's weapons turned inward. It all started as a cost-of-living strike that escalated out of control. Lebanon's inner stability had already been threatened for a few years because of the government's composition, its programs, the UN-sponsored investigation of Rafik Hariri's murder, the choice of a new president and the country's electoral laws. Eventually the focus shifted to another important root of the instability; Hizbullah's arms (International Crisis Group 2008:1-2). The government decided on two actions to target the problem. For one, on May 6th they fired the head of security at Beirut's airport, Wafiq Shuqayr, a general believed to have shared information with Hizbullah. They also wanted to shut down the independent telephone system that Hizbullah allegedly used because it ensured the secrecy of their internal communication. The government was afraid that it would be used by Hizbullah or Syria for domestic surveillance. These issues were not new, and the government could have made these decisions years before. In 2006, there was a violent conflict between Israel and Hizbullah lasting for thirty-three days, causing much human and material damage. Political scientist Paul Salem, argues that it is likely to believe that if the Lebanese army had taken back control over the south of the country and removed Hizbullah's arms when Israel withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, "the war in 2006 would not have erupted" (Salem 2006:15). However, due to an unwritten agreement between the March 14 alliance and Hizbullah, stating that their weapons should only be used against Israel and were never to be turned inwards, this was not done. In May 2008 this agreement quickly came to an end and

initiated a conflict which still influences the country's stability (International Crisis Group 2008:1-4).

The current Lebanese context

During my field work from August to November 2010, the situation between the political alliances in the country was still tense. There were rumors flourishing concerning the UN-sponsored investigation of Hariri's murder, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL). After five years, the tribunal was soon going to publish its findings. It was no longer only Syria that was suspected, but Hizbullah as well. Hizbullah were now in a coalition government with Rafik Hariri's son, Saad, who was Prime Minister. UN delayed the release of the STL's findings several times, which indicates how flammable it was. Lebanon has experienced a change of government since then. When representatives from the March 8 alliance withdrew from the government, the rest had to resign as well. Najib Mikati, a representative from the March 8 alliance, was elected new prime minister, and has formed a new government. Four members of Hizbullah was accused in the STL, however, Hizbullah still denies any affiliation with the murder (Bakri 2011). The alliances of March 8 and March 14 continue to influence the society in Lebanon. In turn, this affects the relationship between the religious groups, because politics and religion are closely entwined. It also affects the interreligious dialogue.

A short history of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon

Interreligious dialogue in Lebanon is a field that has grown rapidly, especially in the last two decades, and activities are numerous and varied. Before the civil war, some groundwork for the dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon was done. In 1954 the "First Muslim-Christian Convocation" was held, and in 1959 the Institute for Research and Training in Development (IFRED) was established. However, these meetings were set up by secular elite and did not include the religious leaders from the different confessions. It was not until 1993 that religious leaders established the "National Christian-Muslim Committee for Dialogue", the sectarian issues were addressed and the voices of the religious clergies were heard (Fleihan 2006). Over the last two decades, the extent of interreligious activities has increased dramatically. Other players have entered the field. For example, local initiatives like the Arab Working Group on Muslim-Christian Dialogue, but also international actors like the

World Council of Churches and UNESCO. Lebanese universities have also contributed to the field, St. Joseph University and University of Balamand in particular. They have contributed with both academic studies and interreligious events (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007:105-110).

The four organizations I have chosen to focus on are all smaller than the previously mentioned organizations. They are locally based (although some of them focus more on the local context than others, who work locally as well as regionally and internationally) and work mainly at the grassroots level. Youth and young adults is a priority for all of them. Although, their work consists of different approaches to dialogue, there are some activities that stand out as common. The first one is the summer camps. In these camps, young people are gathered over a period of time to get to know each other. This happens through playing, sharing social, cultural and developmental activities and through participation in lectures and seminars. At least two of the NGOs have organized these kinds of camps in the past and many of the participants I have interviewed have been involved in such, either with Lebanese only or with people from other countries as well. This is a type of interreligious activity that gets the participants to live with one another. The second type of events is interreligious dialogue in schools. One of the NGOs targeted high schools to spread knowledge about other religions and interreligious dialogue. With volunteer teachers from the NGO, they have now implemented the program in several high schools in Lebanon with a desire to eventually make it national and compulsory. Through workshops or clubs at the schools, movies, texts and various psychosocial exercises they intend to get kids to understand the concepts of dialogue and coexistence. The third type of event frequently arranged by all of the NGOs I have focused on is interreligious workshops. These are events with relatively short duration, and usually do not involve staying overnight. The workshops involve dialogue and learning skills of for example listening and conflict management.

1.5 Earlier studies

There is much research done on Lebanon. Many have found the country's history, political system and pluralistic structure interesting. A large part of the research is directed more towards the political system, the civil war, Islam or Lebanon's relations to external actors than directly towards interreligious dialogue. However, a few examples should be mentioned. In

their book *Unity in Diversity* (2007), Abu-Nimer et al. have given an introduction to and an overview of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. They address the subject both historically and contemporary. In their book other researchers are emphasized as important contributors to this field of research; for example Saoud Al-Mawla and Muhammad Al-Sammak. Most of their work is written in Arabic or French, making them inaccessible to English readers. Tarik Mitri's "Interreligious and Intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean area during a period of globalization" (1997) and Amal Khoury's "Interfaith Dialogue in Lebanon: The Necessary Path Towards Post-Conflict Reconciliation" (2005) may also be mentioned

As far as I know, there are not any qualitative studies of interreligious dialogue among young adults at the Lebanese grassroots-level. One master thesis that has a similar topic as mine is the thesis of Vassilia Bilak called *Towards a contextualised approach to peacebuilding: Exploring the potential contributions of religion to peacebuilding in Lebanon* (2011). She focuses on how religious organizations are working for peace in Lebanon, and she has interviewed leaders of different interreligious NGOs. However, her focus is on the organization level rather than the participant level. I believe that my study can provide new information to the field by giving a cross-section of the grassroots the opportunity to express themselves. It is, in my opinion, interesting and useful to learn more about the participants' experiences when it comes to dialogue in Lebanon.

2 Material, method and ethical considerations

In this chapter, I will describe the manner in which I approach my field of research. I have chosen to conduct empirical fieldwork. This choice has implications for my project. Fieldwork consists of qualitative research, here focusing on a relatively small number of informants with a high level of detail in the provided information. This is in contrast to focusing on a large group of informants with a low level of detail. I will discuss choices made in the process of gathering material and writing the thesis, and I will present my informants. In addition I will present and discuss essential ethical considerations. How do I ensure that my informants stay anonymous? How should the topic of religion be treated? What does it mean for the thesis that I use English as working language? These questions, among others, are answered in this chapter. Finally, I will discuss my choice of analytical method.

2.1 Searching for contacts in Lebanon

The overall topic for this thesis is interreligious dialogue between young adults in Lebanon. The material was collected through qualitative interviews during an empirical fieldwork in Beirut from August to November 2010. When I decided to write my thesis concentrated on this topic, I started to search online for organizations engaged in the interreligious field. I sent e-mails to a large number of potentially relevant organizations, but it was a challenge to get in contact with organizations while I was still in Norway. However, after a lot of research, including advice from different Norwegian actors engaged in questions concerning Lebanon, I got in contact with a local organization (organization C). This organization has offices in Beirut. During the summer of 2010 they were arranging a dialogue workshop for young people from all over the world. I sent them an application and was accepted to join.

In June 2010 I participated in the workshop, which focused on interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. We were 38 Christian, Muslim and non-religious participants from 10 different countries, including six from Lebanon. Although this was an international event both in terms of participants and thematic focus, the workshop was very useful for learning more about how and where I could gather more information for this thesis. Also, participating in the workshop allowed me to learn more about the culture before starting my fieldwork in the fall semester. It gave me an idea of how interreligious workshops can be organized, and this stay provided

me with contacts in the field of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon, both on the leadership and the participant level. These were people I could contact when I went back to Beirut to conduct the interviews in August. This was the starting point for my selection of informants. Through these persons I came in contact with several other people and organizations in Beirut which are active in interreligious events. In addition to visits to the offices of several NGOs, I was invited to social meetings and dinners with some of those who had been participants in the projects. These meetings gave me the opportunity to ask if people were willing to give interviews. It took some time before I got the first interview, the first couple of times I talked to people I was not direct enough. After a few attempts I realized that it was no use approaching potential informants in a too cautious manner. I had to be more direct, calling them, sending emails to everyone separately, not as part of a collective e-mail. This change in strategy gave the results I was looking for, and soon I had several interviews lined up.

This way of gathering contacts and informants can be seen as an example of the snowball effect. As a result of my participation at the interreligious workshop in June 2010, the snowball had already started to roll when I went back to Lebanon in August. One potentially problematic issue with this approach is that the selection you end up with is more or less dependent on coincidences. The fact that I first got in contact with one of the organizations, and then expanded my network on the basis of the people I knew there will inevitably have influenced the material I got access to.

“Fieldwork” in Lebanon

When I first started preparing for the thesis my plans were more along the line of doing empirical fieldwork in a more anthropological sense of the word, or at least a combination of observation and interviews. My focus was on dialogue between Lebanese young adults, however, because it was difficult for me to access dialogue events between the Lebanese, since they speak Arabic. I decided to conduct interviews instead. The nearly four months I spent in Lebanon provided me with a lot of knowledge about the context of my informants. The different interreligious events I attended helped me get in contact with informants and obtain information on how the organizations work. Talking to other people, who were not active on the interreligious scene, further increased my understanding of the Lebanese society.

2.2 The informants

I interviewed both leaders of, and participants in, mainly three different dialogue organizations in Lebanon. My aim was to interview participants associated with the Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, Shiite Muslim and Druze religious communities between the ages 20 and 30. In addition to the participants, I interviewed the leaders of the three organizations, and one additional leader of another dialogue organization located in the south of the country. The reason why I chose to interview one additional leader is that the first three leaders are all Maronites, and in order to get another and possibly competing view of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon, I decided to interview a Shiite leader as well. I have focused mostly on the young adults' experiences in my research. The reason for this is the great focus put on youth's ability to change the society in Lebanon by the NGOs, which mirrors the different projects they have, which was mentioned in the previous chapter. I wanted to keep a broad approach and in addition to choosing informants from different religious communities, I decided to try to interview the same number of men and women. During the fieldwork, I interviewed 19 people all together. However, because some of them did not meet my criteria of religion, gender and involvement in interreligious dialogue between Lebanese people, as well as having too much material for the amount of time provided for this research, I decided to use only 15 of them.

Anonymization

The anonymization of the informants is an issue I have pondered over while working on the thesis. In studies where people's statements are the material, it is usually necessary to anonymize the informants. This is done to protect the informants and sensitive issues like religion and politics requires special treatment in respect to anonymity. How will I best anonymize my informants to the degree that people will not be able to recognize them? One challenge is that several of my informants know each other. It happened a few times that they would ask one another if they had been interviewed by me. The anonymization of informants is often problematic. It is impossible for me to guarantee that none of them are recognized. However, I have tried my best to avoid this by choosing to give my informants common Lebanese names. I have also chosen not to write their age or what kind of work or education the participants have. With respect to the leaders, I have mentioned their education and work, but not the names of the organizations they lead. I rather refer to them as organization A, B, C

and D. This is also done in consideration for the participants' anonymity, because if the organizations are mentioned by name it will make it easier to recognize who they are.

My informants are as follows:

LEADERS

Joe is the leader of organization A. He is a Maronite theologian and a university professor who has been involved in interreligious dialogue since his days at university some 20 years ago. The organization he is leading is a local, non-confessional organization which has a strong emphasis on youth, especially through a program they are running in highschools in different parts of the country. He believes in the necessity of critical thinking combined with solidarity to create a change in the Lebanese society. The interview was conducted at the offices of the NGO, with one of the student interns working there present during the interview. This was on the informant's request. This might have influenced his answers, but as the informant was familiar with giving interviews and did not seem very much affected by the intern's presence, it is assumed that the answers would not have been more than marginally different without the intern present.

George is the leader of organization B and he is also a Maronite theologian. He first got involved in interreligious dialogue when he wrote his PhD on the subject a few years back. He is the founder of the most recent of the organizations I have focused on. It is locally based, and started its practice the summer 2010 by arranging an interreligious summer camp for Lebanese youth. George believes in the necessity of dialogue through life, and emphasizes the importance of being together in order to learn about the other. The interview was conducted in his office.

Youssef is the leader of organization C. Like the two previous leaders, Youssef is also a Maronite theologian. He started his work with interreligious dialogue in the south of the country some 20 years ago when he had finished his theological seminary. The organization he is leading is working locally inside of Lebanon, but they also have projects regionally and

internationally, like for instance the workshop I attended. They use development as a tool in their interreligious projects. An important subject for him is to bring people from different religions together so they can learn to see each other through the other's eyes. The interview was conducted in his office.

Ali is the leader of organization D. He is a Shiite Muslim and the organization he runs is located in the southern part of the country. Ali is a college professor and has been actively involved in organized interreligious dialogue for ten years, but says he has been raised in an environment where dialogue between different groups was important because his parents were involved in the interreligious field. Ali has a focus on action throughout the interview and argues that without action, dialogue will not have any effects. The interview was conducted in a café in Beirut. This means there were people around us, something which might have affected the answers, but he didn't seem to be bothered by it.

PARTICIPANTS

Maggie is a Maronite student which is deeply involved in several civil society organizations, both interreligious and others, among them organizations B and C. She considers herself to be an activist and had been involved in interreligious dialogue for one year when I interviewed her. She said she had grown up in an allchristian environment. However, she had always been curious to know people from other religious and social groups. She believes in the importance of Lebanese people feeling unity and a connection to Lebanon as a country. The interview was conducted in a café in Beirut. There were few people present, so the interview unfolded without any interruptions.

Antoine is a Maronite student who first got involved in interreligious activities when he started university. He is actively involved in organization B. He explains that it was hard for him at first to participate in activities with people from other religious groups than him self. He says that his attitude shifted bit by bit when he had to change to a majority Druze school. Antoine believes in the importance of knowing your own religion when entering into a dialogue with others and in changing oneself to change the society. The interview was

conducted at a café in Beirut. There were few people present, so the interview unfolded without any interruptions.

Sara is half Sunni, half Christian, but practices only one religion; Islam. She is involved in organization B, among others, and works in a company in Beirut. She says that being from a religiously mixed family made her want to join interreligious activities, and the first time she entered was after a period of political unrest in the country in May 2007. She says that she is experiencing labeling based on for instance religion and politics in the Lebanese society, and as a consequence being judged on the basis of this label. She emphasizes the need to treat each other as individuals. The interview was conducted in a café in Beirut. In the middle of the interview the memory on my tape recorder was full and because of this I had to pause the interview and delete some of the old files. This was a disturbing element in the interview, and may have influenced it.

Muhammad is a Sunni informant involved in organizations B and C, in addition to other more Human Rights related NGOs. Being a student, he first got involved in a human rights organization which later led him into interreligious work. Muhammad emphasizes the role of dialogue as a way to meet people from other religious groups and get a more nuanced view of the other. He also characterizes politics as a destructive force in Lebanon. The interview was conducted at a café in Beirut. Muhammad had invited a friend of him to join the interview as well, who was present approximately half of the time the interview lasted. This may have influenced the interview.

Isam is a Sunni informant who works at a company in Beirut. He is involved in organizations A and C, and first got in contact with organization A through the Sheikh at the Mosque he goes to. He has attended both national and international dialogue sessions, and he wishes to influence others to change their attitudes. He believes in what he calls a culture of dialogue, or dialogue as a way of life. The interview was conducted at a café in Beirut. There were few people present, so the interview unfolded without any interruptions.

Dina is a Druze informant, working in Beirut. She is actively involved in organization A and has been so for some time. She was raised to be open-minded and not judge others on the basis of group affiliation. She joined the interreligious organization because she found it to be filled with likeminded people, which was something she was missing in other areas of the Lebanese society. As Sara, she expressed being tired of being labeled by others. The interview was conducted at a restaurant in Beirut. There were few people present, so the interview unfolded without any interruptions.

Rula is a Druze informant who attended the summer camp arranged by organization A. This was the first time she had been a part of an interreligious activity, and the first time she had been living with people from other groups for several days. She is a student. Before she joined the summer camp she did not expect to be affected by it, however, she says that during the camp she became aware of all the things she did not know about other religions. The interview was conducted in the privacy of her home. One issue that may have influenced the interview was the language. We sometimes had a hard time understanding everything the other said.

Firas is Druze and working in Beirut. He is actively involved in organizations A and B and calls himself an activist. He has been involved in interreligious dialogue at a national and an international level. *Firas* is more oriented towards the religious leaders than the other informants and believe it is essential to include young religious leaders in interreligious dialogue in order to achieve any societal change. The interview was conducted at a café in Beirut. There were few people present, so the interview unfolded without any interruptions.

Bilal is a Shiite informant who works in Beirut. He is involved in organization B, among others, and first got involved in interreligious dialogue during his time at university. It is important for *Bilal* to be the one representing himself. He also wanted to influence other's views on Shiite Muslims through the interreligious events he attended. The interview was conducted in the offices of his family's business. The interview unfolded without any interruptions.

Ahmad is a Shiite informant who works in Beirut. He was active in the interreligious field in Lebanon, however not in any of the four organizations I have mentioned above. He first got involved in dialogue when he was at university and especially believes in the importance of knowledge in a dialogue, and that one has to be open to learn from the other. The interview was conducted in a café in Beirut. There were few people present, so the interview unfolded without any interruptions.

Maya is a Shiite informant working in an organization in Lebanon. She is involved in organization C and she got involved in interreligious activities through a friend. She grew up in a Christian neighborhood and says she is used to be in an interreligious environment. She sees the need for a change in the legislation in Lebanon in order to create a better society. The interview was conducted at a restaurant in Beirut. There were few people present, so the interview unfolded without any interruptions. One issue, however, that may have influenced the interview was the language. We sometimes had a hard time understanding everything the other said.

2.3 The interviews

Qualitative methods: Semi-structured research interview

The semi-structured research interview is highlighted in Kvale and Brinkmann's book *Det kvalitative forskningsintervjuet*⁴ (2009). This is the type of interview that I have used to collect material for this thesis. Kvale and Brinkmann argue that this type of interview aims to gather descriptions of the informants' lives, in order for the researcher to interpret its significance (Kvale, Brinkmann 2009:23). I chose semi-structured interviews because I wanted to learn more about my informants' own experiences with interreligious dialogue in Lebanon.

It was important for me to be flexible, which was another reason for choosing semi-structured interviews. It is impossible to know what the informants would answer beforehand, and it is necessary to have a great deal of concentration and focus in order not to miss important and

⁴ English title: *InterView: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*

interesting answers. I used self created interview guides with various topics to be reviewed and suggestions for questions. I made one for the leaders and another for the participants⁵. I only considered it as a guideline and not as a fixed template for the interviews. This means that even though I was using the guides, it was still vital to be flexible and ready to pursue what the informant told me with critical follow-up questions. One thing I experienced when I worked with the interview guide in advance was that it made me more aware of my prospects and provided me with an understanding of what I expected to find out during the interviews.

The quality of knowledge I obtained from the interviews depends on me as an interviewer, my practical skills and personal assessments. The process can be addressed as *active knowledge production*, where knowledge is produced in the interaction between the interviewer and the person being interviewed (Kvale, Brinkmann 2009:37). Interviews require careful preparation. If the interview is going to be an opener to the knowledge of the interviewee's world, it depends strongly on a well prepared researcher who is willing to do the interview on the informant's terms. This requires knowledge about the field, preparation for the interview and not least the ability to be a good listener (Fonneland 2006:224). It is also worth mentioning the possible discrepancy between my informants' statements about interreligious dialogue and what they actually mean. My material is not made up of my informants' thoughts about interreligious dialogue in Lebanon, but rather what they choose to express to me in the interviews. This is an important distinction to understand.

The interview situation

Before the interview takes place, the informants have to receive enough information about the plans for the thesis so they will know what they are agreeing to participate in (Fonneland 2006:237). I usually came in contact with people through others, and at the first meeting I told them a bit about what I was doing in Lebanon. Later I would call them or send them an email, and I would attach the information sheet⁶ containing information about the project, as well as contact information to me and my supervisor. If they agreed to do the interview I would ask them if there were any particular places they felt comfortable conducting it and whether they wanted to have a translator present or not. At the interview I brought with me a printout of the

⁵ See appendix 1 and 2

⁶ See appendix 3

information sheet and before I began asking questions I got a signature from the informant stating that they had understood what they were participating in.

Transcriptions

I used a considerable amount of time transcribing the interviews after I had conducted them. I wanted to be as thorough as possible and it was important to me to write down what the informants had said as accurately as I could. In some of the quotes included in this thesis, I have corrected a few grammatical errors, but never to the extent that the original meaning of the sentence, as I understood it, was altered.

2.4 Ethical considerations

In all types of academic research there are ethical considerations to be made. The qualitative type requires focus on the ethics because one is dealing with human beings (Fonneland 2006:237). Respect for individuals' integrity, rules of confidentiality and anonymization is essential to keep in mind. For example, one has to acknowledge that the interview situation is characterized by an asymmetrical relationship between researcher and the informant (Fonneland 2006:232). This is impossible to avoid, and it is therefore important to be aware of. It was for example I who decided what we would talk about, who was asking the questions and could lead the conversation in the direction I wanted it to go.

The topic of religion involves several challenges related to the use of qualitative methods. In general, there are strict rules about privacy and the handling of personal information. Some themes are particularly sensitive, religion is one of them. It is very important to inform the potential respondents about the project in a thorough manner, so that they understand what they are agreeing to participate in. It is often necessary to obtain a written consent, like in this thesis. The interviewees must be told that they have the option to withdraw at any time and that their identity will be anonymous. The interview material obtained from the interviews has to be treated in a manner that maintains the integrity of the informant. Sensitive information

must be treated with caution. (Fonneland 2006:237). This study is registered and approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD)⁷.

The language barrier

I have chosen to write this thesis in English and I will justify this ethically. Since I have done an empirical study where I interviewed Lebanese people about their experiences and thoughts with respect to interreligious relations and dialogue, where I use their stories as material for my analysis, it is important for me that the people I have interviewed will have the opportunity to read what I have written about them. It is also important so that they may give me feedback if they think I have misinterpreted something. This choice is inspired by a post-colonial perspective⁸.

There are some challenges when it comes to conducting qualitative interviews in English. This is a language which is neither mine, nor my informants' mother tongue. This may have increased the chance of miscommunication between me and the person who was interviewed. It may also have influenced the formulation of questions and answers. I consider my English skills to be sufficient to conduct the interviews, and I can with relative ease express what I want to say, yet it is not the same as expressing my thoughts in Norwegian. Before the interview I asked my informants how they felt about doing the interview in English, and that it was possible to provide an interpreter if they wanted this. None of the informants asked for an interpreter. Kvale and Brinkmann state that qualitative interviews, among other things, depend on the context, the language, and that they are inter-subjective. This means that the interview is a process of interpretation, both for the interviewer and for those being interviewed. It is a transfer of information between two people (Kvale, Brinkmann 2009:72-74). This transfer may to some extent be complicated by internal translations as questions and answers are transferred from Norwegian, through English to Arabic and back again. In my own experience, most of my informants spoke English well. However, in a couple of the interviews we had some problems understanding everything the other said, which consequently could have led to misunderstandings.

⁷ See <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/>

⁸ A post-colonial perspective constitutes that the persons being studied have the possibility to read what has been written about them, and if they believe it is wrong than they can provide the researcher with feedback (Young 2003).

2.5 Presumptions and my role as a researcher

Reflexivity about my own role as a researcher is one of the most important issues to be aware of when using qualitative methods. There will always be a mutual influence between the researcher and the research field. The way someone interprets the surroundings and what other people are saying depends on his or her background and presumptions. Thus, the researcher can be considered to be the co-creator of the interview as a product (Starrin, Renck 1996:58). In an interview situation it is impossible to be objective, so the challenge is to be subjective in the most scientific way possible (Tafjord 2006:243-244).

The fact that I am a Norwegian woman, a student and 27 years old will inevitably have influenced my perspective on the material, as well as the informants' approach to me. Another issue concerns my choice of location for the research. I chose Lebanon, a country other than my native country. The fact that I am not as familiar with the Lebanese society as the Norwegian, not to mention everything that is taken for granted by the Lebanese in the Lebanese context which can be difficult for me to grasp, is something that must be taken into consideration both by me and the reader.

I believe that openness and courtesy towards the informants are essential in order to conduct a good and rewarding interview. However, there is a balance between being close and being too close with the informants. Being close friends with the informants can make it harder to be critical of negative things in the society one is studying (Kraft 2006:271). This is a challenge, especially when encountering several people who express a wish that this thesis might be able to contribute to something positive in the Lebanese society. This is an issue I have had in mind during the work on the thesis.

2.6 Analysis

I have chosen a theme-based analytical approach to examine the different aspects of my material. I extracted topics I found to be central in the interviews, and structured my analysis according to these. This process of coding the material started early. Already when I was

doing the interviews and transcriptions, I recognized topics that were recurring in the material. I interpreted them as issues the informants believed to be important in connection with their experience with interreligious dialogue. As the theoretical framework fell into place, this also made it easier to distinguish the relevant and necessary thematic refinements of the thesis. That is, my understanding of the interview material, the Lebanese context and the theoretical framework resulted in the topics I chose to focus on in the analysis.

When conducting qualitative interviews, another dimension is provided to the material in comparison to handling written text only. The context of the interview situation adds information that has to be taken into account. When reading the written transcriptions I recall the interview and the written words represent more to me than the actual words on the paper. For example, the sentence may have been said with a certain look on the face of the interviewee or a certain tone in the voice which can imply sarcasm, joking, importance, excitement, anger, etc. As the researcher, I have to include this information when doing my analysis. In addition statements acquire their meaning depending on the larger context, for example the historical and societal context (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:69-70). This is necessary to be aware of.

I have chosen to approach my material mainly in an inductive manner. This means that it is the informants' world views and their understandings of personal experiences which forms the basis for my interpretation and selection of themes to analyze (Salomonsen 2003:99). However, one will always bring some theoretical frameworks into the research situation, and thus one cannot say that the perspective is free of a deductive point of view. Nevertheless, it has been important for me to be as true to my informants' descriptions and explanations that I can be and let their interviews guide my choices to a large extent. It is necessary to use an existing theoretical framework to be able to execute an analysis. In the following chapter I will present and discuss the theoretical approaches I have used.

3 Theoretical frameworks

In this chapter I will describe the key theoretical perspectives that form the basis for the analysis I am going to present in later chapters. As I have explained in the previous chapter, I have approached the material in an inductive way. This means that I have let the material guide my theoretical choices to a large extent. I have not chosen only one theoretical paradigm, but a combination of various theories in order to get an extensive understanding of my interview material. The overall topic in my research is how my informants express their thoughts about interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. Interreligious dialogue presupposes contact between members of different religious groups. There are many theoretical approaches to analyzing intergroup relations depending on which academic tradition it belongs to. I have chosen to combine theories mainly from social psychology, interreligious studies, social geography and political science in order to illuminate my material.

In the following sections, my main emphasis is first on the intergroup contact hypothesis, and theories concerning categorization. I have used theorists like Allport (1954), Pettigrew (1998), Brewer and Miller (1984). Second, I explain some theoretical perspectives concerning what interreligious dialogue is. The strongest focus here lies on Leirvik's (2006) view of dialogue as *the space in between* in addition to Rasmussen's (1997) concept of *diapaxis*. Third, I explain theories concerning the concept of relational space with Doreen Massey (1995) in the lead. In addition to the main three sections, I include some theoretical perspectives which will be used less frequently; the concept of postmemory, the division of knowledge into theoretical and experiential and two different approaches to politics. Finally, conclude this chapter by discussing the different perspectives interrelatedly and why I have chosen these particular perspectives to illuminate my research material.

3.1 The contact hypothesis

Intergroup contact involves face-to-face interaction between members of different social groups and the contact hypothesis argues that groups in conflict with each other, through contact under certain conditions, can undermine negative stereotypes and behavior towards other groups. It may even lead to increased liking so that people want to interact (Evaldsson 2007:68). Several scientists have contributed to this field, but Gordon Allport's hypothesis

has proved to be the most influential. In his classic book, *The nature of prejudice* (1954), he states that mere contact is not sufficient to improve intergroup relations. Positive effects of intergroup contact can only take place when four key conditions are present: 1) the participants have to be on the same social level during the interaction, 2) the activities have to include intergroup cooperation, not competition, 3) the participants have to have common goals, and 4) the interaction between different groups have to have the support of law and authorities (Allport 1954:281). In other words, it is an erroneous notion that intergroup contact in itself will produce better relationship between groups, as some researchers have claimed. Contact can also reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudice, especially if one or more of the four key conditions are missing (Evaldsson 2007:69-70).

Several other conditions have been suggested after Allport's four. The social psychologist, Thomas F. Pettigrew, a student of Allport, argues that there are now so many conditions that the hypothesis is in danger of becoming meaningless because no situation can meet all of them (Pettigrew 1998:69-70). However, the acceptance for a fifth condition for the contact hypothesis is relatively wide: "The contact situation must provide the participants with an opportunity to become friends" (Pettigrew 1998:76). That is, contact between members of different groups has to be extensive enough and recurring often enough for cross-group friendships to develop. In Pettigrew's words, it has to have "friendship potential". For friendship to evolve, "extensive and repeated contact in a variety of social contexts" (Pettigrew 1998:76) is vital.

Problems with the contact hypothesis

Even if all of the conditions explained above are present in an intergroup situation, there can still be problems affecting the contact. For example, the context of the contact, the types of contact and perceptions of fear, threats and insecurities among the individuals in contact can have negative impact (Evaldsson 2007:70-71).

Two central problems concerning the contact hypothesis is highlighted in the following. They involve the issues of getting a representative sample of the population to have intergroup contact, and generalization of attitude change. First, Thomas Pettigrew presents a problem

concerning the contact hypothesis which he calls *the causal sequence problem*. His research suggests that people with prejudices stay away from situations where people from other groups are present (Pettigrew 1998:69), for example such dialogue initiatives as I refer to in this thesis. If one is narrow-minded, prejudiced and have negative feelings towards other groups in the society, one will probably not seek out activities which aim to bring members of different social groups together. The problem with this is that it can give a false impression of the positive outcomes of contact. Contact under these circumstances may give an impression of a better outcome than it would have done if a representative sample of the population had participated in a meeting. Another problem is that it makes it difficult to reach those who “need” the dialogue, so to speak.

Second, Pettigrew addresses the *problem of generalization of attitude change* and criticizes Allport for not specifying how the effects of contact generalize beyond the immediate situation (Pettigrew 1998:70). It may be useful to explore this generalization from interpersonal to intergroup contact⁹ in some more detail. Can positive effects from getting to know one outgroup¹⁰ member affect attitudes towards the outgroup as a whole? Researchers have answered this question in different ways. Hewstone and Brown, for example, emphasize the importance of *group salience* in order for generalization to occur, meaning that the group identities are emphasized in a group meeting. They state that effects of contact can only be generalized to the outgroup if the people interacting view each other as typical representatives of their groups (Hewstone and Brown 1986:18-19). However, when seen in the light of Byrne’s (1971) similarity principle, which states that people with similar interests and values seek each other out, it means that people from different groups in contact with each other are likely to share interests and values. He also states that outgroup members with the same interest as the ingroup members often will not be seen as typical for the outgroup; hence the group salience will be low. Pettigrew (1998) follow up this train of thoughts by writing that the people most likely to participate in intergroup meetings will be the ones least likely to cause generalization in attitudes (Pettigrew 1998:74).

⁹ Interpersonal contact means contact on an individual basis, while intergroup contact means contact on a group basis (Evaldsson 2007:62-63).

¹⁰ An outgroup is a group which the perceiver does not belong to (Brewer 2003:20-21).

Pettigrew (1986) and Abu-Nimer (1999) address another problem concerning Allport's contact hypothesis. They suggest that it should relate more to the macro level. It operates mainly at the individual level, something which may lead the researcher to underestimate the systems' impact on the group relations. Pettigrew argues that individual prejudice is important, but the biggest problem is the institutionalized discrimination. Prejudice is not primarily a psychological problem, but a social construction. Pettigrew argues that group contact alone is not enough to change society, it is necessary to change the system, remove intergroup separation and institutional discrimination as well (Pettigrew 1986:172-173).

3.2 Categorization

The tendency for people to differentiate themselves according to group membership was first documented in anthropological observations made by Sumner (1906). He introduced the terms *ingroup* and *outgroup*, referring to the social group an individual belongs to or does not belong to (Brewer 2003:20-21). It is also a widely accepted opinion that human beings categorize everything around them into clusters in order to make sense of the world (Brewer 2003; Abrams and Hogg 2001). People are placed into social groups, ranging from small groups like families and friends, to large social groups according to religion and political affiliation. Brewer writes that in order to understand intergroup dynamics, one must understand the social categorization used to draw the ingroup-outgroup differentiations (Brewer 2003:6). Studies show that an individual is more likely to attribute positive qualities to one's ingroup than to one's outgroup (Brewer 2003:21). In addition, the members of outgroups are very often considered more homogenous than the members of one's ingroup (Evaldsson 2007:65).

The decategorization model

Brewer and Miller present in their book *Beyond the contact hypothesis: theoretical perspectives on desegregation* (1984) a model of intergroup contact called the decategorization model. It is based on the idea that for contact to have positive effects, interaction must be person based as opposed to group based. If the interaction is group based, it will most likely be characterized by the fact that members of the outgroup are perceived as a homogeneous mass without taking into account the differences that exist within a group. If

the categorical membership is always visible or emphasized, it is, according to the model, unlikely that contact will lead to less prejudice (Brewer 2003:98). Rather, it will increase competition and outgroup-rejection (Brewer and Miller 1984:287).

Brewer and Miller then introduced two concepts that have to be present for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice: *differentiation* and *personalization*. Differentiation happens when “one learns information that is unique to individual outgroup members, allowing one to draw distinctions among and organize them into smaller subgroups” (Brewer and Miller 1984:287). Hence, the self is seen as more distinct than in category-based interaction. Personalization (or decategorization) encourages participants in interaction to replace category identity with person identity as the basis of classification (Brewer and Miller 1984:288). This model proposes that it is important to interact with others not on the basis of group affiliation, but rather as individuals. The social categories have to be downplayed, and we have to treat each other as individuals (Brewer 2003:99).

The recategorization model

Another model which, similar to the decategorization model, claims that ingroup bias will be hard to avoid if in/outgroup categories are emphasized is the *recategorization model*. However, this model approaches the issue in a slightly different way than the model described above. Instead of arguing that the social categories of the participants in a meeting are removed completely, it argues for the creation of *one* new, inclusive category which encompasses both ingroup and outgroup members (Geartner et al. 2001:357). According to Geartner et al., research has shown that people’s need for a positive self identity leads to a positive differentiation of the members of the ingroup. Geartner et al. argue that if Turner is right, then a recategorization of former outgroup members into a common, new ingroup with the former ingroup members will result in more positive attitudes towards them (Geartner et al. 2001:357).

When asking the question of which of these two approaches is the most fruitful, Geartner et al.’s research shows that recategorization led to a greater degree of liking among the participants and they got a closer and more cohesive relationship than with the

decategorization model (Geartner et al. 2001:365). Considering this research, recategorization seems to result in a better and more lasting relationship. However, whether it is possible to structure contact in the real world according to either of these models, is another question. Both Brewer and Miller (1984) as well as Geartner et al. (2001), have used controlled situations in their research. Thus, it is somewhat uncertain to what extent their conclusions can be transferred directly to society.

Social identity

Complementary to the theories of categorization, described above, one can regard theories concerning *social identity*. Richard Jenkins discusses in his book *Social Identity* (2008) the manner in which human identity is created. I have chosen to point out a few arguments relevant in order to shed light on interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. Jenkins sees identity as a social construction and states that similarities between members of a group can only be recognized in contrast to another group. “Defining ‘us’ involves defining a range of ‘thems’ as well” (Jenkins 2008:102). According to Jenkins, describing others simultaneously involves describing ourselves and describing ourselves involves describing others. This means that identity is created in the encounter with others. “Similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary. At the boundary, we discover what we are in what we are not, and *vice versa*.” (Jenkins 2008:103).

3.3 Interreligious dialogue

The different theories described above concern contact in intergroup relations. In my material, contact between groups constitutes one of the most central elements. However, there is another factor present which the contact hypothesis does not sufficiently cover; the religious factor. As complimentary theories to the contact hypothesis I will use Lissi Rasmussen’s term of *diapaxis* and Oddbjørn Leirvik’s *the space in between*.

Diapaxis

The Danish theologian Lissi Rasmussen presents dialogue as a necessity of life. According to her, dialogue is a two way communication taking place with mutual trust and respect for the other (Rasmussen 1997:34). She writes in her book *Diapaxis og dialog mellem kristne og*

muslimer (1997) that, according to her own experience with interreligious dialogue in Africa and Europe, "dialogue is only meaningful when anchored in shared practice or existence" (Rasmussen 1997:35, my translation). She introduces a new concept in that regard, namely diapraxis, and explains it as a "dialogue of action" (Rasmussen 1997:35). Diapraxis is explained by Rasmussen as shared experiences and activities. She argues that it is the practical cooperation which must come first which in turn can lead to a real dialogue. She further elaborates and describes diapraxis as common social and political engagement. Rasmussen relates it to believers' struggle for peace and a life with God in the center. Another reference that she points out is diapraxis as common religious practices, like prayer and meditation (Rasmussen 1997:35-36). In diapraxis it is important for members of different faiths to stand together to fight injustice or for good causes. In this context, cooperation is a key concept (Rasmussen 1997:35).

In reference to Rasmussen's term of diapraxis, I will also highlight Inge Eidsvåg's views on *practical dialogue*. A practical dialogue is for him what happens when people meet and work together in a spirit of dialogue. In a practical dialogue it is the interaction, not the words that is central (Eidsvåg 1997:229). Similar to Rasmussen, Eidsvåg emphasizes the importance of cooperation and he writes that: "Through the practical tasks we got a greater understanding of both each other and our common tasks." (Eidsvåg 1997:229, my translation).

The space in between

In his book *Islam og kristendom* (2006), Leirvik uses the term of *the space in between* when referring to the relationship in between Christianity and Islam. Leirvik's preoccupation is what happens in the space between the two religions (or between the religious individuals and groups). He describes the space in between as unstable and constantly moving, where both the boundaries of the space, and people's positions within it, are shifting. This is a characteristic that distinguishes social relations. In Leirvik's words, "the relationship between religions is a relationship between people that move in specific social and political spaces" (Leirvik 2006:117, my translation).

Leirvik distinguishes between the spiritual dialogue and the necessary dialogue. The spiritual dialogue involves dialogue on theological issues and faith across religious boundaries, while the necessary dialogue can be used as a means to resolve religious conflicts (Leirvik 2001:203, 217). This distinction, he relates to the space in between and describes what he calls *the necessary space in between*: “(...) the religious dialog [is] necessary in order to create shared spaces in the society – for people who think and believe differently” (Leirvik 2006:300, my translation). He believes that the space in between can be filled with interreligious dialogue to create a more constructive relationship between the members belonging to different religions. However, it is essential to have a critical approach to power in these shared spaces. More often than not, spaces in the society are dominated by different groups which make it difficult to create domination-free spaces (Leirvik 2006:301).

3.4 Relational space theory

In the above, I have discussed Leirvik’s concept of the space in between, where he presents his thoughts on shared space. In the following, I elaborate on the topic of space and especially relational space. Space and place are complex concepts and can be understood in many different ways. However, there is a tendency among researchers to refer to space as something more abstract and unbound than place. However, these are terms which are strongly interrelated and have to be understood in relation to each other (Massey 1995).

In my approach to interreligious dialogue in Lebanon I have chosen a relational understanding of space. This is a perspective which can be said to have originated from the view of space as social context. The term *locales* can be useful in this regard. The term is taken from the British sociologist Anthony Giddens’ classical work *The Constitution of Society* (1984). He defines the term in these words: “Locales refer to the use of space to provide the *settings* of interaction, the settings of interaction in turn being essential to specifying its *contextuality*” (Giddens 1984:118). Space is understood as the location where individuals’ everyday lives overlap and the place derives meaning through social practice.

In more recent research, one can see a continuation of Giddens’ theories concerning locales in for example Doreen Massey’s contribution. She introduces the term “place as meeting-place”

(Massey 1995:59). She is a central representative for the relational space perspective. This is a perspective which has been generated by the globalized world we are living in (Berg and Dale 2004:46). Instead of seeing places as bounded and unique, places are now to a larger degree seen as a part of a global system. It is this issue Massey sheds light on when she describes place as meeting-place, which in her own words represents “the location of the intersections of particular bundles of activity spaces” (Massey 1995:59). She explains that when activity spaces intersect, places acquire meaning. Activity space is the “special networks of links and activities, within which a particular agent operates” (Massey 1995:54). A central element with this understanding of space and place is that they are open and the relations which create meaning stretch out across a big area. In addition, places are dynamic, they are in constant change due to the different and alternating relationships that appear and disappear. Locations and people are interdependent, and the influence between people and places goes both ways (Berg and Dale 2004:49).

A study which can be seen in relation to relational space, the theories of categorization and a domination-free space, all of them presented earlier, is Guinote and Fiske’s (2003) study on what influence being on the outgroup’s territory has on stereotypical perceptions of outgroups. Their research provides no definitive conclusions, but instead they show that the influence depends on the context. They argue that being on an outgroup’s territory can implicate stronger categorization and increased stereotypical attitudes towards the outgroup (Guinote and Fiske 2003:329). They argue that because of the strong association between groups and places, the places become “one source of category activation” (Guinote and Fiske 2003:325). However, there is also evidence that indicates that being in an outgroup place implies decreased stereotypical attitudes, because the amount of contact and familiarity can decrease the cultural shock and increase learning about the outgroup (Guinote and Fiske 2003:329).

3.5 Postmemory

Craig Larkin has made use of Marianne Hirsch’s term of *postmemory* when discussing Lebanese youth’s relation to the Civil war. He defines postmemory as “a residual type of memory, a recollection of an event not personally experienced but socially felt, a traumatic rupture that indelibly scars a nation, religious group, community, or family.” (Larkin

2010:619). This type of memory works to connect following generations to their collective past. It creates frameworks for affirming social identities and it implies a dialectic of simultaneous attachment and dislocation to the past (Larkin 2010:619-620). According to Larkin, the Lebanese youth have no personal experiences with the civil war but still it is extremely present in the social discourse in Lebanon; “finished yet very much alive” (Larkin 2010:620).

3.6 Knowledge

Knowledge is a concept that can be understood in many ways. In this thesis, however, I have chosen to use Berit Hyllseth's (2001) definitions of *theoretical knowledge* and *experiential knowledge* to illuminate the informants' descriptions of the representations of knowledge in interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. She presents the two types as oppositional. First, theoretical knowledge, according to Hyllseth, is abstract, general and inter-subjective (in the meaning of shared). She describes it as a type of knowledge that is more stable and observable than experiential knowledge, and that this is a knowledge which usually is written and can be used by anyone (Hyllseth 2001:19). Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, is concrete, particular, subjective and historical. This knowledge is connected to experiences and events and means that one gains knowledge through practical experiences. This type of knowledge can be made partly intersubjective in that people have shared experiences or share their own experiences with others (Hyllseth 2001:20).

3.7 Politics as arena and process

Politics is a complex concept and in order to discuss how my informants view politics in Lebanon I have chosen to use Adrian Leftwich's (2004a/b) division of politics into an area approach and a process approach. He writes that different scientists have different ways of looking at the concept and what is included. He defines a key distinction among the theorists: “whether they define it primarily in terms of a *process*, or whether they define it in terms of a site or an *arena*” (Leftwich 2004a:13).

The latter, or arena approach, usually have a narrower focus, mainly the place and institutions where politics happens, for example the state, politicians, parliament, political parties, etc. The idea here is that it is only governments that can define binding rules. And that only such binding rules apply to the society as a whole, and thus can be defined as politics. The activities that lead up to these binding rules and the institutions which create are, according to Leftwich's arena approach, included in the concept of politics (Leftwich 2004a:13).

Within the process approach, politics is viewed not as confined to certain arenas or sites, but rather as a general process in the society within and between all the groups which constitute them. Leftwich has a political approach to human behavior and points out the three elements of people, resources (both material and non-material) and power as essential. He states that every process involving these three elements can be defined as politics. According to the process approach, politics consists of all the "conflict (peaceful or not), negotiation and cooperation over the use and distribution of resources" (Leftwich 2004a:14). He states that the requirement that two or more people have to make a joint decision involving resources and power, is an essential feature of human behavior. Politics concerns all the processes where this happens (Leftwich 2004b:104-105).

3.8 Discussion

Several different topics concerning my informants' experiences with interreligious dialogue in Lebanon are presented in my material. It has been important for me throughout the work on the analysis to show this diversity, to let my material indicate which topics to focus on and in turn which theories to use. In order to do this in the best way, I have chosen not only one theoretical perspective but instead I have combined different ones; intergroup theories, dialogue theories, theories about relational space, knowledge, postmemory and politics, which have all been described in this chapter. It is the intergroup, relational space and dialogue theories that are used the most in the upcoming analysis. This is the reason why I have chosen to discuss them further. In this section I will discuss the connection between the three theoretical perspectives and show the reasons why I have chosen precisely these three.

First, I will direct my attention towards my research questions that is to be addressed in the upcoming analysis. These are questions I will answer during the thesis, and the theories I have chosen will help me to do that. The research questions are as follows:

- How do the informants interpret the significance of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon?
- What role does interreligious dialogue and the NGOs constitute in the informants' lives?
- How do the informants express their views on the relation between interreligious dialogue and politics in the Lebanon?

As my main theoretical perspective I have chosen to use intergroup theories, in particular the intergroup contact hypothesis. In broad strokes, the contact hypothesis states that, with certain conditions present, contact between members of different groups can lead to a better relationship between them, less stereotypical attitudes and less conflict (see for example Allport 1954 and Pettigrew 1998). Interreligious dialogue aims at bringing people belonging to different religious groups together for them to enter into a dialogue with each other. My material indicates contact as a central concept. The contact hypothesis has been chosen because it illuminates possible effects of contact in a constructive manner. In addition I have explained Miller and Brewer's (1984) model of decategorization and Geartner et al.'s (2001) model of recategorization as complimentary views on intergroup relations. This is an alternative understanding of intergroup contact which can contribute to a thicker description of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon.

There are, however, some problems connected to the use of intergroup theories that should be mentioned. The theories tend to focus on and be developed in the Western part of the world. The societies often referred to are societies which do not have intergroup conflicts to the extent that they are violent. Testing and modification of these models have usually been conducted in an experimental and controlled manner, which can be problematic to transfer the real world (Evaldsson 2007:60-61). The reason why I chose to use these theoretical perspectives in spite of this criticism is that they shed light on my material in a relevant way, as contact and categorization are two absolutely central concepts.

To include the religious aspect of intergroup relations, I have chosen Rasmussen's (1997) term of diapraxis and Leirvik's (2006) the space in between. The reason I have chosen Rasmussen's term is that she argues for a more practical approach to dialogue where diapraxis, working together towards a common goal, leads to a real dialogue. The term helps me to illuminate the way my informants understand interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. Leirvik emphasizes the importance of creating shared spaces, free of domination in order for dialogue to occur. The reason why I have chosen his term is that space and place is essential in my material. I believe that both theories can contribute to an understanding and clarification of how my informants interpret the significance of interreligious dialogue, the NGOs and the activities they are involved in.

I have also chosen to use relational space theories, as they are presented by Doreen Massey (1995). She argues that it is the social relations, or activity spaces which intersect, on a certain location that gives meaning to that place. Her term "place as meeting-place" implies that the place does not have any meaning without social interaction. This theoretical perspective can be used complementary to Leirvik's views on shared space, or the space in between. The relational space theories highlight contact and social relations as an important aspect of space and place, hence, they too can complement the contact theory and contribute to a fuller understanding of my research questions.

4 Interreligious dialogue in Lebanon

Interreligious dialogue in Lebanon is by many seen as a possible way to reconcile the various communities in the country after the civil war and it is clearly marked by its socio-political context (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007:95). The possible meeting points between members of different religious groups in the country are relatively few, and the lack of any unifying sentiment of a common history, but rather an emphasis on the dichotomy between “us” and “them”, constitutes a challenging basis for interreligious dialogue in the country.

In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which the leaders and the participants in the NGOs I have focused on speak of interreligious dialogue. By pointing out some of the topics the informants emphasizes as meaningful, I will investigate how they interpret the significance of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. I will also address what they wish to achieve with their involvement and which approaches the NGOs have in order to reach these goals. I will argue that a new model of interreligious dialogue can be found in the material, that is, to engage in dialogue by visiting the places of the other. Finally, I will discuss the representation of history in the work of the four NGOs focused on.

4.1 What is interreligious dialogue?

“I think that for each activity, interreligious dialogue can have [a] different definition, I mean, it is related to the objectives of the activities and also to the objectives of people that are conducting this activity. It depends from where these people come and where they want to go.” (Joe).

Joe, the Maronite leader for organization A, says, as quoted above, that the definition of interreligious dialogue can differ from one context to the next depending on the people involved. In the interviews I conducted in Lebanon, I asked all of my informants several different questions concerning what they think interreligious dialogue is and what experiences they have had with interreligious activities. Their responses show a great variation, which corresponds with Joe’s view. However, there are some elements that are recurring in the answers. On one hand, I can recognize a focus on the individual in my material. Some of the

informants give personal qualities an essential place. Qualities such as being a good listener, showing empathy, being honest, open-minded, positive and humble was emphasized. As I interpret it, a great deal of emphasis is put on the efforts the person has to make in order to enter into a dialogue with others. For example Antoine, a Maronite informant, says that in order to change, in his words, a closed society like the Lebanese through dialogue, every person has to change him- or herself first.

“In Lebanon, because our society is very closed, it should come from inside. So the change will be like changing... it’s not let’s say if I want to change this picture, it’s not drawing on the picture to change it, it is each point on this picture should change herself.” (Antoine).

On the other hand, my informants also put a strong emphasis on dialogue in a more practical, social and collective perspective. Some of them mention specific issues they think should be addressed in dialogue sessions. Ahmad, a Shiite informant, calls them "issues of life". He explains that it is not a priority for him to have a dialogue on a theological level, instead it should address more practical and social issues, like how to live together and how to find common values between different religious groups.

“Actually I am interested in the theological level, but I don’t think it is a priority. It is not a real issue. When you are discussing *issues of life*, how to live together, common values, interacting with each other, [it] is much [more] beneficial than discussing theology which is usually restricted to a smaller area.” (Ahmad).

I will investigate the matter further by discussing four main topics presented in my material and addressed by several of the informants: “a culture of dialogue”, living with the other, knowledge and friendship.

“A culture of dialogue”

In her book *Bring Down the Walls: Lebanon’s Postwar Challenge* (2000), Carol Dagher argues for the need to spread “a culture of dialogue” at the grassroots level in order to achieve results of interreligious dialogue (Dagher 2000:54). She does not elaborate on the meaning of

the term any further, but I have found “a culture of dialogue” to be a recurring term in my interviews as well. Joe, the Maronite leader for organization A, says that an important goal for his organization is to spread “a culture of dialogue”, using education and media. “With a culture I mean something that is dissimilated in the society and on the people on the grassroots level” (Joe). His definition corresponds with Dagher’s view of the importance of the grassroots level in order to get results. Words which are used by my informants to explain what they mean by a culture of dialogue are: respect, openness, a way of life and spiritual solidarity. Spiritual solidarity is a term used by Joe. He refers to the communion, he thinks can occur not only among Christians, but also between members of different religions. “The culture of dialogue” can be seen as a way to live life or in other words, as an attitude one has towards members of other social groups.

Hence, interfaith dialogue, according to several of my informants, is not only something happening in the actual events and projects they are involved in over a specific time period. “I am living this idea of accepting the other,” Antoine, a Maronite informant, said to me in his interview. Others also describe experiences of a change in their lives. When I asked whether the interfaith initiatives have broadened his view of people from the other religious communities, Isam, a Sunni informant, answered that he can’t really remember how he thought earlier. He says that: “I don’t really have an answer to how I was before because I’ve forgot... this is how much I have changed, you know”. Muhammad, another Sunni informant, says that although it is only three years since he first participated in an interreligious activity his life has “turned 180 degrees”. In order to explain in what way, he mentions that he is now much more diplomatic facing other people, for example in the way he responds to negative emails. He says he is also perceived differently by people who know him: “I am the man of peace.” For the dialogue to have an impact, it is important that the dialogue does not end when the project is finished. Ali, the Shiite leader for organization D, explains that: “The dialogue itself is very important, but if it stops there, the dialogue is a waste of time. It is what it translates into”. Ali calls for action. It is not enough only to talk, it is important, but if one does not put the things one say into action, the dialogue will not have any effects.

“A successful dialogue is not important, it is what comes after. You and I are having a successful dialogue, if I will ask you what will come out of this you will tell me I will show you my thesis in six months. So something...the dialogue now, this conversation is senseless, it just ads a little bit of

information to you and a little bit of information to me, but if you don't put it in a book called thesis, and you don't argue with your teachers and then finally they don't come out with a masters for you, then we haven't done anything, we have wasted our time. Dialogue is the same way." (Ali).

Muhammad uses the term "culture" several times in the interview and he attaches different words to it: culture of diversity management, culture of loving the other, culture of human rights and culture of being open to the other. He does not use the term culture of dialogue explicitly but the concepts are all put into a framework of the interreligious dialogue activities he has been involved in. He describes the culture as a lifestyle as well, and says that it is necessary to change the way people are living to correct wrong assumptions about the other. People have to become more open towards meeting other people with different views than themselves. This is how he articulates it:

"Of course the main objectives of dialogue is to bring together people who have different perspectives, different point of views, to share those and *to share a life style together*. To see that...to experiment more that the assumptions they have on each other may not be really correct. We can explore the beauty of others and we can present our point of view correctly without assumptions" (Muhammad).

The way I understand the term "culture of dialogue", in the light of what is referred to by the informants mentioned here, it represents a more holistic view on interreligious dialogue. Dialogue is presented as a life style, not only an activity done at the interreligious events, but rather something which is more long term and committing than that. Ideally, it requires a real personal change from the participants and implies a recurring contact between members of different groups. According to the contact hypothesis, as described in chapter 3.1, recurring contact between people belonging to different social groups is positive in order for the contact to reduce prejudice if certain conditions are present. Pettigrew writes that optimally: "Repetition makes intergroup encounters comfortable and "right"" (Pettigrew 1998:71), which in turn can lead to increased liking. (See also Brewer 2003:93-94). This view is consistent with for example Muhammad's quote, cited above.

Living with the other

In light of my material, I have noticed that another central topic concerning interreligious dialogue is to live together and spend time together for days on end. One Druze participant explicitly gave this answer when I asked her what she thinks interreligious dialogue is: “Everybody has to live with the other” (Rula). Both participants and leaders highlight the importance of living together in a place over several days, as it is done at many interreligious summer camps in the country. The purpose is for the participants to learn how to live together with people from different religious communities and learn how to coexist. As I argued above, it is important that the dialogue does not end after the interreligious events. By learning how to live together one can bring the knowledge back into society afterward.

Because of the civil war, Lebanon has been, and remains, a divided country. This means that the various ethnic and religious groups are largely living in demographically homogeneous areas. During the civil war, the demographic composition of the country changed. Many were driven from their homes, and areas that were previously shared are now increasingly dominated by one group. After the war ended in 1990, several campaigns have been initiated, directed towards groups who fled from the war, encouraging them to move back to the areas they fled from (Dagher 2000: 86-89). George, the Maronite leader of organization B, explains that part of the reason why he wanted to arrange an interreligious summer camp in July 2010 is that few people in Lebanon have really lived with the other. He adds that:

“(…) very rare are those Christians, Lebanese Christians, who have visited a Muslim house. And very rare are those (…) Muslim persons that have been in a Christian house for more than ten minutes maybe, or fifteen minutes. Not for a lunch or for a dinner or for sleep in another house.” (George).

The way I interpret him, doing regular, everyday activities together can promote increased understand and better relations to people from a different group than themselves. He elaborates by talking about what he calls the dialogue of life: “So my idea was to build bridges between the different communities through the dialogue of life, through life” (George). This view on dialogue corresponds with Rasmussen’s term *diapraxis*. According to Rasmussen, it is only through shared action and joint activities that “real dialogue” can occur (Rasmussen 1997:35). To live with the other can also be associated with Leirvik’s term of the

space in between. The dialogue activities, for example the interreligious summer camp, are shared spaces, open to people from different religions, created as a meeting place for members of different religious communities.

Moving to an area with a majority of inhabitants from another group than oneself and living together with them there is looked upon with great admiration by some of my informants. Maggie, a Maronite informant, for example, says that in one of the interreligious summer camps she has attended, it was the religious leaders that came to speak at the dialogue sessions that made the strongest impression on her:

“That’s why I really liked this, because these are the leaders that really know what they are talking about. They have lived it. There is one Christian leader, he is a priest and he lived in an Islamic city, and he talked to us and told us about his experience in this city, and how he has Muslim neighbors and how he got a lot of critique because of this interaction with Muslims. I was sitting and listening to them and I was, oh my God, it was really good, you know, they were amazing, wow. I really want to learn more, tell me! I was asking questions, and trying to get more information about them and how they live this experience, why they wanted to live this. As a leader, a religious leader it is not easy, it is not like us, we can talk to anyone, no, it’s dangerous a little bit. So this was really special and I learned a lot from each one of them, really.” (Maggie).

Maggie is impressed with the religious leaders because they show courage by contacting other communities. She considers it to be harder for the religious leaders than for others. It is important for leaders to put what they say about tolerance and living with the other into action, to practice what you preach, so to speak. Dina, a Druze informant, backs up this notion and tells me that she is impressed with the NGO she is involved in, because its leaders are living proof of what the NGO stands for. Thus, action made by others (for example people in leading positions) can have an impact on how people think about making contact and inspire, something which is consistent with Dividio et al.’s (2011) study on the impact of indirect contact on intergroup relations. They introduce the term “extended contact”, meaning “learning that an ingroup member is friends with an outgroup member” (Dividio et al. 2011:174). Their study suggests that “extended contact” can contribute to attitude change and decreased prejudice.

Some informants emphasize that in Lebanon, people from different groups *have* to live together. The country is small, and although many areas are divided, one must still have contact with other groups in the daily life, work and education. Therefore, the experience and knowledge you get through these events is considered by many as valuable on every level of the society. Rula, a Druze informant, describes it this way: “You have to live with others in your life. I can’t be alone. In university I have others, at work... you have to live and to not take a generalized idea of this kind of people”. George, the leader for organization B, says that he thinks that Lebanese people have the desire to live with the other, otherwise they would move away from Lebanon: “I know that in the deep of each one we have such desire to learn of each other and to live with each other, otherwise we would choose another country” (George). However, it should be mentioned that Lebanon has experienced and is still experiencing a great deal of people emigrating to other countries, especially among the Christian population (Tabar 2010).

Knowledge

Interreligious dialogue can be closely linked to the acquisition of knowledge. At all of the organizations’ interreligious events there are lectures and workshops about dialogue, conflict management, different religions and other topics. The participants learn skills of listening and communication. One of the organizations I have focused on, organization A, has an especially strong focus on knowledge. They have a project located in several high schools in Lebanon, teaching the students about the different religions and religious communities. One of the most important objectives for them is that the students learn critical thinking.

“The main idea behind the foundation of [name of the NGO] is to try to bring together studies... I mean critical thinking, the studies, objective reflections, and solidarity. Dialogue, but not dialogue in a sense just to exchange ideas, but also solidarity... I mean to establish a kind of interfaith network or relations between people from different religions. It is a kind of challenge because our aim is to say at the same time that both critical thinking and more knowledge, more objective knowledge, bring people closer together and not the opposite.” (Joe).

This view is consistent with what Pettigrew writes about knowledge. “When new learning corrects negative views of the outgroup, contact should reduce prejudice” (Pettigrew 1998:70). Given that the outgroup’s behavior is different than the stereotype, the contact

occurs often and the outgroup members are seen as a typical member of this particular group (Pettigrew 1998:71).

Knowledge can be manifested in many different ways, however, I have chosen to divide knowledge acquired from interreligious dialogue in two; theoretical and experiential knowledge, cf. Hyllseth's division. She defines theoretical knowledge as knowledge which concerns the relatively stable and observable facts, as abstract, general and inter-subjective (Hyllseth 2001:19). Experiential knowledge is defined as "knowledge [which] is linked to specific experiences and events and is associated with these experiences. It is in other words, the person who has experienced the situation that holds knowledge." (Hyllseth 2001:20, my translation). In the first category, the lectures and presentations of religions, dialogue, conflict resolution, human rights and other topics which the organizations can be placed. In the second category, activities like shared religious rituals, visiting mosques, churches and other holy places, cooperation in development projects, eating together and experiencing things together are included. Both types of knowledge are represented in my material.

George, a Maronite leader, told me about an episode he had with the participants in one of the summer camps he held. Everyone who participated had decided that they wanted to maintain contact among themselves after the workshop. They agreed to get together once a month in different places in Lebanon. The first gathering was in the southern suburb of Beirut, Dahiyah, a largely Shiite district that has been given low priority by the government, not to mention being hit hard during the civil war and the war against Israel in 2006. They went to visit one of the participants' homes to eat an Iftar meal together, the evening meal that breaks the fast during Ramadan. According to George, during the two hours they were in Dahiyah the power went out around 20 times. One of the participants cried out that he now understood why there are so many riots because of poor power supply in the suburb. He could even see himself demonstrating as well. As I understand it, this episode illuminates a dialogue event with knowledge gained through practical experience (a visit to a part of the city, eating together, visiting the home and neighborhood of this participant) leading up to a experiential understanding and sympathy for the other when one of the participants identifies with the situation of one of the other.

Helge Svare, a Norwegian philosopher, uses an anecdote about a backpacker as an illustration of his view on dialogue and knowledge. He compares people in a dialogue to backpackers who want to learn as much as they can about the places they are traveling to and about the people they meet (Svare 2006:16). This means that a person should be open to the fact that the one he is talking to can teach him something and have a desire to listen to what the person says. My material corresponds with Svare's anecdote. Ahmad, a Shiite participant, for example, sees dialogue and knowledge as closely connected. He says that "At least we go to every event which has to do with religious dialogue in a mindset which aims at learning. When you think that the other is worth teaching you then you dialogue" (Ahmad). Ahmad describes an attitude towards others; "a mindset which aims at learning." It is important to reach the point where one is open enough towards the other to believe that one can learn something from him. As I understand it, being able to acquire knowledge is essential to reach this point.

Friendship

"It will not be forever, us, the group. If in five years we will be apart, traveling, marrying, our lifestyle will change but our friendship will stay. I feel that it is not useless what we are doing, you know. Maybe we are not doing a lot of change but we are getting to know the persons on a personal level, and have eternal friendships. I think this is a really positive point and it something that lasts." (Maggie).

The importance of making friends through interreligious dialogue is emphasized by my informants. It is also mentioned as a reason for joining activities like these. Sara, a Sunni informant, gave me her assessment of two different workshops she had attended. One of them, she says, was "beneficial more on the personal level than the social level that they [the arrangers] wanted". She justifies this by saying that after the workshop had finished, everyone went back to their own lives and no lasting relationships were formed. While at the other workshop she made friends with the participants and they still meet each other regularly. She credits the organizer for his job selecting participants and encouraging them having, in her words, "post-relationships and spending a lot of time together". As I understand it, when contact results in friendships the contact is seen as more lasting and beneficial on the societal

level. This confirms Pettigrew's fifth condition for positive effects of intergroup contact. The contact must have "friendship-potential" in order to generate positive effects (Pettigrew 1998:76). The fact that the interreligious activity Sara refers to in the most positive manner also encourages "post-relationships", consists with the long-term perspective Pettigrew has: "Optimal intergroup contact requires time to develop" (Pettigrew 1998:76).

However, the claim that friendships help to generalize attitude change towards groups as a whole is challenged by several researchers. People might like each other as individuals, but at the same time hold negative feelings towards the group (Abrams and Hogg 2001:12-13). Hence, positive effects of contact with individual outgroup members is difficult to generalize to the outgroup as a whole even though friendships develop.

4.2 What are the informants' aims with interreligious dialogue?

There are several aims of dialogue mentioned by the informants. To reach a mutual understanding between the religious communities, to make friends, to acquire knowledge and skills, and to get contacts are all given as reasons for joining interreligious activities. However, *change* is a key concept mentioned by several informants when I asked what they want to achieve with their work. Interreligious dialogue is considered to be a means to change the Lebanese society into what they consider to be a better one. Joe, the Maronite leader of organization A, for example, explicitly describes dialogue as something that should change something in the people having it and in the "reality":

"(...) dialogue what I mean is about real activities, that we want to change something. For me dialogue should change something... should change something in the reality and should change something in the people that are doing dialogue." (Joe)

The Shiite leader of organization D, Ali, gave this answer to what he wanted to achieve with his interreligious work:

“Whatever is good for the human race, anything that gets us a lot of good, guides more people towards the good, makes them more civilized, makes them better human beings, raise a better society, raise the awareness of duties and rights, and so on.” (Ali)

The Shiite informant, Maya, specifies that not only is this a matter of changing herself, but also that this change needs to be spread to others. This is something she wishes to do through her involvement in interreligious dialogue. “I would like to transfer this experience and this change to others. To make it... not [only that] I changed myself, no, I want to help the others to change their views.” (Maya) When it comes to what it is that needs to be changed, the Druze informant, Dina, describes a problematic relationship between the different religious communities in Lebanon, a relationship marked by fear of the other. She is working to remove this fear, which according to her is a reason why people stick to their own communities.

“For me, this [interreligious dialogue] is something that I need to do. What I really want is that we can live in a society where this is no longer a problem, where people know the difference between religion and community. (...) The feeling of belonging to a community is so important because the fear of the other. Because if I don't fear you I don't have to go back to my community and feel like I am protected by my community. I think for me, to make this is a really, really long way to go. I don't think I am ever going to achieve this but we are working towards this, to release this fear in the community and to make them see that this is not the way it should be.” (Dina)

Although the ultimate goals some people have for their work in the interreligious field are to make peace and to make a change in the society, most of them view this in a long term perspective, as shown in Dina's quote cited above. Most of them do not believe that the societal change is something they get to experience in their own life time, but rather that they build a foundation for future generations. George, the Maronite leader for organization B, compares his work to planting a cedar tree:

“This project that we are working on it is for me like a cedar, we plant a cedar but you will never see it growing up. But your children, grand children, will see it one day growing up. And they can enjoy

sitting in its shadow, and can enjoy it. So at least we have to work in this direction, we have to go in this direction.” (George)

Sunni informant, Muhammad, is addressing the same issue. He considers dialogue to be a kind of long term education, where one has to start by educating people in order for them to educate others in the future. In this way, he says, dialogue may educate the future leaders, politicians, husbands and fathers and in turn have a “snowball effect” on society:

“We can work on a person in a dialogue and maybe this person is a future leader or politician or a future husband or a future father. If he will raise other generations, at least he can raise them in a better way. It is like a snowball effect, we can start in this particular focal point and it will be spread later” (Muhammad).

If this goal is achieved; to make a change in the Lebanese society and better the relationship between the different religious communities, it may work as an inspiration for other countries as well. Shiite informant, Ahmad, states that if Lebanon manages to make this transformation, then they can be a “model country” for other countries in the world experiencing conflicts along religious lines.

“And two Abrahamic religions live together, if this experience in this country works out than this would be promising for countries elsewhere, in Iraq, in Nigeria, in Europe where you are having more Muslims with time. So this is a model country, if we manage to do it than we can say everyone can do it” (Ahmad).

4.3 Is contact positive or negative?

When looking at the four topics presented in chapter 4.1; the culture of dialogue, living with the other, knowledge and friendship, all of them can be closely connected to contact between individuals from different groups. Contact between people from different religious communities is a prerequisite for all of the projects of the NGOs I focused on. George, the leader of organization B, says for example that: “I do believe in this fact of being together that will allow those kids, those students, to understand and to discover the dignity of being

different” (George). Contact between people from different groups is considered to be something necessary, positive and something one can learn from. However it is not only contact in a controlled environment like the NGOs which is highlighted as positive. Muhammad, for example, thinks a certain form of dialogue can be reached by bringing people from different religious groups together in a casual environment, for example a restaurant. He explains religion as a dividing factor in the Lebanese society, and says that people have not had the possibility to interact with people from other religious groups on a regular basis.

“I think in Lebanon that one of the basic differences between people is the religion. And they have been in war based on the religion, and people have been sticking to their own religious groups and they haven’t been really exposed to other religions, to people from other religions. So it is very important, so maybe if we can gather them to a lunch or to a coffee, whatever, it will be a...we will reach a certain form of dialogue without even getting into subjects about religious differences. We can reach a certain point of dialogue just by bringing people together from different religions” (Muhammad).

Seen from an intergroup contact perspective, casual contact between group members seldom leads to a decrease in prejudice. Some studies even show the opposite, that without certain conditions present prejudice can increase (see for example Dovidio et al. 2011). My interview material shows that meetings between members of different groups are approached by my informants in different ways. Antoine, a Maronite informant, explains that in a situation with members of other religious groups he often feels forced to moderate his religious identity. He said that when he is only with Christian Maronites he feels, and can act, 100% Christian. With a ratio of 50-50, he feels and acts approximately 70% Christian. And in situations where his group is a minority, he feels and acts around 50% Christian. Exactly what it is Antoine perceive as acting as a Christian is hard to say. Whether it is about being able to talk about his group or religion, or if it has more to do with behavior, he does not specify. Whatever the underlying reasons, this is one example of a problematic aspect of contact.

Another example is presented by the Maronite informant, Maggie. When I asked her how it is possible to get into contact with people who are not open minded or willing to get in contact with other groups, she told me that it is necessary, but difficult. It may even involve a threat, which, according to Stephan and Stephan, can lead to more prejudices (Evaldsson 2007:71).

“But how can we get a strange person or a different person, fanatic person, to our circle? It’s difficult. She will not come to our circle, you know, and if you want to go to the circle of the fanatic persons it is dangerous. I mean, maybe they are going to hurt you, emotionally, physically maybe, it’s really...I can’t just do it alone.” (Maggie).

This is also addressed by Sunni informant, Muhammad, when he talks about the threat he feels concerning the weapons of Hizbullah. He questions the possibility of “true interfaith” if the threat connected to Hizbullah’s weapons does not end. “We don’t live in an easy, nor safe environment. We live in an environment where violence and force and threatening are all the way around us.” (Muhammad).

As pointed out in chapter 2 concerning my theoretical perspectives, researchers have argued that certain factors have to be present for contact to have positive effects (Pettigrew 1998). Pettigrew mentions Allport’s four situational conditions: “equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of the authorities, law, or custom” (Pettigrew 1998:66). In addition he includes that the contact have to be extensive enough and be repeated often enough for the participants to have the opportunity to become friends (Pettigrew 1998:76). If my material is seen in the light of Pettigrew’s theories one may argue that the reason why many of the informants speak differently about contact in a setting located at the NGOs’ events and contact outside of them is because the contact at the events ideally is distinguished by at least some of the same conditions that Pettigrew presents, while the contact outside of the events most likely is not. The dialogue meeting is a setting where everything is facilitated in order to have a peaceful and prosperous meeting.

For example, in the NGOs and events I have focused on, a majority of the youth who participated were educated people. All of my informants had a university education. This may of course have something to do with me being more likely to get in contact with people who speak English, and that they are more numerous in the educated part of the population. But it also means that my informants can be considered to be in the same social layer of society, and according to Pettigrew more likely to have positive effects of contact. To learn how to live

together is another important factor of the interreligious events. An important part of that is to work together. Muhammad says that when he first joined an interreligious program through an NGO, it was hard to work together but the more he learned about topics like diversity management and conflict, the easier it got to work together towards the same goal.

“We were afraid first and we weren’t able to work, to operate properly between each other. Not until we had acquired some knowledge about human rights, about diversity management, about how to deal with conflict properly, so we started to work with each other despite our differences. The aim of this project wasn’t to change our thoughts, but to understand that we are different and we can work together despite our differences.” (Muhammad).

This corresponds with two of Allport’s conditions, common goals and intergroup cooperation, and speaks in favor of my own view on why intergroup contact in the dialogue events are referred to as more rewarding than contact outside of the events.

As I pointed out earlier, friendship is greatly valued by the participants I have interviewed. Getting new friends are given as a reason for joining interreligious activities, and activities which result in friendships between the participants are considered to be more successful and rewarding than others. This corresponds with Pettigrew’s fifth condition.

Above, I have shown examples from my material of four of the conditions Pettigrew mentions in his article in my material. Concerning the last one; the support of law and authorities, the informants, especially the leaders of the organizations, say that they do not get much support from authorities, on the contrary. Especially the politicians are considered not to constructively contribute to dialogue. This will be further discussed in chapter 6. According to Pettigrew, this may cause problems for how effective the dialogue activities can be.

Another reason why my informants speak so positively about the interreligious meetings can be that in these dialogue meetings the participants are handpicked by the arrangers. Hence, the participants want to be a part of the event. They know that they are going to meet members of

other groups, and they are there because they want to get to know people from different groups. This is not necessarily the case with meetings in other contexts. “The problem is not in the people who are willing to go to these camps, we are not the problem” (Sara). This is an issue reflected in the casual sequence problem (Pettigrew 1998) which will be addressed in a more thorough manner in chapter 5.

4.4 Models of interreligious work in Lebanon

Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty present four different models for interreligious dialogue in Lebanon in their book *Unity in Diversity* (2007). The first one is called “the dialogue for life”, the second “unity dialogue”, the third “ritualistic and ceremonial interreligious dialogue”, and the fourth is called “the advocacy approach”. I will use these four models to discuss the work of the NGOs I have chosen to focus on in this thesis. I will argue that the work of the NGOs I refer to in my analysis contains elements of all four models mentioned above, as well as an additional model which will be presented in chapter 4.4.

The dialogue for life

The first model, the dialogue for life, involves a dialogue about everyday experiences and issues that affect everyone in the country. This is a dialogue which takes place between individuals and communities, not between religious leaders on a VIP level (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007:127). This is a term several of my informants use when they talk about the projects they have been involved in. As an example Firas, a Druze informant, says: “The dialogue we are aiming to is the dialogue of life” (Firas). He elaborates by saying that the aim of the dialogue of life is to get people to use their religious affiliation in a positive way for the good of society. George, the Maronite leader of organization B, also uses the term, but compared to Firas, George talks about having a dialogue *through* life.

Unity dialogue

In the second model, the unity dialogue, conflicts between the groups are not emphasized, they are put aside, and instead people gather around shared problems among all the religious groups, be it local, regional or international issues. According to the authors, the aim is to

create unity between Lebanese people from various ethnic, political and religious groups and not focus on the differences (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007:127). One example of this model is the emphasis put on the similarities between people from different religions. Ali, the leader of the Shiite organization, states that:

“When we want to say that we are not different we don’t have to keep stressing it. I don’t have to keep stressing, you are my equal, I don’t have to because it already is. The more I stress it, the more that means that I have a complexity about it. The more we have to tell Sunnis that there are no differences between us, the more meaning that we have a problem.” (Ali).

Among some of the participants, however, this perception is viewed with skepticism. Antoine says that common issues are nothing. It is not in the similarities the problems rest and ultimately he thinks this approach cannot add anything to a possible solution or improvement in relations between the religious communities:

“If you really want to dialogue we should talk about issues that we really have differences in. If we will talk about the issues that we have in common so we are not doing anything. It is the same, Jesus said that if you love the person who loves you, you are doing nothing but if you love the person who doesn’t love you, this is real love. So if you talk about common issues you talk about nothing” (Antoine).

Ritualistic and ceremonial dialogue

The third model, ritualistic and ceremonial interfaith dialogue, deals with shared religious experiences. People from different religions participate in each other’s ceremonies and rituals, such as common prayer or joint arranging of religious events (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007:127). The ritualistic and ceremonial dialogue is represented by the visits my informants make to religious places, churches and mosques, and by joint religious practice like prayers and ceremonies arranged by the NGOs. One example is Joe, the leader of organization A, who explains one of their events where religious leaders, and others, gather to “pray for the same intentions and celebrate the same spiritual values”:

“The idea is to enhance the basic spiritual values that we share and they can be a common ground between different people, and we celebrate every year this common ground, these spiritual values. (...)

People gather together, Christians and Muslims pray for the same intentions and celebrate the same spiritual values.” (Joe)

The advocacy approach

In the fourth model, the advocacy approach, collaboration on development projects among people from different religious communities is used as a tool in dialogue. The idea is that through collaboration towards a common goal you can get to know the other and rebuild the country after the war at the same time (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007:127). There is especially one of the NGOs that consider this a way to successfully reach coexistence and dialogue among the people in Lebanon. Youssef explains that his organization works at different levels and one way is to help people, Christians and Muslims, in rural areas work together with agricultural projects in their own areas. He says that: “(...) we have used development as a tool in interfaith dialogue” (Youssef).

Theological dialogue

The theological or institutional dialogue is neither mentioned in Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty’s (2007) framework of interreligious activities in Lebanon, nor is it a priority of the organizations I have focused on in my interviews. Joe, the leader of organization A, describes the institutional dialogue as something that is considered VIP, an activity only people in the highest ranks of society are engaged in. He even says that it is not a real activity, just an “exchange of ideas”:

“It is not the most important, the institutional dialogue, it is good I mean the VIP dialogue and institutional dialogue. It is more an exchange of ideas more than a dialogue. It can sometimes become kind of a form of dialogue. But dialogue what I mean is about real activities... that we want to change something.” (Joe)

4.5 A fifth model - Engaging in dialogue by visiting the places of the other

Above, I described Abu-Nimer’s et al. (2007) four models of dialogue in Lebanon. I will argue that there is another important model, namely *visiting the places of the other*. There is a

great focus on visiting the places of the other among the NGOs active in interreligious projects. It can be religious places like churches and mosques, but it can also be cities and areas where the majority of the population is from one of the religious groups. All of the leaders of the NGOs talk about the importance of visiting places in the country that are specifically related to one or the other of the religious groups. Preferably, one should visit several places so that one can really get to know each other and Lebanon as a country. One of the Shiite informants argues that you get a deeper understanding of the other if you visit the place he is from:

“When you visit the other’s area, you know where he lives, you get to know more his culture. So you know the social fabric in which he lives, so you come to discover more the way he lives. You get to know the other more deeply when you visit him, so the visits were very enriching” (Bilal).

To visit the other’s areas is linked with knowledge and experience. To acquire knowledge of the other can be an important part of being in a dialogue with someone and, according to for example Pettigrew (1998), it can improve the relationships between members of different groups. Bilal says when you visit the place the other comes from you get a deeper understanding of this individual and his culture. The place itself is seen as an important source of knowledge.

As a result of the country’s turbulent history, in particular with the civil war lasting from 1975-1990, the possibilities for travel were limited. During the war, checkpoints throughout the country and a difficult security situation made traveling more time-consuming and dangerous (Haugbolle 2010:57). This is something that still affects society today. One of my Maronite informants said:

“Let’s say I want to go to Dahiyah which is majority Shiite, it is not always about [if] it is not safe or something like that. I avoid going to Trablous [Tripoli] because it is majority Sunni. This is something I can’t understand in my personality, I have been raised like that, it is not like something... it is hard to break these feelings. (...) we are still facing problems, I am talking about myself, to go to an area where we are not [a] majority” (Antoine).

Even though the civil war is over, this notion that some places represent danger is still present among the Lebanese population. If places are seen in a relational place perspective, which states that places acquire meaning through the meetings and the social relations that takes place at that specific location (Massey 1995), one can understand it by recognizing that the destructive relations caused for example by the civil war, have influenced people's views on certain places. According to my informants, it is still not very common to travel to all parts of Lebanon, at least "not for the mission to know people" (Maya).

Cecilie: Is it not normal for Lebanese people to go to other regions and travel around?

Bilal: Not to that extent, in fact after the years of the war it was a bit abnormal. But I think in 2004 the memorandum of agreement which took place between Hizbullah and *at-tayyar*¹¹ helped a lot. Before 2004, after the years of the war especially, if you say Muhammad in front of a Christian he will think you are an alien from outer space. What is he doing here? But now the trend is not to that extreme. Many students, Muslims, are studying at my university and many Christians are coming to the southern suburb of Beirut, there is a trend to break the ice. And it is being successful a bit, I think."

If we see the dialogue meetings through Massey's (1995) relational space perspective, it means that through the social relationship between the participants from different groups, the place the meeting is located at will acquire meaning for them. As I understand it, the place will acquire a *new* meaning when subjected to new social relations. In this way the visits my informants have made to various locations in Lebanon will lead to new understandings of these places. Hence, places which were previously associated with other groups and maybe even with danger can acquire new meaning as shared spaces when the NGOs arrange visits to the places of the other.

As discussed above, Lebanon can be considered relatively divided in that people from different groups live in separate, homogenous areas. Maggie says that it is important to break out from one's own zone. There are not a lot of multi-religious places so it is necessary to do so in order to interact and enter into a dialogue with others.

¹¹ *At-tayyar* refers to the Arabic name for the political party The Free Patriotic Movement; *At-Tayyar al-Watani al-Horr*.

“You know it is a kind of dialogue, you have to go to different cities, different places in Lebanon, not just be in this zone, because you know Lebanon is zones, just zones, zones, zones. There is no multicultural city, in Beirut, maybe, but in south no, in Bekaa, no, in Jounie no” (Maggie).

This implicates a strong association between places and groups in Lebanon. Some places are seen as distinctly Muslim, Christian, Druze etc, while others are more mixed. This is a notion which, according to Guinote and Fiske (2003), may affect the dialogue initiatives including visits to the other’s areas. According to their research, being on the site of an outgroup may lead to increased categorization of the members of this group and stronger stereotypical attitudes towards them (Guinote and Fiske 2003:329). The NGOs who arrange visits to the places of the other as a part of their dialogue activities want to accomplish the opposite of what Guinote and Fiske’s research indicates. The visit is supposed to diminish stereotypical attitudes and increase the level of knowledge among the participants. However, Guinote and Fiske also refers to other researchers who have argued that being in an outgroup’s place is not always associated with increased stereotypical attitudes. Their research shows that enhanced familiarity with the outgroup, its culture and areas can lead to individuals developing a more intricate and complex perception of the outgroup. The more one learns and the more familiar one gets with members of the outgroup and with the outgroup’s place, the more comprehensive the perception of them becomes. This is in line with the NGOs’ objectives, and also supports Pettigrew’s (1998) view, where the importance of forming friendships and deeper relationships among the participants is highlighted, as I discussed in section 4.1.

4.6 The representation of history in interreligious dialogue

Lebanon's history, which I have addressed in chapter 1, contains a series of events that can be difficult for people in the country to discuss and address. How should dialogue organizations deal with the wars and conflicts that have taken place in the country over the years? Are the historical events something that should be addressed, talked about and thus reconciled with, or should they be avoided because talking about the conflict-ridden history will not make it undone but rather lead to new conflicts? The NGOs’ approaches to the Lebanese history vary. While some are actively using history as a means to create unity, others are downplaying it in order not to cause division.

Ali, the leader of organization D, has a way of handling the dilemma of history, namely to actively use it in his work by concentrating on positive historical events. He tells a story about Imam Moussa Sadr, a famous Shiite Imam who went missing in Libya the 1970's:

“In 1975, six Christian villages were surrounded in Baalbek. They were threatened of genocide, of getting killed. Imam Sadr, our leader, tried to break the siege on these six villages and it did not work. No matter what he tried, no one was listening. So he decided that he was going to do something about it, so he went into a mosque and he declared hunger strike.” (Ali)

Ali says that the Imam finally managed to spare the Christian villages and none were killed. The imam's struggle to help the Christians is part of a good history between Christians and Muslims, and according to Ali it is these stories that should be used in pursuit of a positive interreligious coexistence in the country. Ali says he deliberately uses the history of such episodes when conflicts arise.

“(…) if I am fighting with Christians why not bring up the speech at the church and the Christian community in Baalbek? If I am angry at Christians why don't Christians come to me and say remember we saved two hundred Muslims in Ashrafiyeh? We Christians saved them, remember that? Why are you upset with us? When we view history let's pick the good part of history, not the bad one.” (Ali)

In comparison, the other NGOs have slightly different approaches to the use of Lebanon's history in interreligious dialogue. Joe for example told me that in order to address hard issues like the civil war it is necessary to go about it in a careful manner. His NGO used, among other things, films to address this problem. They have produced a short film where they invited two former militia leaders to speak about their experiences. Joe also said during their activities they encourage the participants to have critical thinking about what they hear about the war. The NGO targets young people who most likely have not been directly involved in the fighting, so a lot of their knowledge about the war is second hand knowledge that comes from their family, community or the media, according to Larkin (2011) it is postmemory. This is just one out of many experiences. Joe puts it like this: “(…) we push them to have a kind of critical analysis of the civil war and to see that all communities was engaged in this war and there are not...we cannot find heroes and bad people I mean”. Another approach is to focus

mainly on the future. Youssef finds that to dialogue about the past, often turns the focus over towards who is right and who is wrong, which makes it hard to have a dialogue.

“We have decided not to speak too much about the past. (...) there are times of course when all of a sudden someone will refer to the past and refer to the past brings the whole discussion or dialogue into an argument about who was right and who was wrong, and therefore we prefer to say no, we have it in our memory, we mention it briefly but we focus more on the future. On the now and the future.”
(Youssef)

His statement corresponds with the political tradition present in Lebanon after the civil war. As noted in chapter 1, the past has been downplayed to an extensive manner in the Lebanese public sphere. As an attempt by politicians to maintain the fragile peace, the problematic history has been “forgotten” and all eyes are directed towards the future (Volk 2008). It can seem like this way of thinking has been transferred to the civil society and to some of the dialogue initiatives. However, this is perceived by some informants as problematic and not mirroring the actual situation in Lebanon today. Dina, a Druze informant, expresses it like this: “It is not easy, and most of this the people don’t talk about, the massacres and everything in the war. We say let’s forget about it. But in the small circles this is all they talk about.” (Dina). The small circles Dina is referring to are, as I understand it, located within the various religious communities. Maybe the interreligious events can be considered some of the few places the participants have the possibility to talk about the historical events and obtain information about the other’s versions of the truth?

In Lebanon today, several elements of the country’s history is not being communicated to the public. For example, the national curriculum in history being taught in schools ends the year 1946, and students in public schools are not being taught anything about the Lebanese modern history, including the Lebanese civil war (Makdisi 2006:201). Another element is what Volk calls a “state-sponsored forgetfulness” (Volk 2008). After the war ended, the authorities did not persecute any of the former militia leaders for crimes committed during the civil war, but they rather gave them a clean slate and allowed them to enter the newly formed government (Volk 2006:293).

Even though it is challenging, several interviews with the informants, exemplified by Dina's statement above, indicate a need for history to be brought up in order for reconciliation to happen. This is consistent with the historian, Salibi's view: "Certainly, however, no political settlement in the country can be lasting unless it takes questions of history into account" (Salibi 1988:217).

4.7 Final remarks

Interreligious dialogue in Lebanon is a multi-faced matter. In this chapter I have given an overview of some of the main topics, as shown in my interview material. The way I interpret it, my informants portray interreligious dialogue not only by focusing on the dialogue itself; that is, the conversation between two or more people, but they have a more concrete and practical perspective. Their emphasis is put on living with the other, practical knowledge and on having a dialogue as a way of life by creating friendships among members of different religious groups. This understanding is consistent with Rasmussen's (1997) term *diapraxis*, and Eidsvold's (1997) views on practical dialogue. The words are not necessarily the most important, but rather the fact that contact between members of different religions is established, and shared spaces where they can meet are created.

I recognize two different ways of approaching space in the interview material. First, I notice that the informants create a shared space through dialogue. This can be categorized as a fellowship or a community among the participating people, created for example in the interreligious camps. Here, it is not the specific place where the dialogue activity is located that is important in itself, but rather the fact that persons belonging to different religious groups can meet and ideally enter into a relationship. Second, I can notice that by visiting the places of the others, the dialogue participants learn about other religious communities. Such visits can, seen in the light of Massey's term of "place as meeting-place", alter the meaning of places that are visited. I argue that this can be considered a fifth model of interreligious work in Lebanon, adding one more model to Abu-Nimer et al.'s (2007) four.

Finally, I concluded this chapter by discussing the representation of history in interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. History is controversial in Lebanon. There is no common understanding of Lebanese modern history. In the text books used in public schools the description of historical events ends in 1946, which contribute to the difficult situation. The different religious communities produce their own sentiments of what has happened since then. This controversy is reflected in the various approaches the NGOs have towards talking about history in interreligious dialogues. Some are actively using history as a means to create unity, while others are downplaying it in order not to cause division.

5 Labeling, categorization and interreligious dialogue in Lebanon

In the previous chapter, I argued that my informants have a practical view on interreligious dialogue in Lebanon and that to learn how to live together is essential. Another important aspect is to visit the places of the other in order to obtain more knowledge about members of other religious groups. Both of these aspects can be closely tied with the Lebanese context. The fact that Lebanon is a demographically divided country influences the relationships and the interaction between the religious groups.

Similarly, it is important to look at the context in order to understand the material used in this next chapter. Lebanon has a confessional organizational system in which religious affiliation plays a central role. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the President have to be Maronite, the Prime Minister Sunni and the Parliamentary leader Shiite. The political parties are also roughly divided along religious lines. Ordinary people are aware of the system as well, for example, civil marriage is not allowed. Religion and politics are two categories that have their mark on the Lebanese society. In this chapter I discuss how my informants experience being placed into these categories, and address how the informants deal with the categorization by using two different models which shed light on this topic. These models are called the decategorization and the recategorization model. I will argue that a new category is created by the participants in the interreligious activities, and further discuss what role this plays for the personal and societal effects of interreligious dialogue for my informants.

5.1 Labeling and categorization on the basis of religious affiliation

As written in chapter 3, there is a high consensus among researchers on categorization as a natural way for human beings to understand the world around them (see for example Brewer 2003:5). People are placed into social groups which are then attributed certain characteristics and qualities. Difficulties may arise when someone is being defined as part of a group they do not believe they belong to, or that a group is given attributes that do not necessarily match

their own views of themselves. Viewing other groups in a negative stereotypical¹² manner is also a classical example of how categorization may be problematic. In Lebanon, the confessional system, as described in chapter 1.2, implies that the religious affiliation is emphasized for example in the work place or in marital matters, which may indicate that this category hard to escape being associated with, if not impossible. In the parliament, for example the ratio between Christian and Muslim representatives has to be 50:50, and civil marriages are not allowed causing people to travel abroad to marry someone not belonging to their religious community (Sikimic 2011).

When I asked Dina, one of my Druze informants, what it was that made her get involved in interreligious dialogue, she gave me an answer I found to be very interesting. She explains her involvement by telling me about her background growing up in the Shouf Mountains with her family. Her father was politically active and her mother was religiously active in the Druze community. Dina went to a Catholic school because, in her own words, her parents did not “want us to become one of those people that are really very narrow-minded, if you want. Until I entered school and I was nine, I did not know that there was something called Druze, Maronites.” The way she was raised was not to categorize people into different groups and judge them based on this, but as she was growing up she found that this was not the norm. “As I grew up I found that there are not much people like me in Lebanon.” She explained to me that she was searching for like-minded people but could not find them:

“(…) this was something that really frustrated me, the fact that I couldn’t really find a lot of people really have the same way of thinking. I thought, ok, at university it is going to happen and it didn’t happen, because I noticed that most Lebanese people even though they say: “Ah, I love every one, but the Shiite, they are really ‘uuh’. You know what? I don’t like to be racist, but uh, he is homosexual.” So the frustration grew and it is really an everyday life-thing, everywhere, because I studied history, so each time... you know the history of Lebanon, it is always Druze, Maronites... And each time anything came up, I hear this sarcastic... I was really frustrated and at some point I was like giving up hope, the Lebanese people are not worth fighting for.” (Dina)

In the above quote, Dina shows signs of frustration over the way certain groups are being attributed certain qualities and opinions based on group affiliation. This view is not unique to

¹² Stereotypes mean “qualities perceived to be associated with particular groups or categories of people” (Schneider, cited in Evaldsson 2007:62).

her. Many of the informants express their frustration about the way they are automatically being placed within a category, and in consequence being attributed opinions and qualities they do not necessarily feel they possess. This is well demonstrated when Dina says: "I was telling her how frustrated I am because I am sick of being pointed out as Druze and of people telling me that they do this, they do that, this whole combination." In her experience people are judging her based on the group she belongs to. Dina told me in the interview I conducted that she feels a belonging to both the Druze and the Christian community, and considers herself to be a part of both of them. She was raised in a Druze family, but her own religious beliefs are Christian. This may have had an influence on why she has a problem with being labeled, and can make it even harder for her to be put in one category and be excluded from another. However, I have found that others also agree to this perception of the situation. After the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, there were major riots in Lebanon, and the Shiite Muslim group, Hizbullah, was accused of having committed the murder in cooperation with Syrian actors (Blanford 2006:155-156). Maya, a Shiite informant, says that she was accused of being involved just by virtue of being Shiite Muslim:

"Yes, I was at the university, first year of university, and some people who loved Hariri they...like: "you are the Shiite, you killed Hariri." No, stop, who says that we are? And they discriminated us and we entered in a bad conversation between us. It was a conflict." (Maya)

Both Dina and Maya talk about how it is to be placed into a religious group, and then being assigned stereotypical and generalized notions of what supposedly represent this group. They experience generalization in the way that one person is held responsible for actions conducted by representatives of his or her group, in the past or present. The statement Dina makes shows that this is problematic: "I can finally meet people who don't think that because I am Druze I would have to have killed someone in the past". It can also be notions of a more contemporary kind, such as political affiliation. As noted earlier, the political parties in Lebanon are to a large extent connected to religious groups. For example, Hizbullah is considered to be connected to the Shiites and The Lebanese Forces to the Maronites. This means that by generalizing, one can easily attribute political affiliation to people based on their religious belonging. A Shiite Muslim informant says that:

“(…) no one believes that you don’t belong to a certain political party. But in fact I refuse to be a part of a political party and whenever I say something they would say: [If] Bilal is saying that, then Hizbullah is saying that.” (Bilal).

Bilal and another Shiite informant, Ahmad, express a wish to correct the stereotypical attributes they feel that other Lebanese have put on their religious group. It is important for them to present a positive image of Shiite Muslims in the interreligious meetings they attend through different organizations. Bilal says, for example, “I want to transfer the positive image of Muslims which they don’t have in their minds. And I think I was successful because the friendship we built is sustainable I think.” He considers himself to be open minded. What is important for him now is to be an "ambassador of positivity" and to spread a positive image of Muslims to the people he believes look at Muslims in a negative way. Ahmad explains that he wishes people would look at him in a way he can identify with and relate to. He wants to achieve this through his interreligious work.

“I really would like people to think of Islam in a way different than they would see it. I do my best to achieve this, at least to dissolve all obstacles which wouldn’t allow you to know me or look at me in a way that I would like you to look at me. So such events would provide me with an opportunity and I like it, I enjoy it.” (Ahmad).

Sara, a Sunni informant, told me about some examples of stereotypical notions she as a Muslim has encountered in Lebanon. She has been perceived as more closed minded, conservative, and less educated than Christians. On a workshop about youth and reconciliation, Sara participated in an exercise where everyone was supposed to tell the others what they believed other groups thought about them. A Christian participant told the group that she thought Muslims consider Christians to be disrespectful of themselves. Sara reacted like this:

“She said that she thinks that Muslims consider Christians as disrespectful for themselves. She said that, “well actually Christians, us, we do go out, we have fun, we drink, we stay out late, we go to universities, we are educated, we go out with our friends and this doesn’t happen with Muslims.” For me that was you know like in the movies: “No, you didn’t!” [laughing] For me that was it. I waited for the trainer to ask a Muslim to say what the Christians might think about them. I said, well yes, a lot of Christians might sometimes think that Muslims are very closed minded, just like x just said. Well in

fact, I talked to the girl and I told her if I didn't go to university, I wouldn't have been invited, if I am not allowed to go out of my house I wouldn't have been here. I was truly offended." (Sara)

Sara also told me she had experienced losing a sponsor of the NGO she works for, because she would not share with him the information of which group she belongs to.

"One time I was meeting with a sponsor for our NGO and he insisted on knowing where I am from, I didn't give him a specific answer, in fact they didn't sponsor us even though they were very interested in the project we are doing, he loved it, and because I couldn't give him an answer, I didn't say that I belonged to his group, they didn't even call us back. So yes, you do get treated differently sometimes. Other times no, you are just labeled but you can change this idea over time, but however you are already labeled, discriminated against." (Sara)

Sara has one parent who is Sunni Muslim and one who is Christian. It is important for her not to exclude one group or the other. She considers herself to be a part of both groups. The quote cited above can indicate that a hybrid identity like hers can arouse suspicion when she meets new people, or at least not refraining from sharing one's group identity.

The quotes I have cited in this section shed light on interaction between people, showing that it often takes place not on an individual basis, but rather based on viewing individuals as representatives of different groups. They also show that the informants describe this kind of categorizations as a burden and something they want to change through interreligious dialogue. Interaction on the basis of group affiliation can lead to depersonalization and stereotypical attitudes towards members belonging to other groups than oneself (Allport 1954; Brewer 2003). My material is consistent with this opinion. It also shows that one of the problems the NGOs are trying to address, namely to prevent stereotyped attitudes, is a real problem for my informants.

On the other hand, research also shows that in order for changed attitudes to generalize from including one person to including the whole group, group salience is important (Hewstone and Brown 1986:18-19). This points to a paradox expressed in my material. Interreligious dialogue does necessarily involve a certain emphasis on religious affiliation; otherwise it

would not have been called *interreligious* dialogue. However, the sentiments shown in my interview material suggest that religious affiliation should not be emphasized in order to better the relationship between the groups, precisely because a focus on group membership is perceived by the informants to lead to a number of preconceived attitudes towards them.

5.2 Labeling and categorization on the basis of interreligious involvement

The material shows it is not only religious and political affiliation that leads to labeling among the informants. To participate in interreligious dialogue awakens reactions among one's own religious group and others. Several of my informants say that when they first became involved in interfaith activities in the NGOs, they were met with skepticism by many outside of these scenes. This can be people from the same religious group as themselves, but also from other groups. They say that the "step towards the other" which they have taken is seen by some people as something incomprehensible and unnecessary. It can even represent something dangerous.

Reactions from one's own religious group

Speaking of members of the same group, Maggie, a Maronite informant, says she was asked if she had opted out of her own group and become a Muslim:

“They are telling me that, “you don't love Christians”, and I hear that “if you want to be a Muslim, yallah, go and be a Muslim! What do you want?” You know how much I hear those types of comments, they are really hurtful comments.” (Maggie)

Others experience being criticized for the way they practice their religion by members of the same religious group. Isam, a Sunni informant, believes it is because they feel threatened by him. Why they do that he does not know.

“Sometimes I am called infidel also among Muslims, although I am a religious person, I consider myself as a religious person, and I practice my religion and in every shape that I can do. In the Muslim side they outcast me because they feel that...I don't know, they feel threatened by me. It is funny. I

don't know how they feel threatened. It's like...this frustrates me sometimes, I am not being judged only by Christians but by Muslims as well because I am doing this step towards the other. They always face me with the famous quote in the Koran that the Christians and the Jews won't approve of you until you become one of them." (Isam)

The Sheikh at the mosque that Isam goes to was the one who first introduced him to interreligious dialogue. He told Isam about a scholarship to go to a course about dialogue at one of the universities in Beirut and he wanted him to attend and "make Muslims honored" (Isam). This first meeting with the interreligious field led to him being more and more involved in one of the NGOs I am focusing on. According to Isam, when he got deeper involved, his involvement was no longer considered as positive as before by the Sheikh.

Isam: The Sheikh that told me about it was not as approval as he was before. This was really awkward.

Cecilie: So when you got involved he...

Isam: Yes, it was like: What? He was supposed to go there just to honor I don't know what. So now I have a bit of a...not conflict but, it's like this... this is between me and that Sheikh and it is really frustrating for me."

The quote sheds light on the attitudes some people have towards dialogue. It is important to represent your community in a positive way, but if one gets more involved than that, it can be considered something negative. To behave in a manner not consistent with what is perceived as the norm in the social group and the society as a whole, is viewed by many with skepticism. Maggie, a Maronite informant tells me that:

"There are people that really fight me. It is like they see in me maybe someone dangerous because I am getting to be close to others, you know. Or they have fear from others. (...) "Always have open eyes. Beware of what you are doing." They are afraid."

These quotes highlight that Isam and Maggie are accused of not wanting to be a part of the religious community and do things the way they are expected to be done. When they reach out to other communities they are not any longer easy to place into one category. This makes others uncertain of them.

Reactions from other religious groups than one's own

Concerning people from other groups than themselves, some informants say that they have experienced being categorized as non-representative of the religious group they are part of, precisely because they seek contact with other groups. According to Pettigrew, a problem concerning the contact hypothesis is that it is difficult to create a generalizing effect of contact, i.e. changing stereotypical attitudes towards a whole group through contact. This is especially difficult if the person you are in contact with among "the others" is not seen as representative of his or her group (Pettigrew 1998:74). I started this chapter by discussing how my informants describe being automatically labeled as representatives of a certain group with the attributes that this implicates. Through their involvement in interreligious dialogue they choose to come in contact with "the other." The way I interpret my material, some of the people I have interviewed are experiencing being dismissed as unrepresentative by people from other groups. Isam, for example, says that he has been greeted with disbelief by Christians because he as a Muslim wants contact with others: "Here is something that everyone uses; that you are unique, you are an exception amongst your society." He elaborates further by saying that:

"Some of the Christians believe that Christians are the ones who are open, who take the positive lead ahead, so when they see a Muslim that takes such an act, sometimes on facebook they say: "What? Why are you coming here?" But most of the time I face positiveness. "We should have more people like you, you know" and yes...sometimes this is different." (Isam)

Seen in the light of Pettigrew's theories of generalization of effects, this can mean that Isam will have greater difficulty contributing to a change in stereotypical attitudes towards the Sunni Muslims in Lebanon because he is not seen as a typical representative for his group.

Positive reactions

However, as the last part of Isam's quote, cited above, shows, the informants do not only receive negative reactions when participating in interreligious dialogue. Some hear from friends and acquaintances that they are doing a good and important job. Several informants told me that they are feeling proud when they attend interreligious events. Not only because

of other people's credit but because they are proud of themselves as well. They are proud of the fact that they are working towards a better society and of the fact that they have friends from other religious groups.

"Most importantly it made me have more diverse friends. I am really proud when I go to one of my friends who are from a more closed society and I say that I have a friend called Eli. Not a cousin, they know I am forced to have my family, but me choosing a friend that is an important part. So it really changed me a lot, on all aspects." (Sara).

Even though some people from the same religious communities as themselves are looking at them as unrepresentative, and not as "real" Christians and Muslims, Maggie is saying that doing the work she does, makes her feel like a true Lebanese and a true religious person:

"When I am doing this I feel that I am closer to God, and I feel that I am a true Lebanese. This is how we can work for our country. You know I feel proud, really, really proud. Also as a Christian, I mean, love, peace, tolerance, these are the values we learn in Christianity, so I feel like I am a true Christian when I do this." (Maggie).

In comparison, Isam says something which is very similar:

"I feel this as a Muslim I am doing my job...you know, forget Muslim, as a religious person, as a believer of God, I am doing my job on earth to spread the word of God...not all the word of God, not only to have other people to be religious, but the word of God in the sense of spreading love and peace, you know." (Isam)

The way I interpret their statements, the dialogue activities is not only a way to work for a better Lebanon, it also becomes a means for them to practice their religion.

5.3 "I like to represent myself" (Bilal)

Labeling and categorization, as described above, are problematic for the informants and seem difficult to avoid in Lebanon. Interaction, particularly with new people, often happens on a group basis, and information about which group a person belongs to becomes essential.

Something which sheds light on this topic is that different informants give similar presentations of how it can be for them to meet new people. They say they are asked a series of questions, where the person asking them aims to find out which group affiliation they have. Sara, a Sunni informant, explains it this way:

“Everyone tends to label you, not even tends, they insist on labeling you. They ask you what your family name is. Where are you from? If the family name doesn’t give them a clue to what group you belong to... I think that you have already heard this before... they ask where are you from to get a clue, if not, where do you live, if not, they might have heard about someone who might be related, who have the same family name but they know what is their religion so they ask [if] you are related to this person.” (Sara)

Not to be able to decide for themselves what their group identity consists of is very frustrating for many people. The young adults I have spoken to say they are tired of having to defend themselves against accusations and generalizations of different sorts. Some of them don’t even want to give an answer when they are asked which group they belong to. Sara says:

”It is really horrible, so... I do tend, I do insist on not giving any kind of color to my groups, even though some people find it a bit offensive to them. But for me this is private and I could never just give out info to anyone.”

Sara calls for people to stop generalizing: “(...) they need to look at each other not as a label, not as a group, they need to look at each other as people.” This is referred to as a serious problem for Lebanon and its inhabitants. Bilal elaborates on the topic by saying that he has a need to be able to represent himself. He especially relates this to the political sphere, because he feels that he is given political opinions that he does not have. “I like to represent myself and objectively judge all the parties in Lebanon. If I am an insider I will not have any right to criticize anyone.” Sara and Bilal’s statements can be understood in light of Brewer’s decategorization model. As described in chapter 3, the decategorization model involves not emphasizing the participants’ association with various social groups, in this case, the religious groups. Instead interaction should be person based. The model originates from an idea that a primary consequence of categorization is depersonalization of the members of the outgroup (Brewer and Miller 1984:287). That is, the members of the outgroup will be treated as a part of one uniform social group without any internal differences. This is consistent with what is

shown in chapter 5.1, that my informants say they are experiencing being treated in a generalized manner. Person based interaction will, according to Brewer and Miller, lead to reduced stereotypical attitudes towards outgroup members, because one sees the person as an individual and not just as a part of a group (Brewer and Miller 1984:288). The way I interpret it, Bilal's wish for representing himself and Sara's plea for treating each other as people and not as a group, can be seen as a wish for decategorization.

However, Bilal also says that he, through interreligious dialogue, wants to change the image many people have of Shiite Muslims in Lebanon¹³, hence he presents himself as a representative of his own religious group. This duality highlights the fact that it is hard not to see society in groups. But even though Bilal presents himself as a Shiite, he also emphasizes the need to be the one deciding what being Shiite entails for him and in this way he does represent himself. The way the Lebanese society is organized can contribute to the difficulties when it comes to being able to truly decategorize. As written above, public workplaces in Lebanon are organized on the basis of the confessional system. This means that the proportion of Christians and Muslims in the workplace must be 50/50, thus one has to operate with religious affiliation in many areas of life. Bilal says that:

“(...) if there are certain job vacancies in a public place in Lebanon and they need 12 employees, six has to be Muslims and six has to be Christians regardless of the merits that you have, regardless of the qualifications, just based on your religious affiliation. This is very negative in Lebanon. (...) And if you want to be part of the parliament or a representative, the seat which you will occupy will be according to your religious affiliation, not only religious affiliation but the sect as well.” (Bilal)

Bilal and several other informants show reluctance towards this way of organizing the society. At the time of writing (spring 2011), protests against the sectarian system took place in several Lebanese cities. A couple of the slogans of the protestors were: “Game over sectarianism” and “Yes to equality, yes to a citizenry whole and complete.” (Sikimik 2011). As I interpret it, these demonstrations shed light on how problematic it is to be considered a representative of one's religious group in many areas of one's life. One of the demonstrators said: “We want equal opportunities for all people no matter what their religion” (Dhumieres

¹³ See section 5.1

2011). It also shows that a great part of the Lebanese people, especially youth, wants to distance themselves from the country's political and societal organization.

5.4 Creating a new "we"

Earlier in this chapter I have discussed aspects of categorization which are perceived as problematic by my informants. First: Automatically being categorized into a group (especially religious groups) in the Lebanese society. Second: Not being able to choose what the categories you are placed in entails. Instead, other people ascribe qualities to them which they cannot support, based on stereotypical perceptions of the appropriate category. In addition, it turns out that wanting to come in closer contact with members of other groups through interreligious activities is not necessarily applauded, neither from members of one's own religious group nor from others.

However, categories are dynamic and fluid social constructions. They are not permanently fixed (Brewer 2003; Abrams and Hogg 2001). The way I interpret my material, new categories are being created through dialogue within the interreligious NGOs. What I can see happening to a large extent is that the informants attribute positive qualities to the dialogue organization, participants and events. The participants in the dialogues are referred to as open-minded, courageous, not afraid of the other, as people who want to make a change in Lebanon, who care about the country and have respect for the people in it. Whether these characteristics can be said to be real qualities of the group can be questioned, but in any case they are used in the construction of unity among participants in the dialogue events. The participants constitute an in-group, a new "we".

For example, Shiite informant, Bilal, says for a dialogue "To be successful all the participants first shouldn't be, if you want, stubborn, stick to one idea. They have to be open-minded." Sunni informant, Isam, points out respect and openness as key characteristics describing what he calls the culture of dialogue: "I define it with few words like respect, also openness of course, but the big word for me is respect." Druze informant, Dina, describes the environment in the interreligious NGO as "peace" and "a circle of friends". Maronite informant, Maggie

addresses the need to have an inner drive to be a part of interreligious dialogue. It is a challenge and it is necessary to have courage to be a part of it:

“There is something inside you that pushes you to, you know, to go to this adventure, to talk to someone that’s not really like you but you have to do it. It is really a big challenge but you have to have the courage to do it. You have to have courage.” (Maggie).

The way I interpret it, all of these characteristics unite those who are active in interreligious dialogue, and instead of defining the religious group they belong to as the ingroup and other religious groups as outgroups, such as many people do, there is a tendency among my informants to define those who participate in interreligious dialogue as the ingroup and those who are not as the outgroup. In this way, “we”, according to my informants, are no longer primarily the religious groups, but those who participate in interreligious dialogue. This shows that categories are variable and depend on who is defining them.

Recategorization

The way my informants speak about their co-participants in interreligious dialogue may suggest that recategorization occurs. It is no longer only about the participants undercommunicating their different religious affiliations and focusing on interaction on an individual basis, as described above, but it is also about creating a new common group category, a new “we”. This new “we” creates new boundaries around a new group of people. The recategorization model proposes that prejudice can be reduced by decreasing the emphasis on the original group affiliation and in addition creating a common superordinate group identity (Gaertner et al. 2001:357).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the recategorization model proposes that ingroup bias¹⁴, which was previously directed towards one’s own group, will now be moved to apply to the new group, which includes the former outgroup members. This will lead to an improved relationship between those who entered the dialogue from different groups (Gaertner 2001:357). When boundaries are shifted, as described by the recategorization theory, a

¹⁴ Ingroup bias means that ingroup members are favored over outgroup members (Brewer 2003:130).

relevant question is if there is someone on the outside of this new and inclusive ingroup, and whether intergroup bias only will be directed at someone else instead? Who are *not* defined as members of the new “we”?

5.5 Dialogue between likeminded people?

What happens to the dialogue if only those who are open and do not have prejudices enter the dialogue events? A criticism directed towards the contact hypothesis is, as referred to in chapter 3, the causal sequence problem. Studies show that it is usually those who are already fairly open towards other people, and who do not have a strong stereotypical view of them, that choose to seek out situations involving contact with other groups. Prejudiced people may avoid contact. Consequently, this reduces the chances of generalizing the effects of contact, that is, to decrease prejudice in the society (Pettigrew 1998:69). This problem is reflected in my material as well. Many informants say that because they have grown up in an area with various groups, have come from a mixed family, or have gone to school with people from other religious groups, they counted themselves as relatively open-minded before they got involved in interreligious activities. Some mention this in particular as a reason why they wanted to join. Initially in this chapter, I described the Druze informant, Dina’s search for likeminded people, that is, open-minded people in Lebanon. She found what she was looking for when she joined organization B. This may indicate that the interreligious organizations attract persons who are open-minded and want to reach out towards the other. This is consistent with Pettigrew’s criticism.

My informants, in particular Maggie and Isam, are addressing the problem of recruiting participants from the part of the population that is not already open to the other. Maggie says she does not meet those who do not accept dialogue in the NGOs’ events. She asks the question of how to reach those who are responsible for creating conflict and war in Lebanon, and says it is necessary to interact with them. However, she says it is not easy for her to get in touch with them because they do not want contact with other groups.

“Sometimes I am asking myself what about the fanatic persons? What about the people that are not so nice? They just don’t accept dialogue. Those people I don’t really get to know them. I don’t meet people like this. They are few, still, but few. Really the next step I want to do is to interact with those

people, but they refuse to do that. How can we make them be more tolerant? People that are making war in Lebanon, not people like you and me, those are the problem. We can't just work with people that are like us, we have to interact with those people." (Maggie)

Isam is also referring to this issue: "In institutions like [the NGO] you don't get to see people which are extremists. Who are interested in this are people like me. (...) But the extremists you have to drag them there, you know."

Following Pettigrew's criticism, this means that it can be difficult for the NGOs and participants to achieve what they want to achieve. Sara, a Sunni member, says she cannot imagine that interreligious dialogue can have a significant effect on society as a whole. She elaborates by saying that:

"Achieve, I don't know how much. I really don't know how much they can achieve. Very unfortunately it is very tough. The problem is not in the people who are willing to go to these camps¹⁵, we are not the problem. The problem is with the person who is not willing to go there just because he knows that someone belonging to x- group is going to be there. Those are the dangerous ones. So it is good that we work on our selves, that we work to spread the word, but this is not the only action that should be taken. That's why I am afraid. The road is very bumpy, it is a mind field, literary a mind field." (Sara)

Many informants recognize that not being able to reach prejudiced and intolerant people is problematic in interreligious dialogue. The dialogue is ideally supposed to contribute to less stereotypical attitude and by only including people who are relatively open-minded, this is difficult to achieve. Hence, it is important to address this issue. However, none of the leaders of the NGOs mention the issue the participants are referring to. Are they not aware of the problem? Do they not want to admit to the problem or do they have a different view? This is very interesting, however, it is outside of the scope of this thesis.

5.6 The NGOs as retreats from labeling

In spite of the causal sequence problem discussed earlier, the work my informants do for the NGOs are still considered rewarding and important. Even though one seldom reaches the

¹⁵ This is a reference to interreligious summer camps, as described in section 1.3.

most narrow-minded people and is able to change their opinions through dialogue with them, dialogue is perceived as something positive by participants in the NGOs' events. To be in an environment where there are only people who are open towards other groups, and as Dina, a Druze informant, says "where religion is not a problem" can be seen as a reason to join activities like the ones described in the NGOs' activities. To be able to interact with likeminded people and escape the labels one gets in society in general is considered very positive by the informants.

"This environment is peace, you know, (...) when all day long you have heard stories about this, who killed this one and people who are judging the others, and I don't know what, and Hariri this, and Jumblatt... I feel the need when I come to [the name of NGO]... It is like a circle of friends. It is not only an organization." (Dina).

Their engagement in interreligious dialogue does not only concern the work they are doing, the changes they want to achieve in Lebanon, and the contact they have with people different from themselves, *it also concerns contact with people similar to themselves*. This sentiment is articulated very clearly by Sunni informant, Muhammad: "It was very interesting to meet people, not only from a different religious point of view, but people who will share with you the willing[ness] to be open to others." For some, these NGOs become the place where the new "we" can unfold and express itself; it becomes a retreat from the labeling they experience in the rest of the society.

"A mini-society where religion is not a problem" (Dina)

When Dina explains the importance of interreligious dialogue she says that the most important thing is to make youth live in a "mini-society where religion is not a problem." The "mini-society" refers to the dialogue events, and the way I understand her, she is talking about a bounded place, a mini-version of society at large, but still not an exact replica. In this version religion is not a problem. She elaborates by saying that it is important to see that: "community and religion doesn't have to come between us." Other informants also add characteristics to their version of this "mini-society" or dialogue events. Sara, for example, says that at the summer camp she attended held by one of the NGOs I have focused on, there was room for curiosity. There was room for asking each other about everything they were wondering about, be it religion, culture, etc. Something which was supported by Bilal: "(...)

we agreed that there will be no taboos” (Bilal). There was room for and time to get properly acquainted and to build friendships. Bilal says that everything they did in the interreligious summer camp, they did to get closer together as a group. All the exercises, workshops, hours spent together had the aim of “cementing the relationship” between the members of the group. Maggie adds that there was a “family atmosphere” and Dina describes it as a “circle of friends”.

As I have discussed in chapter 3, places are dynamic structures. Their meaning is constructed and reconstructed through meetings between people (Massey 1995). Meetings between different people create different meanings. My informants describe the meetings with words like peace, curiosity and family atmosphere, because it is these individuals in particular who meet. As I have argued above, it is often people who are already open-minded that participate in dialogues. As a consequence, the place or community created through the dialogue meeting is considered an open, peaceful and safe place for my informants. Dialogue organizations can be seen as retreats from the categorization in the society at large, because people who are not open-minded do not participate. According to relational space theories, in a meeting where "fanatic persons" (Maggie) and "extremist" (Isam) participate it would cause the place to have a very different meaning.

A double headed approach to the NGOs

My material shows a double headed approach to the NGOs’ interreligious events. On one hand, the informants recognize the problem with causal sequence, and see it as a problem that the NGOs do not reach people who are closed-minded and prejudiced. They believe that it is more difficult to create any real changes in the society if these people are not included. On the other hand, the fact that one can meet like-minded people is an opportunity to escape labeling. Consequently, my material indicates that the interreligious activities arranged by the four NGOs have a greater effect on a personal level than on a societal level.

5.7 Final remarks

My informants express sentiments of being automatically placed into social groups in the Lebanese society. Many feel they are being attributed opinions, actions and characteristics

that are stereotypical and incorrect. The two main social groups which are referred to are based on religious and political affiliation. Very often, these two are intertwined. Many informants say they are tired of defending themselves against accusations based on group affiliation. In addition to being assigned religious and political opinions in the society as general, the informants' involvement in interreligious dialogue and their reaching out to other groups cause many people outside of these NGOs to react with skepticism.

In this context, some informants express a strong wish to be the one deciding which social groups they belong to and what they entail, to be representing oneself, as Bilal says. They want to be treated as individuals and not as a part of uniform groups. Illuminated by Brewer and Miller's (1984) decategorization model, a shift towards this way of interacting with other people can lead to a more diverse and nuanced approach to members of other groups.

On the other hand, recategorization (Geartner et al. 2001) appears to be taking place among the participants in the dialogue organizations. Persons involved in interreligious dialogue are defined as a new inclusive category, containing both previous ingroup and outgroup members. A new "we" is created, containing people who are described as open-minded and peace loving, who want to change the Lebanese society to what they think is a better one. This may be because only people who are already open-minded attend the dialogue activities, a problem which is addressed by Pettigrew (1998) in what he calls the causal sequence problem. The causal sequence problem states that situations involving interaction between people from different social groups will most likely not attract prejudiced people. It will inevitably influence the dialogue events if only people who are already open-minded participate. This is recognized by the participants (however, apparently not by the leaders of the NGOs), who have a two headed approach to the topic. They see it as a problem that the "extremists" cannot be reached, and the effects of the dialogue activities are questioned as a result of this. At the same time it is seen as positive because without prejudiced people at the NGOs events, the participants get to meet like-minded people. Hence their engagement in interreligious dialogue does not only concern the work they are doing, the changes they want to achieve for Lebanon, and the contact they have with people different from themselves, it also concerns contact with people *similar* to themselves.

The shared spaces created by the NGOs become retreats from the categorization experienced in the Lebanese society because they attract open-minded people. The interreligious events can be seen as a place where the new “we” can unfold and flourish. This is something that is especially visible in the encounter between the dialogical and the political sphere, which will be further discussed in chapter 6.

6 Interreligious dialogue and politics in Lebanon

I concluded the previous chapter arguing that by engaging in dialogue, my informants are creating a new and inclusive category which covers all of the individuals involved in interreligious activities. This process can be considered a recategorization process (Geartner et al. 2001). However, there are people, characteristics and actions which are not included in this new, “inclusive” category. During my interviews, I became aware of the manner in which my informants, especially the participants, were talking about politics, politicians, friends who are politically active and their own relation to politics. Some questions on political topics were included in my interview guide, but several times it was the informants themselves who addressed the topic unsolicited. This indicates that politics is an important factor to address in relation to interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. As described in chapter 1, the Lebanese political system is characterized by a strong connection between the political and the religious spheres. The confessional system contributes to this overlapping and even though all of the political parties include people with different religious affiliations, one can notice a great predominance of one religious belonging in each of the different parties, implying that political support and religious affiliation are interconnected. The polarization in the political landscape in the country is also becoming more and more visible after the assassination of Rafik Hariri, with the March 8 alliance on one side and the March 14 alliance on the other. This is described in more detail in the introductory chapter. There is reason to assume that since the religious and the political spheres are intersecting, the political context influences the relations between the religious communities in a substantial manner.

In this chapter I discuss the relation between the dialogical and the political spheres in Lebanon, based on my informants’ understanding of the situation. I address in what way the organizations I have focused on and their leaders relate to politicians and politics in Lebanon. Then, I move on to the participants and examine their views on the political sphere. Is this a sphere that can be combined with the dialogical sphere they are part of? Furthermore, I discuss how the Lebanese voters are characterized, and the distinction drawn by my informants, between those inside and those outside the party political sphere. Last, I use Leftwich’s (2004a/b) division of politics into arena and process to discuss my informants’ approach to dialogue. Is it possible to regard interreligious dialogue as a political activity?

6.1 The NGOs, the leaders and the political sphere

I begin by presenting the different approaches the leaders and their NGOs have towards politics and politicians in Lebanon. What my material shows is that they relate to the political sphere in various degrees. Youssef, the Maronite leader for organization C, says for instance that they have quite a lot to do with politicians because of projects that require politicians to be present. One example is a project which aims at unifying the Lebanese people by increasing the understanding of political elements such as the Ta'if Agreement¹⁶. However, he is still critical towards politicians in general because he thinks they often misuse religion in their own interest:

“But the most serious problem is actually in politics misusing religion, and I think we have been witnessing in the last few years that politicians are making use of religion for their own interest. And that is why there are many incidents where we have trouble, not because of religions but because of politics that misuse the religion in it. So religion basically is good, politics is not good in misusing it for its own interests in politics” (Youssef).

Similar to Youssef, George, the leader of organization B, states that: “(...) it is not the religion that is the problem. It is the abuse of religion and the misuse of religion.” However, the difference between religion and politics is clearer for Youssef than for George because for him the religion in itself represents something which is “basically good”, while politics is “not good”. As I understand it, political factors are considered more conflictual than religious factors. Ali, the Shiite leader for organization D, uses words with strong negative connotations when speaking of politics and politicians. “Liars” and “hypocrites” are a couple of them.

“Our politicians are liars. [In] meetings they are embracing each other but when they come out they curse at each other so we, the base, will be happy that we are cursing at the other guy, when it is a bunch of political bogus. Especially in this kind of atmosphere, having a dialogue is not easy.” (Ali).

¹⁶ See chapter 1.3 for further explanation.

Ali stresses that if politicians were to attend their events it should be as individuals and not by the virtue of their political involvement. This is backed up by Joe, a Christian leader, when he says that dialogue “is not a program with a political agenda” and although interreligious dialogue sometimes may evolve around political themes “it is not a means to do politics” (Joe). The way I interpret it, Joe’s quotes show that he wants to distance his dialogue initiatives from the politicians and the politically based activities. Joe elaborates by saying that the politicians in Lebanon are working in a completely opposite direction than where he wants to go through interreligious dialogue. He makes a distinction between the sphere he considers himself and the NGO he works in to be a part of, and what he calls the “political sphere”. While he wants to create unity among people and reduce the fear of others, he says that he sees the political sphere in the completely opposite way:

“I think the current political situation in the country is based on the idea... and the current politicians, the political power in the country are currently based on the idea of the fear of others. If you do a small analysis of the political discourse you will see directly that each one is trying to gain, or to maintain in power because he is telling his own people that the other is a threat for you, so I will protect you. All the political discourses are based on this idea”.

Joe says that the politicians are actively working against reconciliation between the different groups because if the groups are reconciled it will reduce the political parties’ support among the voters. It is something that hampers his work because, as he puts it: "the atmosphere is very negative", making it difficult to hold a dialogue. He says that Lebanese people are very political, and it is difficult for the participants in the dialogue projects to deal with two such different discourses at the same time, "the political one based on fear, and our discourse based on trust". Here, the distance between the two spheres is clear, as well as the “us-them” dichotomy. He clearly distinguishes between “the political one” as opposed to “our discourse.” The leaders distinctly separate what they do from what the politicians do.

Misuse of religion

The fear of politicians misusing religion is a recurring sentiment among the leaders. Even Youssef, the leader of the organization that recognizes the need for politicians to be involved in certain events is skeptical:

“There was a time when we felt in our daily work that we need to save God...interfaith dialogue from being misused by politicians. And this is not easy sometimes, especially in a context like the Lebanese one. But yes, true interfaith dialogue is a dialogue that can put things on the right track and we have appealed many times by the way, for politicians to not use religion as a fuel in their political strife”
(Youssef)

Two of the leaders say that if politicians are to participate, it cannot be as politicians but rather as private persons. They justify this by saying that politicians always have agendas. A division has been created between the ingroup (the people active in interreligious dialogue) who want to create unity among the Lebanese people, and the outgroup (the politicians) who represent fear of the others and who use that fear to keep people apart. However, the outgroup members can become a part of the dialogue events, and consequently a part of the ingroup, but only if they renounce their political belonging and become recategorized into the ingroup.

This is a different recategorization than Geartner’s et al. (2001) model which I discussed in chapter 5. In this situation there is not a new, inclusive ingroup which is created. Instead, the outgroup members receive an invitation to join the present ingroup under certain conditions. If the politicians want to join, they have to renounce their political categorization at the dialogue meetings. According to the informants, these are two spheres that cannot intersect.

However, Abu-Nimer et al. (2007) write that politics is important to address in an interreligious dialogue.

“To continuously ask participants about religion and completely ignore their own socio-political realities seems counterproductive in terms of promoting political changes to address violence and achieve justice.” (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007:21).

This is also seen as a problem concerning the contact hypothesis. As written in chapter 3, the contact hypothesis does not sufficiently take into account institutional discrimination. It is also stated that it is necessary to change the system as well as encourage intergroup contact to reduce prejudice. It is not enough to do only one (Pettigrew 1986:172). According to both

Abu-Nimer et al. and Pettigrew, under-communicating the influence of politics on the situation in Lebanon can hinder positive effects of interreligious work. As I understand it, there is not so much attention among the NGOs given to ensure that participants from different political parties attend the interreligious events and since the dialogue I have focused on is *interreligious*, this is perhaps not surprising. However, when seen in relation to the political polarity in the Lebanese society (with two alliances including Christians, Muslims and Druze on both sides), not taking political affiliation into account may result in a dialogue between members of only one of the political alliances, hence, increasing the difficulty of changing the underlying system. Youssef is the only leader who addresses this in a specific manner:

“We always try not to have one color in our meetings. It is not healthy at all. So in most gatherings we will have people from both [political] parties¹⁷, and sometimes in certain events [it] will lead to some hot discussions. But I think this is a healthy way and in fact when we bring people to our meetings, we need to bring people from both parties and not only from one. (...) we don't want to see them walk in parallel but that they get together and interact with each other” (Youssef)

This idea is in line with the contact hypothesis discussed in chapter 3, suggesting that contact lead to something positive.

6.2 The participants and the political sphere

The participants in the interreligious activities describe politics and politicians in manners similar to the leaders, as discussed above. In the following I have highlighted some of the most common characteristics used among the participants by addressing how they speak of the lack of social change in Lebanon, and the use of religion as a mobilizing factor, both in a negative and a positive manner.

Lack of change

I recognize a high level of frustration among my informants due to lack of political results and change in Lebanon. Antoine shares his frustration by saying that:

¹⁷ Referring to the March 8th alliance and the March 14th alliance

“We don’t have politics in Lebanon. I am sorry to say (...) I give a person one chance and sometimes I give them two chances but these people we give them lots of chances, many chances and they didn’t change anything, even they didn’t change themselves”.

I connect what Antoine says to the politicians currently in position. A large part of Lebanon’s political leaders have been in their positions for many, many years. For example the current Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri¹⁸, has been in his position since October 1992, that is, almost 20 years (Yazbeck 2009). Also among the other parties the turnaround time is long for the leading positions. Several of the people in charge during the civil war are still involved in governing the country today. As I understand it, this can be seen in connection to the absence of trials for war crimes committed by the militia leaders during the civil war (Volk 2008) as I have described in the introductory chapter. Maybe this is the reason why Sara calls the political leaders dictators: “(...) the...I wouldn’t call them leaders, the... dictators that we have, we have dictators for each party.” Dictators are known for autocracy and for not stepping down willingly, which, in the way I interpret it, is the comparison Sara has made here. The politicians are called other things as well, mainly liars and hypocrites, which is justified by saying that the politicians say one thing and do another. This is a recurring statement among both the leaders and the participants. Whether the politicians are working for the country and its people or just their own gain is being questioned for example by Dina, a Druze informant.

“Let’s not talk about politics in Lebanon, because it is bullshit, sorry. I mean, who are we working for as politicians? I don’t think it is the people. Even though we are working for them, we are not really working for them. Some parties actually believe that they are defending Christians, instead of saying let’s do something so that these Christians won’t kill anymore Muslims and get killed. Politics I cannot talk about.” (Dina)

The way I interpret the participants, they believe that the politicians do not want to better the relationship between the religious communities in the country. Again, one can notice similarities between the leaders and the participants. They do not only consider the politicians unable to make a change, but also think that they are literally working against reconciliation because they fear that it will reduce their follower’s dependence towards them. “They are

¹⁸ Nabih Berri is the Shiite Muslim leader of the political party Amal.

the ones who benefit from the people being so divided. Because it is this division that is keeping them alive, it is this division that is keeping them in their own seats.” (Sara).

Religion as a mobilizing factor

As argued above, my informants believe that for the politicians to stay in their positions, they are actively using religious affiliation as a mobilizing factor to reach out to their own religious communities. As Rula, a Druze informant, say: “you didn’t see a political man with no religion”. This is closely related to the misuse of religion, as I have discussed above. Ahmad says that religious affiliation is connected to strong emotions and because of this it is easy for the politicians to misuse religion in order to create divided “camps”:

“I think that religion has to do with something which is extremely basic inside us. You cannot do without. Even if you think that you are not religious then non-religion is your religion. So this is a very strong type of feeling. And with such strong emotions people tend to clash if there are certain misunderstandings or whatever, so...and it is very easy to organize people into camps based on such very strong emotions, right? So it can be used, it can be easily used and those who use it are responsible, the politicians who are interested usually in money, power, authority or whatever.” (Ahmad)

Ahmad describes the politicians as people who are interested in power and money. The way I understand it, these may be considered hidden agendas sought to be achieved through the misuse of religion. Bilal also refers to hidden agendas when he speaks of the “national dialogue”¹⁹ currently being held among the politicians.

“But I don’t know, I think the failure of many of these dialogues is due to a hidden agenda, the hidden agendas the politicians have. I think this is the reason. All though deep inside they might be convinced of the efficiency of these dialogues but the hidden agendas that they have leads to the failure. They have hidden agendas, all of them.” (Bilal)

All the different topics addressed in this section can be seen in contrast to what the informants say they themselves are working towards through interreligious dialogue. As described in chapter 4, creating unity is an important goal for the NGOs. As I see it, the politicians are

¹⁹ The National Dialogue is a dialogue between the political leaders in Lebanon established in 2006 as a place to discuss matters of national importance (Schenker 2006).

believed to create the complete opposite by using religion as a mobilizing factor to pit the communities against each other. They are also accused of protecting their own selfish needs and having hidden agendas in order to remain in position. According to the informants, these are factors which cannot be combined with interreligious dialogue.

Detachment

In this paragraph, I elaborate on the criticism directed at the politicians by my informants. The elements they criticize connected to the politicians are the same they say they want to do something about through interreligious dialogue. First, they point out the lack of change that they see in the society. As I have discussed in chapter 4, the informants say that they want to help improve the Lebanese society through their engagement in the various interreligious NGOs. Even if they believe that this is a difficult goal to reach, they work towards it. This stands in stark contrast to the way they present the politicians in the country. Not only are they accused of being behind the conflict-filled situation in the country, they are also accused of not wanting to do something to improve the situation. Also, the informants say that they feel that politicians are misusing religion. They use it as a mobilization to achieve their own goals (as Ahmad puts it, "money, authority or whatever"). This is described as a hidden agenda that "all of them" (Bilal) have. According to my informants, interreligious dialogue involves showing respect. Respect for members of other religious communities and respect for the different religions. The way I understand it, to misuse religion for one's own gain is contrasting with this respect. The way my informants describe politicians show, as I understand it, a strong detachment and separation from the party political sphere and it shows a clear "us-them" dichotomy. As I interpret it, the politicians are categorized by the informants as an outgroup, meaning that they are not considered a part of the group that the informants themselves belong to (Brewer 2003:131). If seen in light of Richard Jenkins' (2008) theories of social identity referred to in section 3.2, the informants statements concerning politics may indicate that, by distancing themselves from the political sphere and defining it as something they are not part of (an outgroup), they create their own group identity. "Defining 'us' involves defining a range of 'thems' as well" (Jenkins 2008:102).

Politics as unity

However, the politicians are not solely seen as a source of conflict. Some of the informants who questioned the motives and agendas of the politicians earlier in this chapter also speak positively about politicians. They even mention them specifically as a positive factor in creating a better relationship between the religious groups. This shows indecisiveness in their answers. Ahmad and Bilal, two Shiite Muslim informants, believe that when General Michel Aoun, leader of the Christian political party Free Patriotic Movement, reached out a hand to the Shiite community represented by Hizbullah and Amal after the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri in 2005, it was important for the relationship between Shiite Muslims and Christians²⁰. Ahmad starts by explaining that he at one point stopped believing that interreligious dialogue could have any effects because of the confessional divisions in the Lebanese society. As he says:

"(...) as soon as you have sectarian problems everyone will go to their trenches, dig and forget that they ever knew, perhaps I will do so, I hope not. I don't think that I will, but it is shameful that many figures that always talk about dialogue and such trends forget about everything." (Ahmad)

As a contrast, he mentions General Aoun's initiative in very positive terms as a factor that changed his view. "People usually follow the politicians in a negative way always, but this time they were following politicians in a beautiful way, and this brings out what is nice in them, what is beautiful" (Ahmad). Bilal explains that after the March 8th alliance was made, it became more common to travel to different places in the country, places associated with other religious groups than oneself: "the memorandum of agreement which took place between Hizbullah and At-tayyar²¹ helped a lot."

Here, the use of religion to mobilize is seen as something positive, since it may contribute to a better relationship between Shiite Muslims and Christians. Both Ahmad and Bilal are referring to politicians belonging to the March 8 alliance, and the relationship between Shiite Muslims and Christians in Lebanon. However, there is an idea that what happened in 2005 also changed something in the attitudes of people belonging to the March 14 alliance, a shift

²⁰ That is, the Christian part of the population supporting The Free Patriotic Movement.

²¹ At-tayyar equals The Free Patriotic Movement (*At-Tayyar Al-Watani Al-Hor*) led by General Aoun.

towards accepting the other, at least the other within the respective political alliances. Antoine, a Maronite informant, talks about an improvement in the relationship between mainly the Sunni and the Christian communities because of politicians' willingness to align themselves with other political parties across religious boundaries:

“(…) it was maybe like in the whole country the idea about 14[th of] March 2005, we should live together as Christians and Muslims, and it was maybe the starting point to really work on this issue. (…) we should live together as Christians or as Muslims. It was a very general idea, it was accepted just because of a political party accepted other political parties which is from different religions.” (Antoine)

However, these political alliances are strategic and one can assume not made solely in the purpose of establishing a dialogue between the religious groups. One might also ask how fruitful this is, when the most explosive and flammable relationship in Lebanon today is not the one between Christians and Muslims per say. But rather, because of the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, the violent conflict in 2008 and the controversy concerning Hizbullah's arms, between the political alliances of March 8 and March 14, and Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims in particular (Blanford 2006:210-211).

6.3 The need for critical thinking

It is not only the politicians that are characterized negatively by my informants. The voters as well are described in different terms than the people involved in interreligious dialogue. I have noticed consistently little faith among my informants in the general population's ability to make autonomous, informed decisions on the political arena, especially if they are politically active. Maggie, a Maronite informant, says:

“I think that Lebanese people don't really know where the truth is. I mean, they just listen to their leaders and don't really have a critical spirit. I feel that this is zero. Once you have this critical spirit, once you see things from other lens[es], then you can criticize you leader or the political party that you belong to.” (Maggie)

Maggie portrays it as if “Lebanese people” are without the ability of critical thinking, and that they blindly follow what their political leaders say. She elaborates by saying that the activists

in the political parties have more difficulties with accepting others because, as she says: “they are really too much in[to] the ideas and the ideology of the political party. They just can’t see outside the boxes.” This view is also noticeable when Sara, a Sunni informant, describes intolerant people as followers. “If I was an intolerant person I would look at my leader, he would be my idol; he would be the human representation of perfect. I would look at them and yes, they are cursing, I should curse too.” (Sara). This view is also consistent with what Shiite informant, Bilal, is saying:

“So the problem is that many Lebanese youth are followers, ok? If their leaders have done so, then it is the correct decision. We adopt blindly what they have accomplished. This is a problem that we have in Lebanon.” (Bilal)

It is not only the participants that have a focus on the necessity of critical thinking. Joe explains that: “The main idea behind the foundation of [organization A] is to try to bring together studies, I mean critical thinking, the studies, objective reflections, and solidarity.” He gives a practical example from their work with high school students in different areas of Lebanon. As a step in their program they focus on the relationship between religion and society in the country and critical thinking as an important part of this.

“The third axe or theme is the relation between religion and society. It is a kind of analysis of the Lebanese war and the implication of religion, religious discourse or religious communities in the war or the conflict. To have a kind of critical thinking about some ideas that they received maybe from their parents or from their societies, or to have a kind of critical analysis of the memory they carry with them, especially about the last civil war in Lebanon.”(Joe)

Joe’s statement shows his NGO’s approach to the topic of the civil war. He points out the impact made on the students by their surroundings, their parents and the society. And he emphasizes the importance of being critical towards the ideas they receive and explicitly mentions teaching the students how to be critical, as a focal point in their work. This can be seen in relation to Crag Larkin’s article *Beyond the War? The Lebanese Postmemory Experience* (2010). He uses Marianne Hirsch’s concept of *postmemory* to explain how young Lebanese people relate to the civil war. He defines it as: “a residual type of memory, a recollection of an event not personally experienced but socially felt, a traumatic rupture that

indelibly scars a nation, religious group, community or family” (Larkin 2010:618-619). This means that people who have not experienced the war themselves, like some of the young adults I have interviewed, still relate to it in a significant way through stories passed on by parents and others in the society where they live, and these stories or postmemories influence their opinions towards other groups in the country. These stories are highly subjective, and necessary to treat in a critical manner.

Dina, a Druze informant, also draws a picture of exactly this problematic issue when she tells a story about students’ reactions to a period of political tension in 2007:

“I told you my parents were really active politically, but we never had pictures of politicians and words of politicians in our house. This is very important. Do you know that in, I think it was in 2007 when the tension was really important, we had problems in schools between kids who are only 13. I know from the school I was teaching in, they sent a letter to the parents saying please, no news for the kids, no politics around the kids. We need to rethink it. My cousin is three years old, he knows how to say the cheering words for Jumblatt²². If we don’t change this...the youth is a force that you need to use and to guide. Civil society makes a road, but this is not enough to teach the faculty, so actually I think that we are now teaching families of the future, so it is not going to happen before one generation. This generation thought that they would educate their children, but this generation I think it is a bit late. Maybe I am a bit pessimistic but we will see.” (Dina).

Dina is witnessing what she sees as a disturbing development where young people and children are taught to be a part of, and uphold, the political unrest in the country, through influence from family, society and media. She considers the adults to be a “lost cause”, while the children have not yet been sufficiently socialized into this mentality that they cannot be altered. Her hope is that if one learns to think critically about the conflict, it will be possible to educate tomorrow's generation of parents.

In my interpretation, the informants refer to people involved in politics in a relatively generalized manner. As I have pointed out in Chapter 5, many informants say they are tired of being labeled as part of a group. However, those who are politically active are described by many of the same informants requesting to be treated as an individual, as a relatively homogeneous mass. Why? Earlier, I have argued that politicians are categorized as an

²² Walid Jumblatt is the Druze political leader of the Progressive Socialist Party.

outgroup by my informants. Evaldsson, among others, states that outgroups are generally considered by the ingroup to be more homogeneous than the ingroup itself (Evaldsson 2007:65). The findings in my material are consistent with this view.

Considering the recategorization I argued for in Chapter 5, Evaldsson writes that: “nothing has been improved if recategorization merely produces a new outgroup and redirects negative stereotypes elsewhere” (Evaldsson 2007:82). With the discussion in this chapter in mind, the material on which this chapter is based, indicate that the new inclusive category the participants have created perhaps has redirected stereotypical attitudes towards the political sphere seen as a new outgroup. This shows that to build community and fellowship between people where no one is on the outside, is a big challenge. However, there are some signs of a different view as well, when a few informants point out that the relationships between people from different religious communities within the respective political alliances, March 8 and March 14, have improved because of the politicians’ decision to work together.

“I refuse to be a follower” (Bilal)

According to my interpretation, a fear exists among many working in the interreligious field that young people will make their decisions based on old generalizations and stereotypes passed on from their parents and others, without considering other “objective” facts. These decisions might in turn cause or prolong instability in the country, hence making this a problem important to address and try to change through interreligious dialogue. In addition, my informants are expressing a wish to objectively choose their own political opinions.

“(…) no one believes that you are not politically active, no one believes that you don’t belong to a certain political party. But in fact I refuse to be a part of a political party and whenever I say something they would say: “[If] Bilal is saying that then Hizbullah is saying that.” Then I will never be representing myself. I like to represent myself and objectively judge all the parties in Lebanon. If I am an insider I will not have any right to criticize anyone, I will have to be a follower. I refuse to be a follower.” (Bilal).

An argument I found in my material against being involved in party politics in Lebanon, is as Shiite informant Bilal is saying; the need to represent oneself. A challenge in Lebanon is, as I discussed in chapter 5, automatically being labeled as part of a religious group and in turn as a

supporter of a certain political party. For Bilal, to be on the inside of a political party affects the possibility to be critical towards the party you are a member of. He wants to be the one who decides what he shall be a part of. Looking at what Bilal is saying, it appears that he believes that if one is an insider, one must be loyal to the party in one and all; one must be a "follower" without the ability of critical thinking, as discussed above.

For Sunni informant, Isam, like for Bilal, being able to have his own political opinion it is important. Isam elaborates by saying that it is essential for him not to be against any of the parties, because he will then be "out-casted" by their members. Isam says he was politically active before, but that it changed when he found the political party to be using him.

“(…) when I saw what they are doing, all the parties, I got out and I thought that they are using me. So now I have a political opinion that’s not with anyone, but it is not against anyone. Because if you are against you will be out casted, of course, so I try not to be against anyone. I try to be against everyone, bits and pieces you know. I am with you all, but I am against this in you, this in you, this in you, to make the people feel that they all have something in common” (Isam).

If Isam's statements are seen in light of his involvement in interreligious dialogue, I interpret it as if he wants to use his political opinion to show that the members of the various parties actually have something in common. It appears that he wants to create unity by focusing on similarities among the political parties, which can be compared to the "unity dialogue", described in chapter 4.3. He elaborates by saying that it is important for him to be accepted by everyone, but at the same time, he does not “want to be neutral.” Isam therefore says that he has chosen a human rights approach to his political beliefs. “Honestly I want to be accepted by everyone, and I don’t want to be neutral at the same time. So at the case of human rights for example, or anything that deals with civil rights, I am present.” (Isam). Isam’s statements indicate that because of the negative connotations politics in Lebanon has for him, he chooses human rights and dialogue as an alternative way to still participate in the society.

An important topic for many is that religious affiliation should not determine which political party one supports. Muhammad says that if one manages to create a society where it is okay for him as Sunni Muslim to choose to join Hizbullah, then “This is true democracy, this is

true politics.” Rula also describes this issue as a problem and gives a concrete proposal for change in Lebanon, namely to start voting for people and parties who do not belong to one’s own religious group:

“Last year I voted for a party that is not in my religion. And everybody has to do this. People say they want to, but in fact they don’t, because this is our wrong culture: If I am *Muwahhida*²³ I have to vote for a *Muwahhidun* man, if I am Muslim I have to vote for a Muslim man.” (Rula)

6.4 Dialogue and party political involvement – An impossible combination?

“I mean, maybe in my case because I don’t belong to political parties it is easier for me to have [a] dialogue. I have to tell you this honestly, that will help you in your research. It is really... I have to be realistic and honest and clear about this thing: The more you are out of politics, the more you can see things from a different lens and the more you can be open. Maybe if I was in *Kateab* or *Aounist* or *Geagea*²⁴, you know those political parties in Lebanon, maybe I wouldn’t be sitting here today and telling you about my experience in the peace building field, in conflict transformation and interfaith dialogue” (Maggie).

Maggie emphasizes the importance of seeing the situation in Lebanon from different angles and stresses that with a close involvement in a political party the ability to do so is hampered. She also indicates that if she had been involved in one of the political parties she would probably not have been involved in “the peace building field, in conflict transformation and interfaith dialogue”. This is one exemplification of the idea that political engagement and dialogue is hard to combine in Lebanon. In chapter 4, I extracted the essence of what my informants think interreligious dialogue is about. When it comes to personal qualities which are necessary to possess in a dialogue, the informants listed honesty and humility as two of the most important ones²⁵. When it comes to politicians, words like liars, hypocrites, hidden agenda and desire for power characterize their descriptions. Judging by these descriptions, from the perspectives of my informants, the dialogical and the political fields are at present

²³ *Al-Muwahhidun* is an Arabic name for Druze, meaning “monotheists”, and *Muwahhida* is the female version of it.

²⁴ *Kateab* is an abbreviation for *Katai’b Kateab*, the Arabic name for the Phalangist Party. *Aounist* refers to Michel Aoun’s Party Free Patriotic Movement. *Geagea* refers to Samir Geagea, the leader of The Lebanese Forces. All of which are mainly Christian political parties in Lebanon.

²⁵ See section 4.1

not combinable. One example is according to Muhammad, the “element of fear” always present at universities in Lebanon. As a result of politics interfering, the communication among students from different religious communities cannot really be labeled as dialogue. “Because all the communication is based on politics, so we can’t really label it as dialogue, as true dialogue. It is based on assumptions, based on maybe mistaken thoughts and assumptions about the other” (Muhammad). Politics is considered full of assumption and mistaken thoughts.

Another issue which is important for some of the informants is to be perceived as objective individuals by members of the different religious communities participating in interreligious dialogue. One may ask if it is at all possible to be objective, but all the same this is the word used by for example the Sunni informant Isam, when he describes how he feels about combining interreligious dialogue and politics.

“(…) but to deal with interfaith dialogue and have a political party this is hard, I don’t believe that you can be as objective as you can be, you will always be somehow subjective. As a person who believes in change I want to break every such activity. This is a key issue. You can be with a party... I don’t know... you can be with a party, no, I don’t know, because you don’t have the culture of dialogue in a party.” (Isam)

The cited quote shows indecisiveness in Isam’s answer. First, he says that one can be connected to a political party, then, however, he withdraws the answer and says that “you don’t have the culture of dialogue in a party.” As discussed in section 4.1, a “culture of dialogue” is regarded as an essential part of interreligious dialogue. The fact that Isam clearly says that politics do not hold a culture of dialogue, tells me that he separates the two. He elaborates further by saying that if he was a part of a political party (he mentions the Future Movement specifically) it would have been bound to influence his approach to the Shiite community. First, as he says, he would have prejudgments towards Shiites since the Future Movement has prejudgments towards them. Secondly, it would make his dialogical work more difficult because: “If some Shiite community knows about me having political side with the Future Movement they will outcast me very easily” (Isam). Isam wishes to break the chain between religion and politics in Lebanon. “We want to break this... like using politics...

using religion in politics. So politics and religion in Lebanon are wearing the same boots. It is really difficult to spread them apart.” (Isam)

This perception is shared by Muhammad. He says that one is perceived by others in a different way if one is not politically active. It is easier for him to be friends with people from different religious communities because he does not have any political affiliation. He thinks he is considered safer in other people’s eyes because of it:

“I always used to have friends from different religions, from different political views and I still have a lot. Because I have this thing - diplomacy, and they know that I am not in a political party. I do human rights so I think that they have this kind of safety. I am Sunnite, I am not the bad one or the good one, or vice versa.” (Muhammad)

This can be compared to what Sara, another Sunni informant, says. She positioned one of the interreligious events she had attended over the other because of the approach used in the event: “Since the first night we knew we are coming here to discuss religion, where in the [other] workshop we were there to discuss the conflict. That made a lot of difference.” (Sara). For Sara, religion is a safer approach to the tense situation in the country than to address the conflict directly.

An orientation away from politics?

Concerning the organizations and their leaders, it may seem like an orientation away from the political sphere is a desirable development, at least for one of the organizations. Joe, the Maronite leader for organization A, speaks about his experience and emphasizes the change in young people who have participated over a longer period of time in their dialogue initiatives. He says that to be in the middle of two very different discourses, like the political and the dialogical one, is hard for them as an organization but also for the participants in their activities. However, despite of this, he can see a growing distance between the political discourse and the volunteers in the NGO:

“And we are noticing this in fact and it is amazing when we see among our volunteers how they are moving on the political level and political thought, and they are becoming capable of cross

communitarian solidarity even in the time of crisis I mean, and they are not only raised on the idea that I am Sunni so I am against Shiites and I am Christian I am against Muslim. We are really noticing that on a mid-term and long term [level], we can notice a kind of change, a real change in the positions of these people, but *this change is a kind of distance also with the political discourse.*“ (Joe).

Based on how my informants in the three NGOs describe the political scene in Lebanon, it seems clear that they consider it to be very much about measures that cannot easily be defended within the values of interreligious dialogue. The informants distance themselves from the political sphere on a moral basis by emphasizing honesty and humility, and politicians and others engaged in politics are not perceived as capable of engaging in both the political and the dialogical sphere. All of my informants claim they are not politically active, or more specifically, they do not follow one particular political party. They say a political opinion is acceptable to have, but to follow a political party in every way is problematic. The political and dialogical spheres are seen by many as two spheres that are impossible to combine, and that it is easier to participate in a dialogue if you are not politically active. I interpret the expressed opinions of my informants about politics, politicians and people who are politically active, to mean that they actively distance themselves from all of this. What is included in the political sphere is excluded from the interreligious community the informants are a part of. Politics are defined as something with completely different goals and prospects. It is something that is outside the dynamic limits surrounding "the space in between" (Leirvik 2006) and outside of the new "we" created among the participants in the interreligious activities, as discussed in chapter 5.

However, the informants are still caught in the same social system because of the close connection the religious sphere and the political sphere have in Lebanon. They have no concrete suggestions as to how interreligious dialogue can contribute to a solution to a political conflict. For example, as addressed in section 6.2, the political affiliation is only taken into account by one of the organizations when selecting the participants in the interreligious events, which may lead to a dialogue between members of only one of the political alliances²⁶.

²⁶ The Shiite dominated March 8 or the Sunni dominated March 14.

6.5 Interreligious dialogue as political activity

Almost all my informants speak about politics in the Lebanese context as something negative. Most of them, the way I interpret their statements, want to distance themselves from the party political sphere by saying that they are not politically active. Although they may have a political opinion, they emphasize that it cannot be put into one political category and they explain that they choose some things from one party and other things from other parties. It is important for them to represent themselves and not be a follower. But how can one really be able to affect something in a larger part of society with such a great distance to the political sphere? And what does the political sphere entail?

An arena or process approach to politics?

As described in chapter 3, the political scientist, Adrian Leftwich, introduced the division of politics into an arena approach and a process approach. First, the arena approach constitutes a narrower and sharper focus than the process approach. Politics assessed through the arena approach is about the activities that occur in connection with the political institutions, such as the parliament, the political parties and the government. This is a location-based approach to politics (Leftwich 2004a:11-12). The process approach on the other hand, is not confined to specific institutional arenas. This understanding of politics upholds that it is a process that occurs in all social contexts in which people interact and there is a power struggle over resources. According to the process approach, politics concerns *people*, *recourses* and *power* (Leftwich 2004b:104).

In this chapter, I have discussed my informants' views on the political sphere in Lebanon. What has emerged from this discussion is that the informants uphold an approach to politics that can be comparable to Leftwich's arena approach. Politics is seen as something only the politicians are doing. As I understand it, their views on politics are location-based. For example, I can see that when they refer to politics, it is always associated with political parties, the government, politicians and involvement in party politics. Politics is linked to what for example Joe, calls "the political sphere." As I have discussed above, this sphere is viewed as incompatible with the dialogical sphere.

However, if one looks at politics in a wider manner, in the perspective of Leftwich's process approach, politics is not only what happens within the political institutions. Politics is something that happens in all social situations where two or more people are present, because according to Leftwich, all such situations involve people, resources and power (Leftwich 2004b:103-104). My informants say that they, through interreligious dialogue, want to influence the development of society and make a change to what they believe is a better one. Ali, the Shiite leader of organization D, answered when I asked what he wants to achieve with his work that:

“Cecilie: What do you want to achieve with your work with the foundation?

Ali: Whatever is good for the human race, anything that gets us a lot of good, guides more people towards the good, makes them more civilized, makes them better human beings, raise a better society, raise the awareness of duties and rights, and so on.” (Ali)

Joe, the Maronite leader of organization A, continues in the same way by defining dialogue as something that “should change something”:

“(…) dialogue what I mean is about real activities that we want to change something. For me dialogue should change something... should change something in the reality and should change something in the people that are doing dialogue. Maybe this will be my definition of dialogue, I mean, when there are something moving within the persons doing this experience and in the reality that they are.” (Joe)

The participants are also referring to the topic of change. Maronite informant, Maggie, express her frustration about not getting support for her work. People are telling her to be realistic in regard to her hopes of change and peace in Lebanon. She says it is the reality that is her starting point which calls for change.

“At my university there is a lot of fanatic persons, a lot, a lot, a lot, especially the political parties. They are just really...I am getting tired every time I talk to them, frustrated, and sometimes crying. It is not easy to talk to someone that just don't respect you, or don't respect what you are doing or seeing what you are doing as useless or impossible: “you are dreaming about change and peace, but it is just a dream, be realistic.” I hate when someone is telling me to be realistic because it's because I am realistic I am doing this. Because I am starting from the reality that I want to change I am doing all this, so please don't tell me about being realistic.” (Maggie)

Rula suggests that interreligious dialogue can be a first step towards actual changes in the country's legislation. Here one can see that the two spheres, the political and the dialogical, overlap and the boundaries that have previously been outlined quite clearly are not so clear.

“The politicians are the problem, and how to solve this problem? Really...To change our constitution and rules. (...) this is the first step leading to another step. Maybe today it is the camp, tomorrow it is another organization and after to do a change with new rules” (Rula).

Now, let me return to Leftwich's (2004b) three elements in the process approach to politics: people, power and recourses. He defines the latter as “things, both material and non-material, that people use to further their own desired ends, as individuals or collectively in groups” (Leftwich 2004b:106). As examples, he mentions land and people, but also non-material things like education and opportunities. I argue that the dialogue can be considered a resource used by my informants to try to gain influence over the Lebanese society. This is visible in the quotes cited above, specifically Rula's. Dialogue is described as a alternative road towards change.

However, as I interpret it, most of my informants still draw a clear distinction between the dialogical and political spheres. In that sense, party politics cannot be included in “the space in between” (Leirvik 2006) created by the interreligious dialogue. It is something that is on the outside. Nevertheless, it still appears that my informants have a political approach to dialogue; they want to create a better society, to achieve change, something they accuse politicians of not achieving. Interreligious dialogue, in addition to other types of peace and human rights work, is an alternative way or a resource used to create the Lebanon they want. Hence, according to Leftwich's process approach, one can define my informants as political actors, however not on a party political level, and interreligious dialogue can be defined as a political activity.

6.6 Final remarks

In the two previous chapters, I first examined what interreligious dialogue means to my informants. I argued that through dialogue shared spaces are created, and further investigated what this shared space involves. In this chapter I have chosen a different perspective, and have examined what the shared space does not involve. The boundaries drawn around the new “we” created in a dialogue do not only help to define what this community is, but also what it is not.

In this regard, I have chosen to highlight the topic of politics and see it in relation to interreligious dialogue, as it is expressed by my informants. Generally in my material it appears that most of my informants make a distinction between the sphere they consider themselves a part of and the political sphere. The leaders emphasize what they see as a misuse of religion in politics, and states that for politicians to join their interreligious events, they have to denounce their political identity and join as a private person. The participants emphasize the lack of change they notice in the Lebanese society and the hidden agendas of for example money and power. The Lebanese voters are also described as unable to assess what the politicians are saying in a critical manner. They are portrayed as closed-minded “followers” who cannot make autonomous decisions, and as being too involved in the political mindset to be open to members of other social groups than themselves.

It seems as if those who are politically active are defined as an outgroup by my informants. The material on which this chapter is based, indicate that the new inclusive category the participants have created perhaps has redirected stereotypical attitudes towards the political sphere seen as a new outgroup. However, there are some signs of a different view as well, when a few informants point out that the relationships between people from different religious communities within the respective political alliances, March 8 and March 14, have improved because of the politicians’ decision to work together.

Finally, I argue that interreligious dialogue in itself can be defined as political activity. Not in a party political manner, consistent with Leftwich’s (2004a/b) arena approach, but in a socio-political manner, consistent with his process approach.

7 Summary and final remarks

In this concluding summary, I will once again direct my attention towards the findings I have arrived at in the course of the previous three analytical chapters and systematically review them. First, I systematically review the findings I arrived at in the course of the previous three analytical chapters. Then, I conclude this review by giving some closing remarks. The overall topic of this thesis is interreligious dialogue among young adults in Lebanon, exemplified by four different local NGOs and some of their participants. The participants come from various religious backgrounds (Maronite, Sunni, Shiite, Druze), and are actively involved in the interreligious field in the country. There are three questions I have answered during the analysis, which will be clarified below.

My research questions are as follows:

- How do the informants interpret the significance of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon?
- What role does interreligious dialogue constitute in the informants' lives?
- How do the informants express their views on the relationship between interreligious dialogue and politics in Lebanon?

7.1 Chapter 4: Interreligious dialogue in Lebanon

- *My material suggests that the informants see interreligious dialogue in Lebanon in a very practical and tangible perspective.*

This is reflected in the way they talk about dialogue and what aspects they emphasize as central to them. When focusing on 1) "a culture of dialogue", which, as I understand it, is to consider the dialogue as a way of life, 2) learning to live with the other, 3) creating lasting friendships through interreligious dialogue and 4) visiting each other's places together, a very practical perspective on interreligious dialogue appears.

To illustrate this point, the contact hypothesis is used, which states that contact between people from different groups (although under certain circumstances) are essential in creating a better relationship between them (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998). Contact is a prerequisite for the four points mentioned above. In addition, one can draw attention to Lissi Rasmussen's (1997) concept of diapraxis and Inge Eidsvåg's (2000) practical dialogue in order to illustrate my informants' expressed opinions. Interaction and collaboration are essential to reach a "real dialogue", often more so than the actual words spoken.

- *Space and place have a central place in my informants' perception of interreligious dialogue in Lebanon. I see two different approaches to the concept appear in my material.*

First, the interreligious dialogue events can facilitate a shared space, open to members of various religious communities. It is about creating fellowship and community among the participants. This is consistent with what Pettigrew (1998) writes about the necessity of "friendship potential" in order for contact between people from different groups to lead to less prejudice. In addition, the shared space can be understood in the context of Leirvik's (2006) concept of the space in between, and Massey's (2005) description of how to see place as a meeting place.

Second, for my informants interreligious dialogue involves to physically travel to each other's places, and in this way acquire knowledge about the other. This can be religious places such as churches or mosques, but it can also be cities or areas in the country which initially are associated with one of the religious communities. One can argue that this is about making these places shared places, or a space in between (Leirvik 2006). In relation to Massey's (1995) theories of relational space, it can be argued that this activity can help to redefine the meaning these places have for the informants, so that the place no longer is seen as belonging to one religious community, but is a shared place.

- *The four organizations I have focused on relate to the Lebanese history through their activities in different ways. The representation of history ultimately influences the effects of interreligious dialogue.*

Organization D actively uses history in their events, but instead of highlighting the conflict and the negative events, they focus on the events which can create unity among communities. These events include incidents where members of one religious group have given their help to, and support for, another religious group. Organization A calls for critical thinking with respect to historical events; particularly in relation to the Lebanese civil war. It encourages everyone to question what really happened and not follow blindly what they hear from family members, media and others. Organization C directs its focus towards the present and future, and downplays the country's history in order not to cause division among the participants belonging to different religious communities. The leader of organization B did not explicitly address the issue of history in relation to interreligious dialogue.

History is a controversial issue in Lebanon. The lack of a common understanding of the country's history affects the relationship between the religious groups. There is a need for a shared space for members of different religious communities to share their versions of history. The interreligious activities might contribute to this. To address history in order to create peace is consistent with Salibi's view; "no political settlement in the country can be lasting unless it takes questions of history into account" (Salibi 1988:217).

7.2 Chapter 5: Labeling, categorization and interreligious dialogue in Lebanon

- *The shared spaces created by the NGOs become retreats from the categorization and labeling my informants experience in the Lebanese society in general, because they attract not only people who are different from themselves but at the same time similar.*

My informants express sentiments of being automatically placed into social groups in the Lebanese society. Many feel they are being attributed opinions, actions and characteristics that are stereotypical and incorrect. In this context, some informants express a strong wish to be the one deciding which social groups they belong to and what they entail, they want to be treated as individuals. This is consistent with Brewer and Miller's (1984) decategorization model, which states that to treat people on an individual basis instead of a group basis will decrease prejudice against members of other groups. A new "we" is created, containing people who are described as open-minded and peace loving, who want to change the Lebanese society to what they think is a better one. This is consistent with Geartner et al.'s (2001) recategorization model, which states that to create a subordinate inclusive category containing both previous ingroup and outgroup members will decrease prejudice against members of former outgroups.

However, it is problematic if only already open-minded people participate in dialogue, something that is addressed by Pettigrew (1998) in what he calls the causal sequence problem. This is recognized by the participants (however, not by the leaders of the NGOs), who have a two headed approach to the topic. They see it as a problem that the "extremists" cannot be reached, at the same time it is seen as positive because without prejudiced people at the NGOs events, the participants meet like-minded people. Hence their engagement in interreligious dialogue does not only concern the contact they have with people different from themselves, it also concerns contact with people *similar* to themselves. The shared spaces created by the NGOs become retreats from the categorization experienced in the Lebanese society because they attract open-minded people.

7.3 Chapter 6: Interreligious dialogue and politics in Lebanon

- *My material shows that the informants place themselves and those who are active in interreligious dialogue in a different category than those who are politically active. A distance is visible between the dialogical and political spheres; dialogue and politics are seen by the informants as two incompatible entities.*

Generally in my material it appears that most of my informants make a distinction between the sphere they consider themselves a part of and the political sphere. Characteristics like liars, hypocrites, desire for power, lack of change, misuse of religion and hidden agendas are directed at the politicians in the country. The Lebanese voters are referred to as “followers” without the ability to critically assess the politicians in power. These categorizations are in stark contrast to how the informants describe the dialogical sphere as discussed in chapter 4 and 5, and can be regarded as categorizing the politicians and those politically active as an outgroup, as explained by for example Brewer (2003). In light of Jenkins (2008) theories of social identity, the outgroup can be used to create the identity of the ingroup. That is, one defines one’s own identity by saying what one is not. Party political involvement is by some informants seen as impossible to combine with interreligious dialogue and by others as difficult. What is included in the political sphere is excluded from the interreligious dialogue sphere where the informants are a part. The politically active persons are regarded as being too far into the political opinions of the party they are a member of to be able to open up to other people’s opinions. Politics is defined as something that is outside the dynamic limits surrounding “the space in between” (Leirvik 2006) and outside of the new “we” created among the participants in the interreligious activities.

- *However, according to Leftwich (2004b) process approach, my informants can still be defined as political actors and interreligious dialogue as a political activity.*

Considering the manner in which my informants are referring to politics in Lebanon, they are in my understanding viewing politics only as activities connected to the political institutions, the political parties, the government and parliament. This approach to politics can be called an arena approach to politics (Leftwich 2004a). This approach involves a sharp distinction between what politics is and what it is not, similar to my informants’ views.

However, if one looks at politics in a wider manner, in the perspective of Leftwich’s process approach, politics is not only what happens within the political institutions. Politics is something that happens in all social situations where two or more people are present (Leftwich 2004b:104-105). As I see it, according to Leftwich’s process approach the

informants have a political motive for their dialogue. They want to change society towards the better, something they accuse politicians of not achieving. Interreligious dialogue, in addition to other types of peace and human rights work, is an alternative way or a resource they use to create the Lebanon they want. Hence, one can define my informants as political actors, however not on a party political level, and interreligious dialogue can be defined as a political activity.

7.4 Closing remarks

This thesis is based on statements from a narrow section of the Lebanese population. It is therefore necessary to examine this field further. However, one of the main challenges concerning interreligious dialogue shown in this study is the difficulty of getting people who are *not* already relatively open-minded to join interreligious events. Many are skeptical towards dialogue and contact with members of other communities than themselves. The political situation also contributes to the difficulties. One challenge for the interreligious organizations and researchers in the time ahead will be to search for ways to reach a wider group of people.

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Appendix 1 – Interview guide - Leaders

Who are you?

- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
- Religious affiliation / political affiliation?
- Education? Work?
- Do you live in an area with various religious groups?
- Do you have close friends from other religious or ethnic groups? If yes how did you get to know them?
- What made you get involved in interreligious dialogue?

Questions relating to the practice of the organization

- Can you tell me about your organization?
- What kind of work does your organization do?
- Can you give some examples of projects you are involved in?
- How do you work?
- What does your organization mean when you say inter-religious dialogue?
- What goals do you have with the dialogue?
- What do you think you achieve with your dialogue projects?
- Do you have any examples or experiences you want to share?
- Why do you choose to work with inter-religious dialogue? What advantages does this have in relation to other types of peace and reconciliation efforts?
- On what basis do you decide who should be participants in the projects?
- How and where do you spread the word about your projects?
- Do you think there are some groups in the society who are less willing to participate in interreligious dialogue than others? Explain!
- Has your organization any religious affiliation?
- If yes: Do you think it affects the dialogue work in any way? For example, if you are working with other religious groups?
- If no: Do you think that is an advantage when working in this field?

- What do you think people from the different religious groups can do to create a successful dialogue?
- Who are the main people you are targeting in your projects?
- Do you think this targeting is will enhance the inter-religious dialogue's ability to change society?
- Which places serves as meeting places for different religious and ethnic groups in Lebanon today?
- What do you think is some of the main reasons for the problematic relationship between different sects in Lebanon today?

Politics:

- How do your organization relate to the politicians?
- Do you think the politicians do enough to better the relationship between different religious sects in Lebanon?
- How would you describe how you see the relation between religion and politics in this country?

Finally

- Is there something you want to add anything you feel you have not been said?
- Is there anything you think I have misunderstood when it comes to interreligious dialogue in Lebanon or the Lebanese community in general?

Appendix 2 – Interview guide – Participants

Who are you?

- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
- Religious affiliation / political affiliation?
- What do you work with?
- What about education?
- Do you live in an area with various religious groups?
- Do you have any close friends from another religious or ethnic group? How did you meet them?
- Why did you get involved in interreligious dialogue?

Experiences with dialogue?

- Have you participated in many dialogue meetings before?
- What kind? When?
- How did you come in contact with the organization?
- Did you know any of the other participants from before?
- How did the interfaith dialogue take place?
- Can you give me some examples of exercises or activities you did?
- How would you describe what interfaith dialogue is?
- What do you think happens in a dialogue process?

Effects of dialogue?

- What do you think is or should be the goals of a dialogue?
- Do you think that these goals are being reached?
- If yes, why do you think so?
- If no, why do you think so?
- What were your expectations for the dialogue before you attended?
- Were these fulfilled? Explain.
- Why do you choose to work with inter-religious dialogue? What advantages does this have in relation to other types of peace and reconciliation efforts?
- What have you personally gained from being part of the meetings you have been involved in?
- Is there anything that has been positive?
- Is there something that has been negative?
- Has it changed anything in your life?

- Have you taken with you the experience you had, and used them in your regular life? If so, in what way?
- Which places serves as meeting places for different religious and ethnic groups in Lebanon today?
- What do you think people from different religious groups can and should do to create a successful dialogue?

Attitudes?

- How much do you think ethnic and religious affiliation has to say in Lebanon?
- What role do you think religion should play in the society?
- How do you relate to other ethnic and religious groups?
- Do you think there are some groups in the society who are less willing to participate in interreligious dialogue than others? Explain!
- What elements affect the cohesion between religious groups in Lebanon today?
- Political elements? Outer elements? Historical elements?
- How do you think these affect attitudes and willingness towards dialogue in Lebanon?
- Have your attitudes towards other groups changed after participating in a dialogue?

Politics?

- Do you think the politicians do enough to better the relationship between different religious sects in Lebanon?
- How would you describe how you see the relation between religion and politics in this country?

Finally

- Is there something you want to add? Anything you feel that have not been said?

Appendix 3 – Information sheet

Request to participate in an interview

My name is Cecilie Haugerød and I am currently studying religious studies at the University of Oslo in Norway. This year I am going to write my master thesis on the topic of interfaith/intercultural dialogue in Lebanon. The title of the project is “Effects of Interfaith Dialogue in Lebanon”.

Based on different Lebanese dialogue organizations’ ideals concerning dialogue and their involvement in projects among Lebanese, I will focus on the participants’ experiences with interfaith meetings. I am interested to know more about how interfaith dialogue has affected their lives, and whether they think the organizations reach the goals they set for their dialogue. I wish to interview 12-18 people from different religious groups and gender who have been participants at dialogue meetings between Lebanese in the country. These interviews will be an essential part of the analysis in my master thesis.

I will be using a tape recorder and take notes while we talk. The interview will last about an hour, and we will agree upon the time and place together.

Everything you say in the interview will be confidential. You will be anonymous in the final report. No one but me will have access to the interview material. After I finish my thesis, by the end of June 2011, all data will be deleted. The interviews are completely voluntary. You will at any time during the process have the possibility to withdraw your contribution from being used in the thesis without the need for any explanations. If you decide to withdraw, all the information about you will be deleted.

If you have any questions you can call me on +961 71901753 or send an email to cecha@student.teologi.uio.no. You can also contact my supervisor at the email address: a.h.grung@culcom.uio.no.

This study is registered with the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD).

Best regards,
Cecilie Haugerød

Statement of consent

I have received information about the project and I wish to give an interview.

Signature Date

Telephone