CHAPTER 14

Jewish–Muslim Dialogue

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Historical Background

Dialogue as conversion and the exchange of ideas and opinions has been taking place between Muslims and Jews since the emergence of Islam in the seventh century. In the case of Islam, as with early Christianity, Jews lived among those involved in the new movement and were divided among themselves over whether or not to join. Also like the case of Christianity, Islamic religious literature professes to record dialogue between oppositional Jews and new believers, thereby establishing from as early as the Qur'an itself some of the points of difference and contention between Jews and Muslims (Q 2:91, 109, 135, 145; 3:64–67, 69–72, 78; 4:150, etc.; Rubin 1999).

The canonization of contention in the early traditions of new religions can be found abundantly in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. New religions are regularly denigrated by established religions, which polemicize against them in order to prevent the emergence of religious competition. The new religions inevitably respond in kind, and in the case of scriptural religions that polemic appears in scripture. After new religions become institutionalized, however, they unsurprisingly engage in the same behavior toward new emerging religions that are perceived as religious competitors. Among Abrahamic religions, therefore, each looks both forward and backward at competing religions, and each establishes arguments to question and discredit many of the basic principles and tenets of religious competitors. This kind of argumentative dialogue is not the kind that is sought after today, but it is also important to acknowledge, because it establishes an intellectual and religious baseline around which virtually all subsequent discussion, apologetics, polemics and productive dialogue have been constructed.

From the earliest years of Islamic emergence to the present, Jews and Muslims have lived together and communicated with one another. This is dialogue in the broadest sense, and social and economic intercourse has always included discussion about personal issues such as religion. During the early centuries of Muslim rule, these discus-

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sions could be natural and unscripted as well as intentionally polemical, and various genres of Arabic literature incidentally mention occasions of the former (Kilpatrick 1999).

After an initial period of religious formation lasting two or three generations, relations between Muslims and the religious communities living under Muslim rule took place within parameters established officially by the Muslim law of the *dhimma* (protection/custody). Jews and Christians were *dhimmī* communities that were protected but subjugated. They held legal citizenship and were safeguarded by law, but at a secondary social status. Under the *dhimma* they were free to worship without interference as long as worship did not occur in public space, but they were forbidden to proselytize (Cahen 2012). Religious discussion, which can easily evolve into argument, could therefore become a dangerous endeavor.

Jews and Christians were protected by law as long as they accepted their subordinate status, but if they did not demonstrate subservience, then official protection could be removed, leaving them exposed to potential mistreatment. The balance between protection and inferior status was accomplished formally by requiring dhimmīs to engage in certain subservient behaviors in relation to Muslims, using specialized forms of address, and even wearing identifiable clothing (Stillman 1979). If dhimmīs were perceived as not accepting their position, they could be subject to violence directed against them individually or collectively. Sometimes accusations could be made against Jews or Christians by Muslims for personal gain or other venal reasons, which would require a collective response or campaign by the *dhimmī* community for its own protection and to ensure its rights. In sum, the *dhimma* provided legal status for Jews in the Muslim world, which was better than what obtained among Jews of the Christian world, who lost all legal rights during the High Middle Ages. But legal protection came at a price that established a clear hierarchy of status which restricted free and open discourse on religious issues to certain exceptional situations.

As is the case with law everywhere, official policies can be honored more in the breach than the observance. During the classical period of Islamic political, cultural and intellectual ascendancy from roughly the ninth through the sixteenth centuries (depending on the region), open conversation and learning between Muslims, Jews and Christians occurred at a variety of levels. Similar dialogue between traditionalists, skeptics, rationalists and sectarians also occurred within each religious community. These kinds of dialogue ranged formally from written polemics to organized discussions in courts of caliphs, sultans and other high-ranking officials, and informally through conversation between members of various religious communities living side by side in the mixed neighborhoods of city, town and village in the Muslim world (Perlmann 1974). The nature of discourse varied by location, context and period, but even during the so-called "golden age" in Spain the nature of relationships was intricate and uneven. It was so complex, in fact, that it is difficult to assess its quality and even the meaning of the terminology used to describe it (Gampel 1992; Glick 1992).

The one institution of particular interest for a discussion of dialogue in the Middle Ages is the *majlis* – a term with a wide semantic field that includes sessions or sittings of intellectuals, scientists and artists sponsored by patrons in which the arts and sciences are discussed or debated. Patrons were typically high government officials, but

they could also be wealthy merchants who wished to support the arts and sciences and thereby further their own status as champions of high civilization. The quintessential *majlis* was that of the caliph, who surrounded himself with the best literati and scientists of the day in his court, which functioned in a manner reminiscent of the classic French salon of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The style of discourse was often one of rivalry and competition, and the caliph would typically put poets, scientists, legal scholar and story-tellers in situations in which they would attempt to overcome their competitors in order to exult in victory and rejoice at the discomfiture of the defeated (Bosworth et al. 1996; Stroumsa 1999). Accounts or references to religious discussions or, more accurately, debates or arguments in such sessions, can be found in a variety of Muslim and Jewish sources. These debates usually took place over theological and legal differences between contending Muslims, but they also occurred between Muslims and Jews, Muslims and Christians, or between all three (Cohen and Somekh 1999; Kedar 1999; Stroumsa 1999). The sessions were not structured like inter-religious dialogues of today, and the purpose of medieval dialogue was not to better understand the religious *other* in a pluralistic environment. Instead, the participant in a medieval religious deliberation sought to demonstrate the truth of his own position, with the belief that this would bring divine reward. Sarah Stroumsa notes that "the *majlis* did not function as a study group, but rather as a debating society . . . Quite often, the debate would turn into a verbal duel . . ." (67). Despite sometimes intense competition, formal rhetoric, and hierarchical expectations, however, the participants and contenders within these *majālis* were generally protected and allowed to speak rather freely (Cohen and Somekh 1999: 130; Griffith 1999: 42f). As a result, religious scholars and intellectuals had the opportunity to learn across religious boundaries and to arrive at a better understanding of the ideals and practices of their religious neighbors, even if such understanding was developed within a contentious framework. This undoubtedly had a positive trickle-down effect among a larger body of citizens.

Societal openness and generosity toward minorities is much more prevalent when polities are stable and when economies are strong. The economic and political weakening of the Muslim world from the later Middle Ages into the early modern and modern periods corresponds with a general decline in the openness of inter-religious discourse and the status of religious and other minorities (Stillman 1979: 64–94). Because of the great expansion of the Muslim world and its political, ethnic and economic variety, these changes occurred unevenly, though the general overall trend was one of decline. During these same centuries, the West was experiencing growth in economies, populations and influence. This resulted in increased Western confidence and influence in the internal affairs of Muslim countries from the Middle East and North Africa to south and southeast Asia, resulting finally in colonization and the wresting of political control from local powers (Lapidus 1988: 268–275).

The Western colonial powers naturally privileged local Christians living in the Muslim world, with whom they could relate as religious compatriots and whom they considered more reliable than Muslims. This reversed the traditional status of dhimmī communities in general, including Jews and Zoroastrians who were likely to become part of the administrative class under colonial rule. The rise in dhimmī status natu-

rally provoked resentment among less advantaged Muslims, and religious minorities were seen as collaborating with the foreign enemy rather than acting as loyal native citizens (Firestone 2005: 443–445; Stillman 1979: 95–107). As a result, when the colonial powers were pushed out of the Muslim world in the mid-twentieth century, minority religious communities often faced a sudden backlash involving increased discrimination and violence. Jews were especially vulnerable in many locations, and the birth of modern Israel was often considered a final oppressive colonial outpost, ruled by Jews and supported by Western Christendom and world Jewry. The history of Muslim decline and the shifting status of Jews relative to Muslims in relation to Islamic legal and social expectations have had a substantial impact on Muslim–Jewish relations historically, and that history has had a significant impact on the state of Muslim–Jewish dialogue today.

Divergent perceptions of the status of Jews under Muslim government throughout the centuries have spawned two classic opposing positions on the possibility of Jewish–Muslim dialogue in the broadest sense. On the one side are those who claim that the Muslim world was extraordinarily tolerant, and that Jews were remarkably free from persecution (Antonius 1939; Chouraqui 1968; Swartz 1970). On the other is the "dhimmitude" school maintaining that Muslims have never been tolerant of their religious minorities, that Jew-hatred (as well as hatred of Christians) is firmly rooted in Islamic theology and law, and that there is no possible way that such deeply embedded animosity can ever be overcome (Bat Ye'or 1985; Bostom 2008). Both positions are simplistic and do not stand up to scholarly historical scrutiny. The truth is neither so romantic nor disastrous, since religious minorities under Islam benefited significantly from their protected legal status, yet also experienced prejudice, violence and even massacres due to their religious identities. Medieval political systems simply did not guarantee life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness as is currently expected from enlightened democratic political systems, and careful historians today are careful to contextualize the treatment of Jews in the Muslim world with the treatment of other religious, ethnic, linguistic and sectarian minorities. Mark Cohen, for example, demonstrates indisputably that while Jews as well as other religious minorities were treated with more or less tolerance (or bigotry) in both the medieval Christian and Muslim worlds, their treatment in the Muslim world was, overall, significantly better – and measurably so – than in the Christian world (Cohen 1986, 1994, 2009). Cohen's excellent scholarship has not convinced factions on either side to abandon their constructed views, so that the rhetoric of an idealized Jewish "golden age" under Islam, and its opposite, a Jewish "disaster" in the Muslim world, continue to be promoted in ways that antagonize and serve as a hindrance to positive efforts at dialogue.

The establishment of the modern state of Israel, a Jewish state in one of the oldest and most sacred areas of the Muslim world, has further exacerbated tensions between Jews and Muslims. While the core of the Israeli–Arab/Jewish–Palestinian conflict is the competition between national communities that dispute one another's national identity and ownership of territory, the dispute itself is often articulated in religious language. The use of religious language and metaphors in this struggle is a result of a number of factors, not the least of which is the inability of either side to convince the other or the world at large that its nationalist rhetoric is fully credible and compelling.

More than that, however, is the fact that modern, secular national identity emerged in the West in large part as an antidote to disastrous religious involvement in politics and government. In many areas that did not experience an emergent modern nationalism, such sentiments and intuitions do not apply. The result is that in many counties, what Westerners might consider unacceptably religious articulations of national identity are not necessarily seen as problematic by local citizens. This is certainly the case in the dispute over Israel/Palestine. Nevertheless, religious rhetoric over the conflict has increased dramatically over the past decades. While the history and causes of this increasing "religification" remain contested, there can be no question that it has been occurring, and the increased religious identification with national struggle has negatively affected Jewish–Muslim dialogue everywhere.

Dialogue between Muslims and Jews as Conscious Community Building and Civic Engagement

Muslim–Jewish dialogue takes place in three major arenas today: Europe, Israel/Palestine and North America. Major differences in national histories, immigration patterns, and current demographic particularities between these disparate areas make it impossible to offer an adequate examination of Muslim–Jewish dialogue in all three areas here. The following, therefore, treats the American context in greatest detail, with occasional reference where appropriate to the European and Middle Eastern arenas.

It is only in the past century that inter-religious dialogue has begun to be viewed as a means for transcending historical and theological tension between religions in order to find common cause for building community and positive civic engagement. This goal remains relatively new in Muslim–Jewish dialogue. A history of these dialogues need not be rehearsed in detail here, but a few points are worthy of consideration.

Three recent historical developments that have affected all religious communities in the West have also had a profound influence on Muslim–Jewish dialogue, and a fourth event has had a great impact on the ongoing viability of such dialogue (Loskota and Firestone 2007). The first development, as noted previously, is the founding of Israel in 1948, and the subsequent wars and conflicts that have ensued. The second development was the Second Vatican Council. The third historical development was the great growth in the presence of Muslims as a demographic force in Europe and the Americas since the 1960s. And the fourth development is the sudden radical increase in mass violence committed in the name of Islam by radicals, beginning with the bombing and eventual destruction of the New York World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001, and the subsequent subway bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005.

Modern occasions of dialogue between Christians and Muslims as a means of building community and civic engagement actually began as early as the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 in conjunction with the World Columbian Exposition. Two Muslims presented papers on that occasion, among the 192 presentations that were overwhelmingly dominated by English-speaking Christians (Wildman). For the next 70 years, Muslims were rarely represented in inter-religious activities in the United States. This is due to two major factors: low Muslim population and visibility,

and the fact that ecumenism between Christian denominations was of much greater interest.

Noticeable interest in engaging Muslims in dialogue began only after the Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and the increase in Muslim immigration in the wake of the Immigration and Nationality Act (Hart–Celler Act) of 1965, which abolished the national origins formula that had for decades limited most immigration to those arriving from western and northern Europe. The establishment of modern Israel had brought Jewish–Muslim relations into global focus decades earlier, but international Jewish–Muslim conflict only became a focal point for dialogue in the United States in the 1970s.

The Second Vatican Council produced a ground-breaking document in 1965 called the "Declaration of the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions," a document best known by its opening Latin phrase, *Nostra Aetate* ("In our time . . ."). This publication marked the first time in history that the Catholic Church publicly proclaimed non-Christian religions to be deserving of respect, and worthy of dialogue. One of its most famous sections recognizes "the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews" and the need "to foster and recommend . . . mutual understanding and respect" through, among other acts, "fraternal dialogues" (Croner 1977: 1). The Council originally had no intention of making any statements about non-Christian religious communities other than Jews, but changed its position in response to objections from a variety of quarters (Aydin 2002: 39). In the final version of the document, a declaration regarding Muslims is positioned even before the section treating Jews: "The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems . . . Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom." *Nostra Aetate* not only marked the beginning of serious Catholic dialogue with non-Christian religious communities, but served as a catalyst for increased Catholic–Protestant engagement as well.

Protestant dialogue with non-Christian religions had begun earlier, though primarily in a context of mission. The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 included a discussion of religious pluralism in Commission IV, but it was ultimately set aside in the interest of evangelization. Some Protestant denominations nevertheless were more open than the Catholic Church in the 1940s and 1950s to using the term "dialogue" in their relations with non-Christian religions, and individual pastors and rabbis began to meet and even share pulpits on occasion. But interest in what we would consider true dialogical engagement with Muslims among both Protestants and Catholics only began to emerge significantly in the 1960s (Aydin 2005: 91–93).

By this time, some liberal sectors of the Western religious world had become interested in forms of inter-religious engagement that would transcend mission or polemic. Initially, that sentiment was limited principally to Jewish–Christian dialogue, which was motivated most significantly by two factors: the large demographic growth of the American Jewish community with its successful integration into virtually all sectors of American society and culture, on the one hand, and remorse and shame among many Christians after the Holocaust, on the other. While dialogue between Christians and

Jews became institutionalized in the 1960s through the formation of councils created specifically for this purpose (Braybooke 1991; Simpson and Weyl 1988), the American Muslim community at this time was still quite small, significantly less visible, and not well organized. While Muslims were sometimes invited to inter-religious events and programs, they were hardly part of the ordinary inter-religious equation because of their low demographic profile in Europe and the United States until the mid-1960s, but also because a simmering sense of anxiety in the Christian West toward members of a religious civilization that had been so threatening to Christendom and the West for many centuries in the Middle Ages (Addison 1942; Akbari 2009; Daniel 1960; Southern 1962; Tolan 1996).

American Muslim engagement in dialogue would increase with the rise in Muslim immigration after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the subsequent rapid increase in Muslim visibility (though in retrospect it is clearly questionable whether overall anxiety toward Islam was dispelled by these developments). Muslim immigration to Europe in about the same period was made up primarily of rural workers who were willing to engage in labor-intensive working-class jobs that were unpopular with Europeans. Turks, North Africans and South Asians tended to congregate in distinct communities in Europe and experienced difficulty integrating into the larger host cultures (Manco 2004; Nielsen 1995). Muslim immigrants to the United States during this period, on the other hand, tended to be more highly educated, became part of the middle class, lived dispersed among other American communities, and integrated more smoothly into the larger population (Denny 1995; Pew 2007). Many came as university students and remained as professionals.

Beginning in the 1960s, the American Muslim community expended significant effort and resources to organize community centers, mosques and local and national organizations. Some communities had organized at the local level prior to this time and Muslim students had begun organizing groups on some US campuses in the 1950s. It was in the 1960s, however, that the Muslim Student Association (MSA) began to develop official chapters and a national presence. Other groups and organizations emerged in the same period to represent the growing communities of Muslims deriving from various national and religious origins. Students who had been active during their student days in the MSA went on to found other organizations, including, in 1982, the Islamic Society of North America, which functioned as an umbrella organization to bring all or most Muslim institutions into one network (Abdo 2007: 101, 197; Ahmed 1992; Fenton 1988: 166). Shortly thereafter, two advocacy and public policy organizations were formed, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) in 1986, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in 1994. As a result of this increased organizing, the American Muslim community positioned itself not only to support its own growth and development, but also to project a larger profile in American affairs generally. This trend naturally brought Muslims into the public arena of inter-religious discourse and dialogue.

As noted above, Jews and Christians had been engaged in dialogue at the institutional and congregational levels for some decades previously, first through clergy relationships and then between lay communities. As Muslim communities grew in many parts of the United States, and as Muslim professionals became more involved in

civic and social affairs, Muslims were sometimes invited to take part in dialogues as well. This kind of dialogue was not Muslim–Jewish as such, but it brought Jews and Muslims together in dialogical environments in which they could meet one another and observe each other's behaviors in inter-religious settings. Clergy councils in some areas invited Muslim religious leaders to join or attend events. Where synagogues and mosques or Islamic centers happened to be in the same neighborhood, rabbis sometimes initiated contact with Muslim religious leaders. Connecting with Muslim religious leadership was not as straightforward as initiating contact with Christian or Jewish religious leaders because of the unique situation among many American Muslim communities at the time and even today; mosques and Islamic centers often do not have trained clergy, or their clergy are trained overseas and often struggle with English (Firestone 2012; Ukeles 2003–4: 47–50).

These congregational-level initiatives were generally ad hoc, and they were initiated by Jews. Some Muslim religious and lay leaders subsequently have become more proactive, particularly those of South Asian origin, but Jews continue to take the lead in initiating dialogue for reasons that will be discussed below. The level of bilateral contact between Jewish and Muslim leaders and laity increased during the 1980s, particularly in the wake of the Camp David Accords that were signed in 1979, which signaled a hopeful development in Israeli–Palestinian relations. Hopeful sentiments in this arena generally encourage positive developments in Muslim–Jewish relations in Europe and the United States, while negative developments tend to inhibit dialogue. Muslim–Jewish dialogues during this period were all at the congregational or grassroots level.

Activity at the university level, however, had begun earlier. The University of Denver held four consecutive annual meetings from 1981 to 1984 that brought prominent scholars of Judaism and Islam together to hear and discuss each other's research under the auspices of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver. The conference organizers subsequently published two volumes of scholarly papers that focused on Jewish–Muslim relations (Brinner and Ricks 1986, 1989). Other colleges and universities subsequently held various colloquia and conferences on Judaism, Islam and Jewish–Muslim relations, and a cadre of Muslim and Jewish scholars began to meet with one another informally to collaborate on issues of common interest in history, linguistics, philosophy, religion, etc. These efforts have resulted in a number of academic collections containing scholarly papers and studies published from the 1980s to the present time. This same informal scholarly community has organized scholarly panels on Muslim–Jewish relations at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion, the Society of Biblical Literature, the Association for Jewish Studies, and the Middle East Studies Association. Most recently, the University of Iowa began producing a peer-reviewed scholarly journal dedicated to the discussion of topics in Islamic and Jewish traditions, cultures and practices, particularly in areas where thematic and doctrinal aspects are common (*Mathal/Mashal*). In the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, centers for the study and enhancement of Muslim–Jewish relations were established at Cambridge University and the University of Southern California (CMJR; CMJE). Both have websites that provide current information about the state of Muslim–Jewish relations at the levels of scholarship and praxis.

At the congregational level both the Muslim and Jewish communities are divided internally over whether or not dialogue should be encouraged. In the Jewish community, congregations on the liberal end of the religious organizational spectrum are most active, while Orthodox congregations are the least active, though some Modern Orthodox congregations belonging to the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America engage in various ways with local Muslim communities. The Muslim community is similarly divided over dialogue in general and dialogue with Jews in particular. Because Islam has not divided into religious movements based on the same criteria and principles relating to modernity and tradition as the Jewish community, it is more difficult to categorize these internal differences institutionally. Nevertheless, the more traditional Muslim congregations tend to be less interested in reaching out to the non-Muslim community in general (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 2007: 6–18). Additionally, Muslims of Arab descent tend to be more directly affected by the Israel/Palestine conflict and are thus somewhat less inclined to reach out to Jews than Muslims of other national backgrounds.

Congregational dialogue programs range from the relational (at a variety of levels) to community action and education. Formal dialogue groups may engage in ongoing discussion over religious ideas and practices, and social and economic justice projects bring Muslim and Jewish congregants together to join forces in community activism. Educational programs include congregational tours, religious school visits or visits of clergy or teachers to religious schools and youth programs. Other programs include voter registration drives and joint initiatives that respond to incidents of hate, or ongoing programs to combat bigotry and prejudice (CMJE 2009; Ivri 2011).

Grassroots programs are organized voluntarily by individual Jews and Muslims outside the framework of any religious congregation or organization. These tend to be less formal and are usually short-lived. They also tend to be difficult to track and analyze. Nevertheless a small survey of Muslim–Jewish initiatives was organized by the Center for Muslim–Jewish Engagement: it was sent to 44 independent organizations and groups in the United States in 2009, ranging from university dialogue groups to meetings organized over the Israel/Palestine conflict, to highly informal living-room chat-groups. The survey noted a trend of increasing interest in dialogue, with nearly all the groups founded after 2001 and nearly half founded after 2007 (CMJE 2009, 2010).

Outside of the university setting, the first significant organizational initiatives began only in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The American Jewish Committee had demonstrated an interest in beginning in the 1980s, but has not succeeded in sustaining significant ongoing working relationships with Muslim organizations (Neuwirth 2001). A particularly significant organizational initiative to promote Muslim–Jewish relations was the 2007 invitation by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), to address its 44th annual conference. This was followed by an invitation from the URJ to Dr. Ingrid Mattson, the president of ISNA, to address the URJ biennial conference later the same year. ISNA is the largest Muslim organization in the United States, an umbrella group for American Muslim associations and organizations, while the URJ is the largest Jewish membership organization. The two groups subsequently developed a series of

programs ranging from pairing synagogues with mosques for dialogue programs at various levels, to developing curricula for religious schools and houses of worship (Boorstein 2007; Perelman 2007).

A second noteworthy organizational project was initiated by the New York-based Foundation For Ethnic Understanding (FFEU), which has organized an annual international campaign to join Jewish and Muslim congregations together in a "weekend of twinning." The project is designed to promote ongoing contact between Muslim and Jewish communities throughout North America and parts of Europe by joining individual congregations in one grand weekend of programs and activities suggested by the FFEU. The twinning project is continuing to expand at the time of this writing (Shamir 2012; FFEU). The most significant partnership program currently in the United States is an organization called "NewGround: A Muslim–Jewish Partnership for Change." Developed originally through a partnership in Los Angeles between the Progressive Jewish Alliance and Muslim Public Affairs Council (Ballon 2007), it has since become an independent grassroots organization organized and funded jointly by donors in the Muslim and Jewish communities (Rizwan 2012).

Some Differences and Hurdles that Affect Muslim–Jewish Dialogue

Jews already have had significant experience in dialogue with Christians prior to becoming involved in dialogue with Muslims. As noted elsewhere in this collection, Jews have been motivated to engage actively in dialogue for purposes of defense – or, to connect this more directly to the common Jewish meta-narrative of oppression and victimization, for the purpose of individual and collective survival. Good relations with non-Jews has been an institutional goal of Jewish congregations and larger Jewish organizations for over a century, and engaging with religious communities at all levels is considered an important part of Jewish communal responsibility. American Muslims, on the other hand, have been less interested and have less experience with inter-religious dialogue. The reasons for these motivational differences are significant and worthy of consideration.

One of the most obvious reasons for the different level of interest in dialogue between Muslims and Jews is the difference in their relative integration into American culture. Jews have lived in the United States and have been integrated into its social, economic and political networks for at least two or three generations more than Muslims, and this basic difference affects power relationships between the two communities vis-à-vis the larger society.

The American Muslim community today is made up of many different sub-groups that may be classified according to: nation of origin, language of origin (which often transcends national boundaries), religious trend, generation of settlement, and so forth. The three largest groups according to virtually all studies are: those immigrants and descendants deriving from Arabic-speaking countries; those immigrants and descendants from South Asia (primarily contemporary India and Pakistan); and established Americans who have converted to Islam (Pew 2007). Most American converts are African Americans who have been a part of American history since the seventeenth

century, and who came to Islam primarily through the intermediary, syncretic and non-Islamic movement of the "Nation of Islam," which emphasized Black American self-reliance and separation from what was regarded as the evils of White-dominated America. While the overwhelming majority of those who were affiliated with the Nation of Islam have left that group to become mainstream Muslims, these Muslims tend to remain interested in developing their own self-reliant communities and do not feel great need to reach out to non-Muslims (Lee 1996; Tapper 2011: 87 n.27). It should be added that the particular nature of their long American experience in conjunction with their inclination toward self-sufficiency and autonomy tend to inhibit their engagement with immigrant Muslim communities as well. Those deriving from the Arab world, South Asia and elsewhere (such as Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Balkans, central Asia, etc.) are largely immigrant and first-generation Americans who are still integrating into American culture. Many belong to local ethnic mosques, and these are not infrequently located in towns or neighborhoods in which Christian evangelical communities reach out to their Muslim neighbors or pester them through their local missionary work. Muslim communities in such a situation tend to be devoted to internal community cohesion, development and support, and tend to avoid interfaith relations. Many mosques are also located in larger, cosmopolitan urban communities, but they, too, tend to be particularly concerned with religious and cultural continuity in the face of powerful forces encouraging assimilation into the larger American melting pot.

American Jews, on the other hand, have all but abandoned the ethnically defined synagogues of previous generations (German, Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, etc.) to form more "American" (less ethnically divided) Jewish communities, as they have integrated deeply into American life (Abul Rauf 2011: 61; Tapper 2011: 77, 89 n.43). Jews had already created religious, civic and advocacy bodies generations earlier, and developed a complex and structured organizational presence to provide economic, social and political support to Jews both locally and abroad. While observers have remarked how the Muslim and Jewish communities of America have undergone quite similar immigrant experiences, the fact that Jews began the immigrant and integration process some two to three generations prior to most Muslims has put them in a very different social position in America. This critical difference provides an interesting and somewhat complex aspect to dialogue, in that the common experience separated by generations has produced something less than institutional parity between the two religious communities (Dolev and Kazmi 2005).

The numbers of Jews and Muslims in America are roughly equivalent, though accurate statistics are difficult to reach because of the ways that the communities affiliate and define themselves, and because the United States Census Bureau does not ask about religious affiliation and belief when conducting censuses. Moreover, the actual results of studies have become controversial because the size of each community relative to the other is viewed in the American public arena as a declaration of power and influence (Ivri 2011; Tapper2011: 74–75). The rough figure of five to six million for both communities seems as accurate an estimate as any, which puts Muslims and Jews in rough demographic parity. Their level of education is also equivalent, and both are very highly represented in the middle and professional classes. Jews, however, are far more established in the American system. Many more Jews hold offices in local, state and

national governments, sit on the boards of large corporations, and are represented in the media and the arts. While Jews have experienced significant discrimination in America, since the Second World War they have become integrated into virtually all levels and areas of society and culture and project a sense of cultural confidence. Muslims, on the other hand, remain victims of very considerable prejudice in American society and culture, and have not yet achieved the kind of social and political success that Jews enjoy.

These parallel but different levels of involvement in the American immigrant experience, among other factors, have resulted in different levels of comfort and fluency as Americans. Comfort and competence contribute to a sense of security and power. This is felt and expressed in non-conscious ways that can present a barrier to ongoing dialogue. For example, Jews have a much more developed institutional infrastructure and, because they are generally comfortable in American social situations, have tended to reach out more to Muslims and invite Muslims to their own "space." Hosts inviting guests into their own space immediately introduces a power relationship into the sphere of dialogue. The host sets the agenda for the event, while the guest enters someone else's space and anticipates what will happen there. When the power and comfort relationship is not balanced, true dialogue is unsustainable (Forward 2001: 108–114). Whereas an individual event may work and contact may be established between two parties, ongoing programs die out when they are not developed through equal planning and sharing of space and agendas (Loskota and Firestone 2007).

While there can be no doubt about the relative power relationship between Jews and Muslims within the United States, American Muslims are part of a world community that is three hundred times the size of the global Jewish community. Another way of conveying the difference is that while Muslims make up some 20–25 percent of the world population, Jews make up approximately two tenths of one percent (Tapper 2011: 78, 89 n.46). An intuitive sense of relative numbers in the American and global contexts has an impact on both communities' relative confidence at the deepest level, a topic that has not yet been adequately explored. Muslims, for example, sometimes marvel when they hear Jews complain that they are a tiny and weak minority while it appears to them that Jews have a tremendous amount of power and influence in America. Something similar was observed in the Israeli context by the Arab Israeli Professor Sami Ma'ri, who is reported to have articulated the following in the mid-1970s: "In Israel, there is an Arab minority with a mentality of a majority, living within a Jewish majority with a mentality of a minority." The imbalance between relative power and perceived power can also adversely affect positive dialogue. One of the reasons that some Jewish advocacy organizations are adverse to improving relations with their Muslim counterparts, for example, may be anxiety at the growing power and influence of the American Muslim community. Support and assistance to Muslim organizations that are likely to support Palestinian over Jewish positions on Israel/Palestine may lie behind some Jewish organizations' criticism of Muslim organizations for alleged ties with terrorism.

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have had a major negative impact on dialogue between Muslims and Jews, and these are both affected greatly by the ongoing struggle over Israel/Palestine. As noted at the beginning of this essay, antipathy between Jews

and Muslims derives from natural polemics related to the competitive emergence of new religions. Such antipathy is neither anti-Semitism nor Islamophobia, which are racist forms of irrational hatred directed against Jews or Muslims as individuals or as groups that can be expressed rhetorically or physically against their persons, property and institutions (USDS, EUMC1, EUMC2). Notwithstanding the relatively benign relations between Muslims and Jews in the pre-modern period, vile and virulent anti-Semitism has become culturally embedded in many layers of contemporary Muslim religious culture since the nineteenth century. This has had a powerfully adverse impact on the ability of Muslims to view Jews open-mindedly (Berenbaum 2008; Bodansky 1999; Kotek 2009; Küntzel 2007).

Islamophobia has been embedded in Western culture for centuries (Shryock 2010). As Jews have absorbed Western values and standards, particularly in the last two centuries, they have integrated Islamophobia into the natural Jewish antipathy toward Islam as a competing and sometimes threatening religious civilization. As an often latent Western Islamophobia has become more thoroughly activated in the past decade, Jews have been included among the vanguard of extremist activists who articulate an Islamophobic perspective in their hateful attacks (Shryock 2010: 104; Islamophobia Today). Their militancy has had a negative impact on the Jewish community's views of Muslims and of Islam in general. The escalation of prejudice within both religious communities is a product of a number of forces ranging from frustration over the lack of resolution to the Israel/Palestine conflict, to postmodern and post-colonial developments, and competition over influence and authority in national and trans-national politics (Brenner and Ramzy 2007; Bunzl 2007; Firestone 2010; Schenker and Abu-Zayyad 2006). Muslim–Jewish dialogue outside of the conflict zones has suffered as a result.

Positive engagement between Muslims and Jews declines when bloodshed flairs in Israel/Palestine during wars, bombings, incursions and other forms of violence, while positive engagement increases when positive events occur, such as President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, or the signing of the Camp David Accords (Ivri 2011; Loskota and Firestone 2007). The complexity of the Israel/Palestine situation has more often hindered positive Muslim–Jewish dialogue than helped it, but the conflict also sometimes stimulates positive dialogue in the Middle East, as well as in the United States and Europe. For example, the ongoing conflict has stimulated investment in many programs and projects in Israel, the West Bank and Palestine that bring Muslims and Jews together in dialogical environments there and abroad. These are sponsored by a variety of local and international agencies.

The events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuring "war on terror" motivated Jews and Muslims to reach out and engage one another. For example, mosques that had little prior interest in outreach outside their communities were motivated to open their doors and engage with the larger American population, and specifically with Jews. After the backlash against Muslims following September 11, 2001, many synagogues (as well as churches) reached out to local Muslim communities, held positive educational programs on Islam and took adults and children to local Islamic institutions in an effort to better understand their neighbors and forestall the rise in Islamophobia (Loskota and Firestone 2007).

Some Shared Attributes and their Impact on Dialogue

A number of factors serve as positive influences on dialogue between Muslims and Jews. In the United States and Europe, Jews and Muslims share a common status within countries made up of overwhelmingly Christian populations with a history of antipathy toward both monotheist minorities. As non-Christian religious minorities in Christian environments, they share a common status as religious outsiders that is reinforced in myriad ways, from the institutionalization of religious holidays to public assumptions and negative comments in the media. This contemporary experience is coupled with a common history of suffering as victims of prejudice in the West. In fact, Jews and Muslims were commonly considered allies of one another in pre-modern times (Cutler and Cutler 1986). Such perspectives tend to remain operative in one way or another over generations when they are embedded in cultural forms such as literature, the arts and music.

Related to the common status of religious *other*, Muslims and Jews have common advocacy issues to which the larger Western culture and society is not naturally receptive, such as the need for religious circumcision, religious animal slaughter (kosher/hallal), and issues of personal status such as marriage and inheritance. Other mutual interests include advocacy to establish and enforce hate-crimes legislation, as well as support for faith-based education. These shared and material existential benefits have provided an impetus for establishing initiatives that highlight commonalities and common religious and cultural heritage (Ivri 2011).

Such coalition building requires bilateral dialogue that is separate from the larger dialogue of religious perspectives. Bilateral dialogue establishes a special relationship between allies relative to a third community (or more communities) to which the two allied communities may be in joint opposition on particular issues. Positive outcomes from such dialogue are less feasible without prior coordination between the bilateral partners. Bilateral dialogue must therefore occur among subgroups within the larger amalgam of religious communities. Just as Muslims and Jews need to dialogue periodically without Christians, so Muslims and Christians need to dialogue periodically without Jews, and Jews and Christians need to dialogue periodically without Muslims. There are, of course, many occasions in which all religious communities, Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic, may and should dialogue together.

Note that the commonalities between Muslims and Jews listed here arise from a shared experience of living as outsiders within larger cultures and societies. While deriving from a common negative experience, the result can be positive not only for the two communities adversely affected, but also for the larger community, which can learn to be more accommodating and accepting of difference.

Jews who are in favor of dialogue with Muslims usually perceive a benefit in breaking down stereotypes and being understood or accepted by Muslims as fellow citizens. This is consistent with the general Jewish interest in "dialogue for survival." Jews who engage with Muslims in dialogue also tend to believe that the effort will help bring understanding about the aspirations of Jews for a homeland in Israel and a reduction in anti-Semitic attitudes among Muslims. They also wish to cultivate ties with a

community that will inevitably have increasing political and institutional clout in the coming generations.

Muslims in favor of dialogue with Jews usually perceive a benefit in breaking down negative stereotypes of Muslims and bringing greater understanding among Jews for the aspiration of Palestinians for a national homeland in Palestine. Many also hope that outcomes of dialogue will include greater trust with an influential Jewish minority and knowledge about successful strategies for lobbying and institution building (Abdul Rauf 2011; Dolev and Kazm 2005; Ivri 2011; Loskota and Firestone 2007).

Current Trends and Observations in Muslim–Jewish Relations in North America

Muslim–Jewish dialogue remains weak and underdeveloped, particularly when compared to Christian ecumenical dialogue and Jewish–Christian dialogue, and increasingly to Christian–Muslim dialogue. The Council of Centers on Jewish–Christian Relations lists 35 regular member institutions and four affiliate members (CCJR). An internet search reveals seven centers for Christian–Muslim relations, and only three centers for Jewish–Muslim relations. While Christians and Muslims have generated formal platforms for dialogue (*Nostra Aetate*, "A Common Word") and Christians and Jews have generated similar documents (*Nostra Aetate*, *Dabru Emet*), no such document has been developed as a foundation for dialogue between Muslims and Jews.

Aside from the ongoing association between the Islamic Society of North America and the Union for Reform Judaism, there is currently little cooperation between Muslim and Jewish organizations. Core tensions revolve around different perspectives on Israel/Palestine and different views regarding the causes and definition of terrorism. Jewish organizations object vociferously when Muslim organizations define Israeli incursions and bombings of neighboring areas such as Gaza and Lebanon as acts of state terror, and when Muslim organizations voice support for Islamist groups such as Hamas. Muslim organizations strenuously object to American Jewish organizational lobbying for Israel that will benefit Israeli government policies, such as the building of settlements and retention of land in the West Bank, or the tendency of Jewish organizational leaders to define certain militant acts among Muslims as terrorism. The anger and tension has prevented dialogue for all intents and purposes at the organizational level.

At the grassroots, level, however, there appears to be a surge in interest since 2001 in dialogue and learning among Muslims and Jews. Anecdotally, we have observed a significant increase in the study of Arabic among Jews in colleges and universities, and a somewhat lesser increase among Muslims interested in learning about Judaism. Grassroots groups appear to transcend age and gender differences, ranging from women who meet to bake and talk, salon discussions, the comparative textual study of religious sources, and initiatives on college campuses to prepare and eat kosher/hallal food (CMJE 2009, 2010). The college campus can also serve as a focus for contention, particularly over Israel/Palestine and the causes and definitions of terrorism.

Muslim–Jewish dialogue at the congregational level is increasing as well, particularly with the publicity and the organizational activity of the Foundation for Ethnic

Understanding in its congregational twinning program. Muslim congregations are reaching out increasingly to other communities through visitation programs and invitations to break the Ramadan fasts through communal *iftar*s. If grassroots and congregational efforts continue to expand at the current rate, such efforts may influence the revision of official institutional stances, and may foster further support for dialogue itself. But everything can change quickly with a shift in the situation in Israel/Palestine or in the politics of the larger global arena.

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