

# **INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**

## **- THE GAME -**



By Lotte Dijkstra

BALANCING BETWEEN HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO

“Diversiteit zou normaal moeten worden, al vanaf de vroegste jeugd, door het belang van burgerschap voorop te stellen en verschillen te erkennen. Assimilatie, het volledig opgaan in een andere cultuur, is onzinnig. Het tegendeel, je opsluiten in je eigen gemeenschap, ook. Een gemeenschap is een poort, geen vestingmuur.”

(Mohamed El Bachiri, 2017)

**By Lotte Dijkstra**

Student number 2582693 | VU University, Amsterdam |

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology | June 30, 2017 |

Supervisor: Dr. P.G.A. Versteeg | Second assessor: Dr. T. Sunier

## PREFACE

I started this research with not much knowledge or familiarity on religions. I have not been raised religiously and did not have any religious people in my social environment. It always remained a mystery to me why people believed in such an undefined concept as 'God'. And the rare occasions where someone I already knew for a while turned out to be religious always struck me with great surprise and disbelief. How could a person that seems so 'like me' be religious? So, one might ask, why choose to do research in a field I do not know much about? Throughout my life I have always been interested in the things or people I was unfamiliar with. This urge to 'see more of the world' has made me undertake journeys to distant countries. Anthropology has given me a way to learn even more about this world.

With this research I have realized that our own country can be as new and exotic to us as a faraway place. I know now that I do not have to travel long distances to find the new, the intriguing, the exotic. It more over made me realize that no matter how much I like the unfamiliar I do not look for it in my day to day life. In fact my whole social life consists of people that in some way or another resemble myself. With this research I stepped outside my comfort zone. For the first time in my life I set foot into a mosque. Despite disturbing documentaries that I had watched safely from my couch I visited the Scientology church to experience it with my own eyes. I feel like I know Segbroek, the neighbourhood where most of my research took place, and its inhabitants better than I know my own.

I would like to thank all my informants for showing me worlds of which I thought they only existed far, far away. For making me wander in a world I have never wandered before. For raising questions I never thought about before. For making it possible for me to live the life I want to live. But most of all for making me part of the game. Your willingness to share your stories, your openness and respect towards others, and your curiosity towards others have truly been contagious. I hope my effort to write down your stories in a sincere way will lead to more understanding of interfaith dialogue and will hopefully lead to fruitful conversations amongst yourselves.

I could not have written this thesis without the support of my family, who never fail to believe in me. My supervisor, who made me see things in a different light and who showed patience despite the fact that I never managed to make a deadline (except for the final one). My proof readers Floor, Gary and John for their critical eye. The flies on the wall, who were always there for inspiring talks, support and needed breaks between the writing. In particular, Judith, with whom I discovered the art of fun talks over cappuccino and chocolate croissants.

# GAME GUIDE

4  
6  
7  
10

## **PREFACE**

## **BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME**

### **1. THE PLAYING FIELD**

11/ 1.1 THE FIELD

11/ 1.1.1 Interfaith dialogue

12/ 1.1.2 The United Religions Initiative

13/ 1.1.3 URI NL

14/ 1.1.4 The scope of the field research

14/ 1.2 THE PLAYERS

15/ 1.2.1 Key informant

15/ 1.2.2 Snowball

16/ 1.2.3 Particularities of the players

16/ 1.3 THE TOOLS

17/ 1.3.1 Research question

17/ 1.3.2 Particularities of the research

18/ 1.3.3 Methods

19/ 1.4 BECOMING PART OF THE GAME

19/ 1.4.1 Struggles

20/ 1.4.4 Methodological questions

21/ 1.5 RELEVANCE OF EXPOSING THE GAME

23

### **2. THE FOUNDATION OF THE GAME**

24/ 2.1 UNDERSTANDING RELIGION

27/ 2.2 UNDERSTANDING RITUALS

30/ 2.3 UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

31/ 2.4 UNDERSTANDING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

36

### **3. WHY PLAY THE GAME?**

37/ 3.1 WHERE DO I BELONG?

38/ 3.2 BE A PEACE BUILDER

40/ 3.3 RELIGION AS ENGINE

43

### **4. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE; JUST A GAME?**

44/ 4.1 COURAGE

45/ 4.2 LOYALTY

47/ 4.3 WHEN THE OTHER BECOMES A THREAT

50

### **5. HOW DO WE PLAY THE GAME**

51/ 5.1 WHAT IS REALITY

51/ 5.1.1 My reality is your reality

52/ 5.1.2 Our realities come together in the ultimate reality

53/ 5.1.3 All realities are different

55

## **END OF THE GAME**

58

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## **ATTACHMENTS**

60/ 1. OVERVIEW PLAYERS

61/ 2. TABLE OF METHODS

62/ 3. OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

63/ 4. FLYER

64/ 5. GOLDEN RULE

## **Brief introduction to the game**

Interfaith dialogue is a game that challenges all that you used to take for granted. It is played by a group of people that differ in nationality, age, gender and of course faith. The game has the world as its playing field and can be played anywhere and at any moment of the day. The goal is to end religiously motivated violence and create peace on this earth. But be warned, this game will challenge you. Will you manage to stay true to your own religion but find ways to be open to the religious reality of the other? You win the game when all participants reach 'finish' at the same time.



# INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME

At first sight, there is something inherently contesting about religion and interfaith dialogue. Religion is often associated with dogmatic ideas on how you should live your life and having superior claims to the truth. This simply does not resonate with the openness towards 'religious others' that interfaith dialogue promotes. At the same time, globalization has increased the visibility of religious plurality and therefore one's religious identity is challenged to a greater extent than ever before. Theologian Moyaert (2014, 93) goes as far as stating that "religion can no longer be formed and established in isolation from the 'other'". Even though one could argue whether religions could ever be established in isolation from the 'other' (you always need an 'other' to create a sense of self), whilst not forgetting the many varieties within religion, it is a fact that globalization has made religious plurality more visible. Amidst all these different religious traditions, that all claim to have a monopoly on the truth, protecting one's religious identity becomes an urgent matter. In some cases this can lead to devaluing the other and committing violent acts against the 'other'.

This realization has given birth to a great number of organizations and networks that are actively looking for the other in order to end religiously motivated violence. They have figured out that one cannot create peace alone. Interfaith dialogue has become a tool to solve religion related problems in society through encounters and dialogue with the religious other. These interfaith encounters demand a certain willingness and openness to engage with someone who has a different understanding about reality. At the same time dealing with another's reality can be challenging for one's own understanding of the world we live in. In an encounter with a religious other, one's religious identity can be contested and challenged which can lead in extreme cases to loss of faith or withdrawal into one's own community. Clearly these two aspects do not encourage interfaith dialogue, rather participants of interfaith dialogue have to look for other strategies to deal with the insecurities that derive from interfaith encounters.

Interfaith dialogue designates the existence of the religious other, and demands an open and inclusive way of valuing the other. Interfaith dialogue can, I argue, be understood as 'inclusive othering'. The other is needed in order to understand yourself and to establish interfaith dialogue. Yet, at the same time the other needs to be valued in an inclusive way in order to contribute to establishing peace in the world. Othering, in scientific research, is often understood as a negative process when compared with belonging. The following quote in a magazine published by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California supports this idea: "while othering processes marginalize people on the basis of perceived group differences, belonging confers the privileges of membership in a community, including the care and concern of other members" (Grant-Thomas et al. 2016, 10). I challenge this idea by stating that seeing the other as different is an inevitable human process that one needs in order to make sense of who one is. Furthermore, I state that othering can have both negative and positive consequences, depending on the strategy that is used. I will argue that in interfaith dialogue people of faith use various strategies of inclusive othering to cope with the insecurities that come from interfaith dialogue.

The United Religions Initiative (URI), an interfaith organization active in 96 countries and locally organized in cooperation circles (CCs), wants to end religiously motivated violence and establish peace and a better world for all people. There are three CCs in the Netherlands that organize activities in their immediate social environments. These three CCs gave me a perfect case study to discover more about how interfaith dialogue plays out in society. In interviews with the members of the CCs and through meetings and gatherings they organized, I

was able to get more insight into, firstly, how my informants think about religion, rituals, religious diversity and interfaith dialogue (chapter 2); secondly, where their motivation to participate in interfaith dialogue comes from (chapter 3); thirdly, how they experienced interfaith dialogue (chapter 4); and lastly, what strategies they used to cope with the insecurities about one's identity that interfaith dialogue brings to the fore (chapter 5). Throughout my field research I realized that my informants, who showed great diversity in gender, age and religious background, also had different ways of understanding the subjects mentioned above.

I have looked long and hard for a metaphor that would allow me to make sense of a phenomenon in which people who are so different to each other, manage to work together towards a better world. Droogers (2012) associates religion with play. This insight provided me with a metaphor that became very useful in my research; the game. A game can be played with players who have nothing in common, as long as they all follow the rules of the game and strive towards the same goal, peace on Earth. In theory everybody can (and maybe should) participate in the game (at least in this game); the question however is how do they play the game?

Interfaith dialogue is, to my knowledge, a rather new subject of study in the field of anthropology. Most research on this subject is carried out by theologians. Research on interfaith dialogue, moreover, often concentrates on the Abrahamic religions. With an anthropological take on interfaith dialogue I hope to give more insight into how subjects such as identification, othering and belonging relate to religion, how people of different faiths deal with religious others in interfaith dialogue, and what stories they tell to cope with the difficulties of interfaith dialogue they encounter along the way.

## FIELDNOTES

“ It is Tuesday morning 08:00am. Amsterdam Central Station is busy as usual. I make my way through a hodgepodge of people towards platform 15b. I pass men and women carrying suitcases wearing suits and high heels. Tourists with massive roller cases in bright colours. Weary looking men who appear to have spent the night sleeping in the station. As I step into the train, carrying a cup of cappuccino in one hand and my railway card in the other, I realise how little interaction all these people have with each other. I'm no exception: Everyone seems to be in a hurry, in their own worlds, busy getting to their destination as soon as possible. This reminds me of something one of my informants said last week; "the encounter is the essence of my belief". We were having a coffee at café Emma, one of his favourites in the neighbourhood Segbroek. 'The encounter' with the 'other' has become a recurring theme in my field research. 'The encounter' has not just been mentioned by most of the informants I have spoken to, it has also become a theme for myself. Over the course of three months, I spoke to nineteen people of different religion, age, and gender. These people are in some way or another related to the United Religions Initiative (URI). People I would normally, in my day to day rush of getting from one place to another, never have met. ”

# 1.

## THE PLAYING FIELD

The playing field is the place where a game takes place. One needs a board to play the game on, tools such as a dice to play the game, and of course players. Just like the board is the playing field for a game of Scrabble or Monopoly, the world can be seen as the playing field for interfaith dialogue. After all the goal of interfaith dialogue is to establish peace for all people. In this chapter I will discuss the playing field of my research. In the first subchapter, I will discuss the field and my research scope. I will then discuss the players that participate in the game. After that I will move on to the tools I used to understand the game, such as the information I was looking for and the methods. I will then elaborate on how I, as a researcher, became part of the game. I will round off by explaining the relevance of this research.

## 1.1 THE FIELD

Interfaith dialogue is a global phenomenon that can be studied in countless settings or locations. In this chapter I will show how I downsized this large field of study into a particular case study. I will start with giving an overview on the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue, from there I will zoom in to the United Religions Initiative (URI), the URI in the Netherlands and from there my specific research scope.

### 1.1.1 Interfaith dialogue

Before I started my field work, I did not realize, that interfaith dialogue is such a wide spread phenomenon. Try to google 'interfaith' and you will be overwhelmed by the amount of initiatives and organizations that actively look for the other within interreligious encounters. Worldwide people of different religious traditions unite in order to end religiously motivated violence, restore peace and create a better world for all people. These interfaith initiatives come in many shapes and sizes depending on "the participants (laypeople, religious leader, theologians, and monks), the structure (local/international, small-/large-scale, bilateral/multilateral), and the themes to be discussed (e.g., everyday concerns, ethical challenges, spiritual experiences, doctrinal issues)" (Moyaert 2014, 3). These initiatives try to reach their ideological aspiration to create a better world for all, by achieving other, more concrete goals. To name a few: 'The Interfaith Alliance', unites people from different religions under the statement: "protecting faith and freedom". Their goal is to establish freedom of religion in America. (The Interfaith Alliance, 2017) 'The Women's Interfaith Network' calls out to all women and urges them to establish friendships despite differences. This network aims to create an inclusive society in which differences are not seen as stumbling blocks to friendship. (The Women's Interfaith Network, 2017) Finally, 'The Interfaith Centre for Sustainable Development' strives towards a sustainable environment through interfaith cooperation. (The Interfaith Centre For Sustainable Development, 2017)

Interfaith dialogue is about meeting the other who adheres to a different 'faith'. This dialogue implies a certain level of agency<sup>1</sup>. People dealing with interfaith dialogue actively look for the other that thinks differently when it comes to faith. It can mean encounters between a Muslim and a Christian, or a Buddhist and a Jew. With a broader understanding of faith, it can even include encounters between a humanist and a Hindu, or an atheist and a Hare Krishna. However if one includes everyone in the group, what does one do with the people who do not agree with including 'everyone'? Moreover, the question of how to define faith and religion raises the question of who is included and who is excluded in the dialogical interfaith activities. Can humanists or agnostics be seen as people of 'faith'? Therefore even though interfaith dialogue favours inclusivity, it also sets boundaries on defining who are people of faith and who are not, moreover, one might have certain perceptions of who is capable of interfaith dialogue and unintentionally exclude those who do not possess these skills.

Interfaith is often positively associated with cooperation for the greater good, for showing love and compassion for others and creating peace for all living beings, and with people who are willing to unite despite their differences. Interfaith critics however share their fear of syncretism. They state that interaction with people from other faiths threatens the purity of one's religion and that interfaith dialogue inevitably leads to incorporating aspects of different religions into one's own or switching religions altogether. Moreover, some confuse interreligious dialogue with the merging of several religions into one. My informants however, did not share this fear of syncretism. According to them, interfaith is about crossing religious and cultural barriers without losing

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<sup>1</sup> Agency can be defined as: "the intentional (willed, reflexive) aspect of human existence" (Eriksen 1995, 52)

one's own belief. Furthermore, attempts to convert other members are strongly discouraged. It is about mutual understanding that would hopefully lead to peace. I have mentioned a few examples of the many organizations, networks, and collaborations with members from different religious traditions that work together under the term 'interfaith'. But how do we define interfaith dialogue?

Leirvik (2014, 3) states that dialogue can be distinguished from "...confrontational and destructive modes of communication..." and that interfaith dialogue can be seen as "...any form or degree of constructive engagement between religious traditions" (Ibid.). Now let us deconstruct this definition. We could understand 'constructive engagement' as building a relationship that has meaning for both parties and requires active involvement from both parties. But what is a meaningful encounter? And on what level is 'involvement' required? In other words what is the goal of a 'meaningful encounter'? Is it mutual understanding, day to day cooperation, creating a deeper emotional relationship? The second part of the definition states that the dialogue takes place between different 'religious traditions'. This also raises questions. What can be understood as a religious tradition? Who decides what 'religion' is and why is the word 'tradition' added to religion?

By now we should have realized that interfaith dialogue is a term that does not allow for a single clear-cut definition. All attempts to do so leave us with more questions than answers. Questions that touch upon topics such as power (who is included or excluded in interfaith dialogue), definition (what is faith or religion) and aspirations (what is the goal of interfaith dialogue). It is not my objective to provide an all-encompassing definition for this phenomenon. Rather, I will focus on the emic perspective of the phenomenon. How do my respondents understand interfaith, how do they find their ways within the world of interfaith and what meaning does it have to them? I will therefore address the questions mentioned above in later chapters through the opinions of my informants. For now, I find it useful to adopt a broad understanding of interfaith dialogue, as multidimensional 'ways of meeting', between people who are consciously occupied with giving meaning to life. Droogers (2012, 211) defines it as "...a process involving the meaning-makers of two or more symbolic systems." This broad way of looking at interfaith leaves space to question the general character of the definition.

### **1.1.2 The United Religions Initiative**

When I started my search for interfaith networks on google I soon came across the website of the URI. It caught my attention straight away. A well designed and straightforward home page with a clear statement: "The URI is a global grassroots interfaith network that cultivates peace and justice by engaging people to bridge religious and cultural differences and work together for the good of their communities and the world". Several news items of recent achievements illustrate this statement, "December 16, 2016 4:30 PM: *'Coalition of URI Cooperation Circles Recognized for Raising Awareness About the Plight of Yazidis and Assyrians'*.", "December 15, 2016 4:04 PM: *'Successful Blood Donation Camp'*." These items are wonderfully embellished with pictures of men and women from different ethnicities in different (traditional) clothing holding hands, smiling faces, or standing in front of a URI banner holding signs stating, 'I am URI' in different languages. (URI 2017)

The URI is a global grassroots interfaith network that was founded in the year 2000 by Bishop William Swing in San Francisco. The purpose of the network is to "promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the earth and all living beings" (URI 2017). At the basis of the community lies the URI charter, this document outlines twenty-one basic principles. The charter starts by stating that the URI is not a religion and that the uniqueness of each belief and

tradition is to be valued and respected. The charter however does emphasize the idea that all religions can unite and work together, in order to achieve a higher goal. In other words, it addresses the possibility to find unity in diversity. The network is now active in 96 Countries and is locally organized through 816 CCs, local interfaith communities. These CCs are active in different fields such as community building, interfaith dialogue, education, environment and women empowerment. Each CC should have at least seven members and represent at least three different faiths or traditions (including the non-religious).<sup>2</sup>

After some more ‘digital’ research I came across a video released by the URI called ‘Be A Peacebuilder’ (unitedreligions 2007). The video starts off in a dramatic way, showing all the harm that is done in the world. War and despair. Dark and gloomy images of dead bodies, men with guns and bomb blasts succeed each other in a rapid tempo. Fortified by disturbing sounds as if in a horror movie. But then, suddenly, the music changes into a serene sound, the images shown are now colourful and follow each other in a more at ease tempo. “This is your invitation to be a peace builder” says the voice over in a friendly tone. I recognize these visuals from the website. Smiling people, from different religions and ethnicities, working together on different projects. A few statements from members accentuate the importance of the URI. The video ends with a solution for all the harm in the world, we should “stop seeing the other as the other and start seeing the other as yourself” (unitedreligions 2007). This statement and especially the tension in this statement was the departure of my research.

I wrote down the statement on a piece of paper. *Stop seeing the other as the other and start seeing the other as yourself*. A seemingly ambiguous comment, for two reasons. Firstly, the quote implies that seeing the other as the other is not desirable. Secondly the quote implies that there is a common ground in humanity, ‘the other becomes yourself’. The URI website states in its principles “a shared human faith behind the different human faiths”. So in the ‘narrative’ of the URI there is an ‘other’ and this other is recognized as such. But by building bridges through cooperation the other becomes yourself. The idea of ‘the other becoming yourself’ is also visible in the name of the network, ‘yoU aRe I’. There is an apparent contradiction in the narrative of the URI. On the one hand diversity is respected and valued but on the other hand all people are like other people. How does this apparent contradiction affect the identity of URI members I wondered? Or in other words, how do they understand their own religious identity in relation to other religious identities and their shared identity as a member of the URI? These questions were enough reason for me to contact the organization and ask them for the possibility to do research with them.

### 1.1.3 URI NL

The Netherlands is one of the countries where the URI is active. There are now three CCs officially part of the URI (and there is one in the running of becoming a member of the URI), *Stuurgroep Nederland* (Steering Committee URI NL CC), *Interreligieus Beraad Segbroek* (IBS) and *de Amsterdamse Vrouwengroep* (*Amsterdam Women group*). All people I spoke to during my field research were either a member of one of these CCs, the URI international or were closely related to one of the CCs or in the process of becoming a member. Each CC has its own purpose and characteristics.

The Steering Committee URI NL has as its main goal to organize and coordinate activities for interfaith dialogue and understanding. This includes developing URI CCs across the country and supporting existing CCs

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<sup>2</sup> Description of CCs by URI: “Cooperation Circles range in size from a minimum of seven members to tens of thousands, representing at least three faiths or traditions, including the non-religious, and subscribe to the shared vision outlined in URI’s Charter.” (URI 2017)

(URI 2017). Their main action area is ‘interfaith and intercultural understanding and dialogue’. The Steering Committee URI NL organizes several events each year in order to increase the awareness of interfaith dialogue in general and the URI in particular in the Netherlands, to stimulate the creation of new CCs and to support existing CCs. The CC has eight members from several different traditions, however one member was never present at the meetings during my field research. The Steering Committee NL met mostly in The Hague and sometimes in Amsterdam.

The IBS is active in a particular neighbourhood in The Hague, called Segbroek. In this neighbourhood you will find several mosques, churches, a mandir, community houses etc. This is where most of my research took place. The IBS organizes interfaith events and other activities in order to improve the neighbourhood. One example is ‘the confidant’<sup>3</sup> project. It never became clear to me how many members the IBS officially had. The group had different people every time I walked in to the meeting room. There were however seven members that almost always were there, and these are the people I interviewed.

The Amsterdamse Vrouwengroep officially became a CC during my field research. This group consists of several women from different religious backgrounds (Muslim, Brahma Kumaris, Jewish, Scientology, Humanist, Hindu, Christian) and age groups. They describe themselves as “a network organization of women from different cultural and spiritual backgrounds who promote dialogue and empowerment between women of various backgrounds in Amsterdam”<sup>4</sup> Apart from that they also organize dialogue events to enlarge their network.

#### **1.1.4 The scope of the field research**

If I had to name one place where I spent most of my time during my field research it would be Segbroek, the neighbourhood in The Hague where the IBS is most active. This neighbourhood was the décor where I held most of my interviews, where I attended meetings and where several events took place. I know the neighbourhood and the people active within this area better than I know my own neighbourhood. At tram stop ‘Goudenregenstraat’ I got off and took the first street on my left hand. At the end of the street I could see the peak of the church tower rising against the sky. Meetings were often held in the rectory and a few of my interviews also took place in the church rectory or office. A few blocks from the church there was the mosque enclosed by a large fence and the Dialooghuis, a community centre run by Mustafa, a Turkish-Dutch man. Two of my informants recommended me ‘café Emma’, which is where I sat often writing my field notes while enjoying a cup of cappuccino or meeting up with one of my informants.

Another, but, smaller part of my field research took place in Amsterdam. Three of my informants that lived in Amsterdam (the other that invited me over lived in Zeist) invited me to their houses in different parts of the city. Moreover the Scientology church, to which two of my informants committed themselves, was located in Amsterdam. I spent the last week of my field research in the silent farm Metanoia<sup>5</sup> in Belgium where the URI had organized an intergenerational retreat. I will elaborate on these events in chapter 1.3.3.

## **1.2 THE PLAYERS**

A game is no game without players. In the previous paragraph I have sketched my research field. In this paragraph I will give an overview of the players that played an important role during my field research. I will first introduce

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<sup>3</sup> Original text: “Vertrouwenspersonen”

<sup>4</sup> I retrieved this information from their URI CC application Form.

<sup>5</sup> For more information: [www.stiltehoevemetanoia.be](http://www.stiltehoevemetanoia.be)

my key informant, I will then explain how I ‘found’ my informants and will lastly share some particularities that I noticed hold true for most of my informants.

### **1.2.1 Key informant**

Wim was my first encounter with the URI. In November I received a very enthusiastic reply on my request to do my research at the URI. Wim is member of the URI Europe and plays an important role as a URI member in the Netherlands because he participates in two CCs, the Steering Committee NL and the IBS. With his response also came an invitation to an event on interfaith and education that took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November. At this event we met for the first time. Wim is in his mid-seventies, thin grey hair on his head a short grey beard and glasses. He wears a jacket with a URI pin and loves a cup of coffee. Wim became my key informant. Via him I came in contact with all my informants. Moreover he forwarded me all emails that he thought were interesting to me. These emails were part of an URI email thread supposed to keep contact persons of local CCs, Global Council Trustee or Global Staff members updated on happenings and activities in the CC network and the URI community. I met Wim around ten times outside meetings and gatherings. We would discuss my progress of the research, meaning that I told him who I spoke to, and I was also able to ask him questions about the URI in general or the CCs in particular: Wim, in turn, told me the things about URI that he thought were worth sharing. We had two ‘official’ interviews.

### **1.2.2 Snowball**

Through Wim I met 18 people that played an important role in my research. Even though Wim initiated most of the contacts I soon also met people through other people. I was for example invited to attend a meeting of the confidants, where I met Jorn who invited me over for dinner and a talk at his house. Through Catherine I met two other members of the Amsterdamse Vrouwengroep. At a certain point in my field research I asked myself the question what the scope of my research was and how I could define my informants (not solely as members of the URI, since I also spoke to other people that were only involved with the CCs). I decided I would look at interfaith dialogue in the Netherlands with the CCs in the Netherlands and their members and acquaintances as case study.

Not all members of the CCs were aware of the URI or the philosophy of the network. Often when I would ask them about it or showed them a video clip they said they had heard from it and vaguely knew what it was. One of my respondents, for example, wondered why, after I showed him a video of a Christmas celebration of the URI (uriglobal 2015)<sup>6</sup>, there was also a humanist lighting a candle even though it is written in the ‘URI preamble’ that all ‘faiths’ are welcome. Others had no clue about, or were, quite the opposite, very familiar with the organization. It shows that the members of the CCs in the Netherlands, even though they were officially a member of the URI were not all familiar with that and focussed mainly on their CC. The Steering Committee NL quite logically was an exception to this. Many of the members of this group were quite active in the URI, travelled to other countries to meet other members and had studied the philosophy of the organization.

The URI should be seen as the departure for my research. It is a network or platform from where people find common goals to work together. It was not my intention to ‘test’ the informants and see how much their views on interfaith corresponded with the philosophy of the URI. The URI philosophy however did give me a valuable

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<sup>6</sup> In this video people from different traditions light a candle for different values such as peace, love, health etc. The URI philosophy allows people from different traditions, including all spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions, to become a member. (URI, 2017)

tool to start a conversation. So I used the URI as a case to study interfaith work and encounters. Because the organization has a global character I was able to look at interfaith dialogue from a more broad perspective even though I concentrated on three groups that were mainly active in the Netherlands. The contact and their sense of belonging was often part of the larger network. In attachment 1 you can find an overview of the people I spoke to.

### **1.2.3 Particularities of the players**

The people I spoke to during my field research truly stand for the diversity URI promotes. As you can see in attachment 1 seven religions were represented in the CCs. Moreover all of the informants had very different stories to tell about their lives, where they grew up (not all members were born in the Netherlands), how they were raised, and how their religious beliefs evolved.

Nevertheless a few things can be named that characterized all of my informants. Firstly, I would describe most of my informants as being active in society, be it in their own community or outside their community as, for example, a spokesperson. Many participated in other organizations apart from the URI, some were bloggers and others were asked to give lectures. One of my younger informants said, during meeting of the Steering Committee URI NL, that she hoped she would be as active as the two older men that were part of the group when she would reach their age. One of my informants sent me an email with an overview of all the events, around thirty, he visited this year.

Maybe being active in society also means being well-educated. With well-educated I do not only mean in an academic way, even though, most of my informants are academically schooled, I am mainly talking about the fact that many of my informants did a lot of 'self- study'. In interviews my informants would refer to things they read or people they were inspired by. The four people that invited me to their houses had large book shelves with books varying in subject from religion and philosophy to history and art.

This brings me to the next point. I had always thought that religious people were taking their religion for granted without questioning it. The opposite, however, was true for my informants. Religion was not something fixed, something they had, rather, religion was something that had always been part of their lives, that had always accompanied them and gave meaning but in different ways. Religiosity was often perceived as a quest. I will discuss this more extensively in subchapter 2.1.

Most of my informants were easy talkers and did not mind sharing personal stories. Moreover, the ease with which they would talk about difficult subjects showed that they thought about these subjects before. I would ask them one short question and they often replied with long answers. Many of them told me after the interview that they enjoyed answering my questions because it made them think about certain things and sometimes gave them new insights in themselves.

## **1.3 THE TOOLS**

In this subchapter I will share the methods I used to get to know my informants and understand their motivation to engage in interfaith dialogue. I will, firstly, share what information I was looking for and what question was at the basis of my research. I will then discuss the particularities of the research. Lastly, I will discuss the methods I used to find the information I wanted to find.

### **1.3.1 Research question**

The question I asked myself after reading about the URI and before I entered the field was: *How do members of the United Religions Initiative navigate their specific religious identity with their interfaith identity through processes of inclusive othering?* This question assumes a tension between one's interfaith identity and one's religious identity. This question implies that the members of the URI have two identities that contest each other. However, while I was doing research, I realized that this question is not accurate for two reasons. First of all, it presents identity as something fixed and something one has rather than seeing identity as something fluid that changes in a dialectical way with the social surrounding. Even though, I saw identities as being in constant flux and context depended I still made the assumption that there would be a tension between them. This because I stated that I was looking for the stories my informants told to make a feeling of belonging to an interfaith group and staying true to their own religion possible. Secondly, I did not find information that would lead to the conclusion that there was a tension between my informants religious and interfaith identity. Rather, I found that interfaith dialogue was an 'extension' of their religious identity, or in other words, religion was often what motivated them to engage in interfaith dialogue (see chapter 3). Their religious identity, however, was challenged in interfaith dialogue because each member had a different concept of truth and reality; my informants did not experience an internal identity conflict because they belonged both to a certain religious group and a certain interfaith group, rather, their identity was challenged because they interacted with the other. Moyaert (2014) describes religious identities as fragile because they lack solid justification of why one belongs to a certain religion and not to another and because it questions one's loyalty to a certain religion. These contingencies are discussed in chapter 4. The question I aim to answer in this research is: *How do members of the URI Netherlands understand and experience interfaith dialogue and how do they deal with the contingencies inherent to their religious identity through processes of inclusive othering?*

### **1.3.2 Particularities of the research**

One of my challenges during my research period was to make the known 'exotic'. This was due to the fact that all my informants (except for the ones I met during the retreat in Belgium) spoke Dutch and lived in the Netherlands. The meetings I attended were, except for the spiritual opening (more about this in chapter 2) very much like the type of meetings I was familiar with. Moreover, I was not fully immersed in the research site because I stayed in Amsterdam and travelled to The Hague usually, two to three times a week. In The Hague I attended meetings and gatherings around three to four times a month and I met most of my informants there. Because of the long interviews I had with my informants and because of working together with them on a project I soon became very acquainted with my informants. It almost felt like starting a new job. The first week everything is new but as soon as you are used to the environment and the people you stop noticing the details. All the above reason challenged me to keep seeing everything I was seeing as something new and exotic. A strategy I used was to write down my fieldnotes as if I was writing it to someone from a different culture and background. I used pieces of my fieldnotes as an introduction to each of my chapters.

What did make the whole research more exotic to me was the fact that I did not have much knowledge about religion. Already in the second week I received the Bhagavad-Gita as a present, a book I never even heard of before. I visited a mosque and the Scientology church for the first time in my life, had dinner on the couch of a pandit (I now know this is a Hindu Priest) and was introduced to Wicca spirituality. I got to know a lot about

religion mainly through in-depth interviews. My research had thus become an interesting combination of being very familiar with the members of the group yet being overwhelmed by all the interesting information about religion. As Droogers (2012, 318) suggests, “the researcher is as human as the research subjects”

### 1.3.3 Methods

In my field research I used several research methods. In attachment 2 you will find a brief description of each method that I used. Because *the recorded interviews* and the *meetings and gatherings* I attended were such a big part of my research I will elaborate on these methods a bit more.

#### Interviews

During my field work my main focus was getting to know the personal stories of my informants. I wanted to understand how my informants understood interfaith dialogue and why they were involved in it, how they experienced (their own) religion and how they viewed their own religion in relation to other religions. I interviewed eight informants twice and eight once. The reason why I interviewed half of them twice was because they had a more prominent role in my research. I, for example, was mostly present at the meetings from the Steering Committee URI NL Nederland and the IBS whereas I only got to know the Amsterdamse Vrouwengroep towards the end of the field research.

The interviews took place in informal settings. I always asked my interviewees where they wanted to meet for the interview because it gave me insight in which place(s) they thought were suitable for an interview with me. Some invited me to their houses, some to cafés or other places that they liked and some invited me to their places of worship. Most of my informants seemed to forget the audio recorder as soon as I turned it on because they did not pay any attention to it and talked freely. Some would in the end ask me not to use certain things they said during the interview because it might affect the harmony in the group. Some would also express some insecurity about whether or not they did well and if I had an answer to all of my questions. All my informants were ‘easy talkers’. With that I mean that they were sharing a lot of stories with me and did not need a lot of input to talk for a long time. This meant that often when I asked one question they ended up talking for at least a few minutes and, if I did not interrupt, could probably go on much longer. They were true storytellers. Some of my informants mentioned that they enjoyed the interview because it made them think more deeply about their faith and about why they were involved in interfaith dialogue. Two of them even said it was nice to “get things of their chest”<sup>7</sup>.

I deliberately choose, especially in the first interview, to let my informants speak freely. This was, firstly, to put them at ease and to create an informal setting, secondly, because I wanted to see which stories they wanted to tell me and, thirdly, because I did not want to guide the interviews too much to possible prejudices I had. Moreover, I wanted to make sure I did not ask any questions that could either provoke or offend them. To conclude, I used these first interviews to establish a mutual bond of trust and willingness to share. Furthermore, these interviews gave me insight in the topics and issues that were important to my informants. In the second interview I was able to question my informants more in-depth on certain topics, refer to things that happened during meetings and gatherings and to ask clarification on certain things they said during the first interviews. Towards the end of my field research I asked more straightforward questions and I also referred to what other members of the groups

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<sup>7</sup> Original text: “je hart te luchten”

had said and what their opinion was on that subject. These questions became so to say sometimes a bit more confronting but never up to the point that people felt uncomfortable with the questions.

The questions I asked can roughly be divided into four themes. *Interfaith dialogue, religious experience, diversity of religions and personal history*. In attachment 3 you will find a short description of each theme, what type of questions I asked and how it helped me to get closer to an answer to the question of how people navigate between their religious identity and their interfaith identity.

### **Meetings/ Gatherings**

The IBS and the Steering Committee URI NL got together once or twice a month. During these meetings the focus was mainly on practical issues such as the financial situation, updates on different projects, making plans for new projects. At a certain point the Steering Committee URI NL decided that they should also come together to share their story on why they were involved in interfaith dialogue and the URI. Interestingly, the same discussion took place at the IBS. Few members expressed their need to get into more depth about their different religious backgrounds. I never attended any gathering or meeting of the Vrouwengroep because I only met them towards the end of my field research.

During the meetings and gatherings I looked at the group dynamics such as the roles and decision-making processes and the (unwritten) rules. I attended several events. The World Interfaith Harmony Week is a worldwide event in which people of different faiths meet each other. I was asked to join the project group that was organizing different events during this week. I also went to an Intergenerational retreat in Belgium. This event organised by URI Global invited people of different ages and countries to join in order to establish a community and think about problems that arise in society through age gaps. The Steering Committee NL asked me to be their representative. Even though I was no ‘official’ member of the URI. The Educational gathering was my first encounter with the URI and took place on November 13 in a church in The Hague.

## **1.4 BECOMING PART OF THE GAME**

We all know what happens to people watching a football game. They are so caught up in the excitement that it is almost as if they are part of the game. They support their football club as if it were their own family, show compassion if a player is injured or know all the gossip about the team. I was so intrigued by the people I was studying that I often felt I was part of the game. In this subchapter I will explain how I struggled with my role as a researcher and how I got involved personally.

### **1.4.1 Struggles**

*“I find myself in an awkward situation. The second event organized by the IBS to celebrate the World Interfaith Harmony Week has just ended. One of the members of the Steering Committee NL has asked me to be a part of the after movie she is making. She likes to have young people in the video. I tell her that I find the idea a bit uncomfortable since I am not a member of the URI. And honestly talking in front of a camera makes me quite nervous too. It becomes even more interesting when another member questions my ‘presence’ in the video. Nevertheless she insists and I agree to help her, trying to overcome my growing sense of uneasiness. This situation is typical for my experience with the URI. I adopted or thought I should adopt a neutral role. However, it soon became clear that that was out of the question. I decided to just go with the flow. If they were asking me something*

*I did not personally have any objections to I would just do it regardless what tensions it might provoke within the group.”*

(Fieldnotes 15 February 2017)

The example about me being in the video is one of the many that shows my involvement in the group. As mentioned before I joined the project group to organize the World Interfaith Harmony Week. For that I was asked to make the flyer (see attachment 4). Without much instruction on how the design should look like I served the web for suitable images. It was very interesting to notice that my informants had different associations with the image I choose, a tree yet all of them agreed on the design. Another example plays out during a meeting. Jan really tries to involve me in the meeting by asking me who I am and if I have any questions. He also asks me to participate in the ‘what’s going on in your life’ round<sup>8</sup> and what I think of the meeting. A third example is that I was asked to join the Intergenerational Retreat in Belgium. Wim asked me if I wanted to go as a youngster, together with Walter we represented the Netherlands even though I am not a member of the URI.

From the beginning I have been open about my role. This is what I shared with the group members:

*“I am here as a master student doing research in interreligious dialogue. I am curious about your motivation to work with the URI or IBS. If all of you are ok with that I will be attending all meetings and other events that take place via your group. I would also like to talk to you individually. If in any case there is something that you don’t want me to use for my research you can let me know. I am also available to help organizing events. If you have any questions about me or my research do let me know.”*

I think my biggest struggle from beginning to end was my own position within the group. Am I going to stay as neutral as possible? Am I going to interfere with what they are talking about/discussing, to what extent can I assist in certain projects, what is my contact with the various members of the group like? What mainly caused this struggle is that I tried to be ‘involved’, in the sense of being part of the group as a member, as little as possible. But as the research proceeded I got more and more involved with the group. Not only because I was attending meetings and people were actively asking me for my opinion or because I joined a project group for organizing an event. But also, and maybe especially, because of the personal talks I had with each member individually. Even though I did not share much about myself they did share a lot about themselves. I slowly started to appreciate each person as I got to know them. So, one could ask, what was my influence as a researcher on the group and how big was my intervention?

#### **1.4.4 Methodological questions**

As mentioned in the introduction, interfaith dialogue implies the existence of the religious other and demands an open and inclusive way of valuing the other. This can be understood as ‘inclusive othering’. The fact that I became part of the game can be explained because of the inclusive character of the group. Firstly, I was, in a way, just like them. A person that was trying to get to know the other without devaluing the other. I, in that sense, naturally became a part of the group. Secondly, I was a researcher that was doing research on interfaith dialogue. Since

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<sup>8</sup> Meetings of the URI always started with a personal update of all the members. They were asked to share what was going on in their lives. People often shared very personal things; for example, about losing a close relative or about getting married.

inclusiveness was such an important trait of the group there is a possibility that by making me part of the group they were actually showing me just how inclusive they were. My informants often mentioned how important they thought it was that I was doing research on interfaith dialogue, which made me wonder if they expected me to write a laudatory piece on the importance of interreligious dialogue. However through the in-depth interviews I had, I was able to retrieve the reasons they had for participating in interfaith dialogue. This made me realize that they were sincerely trying to be as inclusive as possible and were in that sense not 'keeping up appearances' in front of me. One of my informants said "I am trying to live the life I want to see" (Fieldnotes 24 March 2017). With which she was trying to say that even though it was sometimes difficult she was trying the best she could.

## **1.5 RELEVANCE OF EXPOSING THE GAME**

Religiously motivated violence over the last couple of years has become headline news. Terrorist attacks are now part of the religious discourse and this has given rise to a great number of interfaith initiatives. These interfaith initiatives not only unite in order to create peace but also to provide the world with a positive counter message as opposed to all the negative statements on religion. As if to say; religion and violence are not inextricably linked to each other, and religions promote peace first and foremost.

Interfaith dialogue is a relatively new phenomenon. In the world but also in scientific research. The research that has been done on interfaith dialogue so far mainly comes from the theological field of research. Theologians are often concerned with ideological questions, such as how do we spread a positive message on religions, or with philosophical questions such as how is interfaith dialogue possible. Often these studies are written from a particular religious perspective, such as Christianity. Studying interfaith dialogue from an anthropological perspective gives new insights in the phenomenon. Firstly, because it does not set out to answer ideological questions such as how do we make the world a better place by interfaith cooperation. Rather, it questions these ideological questions and gives insight in why people engage in it. Secondly, because this research is not written from a particular religious perspective, it gives a broader notion of how religious people in general deal with the religious other.

Anthropological research on interfaith dialogue mostly concentrates on people that adhere to the Abrahamic religions (Muslims, Jews and Christians). To my knowledge there is no anthropological research on an organization that deals with interfaith dialogue on a large scale such as the URI. Moreover othering, in scientific research, is often understood as negative as opposed to belonging that has a positive connotation. Through the case study of the URI NL I will show that othering is not only a negative process but, rather, that it becomes negative through the way one 'others'.

In this research I aim to show the reality of religious diversity and interfaith dialogue not from a religious perspective but rather from a human perspective. I also hope to give more insight in how religious people deal with the religious other. I hope to take away some prejudices that religion automatically means closed-ness towards religious others and that interfaith dialogue always leads to loss of faith or syncretism.

## FIELDNOTES

“  
We are sitting opposite each other at a small table in the corner of a cafe. It is 11:35am, our cups of cappuccino half empty, our apple pies still untouched. The cafe is filled with people chatting away and I have trouble concentrating on what Peter is trying to explain to me. Since we sat down our conversation quickly moved from 'day to day chit chat' to difficult subjects such as religious diversity and the 'ultimate truth'. He tells me that it is “wrong to imprison God in a religious system” and that everyone should be free to believe what they want to believe. When I look at him doubtfully, he picks up our now empty cups and puts them in a line. “These are the different 'gods' people believe in”, he states. Above these Gods is the 'ultimate truth'. I must have looked blank because he picks up a pen and starts to illustrate on a piece of paper how the 'different Gods' all come together in the 'ultimate truth'. It is a complicated question and the answer even more so. After a while he concludes, that "everyone has their own truth" and that it makes sense that people think their own religion is better than others.  
”

# 2.

## **THE FOUNDATION OF THE GAME**

When players play a game there are some foundations on which the game is based. With foundation I do not mean the rules of the game but the general knowledge that helps you to play the game. With Scrabble you will draw from your own vocabulary and with Trivial Pursuit from your general knowledge. These foundations are what Droogers (2012) calls schema repertoires. Repertoires can be seen as the 'pools of knowledge' from which a person understands the world. In this chapter I will show that the schema repertoires of my informants concerning religion, religious differences, rituals and interfaith dialogue are different and in fact differ so much from each other that one might, by the end of this chapter, wonder whether the players are able to play the game.

## 2.1 UNDERSTANDING RELIGION

*“God is an experience that has never not been and will always be. With God I have the most intimate conversations, but at the same time these interactions are with myself and ultimately, with the god that lies within me.”<sup>9</sup>*

(Wim, personal communication)

*“To believe (in a religion) is that you truly believe in that what it preaches and (but) for me, religion is more the spiritual journey, the road that leads you to the answers to life’s key questions.”<sup>10</sup>*

(Maartje, personal communication)

*“Religion to me is the route that Allah or God has outlined in order for people to be able to return to paradise. That’s the key to religion....It is simply a set of rules, norms and morals as well as examples. The end result leads to our return to paradise.”<sup>11</sup>*

(Sabir, personal communication)

As seen in the excerpt of my field notes in the beginning of this chapter, religion says something about how you understand reality. Religion is one of the foundations of the game. However my informants do not understand religion in the same way which is clear from the quotes as shown at the start of this chapter. In other words, their religious schema repertoire on religion differs. For Wim religion is a personal relationship with something that transcends us, for Maartje religion is the quest for the spiritual in order to give answers to questions of life, to Sabir religion is more a guide in life that Allah has given to us, a set of values and rules in order to reach ‘paradise’ after life. Religion, states Droogers (2012) “...with universal claims of applicability, depends on the universal human gift of meaning-making”. Religion thus gives meaning to one’s life, it shapes how we view our reality.

For all my informants (to a lesser extent for the one who is no longer religious) religion is extremely important in their lives. Most of them saw religion as guidance on how to live their lives. For some this meant being very active in their own religious community. Walter, for example, is pastor in the church where the URI often hold meetings and Maartje works fulltime for the scientology church as a public relations manager. For others this meant being very active in and outside their religious community. Peter, for example, called himself ‘Buurtpastoor’ and is with his ‘Kleurkerk’ (literally Colour Church) a familiar face in Segbroek. For some, religion was more of a personal matter. Marije for example rarely visits the church. She explained that the work she does now with URI, but also with other similar organisations, brought her closer to the Lord. She does however read biblical texts at home and prays every day. Wim also hardly visits the church and talks about finding the divine in oneself.

Religion is something that has always played an important role in the lives of my informants, be it on different levels. For many of my informants, religion is not something fixed, something they received when they

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<sup>9</sup> Original text: “God is een Ervaring die niet meer is weggegaan en ook niet weg te denken. Met God voer ik de intiemste gesprekken, tegelijk zijn deze met mezelf en voor mij ook het goddelijke in mij.” (Wim, personal communication)

<sup>10</sup> Original text: “Geloof is echt dat je in iets gelooft dat je iets aanneemt en voor mij is een religie meer de zoektocht van het spirituele, de weg naar het vinden van antwoorden op de levensvragen” (Maartje, personal communication)

<sup>11</sup> Original text: “De religie is voor mij de manier van Allah of God die hij heeft uitgestippeld zodat de mensen goed kunnen terug keren naar het paradijs. Dat is de religie...Het is gewoon een set aan regels en normen en waarden en voorbeelden. Zodat we uiteindelijk kunnen terugkeren naar het paradijs” (Sabir, personal communication)

were born and something that stayed the same for the rest of their lives. Rather, religion to them was a quest, sometimes a struggle and often a guide. But always something that was in motion, something evolving as they grew older, had new experiences or when they met new people. Even within the religion they were still learning, finding new things and questioning what they already knew. Pastor Walter illustrates this transformation in believing clearly when he tells me that he does not believe like he did “as a child anymore”. His main drive to become a priest used to be because he was scared to end up in hell. He saw God as a punishing God. This change in religious adherence can be explained by making use of the concept of schema repertoires. Repertoires of knowledge are useful in understanding the construction of meaning because of three reasons. Firstly, it shows the contextuality of one’s knowledge. Not every piece of knowledge is always useful in each situation. Secondly, human knowledge changes just like repertoires by adding to it and reshaping it. And thirdly, just like repertoires, human knowledge can contain inconsistencies and contradictions since various pieces of knowledge are used in various different contexts. Repertoires explain why people over the course of time can change (Droogers, 2012). Growing in one’s religion was very important to all of my informants. The refusal to grow often resulted into what Dirk called: “the challenge of the institute”<sup>12</sup>, in which religious people only busy themselves with ancillary matters and forget about the essence of religion. In other words; the institute became the message. This phenomenon was often mentioned when we talked about religiously motivated violence. The main understanding was that when you do not lose sight of the essence of each religion, there will never be violence.

However this process of ‘growth’ meant something different to each member. For some growing meant in particular getting more in-depth knowledge about one’s own religion. For example, reading the religious texts of a particular religion, visiting religious services, but could also include conforming to all the rules and practices, such as fasting, vegetarianism or dressing in a certain way. Sabir and Dirk for example were strongly committed to the religious texts of their religions (respectively the Koran and the Bhagavad-Gita). When I interviewed them, they almost always answered my questions by referring to religious scripts. Walter also committed to the text of the Bible but mentioned that it should be placed in the context of when it was written. With this he meant that certain writings, such as how women should dress, were not applicable in the present day. He also states that mercifulness is more important than living according to the letter of the law.

For others, this growth into one’s own religion meant opening their horizons to other religions or stepping away from the dogmas of one’s religion and, instead, making it more personal. Wim, for example, states that he is a Christian but ‘shaped to his individual’. He does not conform to a religious authority such as the church but ‘designs’ his own way of being a Christian. And Jan described himself as a religious person he said “I am sort of Christian” (Interview Jan). He also felt a strong connection with Buddhism and mentioned that he does not always like to answer the question what religion he associates himself with. In other words he dislikes categorising himself.

This last way of looking at growth within one’s religion can be considered part of what Woodhead and Heelas (2005) call ‘the subjective turn’. The subjective turn is about what determines a person to live his or her life in a certain way. It is no longer the external (expectations) that determines how you should live (life-as, conformity to external authority) but the internal (subjective-life, the authority is within the individual). “The turn is away from worlds in which people think of themselves first and foremost as belonging to established and ‘given’ orders of things which are transmitted from the past but flow forwards into the future” (Heelas and Woodhead

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<sup>12</sup> Original text: “De uitdaging van het instituut”

2005, 3). It is about living one's life in full awareness of one's own being and welfare. The role of the 'authority' thus changes from an outside authority to an internal authority. The subject is thus called to "exercise authority in the face of great existential questions and this opens up the possibility of experimentation, questioning and exploring also across religious boundaries" (Moyaert 2015, 10).

Jan narrates:

*"I experience my own development, this is a journey within myself. Each time I push my boundaries I see this as a positive development and this expands my way of thinking exponentially. I can see clearly that as a person, I am unique, and all religions are unique within themselves, but I also see that everyone can complement each other, and to complement (or emphasise the quality of all that is unique), is a key word for me.*

*To understand that one can complement someone else and that just "you" is not enough is where it begins...so it starts with the other person, the other religion, the other way of looking at spiritualism and finding qualities in others that you yourself might not yet have developed. In this sense I only see this as an enriching experience. I can comprehend that some might find this threatening on a psychological level, but not on a spiritual level. It is this perceived "threat" that stops people from experiencing and ignoring 'the new', 'the unknown' and 'The Encounter' altogether. To be trapped in your crystal ball, when that crystal ball finally opens it will show you this beautiful universe where all levels of spirituality open up to you."*<sup>13</sup>

Many of my informants were raised in an orthodox religious milieu. Their quest has led to a more open-minded view of religion, more as something personal. This process of growth was only mentioned by those who I consider to be part of the so called 'subjective turn'. They did not state that everyone should have this growth process but rather that they wished it for everybody. This idea of being open-minded also correlates with their ideas on whether or not it is possible for orthodox people to join. Most of them said it would be very difficult if not impossible. The interesting thing is that those who strongly confirmed to an external authority (Religious texts, God) never mentioned this process of growth. Rather they explained how they grew within their own religion. Moreover they did not deem it impossible nor problematic for the orthodox to join in interfaith dialogue. They rather believed that the URI should put more effort into involving them. This same tension could be found in questions on who should or should not be a member of the URI. Dirk, for example, highlighted the uniqueness of

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<sup>13</sup> Original text: "Ik beleef die ontwikkeling, die journey van mijzelf, waarbij iedere keer de grenzen verlegd worden uuh als positief ja [zucht] omdat het je zo ruimdenkend maakt, omdat het je zoveel innerlijke ruimte ook geeft, omdat je ziet dat, je bent wel uniek als mens, en ik denk dat elke religie ook iets unieks heeft, maar uuh je beleefd elkaar ook in je waarden als complementair, complementair is voor mij een kernwoord. Dat je complementair bent, dat je nooit eigenlijk genoeg aan jezelf hebt...en dat die andere mens, daar begint het dan mee, die andere religie, die andere spirituele stroming, die soms kwaliteiten heeft die jijzelf niet hebt meegekregen. Dus in die zin vind ik het alleen maar een verrijking. En ik begrijp psychologisch wel maar spiritueel gezien niet dan men dit als een bedreiging ervaart... dat dat in zijn anders zijn een bedreiging is, waardoor je dus de nieuwsgierigheid, de belangstelling waardoor je het element van ontmoeting ontloopt en negeert. Afgesloten zijn in je eigen glazen bol, en als die bol open gaat oog hebben voor dat prachtige heelal waar diverse stromingen zijn." (Jan, personal communication)

God in religion and he feared that if people joined who do not adhere to a God, the strength of the group would decrease.

The above shows that the members of the groups I studied have very different ways of understanding religion and thus a different sense of reality. It is almost like playing scrabble with people who all speak a different language. However there is one thing that they do have in common. They have lost their 'religious naïveté': they no longer take their tradition at face value but ask questions, formulate criticisms, and look upon their traditions both from a distanced and committed viewpoint" (Moyaert, 2014, 95). Religion to my informants is thus not something they take for granted but rather something they've grown into and continue to develop into.

## 2.2 UNDERSTANDING RITUALS

"For me, I look at the other person's rituals and try and find a connection accordingly. I feel connected with their notation that they perceive the earth as a holy entity or as Mother Earth, God or Goddess....sometimes it is what you see in another person (and their spirituality) is what becomes more important and amplifies your own beliefs and traditions."

(Wim, personal communication)<sup>14</sup>

*"Kijk ik zoek bij de ander in de rituelen datgene wat mij verbindt met hen, kijk en ik kan mij prima verbinden met het feit dat uh dat uh dat de aarde door hen heilig wordt ervaren, of als moeder, of als god, godin...dat je soms door dat dat wat je bij de ander ziet sterker in je eigen traditie komt te staan"*

(Wim, 1, 19:00)

Each game has a certain way of showing that the game is on. The players sit down, maybe around a round table. All preparations are made. The board is laid out on the table, all players receive a pawn of their choice. Maybe someone reads the game instructions to the group. A dice is thrown, a first card is picked, the sound of a bell. The game is on. These acts can be seen as rituals that mark a passage from the day to day business into playing a game together with a group of people. However different the players are, they are now in the game together. In the previous paragraph I ~~tried to~~ explained that the differences between how the players experience religion sometimes lead to tensions about questions such as "who is included" and "who is excluded" in the group and who is 'capable' of interfaith dialogue. These tensions came to light in ways the URI rituals were understood and how people thought about ritual sharing.

Rituals are recognised through schemas. Repertoires are made up of schemas, "culturally accepted mini-scripts for and of a certain thought emotion or act" (Droogers, 2012, 118). Schemas are characterised by a minimalistic nature and they consist of the minimum of characteristics a certain act has to have in order to be qualified as that act (or emotion or thought). Droogers (2012) compares a schema to "an empty bureaucratic form that has to be filled out for each particular case". Schemas thus account for the existence of a wide variety of prayers, blessings, opening ceremonies, even within the same religious group. Schemas however

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<sup>14</sup> Original text: "Kijk ik zoek bij de ander in de rituelen datgene wat mij verbindt met hen, kijk en ik kan mij prima verbinden met het feit dat uh dat uh dat de aarde door hen heilig wordt ervaren, of als moeder, of als god, godin...dat je soms door dat dat wat je bij de ander ziet sterker in je eigen traditie komt te staan" (Wim, personal communication)

help in recognising and understanding certain matters. A Catholic being present in a Anglican church will have hardly any difficulty in recognising what is happening. However when this same person is visiting a Mandir, he or she might have number of difficulties understanding the status quo , because these schemas are based on a different repertoire of knowledge. A prayer may still be recognised as a prayer; it will, however, not be fully understood.

For the sake of this research I would like to differentiate two types of rituals. The ones associated with a specific religion and those that are not. I noticed that this distinction in meetings within the URI have led to confusion. I will firstly discuss the non-religious related rituals. On the website of the URI one can find a section describing ‘interfaith ceremonies’. I added an example of the description of one of these ceremonies in the attachments (attachment...). These opening ceremonies (or rituals) were very common to the meetings and events I was part of. All meetings that I attended started with an opening ritual. My informants called this a ‘spiritual opening’ which was sometimes accompanied by lighting a candle. The spiritual opening was interesting because it was valued differently by my informants. Walter, for example, described the spiritual opening as a way to “take some time to think about life”, but also that it marked “the passage from busy traffic to the meeting.” Others did not see the value in these rituals because it had no direct link with God or with religion. Sabir also mentioned that it might withhold more orthodox people to join.

I will, firstly, discuss two examples of URI related rituals and show what issues they brought to the forefront. The first example is of a spiritual opening that took place at the first meeting I attended. I will describe this one because I used it as an example during most of my interviews. Sadeed was asked to do the spiritual opening for this particular meeting of the IBS. He read a piece of text from the Koran, about Abrahamic religions, stating that they all have the same God and that we should therefore not fight but unite. One of my informants stated that it was a shame that only the Abrahamic religions were attributed in this opening. Another said that this was reasoned from his own worldview and that he wondered whether people were able to step away from their own religious world view and say something that holds true for all members. A second example of a URI ritual was a video about the URI Christmas celebration. In this celebration people from different faiths light candles for, supposedly, universal values such as peace, love, and compassion. The reactions to this were also diverse. One of my informants expressed herself passionately after seeing the video. “Totally my thing” she stated. Another reacted more critically and wondered if the message went deep enough and that the values named might mean something different in each religion. Yet another participant shares with me that he wonders why there is also a ‘Native African American’ involved amidst all the religions. These two examples show that the objective of the URI rituals is not clear to all members who participate in it.

Apart from these URI related rituals we also spoke about cross religious ritual sharing. Rituals are often understood as fixed social rules and ritual sharing touches upon issues such as disloyalty and inauthenticity. “Via mediating practices, God imprints God’s self on the life of the believer and, through these practices, the believer dedicates his or her life to God...the promise to God is, amongst other things, fulfilled by performing particular actions and maintaining specific rituals” (Moyaert, 2014, 104). For some of my informants ritual sharing was indeed problematic. Walter, for example, shared that the ritual of communion is a ritual that should not be shared with people from a different faith. He states that to him it is not just a piece of bread, not just a symbol for the body of Jesus, to him the peace of bread really is the body of Jesus. Maartje also mentioned that she does not mind participating in certain rituals from other religions than hers. But only to a certain extent, she would for example

not eat food that has been sacrificed to the Gods or God. There were also people who held less strict rules when it came to cross-riting. In the quote at the beginning of this paragraph Wim talks about rituals from other religions than his own and how he tries to find in them what binds him to other people of faith. He shared with me a story of a ritual that was performed by the Hare Krishnas at a URI gathering. He experienced this as something very beautiful. And he even states that “it helps you to become stronger in your own belief”. Another informant, who was the founder of the silent farm called Metanoia (and former member of the URI European Council), is a Christian but also found a lot of meaning in Buddhism and the practise of meditation.

In this light it is hard to talk about rituals as if they are fixed to the borders of a religion. Bell (1992) talks about ‘ritualisation’ instead of a standalone ritual. She stated that ‘ritual’ has the tendency to be categorised and therefore brings with it or relates to specific social rules. (Bell, 1992) Ritualisation, however, is about the production of ritualised acts. It describes the strategy of making a certain act different to other similar acts. So in other words; it does not describe the act itself but it describes how the act is ritualised. Ritualisation can be defined as “a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities” (Bell 1992, 74). Because ritualisation describes not the act itself but the strategy that distinguishes the act from other acts it leaves room for innovation and change. And it is, in relation to interriting, a very useful concept. Ritual is often seen as something fixed, formal and repetitive. Ways to re-enact, transfer and embody religious beliefs. However these aspects are not intrinsic to rituals. Not all rituals are always fixed, formal and repetitive. Ritualisation, by focusing on the strategy leaves space for choice on how a ritual is performed. Routinisation can be a strategy but it does not have to be. Ritualisation leaves space for the invention of new ritual acts. Moreover, because it describes not ‘what is’ but ‘how it is done’ it does not fix certain rituals to certain traditions. Rather new rituals are invented for a new goal, in the case of URI this was establishing a mutual understanding. Because the strategy of the ritual changes, also the meaning of the ritual itself changes. For example an Islamic prayer has a different meaning in a mosque than in the environment of interriting. (Bell 1992) Droogers (2012) also states that even though the same schema’s underlie certain rituals, no ritual is the same, because of the minimal character of schemas the rituals will never be executed exactly the same way.

The strategy one uses to ritualise an act says something about whether or not interriting is a possibility. It however does not necessarily say something about the openness or closed-ness towards people of other faiths. If one, for example, focusses on routinisation as a strategy in ritualising, there is less space or no space for others to join, likewise, for one to join another’s ritual. This however does not imply closed-ness or devaluing the other’s rituals. Rather, it says something about the extent to which rituals express one’s relation to a certain God, one’s loyalty towards this God, and the extent to which a person feels it needs to protect this loyalty. Nevertheless my informants had different ideas on what objective a certain ritual served and this became a source of misunderstanding. It is almost as if the game has started without all the players being involved. In the next chapter we will be looking at how my informants explain the existence of different religions.

### 2.3 UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

*“You might as well ask me why there are so many different cultures...people grew up separately from each other, and because of that, different systems developed and so did different religions, different cultures, etcetera...”<sup>15</sup>*

(Jan, personal communication)

“...religion is a chronically unstable category that is often universalised but can only be meaningfully studied with a view to the religions’ internal diversity and their perceived relation to religious ‘others’.” States Leirvik. (Leirvik, 2014, ch. 0). Inherent to the interfaith game is that different religions exist. But how do the players understand these differences? In the textbox at the beginning of this chapter Peter tried to explain to me how all religions eventually lead to the same ‘ultimate truth’. But what is this ultimate truth exactly and how do my informants understand the ultimate truth?

When I asked my informants how it was possible that there were so many different religions they often replied in a ‘well isn’t that obvious?’ manner. Just as there are different cultures there are also different religions they stated. And furthermore the same religion can be different in various countries because of their culture. So the fact that there are different religions was an idea that did not seem to surprise nor give my informants any problems. At first glance this, to me, looked like they reduced religion to something cultural or cultural specific. Almost a relativistic view of religion. Something that only exist in our minds because humans decided to believe in it. This seemed to contradict with the way they described their religion as something real, like a relationship, something they could experience, something they just know was true to them.

I soon found out that they did not just reduce religion to something cultural. They did experience their religion as the truth, however made up stories to reconcile their religious truths with the truth claims of other religions. I discovered two stories that helped my informants deal with the existence of different religions. In the first story my informants believed that there was an ultimate truth but did not give it a name. They used metaphors such as a puzzle, ‘the elephant and the blind men’, ‘a tree and a mountain’. The metaphors all carry the same meaning. There may be different paths (read: religions) but they all lead to the same. To the top of the mountain, the trunk of the tree, a piece of the puzzle. John tells me about a dream he had in which ‘someone’ spoke to him saying that there is not one truth, but that the truth is one big jigsaw and everybody has a piece of the puzzle.” I then asked them what exactly was on the top of the mountain. They then often replied that Allah is the same as God or Krishna. Yet when I asked them how that related to polytheistic religions they looked confused and told me that they had too little information on that. In chapter 5 I will elaborate more on this subject.

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<sup>15</sup> Original text: “je kan net zo goed vragen hoe komt het dat er zoveel verschillende culturen zijn...men is gescheiden en van elkaar verwijderd opgegroeid, en dan ontwikkelen zich verschillende systemen, verschillende religies, verschillende culturen, enzovoort...” (Jan, personal communication)

## 2.4 UNDERSTANDING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

*“Open the windows, open the doors, be curious about the other, and look for ways to cooperate”<sup>16</sup>*  
(Jan, 51:10)

The way my informants understand interfaith dialogue strongly touches upon questions about their motivation to occupy themselves with interfaith dialogue, how they experience interfaith dialogue and what their strategies are within interfaith dialogue, respectively chapter 3, 4 and 5. In order not to avoid repetition I will in this section discuss some issues that became apparent when we talked about interfaith dialogue. But before I do that I will briefly show how my informants became familiar with interfaith dialogue.

Not all of my informants went through the same process of becoming acquainted with people from another faith. Some stated that interfaith dialogue has always been part of their lives. Walter, for example, grew up in Surinam where he lived amidst Muslim and Hindu families, himself coming from a Catholic family. Sharing religious festivities and having daily interfaith encounters has always been part of his life. Shabir states that growing up in the Netherlands as a Hindustani Muslim had made his ‘normal’ daily encounters ‘interfaith encounters’. Other informants became familiar with interfaith dialogue through certain experiences they had in life, mainly work related. Both Wim, Jan and Marije told me they felt they were pioneers in their field of work concerning interfaith dialogue in the Netherlands. Wim was director of a Christian school where he was confronted with the arrival of Muslim students. Jan was spiritual counsellor and was confronted with questions such as “how do we deal with people from a different religion” and Marije, during her political career made and continues to make an effort to find a connection between groups that all “live on separate islands” and visited several religious institutes other than her own. Interestingly they were all raised in an orthodox family and became familiar with interfaith in a later stage in their lives. It thus may not come as a surprise that they describe their interfaith identity as a ‘process of growth’. Yet others ‘switched’ religions in their lives or had family members who had a different religion than theirs and therefor became inevitably familiar with interfaith.

Even though all my informants have different ‘life stories’ of how they became acquainted with people from other faiths, fact is that they are now a member of the same interfaith group, coming together at least once a month. These different people not only have different backgrounds, faiths and personalities (as might be obvious) they also have different ideas on what interfaith is.

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<sup>16</sup> Original text: “De vensters open, de deuren open, benieuwd zijn naar de ander, en zoeken hoe je met elkaar kan samenwerken (Jan, 51:10)

When I asked them to tell me what interfaith is they would give me general answers such as:

- “...That people from different faiths and believes can find each other and can approach each other with respect. That they can have fruitful discussions instead of entering into longwinded debates.”<sup>17</sup>  
(Marije, personal communication).
- “Because this is the start of the dialogue, you are facing two perceived realities which are different on one level or another, but to then communicate with one another to allow, as a minimum, an understanding of each other’s perceptions of reality.”<sup>18</sup>  
(Maartje, personal communication)

However when our conversations evolved from a superficial level to a deeper level some issues concerning how they understood interfaith dialogue became apparent.

The first issue revolved around questions of inclusivity and exclusivity. I asked them what kind of people are or should be a member of the URI or their CC. Some stated that only religious people should be part of the group.

*“Someone said there is an atheist who would like to become of member, and then I think what are we doing? ... Because if atheists join, and groups of Muslims, and Christians, and Hare Krishna’s, and Witches, what do you have in common, more than drinking a cup of tea.”*<sup>19</sup>

(Dirk, personal communication).

Others said that all people were welcome to join. Wim said that the URI connects ‘meaning-seekers’. He states that that is a very broad concept, in that sense even scientists who look for the meaning of life could be called “Seekers of Meaning”

Quinten states:

*“many organisations outgrow their names, including the name interfaith...in that the focus on faith or religions was how they started but now there are more and more opportunities and invitations and more and more participation by non-religious people in this work. Talk deeply about beliefs, whatever they are, religious or non-religious. The world around the name has changed.”*

(Quinten, personal communication).

The solution in this case was less sought within religion (as in promoting God) and more in bringing all diverse people together. Walter mentioned that even inclusivity can become exclusive:

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<sup>17</sup> Original text: “...dat mensen van verschillende geloven elkaar weten te vinden en elkaar gelijkwaardig benaderen, en met elkaar in gesprek, in discussie gaan, niet in debat” (Marije, personal communication).

<sup>18</sup> Original text: “Want dat is waar dialoog begint, je hebt twee realiteiten en die zijn verschillend over iets en daar met elkaar te communiceren kan je in ieder geval begrip opbrengen voor elkaars realiteit.” (Maartje, personal communication).

<sup>19</sup> Original text: ...iemand en die zei we hebben nog een atheïst die wil ook wel lid worden ja dan denk ik waar beginnen we aan... want als er dan atheïsten bijzitten en groepen van de moslims en van de christenen en van de Hare Krishna’s en van de heksen en van de, ja wat heb je dan nog gezamenlijk, is dan een kopje thee drinken... (Dirk, personal communication).

*“When we say we will not exclude anyone we can become so radical in this idea that we exclude those that do not agree with us...we have to be very conscious about that”<sup>20</sup>*

(Walter, personal communication).

The second question was who can be in the group. This question dealt with ideas on whether or not ‘orthodox’ (orthodoxy in this case was understood as religious people who are very much oriented towards their own religion and have little or no motivation to go outside their own religious community) could or would be able to join the group. And whether or not they should invest more time in convincing them to join. Jan states that

*“...you should not bother orthodox believers with the question of why they do not join interreligious dialogue. Moreover what gives me the right to demand accountability from them?”<sup>21</sup>*

(Jan, personal communication)

Another issue that I encountered was about what interfaith dialogue actually entails. Is it simply about cooperation. Organising events together, being active in society and bringing people of diverse faiths together. Or should interfaith dialogue be understood as talking about each other’s beliefs on a deeper level, away from the day to day encounters. Or as Dirk would say, more than “just drinking a cup of tea”. Yet, it seemed to play a role for all members. Leirvik (2014) makes a distinction between ‘spiritual’ and ‘necessary’ dialogues. Whereas spiritual dialogues are based on personal motivation and guided by an expectation of being enriched by other spiritual traditions (a typical example would be Christians and Buddhists meditating together), necessary dialogues are driven by a felt sociopolitical need to prevent or reduce religion-related conflict in society, by fostering peaceful interaction between representatives of different religious groups. Nevertheless some also stated that they really enjoyed the spiritual dialogues: this was however not the main goal. The Vrouwengroep Amsterdam might be an exception to this because their main focus was establishing a close community of women and sharing intimate relationships). What was however more interesting is that the way the necessary dialogues should be held differed. Walter stated that he thought the practical part was more important and that the theoretical part should be left to scientists. Merel also said that the events they organised were there to go deeper into each other’s religions but that meetings should be more practical. Sabir and Dirk on the other hand believed that the only way to solve religious related problems was to talk to each other on a deeper level. And to sort out what different religions say about various problems by making use of religious text. During my field research it was often a topic of discussion and the decision was made to spend more time on having in-depth talks about each other’s beliefs.

The last issue which I would like to discuss concerns the definition of interfaith dialogue, and what goals interfaith dialogue can or should reach. Firstly, the idea that interfaith dialogue could end religiously motivated violence was questioned. Most of my informants believed it would definitely contribute to it but it would take time. Others wondered whether religious people who commit violence can actually be called people of faith and more so if there would not be another problem underlying religiously motivated violence.

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<sup>20</sup> Original text: “Wanneer wij zeggen van goh we sluiten niemand uit uuhm kunnen wij daar heel erg radicaal in zijn dat we op een gegeven moment ook anderen zelf uitsluiten, diegene die ervoor kiest, die het niet met ons eens zijn, ... dan kan het heel gemakkelijk zijn om te zeggen van hee die doet niet mee, maar dan sluiten wij ook uit, dus dan moeten we heel erg bedacht op zijn.”  
(Walter, personal communication)

<sup>21</sup> Original text: “je moet de orthoxe gelovigen niet lastig vallen met de vraag waarom doe je niet mee aan het interreligieus gesprek, bovendien roep je de ander ter verantwoording, en wie ben ik dat ik een ander ter verantwoording roep.”  
(Jan, personal communication)

In this chapter I have discussed the foundations of the interfaith game. How do the players, my informants, understand religion, religious differences and interfaith dialogue. One thing I can conclude is that, apart from there being similarities, there are also many differences. This raises the following question. How does a game, that is played by people who think differently about the foundations of the game, be played out properly? Can we play a game of scrabble if we do not agree on the way a certain word is spelled correctly or a game of Trivial pursuit if we do not reach consensus on a certain historical fact? In the next chapter I will look at what motivates the players to play the game and we will see if we can find an answer to this question.



“ They are already sitting around the table in Walters rectory when I come in. Jan gives me an update, they have just started sharing their 'personal updates'. It is always the same structure at the beginning of the URI steering group meetings, first a spiritual opening and then each member shares with the other members what is going on in their lives. Wim tells us that he has worked a lot and that he thinks about going to Surinam for a few weeks. Jan shows his compassion by stating: "that is what you need, passion, responsibility, and peacefulness". Walter tells us about his promotion to the URI Global Council. The other members nod and smile. Jan asks him how he feels about it. Walter replies that it gives him strength and inspiration and that to him it is part of his religious path. "You are a true world citizen" concludes Jan. It is my turn. Since the first meeting I attended, I have been asked to participate and also share something about my life with the group. And so I did. This time I share with them a rather personal story of someone that passed away and I can't help but be emotional about it. Maartje, immediately, gets tears in her eyes too. This shows my close involvement with the group and their way of showing compassion. While I am trying to pull myself together, Dirk hands out a flyer from the ISKON (International Society Krishna Consciousness) which describes 'the way to peace'. He states that he thinks it is important to focus more on religion in interfaith dialogue. Gwen happily shares the news that the world has gained three new legal persons: the Whanganui River in New Zealand, and the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers in India. For the first time, the silent nodding of the group is interrupted by a small conversation between Gwen and Dirk in which they express how important this development is. Jan closes the circle by sharing that a close friend of his is very sick. He rounds it up by stating that "dead is present" and that these are moments in which we are challenged to reflect on our spirituality.

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# 3.

## WHY PLAY THE GAME?

Does one solely play a game to win? Surely there are other aspects that motivate players to play a game. Maybe it is the social aspect? Sharing a fun evening together, drinking wine, nibbling nuts, sharing laughter and minor frustrations. Perhaps it is about the strategy of playing. Establishing fruitful cooperation with other players, thinking about strategies that increase your chances of winning. Could it be about assurance? Knowing that you are part of the game or are identified as an important player in the game? Or maybe it is solely about the art of playing, the value of playing is in playing itself. The previous chapter ended with the question of how it is possible that a game, played by people who have different understandings about the foundations of the game, can be played out properly. In this chapter, I will look at what motivates my informants to play the interfaith dialogue game. This might give us more insight on why this group of diverse people gets together.

### 3.1 WHERE DO I BELONG?

*“Yeah, I did want to be part of something. Something that combined my interest with doing some good work. And I did have an interest in philosophy, world religions and you know finding out what other people believe, enlarging my own ideas about the universe. About everything. So that curiosity was sort of married with a sense of wanting to be part of something that did something big in the world”*

(Quinten, personal communication)

All my informants see value in interfaith dialogue. They state that it creates mutual respect and understanding of the other and takes away certain prejudices. Catherine states that the only way to truly understand someone is through dialogue, and Walter adds “ ‘Unknown, unloved’, through getting to know each other the appreciation for the other can grow”.<sup>22</sup> However, this does not explain what exactly motivates them to engage in interfaith dialogue. Because it does not say anything about why they want to engage with the other. As the quote in the beginning of this chapter suggests, a feeling of belonging to a group is an important motivator to join in interfaith dialogue. This feeling of belonging has different aspects. It is not merely a feeling of wanting to be part of a group (like a bunch of friends) but a feeling of being part of a group of like-minded people, a group that does something ‘good’ in this world and a group that fulfils the urge to get to know the unknown other.

Let us start with the idea of being part of a group of like-minded people. Jan and Wim state that being a pioneer in interfaith dialogue in the Netherlands was a lonely position. Their membership of the URI gave them reassurance for the work they were doing. Catherine expresses the importance of sharing each other's values and learning from each other. Quinten tells me "it was like having a thousand pen pals" when he joined the URI mailing list. He could share his stories, read other's and have meaningful discussions. This also touches upon the second aspect of belonging, namely one's curiosity to get to know the other. Maria states that when you truly open up to someone "you recognize thousands of nuances of being human"<sup>23</sup>. To her difference means richness. Sabir tells me he used to be interested in astrology and ‘human design’. When he did a test he found out that his personality resembles that of a ‘bridge builder’. He therefore feels it is his task to get to know people and share knowledge. Moreover, he states that he is just very curious to get to know other people, not only because he finds it interesting and might learn something from them but also because it makes others more trustworthy. The last aspect of belonging is ‘doing something good’. My informants are a member of the URI or its CCs because they believe this organization is doing the right thing. Sarah states that the URI comforts her. All the good things members of the URI do as opposed to all the bad things that happen in the world gives her strength to do the same. This was also visible in the emails the members of the URI sent each other. Sharing stories about the good things they had done or about the bad things that happened to them. Others would then reply with statements of gratitude for the good work they did or sending words of support and blessings to those who needed it.

The sense of belonging my informants have to their CCs strongly correlates with the process of identification. Richard Jenkins (1996) proposes a model of ‘*internal-external dialectic of identification*’ which can be understood as “the process whereby all identities (individual and collective) are constituted” (Jenkins 1996, 20). This model is useful in understanding how my informants identify themselves for two reasons. Firstly it

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<sup>22</sup> Original text: “Onbekend maakt onbemind, met een betere kennismaking kán waardering groeien” (Walter, personal communication)

<sup>23</sup> Original text: “als ik echt opensta, dan ontstaat er een soort contact en dan herken je duizenden verschillende nuances van mens zijn...dus voor mij is verschillen een rijkdom” (Maria, personal communication)

emphasizes the important role of the other in the identification process and secondly, it sees identity formation as a fluid process that changes through social interaction. Risse-Kappen (2010, 36) highlights the 'social group' as the sole factor one identifies with: "[identity is understood as the] collectively shared constructions linking individuals – the subjects of identification – to social groups as the identification objects." This definition implies that individuals need social groups to identify with, to know who they are but also who they are not. Similarly, Eller (2007, 232) highlights the group potential to influence one's identity. Not just to create a feeling of belonging, but to create an 'other' or an 'out-group' that is different to the members of the group. Identity is thus socially constructed. Jenkins (1996) states that identification always takes place in social interaction and that this process is dialectical. To understand who you are, you have to know who the other is. Furthermore in imagining who the other is you also imagine how the other would identify you, and with this 'imagined knowledge' adjust your own identity. This process goes on and on. To identify yourself is thus a constant process whereby individuals define and redefine themselves and others through social interaction. The group thus confirms or contests one's identity. In the next subchapters, I will show how the group (URI and its CCs) enhances, shapes or confirms the identities of the individual group members.

### 3.2 BE A PEACE BUILDER

*"I always have been a peace builder...there are people who have this in their genes, they breathe it, from when they were little, you don't grow up and then decide to become a peace builder, you were born that way, you always think that way, and then you find the things around you that make it possible, that's your spiritual journey"*<sup>24</sup>

(Catherine, personal information)

"This is wonderful!" exclaims Sarah passionately. I had just shown her the video of the URI called 'be a peacebuilder'. I showed this video to all of my informants to see how they related to it and if they could identify with it. Catherine (see quote) strongly identifies with being a peace builder and all my informants except for one could relate to being a peace builder. They had the idea that, by being part of this group, they contributed to a better world. Many of them were concerned with how societies evolved and how people treated each other. Being part of this group gave them a feeling of being able to do something about it. Maartje states that she is proud of being part of the group. "I am part of that, this is what we do".<sup>25</sup> My informants shared with me their disbelief about what horrific acts people of faith commit against each other. Even though some of the informants would question if these people can really be called people of faith, they still felt they had to do something about the violence. Walter stated that interfaith dialogue was "*the right thing to do*". He could not precisely describe why but compared it to why you take your children to school. You do not yet know what the outcome of their education will be, yet you just know it is right to do so. Being a peace builder and acting upon it by organizing several interfaith events did not necessarily have to end religiously motivated violence as a direct goal. Rather it was

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<sup>24</sup> Original text: "I always have been a peace builder...there are people who have this in their genes, het is they breath it, from when they were little, you don't grow up and then decide to become a peace builder, you were born that way, you always think that way en dan vind je de dingen om je heen in je leven die dat mogelijk maken om meer van te maken, that's your spiritual journey."

<sup>25</sup> Original text: "Daar hoor ik bij, dat doen wij"  
(Maartje, personal communication)

considered to be 'a step in the right direction'. Maartje compares it with water pools that slowly come together and in the end make one big pool. Members of religious communities that are more outgoing will go out and visit interfaith events. They will return to their own communities and share their experiences with its members. Both Maartje and Sarah state that you have to start with the people that are open to it. Interfaith dialogue can be seen as a counter message as opposed to all the negativity we see around religions. Building peace is the second motivation my informants have to join interfaith dialogue.

But what does being a peace builder imply? To Gwen peace does not mean much as long as people do not have equal rights. To her, the biggest aim is to be the voice of those who do not have a voice whether that be people or nature. Moreover, she states that the responsibility to heal the world lies with yourself and one should not blame an external authority. Dirk also believes that you should start change with yourself:

*"All the suffering around us is within us... Within us is ISIS that cuts off our heads, within us are the people who pollute the world. So if we want to better this world we have to get rid of the ISIS within us, the polluter of the world within us."*<sup>26</sup>

(Dirk, personal communication)

Peter states that building peace is all about meeting the other because, when you meet the other, stereotypes can disappear so that you see the other more as a human being instead of an enemy. To him meeting the other is the 'ultimate reality'.

It is clear that my informants believe that change is needed, that change begins with yourself and the people around you and that it is a long process. In the previous paragraph, I talked about how identity is shaped in a dialectical way between groups and individuals. I also talked about how a group can confirm one's identity either by being the same or by being different. Being a peace builder, or making change in this world is an identity that is shared and confirmed by all group members. This shared identity not only confirms the individuals urge to identify him or herself as a peace builder but also creates a sense of belonging to the group. The group assures the individual group members that they are doing the right thing. This was a recurring topic in meetings as you can read in the introductory text box of this chapter. Members actively complimented each other on the good work they were doing and also on particular personality traits such as being a true 'connector' or a 'citizen of this world'. Interfaith dialogue is thus at the same time a tool to establish peace but also a confirmation of one's identity as a peace builder. Dirk states:

*"We are all different individuals at URI, and you could say that the fact that we are all sitting around one table already makes us peace builders, we are sending out this message"*<sup>27</sup>

(Dirk, personal communication).

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<sup>26</sup> Original text: "...alle ellende die er om ons heen is zit in ons, ergens in ons zijn we die ISIS die de kop afsnijdt, ergens in ons zit die vervuiler van het milieu, ergens in ons zit, dus willen wij de wereld verbeteren dan moeten we die ISIS uit onszelf zien weg te krijgen, de vervuiler van deze wereld uit onszelf..."

(Dirk, personal communication)

<sup>27</sup> Original text: We zijn allemaal verschillende individuen bij URI, En ja een peace builder je zou kunnen zeggen omdat we dan met zn allen aan 1 tafel zitten en dat kunnen laten zien in die zin is het een peace builder...of nou daadwerkelijk het effect zo geweldig is dat weet ik eigenlijk niet...maar in elk geval het is een initiatief die mensen bij elkaar brengt en daar ook mee naar buiten komt en iets laat zien."

(Dirk, personal communication).

This quote shows that the diversity of the group supports the idea of being a peace builder. Thus the other in this sense has to stay the other in order to maintain this conformation. Where does the urge to be a peace builder come from? In the next paragraph, I will discuss how the adherence to a certain religion contributes to the urge to do good.

*“Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and members of other faiths that are convinced by the authority of God, should not sit still and silently observe, how impiety in our society rapidly increases. God has the highest authority and no people nor society can live in peace and prosperity without accepting this essential truth”*<sup>28</sup>

(Dirk, personal communication)

Dirk is one of the examples of my informants whose drive to engage in interfaith dialogue has a very clear connection to his religion. His biggest goal in participating in interfaith dialogue is to increase the acceptance in society that God exists. He feels it is the responsibility of all people of faith (who adhere to a God) to fight against the growing impiety in society. Catherine, who is Scientologist, also mentions the importance of religion in society. She states that religion gives meaning to life and that without it people get lost. Another motive Dirk has to engage in interfaith dialogue is to represent his religion. Similarly, Maartje, Sadeed and Gwen state that they see interfaith dialogue as a platform to present their religion and to clear away prejudices in order to create mutual understanding. Sadeed, for example, felt the need to show the world that Islam is not a religion that stimulates its adherents to commit violence. Maartje stated that she wanted to show that Scientology is not so different to other religions, despite what various people say about it.

Religion also inspired them to actively go out and meet the other to strengthen their relationship with God. This has to do with the idea that God is within everyone and that God loves all human beings because they are his creation. Sabir states that Allah may have put something beautiful in people that you do not know about. This idea was a drive for him to get to know other people. Walter stated that:

*“The essence of religion is seeing God in others and yourself. That idea comes with respect and a feeling of reference and because of that I will treat you differently”*<sup>29</sup>

(Walter, personal communication)

The love of God for Walter meant that he accepts everyone for who they are with all their faults, also people who adhere to a different faith. For Peter, the ultimate truth was love for the other (God), and because God is in everyone the encounter with the other was essentially what represented this love. Marije states that she feels much closer to God now than before, organizing interfaith events has brought her closer to God than when she was still going to church. Her actions embody what God meant by taking care of your neighbor (naastengeliefde).

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<sup>28</sup> Original text: “Hindoes, moslims, christenen en leden van andere geloven, die overtuigd zijn van de autoriteit van God, moeten niet stilzitten en zwijgend toekijken, terwijl de goddeloosheid in onze samenleving snel toeneemt. God heeft het hoogste gezag en geen volk of samenleving kan in vrede en voorspoed leven zonder deze essentiële waarheid te aanvaarden.”

(Dirk, personal communication)

<sup>29</sup> Original text: “De essentie van godsdienst is God in anderen zien en in jezelf. En dat brengt een stukje ontzag en respect, en dan ga ik anders met je om. Be a peace builder is een groot woord maar het mag in de kleine dingen zitten, elkaar een gevoel van veiligheid geven.”

(Walter, personal communication)

Religion motivated my informants to meet the other but it also motivated them to take care of the earth. Wim, Dirk and Gwen (respectively Christian, Hare Krishna, and Wiccan) saw the earth as something we do not own but rather is 'owned' by a higher authority. In this sense it does not give us the right to rule the world as if it were ours. Rather we are 'guardians'<sup>30</sup> of this Earth. Wim emphasizes that we should take responsibility for the 'wholeness of the creation'<sup>31</sup>. That this world was given to us by God and that we should not fail to take care of it. Dirk and Sabir both express their incomprehension towards people who feel they 'own' this world. According to them, it is not just about 'having the right to', instead it is about the duties we have towards this earth and its authority.

Religion motivates people to actively look for the other and, moreover, treat them with kindness and love so that peace on earth can be established. The Golden Rule (attachment 5), a model which presents that one can find a similar philosophy of how to treat the other in all religions (mentioned in this schema)<sup>32</sup>, is a telling example of this. Nevertheless, religion is often associated with violence. Eller (2007, 228) states that since the 1960s the number of extremist religious movements and religiously inspired terrorist groups decreased rapidly, which at the same time might explain the growth of interfaith initiatives. However, Eller (2007, 228) states, the relationship between religion and violence is often insufficiently explained as "either blaming religion for violence or excusing religion from violence". Rather, states Eller (2007, 229), "violence is a culturally constructed behavior, which arises out of specific social conditions that are not unique to religion but that are unfortunately common to religion". In paragraph 4.3. I will elaborate on the relationship between identity and the other and I will explain how the other can sometimes become a threat to one's identity which can result in violent acts against the other.

With this chapter, I set out to discover the motives of my informants to play the interfaith game. I also wondered, since my informants differed so much on the foundation of the game, whether their motivations may reveal why this group of people gets together. We found out that the other plays an important role in the formation of one's identity as a peace builder. The other confirms one's identity as a peace builder by the mere fact of being different and by creating a sense of belonging to a group that aims to make this world a better place. We also saw that one's religion was a strong motivator to engage with the religious other. We could thus say that religion was the engine behind one's urge to become a peace builder and thus engage with the other. Yet, at the same time, the other challenges one's own religious identity because they might have essentially different ideas about reality. In the next chapter I will explain why the encounter with the religious other can be challenging and why, to my informants, it is not just a simple game.

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<sup>30</sup> Mentioned by Gwen

<sup>31</sup> Original text: "De heelheid van de schepping"

<sup>32</sup> As is seen in the image not all religions are on it. Gwen who is Wiccan expresses her frustration for the fact that the pagans are not mentioned in the golden rule. Nevertheless, she does say that in Wiccan spirituality there is a similar saying: "If it does not harm anyone, do what you want".

It is Tuesday the 14th of March when I open my inbox and find an interesting email forwarded to me by Wim. This is what I read that morning whilst sitting comfortably in my chair drinking a cup of tea:

"Dear All,

Sometimes life surprises you in a bad way. I would like to share this with you. I attended a meeting at Café Nieuwspoord yesterday. The meeting was about the Hizmet Movement, also known as 'Gülen'. 'Gülen' actively encourages interreligious dialogue, however, during the gathering Hanneke Gelderblom (who represents the liberal Jews and is a former member of the political party known as 'D66') wondered why she never saw them anywhere in the interfaith dialogue. I replied to her that I do regularly meet the Hizmet Movement during meetings and gatherings of URI and Religies voor Vrede [translated: Religions for Peace].

And then she replied with something that astonished me: "Well in those "Gezelligheidsclubjes" (literally 'cosy clubs'), that is something different"

A remark we should think about! "

The replies to this email from the other members of the group showed very clearly that they did not agree with Hanneke's statement. When I referred to it during interviews I could clearly see the resentment on their faces. The team members insinuated that Hanneke is no authority on this subject matter and that it should be noted that interfaith dialogue isn't always "fun or easy".

Walter stated that there are two possible ways to interpret this email; The person who makes a statement like this could be called ignorant or;

They [URI steering group] had to seriously consider if they were doing the right thing.

He ended his email by saying the following: "If we look at what we have established and achieved so far, I know what my conclusion would be".

# 4.

## **INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: JUST A GAME?**

Not all games are exclusively entertaining or enjoyable. Nor should they be considered as flippant pastime. Quite the contrary, playing a game can be serious business. In the case of interfaith dialogue, it definitely is. The short excerpt from my field notes shows not only how important my informants feel interfaith dialogue is. It also shows a strong reaction against people who believe interfaith dialogue is not much more than drinking a cup of tea and making small talk. In the previous chapter, I have discussed the motives of my informants to engage in interfaith dialogue. In this chapter, I will show how my informants experience interfaith dialogue.

## 4.1 COURAGE

*“To be a community does not mean that people always have to become good friends, or does not necessarily lead to cuddle sessions. And you also have to respect people if they don’t want it. One should not feel forced to do anything one does not like.”<sup>33</sup>*

(Wim, personal communication)

“These meetings are really challenging, not just plain fun!<sup>34</sup>” exclaims Walter after I ask him how he feels about the email Wim had sent earlier. Moreover, he says jokingly: “I do not always find it ‘gezellig’ (cozy) to be there”. This email, Walter is referring to, was a very telling event in my research because it highlighted issues that I had encountered within the group so far. Firstly, it touched upon the question of whether or not interfaith dialogue actually solves ‘real’ problems in society, such as religiously motivated violence. Secondly, it raised the issue of what interfaith should be like, talking deeply about each other's religions or cooperation and being socially active. Thirdly, it showed in what way interfaith dialogue is challenging. Walter elaborated on his statement by saying that interfaith really challenges you. After listening to a reading by the Hare Krishna he realized he had fundamentally different ideas about certain things. He says it demands a certain flexibility from yourself in relation to others. Most members, however, preferred to highlight the importance of interfaith dialogue instead of naming its difficulties. Nevertheless, they did acknowledge that you need a certain amount of courage to engage in interfaith dialogue.

Moyaert (2014) confirms that interfaith dialogue is not something that should be taken lightly. In encounters with the religious ‘other’ one is reminded of the contingency within one’s own religious identity. This contingency in religious identities derives from the idea that there is no solid justification of why one belongs to this religion and not to another. Why am I a Christian and not a Buddhist? One’s (religious) identity is largely determined by others, Moyaert (2014, p. 103) states “who we are always depends partly on what is pre-given, contingent and relative. The nation to which we belong, the language we speak, the cultural heritage we are granted, and the tradition in which we are reared – as well as our race, gender, and ethnicity – are all rather arbitrary and partly accidental; nevertheless, they anchor us, define the ‘location’ from which we speak, mark our identity, and in part stipulate the opportunities that life holds for us.” The fact that one is born into a certain tradition determines, maybe unwillingly or unconsciously, the way one views the world. The awareness of this contingency, which is in a way true to identity in general, is especially problematic for religious identity because religion often makes absolute claims about our reality. “Religious tenets are said to be all encompassing, unsurpassable, and of central importance to the life of their adherents” (Moyaert, 105). One of my informants describes this process as follows:

*“Some people, when they sort of conclude all religions offer something, they start questioning ‘well what’s so special about mine’, and sometimes that makes them go ‘well I don’t need any of them’.”*

(Quinten, personal communication)

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<sup>33</sup> Original text: “.. het gemeenschap zijn betekent niet altijd dat het uuh dat het dan ineens tot hele grote vriendjes uuh knuffelpartijen dat soort dingen hoeft te komen. he en dat je daar de ander ook in met respecteren als ie dat dat niet wil of maar dat ie als het ware zich opgedrongen voelt..”

(Wim, personal communication)

<sup>34</sup> Original text: “Zoete koek”

The process Quinten describes in this quote relates to relativism. Relativism reduces religion to culturally and historically determined social constructs, which result in an endless quest for meaning or loss of faith. It might be clear that, since interfaith dialogue is not about uniting all religions into one, relativism is not a useful strategy to deal with the contingency in one's identity.

However, the 'involuntariness' that Moyaert (2012) associates with religious identity was not applicable to my informants. Mainly, because most of them extensively studied their own but also other religions. Almost all of my informants talked about their religious adherence as something that was or became a conscious choice<sup>35</sup>. Something that became so inextricably linked to their day-to-day experiences that they could not deny that it was true to, or right for them. Walter, for example, stated that he tried to be non-religious for a while, but he failed to do so. Jan tells me he lost his faith for a while but found it again. Peter sees God in everyday encounters with other people. Dirk explains that when he became familiar with Hare Krishna he knew it was for him, even though he came from a Christian background. Moyaert (2014) describes this as saying YES to the groundless ground, it is a "transformation from the 'passivity' of resigning oneself to one's lot to an authentic, abiding religious commitment". My informants, in other words, succeed in placing the voluntary aspect of choosing one's religion above the involuntary one and decide to stay loyal to it. The 'fragile religious identity' thus transforms into a 'wanted and kept identity'. My informants, therefore, could not relate to relativism. There is, however, another reason why interfaith dialogue can be difficult. When one chooses to adhere to a certain religion how does one express his or her loyalty towards it? In the next subchapter, I will elaborate on how my informants express their religious loyalty and how that relates to interfaith dialogue.

## 4.2 LOYALTY

*"To create an equal encounter, one has to dare to let go of that which leaves you in the dark"<sup>36</sup>*

(Wim, personal communication)

How can one, in an interfaith encounter, be at the same time (1) loyal to one's own religion, (2) open to the other's religion, and yet (3) not lose one's own faith? Moyaert (2014) states that loyalty is expressed in a dialectic between sedimentation and innovation. For a Christian believer, for example, this means "encountering God through reading the Bible, performing daily rituals, and maintaining the tradition, and, on the other hand, letting God break the tradition open so that God's transcendence does not become pinned down by it". Peter almost literally denotes this idea of innovation when he says that it is wrong to "imprison God in a religious system". For Sabir, however, sticking to what the Koran prescribes means loyalty to God. In other words, God is inextricably linked to his religious practice (Islam).

As mentioned before, critics of interfaith dialogue often express their fear of people losing their own faith while in dialogue with people who adhere to a different faith. My informants did not share this fear, quite the contrary. Many of them stated that interfaith dialogue positioned them stronger in their own religion. When listening to other people telling their stories about their faith they were inspired to look more deeply into their own.

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<sup>35</sup> One could argue the extent to which a choice is made consciously. One always reasons from what one knows or has learned. In this way, a choice to adhere to a certain religion still derives from one's religious framework (a framework that is shaped and reshaped in social interaction).

<sup>36</sup> Original text: "Kijk maar een gelijkwaardige ontmoeting creëren dat ja daar moet je dus iets los durven laten van datgene waarvan je soms in het donker voedt." (Wim, personal communication)

Through interfaith dialogue Maartje is able to understand her own religion better, Dirk mentioned that interfaith dialogue gives an 'extra dimension' to his own spirituality and Wim states that through the encounter with other religious people he is able to discover his own religion more in-depth. Sabir told me that he was inspired by religious others who followed their religion very strictly to do the same. In the previous chapters, I introduced the concept schema repertoires and I defined interfaith dialogue as a process involving the meaning-makers of two or more symbolic systems. These symbolic systems could be seen as schema repertoires. Within dialogue one's own schema repertoires are challenged, those things that one considered 'standard' or those things that one was not even aware of (like a software program) are revealed in dialogue with the religious other. Droogers (2012) calls these "the hidden articles of faith". During our interview, Walter realized that certain religious sayings that were common to him were not so common to me (a non-religious person). In dialogue with others, believers are triggered to rethink what they took for granted, discover new things within their own religion or research their own religion more deeply. All this can lead to becoming stronger in your own faith. Interfaith dialogue thus does not imply losing one's faith, rather it can be an inspiration to hold on to one's faith.

On the other hand, interfaith dialogue also means letting go. I discussed this matter with my informants and the conversation I had with Peter is a nice example of how this can at the same time be a wish but also something that is dubious.

*Peter: I wonder to what extent these kind of organizations [IBS] are too naive...that people will eventually distance themselves from their own belief system, that they are willing to do that.*

*Me: Is that something positive?*

*Peter: It should be.*

*Me: That you are taking a distance from your own belief system?*

*Peter: Yes, or at least as far as possible.*

*Me: Does that mean that you will lose your faith?*

*Peter: No, not necessarily. It is more that you, for the benefit of the encounter, take a distance from your own conception of the truth. That you park it for a moment. I wonder to what extent the human heart is capable of doing that.<sup>37</sup>*

(Peter, personal communication)

Wim also states that interfaith dialogue is a matter of being able to look across your own religious borders. He states that in interfaith dialogue you can, at the same time, let go and hold onto your own religion. Peter says something similar. We have to dare to look over "the walls of our own tradition."<sup>38</sup> Basically, all my informants promote a certain willingness to look into and to understand someone's religion. Yet at the same time, it is questionable if one can 'let go' of one's own religious identity and simultaneously stay loyal to it. Since most of

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<sup>37</sup> Original text: "ik vraag me af in hoeverre dit soort organisaties [ibs] niet te naïef zijn...dat mensen uiteindelijk afstand nemen van hun eigen geloofssysteem en dat ze daartoe bereid zijn. [I: is dat iets goed of iets niet goeds?] dat zou iets goeds moeten zijn [zegt ie wijfelend] [I: dat je afstand zou moeten doen van je eigen geloofssysteem?] of in ieder geval zo ver mogelijk. ja. [I: betekent dat dan dat je je geloof verliest?] uh nee dat hoeft niet. Maar dat is dus...dat je zeg maar ten dienste van de ontmoeting dat je zegmaar je eigen uuuh gronde van waarheid of je eigen waarheden dat je daar even afstand van neemt. even parkeren. Ik vraag me af in hoeverre een menselijk hart dat kan."(Peter, personal communication)

<sup>38</sup> Original text: "over het muurtje durven kijken"

who we are is either unconscious or something we long to hold on to, changing one's schemas, even if it is just temporarily, can be a dramatic process of letting go of all that is familiar to you.

The question of how far one dares to go in order to let go, even temporarily, of one's loyalty towards one's religion in favour of the encounter can be explained through the concepts: identity and schema repertoires. Moyaert (2014) states: "Being conscious of one's inability to relativize certain religious attachments, which at the same time cannot be proven to be superior, can make the encounter with the religious other rather disconcerting". In fact, our identity may be so fragile that we cannot bear that other people think, act or believe differently than we do. In the next paragraph, I will briefly discuss what could happen if one feels threatened by the other and because of that fears to lose his or her identity.

### **4.3 WHEN THE OTHER BECOMES A THREAT**

*"If you don't talk you will fight."*

(Walter, personal communication)

As mentioned before the social group is important in the process of identification, if not the most important. Identity gives you a sense of who you are and has, according to Eller (2007), four aspects that all relate to group integration. Ideas about where you come from, what you are (race, religion, language), what you believe or value, what you expect from life or the afterlife are all shaped and reshaped through interaction with the group. In the previous section, I showed that religious identities are inherently contingent because they lack solid justification of why one belongs to this religion and not to another and cannot be proven superior over other religions. In chapter 5 I will get into more detail about how my informants deal with the lack of solid justification and whether or not they consider their religion superior to other religions. In this subchapter, I will focus on what happens if people fail to deal with the contingency of their religious identity.

Several writers state that identity, when seen as something fixed, is the main cause for violence between social groups. Slocum-Bradley (2008, 7) describes "The naturalness of social categories as everyday primordialism", Sen (2006) talks about the illusion of 'unique identity' in which the world is seen as consisting solely of fixed, clearly delineated categories such as religions, cultures or civilizations and Moyaert (2014) talks about viewing identity as 'idem', "a kind of a formal identity...that focusses unilaterally on notions such as essence, stability, and continuity". These ways of viewing identity assume essentialism and evoke thinking in dichotomies. Good/bad, ugly/beautiful, same/different, self/other. This also relates to, what Reedijk (2010) calls the either/or discourse which means that we cannot be two things at the same time, for example, a truthful Christian participating in Hinduist rituals. Interaction with people from another faith would, in these views, automatically lead to a loss of identity. Moreover, this either/or discourse leads to processes in which the out-group is imagined as being essentially different and less valuable than the in-group.

Holslag (2015) states that othering is a process of selfing, the other can at the same time acknowledge one's identity or challenge it. If the self is no longer clear the other becomes a threat and in a desperate act to cling to that which you know (your schema repertoires) your identity must be protected at all costs. Seeing the outsider as a threat can cause a certain group to isolate themselves from others, Moyaert (2014) calls this the 'protective withdrawal'. This strategy to deal with the contingency of one's identity is called absolutism and is associated with exclusive claims to the truth and results in closed-ness towards others. Seeing the outsider as a threat can take

horrific shapes of which genocide might be one of the worst outcomes. “Genocide is...not necessarily a war against a specific targeted group, but a war against identity (a symbolic notion) from which a specific targeted group is derived” (Holslag, 2015). Holslag (2015) states that in the case of genocides the identification process serves but one goal, namely, to solidify the self at the cost of the other. Violence is often seen as an essential characteristic of religion. Eller, (2007) however, states that religion is not inherently a source of violence, rather, a religious group can, just like any other group, commit violent acts when its identity and its existence is threatened.

Bringing religiously motivated violence to and an end is what my informants set out to do, not directly but at least making a step in the right direction. This, however, asks from them the ability and willingness to deal with the contingencies of their religious identity. Relativism and absolutism are not useful in interfaith dialogue because they either relate to everything as meaningless or see the other as a threat. (Moyaert 2014) Nevertheless one should be aware of these strategies because as soon as one’s identity is threatened by the other one of these strategies can come to the fore. Even some of my informants referred to it; Sadeed, for example, wondered why, if we all have respect for each other, we cannot just unite all religions, since that would make things a lot easier. On the contrary, Sabir stated that he might eventually lose interest in interfaith dialogue because he might become tired of questioning or having to explain his own faith.

In this chapter, I have explained why interfaith dialogue is not just an easy game. I have discussed why religious identity is inherently contingent and how the religious other can be a threat. In the end, interfaith dialogue is about finding a balance between holding on and letting go: to what extent can I let go of my own truths and move along the waves of the other’s truth without losing solid ground of my own beliefs? Those who engage in interfaith dialogue, have to come up with strategies that enable them to deal with the insecurities about identity. In the next chapter, I will discuss what strategies my informants have, to deal with the religious other.

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It is an incredibly sunny day today and I made the decision to take the bike instead of the train to Segbroek. Today is one of the last days that I will visit The Hague for my field research. When I cycle through the streets of Segbroek I realise that so many things in this neighbourhood have become familiar to me. The mosque, the church, the cafés, the multitude of Turkish stores. These are places that I would have normally never noticed, or maybe noticed but never dared to enter. Now, these places have a 'face', they have become familiar to me because it is where I met my informants, attended meetings and gatherings or just had a normal chit chat over a cup of tea. I park my bike in Bleekerstraat, next to the entrance of Het Dialooghuis. This community center run by Mustafa, a Turkish-Dutch man in his forties, is always busy. Whenever I come in, several people walk in and out, or are working inside, making coffee or cleaning the place. When Mustafa is not there, there are always one or more interns present. Today is no different. I was supposed to meet Mustafa for an interview today but when I walk in he is not there. Instead, I have an interesting talk with one of his interns about the youth event organised during the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Our conversation is interrupted, several times, by people who are looking for Mustafa. The intern, who is a 17 year old boy, offers me something to drink and we talk about the different people he met at the event. He tells me that it was good to be there because, at first sight, he thought 'the guy with the stripes on his face' was weird, but after he talked to him he understood why he had them. After a while, Mustafa stumbles in loudly. With his deep voice he apologises for making me, 'the little princess', wait. We quickly move to the large table in the meeting room of the centre, where we start the interview but, only after I have been offered tea, fruit, and cookies. Yet another unfamiliar place has become so familiar to me because of the warm-heartedness of my informants.

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# 5.

## HOW DO WE PLAY THE GAME?

What strategy does one use to win the game? In interfaith dialogue, one's schema repertoires are constantly challenged. Yet all participants of interfaith dialogue are in one way or another motivated to 'do good'. And more so, they have realized that they cannot undertake this journey alone. In fact, they need the other in order to establish their goal; to make the world a better place. One's schema repertoires, however, have consequences for the way one approaches the other. Are believers able to maintain their individual schema repertoires yet confirming to 'officially correct' schemas? How much are believers allowed to develop their own religious schema repertoires? What does a religious schema repertoire say about the religious others and how to deal with differences? All these questions essentially deal with reality. What is it, and how does mine relates to yours? In other words, schema repertoires differ in their flexibility, durability, and resistance to new influences. And this is reflected in the strategies that my informants use to play the interfaith game. Moyaert (2014) states that “personal identity implies a tension between sameness and otherness, continuity and discontinuity, permanence and change. This dynamic dialectic can be kept together only through the mediations of narrative”.

In this chapter I will tell the stories my informants use to be able to play the interfaith game.

## 5.1 WHAT IS REALITY?

In the encounter with the other “the primal tendency is to discover the familiar that fits one’s own social context. So that the unfamiliar becomes acceptable” states Droogers (2012, 151). In other words, people try to narrate reality in such a way that it fits their own reality. This has to do with the extent to which people focus on finding similarities or acknowledge differences, and also the extent to which they are aware that their own reality is not necessarily the same as the reality of another.

### 5.1.1 My reality is your reality

*“Well that is his truth, and you just have to accept that. Even if you do not agree. You do not have to accept that what he states is the truth, but you have to accept him. I do not agree but that does not mean we have to fight over it, he is also a creation of God.”<sup>39</sup>*

(Mustafa, personal communication)

Mustafa reasons from his own religious framework when he states that Jews, Christians, and Muslims all adhere to the same God, which he calls Allah. He then subsumes Hinduism and Buddhism under philosophies and does not view them as religions. He, in other words, subsumes only those religions under that same God that make sense in his reality. Other religions such as Hinduism or Buddhism do not fit in his perception of religion and therefore he calls them philosophies. Moreover, he states that Islam is ‘the last update’ of Christianity and Judaism and that these religions, therefore, fall under the Islam. The quote at the top of this section shows this very clearly. By adding ‘he is also a creation of God’ Mustafa shows that he understands this world as a creation of God. Therefore, he has to accept all living beings in it, even if he does not agree with them. With this strategy, he gives people who have a different idea about reality a place so he can stick to his own concept of reality. Dirk also has an all-encompassing view on the diversity of religions. He states that all ‘Gods’ are the same. The reason they have different names is that of the relationship one has with God. He sees all religions who adhere to a God as levels to get closer to God (Krishna). He states:

*“Just like you cannot explain to a child where babies come from, there are also different spiritual levels in human society; and that’s why there are all these different religious paths. Not everyone can understand these higher or complicated concepts, let’s leave out high and low; complicated and less complicated concepts. You have to be ready for that. From your Karma and previous lives, to make that step. So, in that way being tolerant and humble is very important in our tradition.”<sup>40</sup>*

(Dirk, personal communication)

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<sup>39</sup> Original text: “Er is een realiteit. Realiteit zit altijd een beetje dicht bij de waarheid. Nou goed dat is zijn waarheid. Dat is zijn waarheid, dat moet je zo maar gewoon accepteren. Ook als je dat niet goed vindt. Niet accepteren dat wat hij zegt waarheid is, maar hém zo accepteren...Je moet minstens ruimte geven, begrip tonen, ok ik begrijp jou. Dat is jouw beeld, dat is jouw kennis, dat is jouw wetendheid. ok. Maar ik ben het er niet mee eens. Klaar. Maar hoeft je geen strijd te voeren... want hij is ook geschept te God.”

(Musatafa, personal communication)

<sup>40</sup> Original text: Net zoals je een kind op de lagere school niet kan uitleggen waar kinderen vandaan komen zo heb je allerlei niveaus ook in de menselijke samenleving op het gebied van spiritualiteit en daardoor zijn er ook al die verschillende religieuze paden, niet iedereen kan die hogere concepten of uitgebreid laten we hoog en laag even weghouden uitgebreide en minder uitgebreide concepten begrijpen, daar moet je ook aan toe zijn vanuit je karma vanuit je vorige levens dat je inderdaad die stap kan maken, dus in die zin is een heel belangrijke kwaliteit in onze traditie is tolerantie en nederig zijn. (Dirk, personal communication)

Gerd Baumann (2005) introduces three grammars of how the other can be understood in relation to the self. I recognize one of these grammars in how both Dirk and Mustafa understand religious differences. This grammar, called encompassment, is inspired by Louis Dumont (1980) and comes from the idea that deep down everybody is the same as them. Differences fall under that what is defined as universal (women are but part of mankind). Encompassment is always hierarchical; it needs the higher to encompass the lower. It contextualizes differences on only two levels: the lower level which recognizes differences, and the higher level which subsumes that which is different under that which is universal. (Baumann 2005)

Subsuming other's reality under your own reality does not necessarily imply absolutism that is often associated with claims to superiority. Even though this view does place one's own religion or truth above the other it does not necessarily lead to the closed-ness associated with absolutism. This is because in this strategy religions are not seen as competitors for the truth. Rather, all truths come together in their truth, in other words, my reality is your reality. Not all of my informants understood the differences in the same way. Some believed that all different realities eventually lead to the same universal truth, however, they sustained from defining exactly what this essential truth was. In the next section, I will elaborate on this.

### 5.1.2 Our realities come together in the 'ultimate reality'

*"When we take off our clothes, we are all the same. We are all human you know, it is so important to realize that. Religion is just a jacket that we are wearing, a label that we received, and that only divides, it does not unite at all. It is good that you have your own religion but do not pretend that your religion is better or that the other is wrong."<sup>41</sup>*

(Marije, personal communication)

Deep down we are all the same. My informants, that thought like this, often used metaphors such as the mountain or the three. They also stated that there were many different religions, however, they said, all religions eventually lead to the same top of the mountain or in other words, to the 'same universal truth'. Sarah proclaimed: "we are one big family". What I found most remarkable about this way of dealing with differences is that my informants had different ideas on what this 'universal truth' was and moreover, were very careful in making clear statements as to what they thought the ultimate truth would be like. I often found it really hard to grasp what exactly they meant by this 'ultimate truth'. I considered if it meant that they truly believed that their religion was comparable to all other religions and that they all came together in one ultimate truth. Or it could mean that they thought, but did not say, that the ultimate truth was actually their reality under which all other religions can be subsumed (as described in the previous section). However, the self-reflexive ability of my informants prevented them from saying these things out loud, assuming that it was what they believed.

The way my informants talked to each other showed that they did not want to hurt or judge the other person and accept them for who they are. Sometimes they caught themselves saying something generalizing or devaluing about others. It became very clear that most of the times they were aware of this and quickly rephrased their sentences. This shows for example in what Dirk said (in the previous section). He first says 'higher and lower concepts' but then rephrases that into 'more and less complicated' concepts. This self-reflexivity and self-

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<sup>41</sup> Original text: "...als je je kleren uitdoet, ben je allemaal hetzelfde eronder, we zijn allemaal hetzelfde. We zijn allemaal mens, weetje, het zo belangrijk om dat van mekaar te zien. Dat geloof is een jasje dat je aan hebt, een etiket wat je hebt op gekregen, en dat verdeeld alleen maar, dat brengt je helemaal niet bij elkaar, het is goed dat je je eigen geloof hebt, maar ga niet pretenderen dat jou geloof het beste is en dat die ander het mis heeft"

(Marije, personal communication)

consciousness I would like to call the rules of the interfaith game. The 'dialogue method' was often named as a way to have a proper interfaith dialogue. In this method, people are allowed to ask each other questions without passing any judgment on the other. The main goal is to get to know each other and create mutual understanding. To make sure they understood each other properly they paraphrased a lot like: "so if I understand it correctly..." "so you mean...".

My informants, that believed in the ultimate truth, were focusing on similarities without devaluing differences as a strategy for dealing with religious diversity. A way to do this was to look at certain important values that could be found in all religions such as love, taking care of others, compassion, respect, etcetera. The Christmas Special of the URI is a good example. People from different religions call out values that are important to all religions. *This 'quest' for similarities can be understood as 'humanizing the other' (as opposed to dehumanizing the other as happens in genocides). In relation to this, Walter states that he believes he could even be in dialogue with someone who is radicalized because this person is still a human being and a creature of God. He states that it is ok to dwell away from the truth because God's love is so big that he loves all people despite their faults.*

The reality in this strategy was something that could be challenged. Wim states that he looks for 'space' (speelruimte) within someone's religious adherence and Walter states that truth is something that is personal and that what is true to him is inferior to what is true to another. By focussing on the similarities, they talked about an ultimate truth, however, they refrained from giving it a name and left its definition somewhere in the middle.

### **5.1.3 All realities are different**

*"Look at your fingers, are they all equally long? Are they all equally thick? People are no different. We will never be the same"*<sup>42</sup>

(Sadeed, personal communication)

In the previous two paragraphs, I have outlined two strategies of dealing with the contingencies of religious identity; 'my reality is your reality' and 'our realities come together in the 'ultimate reality''. Some of my informants (the minority), however, wondered if we could ever really step away from our own reality. They expressed this doubt in a few ways. First of all, they stated that words such as peace, love, and respect mean something different in different religions. The word itself only means something in a particular social and religious context. Secondly, they stated that 'words are just words'. With this, they meant that it is easy to say that we want, for example, peace on earth and that therefore we should be able to deal with differences, but in reality, it is not that easy. Gwen emphasized that it should be about 'actions' not 'words'. Peter concludes that in the end everyone has their own reality and that is not necessarily better or worse, it is just different.

Another issue, that was mentioned only by Maria, had to do with power structures within the group or in general in the organization. She states:

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<sup>42</sup> Original tekst: "Kijk naar je vingers. Zijn ze allemaal even lang? Zijn ze allemaal even dik? En dat zal je met mensen ook hebben. Je zal nooit hetzelfde zijn." (Sadeed, personal communication)

*"I am a feminist in heart and soul, so I look at everything critically...of course, it is great that all these organizations want to establish peace, but do they work together with homosexuals? With the poor? How do they deal with black and white? That is what I question".*

(Maria, personal communication)

Even though power structures or decision-making processes have not been a big subject in this research I feel the urge to briefly comment on it because it might be an interesting subject for future research. At the beginning of this chapter, I stated that people, when they encounter people with different schema repertoires, tend to look for those things that fit their own schema repertoire in order to make the unfamiliar familiar. However, states Droogers (2012, 151): "differences in power may prevent such an open exchange, and the most powerful position is then imposed." The person with the least power may try to hold onto its own schema repertoire but will fail and is forced by the stronger party to adapt. Even though inclusivity and equality were highly valued by all members of the group, one could question the decision-making process. This issue touches upon the debate whether or not diversity in a group automatically leads to more equality in the decision-making process. Some say that the presence of a range of people leads to more creative solutions, however, one could argue, to what extent does everyone get an equal say in the decision-making process? (Caney, 1992). Some of my informants referred to interfaith dialogue as a process of growth which might imply that they were 'grown ups' in interfaith dialogue whereas others still had to learn. Even though they emphasized that they did not want to force anything onto anyone. The fact that they feel they are experienced practitioners of interfaith dialogue might influence how decisions are made. A very telling example of this is when Jan asked me if I wanted to join the group. I, however, knew that Dirk was against that (see chapter 2).

I have discussed three ways of dealing with the religious other and their realities on (1) subsuming another's reality under one's own reality, (2) focussing on similarities and believing in an ultimate truth without giving it a name or (3) sustaining from the idea that there is a shared truth and instead choosing to view reality as something that holds true for you and that that is enough. All these strategies challenge one's schema repertoires and influence one's processes of identification. In this light, Moyaert (2014) talks about the narrative self. She states: "The narrative self is not a permanent continuous substance but a self-reinterpreting identity that knows that its narrative is never finished" (Moyaert, 2014). The narration of the self can be seen as a natural process that often happens unconsciously. However, when a certain event does not make sense or interrupts what one always thought to be true we are forced to narrate our story differently. In that sense, we are both readers and writers of our own story, even though we would like to write our plot we are constantly forced to rewrite it. Moreover, through narrating our life we can overcome things that at first sight seems incompatible with our identity or concept of reality. "The formation of identity is a never-ending journey one may only undertake with others" (Moyaert, 2014).

## THE END OF THE GAME?

I have reached the end of the game; with writing down my final words of this thesis, my part in the game is over. However, for my informants the game is still on and, if we look at the world and all its wrong-doings, will be on for a little while longer. Building peace is not an easy task, it requires hard work, patience, and perseverance. Nevertheless, the members of the CCs in the Netherlands set out to do just that, even if it means that change is slow. In this thesis, I have set out to uncover the depths of the interfaith dialogue game. Firstly, I have discussed the foundations of the game and showed that they differed greatly amongst the players. Secondly, I looked at what motivated the players to play the game. I found out that their motivation to play is a combination of wanting to do good in this world, strongly driven by their religion, and a feeling of belonging to a group that confirms their identity as a peace builder. In the third chapter, I discussed how the players experience the game. I stated that the interfaith game is not 'just' a game because it seriously challenges your concept of reality and brings with it questions of loyalty. Finally, in chapter 5, I showed how the players deal with the uncertainties that derive from the interfaith dialogue. Or in other words, how do they give the other a place within their own reality?

The other has an ambiguous role in interfaith dialogue because he or she both confirms and challenges one's identity. Interfaith dialogue means being in a dialogue with someone who is different than you are (or at least someone with a different faith). Being a peace builder, a concept the players strongly identify with, in interfaith dialogue implies being able to deal with the religious other. So, the mere fact that they are all, despite their differences, sitting around one table, confirms their identity of being a peace builder. Moreover, belonging to a group that aims to make this world a better place also supports the idea of being a peace builder. The diversity within the group can be seen as a reflection of society. Being part of a group that stands for peace and change not only gives them strength and confirmation, but also gives them a purpose in this world. The group, in other words, gives them purpose in life.

On the other hand, we have seen that the other also challenges one's identity. We have talked about 'fragile religious identity' which means that a religious identity is built on a 'groundless ground' and that you ought to say yes to this in order to hold onto it. In a dialogue with the other, this identity can be challenged. In other words, one's schema repertoire from which one understands the world can be challenged in an encounter with the other. This, we saw, can have multiple consequences. Worst-case scenario, one can feel threatened by the other and chooses one of the escape routes; absolutism or relativism. In absolutism, one retreats into one's own community and highlights the differences with the other. Absolutism in its most extreme form can lead to dehumanizing the other, which, in turn, can lead to violent acts such as genocide or holy war. Relativism reduces religion to culturally and historically determined social constructs which results in an endless quest for meaning or, worst-case scenario, loss of faith. On the other hand, my informants stated that their faith became stronger because of the encounter with the other. It revealed what Droogers (2012) called the 'hidden articles of faith'. So in the encounter with the other certain schema repertoires that one 'forgot' about were re-discovered.

The ambiguous role of the other supports the idea that one's identity is constantly shaped and reshaped in social interaction. One, thus, needs the other in order to understand who one is. This realization, however, does not take away the fact that the encounter with the other is challenging. In fact, the encounter with the other who has a different schema repertoire than you can be very difficult and maybe even disturbing. How do the players deal with this insecurity and how do they prevent 'loss' of identity? It is a game of holding on and letting go, a

game of finding the exact balance of letting go just enough to give the other a 'place' but not too much so that they will lose their identity. How much one dares to let go of what one considers to be true or real depends on the flexibility of one's schema repertoires. People with strict schema repertoires have less space for understanding other religious realities and therefore tend to concentrate more on how different realities fit into one's own reality. People with flexible schema repertoires have more space for the combination of different realities because the schemas are less bound to specific rules. How flexible or strict one's schema repertoires are depends on the religion one adheres to and the way one is supposed to express his or her loyalty to God. I have discussed three strategies the players use to deal with the reality of another. These strategies vary in the way one's own reality is related to another's reality. They either tried to 'fit' another's reality into their own reality, believed all realities lead to the same ultimate truth or understood each reality as being true to that person without making statements about which one is better in general. Rather, they stated that their truth was best for them and therefore more true than other realities.

What all these strategies have in common is that they enable the player to give the other, who is unarguably different, a place within their own reality. Even though othering is often seen as a negative process, I argue that othering is an inevitable human process and that othering can have positive outcomes. In fact, only if we understand othering as an inevitable human process in making sense of ourselves and the world around us, we can move forward towards a society that is based on respect and mutual understanding. The way we 'other' depends on how we understand identity. If we understand our identity within the either/or discourse, identity becomes something we can 'lose'. In this discourse, the other automatically becomes a threat because he or she is characterized in a way that opposes our identity. In other words, the schema repertoires are so strict that the self can only be understood as opposed to the other rather than in relation to the other. He is Muslim and I am a Jew and therefore we are different. Other aspects of one's identity that might lead to similarities are ignored or denied. The either/or discourse thus leaves little space for 'narrating around' the differences of the other. However, 'Inclusive Othering' is a way to recognize the other's reality, that might be essentially different to yours, yet giving it a place within your own reality. People are able to narrate differences in such a way that they fit within their own schema repertoires. Whenever we encounter someone who is essentially different to us we are forced to rewrite our life story in order to make sense of the unfamiliar. No matter how much we would already like to write our plot, encounters with the other prevent us from knowing the exact ending of our story.

Inclusivity, respect, and equality are important values in interfaith dialogue. We could thus state that the interfaith group is a safe space for the encounter with the other. As long as one does not feel threatened by the other, dialogue can continue. I sometimes wondered, though, what exactly the 'tipping point' is for this safe space to change into a threatening space. I questioned just how equal and inclusive a group can be and if there is not always someone who gets the final say. Future research could focus on power structures within the interfaith dialogue and look at how and when power threatens one's religious identity. Even though I did not focus on this in my research I do feel that power and play are entangled and that power can play a role in interfaith dialogue. Even if it is only about simple questions such as who makes the final decision.

With this critical note, I would like to conclude this thesis by saying that inclusive othering is a perfect tension between on the one hand fulfilling the need to live in peace together in this world, and yet having the urge (and maybe even the right) to be different. This tension can even be found within the field of anthropology itself where we constantly set out to discover the 'other' in order to gain more understanding of this world. The interfaith

dialogue game is far from played out. Differences that unite are still an exception rather than the rule. But within the interfaith game one thing is certain; no matter how different the players are, they agree on one thing; they want to make this world a better place and they need each other to do it.



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## Attachment 1: Overview players

INFORMANTS (names have been anonymized)	MEMBER	RELIGION	AGE GROUP	"OFFICIAL" INTERVIEWS	LOCATION	INFORMAL TALKS	OTHER FORMS OF CONTACT
Jan	URI Stuurgroep	Christian/boedhist (bit of all)	60-80	2	Home	YES	Email
Wim	URI Europe, URI Stuurgroep, IBS	Christian	60-80	2	Dialooghuis + vicarage	YES	Email + phonecalls
Catherine	CC vrouwengroep	Scientology	40-60	1	Home	NO	Email
Walter	URI Europe, URI Stuurgroep	Catholic	40-60	2	Office	YES	Email
Maria	CC vrouwengroep	Spiritual	60-80	1	Home	NO	Email
Marije	URI Stuurgroep	Christian	40-60	2	Theater Vaillant + Korenhuis Den Haag	YES	Email
Dirk	URI Stuurgroep, IBS	Hare Krishna	60-80	2	Home + vicarage	YES	Email + Whatsapp
Jorn	CC vertrouwenspersonen	Hinduist	40-60	0	Home	YES	sms + facebook
Peter	IBS	Christian	20-40	1	Home + café Emma	YES	whatsapp
Gwen	URI Stuurgroep	Pagan	60-80	1	Home	YES	Email
Quinten	URI Europe	none (former catholic)	20-40	1	My home	YES	Email + Skype
Maartje	URI Stuurgroep	Scientology	20-40	2	Scientology church	YES	Email
Andrew	URI Europe	Christian and eastern spirituality		1	Silent retreat belgium + skype	YES	Skype
Priya	URI Europe	Muslim (convert)	>20	0	Silent retreat belgium + skype	YES	Skype
Shannon	URI San Francisco	Christan	40-60	0	Silent retreat belgium + skype	YES	Skype
Sabir	IBS	Muslim	20-40	2	Spui library Den Haag	YES	Email
Sadeed	IBS	Muslim	40-60	2	Office mosque	YES	Email
Sarah	CC vrouwengroep	Hinduist	?	1	Buurthuis Zuid- Oost	NO	Email
Mustafa	IBS	Muslim	40-60	1	Dialooghuis	YES	Email
John	URI San Francisco	Christian	60-80	0	Silent retreat belgium + skype	YES	Email

## Attachment 2: Methods

RESEARCH METHOD	DESCRIPTION	USABILITY	REMARKS
<b>Recorded interviews</b>	Interviews usually took 1,5 hours or longer. I recorded the interviews. These interviews were semi structured, meaning that I had a list with topics but did not follow a list of questions. The topics were motivation for joining URI, religion, religious diversity and how they identify with other URI members (othering).	I consider these interviews very useful. Because I recorded the interviews I was able to register precisely what people said and more importantly how they phrased it. Because of the duration of the interviews I was also able to go into subjects in-depth.	Usually the first interview served to get to know the person and establish a bond of trust. With the second interview I could go into the topics deeper. Even though I recorded the interviews it did not seem to stop my informants from talking freely about personal matters.
<b>Informal talks</b>	During coffee breaks at meetings, or walking to the tram station after the meeting. Going for a coffee or talking at an event.	In an informal setting some informants shared certain opinions or beliefs on more practical things. In the formal interviews I could refer back to these statements	Some would share their discomfort with how certain people acted during the meetings or would try to get to know me a bit better.
<b>Meetings</b>	I attended meetings of the IBS and URI Stuurgroep. I attended around 5 meetings each.	These meetings gave insight in what the groups were working on, how they structured their meetings, what issues they raised, how they communicated, and what role each member fulfilled within the group.	Religion or spirituality played only a small role during this meetings. Meetings were opened with a 'spiritual opening'. During the meeting mostly practical things were discussed about how and when to organize an event.
<b>Drawings</b>	I asked the people I interviewed to draw themselves amidst the groups of people they felt connected with. In order to understand how they would identify with certain groups.	Some people understood what I was trying to get at and some of them did not.	I am not sure yet if the information I got from these drawings is interesting for my research.
<b>Showing video's</b>	During an interview I would show my informants two videos of URI. One about 'be a peacebuilder' and one about a Christmas gathering of the URI. I asked them to react on these.	It was very interesting how different members reacted to these video's.	Some thought they were beautiful, some even got emotional. Some thought they were too 'dramatic'. Some recognized members of the URI they met before.
<b>Email contact</b>	He also added me to the email lists of both the IBS and the Stuurgroep URI.	These emails showed me how people communicate, what they write but also for example how they end their emails 'in peace' or 'blessed'.	
<b>Forwarded email</b>	My key informant forwarded me a lot of emails from URI members.	These emails gave insight in what is communicated on a global network in URI.	
<b>WhatsApp contact</b>	During my field research I had WhatsApp contact with two informants.	What do they write, what do they share?	One of my informants was in India for 6 weeks. He would sometimes sent me texts or questions related to Hare Krishna.
<b>Observation</b>	What are people wearing. Who talks most and in what way. Body language. Do they take notes or not.		
<b>Events</b>	The world interfaith harmony week, interreligious gathering Scientology, URI and education gatherings	These events gave me the possibility to fully participate and also meet new people and have informal talks with my informants.	Fully participating also sometimes put me in a difficult position. They were asking me for my opinion whereas I tried to stay as neutral as possible.

## Attachment 3: Interview questions

Theme	Description	Sample questions	Contribution
<b>Interfaith dialogue</b>	This theme was about getting a better understanding of why my informants thought interfaith dialogue was important. But also what they understood as interfaith dialogue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is your motivation for interfaith cooperation?</li> <li>➤ What does interfaith cooperation mean to you?</li> <li>➤ How do you experience working together with people from another religion?</li> </ul>	To get to know what my informants mean by interfaith dialogue (the emic perspective). Why they do it (motivation) and how do they associate with it (identity).
<b>Religious experience</b>	This theme gave me insight in how my informants experienced and understood religion. Which religion they adhere to, what role religion played in their lives, how they experience their religion. But also what were their thoughts on religion, how did they understand and define religion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How would you describe religion in your life?</li> <li>➤ What does religion mean? What does being religious mean to you?</li> <li>➤ Is Muslim / Christian something that you are or that you become.</li> </ul>	To get to know what my informants mean by religion (the emic perspective). How they experience it and understand it (identity) and how it might contribute to dealing with interfaith.
<b>Diversity of religion</b>	How do my informants understand the diversity in religions and how does their own religion relate to other religions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What does your religion say about other religion?</li> <li>➤ Why are there more religions?</li> </ul>	How do my informants give the 'other' religions a place. (othering)
<b>Personal history</b>	To get a better understanding of the person sitting in front of me. How do personal experiences contribute to the shaping of the person, has it driven the person either to becoming more religious or more interfaith?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How did you come in contact with the URI?</li> <li>➤ Were you raised religiously?</li> <li>➤ These questions usually differed per person and came up during the interview (not prepared)</li> </ul>	Getting a better idea on how my informants identify themselves and how others have contributed to the their idea of who they are. (identity, othering)

## Attachment 4: Flyer

# World Interfaith Harmony Week Programma

Vanuit het Interreligieus Beraad Segbroek (IBS) nodigen wij u van harte uit deel te nemen aan een of meerdere van onderstaande programma's:

**Woensdag 1 februari – 08:30 tot 09:15**

**Interculturele thee en koffie ochtend**

Basisschool De Drie Linden, Verlengde 2<sup>e</sup> Braamstraat 5

**Zaterdag 4 februari – 14:00 tot 16:00**

**Jongeren ontmoeten elkaar**

H. Familiekerk, Kamperfoeliestraat 279

Jongeren gaan vanuit verschillende godsdiensten in gesprek over de drie uitgangspunten.

**Zaterdag 11 februari – 15:30 tot 19:00**

**Thema middag 'Geloof in duurzaamheid'**

H. Familiekerk, Kamperfoeliestraat 279

Presentaties over duurzaamheid o.a. vanuit verschillende heilige geschriften. Gelegenheid voor gesprek tussen panelleden en bezoekers. Aansluitend diner.

*Graag aanmelden bij:* Bart Ten Broek,  
bart.tenbroek@online.nl of 06-19599553

**Open dagen**

*5 februari* - 15:00 tot 18:00

**Iskcon (Hare Krishna)**, Weimastraat 213

Lezing, Puja ceremonie en vegetarische maaltijd.

*12 februari* - 10:30 tot 12:30

**H. Familiekerk**, Kamperfoelieplein 29,

R.K. jongerenvereniging met na afloop koffie en thee.



Stichting  
Interreligieus Beraad Segbroek



UNITED RELIGIONS  
INITIATIVE



# Attachment 5: Golden Rule

**THE GOLDEN RULE**

**BABA'I FAITH**  
Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself  
*Baha'u'llah, Gleanings*

**HINDUISM**  
This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you  
*Mahabharata 5:1517*

**BUDDHISM**  
Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful  
*Udana-Varga 5:18*

**CONFUCIANISM**  
One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct... loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself  
*Confucius, Analects 15:23*

**ISLAM**  
Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself  
*The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith*

**TAOISM**  
Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss  
*T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213-218*

**JUDAISM**  
What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary  
*Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a*

**SIKHISM**  
I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all  
*Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 1299*

**JAINISM**  
One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated  
*Mahavira, Suttrakritanga*

**CHRISTIANITY**  
In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets  
*Jesus, Matthew 7:12*

**ZOROASTRIANISM**  
Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself  
*Shayast-na-Shayast 13:29*

**NATIVE SPIRITUALITY**  
We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive  
*Chief Dan George*

**UNITARIANISM**  
We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part  
*Unitarian principle*

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