Chapter 4
Dialogue as Playfulness: Communication Beyond Binaries in a Neighborhood Torn Over the Status of Asylum Seekers Living There

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ABSTRACT
This chapter uses Gergen’s shift of focus from independent and coherent selves to relational beings and Klein and Maimon’s mathematical model of consciousness and suggests a new approach to dialogue. Through the metaphor of playfulness, this chapter stresses the importance of training in perspective taking and coordinated experiences in cases of conflict. Moreover, this chapter suggests the importance of integrating other forces operating within the context of conflict into the dialogic process. The chapter demonstrates the theoretical dimensions discussed through the example of conflict over the status of refugees in a Tel-Aviv neighborhood.

INTRODUCTION

Somewhere beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I will meet you there. Rumi

With the possibility of expulsion to Rwanda looming over their heads, the African residents of the small Shapira neighborhood in the South of Tel-Aviv feared walking freely around the streets. They knew that not only was their official status at risk, but their acceptance by the locals was also questionable, even explosive. Indeed, the influx of newcomers in the past decade has posed major challenges to the
struggling neighborhood. Lack of government support or a clear policy meant that these African immigrants were crowding in small apartments and kindergartens leading in turn to relief organizations moving into the neighborhood to offer aid. While some of the residents have actively supported these Africans or advocated against their possible deportation, others have adamantly protested their presence in their neighborhood and the country in general. As the government’s intentions to deport the immigrants become more tangible, the more palpable and contentious the tension between the residents has grown.

Shapira can be understood as a contact zone (Pratt, 1991, 1992)—a geographical or ethnographical space where cultures meet. The neighborhood is home to a growing number of refugees from different African countries, as well as to different Israeli subgroups that vary according to age, education, socioeconomic status, and religion. Power dynamics in the neighborhood are contingent on government policies and partisan political interests at the state level that construe a complicated situation. Since asymmetrical power relations characteristic to the neighborhood are known to intensify tensions and clashing interests (Goncalves, 2016, p.8), dialogic efforts there might seem dim and hopeless.

This chapter begins with theoretical exploration of the notion of dialogue. It suggests opening the aperture to view dialogue not merely as a dual process in which two narratives are being exchanged but as a more extended process interwoven in myriad relations. The metaphor of “playfulness” is used here to gesture towards a way of being (with) that which is malleable and open. The metaphor also points to a spatial dimension, alluding to the importance of myriad relations and connections that are directly and often indirectly parts of the dialogue. While playfulness can be achieved through literal play, as in games or arts (as the example used in this chapter demonstrates), play is not limited to these. The second part of the chapter illustrates this approach to dialogue through the example of cultural activities and discussion in Shapira over the status of the refugees living there.

BACKGROUND

Dialogue

The concept of dialogue was discussed by the Jewish philosopher and mystic Martin Buber in his monumental *I and Thou* (1970). The discussion begins with this classic because of Buber’s intricate focus on vulnerability and openness and due to his ability to interweave the personal and interpersonal dimensions as dynamic and interdependent. In this book, Buber differentiates between an instrumental way of relating to the other (as “It”) and the dialogic approach characterizes relations in
Impact of Violence in Movies on Juvenile Delinquency
www.igi-global.com/article/impact-of-violence-in-movies-on-juvenile-delinquency/204936?camid=4v1a