Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians

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Abstract

In the past few decades, planned contact interventions between groups in conflict have played an important role in attempts at improving intergroup relations and achieving peace and reconciliation. This article focuses on such reconciliation-aimed intergroup encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians that seek to reduce hostility and increase understanding and cooperation between the two nationalities. Like other contact interventions conducted in settings of intergroup conflict, encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians represent a paradoxical project: this is a project that aspires to generate equality and cooperation between groups that are embedded in a protracted asymmetrical conflict. Though existing research teaches us valuable lessons on the effectiveness of contact conducted under optimal conditions, little is said about contact between groups involved in asymmetrical protracted dispute. The goal of this analysis is to examine the evolution of reconciliation-aimed contact interventions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the past 20 years. The research method is qualitative, relying on ethnographic data assembled during the relevant period of time. The findings identify and trace the evolution of four major models of Jewish–Palestinian planned encounters: the Coexistence Model, the Joint Projects Model, the Confrontational Model, and the Narrative-Story-Telling Model. The strengths and limitations of each model in transforming intergroup attitudes in asymmetric conflict are discussed.

Keywords

asymmetric conflict, contact hypothesis, intergroup contact, intergroup encounters, intergroup relations, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Jewish–Arab relations, reconciliation

Introduction

Ethno-political conflicts tend to be accompanied by psychological phenomena such as mutual prejudice, delegitimization, and dehumanization (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2000, 2001). In the past few decades, planned contact interventions between groups in conflict have played an important role in attempts to improve intergroup relations and achieve peace and reconciliation (Bekerman, 2009a,b; Kelman, 1998; Maoz, 2000c; Salomon, 2004).

This article focuses on those reconciliation-aimed intergroup encounters that attempt to reduce hostility and increase understanding and cooperation between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. Structured encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians are encounters that take place between two groups with asymmetric power-relations, engaged in competition over scarce resources; the Jewish majority (some 80% of the Israeli population) is in control of most material and political resources and determines the national character of the country. The relationship between the Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel is also significantly affected by the larger protracted asymmetrical conflict between the State of Israel and the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip territories. Thus, like

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other contact interventions conducted in settings of intergroup conflict, encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians represent a paradoxical project that aims to produce equality and cooperation between groups embedded in a reality of conflict and asymmetry (Bekerman, 2002, 2009a,b).

Although existing research teaches us valuable lessons on the efficacy of contact interventions conducted under optimal conditions (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000), little is said about the efficacy of such interventions between groups involved in an acute asymmetrical dispute (for important exceptions see Bekerman, 2002, 2009a,b; Salomon, 2004, 2006).

Our analysis is inspired by a recent school of thought that looks at processes and effects of contact under the non-optimal conditions that exist in deeply divided societies (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005, 2007). It also joins a growing number of studies presenting a critical approach to planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (Abu-Nimer, 1999, 2004; Bekerman, 2002, 2007b, 2009a,b; Halabi & Sonnenchein, 2004; Helman, 2002; Salomon, 2004; Suleiman, 2004).

Building on these traditions of research, the goal of this investigation is to examine the evolution of reconciliation-aimed contact interventions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the past 20 years. It identifies and traces the development of major models of intergroup encounters – specifically, the Coexistence Model, the Joint Projects Model, the Confrontational Model, and the Narrative/Story-Telling Model, which will be characterized later – and discusses the mechanisms used by each model to cope with the reality of conflict and inequality. Observing planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians enables us to learn about models and mechanisms through which intergroup contact interventions conducted in conflict situations address barriers to conflict resolution and assist the transition to peaceful reconciliation.

Planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians: An overview

Attempts at improving intergroup relations through organized encounters between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel began sporadically as early as the 1950s, when the Palestinian-Arab population in Israel was still under military rule. They continued through the 1960s and the 1970s, at which time several large-scale programs of planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians were established (Maoz, 2006). In the 1980s, planned encounters between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel grew rapidly in number and altered

their form and objectives. A series of public opinion surveys indicated growing right-wing extremism and increased anti-democratic and anti-Arab tendencies among Israeli Jews (Zemach, 1986; Maoz, 2000a, 2010). These trends evoked concern among Jewish educators and served as a strong trigger for the initiation, expansion, and institutionalization of contact interventions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (Maoz, 2000a). School curricula concerning Jewish–Arab relations were endorsed and supported by the Ministry of Education; encounter workshops targeting students and teachers were incorporated into these curricula (Maoz, 2000a, 2010). Thus, planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians became part of a quickly expanding category of intergroup contact interventions used, in the last decades of the 20th century, to address different conflicts and intergroup tensions around the world (Bar-Tal, 2002, 2004; Bekerman, 2009a; Salomon, 2002, 2004, 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 2001).

Since the mid-1980s, dozens of encounter programs between Israeli Jews and Palestinians have been conducted each year. These range from one-time meetings to long-term, continuous series of meetings. They have been undertaken within a diverse range of demographic groups, including youths, university students, university professors, and other professionals (Maoz, 2004). Planned encounter programs typically include eight to twelve participants from each nationality, are facilitated by a Jewish and an Arab facilitator, and conducted in the framework of educational and communal institutions and organizations (Maoz, 2010).

A series of public opinion surveys of representative samples (N=500) of the Jewish-Israeli population in the years 2002, 2003, and 2005 (Maoz, 2010) indicate that about 16% of the Jewish-Israeli population have participated in at least one program of planned encounters between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel in their lifetime. This rate of reported participation was consistent over the examined years. The rate is even larger (21% of Israeli Jews) when considering only the secular Jewish population. Although not a very large percentage, these data clearly show that planned encounters have reached, over the years, a remarkable number of Israeli Jews. About one in six Israeli Jews has participated in his or her lifetime in an encounter with Palestinian citizens of Israel (Maoz, 2010).

The contact hypothesis and encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians

In many cases, planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians derive their rationale from the contact

hypothesis presented by American social psychologist Gordon Allport (1954). This theory was further developed and first transported to the Israeli context by the educator and social psychologist Yehuda Amir (1969). The contact hypothesis states that intergroup contact can be effective in reducing negative intergroup stereotypes and mutual prejudices, provided that certain conditions are met (Pettigrew, 1998). The primary conditions for effective intergroup contact are: (1) equal status of both groups in the contact situation; (2) ongoing personal interaction between individuals from both groups; (3) cooperation in a situation of mutual dependence, in which members of both groups work together toward a common goal; and (4) institutional support – consensus among the authorities and the relevant institutions about norms that support equality.

Although research findings generally support the effectiveness of contact in improving intergroup relations (Pettigrew, 1998),[1] much of this research relates to contact conducted under optimal conditions as defined by the contact hypothesis (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005, 2007).

The majority of existing research does not study the effectiveness of intergroup contact interventions in conditions of acute asymmetrical violent conflict.[2] Moreover, little attention has been given to the mechanisms through which intergroup encounters – conducted in settings of active conflict between the sides – attempt to address psychological barriers to conflict resolution and assist the transition to peaceful reconciliation. The analysis in this article is based on empirical data derived from several research programs on planned intergroup encounters conducted in the context of the acute ongoing asymmetrical conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

The goal of this article is three-fold: to identify and trace the evolution of major models of encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians; to explicate the mechanisms through which these models attempt to address the existing reality of Jewish–Arab conflict and achieve reconciliation; and to elaborate on the dilemmas and limitations associated with operating each of these models.

Methodology

Database
The analysis here is based on empirical data derived from a series of research programs conducted by the author

between 1988 and 2008, tracing the evolution of models of planned contact interventions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians through the subjective perceptions of those involved in shaping, enacting, and participating in planned Jewish–Arab encounter activities. In line with the grounded theory tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the idea was to identify meaningful themes and critical issues that arose from the discourse of the encounter itself, rather than to impose preconceived categories and classifications. Accordingly, the research tools used are qualitative (Straus & Corbin, 1998) and include the following:

(1) A total of 155 in-depth interviews, discussions, and conversations that have been conducted over the years with organizers, directors, facilitators, and participants of Jewish–Arab encounter programs.
(2) 130 observations of encounter activities and encounter program staff meetings conducted in different programs of Jewish–Arab encounters between 1988 and 2008.
(3) Analysis of 230 documents relating to encounter programs, such as proposals, plans and programs, and activity summaries. These include internal and external correspondence; plans and project proposals; protocols and meeting minutes; and project reports written by management, facilitators, evaluators, and participating teachers.

Classification into models of encounters
The classification into models of encounters was performed by two independent coders; these coders attempted to identify assumptions, ideologies, goals and major practices, and categories of the encounter activity that are manifested in the discourse within and surrounding the encounter. A core corpus of data was used to make an initial classification into categories or models of encounters. These categories were later further validated, refined, and extended (by adding additional categories and sub-categories, examples, and descriptions) and used to analyze the whole dataset.

Questions that led the analysis and informed the classification into models of encounters included the following: (1) Does the text analyzed (i.e. the interview transcript, observation protocol, or document) describe or refer to the goals of the encounter? Which goals are described? (2) Does the text include descriptions of the ideological assumptions underlying or directing the encounter activity? Which ideological assumptions are presented? (3) Which major practices are described as ones that should be used and/or are actually used within the encounter? (4) Which dilemmas, problems,

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[1] For recent extensive meta-analyses, see Pettigrew & Tropp (2006).
[2] For important exceptions, see Salomon (2004, 2006).

disadvantages, or disagreements are described in relation to the encounter activity? (5) What are the strengths, advantages, best practices, and successes described in relation to the encounter activity? (6) What are examples of problematic or failed practices applied within the encounter?

For example, let us trace the analysis and classification derived from an interview with a (Jewish) encounter program director and facilitator. The interview included the following data relevant to the classification: (1) The encounter goal was described as 'fostering coexistence and reducing negative stereotypes'. (2) The interviewee presented assumptions stating that the encounter should strive for harmony and mutual respect between Jews and Arabs in Israel and should not deal with 'destructive' political topics such as claims regarding discrimination towards the Arab citizens of Israel. (3) The interviewee described successful or best practices employed during the encounter activity as those in which the participants learned about traditions that are similar in both cultures and discussed words that are similar in both languages. (4) The interviewee presented as problematic or as counterproductive those cases in which attempts were made to discuss claims regarding discrimination towards the Palestinian citizens of Israel. The analysis of these data would lead us to identify and classify the encounter model described in the interview as 'coexistence' (see below a description of this model and its major characteristics).

Findings

The analysis of data assembled over the years enabled us to identify four major different models of planned encounters between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel and to trace their evolution: the Coexistence Model, the Joint Projects Model, the Confrontational Mode, and the Narrative/Story-Telling Model. Each of these models is described below.

The Coexistence Model

The Coexistence Model seeks to promote mutual understanding and tolerance between Jews and Arabs, reduce stereotypes, foster positive intergroup attitudes, and advance other goals in the spirit of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954). This model was brought to Israel from the USA in the 1980s; it constituted the first and, at that time, dominant model of planned contact interventions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. It remains the dominant model, guiding the majority of these contact interventions.

The Coexistence Model emphasizes interpersonal similarities ('we are all human beings') and cultural and language commonalties, as well as supporting notions of togetherness and cooperation (Bekerman, 2007b; Maoz, 2004). Critics cynically refer to it as 'the hummus and falafel model' because of its promotion of folkloristic, seemingly superficial aspects that join Jews and Arabs. As this model focuses on interpersonal interaction and on personal identities, it does not tend to confront issues such as the conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, dilemmas of national identity, and claims concerning discrimination towards the Palestinian citizens of Israel (Maoz, 2000a,b). Consequently, the Coexistence Model can be seen as supporting the status quo of the existing structural relations between Jews and Palestinian-Arabs in Israel rather than seeking social or political change.

Strengths, dilemmas, and limitations
The strength of the Coexistence Model lies in its emphasis on widely shared and noncontroversial commonalities such as 'we are all human beings'. Thus, it avoids painful disagreements and can foster mutual respect and sympathy. The focus on commonalities renders the Coexistence Model especially suitable for young children who are not yet cognitively and emotionally equipped to deal with the painful complexity of the conflict (Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Indeed, this model has been found in research to be successful model of encounter for kindergarten and elementary school students (Maoz, 2001). Furthermore, the consensual and apolitical nature of the Coexistence Model enables the enlistment of participants who would normally object to an encounter with the other group, including those that hold nationalistic or militant political opinions.

However, the limitations of the Coexistence Model are also clear. Many Jews and Palestinians arrive at the encounter with a strong expectation and need to discuss the relationships between the sides. An encounter that avoids doing so can be seen by such participants as disappointing, irrelevant, and unfulfilling, at best (Maoz, 2000a,b). At worst, such an encounter can be viewed as immoral – as intentionally perpetuating existing asymmetrical power relations by focusing on changing individual-level prejudice while ignoring the need to address collective and institutionalized bases of discrimination (see Bekerman, 2007b; Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005; Maoz, 2000b).

The Joint Projects Model

Closely related to the Coexistence Model is the Joint Projects Model, which is based on the assumption that

working together towards a common, superordinate goal reduces intergroup hostilities, increases liking and cooperation, and fosters a common identity transcending the separate identity of each group (Sherif, 1966).

Like the Coexistence Model, the Joint Projects Model also became a prominent model of encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the mid-1980s. Since then, it has been one of the most popular models in this field. Examples of joint projects are numerous and include joint Jewish–Arab theater projects, Jewish–Arab choirs or orchestras, Jewish–Arab art projects and scientific projects, joint study groups, joint environmental projects, mixed soccer teams, joint curricula-building, and more.

In most cases, the Joint Projects Model, like the Coexistence Model, emphasizes commonalties and does not tend to deal directly with separate national identities, political conflict, or claims regarding discrimination towards the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Thus, like the Coexistence Model, the Joint Projects Model can be defined as a model that preserves the status quo and does not explicitly relate to the asymmetric power relations between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel.

Strengths, dilemmas, and limitations

The Joint Projects Model is often seen as an ideal model for improving intergroup relations, as it includes a concrete, visible process of working together that results in a joint product, potentially reflecting (also to outside viewers) the success of the integroup cooperation. Moreover, shared interests and cooperation are often regarded as especially effective tools for reducing intergroup hostilities and transcending separate group identities (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997). Cooperation over superordinate goals is assumed to create interdependence between the groups involved. In such conditions of interdependence, the weaker group's contribution to the joint project is expected to enhance both its self-esteem and the respect it receives from the stronger group (Sherif, 1966; Aronson & Patnoe, 1997). The empowerment of the weaker group through joint efforts is especially important in the context of Jewish–Arab interaction, where the Jewish group is often seen as overly dominant and controlling and the Arab group as passive and submissive. Indeed, studies of joint Jewish–Arab soccer teams show that this model was highly effective in improving intergroup attitudes (Zuabi, 2008).

However, the Joint Projects Model also has its limitations. Firstly, as described above, encounters focusing on a joint project do not deal directly, in most cases, with issues related to the conflict. For participants interested in discussing the relations between Jews and Arabs, engaging in a joint art project (for example) can be experienced as disappointing and as highly irrelevant to their actual needs and preferences.

Secondly, the joint project does not always elicit the same degree of involvement in its Jewish and Arab participants. For example, joint writing of curricular materials about Jewish and Arab marriage traditions may be of high interest to Jewish teachers but of low significance to their Palestinian-Arab counterparts because it does not directly tackle national identities or the conflict itself. As a result, Jewish teachers may become highly involved in the work, while Palestinian-Arab teachers show less commitment (Maoz, 2000b). Such a process can serve to strengthen existing stereotypes of Jews as overly dominant and controlling and of Arabs as lazy and passive (Maoz, 2004). Unfortunately, even topics that may initially seem ideal for joint projects may elicit low interest or even aversion among one of the participating groups. Maoz (2000b) describes such a dynamic that evolved between Jewish and Arab teachers participating in a project aimed at building joint curricular materials.

The failure of a joint project to produce cooperative intergroup interactions and, more importantly, the failure of the two groups to create a product together, can have relatively deleterious effects. This is because it can be construed by participants – as well as by outside viewers – as a more concrete, significant and outwardly visible failure than a lack of success in a regular dialogue project (in which participants are not expected to produce a concrete joint product). Growing criticisms of the Coexistence and Joint Projects Models eventually led to the emergence of the more politically-focused Confrontational Model.

The Confrontational Model

In contrast to the Coexistence and Joint Projects Models of planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, the Confrontational or Group Identity Model emphasizes the conflict and power relations between the sides. The goal of this model is to modify the construction of identity of members of the minority and majority groups and encourage greater awareness among Jewish participants regarding the asymmetrical relations between Jews and Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, and of their role as a dominant or oppressive group (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Sonnenschein, Halabi & Friedman, 1998). This model also seeks to empower the members of

the Palestinian-Arab minority by having them confront Jews directly, through discussions of national identities, national and civil aspirations, and discrimination (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Maoz, 2004; Sonnenschein, Halabi & Friedman, 1998).

The Confrontational/Group Identity Model is a clear product of the needs and dynamics in the field. It was first presented and applied in the early 1990s by Palestinian-Arab facilitators and participants who were not satisfied with the dominant Coexistence Model and felt it did not address their needs and concerns as a national minority group. These were joined by some Jewish colleagues who agreed with them and supported their claims (Maoz, 2000a). Theoretically, the Confrontational Model derives from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and thus emphasizes intergroup (rather than interpersonal) interaction as a tool for transforming intergroup relations.

In contrast to the Coexistence Model and the Joint Projects Model, the Confrontational Model clearly and explicitly focuses on increasing the awareness of encounter participants regarding the asymmetric structural relations between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Maoz, 2004).

Strengths, dilemmas, and limitations
The clearest strength of the Confrontational Model is its direct and explicit discussion of issues such as the relations between Jews and Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, asymmetry, discrimination, and dilemmas related to expression of Palestinian national identities and to the definition of Israel as a Jewish democratic state (Ron, Maoz & Bekerman, 2010). Although discussing these issues is often difficult and even painful, there are many Palestinian and Jewish encounter facilitators and participants who do not see the dialogue between them as complete or relevant to their needs unless it explicitly deals with these issues (Maoz, 2000a). Such discussion can help reach deeper awareness and understanding of the general conflict, its affiliated dilemmas, and the implications – for each group and for Israeli society at large – of living in a situation of asymmetrical conflict (Maoz et al., 2002; Ron, Maoz & Bekerman, 2010).

However, the direct confrontation can also distress and alienate Jewish participants and cause negative attitudes and distrust towards Arabs and towards the practice of encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (Maoz, Bar-On & Yikya, 2007). Moreover, the boundaries between confrontation and verbal violence are often

not clearly demarcated. Thus, Confrontation Models can be more susceptible to destructive intergroup communication patterns that include verbal violence towards, and degradation and delegitimization of members of the other group (Maoz, Bar-On & Yikya, 2007). Criticism of the Confrontational Model and its potential drawbacks led to the emergence of the Narrative Model of encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

The Narrative Model

Toward the end of the 1990s, another model arose that combines coexistence and confrontational aspects of the relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. This model – most prominently identified with the late Israeli psychologist, Dan Bar-On – uses a narrative approach in which participants from both groups engage in 'story-telling' of their lives in the conflict, sharing their personal and collective narratives, experiences, and suffering in the conflict (Bar-On, 2000, 2002, 2006, 2008; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004).

The Narrative/Story-Telling Model combines interpersonal interaction with interaction through group identities, subsequently combining the formation of personal ties with discussions of the conflict and of power relations (Maoz, 2004). It is based on the assumption that, in order to reach reconciliation, groups in intractable conflicts must work through their unresolved pain and anger through story-telling. Encountering the experience and suffering of the other through story-telling is seen as enabling conflicting groups to create intergroup trust and compassion by re-humanizing, and constructing a more complex image of, each other (Bar-On, 2006, 2008; Maoz & Bar-On, 2002).

Strengths, dilemmas, and limitations
The strength of the Narrative/Story-Telling Model as a tool for conflict transformation stems from the power of personal stories in creating immediate empathy towards outgroup members (Bar-On, 2002, 2006). The exposure to multiple stories about lives in the conflict has been found to also increase the understanding of the complexities of one's own group and of the other group's personal and collective trajectories in the conflict (Bar-On, 2002, 2006; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). Furthermore, the Narrative Model combines the advantages of both the Coexistence and the Confrontational Models that preceded it and addresses some of their limitations. Like the Coexistence Model, the Story-Telling Model relies on creating personal ties and empathy to each other as human beings. However, in contrast to the

Coexistence Model and similar to the Confrontational Model, story-telling does not ignore the existing conflict and power asymmetries between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Nevertheless, and contrary to the Confrontational Model, the discussion of these issues through personal stories enables an increase of intergroup acceptance and understanding while avoiding dead-end arguments about who is more moral and more humane.

More extensive consideration shows that, in spite of its clear strengths, the Narrative/Story-Telling Model is not free of dilemmas and limitations. Bar-On (2006) discusses the question of the 'good enough story' – a story that creates intergroup empathy and does not alienate or hurt the other participants. He raises the following questions: How do we identify a 'good enough' story (Ross, 2000)? How do we (and should we) encourage the telling of such stories and discourage the telling of stories that can escalate intergroup hostilities and hurt or degrade outgroup members?

Closely related to the above issue is the question of the authenticity of the stories told (Bar-On, 2006). Should the story be authentic? Factually true? How do we know if it is indeed true? Do we stop or openly refute a story that we judge as being an inaccurate representation of historical facts?

The story told in the story-telling encounter needs to simultaneously fulfill several functions and goals that can often be contradictory. It should be personal but also clearly represent the political context of the narrated events. It should strive for authenticity but yet attempt not to hurt or alienate the other side. It is expected to create empathy and yet to fully express the narrators' perspectives and experience in the conflict. Clearly, it is not realistic or even reasonable – given the complex circumstances of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the clashing historical narratives of the sides – to expect (or even strive for) an ideally 'good story' that maximally fulfills the needs and expectations of participants from both groups (Bekerman, 2007a). Thus, a 'good enough story' would be a story that fulfills its story-telling functions in the best way possible within the constraints posed by the situation of protracted intergroup conflict.

Consider, for example, a story told by a Palestinian encounter participant that includes an account on how her grandparents had to desert their village when the Jewish forces attacked it during the 1948 war that led to the establishment of the State of Israel. (This war and its consequences are referred to by Palestinians as the *Naqba* – meaning 'the catastrophe' of the Palestinian people.) Alternatively, consider a story told by a Jewish-Israeli participant that relates to the perceived acts of heroism of her grandfather in the same war (referred to by Israeli-Jews as the 'War of Independence') and to the pride that was felt in her family when Israel won the war. Telling such stories in a 'good enough' way is a complex task that is often not easy to achieve in the context of the story-telling Jewish–Arab encounter.

The dilemmas associated with the story-telling methodology serve to remind both researchers and professionals in the field of conflict transformation that using story-telling (or any other method) does not automatically ensure success (Ross, 2000). It is critical, especially when employed between groups in intractable conflict, to pay close attention to the possible pitfalls and limitations of the method and to ways to avoid them.

Discussion

This study examined the evolution of reconciliation-aimed contact interventions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the past 20 years. It identified and traced the evolution of four major models used within these interventions to cope with the reality of conflict and improve intergroup relations: the Coexistence Model, the Joint Projects Model, the Confrontational Model, and the Narrative/Story-Telling Model. Our analysis also pointed to the strengths and limitations of each model in transforming relations in asymmetric conflict. Such analysis begs the question: which is the most effective model in promoting peaceful relations and reconciliation?

Although there is no systematic research comparing the efficacy of these four intergroup encounter models in transforming relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, elaboration on several existing research findings enable us to address this question tentatively.

An extensive research program conducted in 1999–2000 found that the majority of Jewish–Arab encounter programs (60%) followed the more traditional Coexistence or Joint Projects Models, while only 34% of the programs were confrontational or used a narrative approach[3] (see Maoz, 2004, for a more detailed description of these findings). Later reviews of encounter activities between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, conducted in 2003 and in 2008, indicated that Coexistence and Joint Projects Models are still dominant in the field. In terms of evolution principles (such as survival of the fittest), the continuing dominance of non-confrontational models may indicate their ability to survive in the Israeli reality. In face of the growing tensions between Israeli Jews and

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[3] The remaining programs reflect a more eclectic approach that could not be clearly classified into one of the four major encounter models.

Palestinians, it may be that such less controversial models are more effective at attracting those populations from both groups that are more nationalist and less initially supportive of Jewish–Arab reconciliation.

To what extent do these interventions demonstrate equality and social justice through their intergroup interaction (Maoz, 2005)? Research on equality and social justice in intergroup interactions in planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians shows that Coexistence and Joint Projects Models tend to preserve and perpetuate Jewish dominance and control while encouraging Arab submissiveness and passivity (Maoz, 2000a,b, 2004). Furthermore, an organizational structural analysis indicates that the vast majority of organizations that employ the Coexistence Model display high Jewish dominance in their hierarchy and distribution of resources and very low to no representation of Palestinians in the different levels of management and decisionmaking (Maoz, 2001).

In this sense, Coexistence Models can be viewed as counterproductive for improving the existing asymmetric relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.[4] In contrast, Confrontational and Narrative Models were found to display high equality and social justice in the interaction between Jews and Arabs within the encounter (Maoz, 2004). Especially in Confrontational Models, an equal and socially just distribution of conversational resources between Jews and Arabs was found to exist between encounter participants and facilitators. Even more importantly, organizations conducting confrontational encounter activities were found to be highly egalitarian and socially just, with Jewish and Arab representation at all different levels of organizational hierarchy, including higher management (Maoz, 2001).

However, the success of the encounter also notably depends on the extent to which it produces constructive intergroup interactions. The Narrative Model has been found to increase trust and create empathy between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, as well as increasing their understanding of the complexity of the conflict situation (Bar-On, 2000, 2006; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Maoz & Bar-On, 2002). The effect of the Confrontational Model in this respect is less consistent. In some cases it was found to increase Jewish–Arab empathy and help participants reach a more complex perspective on the conflict (Maoz et al., 2002; Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002). However, in other instances, direct confrontations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians led to destructive interaction

and to verbal violence (Maoz, Bar-On & Yikya, 2007). A tentative comparison of several case studies indicates that, along with other factors, the success of the encounter model may depend largely on the target population it addresses. Thus, the risk for destructive interaction and verbal violence in Confrontational Model encounters is increased when such encounters include participants that initially hold extreme opinions against the other group. While this may be true to some extent for all the encounter models, the Confrontational Model, which encourages direct confrontation and expression of opinions about the conflict, seems to be especially vulnerable to the escalation of verbal violence.

Another issue to consider when discussing the effects of different encounter models is the issue of social change. Encounter interventions between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel are embedded in a sociopolitical reality of power asymmetry in which the Jewish majority controls and has more access to resources, including land and political power, while the Palestinian minority suffers from discrimination in different domains (Bekerman, 2007b; Maoz, 2000a).

In his in-depth critical re-evaluation of Jewish–Palestinian encounters, Bekerman (2007b) discusses the need to redirect these interventions from their aim of cognitive transformation (such as attitude-change and stereotype-reduction) to one of actual structural change of the existing power-relations through active participation in the social and political world. The suggested changes include redirecting encounter activities so they contain organization of and participation in political demonstrations and/or forums discussing redistribution of resources between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (Bekerman, 2007b).

Bekerman's call for encounters to mobilize activism and collective action is obviously not universal. Nonetheless, in the context of assessing the effectiveness of the four encounter models, it evokes the limitations of these models in producing actual change. None of the four models examined in this study include explicit mechanisms that are directly geared toward mobilizing collective action aimed at changing the non-egalitarian distribution of resources between Jewish and Palestinians citizens of Israel. The role of mobilizing collective action and attempting to produce social change is mostly left, at this point, to other agencies and organizations that are explicitly self-defined as politically activist. These include organizations such as the Association for Civic Rights in Israel (for further information, see www.acri.org.il) and organizations such as Sikkuy (the Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel) which focuses specifically on monitoring and reducing the existing

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[4] See also Bekerman, 2007b, for an in-depth critical discussion of coexistence-aimed encounters.

inequalities between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel (for further details, see www.sikkuy.org.il).

In sum, although existing research can give some indication of the conditions determining the success of the different encounter models in transforming relations in asymmetric conflict, much more systematic research is needed in order to have a clearer picture of what succeeds where and with whom. It is also important to include, in future research, an examination of non-encounter organizations that are more oriented towards activism and collective action, as well as the models and mechanisms they employ in order to promote social change in the asymmetric structure of relations between Jews and Palestinians in Israel.

In the meantime, the identification of major models of intergroup encounters can theoretically and practically contribute to our understanding of the role of planned contact interventions between groups in conflict in achieving peace and reconciliation. First, the classification into Coexistence, Joint Projects, Confrontational, and Narrative Models of intergroup encounters can be applied to other contexts and forms of contact-based interventions around the world aimed at fostering peace and reconciliation (Saunders, 1999; Niens & Cairns, 2005). This classification can be used by researchers, organizers, and facilitators of contact-based interventions, conducted in settings of protracted, asymmetrical conflict, as a tool for understanding the nature and dynamics of the intergroup communication within the reconciliation-aimed encounter. Consequently, it can be used to appraise the efficacy of different intervention models in promoting reconciliation in different regional contexts.

Second, the classification into four models can be used to analyze discrete episodes (whether planned or everyday spontaneous interactions) of communication between members of groups in asymmetric conflict. In many cases, such interactions can be easily classified as predominantly emphasizing 'coexistence' ('let's forget our group identities and concentrate on personal similarities'), a 'joint project' orientation ('let's focus on working together and leave aside other things'), confrontation ('let's directly argue about the conflict') or 'story telling'. Such classification can help understand the dynamics of the interaction and the goals of its participants and even predict constructive and destructive patterns of communication that are likely to occur in each type of intergroup communication.

Conclusion

Extensive research has focused on explicating the conditions of contact and assessing the efficacy of such contact

in improving intergroup relations (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). But can contact interventions also be effective in situations of protracted asymmetrical ethnopolitical conflict (Salomon, 2004)? Can they improve intergroup relations and foster peace and reconciliation?

The present study has attempted to address these questions by observing the evolution of intergroup contact interventions embedded in the deeply divided, and often violent, arena of the protracted asymmetrical Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The analysis here was inspired by a recent school of thought that studies processes and effects of contact in non-optimal conditions of deeply divided societies (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005, 2007). It also joins a growing number of studies presenting a critical approach to planned encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (Abu-Nimer, 1999, 2004; Bekerman, 2002, 2007b, 2009a,b; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Helman, 2002; Salomon, 2004, 2006; Suleiman, 2004).

Building on these important traditions of research, our study takes a step towards defining and appraising models and mechanisms of intergroup contact that may be effective in bringing about reconciliation and in improving intergroup relations in protracted asymmetrical conflict.

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