Narratives in Conflict and Practices of Face-to-Face and Online Intergroup Communication

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Review

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Abstract

Intergroup communication (IC) serves as a critical arena in which narratives, worldviews, and group behaviors are expressed, confronted, and translated into concrete communicative practices. Within this unique space of interaction, divergent narratives may remain rigid and unchanging, manifesting as parallel monologues that coexist without genuine engagement. Yet, under certain conditions, such communication can also open the door to dynamic processes of mutual challenge, development, and transformation. This narrative literature review aims to strengthen the growing connection between scholarship on narratives in societies embroiled in intractable conflict and the well-established research tradition on intergroup contact. Specifically, it seeks to enhance our understanding of the interplay between narratives, behaviors, and communication practices in both face-to-face (FTF) and online contexts of IC. While the discussion includes broader global perspectives, the primary case study centers on the ongoing conflict and communicative interactions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Keywords: group behavior; intergroup communication; ethno-political conflict; narrative; online dialogue

1. Introduction

Research on narratives, identities, and group behaviors in contexts of intractable ethno-political conflict highlights the central role of collective narratives in perpetuating conflict. These narratives serve to the consolidate exclusive and polarized national identities, contribute to the delegitimization of the opposing group, and shape perceptions of the conflict as a zero-sum game (Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Bar-Tal. 2020; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009, 2011; Ehrmann & Millar, 2021; Gamaghelyan & Rumyantsev, 2021; Hammack, 2011; Jelić et al., 2021; Ron, 2022; Ventsel et al,. 2019; Whittle, 2023). A complementary body of literature examines the potential of face-to-face (FTF) encounters and online intergroup communication (IC) processes to reduce prejudice, intergroup anxiety, and hostility, while fostering peacebuilding efforts (Hasler et al., 2023; Mor et al., 2016; Nolte-Laird, 2022; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011; Ron et al., 2020; Stephan, 2014; Tropp et al., 2022; Van Assche et al., 2023).

This review seeks to explore the interplay between collective narratives, group behaviors, and communication practices in the context of intractable conflict. It aims to shed light on the unique role IC may play in shaping the ethos, narratives, and ideologies that characterize ethno-political conflicts, as well as its potential contribution to the fields of conflict resolution and peacemaking.

2. Narratives and their Role in Intergroup Conflicts

Narratives have become a central concept in the study of social and cultural phenomena. Bruner (2008; Myers, 2021) argues for the primacy of narrative as a fundamental organizing principle of

cultural life. By providing meaning, narratives form the salient content of the mind and reveal links to a community of shared stories and practices (Bruner, 1990; Myers, 2021). Through the process of narrative engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Busselle & Cutietta, 2019; Hammack, 2009), individuals construct personal life stories that, while distinct from collective narratives and the broader structures of social identity, are nonetheless grounded in and shaped by them, simultaneously serving to carry them forward (Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Bamberg, 2011; Bamberg et al., 2011; Hammack, 2009; Kawai et al, 2022).

At the group level, narratives function as a tool of mobilization, reinforcing social identity by converging around shared historical memories and 'meta-stories' that incorporate moral codes and values (Bliuc & Chidley, 2022), and constructing a meaningful and coherent sense of the past and the contemporary reality (Bhat et al., 2023; Grever & van der Vlies, 2017; Haraldsson & McLean, 2022; Liu & Hilton, 2005). They contribute to the formation of social consensus, strengthen feelings of solidarity and belonging to political, national, or religious communities (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009), and provide justification for their existence and modes of operation, both internally and externally (Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Gamaghelyan & Rumyantsev, 2021). Collective narratives provide social representations of collective history and serve as expressions of collective memory, contributing to the group's social distinctiveness (Hammack, 2011; Nicolson & Korkut, 2021). As such, they constitute a central component in the construction of group identity and in shaping attitudes toward other groups (Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Figueiredo et al., 2017; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Uluğ, 2023). Narratives structure historical memory by assigning prominence to certain events over others (Bhat et al., 2023; Grever & van der Vlies, 2017; Ross, 2002), thereby defining the terms through which reality is described. They also reflect the prevailing ideology, norms, and values of the society in which they emerge (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009, 2011), while simultaneously revealing the deep fears, perceived threats, and historical traumas that fuel the conflicts in which groups are engaged (Auchter, 2018; Li, 2022; McLamore et al., 2019; Ross, 2002).

At the individual level, narrative functions as a structural mechanism through which people make sense of their ideological affiliations and personal experiences (Alber, 2017; Bamberg, 2011; McLean et al., 2017, 2020). This process occurs, among other means, through the construction of temporal and spatial frameworks, as well as contexts of causality and continuity (Haraldsson & McLean, 2022; McAdams, 2021; McAdams et al., 2006). Narratives serve as interpretive anchors for experience and support the ongoing process of identity formation (Bamberg et al., 2011; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2011; Hammack, 2011; McLean et al., 2017, 2020; Park & Moon, 2022). They foster a sense of safety and meaning, enhance coherence (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009; Duranti, 2006; Haraldsson & McLean, 2022), and contribute to the development of positive self-esteem (Bamberg, 2011; Bar-On, 2006; Hilman, 2023). Personal narratives reveal how people position themselves within systems of power relations in society, as well as how they internalize prevailing social discourses at a given moment (Bamberg et al., 2011; De Fina et al., 2006; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; McLean et al., 2020). In doing so, they shed light on the processes through which thoughts, perceptions, and emotions are structured, offering insights into how individuals and groups make sense of their social worlds and the conflicts in which they are involved (Hammack, 2009; Kvernbekk & Bøe-Hansen, 2017; Ron & Maoz, 2013a).

In contexts of intergroup conflict, narratives play a crucial role in reinforcing the legitimacy of the group and its actions (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009; Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Gamaghelyan & Rumyantsev, 2021), in shaping group identity, and in enhancing the sense of meaning, order, security, and social solidarity (Canetti et al., 2017; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Klar & Baram, 2014; Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017). Simultaneously, narratives help individuals and communities cope with trauma and emotional pain (Jirek, 2016; Kearney, 2007), offering a response to the anxieties, perceived threats, and feelings of insecurity that accompany situations of intergroup tension and violence (Hammack, 2009, 2011; Jelić et al., 2021).

Narratives also play a central role in sustaining and even exacerbating intergroup conflict (Bar-Tal, 2020; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005; Golynchik, 2020; Rotberg, 2006; Uluğ et al., 2020). Group

narratives, inherently limited in both their capacity to represent others and in the quality of those representations, tend to become particularly exclusive and selective in conflict settings (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Ehrmann & Millar, 2021; Tyushka, 2021; Ushomirsky et al., 2023). They offer partial and narrow interpretations of the conflict that serve to justify the group's actions and portray it as a victim, while simultaneously excluding, morally denouncing, and even delegitimizing the other and their narrative (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009, 2011; Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Cole, 2007; Hameiri & Nadler, 2017; Hameiri et al., 2024; Tyushka, 2021; Uluğ et al., 2020).

Especially in situations of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013, 2020; Golynchik, 2020; Harel et al., 2024; Zartman, 2019), the opposing narratives of both sides are marked by the absolute justification and idealization of the in-group, alongside the cultivation of a collective identity rooted in victimhood and the simultaneous dehumanization and demonization of the out-group (Bar-Tal, 2020; Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Maoz & McCauley, 2008; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008). These competing group narratives impose a heavy emotional burden on the conflict, characterized by fear, contempt, blame, and resentment (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Jelić et al., 2021), and are accompanied by a socio-psychological repertoire of attitudes, goals, and beliefs regarding the causes and trajectory of the conflict, the nature of the adversary, and the vision of a desirable resolution (Bar-Tal, 2020; Ehrmann & Millar, 2021; Bliuc & Chidley, 2022;). In doing so, conflict-sustaining group narratives contribute to the entrenchment and perpetuation of a broader culture of conflict (Adwan, 2024; Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Bar-Tal, 2020; Golynchik, 2020;).

One of the most prominent test cases illustrating the role narratives play in intergroup relations is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a series of studies focusing on Israeli and Palestinian youth, Hammack (2009, 2011) examines the role and influence of master narratives, which he defines as cultural scripts or dominant discourses that proliferate within a society (Hammack, 2009). He emphasizes the significant role these master narratives play in sustaining the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and reproducing it across generations. According to Hammack, the collective narratives embedded in the discursive field of the conflict reinforce the polarized national identities of both groups, as well as the belief systems and emotional frameworks that have fueled the conflict over time (Hammack, 2009, 2011).

Other scholars draw similar conclusions. Bar-On and Adwan (2006; Adwan, 2024) describe how each side's narrative aligns with what they term the logic of conflict and contention, relying on discursive codes of intergroup exclusion. Building on this, Bekerman and Zembylas highlight the pervasive influence of collective narratives and national discourse even among those engaged in educational efforts aimed at coexistence (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009, 2011). Rotberg (2006) further illustrates how historical consciousness and competing historical narratives continue to shape contemporary emotions and positions among both Israelis and Palestinians. In a similar vein, Bar-Tal, Salomon, Klar, and Baram describe the role of collective memory and narrative in structuring mutually exclusive national identities and framing the conflict as a zero-sum game (Bar-Tal, 2020; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Klar & Baram, 2014).

Given the central role narratives often play in escalating and perpetuating ethno-political conflicts, it is essential to examine how IC processes can challenge conflict-supporting narratives and behaviors, and contribute to reconciliation and peace-building.

3. Intergroup Communication in Intractable Conflicts

Intergroup communication (IC), also referred to as intergroup dialogue or intergroup contact, is widely employed as a strategy for improving relations between groups. Zuniga (2003; Zuniga et al., 2014), who used the term intergroup dialogue, defines it as "a face-to-face facilitated conversation between members of two or more social identity groups that strives to create new levels of understanding, relating, and action" (Zuniga, 2003, p. 9). Among the various interventions designed to reduce intergroup bias, IC has been the most widely applied and the most extensively studied (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011; Ron et al., 2017, 2020; Tropp et al., 2022).

The starting point for most theoretical discussions of IC is Allport's contact hypothesis (1954). This hypothesis posits that intergroup contact can reduce stereotypes when four key conditions are met: (1) equal status among the groups within the contact setting, (2) shared goals and cooperation in achieving them, (3) opportunities for personal acquaintance through sustained and meaningful interaction, and (4) social and institutional support for the contact. Subsequent researchers have proposed additional conditions for successful IC, including the use of a common language, voluntary participation, interactions that are perceived as pleasant and mutually beneficial, favorable economic circumstances, and the absence of strongly negative attitudes toward the out-group (Dixon et al., 2005, 2007; McKeown & Dixon, 2017; Ron, 2022).

Most empirical studies examining the impact of IC on reducing prejudice have reported positive outcomes when it occurs under the conditions outlined in the original contact hypothesis, even when not all conditions are fully met (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Ellis et al., 2016; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2011; Tropp et al., 2022; Van Assche, 2023). At the same time, scholars have criticized the hypothesis for its limitations, particularly regarding its narrow focus on the individual level of the IC experience, its difficulty in sustaining positive effects during periods of escalating intergroup conflict, and its limited capacity to address issues of interethnic relations and asymmetric power dynamics (Bekerman, 2009; Dixon et al., 2005, 2007; Maoz, 2010, 2011; McKeown & Dixon, 2017; Saguy & Dovidio, 2013; Suleiman, 2004).

In light of the limitations of the contact hypothesis, alternative approaches to IC have been developed. Maoz (2011) identifies four distinct IC models, each highlighting different aspects of intergroup interaction. The coexistence model emphasizes interpersonal communication, fostering understanding and tolerance, and reducing stereotypes, with particular focus on similarities and shared aspects (Allport, 1954; Dixon et al., 2005; McKeown & Dixon, 2017). Building on this interpersonal focus, the joint projects model assumes that cooperation on a shared task directed toward a mutually relevant goal can strengthen relations between groups and promote the formation of a superordinate identity (Sherif, 1966; Sherif et al., 1961; Smith & Haslam. 2017; Swaab et al., 2021). In contrast, the confrontational model shifts attention to the conflict itself, underscoring the importance of acknowledging asymmetric power relations and emphasizing group and national identities, in line with the social identity theory tradition (Hogg et al., 2017; Ros, 2022; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Finally, the narrative model, extending this acknowledgement-based approach, builds on storytelling (Bar-On, 2006, 2010, Husnu et al., 2017) and stresses the importance of exposure, recognition, and legitimization of the other's collective narrative (Adwan, 2024; Bar-On, 2006, 2010; Salomon, 2004; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020).

The narrative model is closely associated with Salomon's (2004; Kupermintz & Salomon, 2006) theoretical approach to intergroup reconciliation and, even more strongly, with the theory and practice developed by Bar-On (2006, 2010; Maoz & Ron, 2016). Salomon argued that the collective narratives of groups in conflict and their implicit delegitimization of the out-group's narrative should be the primary target for change in efforts to promote reconciliation. To this end, he proposed an educational process centered on exposing, recognizing, and legitimizing the narrative of the other (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2006; Ron & Maoz, 2013a; Salomon, 2004). Bar-On's approach to encounters and communication between conflicting narratives was embodied in the development of the TRT (To Reflect and Trust) groups (Bar-On, 2006, 2010). Initially implemented in encounters between descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants of Nazi perpetrators and later adapted to IC processes in various conflict zones, the TRT groups emphasized sharing, listening, and reflecting on personal stories, with the aim of enabling mutual coping with traumatic pasts as well as contemporary realities (Bar-On, 2010; Mana & Srour, 2020).

Ron and Maoz (2013a; Ron, 2022) highlight the potential of confronting the other's narrative within IC processes to foster a new and more critical awareness among participants, constituting what they term 'dangerous stories' (Ron & Maoz, 2013a). These are new and subversive practices of remembering the past and interpreting contemporary reality (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011; Ostovich, 2002, 2005) that challenge taken-for-granted and fixed narratives, as well as tribal group identities,

thereby opening possibilities for alternative affective and ethical relations with others (Ron & Maoz, 2013a).

Thus, the narrative approach recognizes the central role of collective and personal narratives in sustaining intractable conflicts, and therefore emphasizes the need to address these deep-rooted narratives while exposing participants to the narrative of the other through IC processes (Ellis et al., 2016; Maoz & Ron, 2016; Ron & Maoz, 2013a; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020).

Intergroup Communication and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Case Study

The protracted dispute between Israelis and Palestinians falls into the category of intractable conflicts, which are characterized by totality, violence, and a widespread perception of being irresolvable. Such conflicts dominate each side's agenda and shape the logic and perspectives of the societies involved (Bar-Tal, 2013; Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Golynchik, 2020; Harel et al., 2024, McLamore et al., 2019; Uluğ et al., 2020; Zartman, 2019). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is further marked by asymmetrical power relations, specifically, the political and military domination of Palestinians by Israel (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Bar-Siman-Tov, 2010; Kriesberg, 2009; Ron, 2022). Although the Palestinian Territories include semi-autonomous regions designated under the 1993 Oslo Accords, and despite the Gaza Strip having enjoyed even greater autonomy from 2005 until the outbreak of the Gaza War in 2023, Israel continues to exercise effective control over the Territories and regularly conducts military operations there (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Hammack, 2010; Hughes, 2020). As for relations between Jews and Palestinians within the State of Israel, Maoz (2004, Ron, 2022) identifies two main characteristics of the sociopolitical context that are particularly relevant to IC processes between the two groups: (1) a coexistence marked by aggression alongside cooperation, and (2) inequality, whereby Jews enjoy greater access to resources and stronger influence over the culture, religion, and language of the State.

The psychological and behavioral repertoire associated with intergroup conflicts plays a significant role in shaping IC processes. Several studies (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011, 2013; Hameiri et al., 2017; Leshem & Halperin, 2022) have documented the psychological dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which each side blames the other for initiating and perpetuating the conflict and for its violent nature, while simultaneously perceiving itself as the victim and as genuinely seeking peace. These perceptions and attitudes are precisely what IC interventions between Jews and Palestinians aim to address. Over the past four decades, FTF Jewish-Palestinian encounters have engaged with issues related not only to the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also to the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Arab Palestinian minority within the State of Israel. Specifically, these encounters have focused on attitudes and beliefs concerning the causes and trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as visions of its resolution (Maoz & Ron, 2016; Ron, 2022; Ron & Maoz, 2013b). They have also addressed majority–minority relations within Israel, including issues of discrimination and civic equality, as well as questions of belonging and loyalty (Bekerman, 2009; Ben David et al., 2017; Kahanoff, 2016; Maoz, 2004; Ron et al., 2010; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008).

Several stages in the evolution of structured FTF IC between Israeli Jews and Palestinians have been documented in the research literature (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Maoz & Ron, 2016; Ron, 2022; Ron & Maoz, 2013a). In the early phase, up until the early 1980s, Jewish-Palestinian FTF encounters primarily focused on cultural aspects, aiming to expose participants to one another's culture through shared experiences involving food, dance, and folklore. Then, beginning in the early 1980s, some programs began to adopt a prejudice-reduction approach, imported from the United States (Maoz, 2011; McKeown & Dixon, 2017; Tropp et al., 2022), which concentrated on addressing stereotypes and mutual perceptions. Toward the late 1980s, a more confrontational approach started to emerge in several programs (Maoz, 2011; Ron, 2022; Ron & Maoz, 2013a). This phase shifted the focus toward the conflict itself, specifically, the clash between Jewish and Palestinian national identities and the broader political context, with the aim of helping participants understand the conflict's impact on their lives (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Maoz, 2011; Ron, 2022).

However, over the past two decades, IC processes aimed at Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation have increasingly adopted a narrative approach (Bar-On, 2006, 2010; Maoz, 2011). This approach acknowledges the central role of both collective and personal narratives in sustaining the conflict, and thus emphasizes the need to engage with these deep-rooted narratives and expose participants to the perspective of the other through IC processes (Bar-On, 2010; Mana & Srour, 2020; Maoz & Ron, 2016; Ron, 2022; Ron & Maoz, 2013a). Empirical studies focusing on the narrative approach suggest that exposure to the other's narrative in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly through FTF encounters, can serve as a transformative experience, with the potential to alter deeply entrenched beliefs related to the ethos of conflict (Ben David et al., 2017; Maoz & Ron, 2016; Ron & Maoz, 2013a; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020).

In addition to these dimensions, various studies highlight the ideological implications of IC processes, both in the context of relations between the Jewish majority and the Arab-Palestinian minority within Israel (Ron et al., 2010; Ron, 2022; Sapir & Alimi, 2023), and in terms of their potential to influence attitudes regarding the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its possible resolutions (Ellis, 2020; Khalaf & Bekerman, 2024; Ron & Maoz, 2013b; Thiessen & Darweish, 2018). These findings add to the broader picture emerging from previous research, which points to the capacity of IC to shift perspectives, challenge deeply held beliefs, and generate ideological and political change (Çakal et al., 2021; Dixon et al., 2005, 2007; Hässler et al., 2021).

4. Online IC in Intractable Conflicts

Over the past 25 years, online communication has become a significant platform for enabling new forms of social contact and interaction (Mor et al., 2016; Hasler et al., 2023; Ron et al., 2020). The rapid expansion of social networks has facilitated a shift toward novel modes of communication and engagement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2013; Papacharissi, 2009; Ron et al., 2020; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021), contributing to the emergence of new centers of power and influence. These developments have also allowed for the expression and dissemination of alternative narratives surrounding social, political, and ethno-political realities (Blagojević **&** Šćekić, 2022; Castells, 2013; Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021; Curran, 2002; Hasler et al., 2023; Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023; Ron et al., 2020).

The wave of protests across the Arab world that began in January 2011 drew increased academic attention to the role of social media in mobilizing solidarity and civil action (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Blagojević **&** Šćekić, 2022; Wilson & Dunn, 2011). Within this broader context, scholars have also begun to explore the potential of social media to build societal bridges, serving as a new space in which individuals from opposing groups, holding conflicting narratives about the intergroup situation, can come together and engage in a communication process that fosters mutual challenge, narrative development, and potential transformation of worldviews related to the conflict (Ellis & Maoz, 2007; Hasler & Amichai-Hamburger, 2013; Hasler et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2009; Nolte-Laird, 2022; Ron et al., 2020; Walther et al., 2014).

While IC processes have traditionally taken place primarily in FTF settings, recent years have seen growing scholarly attention to interventions based on online IC (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2015; Hasler & Amichai-Hamburger, 2013; Hasler et al., 2023; Nagar et al., 2021; Nolte-Laird, 2022; Schwab et al., 2018; Segal & Keduri, 2022). In the literature, these digitally mediated forms of intergroup engagement are commonly referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC) or online intergroup dialogue (Ellis & Maoz, 2007; Mor et al., 2016; Nolte-Laird, 2022; Ron et al., 2020; Selvanathan et al., 2019).

Several studies have examined online IC through the lens of intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; McKeown & Dixon, 2017), identifying communication patterns that also characterize FTF encounters (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2015; Hasler et al., 2023; Imperato et al., 2021, 2024; Mor et al., 2016; Ron et al., 2020; Selvanathan et al., 2019). Drawing on Maoz's (2011) typology of IC models, these studies highlight the effectiveness of social media as a platform for facilitating IC processes aligned with the coexistence model of intergroup contact. This model, grounded in Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, emphasizes interpersonal engagement, the promotion of mutual understanding

and tolerance, and a focus on intergroup commonalities (Hasler et al., 2023; Imperato et al., 2021, 2024; Maoz, 2011; Mor et al., 2016; Ron et al., 2020; Schwab et al., 2018;).

However, online interactions based on the confrontational model of intergroup contact, which focuses on group identities and asymmetric power relations in the context of ongoing political and social conflicts (Maoz, 2011; Ron, 2022; Ron et al., 2010), as well as those grounded in the narrative model, in which participants from both groups engage in story-telling by sharing personal and collective narratives, experiences, and suffering related to the conflict (Bar-On, 2008, 2010; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020), have not been found effective in reducing intergroup hostility (Hasler & Amichai-Hamburger, 2013; Hasler et al., 2023; Hoter, 2017; Hoter et al., 2012; Mor et al., 2016; Walther et al., 2014). In some cases, such interactions have even led to defensive and negative responses, including discussions marked by mutual recriminations over the intergroup situation (Mor et al., 2016; Ron et al., 2020).

Mor et al. (2016) suggest that the limited effectiveness of social media for supporting more complex models of intergroup dialogue, such as the confrontational and narrative approaches, may stem from the discontinuous nature of interactions on social networks. These platforms often lack the processual depth and continuity necessary for dynamic engagement capable of challenging conflict-supporting beliefs, worldviews, and narratives (Maoz & Ron, 2016; Mor et al., 2016; Nolte-Laird, 2022; Ron, 2022). Given these limitations, which may even result in backlash effects in intergroup dynamics (Ron et al., 2020), some scholars recommend adapting the goals and design of IC interventions conducted on social media to the constraints inherent to these platforms (Hasler et al., 2023; Imperato et al., 2021; Mor et al., 2016).

5. Discussion

This narrative review seeks to strengthen the important link between two evolving areas of scholarship: the growing body of research on narratives in intergroup conflict and the well-established tradition of studying contact and communication processes aimed at improving relations between opposing groups.

Research on narratives and group identities in the context of intractable ethno-political conflicts highlights the significant role collective narratives play in sustaining and even escalating the conflict (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2009, 2011; Golynchik, 2020; Uluğ et al., 2020). These narratives often serve to reinforce exclusive and polarized collective identities that delegitimize the other side (Bliuc & Chidley, 2022; Ehrmann & Millar, 2021; Hameiri & Nadler, 2017; Hameiri et al., 2024; Hammack, 2011; Tyushka, 2021; Ushomirsky et al., 2023), shape conflict-related emotions and beliefs (Adwan, 2024; Salomon, 2004; Rotberg, 2006), and frame the conflict as a zero-sum game (Bar-Tal, 2020; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Klar & Baram, 2014).

Despite widespread recognition of the negative role collective narratives play in intergroup conflict, the existing literature pays relatively little attention to the potential for change through the creation of spaces where opposing narratives and worldviews can be expressed and confronted within grassroots processes of intergroup communication.. In this context, only a limited number of studies have explored the possible effects of exposing individuals and groups to the narrative of the other side (Adwan, 2024; Ben David et al., 2017; Husnu et al., 2017; Kupermintz & Salomon, 2006; Ron, 2022; Ron & Maoz, 2013a; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020).

In light of this gap, the current review seeks to make a theoretical contribution by examining the interrelations between ethno-political conflicts, narratives, and intergroup communication. Among the studies surveyed, several point to the potential of confronting the narrative of the other within IC interventions as a means of fostering change (Bar-On, 2006, 2010; Ben David et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2016; Hasler et al., 2023; Ron, 2022; Ron et al., 2020; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020). This potential is illustrated through the case study presented in the review, namely, the intractable conflict and communication processes between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, which demonstrates how IC can promote greater awareness of unequal power relations and social injustice. It also highlights the role of "dangerous stories" that engage with the narratives of the suffering other in the context of the

conflict (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011; Ostovich, 2002, 2005; Ron, 2013a; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008). Together, these findings deepen our understanding of how IC processes can help address the harmful influence of narratives in sustaining ethno-political conflicts.

The current review may also offer an additional contribution to the field of intergroup communication. Research on IC has generally fallen into two main categories: quantitative studies that examine the impact of IC on participants' attitudes toward the out-group (Rosen, 2009; Salomon, 2004; Tropp et al., 2022; Van Assche et al., 2023), and studies that analyze discourse styles and patterns of interaction within IC processes (Bekerman, 2009; Hammack, 2009, 2011; Maoz, 2011; Ron, 2022). However, relatively little attention has been paid to the ideological ramifications of the IC experience, or to the ways in which participation in IC might shape perceptions of the nature of intergroup conflicts and possible avenues for their resolution (Alber, 2017; Ron et al., 2010). In light of this gap, the current review seeks to illuminate the connections between participation in IC interventions, ideological positioning, and attitudes toward conflict resolution.

In terms of research focus, the contribution of the current review lies not only in its examination of key issues within the context of intergroup communication, such as group narratives, ideology, and attitudes toward conflict resolution, but also in its exploration of the interconnections among these themes. By integrating insights from multiple fields, including narrative studies, IC, social and political psychology, conflict resolution, and peace research, this review offers a more holistic perspective. In doing so, it aims to deepen our understanding of both the potential and the limitations of bottom-up, grassroots processes of intergroup communication in complementing top-down political efforts at peacemaking and conflict resolution (Firchow & Dixon, 2025; Mitchell, 2009; Peshkopia, 2020) and in fostering reconciliation within ethno-political conflict settings.

As for future research directions, this review focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the communication processes between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians as a case study, while also addressing broader, more global dimensions. Future studies should therefore explore the relationships between IC, narratives, ideology, and attitudes toward conflict resolution in additional conflict contexts. Such comparative research would help assess more precisely the transformative potential of IC in other conflict zones around the world.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

IC	Intergroup communication
FTF	Face-to-face
CMC	Computer-mediated communication

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