

Shifting Away From a Monolithic Narrative on Conflict: Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans in Conversation

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Clashing narratives and power asymmetry can serve as obstacles to promoting reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. In this study, we examine transcripts from a contact encounter among Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents. The first aim of this study was to identify the basic root narratives articulated by the Israeli and Palestinian participants in conversation. The second aim was to test conversational conditions associated with moments of perspective taking. Our analysis of two separate dialogue groups indicated that the Jewish participants tended to articulate a root narrative in which the Jews have good intentions to live in peace but must defend themselves. Palestinian participants tended to invoke a narrative in which they own the land but have been dispossessed and humiliated due to Jewish occupation. A comparison of different dialogue sessions indicated that when the conversation focused on the present as opposed to the past and when there was active involvement of an American third party, there were more moments in which members of each group acknowledged the narrative of the other. Our findings highlight the importance of third party involvement and concentrating discussion on the present to create more instances in which individuals can incorporate the other into their accounts of the conflict.

Keywords: cultural narratives, intergroup contact, intergroup relations, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, third party

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In the last several decades, social science research has moved away from understanding class and ethnic conflict solely as a struggle over resources to seeing conflict as a struggle over recognition and misrecognition of identities (Bourdieu, 1986; Geertz, 1973). One of the ways in which collective identities are expressed is through an articulation of a narrative that delineates the essence of the collective and frames the reality of the conflict (Bekerman, & Zembylas, 2011; Cobb, 2013; Hammack, 2011). Individuals' identification with their in-group's collective narrative leads to the justification of conflict and thus prolongs its continuation (Bar-On, 2002; Hammack, 2008; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998).

Although the importance of intergroup encounters for helping individuals shift away from a one-sided view on conflict has long been acknowledged (e.g., Bargal & Bar, 1992), research on such encounters has identified two major obstacles that prevent Israeli and Palestinian participants from legitimizing and empathizing with the experience of the other. The first obstacle is the asymmetric power relationship between Israeli-Jews and the Palestinians, which translates into the contact situation and negates the requirement of equality within the encounter (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Maoz, 2000b; Rouhana, 2004). The second obstacle is a conversational focus on the history of the conflict that leads participants from both sides to concentrate on their own past victimhood (Pilecki & Hammack, in press; Sagy, 2002; Steinberg, 2004).

In this study, we examine transcripts from a contact encounter among Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents in order to (1) identify the basic root narratives articulated by the Israelis and the Palestinians when discussing the conflict and (2) examine whether certain conversational conditions (e.g., focus on present vs. past, active role of third party) promote greater recognition of the out-group narrative. Our larger aim is to produce knowledge that will contribute to peace-building practices and peace education among Israelis and Palestinians in particular and among individuals in conflict settings more broadly.

The Narrative Basis of National Identity

Narrative psychological theory claims that people do not just tell stories; they think in stories (Bruner, 1986; Howard, 1991; Schank &

Berman, 2002). The correspondence between the human cognitive system and narrative structure plays a central role in individuals' understanding of themselves and the world around them (Kihlstrom, 2012). Collective and historical narratives that circulate in a culture serve as the symbolic construction of a national group's shared identity that are usually grounded in a basic root narrative (Lakoff, 2008).

Root narratives are based on the most fundamental components of narratives, which include an agent, a setting, and an action. Like ideology, the root narrative frames who the collective actor is and the context in which she or he lives (Althusser, 1971). The problem central to all narrative is based on a mismatch between the collective actors' intentions and the context in which they live (Bruner, 1990). For example, Marxist ideology frames human beings as inherently social and bound to nature. The Marxist collective actor (or the human) is situated in a capitalist setting of increased privatization and inequality driven by the accumulation of private property. According to Marxist narrative, the mismatch between the social nature of the "human" and the setting of capitalism creates the problem of alienation, in which humans are alienated from each other and from nature (Marx, 1932/2007).

In the case of violent political conflict, such as that between Israelis and Palestinians, each ethno-national collective creates a narrative that explains the conflict in divergent ways. Each narrative affords individuals within the collective the ability to interpret the conflict, both in terms of the collective actor's original internal intentions and in terms of how the actor can act within a particular context. The agent's intentions, context, and action are interwoven in a continual causal chain of events that explains why things happened and continue to happen the way they do. Thus, the same root narrative serves as the base for both stories about the past and stories about occurrences from the present (Salomon, 2004).

Analysis of root narratives suggests that they play a central role in explaining the divergent views of progressives and conservatives in the United States (Lakoff, 2008), divergent attitudes toward national citizenship (Fischman & Haas, 2012; Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2011), and differing approaches to climate change (Lakoff, 2010). A recent survey of Arab

Americans indicates that support for a two-state solution (based on Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders) was predicted by Arab Americans' acknowledgment of the Jewish narrative on the conflict (Ben Hagai, Abdelhalim, Chavez, & Zurbriggen, 2013). Similarly, a study of Jewish Americans suggests that support for peaceful solutions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is best predicted by participants' agreement with the Palestinian narrative on the conflict (Ben Hagai, Zurbriggen, Hammack, & Ziman, in press).

In short, basic root narratives, like cultural schemas and cultural models, serve as the prisms through which individuals view the past and the present as well as themselves and the world around them (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shore, 1996; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Because each side in the conflict has its own narrative about what has happened, what is still happening, and why, each side's narratives will be repeatedly contested during an intergroup dialogue encounter. It is only when individuals acknowledge the other side's perspective on the conflict that true dialogue can begin (Salomon, 2004).

Obstacles to Constructive Intergroup Dialogue Between Israelis and Palestinians

Studies on intergroup encounters in Israel have shown that the asymmetry in power between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority within Israel translates into the dynamics of the contact situation. Maoz (2000b) notes that members of the Jewish group often assert their hegemony by attempting to define both the structure and the content of the encounter. Jewish domination of the discussion occurs by shifting the conversation from structural change to interpersonal coexistence (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Maoz, 2000b; Rouhana & Korper, 1997). Concentration on interpersonal coexistence contradicts the Palestinian participants' goals of promoting political change and equality through the encounter situation (Bekerman, 2002; Halabi & Sonnenshein, 2004b). Consequently, a number of Palestinian and Israeli researchers have questioned if indeed such encounters are beneficial in promoting peace and equality (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Bekerman, 2007).

One of the ways practitioners and researchers have recommended responding to the asymmet-

ric power between Palestinian and Israeli participants is to involve a third party (Nadler & Saguy, 2004; Rouhana & Korper, 1997). Ross (2000) claims this involvement helps to bring the sides closer to agreement: "To do this, [a third party] must understand what underlies each dispute's verbal and nonverbal messages and help the parties to do the same so they can respond appropriately, whether or not they agree with what the other party is saying" (p. 44). The third party's legitimization of the weaker side's claims can also empower the minority group and assist in creating symmetry between the sides (Kelman, 2001; Nadler & Saguy, 2004; Rouhana, 2001). Furthermore, when participants fail to reach an agreement, a third party may be crucial to assist in identifying key disagreements and offering proper concessions without either side losing face (Rubin, 1980).

Beyond power asymmetry, conflicting historical accounts constructed by state apparatuses circulate among the Jewish Israeli and Palestinian populations (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011). Such historical stories are part of the collective-making project. Stories of the collective origin usually focus on trauma or loss as well as past victimhood (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2011). Conflicting ways of looking at the history of the conflict serve as barriers to constructive dialogue, because they position members of the different groups in opposition to each other, bringing individuals to disavow the other side's trauma (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009; Vollhardt, 2009). For example, according to Sagy (2002), in an encounter situation between Israelis and Palestinians, discussions of collective traumatic events such as the Holocaust and the *Nakba* (i.e., events of 1948 in which many Palestinians were displaced from their homes due to the creation of the new state of Israel; see Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007) led to "a heavy silence or to verbal violence. The result was a feeling that the group had reached a dead end, and was paralyzed in despair because of the other's impenetrability" (p. 266). On the other hand, research shows that when participants speak of personal experiences in the conflict, there is a greater amount of perspective-taking and empathy between the members of the opposing nationalities (Bar-On, 2002; Sagy, 2002; Steinberg, 2004). Bar-On (2000) has proposed to concen-

trate encounters between Israelis and Palestinians on the sharing of participants' personal narratives in order to rehumanize the rival group. According to [Maoz \(2011\)](#), personal storytelling about the conflict helps to "increase intergroup acceptance and understanding and to avoid dead-end arguments about who is more moral and more humane" (p. 121). A concentration on the present experiences of participants within the conflict, as opposed to a debate over the historical origins of the conflict, appears to lead to an increase in perspective-taking and empathy between Palestinians and Israelis.

This Study

The working hypothesis of this study is that individuals use basic root narratives to interpret both past and present events related to the conflict ([Lakoff, 2008](#)). Nevertheless, mindful of research that shows that individuals' identification with a collective narrative is also shaped by life experiences and social positionality (e.g., age, gender, race and class) ([Abu-Lughod, 1991](#); [Ewing, 1990](#)), we chose to first examine narrative content in situ as it occurred naturally in the dialogue process. Our first research question was thus largely descriptive or phenomenological with regard to the narrative content of intergroup dialogue: We asked, "What is the root narrative content produced by Israeli and Palestinian youth?" To answer this question we closely examined transcripts from conversations of two different dialogue groups of Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents, who met for a 2-week contact encounter. A grounded theory approach based on close reading and rereading of hundreds of pages of conversations led us to identify two root narratives as central to the conversations of the Israeli and Palestinian adolescents on the conflict.

The second question we address in this study is "Are the Israeli and Palestinian adolescents more likely to acknowledge the narrative of the other when the conversation focuses on the present reality of the conflict (as opposed to the history) and the American participants take an active role in the dialogue?" Because this question asked about differences between two types of conversational conditions, we complement our qualitative analysis of the conversations with a quantitative comparison of frequency of

out-group narrative acknowledgment by the Israeli and Palestinian participants in conversations about the past compared with conversations about the present in two different dialogue groups. In the first dialogue group, discussion of history occurred after a discussion of current events, whereas in the second dialogue group, discussion of history occurred before a discussion of current events. Thus, the order of the two discussion conditions was counterbalanced.

Method

Setting

This study examines transcripts from recorded conversations among Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents from a 2-week contact program based in the United States. As part of the program, adolescents participated in group-building activities such as visiting amusement parks, playing outdoor games, and visiting tourist spots in the major metropolitan area where the encounter occurred. In addition, during most mornings of the contact program, participants sat down for a 2-hr facilitated conversation about the conflict. Different dialogue sessions were dedicated to different topics. Among the topics discussed were personal identity, social identities, the history of the conflict, religion, political violence, the present reality of the conflict, future solutions, and personal actions.

The participants in the program were assigned to two different dialogue groups, taking care to balance demographic factors and to separate previously acquainted youth. Each group met 11 times for approximately 2 hr per session over the 2-week duration of the program, resulting in a total of 22 sessions and more than 44 hr of dialogue. Average transcript length per each session was approximately 160 pages.

The discussion sessions were led by trained facilitators, one Jewish and one Palestinian. Each dialogue group reflected a different model of intergroup contact. Facilitators in the first dialogue group used a *confrontational* ([Maoz, 2011](#)) model, which emphasized intergroup differences, specifically the power asymmetries that exist between groups. As such, facilitators in the first dialogue group tended to highlight the power dynamics among the Israeli, Palestinian, and American participants. In contrast,

facilitators in the second group used a *coexistence* (Maoz, 2011) model, which emphasized intergroup similarity with the aim of increasing mutual understanding and tolerance. Facilitators in the second group therefore tended to encourage the participants to be more empathic toward members of the out-group. In this article, we are interested in exploring shifts in the conversation when a third party is actively involved and the conversational topics change. Therefore, we do not compare the dialogue groups to each other but rather focus on changes within the dynamic of each dialogue groups at different times.

Participants

Participants were recruited to the program through presentations in secondary schools and other formal and informal venues in several regions of Israel, Palestine, and the U.S. metropolitan area in which the encounter occurred. Participants were selected based on their English proficiency, leadership skills, and ability to discuss the history of the conflict. Program organizers explicitly sought to recruit a diverse configuration of participants in terms of demography and political ideology, and the youth expressed diverse motivations to engage in contact (e.g., to make friends with the other side, to prove to members of the other side that their group is in the wrong).

The average age for the *first dialogue group* was 16.57 ($SD = 0.73$). In this group there were three Jewish Israelis (one male and two females), four Palestinians (two female and two male), and six Americans (all female). All the Palestinians in the group identified as Muslim. Among the American participants three identified as Christian, two identified as Muslim, and one identified as Jewish.

The average age in the *second dialogue group* was 16.33 ($SD = 1.05$). In this second dialogue group there were four Jewish Israelis, (two females and two males), five Palestinians (three females and two males), and six Americans (two males and four females). Two of the Palestinians in the second group identified as Christian and three as Muslim. Among the second group of Americans, there were two Christians, two Muslims, one Jew, and one person of mixed religious background (Jewish and Christian). Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the participants.

Qualitative Analysis

In the first stage of analysis, a qualitative approach was used in order to identify the root narratives articulated by the participants. In this stage, the first author carefully examined recordings and transcripts from different conversational sessions, including sessions about religion, the history of the conflict, personal life stories, political violence, and the future of the conflict across the different dialogue groups, using a grounded theory approach. Based on grounded theory method (Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a close reading of hundreds of pages of transcripts was accompanied by careful note taking that summarized the content of the participants' speech as well as the shifts in the conversational dynamics. Particular attention was given to the basic elements of the narrative structure participants articulated, specifically, how participants framed the nature of the collective actor and the settings in which s/he lived. Following a prolonged process of rereading of the transcripts, the first author analyzed her notes in terms of emerging themes and categories. These themes and categories were then further checked and modified in relationship to transcripts from additional dialogue sessions. After a hermeneutic analysis of all the sessions in which aspects of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict were discussed, two root narratives were determined to be central to the conversation between the Israeli and the Palestinian participants across the two different dialogue groups. Potent examples of the content of the narratives and the dynamics in which they were contested in the conversations are presented in the Results section.

In addition to identifying root narratives central to the conversation, close reading of the transcripts suggested a change in the conversational dynamics between the History and the Current Events Sessions. It appeared that there were more moments of empathy and narrative recognition when the participants discussed current events related to the conflict and when the American participants were actively engaging in the conversation. In order to verify if this shift yielded significant differences in out-group narrative acknowledgment, we complemented our qualitative examination of the sessions with a quantitative comparison of the History and the

Current Event Sessions in the two dialogue groups.

Measures and Quantitative Comparison

To test if different conversational topics (i.e., past vs. present) and third-party involvement were associated with a shift away from a monolithic view on the conflict, a coding manual based on the root narratives identified in the qualitative stage of analysis was constructed. Two researchers who were blind to the aims of the study or the study questions were trained to identify and code out-group narrative acknowledgment and In-Group Narrative Articulation.

The first primary measure for comparison, (hereafter) Out-Group Narrative Acknowledgment, is based on instances in which the participants articulated aspects of the out-group narrative on the conflict (Salomon, 2004) (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.77$). The second measure, (hereafter) In-Group Narrative Articulation, is based on instances where members of each group repeated its own national group narrative on the conflict (Cohen's $\kappa = .75$). See Table 1 for examples of the measures.

Sessions

In the first dialogue group, a session in which the history of the conflict was discussed (hereafter referred to as the *History Session*) occurred

on the eighth day of the program. The session in which the current reality of the conflict was discussed (hereafter referred to as the *Current Events Session*) occurred on the fourth day of the program. In this group, the discussion about the history of the conflict only lasted 1 hr, and thus we compared it with the first hour of discussion in the Current Events Session.

In the second dialogue group, discussion of the history of the conflict occurred on the fourth day of the program, and discussion of current events occurred on the seventh day of the program. Thus, the order of the History Session and the Current Events Session were counterbalanced across the two dialogue groups. In the second dialogue group, both the History Session and the Current Events Session lasted approximately 100 min.

In both dialogue groups, the American participants asked mostly clarifying questions in the History Session and tended to make more statements challenging each side's view on the conflict in the Current Events Session. Because this study is based on analysis of conversations in a seminaturalistic setting, the extent to which the American adolescents participated in the conversation could not be fully manipulated. It appears that on average the American participants were more active in the second dialogue group compared with the first.

Table 1
Examples of the Two Measures of Narrative Acknowledgement

Measure	Thematic category	Coding example
Out-group narrative acknowledgement	Jewish	"I don't think they needed to come into your house and take all your property."
	Palestinian	"We recognize that you need to defend yourself."
Root narratives	Jewish	
	Good intentions	"The soldiers don't like to do what they do. And they are normal people, and it does hurt us, what's happening there."
	Defense	"There were cases that the Palestinians came to kibbutzim. The children all slept in a house of children and they, [the Palestinians] just killed them . . . [W]e really had to defend ourselves and build an army. We have no choice, as I said before it is us or them."
	Palestinian	
	Ownership	"Imagine yourself sitting in a village. You have a village. You have a village, and you own the land, and living with your family. And someone is coming and kicking you out of this land."
	Suffering and humiliation	"It is a way to humiliate people and torture them, and it is not fair because in Israel they don't have any checkpoints . . ."

Results

In the first part of the Results section, we use examples from the different dialogue groups across different conversational sessions to illustrate the manner in which root narratives were used by participants to frame their collectives and the setting of the conflict. Second, we present examples from the Current Events Sessions in which there was an acknowledgment of the narrative of the other. Lastly, we present the results of the quantitative comparison between the History Sessions and the Current Events Sessions in term of frequency of Out-Group Narrative Acknowledgment and In-Group Narrative Articulation.

What Root Narratives Do Israelis and Palestinians Invoke in Conversation?

Our grounded theory analysis of two dialogue groups suggested that the Jewish Israeli participants' interpretation of the conflict was based on a root narrative in which the Jewish actor has good intentions to live in peace but must defend him/herself from Arab attacks. In contrast, our analysis of the Palestinian participants' statements suggested that their interpretation of the conflict was based on a narrative in which the Palestinian actor belongs to the land and owns it, but because of Jewish occupation of the land, s/he is humiliated and made to suffer.

For example, in the History Session as she starts to explain her perspective on the conflict, Sivan (from the first dialogue group), a Jewish Israeli participant, says to the group, "So we thought to ourselves, 'Okay, we have nowhere to go, and nobody wants us here, so, maybe we can go to Israel.' We didn't come to be just our nation and kick the Arab people out of there. We wanted to live with you . . . We wanted to live with you in peace . . . And about the land, we bought the land. We didn't just come and take the land."

A very similar framing of the Jewish collective actor's intentions was made by Merav in the beginning of the History Session in the second dialogue group:

Maayan (Israeli): I mean, every Aliyah [waves of Jewish immigration to Israel], we call it, like, when there are lots of people coming to Israel. So, we have like, five or six aliyahs, before the independence. So, every

aliyah it's, like, a little bit different. There is Aliyahs with families who most of them escaped from anti-Semitism. And there are aliyahs of young peoples who came to Israel to build it. They started building kibbutz, and cities . . . Most of the people came young—people who left their family in Europe, to build the country. That's what they believed in . . .

Merav (Israeli): I have to say that, yes, the Aliyahs, it was because of all these reasons. But the main reason, I think, that all the Jews wanted to finally, like, live in calm, and like, to be able to defend themselves and, to live in honest. And like, Israel it's like, it was the best option.

Maayan (Israeli): It's, it's the dream.

Facilitator (Palestinian): What do you mean by best option?

Merav: It's the best place, like, I mean it wasn't so populated, Israel, and it wasn't so much developed.

In both Sivan's, Merav's and Maayan's statements, the Jewish actor is represented as having idealistic good intentions for a peaceful safe home. Such statements of the good intentions of the Israelis to live in peace were usually followed by statements from Palestinians expressing their dispossession from the land and humiliation.

Ashraf (Palestinian): What about these Jews, didn't they think about the Palestinians? The blood in the street, and they lived in the place. They stole the land. They didn't think for a moment, what about them? Just, like, came in the house.

Yuval (Israeli): In the beginning, the Jews bought the land.

Ashraf (Palestinian): They bought the whole thing?

Maayan (Israeli): No, but a lot of land.

Dana (Palestinian): No, no, no, not the whole of the lands. Many lands were . . .

Yuval (Israeli): War is the rules. All the wars have rules . . .

After Merav and Maayan presented the good intentions part of the Israeli narrative, Ashraf, a Palestinian participant, invoked the house metaphor at the base of the Palestinian's root narrative, suggesting that the Jewish Israelis had broken into the Palestinians' home(land) and pushed them out. Moreover, in his rhetorical question—why the Jews didn't think of the Palestinians—Ashraf is suggesting that maybe the Jews did not have such peaceful intentions. In his statement, Ashraf is framing the Jewish actor in a light that the Jewish participants do not

identify with. This leads Yuval to contest Ashraf's statement with the second part of the Jewish narrative in which the land was taken in a war as part of Jewish Israelis' efforts to protect themselves. Nevertheless, suggesting that the land was taken in a war creates a dissonance in the Palestinian narrative. The Palestinians understand themselves as native inhabitants living peacefully on the land. Following this logic, how could they start a war against the Jews? But if the Palestinians did not start the war, who did? Overall, the crux of the argument is based on the character and intentions of the national actor, as well as the diverging interpretation of the reality of the conflict.

The Jewish articulation of their own intentions to live in peace, as well as their framing of the environment as requiring them to constantly defend themselves, was not only articulated in the History Sessions but also in the Current Event Sessions, as exemplified by Merav and Dana's exchange:

Merav (Israeli): I don't think we depend on the misery of anyone to be happy. But if we want to live in security, if some people from the territories won't do whatever they do, this situation will not be If in Sderot . . . won't have Kassams, and if we won't have, like terror attacks, and if we won't find everyday people who want to do terror, this situation will not be

Dana (Palestinian): But what is happening by the wall and the checkpoints is much more than security There are thousands of dunums [of land] being stolen Many houses are being destroyed because of the wall. And the same thing in the checkpoints, where normal people that try to pass wait for hours and hours, and they are being insulted and humiliated.

Such use of the root narratives to reason about the present was common across the different dialogue groups. For example, when Wajdi tells Idan (participants in the first dialogue group) about the humiliating treatment of his friends at a checkpoint:

Wajdi (Palestinian): They punched him for nothing, for nothing. They knew that he don't have bombs. He don't have anything. Then after they punched him, they let him pass.

Idan (Israeli): You know, um, bombers, checkpoints, patrols, everything aside. Don't fool yourself, we, we might be just civilians in it, but this is a war . . . , and the face of war is not pretty.

Much like in the History Sessions, in the Current Event Sessions we also see the recur-

ring dynamic in which statements of the good intentions of the Jews are met with statements about the humiliation and dispossession of the Palestinians, which in turn are met with statements about the Jews' needs to protect themselves and the framing of the context by the Jewish Israelis as a context of war. The framing of the conflict in terms of a war in which the Jewish Israelis must defend themselves is used to legitimize the humiliation and suffering that the Palestinians experience, thus perpetuating the verbal conflict within the dialogue groups.

In sum, the same narrative schemas, substantiated by different examples, are used to reason about both present and past events. When talking about the past as well as the present, the Jewish participants tended to invoke a narrative in which they have good intentions to live in peace but must defend themselves, whereas the Palestinians tended to invoke a narrative in which they belong to the land but have been and still are continually dispossessed and humiliated.

Dynamics of Out-Group Narrative Acknowledgment in the Current Events Session

Although in the History Sessions the American adolescents tended to ask clarifying questions, expressing that they felt they had insufficient knowledge of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the Current Events Session the American participants tended to make more critical statements about each side's narrative on the conflict. Moreover, in the Current Events Sessions, the focus on the present reality of the conflict afforded participants more chances to share examples from their own experiences in the conflict.

Personal examples that were legitimized as true were often followed by instances of incorporation of the other into participants' view of the conflict. For example, in the Current Events Session, following a remark by Nicole, an American participant, Noora, a Palestinian participant who was mostly silent throughout the contentious exchanges, begins to describe the reality of life in her village:

Nicole (American): It seems like, I understand that, like, there needs to be, some balance between the two. Like, the Israelis need some security. But, I just think that it's, humiliating, all these things that are making

you guys [Israelis] feel safe and can help you live a normal or a better life are the same things that are making the Palestinians' lives really bad . . .

Nir (Israeli): [We do it] to protect ourselves.

Noora (Palestinian): I have a, a question for Nicole, because she asked about the wall. How would you feel if your house is surrounded by the wall, your country? And you can't go anywhere outside your country?

Nicole (American): It would drive me crazy.

Yuval (Israeli): Again? [Doesn't seem to understand]

Noora (Palestinian): Yeah. And if the wall surrounded your house, how it will feel?

Yuval (Israeli): Don't say "What if?" Say what is true.

Noora (Palestinian): Our houses and neighbor houses is here. And the wall here, we are here. And the wall would be like this, and it will take us with it.

Yuval (Israeli): I think. I don't like the checkpoints, I don't like the wall, and I don't want to use this, but, that's the opportunities that, that the government found. But I don't think that it's really good. But that's, [what] we can do. So, that's what they do. The soldiers in the checkpoints are practiced for a war, so they are. They are training them to kill people.

Nicole's acknowledgment of the Palestinian and Israeli narrative on the conflict creates a space for Noora to articulate her personal experience with the conflict. At first Noora's account is met with Nir invoking the Israeli narrative on the conflict (Israel's need to defend itself); then Yuval attempts to dismiss Noora's claims by suggesting that they are hypothetical ("don't say what if, say what is true"). But when Noora continues with concrete evidence from her own life and asks for empathy ("how would you feel?"), Yuval then uses the "I" pronoun to separate himself from the collective, saying "I don't like the wall . . . That's what they do." In his statement Yuval comes to acknowledge that the Israeli soldiers and government are not always guided by peaceful intentions and that their actions cause suffering to the Palestinians.

Following Yuval, Dana (Palestinian) makes a statement in which she acknowledges the Israelis need to defend themselves but also requests that the Israelis recognize Palestinian experiences of the conflict:

We said we are against suicide bombings. We say that we see somehow the checkpoints and the wall as ways of defense, but from the other sides, there are a lot of cases that, that people are trying to, not offend us, but they, they are claiming that, like, we are talking wrong

things or we are lying. These are things that we live in our daily life and no one can deny . . .

In this example, after acknowledging the Jewish Israelis' narrative on the conflict, Dana requests that her experiences and other Palestinians' accounts of the occupation be accounted for. In fact, Dana's comments create a choice for the Israelis: either you delegitimize us by suggesting our accounts about our lives are false ("we are lying") or you acknowledge our experiences and thus our narratives. Dana's comments frame personal experiences as having a primary claim to truthfulness; this claim to truthfulness serves to empower the Palestinians and to require that their voice in the conversation be heard.

Indeed Dana's request as well as Noora's personal story about the wall seem to have had an influence on Mayaan (an Israeli participant), who begins to describe her own personal experience with the wall near her home in Jerusalem. Interestingly, at this point in the conversation Mayaan's narration of her experience does not drift into competitive victimhood in which each side competes as to who suffers more (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008), but rather to a statement more in line with inclusive victimhood (Vollhardt, 2009) that postulates the oppressive effects of walls on children's lives in general.

Mayaan (Israeli): I live in Gilo, which is a neighborhood that a few years ago was shot [shot] by Palestinian village. So they built, I mean, not the wall, but they built a wall in Gilo, in some part of it, and I passed the wall every day on my bus. And the wall is still there, even though [there has been] 5 years of peace. No, I mean not peace, but quiet. And I see that in the schools, they built also a wall and it's still there. I mean, the children live without a view. They [the children], they go to play in school with a wall and with some picture on it . . . It's really frustrating. I mean, after you've built a wall, it's, it's really hard to put it down. But, but I think, I mean I don't have other solution. But I don't think we don't need the wall, but I think we need another solution. I have no idea which . . .

Mayaan's telling of her own experience with the wall in Jerusalem leads her to shift away from a reliance on the narrative in which Israelis always have to defend themselves and to admit that there has been relative quiet in the last 5 years. Moreover, as she speaks she articulates a shift in thinking about the wall from a one-sided perspective in which it is a tool necessary for

Israelis to protect themselves to reasoning about walls in general or from a superordinate perspective (“once you build a wall, it is really hard to put it down”). Thus it seems that Mayaan’s use of her own daily observation of the wall affords her an opportunity to connect to the Palestinians’ experiences with the wall and acknowledge its harm to children’s lives (Vollhardt, 2009).

Also of note in Mayaan’s utterance is the manner in which state-power works to shape the consciousness of the participants; even when Mayaan came to reflect on the wall from a superordinate perspective, she is limited in her imagination of solutions by a political reality structured by the policies of military and political leaders. From a Jewish Israeli hegemonic perspective, the wall is a peaceful solution. Because other solutions have not been attempted, it is hard for an adolescent from Jerusalem to imagine and reflect on the possibilities of different solutions (because they have not been made possible).

Finally, acts of acknowledgment by the Palestinians of the Jewish narrative of hoping to live together in peace also occurred during the Current Events Session. For example, although Ashraf refused to recognize the Jews’ right to be in Israel in past sessions, at the end of the Current Events Session after an acknowledgment by Peter, an American participant, of the Palestinian narrative on the conflict, he shifts his position. Similar to the earlier cases, such recognition occurred after there was acknowledgment of the Palestinian narrative by a member of the out-group. The recognition of the Palestinian narrative led to reasoning on the conflict that includes an acknowledgment of the other:

Ashraf (Palestinian): It [Israel] exists, but I don’t recognize it.

Peter (American): Who’s the one that’s, like, who’s the one that’s keeping you down? Who’s the one that forced you to have ID, a mystical country that doesn’t exist? Like, you have to acknowledge the fact that there’s a, millions of people that live in Israel. And you have to accept that as a reality, unless you want to kill them or move them all. But I don’t think anyone has a good way of doing that . . .

Ashraf (Palestinian): They move more than one million people in 1948.

Peter (American): How does that make you feel? Angry?

Ashraf (Palestinian): Yeah, of course.

Peter (American): So, how can you do the same thing, how can you want the same thing for Israelis? . . .

Ashraf (Palestinian): . . . If I get to do anything I want . . ., I will do like, I wouldn’t move all of them, because it’s not reasonable.

Facilitator (Palestinian): Move them where?

Ashraf (Palestinian): I said I wouldn’t.

Facilitator (Palestinian): So what will you do with them?

Ashraf (Palestinian): We can live together.

Although Ashraf experiences the reality of the conflict in terms of dispossession from his home(land), which is perpetuated every day through humiliation and discrimination, when his narrative is recognized and empathized with he seems to shift his reasoning. When Peter directs Ashraf’s attention to the anger he feels because of the Palestinian dispossession of their own homeland and suggested that this is how the Jews will feel if they too are deported from Israel to Europe, Ashraf appears to change his mind (if only for a moment). Suddenly deporting and dispossessing the Jews does not seem reasonable (maybe because it has not succeeded in the Palestinian case). Seeing the Jews as possibly sharing his own feelings of anger (because of deportation) leads Ashraf to acknowledge the possibility that the two sides can live together.

Quantitative Comparison: History and Current Events Sessions

Table 2 presents a full description of the number of utterances made and the coded measures. To test if there was a significant difference in the frequency of invocation of statements that acknowledge the narrative of the other or reiterate the in-group’s collective narrative across the History Session compared with the Current Events Session, we used a chi-square test. We used this for three main reasons. First, because the conversational conditions influenced the group as a whole, not the individual directly, it was most appropriate to use the group as the level of analysis, not the individual (Cronbach, 1976). Second, because both our independent variables (type of

Table 2
Counts of Out-Group Narrative Acknowledgement and In-Group Narrative Articulation

Participants	Historical events			Current events		
	Israeli	Palestinian	Total	Israeli	Palestinians	Total
First group ^a						
Out-group narrative acknowledgement	3	2	5	8	8	16
In-group narrative	15	56	71	13	14	27
Total utterances	223	447	670	106	168	274
Second group ^b						
Out-group narrative acknowledgement	9	23	32	31	26	57
In-group narrative	120	112	232	47	52	99
Total utterances	487	464	951	474	501	975

^a Conversation time = 60 min. ^b Conversation time = 100 min.

session) and our dependent variables of instances of narrative articulation are fundamentally nominal, the most appropriate test is a chi-square (Nolan & Heinzen, 2011). Third, the chi-square is particularly suited for this analysis because it is robust in regards to violation of random sampling and small sample size (Olejnik & Algina, 1985; for examples of similar studies see, Kimbrough Oller, 2010; Nastri, Peña, & Hancock, 2006).

For the first dialogue group, the chi-square test indicated a significant increase in the number of times participants acknowledge the out-group narrative in the Current Event Session compared with the History Session, $\chi^2(1, N = 21) = 5.76, p < .05$. The same finding was identified in the analysis of the second dialogue group in which there was a significant increase in the number of instances in which there was an acknowledgment of the out-group narrative in the Current Event Session compared with the History Session, $\chi^2(1, N = 89) = 7.02, p < .05$.

In terms of the number of times participants invoked the root narrative on the conflict, there were significantly more instances of invocation of the root narratives in the History Session compared with the Current Event Sessions in the first dialogue group, $\chi^2(1, N = 98) = 19.75, p < .05$, and the second dialogue group, $\chi^2(1, N = 331) = 53.44, p < .05$. Nevertheless, in terms of the first group this difference should not be overly interpreted because in the first group there were fewer overall utterances in the Current Event Session compared with the History Session.

Discussion

In this study we used a root narrative framework as a guide to our analysis. We aimed to identify the root narratives that dialogue participants invoke in intergroup encounters. In line with research that shows that a contact model does not greatly affect the dominant narratives that emerge within Israeli–Palestinian contact (Pilecki & Hammack, *in press*), our findings suggest that Jewish Israelis in both groups tended to use a root narrative in which they have positive intentions to live in peace but live in a context in which they must consistently defend themselves against Arab attacks. On the other hand, the Palestinians tended to interpret events related to the conflict based on a narrative in which they are native to the land but have been dispossessed from their homeland and are humiliated and suffering due to Jewish occupation.

The contradiction between the national narratives in relationship to the collective actor's character (good intending Jews in contrast to powerless indigenous Palestinians) and the reality of the conflict (needing to constantly defend themselves vs. being humiliated and discriminated against) led the participants to continually contest each other's narratives as well as the causal factors pertaining to the conflict. When the Israelis would speak of their good intentions to live in peace, the Palestinians would question those intentions based on their dispossession and humiliation. Such contestation would often be met with the Jewish Israelis postulating that they must defend themselves and protect themselves from an existential

threat. In response, the Palestinians would retort, "From whom? From us, who are not nearly as powerful as you?"

Narratives and Conflict

The stagnant manner in which these narratives repeated themselves throughout the sessions when talking about both the present and the past, as well as collective and personal experiences, suggests that they were used as heuristics in individuals' understandings of their own social identities and the realities in which they live. Our analysis of transcripts from different conversational sessions suggests that identification with the collective actor's intentions and the framing of reality that the narrative affords (Bruner, 1990; Lakoff, 2008) serve as the crux of the intertwining of personal and social identity. The qualitative aspect of this study contributes to psychological theory by illustrating how, within the context of intergroup dialogue, social identity is performed through an articulation of narratives that express an identification with the collective actor's intentions as well as the framing of the setting in which he or she exists. It appears that the subjective component of social identity such as Israeli and Palestinian is based in part on identification with the collective actor's intentions and a shared understanding of the setting from which the collective actor must act.

The Legitimizing Influence of Personal Experience and a Third Party

The second question we aimed to address in this study was whether a conversational focus on the present reality of the conflict, together with third-party active involvement in the conversations, created an increase in instances in which the Israeli and Palestinian participants recognize the narrative of the other within the two dialogue groups. A count of instances of recognition by coders blind to the research question revealed that there was a significant increase in acknowledgment of the out-group narrative in both dialogue groups when current events related to the conflict were discussed and there was an active involvement of an American third party, compared with when the history of the conflict was discussed and the Americans mostly asked clarifying questions. It also ap-

pears that there was a significant decrease in instances in which the collective root narratives were invoked in the Current Events Sessions compared with the History Sessions. It is possible that the decrease in the first dialogue group might be due to an overall decrease in the number of utterances or conversational turns made in the Current Events Sessions compared with the History Sessions, a change that may have been the result of the slower pace and less interruption in the conversation.

An examination of instances of out-group narrative acknowledgment indicates that when the American third party acknowledged each side's narrative and the conversation focused on the present, there was an increase in telling of personal narratives. Bringing more personal stories into the conversation brought new information into the conversation. This information had a special claim to truthfulness because it was based on personal experiences (, e.g., Noora's statements). This new information was judged to be true perhaps because refuting it would suggest that these who postulated them were liars (e.g., Dana's statement that "no one can deny" her experiences), a delegitimizing move that participants in intergroup encounters were, perhaps, not ready to pursue. Moreover, this new personal information that was less of an abstract historical story allowed participants to reflect on their own experiences and how they might be similar (e.g., Maayan's description of the wall, Ashraf's experience of anger); as a consequence, both Israelis and Palestinians considered the other's position in their account of the conflict.

Thus the results of the analysis of the two dialogue groups suggest that there were more moments of intergroup recognition across the two samples in the Current Events Sessions compared with the History Sessions. This finding lends support to theories that claim national accounts of history are an important source of collective narratives that prime participants to repeat root narratives of conflict. Similar to previous studies, this study contributes evidence suggesting that a third-party acknowledgment, as well as challenge of each group's narrative on the conflict and personal storytelling, act to equalize the power asymmetry between groups and humanize members of the enemy group (Bar-On, 2002; Ross, 2000). An agenda that focuses on the present, however, rather than the

past, appears to privilege the dominant group (i.e., Jewish Israelis) by skirting the issue of dealing with historical grievances (Halabi & Sonnenshein, 2004a; Maoz, 2000a). Thus, even though our findings suggest that a conversational focus on the present may reduce ethnocentric talk, we recognize that avoidance of dialogue about the past conforms to the typical agenda of the dominant group in these encounters.

Limitations of This Study

The main limitation of this study lies in its grounding in seminatural discussions among Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents engaged in intergroup contact. Thus American involvement or the telling of personal experiences could not be fully manipulated but only observed. As a consequence, we cannot make more nuanced claims about the conversational processes that facilitate recognition of the out-group narrative on the conflict. For example, it is possible that challenges of the third party in the History Sessions would have resulted in more moments of out-group narrative recognition in the History Sessions as well as the Current Events Sessions. We could not check for these scenarios because such instances did not occur naturally.

Additionally, because of the seminatural nature of this study, we could not control or test the possible moderating effects of the participants' religious and gender identity. For example, it is possible that the diverse religious backgrounds of the Palestinians in the second dialogue group (two identified as Christian and four as Muslim) compared with the first dialogue group (all Muslim Palestinians) resulted in less in-group cohesion, which contributed to the increase in acceptance of the out-group narrative. Furthermore, it is possible that the facilitation style of the first dialogue group, which highlighted the power dynamics between the national groups, contributed to the lower frequency of out-group narrative recognition compared with the second dialogue group, where the facilitators promoted intergroup empathy. Because facilitation style may have served as a confounding variable, we did not compare the groups to each other but rather we conducted a within group comparison across different dialogue conditions.

An additional limitation of this study is that it is based on participants' utterances during the dialogue sessions only. The extent to which a shift in participants' framing of the conflict occurred independently from the conversational dynamics could have been better accounted for by a questionnaire given to the participants at the end of each session that measured the extent to which participants came to acknowledge the narrative of the other outside of the context of the dialogue group.

It is also important to note that the American participants, like the United States in general, are not necessarily perceived as a neutral third party, especially not by the Palestinian participants, because the United States often represents itself as Israel's closest ally. Nevertheless, the fact that at least a third of the American participants in each group were Muslim may have somewhat contributed to the credibility of the Americans as a third party. It is possible that if the encounters occurred in Europe, South America, or Asia and the third party consisted of adolescents from those regions, the influence of a third party would have been more pronounced, because they may have been regarded as more neutral.

Finally, although the main goal of intergroup encounters is to promote peace and reconciliation, in this study we do not aim to make claims about the long-term accomplishments of such encounters do so. Rather, our aim was to empirically examine cases of conversations in order to understand the content as well dynamics that promote more moments of acknowledgment of the out-group narrative. Ultimately, the long-term success of peace education depends on multilevel processes facilitated by social institutions such as the educational system, the media, and political decision makers to promote an outlook of hope for reconciliation between Jewish Israelis and the Palestinians (Bar-Tal, 2004; Hammack, 2009).

Implications for Peace-Building Dialogue Practice

There are three primary implications from our findings for dialogue-based peace-building practice among youth. First, given the centrality of collective narratives in intergroup encounters among groups in conflict, it stands to reason that facilitators should focus on drawing attention to

these collective narratives as they arise in conversation. Raising awareness of the centrality of collective narratives among dialogue participants might facilitate a more critical interrogation of those narratives.

Second, dialogue that focuses on the present rather than the past is characterized by a reduction in ethnocentric talk—the rhetoric of conflict itself. Present-oriented dialogue opens up the space for interlocutors to share personal experiences about the conflict in a manner that appears to facilitate empathy, understanding, and mutual recognition. Thus, even though a conversational focus on the present is more in line with the agenda of Jewish Israelis (Maoz, 2000a), we found that it allowed both groups to challenge their own received polarized narratives. Dialogue facilitators might strive to maintain a delicate balance between past and present focus, reflecting back to the group the ways in which discussions of history appear to inhibit mutual understanding and recognition, even while they are in line with the agenda of the lower status group (Maoz, 2000a).

Finally, in order to more effectively reduce prejudice, it is important to create equality within the contact situation (Allport, 1954). Creating equality in the contact situation is particularly challenging when the groups involved are part of an asymmetrical conflict (Maoz, 2000b). It appears that a more equal dynamic can be achieved through the involvement of a high-status third party. The involvement of a third party that equalizes the power dynamic between members of the more powerful and the less powerful groups may be vital to promoting a shift away from a monolithic view on the conflict.

In conclusion, it appears that in intergroup dialogue encounters, misrecognition of the other is based on a reliance on a monolithic narrative on the conflict. Personal experiences, together with a powerful third party that acknowledges yet challenges both side's views on the conflict, encourage participants to reason about the conflict—not from an ethnocentric perspective—but from a perspective that can encompass the other in their account of the conflict.

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