Imagine All the People: Negotiating and Mediating Moral Concern through Intergroup Encounters

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Abstract

Intergroup encounters can often become difficult conversations in which power relations and disagreements are perpetuated and re-enacted through the interaction and communication between the participating groups. Thus, especially in asymmetric settings, moral inclusion and moral responsibility toward members of other groups are crucial to dialogue, conflict resolution, and reconciliation. Yet it is exactly the circumstances of asymmetry—involving threat and dehumanization—that pose barriers to the elicitation and sustaining of moral concern. Drawing on and integrating two separate research traditions—the psychology of intergroup conflict, dialogue and peace building, and communication research on "mediated suffering"—this article discusses perceptions, representations, and emotions that underlie recognition of and empathy toward the suffering of others with the aim of increasing our understanding of when and how we can be brought—through mediated and unmediated dialogues and encounters—to care about the suffering of others.

This article relates to a crucial aspect of difficult intergroup conversations: the question of when and how can these encounters with the other evoke moral concern. Our elaboration on this question draws on and integrates two separate research traditions—the psychology of intergroup conflict, dialogue and peace building, and research from communications and media studies on "mediated suffering."

Introduction

Moral concern is central to understanding encounters and dialogues aimed at reconciliation and conflict resolution. Especially in asymmetric, intractable conflicts, moral recognition and responsibility are crucial to processes of dialogue, conflict resolution, and reconciliation. Yet the circumstances of asymmetric conflict, where power asymmetries between the two sides exacerbate threat and dehumanization (Bar-Tal, 2013; Haslam, 2006; Maoz & McCauley, 2008), pose severe challenges to the elicitation, evolution, and maintenance of moral concern. Indeed, intractable, asymmetric intergroup relations and conflicts usually involve moral *exclusion*: This occurs when individuals or groups are perceived and represented as outside the boundary in which moral values and considerations of fairness apply. Those who are morally excluded are represented and seen as undeserving; or they may be nonentities in that they are simply not

represented at all. Consequently, harming or exploiting them appears to be acceptable or just (Opotow, 1990).

A core aim of this paper is delineating those morally inclusive mechanisms that can mitigate moral exclusion and help to elicit concern for the suffering of others. This is done through critical, interdisciplinary consideration of two research traditions that share a common presumption regarding the power of exposure to others' pain:

(1) In research on the psychology of conflict, dialogue, and peace building, the view that encountering the narratives of the suffering of outgroups increases recognition of and sympathy for them.
(2) In communication research, the notion that "mediated suffering" (media depictions of the suffering of others) can elicit moral concern in audiences and even lead to action aimed at alleviating distress.

Preliminary empirical evidence and new theoretical directions raise significant questions regarding the limitations of these shared presumptions, suggesting that encountering narratives of suffering of outgroups through direct or mediated dialogue can even have "paradoxical" negative effects of increasing feelings of threat and hostility toward them (Mor, Ron, & Maoz, 2016; Nagar & Maoz, 2017a), or at the very least decreasing recognition of their pain (Nagar & Maoz, 2017b). Alternative explanations for the effects of mediation on moral concern have also emerged, proposing that it is long-term audience habituation to media representations of strangers rather than intense encounters with depictions of their suffering that create a baseline of social tolerance (Frosh, 2011).

There is thus a need for serious reconsideration of the purported link between exposure to others' suffering through dialogue and mediated encounters and the elicitation of empathy and moral concern. This focus is justified not only because previous research shows that moral factors play important roles in dialogue and intergroup conflict, but also because new user-driven digital communication practices and "citizen witnessing" (Farrell & Allan, 2015)—such as amateur video footage of violent clashes distributed through social media (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2014)—alter popular exposure to narratives and images that invite moral response to conflicts.

In the sections below, we address these questions through the lens of the two research traditions described above. We begin with a concise review of the major lessons that can be learnt from research on encounters and dialogues with the other group in conflict and elicitation of moral concern, thus laying the grounds for our discussion and for further refining the questions it centers on. We then move to more broadly consider recent scholarly work on mediated and particularly digitally mediated encounters and engagements and its implications for understanding the conditions for moral response. By this, we hope to promote a cross-disciplinary engagement with the possibilities for generating dialogue and moral concern across barriers of indifference, hostility, and violence. Addressing the major questions posed in this paper through these two approaches enables us to construct a broader view of the challenges and difficulties of eliciting moral concern through different forms of communication and conversations, ranging from face-to-face dialogue to encountering others through digital media as well as elaborate on potential solutions.

Encountering Narratives of the Suffering of Others in Conflict: Intergroup Dialogue, Recognition, and Moral Concern

Although intergroup conflicts are often rooted in competition over material resources and territorial control, they are made salient through the construction of stories that motivate intergroup antagonism (Hammack, 2008, 2009, 2011). Group narratives are limited in nature, both in terms of the extent to which they are able to represent others and their otherness, and in terms of the quality of those representations (Bar-On, 2008; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011; Kelman, 2008). Additionally, the core societal beliefs of group narratives are typically characterized by claims of exclusive legitimacy, victimization, and perceptions of the justness of the goals of one's own group (Bar-Tal, 2007, 2013). This means that in

ethnopolitical conflict, the opposing narratives of both sides tend to promote the absolute justification and idealization of the national self and the cultivation of its victimized collective identity, alongside the exclusion and devaluation of the "enemy" and its narrative (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2007; Hammack, 2011).

Metz (1980) argues that there are memories of human suffering that interrupt these taken-for-granted and fixed historical narratives. "Dangerous memories" are new and subversive narratives about the past. Such memories question the static and tribal group identities that rest on a distinction between the "good us" and "bad them." These "dangerous memories" (Ostrovitch, 2002, 2005) contribute to the formation of an alternative consciousness, one that shows compassion for others and their suffering, as well as responsibility and moral concern (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011; Rafferty, 2020).

The focus on collective narratives as major mechanisms in the production of conflict and peace (Rafferty, 2020) is strongly reflected in projects fostering intergroup contact, encounters, and dialogues aimed at reconciliation. Reconciliation-aimed intergroup dialogues have become increasingly prevalent in the past few decades in different sites of conflict and divided societies and extensively so in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Maoz, 2011, 2018; Ron & Maoz, 2013).

Though much of the earlier research on intergroup contact centerd on its outcomes and effects, in recent decades increased attention has been paid to the intergroup communicative and interactional processes that evolve within the contact situation (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005, 2007). Stephan and Stephan (2000), for instance, have stressed the importance of cognitive and affective intergroup processes, such as the reduction of threat and empathizing with the other's suffering. Salomon (2004) claims that the collective narratives of groups in conflict and their implied delegitimization of the outgroup's narrative should be the main target for change when promoting intergroup reconciliation.

In line with this, dialogue-based peace-building projects have increasingly come to focus on the narrative or storytelling approach (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Maoz, 2011, 2018; Ron & Maoz, 2013; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020) which aims at reducing moral exclusion and dehumanization through exposure to the narratives and sufferings of the other side in conflict. The narrative model of reconciliation-aimed encounters, most prominently identified with the late Israeli psychologist, Dan Bar-On, brings participants from both groups to engage in "storytelling" their lives and to share their personal and collective narratives, experiences, and suffering in the conflict (Bar-On, 2008). Encountering the experiences of the other through storytelling is understood to enable conflicting groups to create intergroup trust and compassion by rehumanizing and constructing more complex images of one another, increasing recognition of and empathy toward each other's pain and suffering in conflict (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Kelman, 2008).

But does encountering the narratives of suffering and pain of others really overcome moral exclusion in situations of protracted asymmetric conflict? Can it actually create empathy and moral concern? Existing research is scarce and produces contradictory evidence (Castano, 2008; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020). In a study that explored the effects of exposure to the narrative of the outgroup in the context of Israeli–Palestinian dialogue, Ron and Maoz (2013) found that continuous involvement in intergroup dialogue–encounters did indeed enable Jewish participants to better understand the narrative, sufferings, and emotions of their Palestinian counterparts, and to undergo a process of moral inclusion. However, other studies—also conducted in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—indicate apparently paradoxical effects, whereby exposure to narratives of suffering of the other side in conflict elicits hostile responses, distrust, competitive victimhood, a sense of threat and even an escalation of animosity (Cohrs, McNeill & Vollhardt, 2015; Maoz, 2008; Mor et al., 2016; Nagar & Maoz, 2017a, 2017b; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012). Moreover, polling data show an inverse association between perceiving one's own group as compassionate and feeling empathy toward the outgroup in conflict (David, Rosler, & Maoz, 2017).

Perhaps most fundamentally, the theoretical principles underlying the presumed effects of exposure to others' suffering through dialogue on eliciting empathy and creating recognition are also unclear.

In other words, the questions that should be addressed not only concern the extent to which encountering the suffering of the other in conflict through dialogue elicits empathy, but also when, why, and how can we reasonably assume that this should occur? Research on intergroup dialogues and encounters in conflict has identified different modes, ways, and mechanisms through which the members of the outgroup in conflict are encountered—with each mode of encounter potentially eliciting a different range for moral response (Hammack & Pilecki, 2015; Hammack, Pilecki, & Merrilees, 2013; Maoz, 2011, 2018; Mor et al., 2016). The advent of digital communication and social media networks further presents us with a dramatic proliferation in the ways in which we can encounter others and their sufferings.

Especially in light of this recent explosion of types and modes of encounter that marks the digital era, it is increasingly important to address crucial questions on how the many different ways in which we can encounter others shape both obstacles to and possibilities for eliciting moral concern. In order to systematically and critically engage with these questions, we will now take a broader look at what research on mediated encounters with the suffering of others—particularly but not only through digital and social media—can teach us about circumstances and conditions that might advance (or hinder) our sense of moral engagement, empathy, and responsibility.

Moral Concern and the Mediated Suffering of Others

In the contemporary era, the suffering of strangers is rarely encountered directly, but through media representations. These mediated encounters with suffering are fashioned by a complex organizational and technical apparatus: a web of media professionals such as journalists and production personnel, utilizing a range of communication technologies—print, radio, photography, film, television, and the Internet—each with its particular functional and esthetic characteristics. The mediation of suffering is therefore not simply about how audiences respond to others' pain, but about how communication systems routinely create and disseminate images and stories of suffering, and how this affects the maintenance and extension of public moral concern (Chouliaraki, 2013; Silverstone, 2007).

A key contention is that "witnessing" suffering through journalism and publicity is central to the creation of shared public moral concern for distant strangers (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009; Peters, 2001; Zelizer, 2007). Indeed, the assumption that the media and their audiences can be witnesses to distant suffering (Boltanski, 1999) underpins the activities of international nongovernmental organizations like Amnesty International (Hopgood, 2006) and Human Rights Watch, as well as local initiatives focusing on the suffering of the outgroup, such as B'tselem and Shovrim Shtika (Breaking the Silence) in the Israel–Palestinian conflict.

However, the assumption that media exposure to others' suffering leads to moral concern and action is not without problems. It appears to endorse a naïve epistemology of how suffering works as a media spectacle: The idea that simply publicizing the suffering of others, making the facts known, leads necessarily and inexorably to the augmenting of concern for their distress and welfare.

At least four ideas in media studies seriously challenge this line of thought. The first is that media images and stories are open to a variety of interpretations according to the cultural context and background of the audience (Ong, 2014). "Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to different responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen" (Sontag, 2003: 11). There is no guarantee that moral concern will be elicited, any more than will indifference, fear, jubilation, suspicion, or "denial" (Cohen, 2001).

The second problem is that consuming information may inhibit rather than enhance social and political action on behalf of victims, since we feel that we are already doing something morally valuable merely by staying informed (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1971/1948). Alternatively, too much information may simply be numbing: hence claims that media coverage of suffering has created "compassion fatigue" (Moeller, 1999) which leads to audience indifference rather than moral concern (it is worth noting, however, that

the concept of "compassion fatigue" has itself been critiqued as a "myth". See for instance Campbell, 2012; Hariman & Lucaites, 2016).

The third problem is that media reports of suffering may estheticize victims and turn their experience into a spectacle (Chouliaraki, 2006; Klienman & Klienman, 1996). Audiences may be voyeuristically fascinated by images of catastrophe (earthquakes, tsunamis, and terrorist attacks) more than they are morally exercised by the sight of human distress. Media representations of the plight of others necessarily use esthetic and rhetorical techniques to convey information. The danger is that these techniques may block rather than enable moral response to other's distress.

Lastly, the deliberate professionalization of the media depiction of suffering through NGOs and organizations such as "Witness," which "trains and supports people using video in their fight for human rights" (https://witness.org), can lead to forms of "strategic witnessing" (Ristovska, 2016). While these images and stories—designed to meet the technical and narrative requirements of mainstream media—can offer alternative narratives and viewpoints that are usually unavailable through professional journalism (Farrell & Allan, 2015), they can risk appearing manipulative to ordinary viewers, leaving them feeling exploited rather than moved to empathy. Particularly in conflict situations, media display of the outgroup's suffering can be interpreted by their adversaries as part of a propaganda struggle for sympathy. Comparative analysis of Israeli and Palestinian television, for example, has shown that the other side's suffering can be portrayed as an act of symbolic aggression: a cynical attempt to exploit their own victimhood for international political gain (Wolfsfeld, et al., 2008).

The advent of digital technologies has intensified and complicated debates around the potentialities for moral concern and action made available (or not) by media. The sense of potential derives from the radically new productive, connective, and reactive capacities of digital media—and the "ubiquitous" (Featherstone, 2009) presence of such media in everyday lives and spaces—compared to the older established mass media of newspapers, television, and radio broadcasting. Put simply, everyday users with smartphones connected to digital networks can film, edit, distribute, view and respond to audiovisual and textual representations without being dependent on large-scale mass media institutions to create and broadcast news of their own or others' suffering: "Potential witnesses are ready to shoot and share whatever may transpire anywhere their camera-packed and networked handheld devices may go" (Simons, 2019: 21).

Indeed, mainstream media have themselves become dependent on—and proactive in seeking out—such products of "citizen journalism" (Wall, 2015) or "citizen witnessing" (Gregory, 2015) for distribution, thus further amplifying these products' ability to reach new audiences. The possible moral consequences of this are, it would seem, a massive enhancement of encounters with others that engender empathy and solidarity, leading to new bottom-up forms of moral and political empowerment. As Martini optimistically puts it, "the 'mediability' of reality, that is, the widespread and constant perception of everyday experiences as potentially filmable and sharable, variously affects both political power systems and cultural communities. From prevention of police brutality to grass-roots circulation of first-hand testimonies, the political existence of users is changing: far from being a passive mass of final consumers, they are socially perceived as an assemblage of connected subjects that to various degrees embrace and utilize the power of their viewership" (Martini, 2018: 46).

Moreover, the interactive and connective capacities of digital technologies seem to put an end to earlier fears about the sharp disjunction between exposure to suffering others through the media, and subsequent individual moral action on their behalf in the world. With digital media, in contrast, one can effortlessly and immediately respond to a video of suffering one has seen *on the very same device* by commenting on it, "liking" it and distributing it to others (or creating and sharing memetic "remixes" of it: Bayerl & Stoynov, 2016; Shifman, 2014). This produces new configurations of "co-witnessing" (Ashuri, 2012) that roll across networks of technologically connected individuals. Hence "*connective* witnessing" (Mortensen, 2015) replaces—or to be more accurate, becomes a dominant format for—"collective witnessing." Such immediacy and ease of personal response, linking individuals through digital networks to

other coviewers who are also responding, helps to generate "affective resonance" (Allan & Peters, 2015) or indeed "affective contagion" (Papacharissi, 2015), consisting of waves of largely emotional reactions to images of conflict and suffering as they are shared "virally" (often transnationally) from devices across social media platforms. For instance, Bruns and Hanusch's study of audiovisual material shared on Twitter in response to the 2015/16 terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels found that displays of individual and collective emotional response to these events were more extensively and speedily shared than texts which were more informational. Indeed, their "circulation and further development at times extends to a point where that affective response becomes newsworthy in its own right" (Bruns & Hanusch, 2017: 1138). Thus, the ease and immediacy of individual reaction to suffering via mobile devices and social media platforms enable dynamic new kinds of collective affect, and connective moral witnessing.

As ever, however, there are reasons to temper this optimism about the capacity of new media technologies *per se* to create moral concern. The first reason is the sense that the kinds of immediate and easy response that individuals enjoy on their devices may not be serious moral (or political) *action*: It can be shallow, temporary and decidedly uncommitted compared to the moral engagement required in the predigital era (writing to government agencies, going on demonstrations, etc.). This accusation draws on the argument that new technologies enable breadth and frequency of connectivity at the expense of depth and intensity in relationships (Turkle, 2012): In the context of moral and political action, its best-known advocate is Gladwell (2010), who coined the term "slacktivism" to suggest that online moral and political response is characterized largely by convenience rather than genuine commitment.

Further checks on optimism regarding the moral capacities of digital media technologies are connected to their institutional and technological infrastructures. Despite near-utopian assessments of the early World Wide Web's decentralized and democratic structure, it is now obvious that digital networks —and most obviously social media such as Facebook—are dominated by a very small number of companies, some of whom are among the largest and most powerful in the world. Relevant to our discussion is the fact that the more exposure and response to images of suffering occurs on social media platforms owned and run by these organizations, the more they are subject to the hidden and largely unpredictable (to the user) operations of corporate algorithms that manipulate attention and traffic on the network, determining what each individual will see in their "feed"—and who will see any images or texts people post or the responses they make (Bucher, 2018).

Furthermore, the corporate-driven algorithmic structures of social media mean that certain groups develop expertise in how best to exploit this new terrain, giving them advantages over others and over ordinary users. Some of these expert groups are technically proficient social and political activists, others are nation-states, and others are profit-driven media and advertising companies. One example of the new difficulties this throws up for understanding the mediation of moral concern is that many responses to suffering on platforms like Twitter may actually be texts produced and shared by "bots" rather than by humans (and ordinary users would probably not be able to tell the difference), as Bruns and Hanusch (2017) also found in their study. More broadly, the centrality of resources, expertise, and proficiency in this context means that digital arenas for circulating images of suffering—especially of conflict—have themselves become *conflict zones*. As Smit et al. (2017) found in their analysis of YouTube and witnessing of the 2013 chemical attack on Ghouta in the Syrian civil war, uploaded videos were frequently remixed or reframed to produce diverse and even conflicting claims: These claims were heavily influenced by underlying platform constraints and rules, but also by highly invested activists and organizations on different sides of the conflict aiming to reframe testimonies in order to garner support for their own particular narratives.

Lastly, one should not underestimate the continued centrality of "old" mass media in this new digital media environment. For all the vaunted opportunities for "citizen witnessing" that digital media offer, most images and texts created by ordinary people about their suffering only reach large audiences if they are taken up from social media and circulated by conventional news organizations (Bruns & Hanusch, 2017), both online and in printed format. This means that the conditions for enabling moral concern in

response to the depiction of others still resides, to a large degree, with traditional mass media and its well-known editorial hierarchies. Though these are no less opaque, and may even be more comprehensible, than the complex combination of algorithmic and human editing constantly performed on social media, it also means that images and testimony of suffering others are frequently liable to be reframed according to the politics of particular news organizations, for good and for ill. As Chouliaraki (2017) found, in her analysis of how mainstream journalism reproduced images taken and shared by migrants to Europe following their survival of the dangerous Mediterranean crossing, the migrants' testimonies of suffering (and relief at survival) were usually transformed into spectacles of frivolous consumption (taking selfies), untrustworthiness and even invasion for Western audiences. This populist and mistrustful media reframing produced forms of ethnocentric "symbolic bordering" between the two groups that mitigated against the creation of empathy and moral concern.

Hence, the mediation of others' suffering raises complex issues that should be further studied and discussed, issues that are not solved—and indeed are made more complicated and urgent—by the emergence of new media technologies. Does fascination for images of suffering necessarily preclude feelings of compassion and moral concern? What are media audiences expected to do with such images and stories, and how can they lead from concern to practical action? How do new media technologies and associated institutions change the *conditions* within which moral decisions can be made and moral concern fostered?

Conclusion

New forms of ethnopolitical conflict have destabilized traditional dichotomies and relations between opponents. These conflicts are also subject to mediation by communications infrastructures which have become radically unstable as a result of technological and institutional transformations. The conceptualizations brought in this paper are inspired by recent advances in thinking about media and morality and the psychology of conflict, morality, intergroup dialogue, and peace building, with the aim of exploring the challenges and potentialities for eliciting—through dialogue and mediated encounters—moral response among conflicting groups in contexts of dynamic change.

This focus is justified not only because previous research shows that moral factors play important roles in intergroup conflict, but also because of the way that emerging user-driven media systems increase popular exposure to information and images that invite moral responses to conflicts. Today's conflicts are subject to intense and ongoing media coverage, both among the parties themselves but also among international audiences.

Hence, the rationale of this paper and its contribution is in bringing together different approaches for a multi-disciplinary exploration of the emotional, identity-related, and moral consequences of mediated and nonmediated encounters with others in conflict. Previous research on the effects of encountering the narratives and suffering of others yields results that are clearly contradictory. Our discussion above enables to more precisely delineate the sources and contours of this contradiction. This is done through considering approaches and theories that differ in their disciplinary focus yet lead to a similar conclusion: Our moral response to the difficult encounter with the suffering and narrative of the other is determined by why, how, and when this encounter takes place. Below, we outline the practical implications of this conclusion for facilitating effective difficult conversations with distant and not distant others.

Principles and Guidelines for Difficult Conversations

Critically reviewing scholarly work on mediated and nonmediated difficult encounters enables us to glean several major principles and carefully suggest strategies regarding the elicitation of moral response through conversations and encounters with distant and nondistant others. Below, we summarize five such principles as well as the guidelines and strategies stemming from each principle.

Not All Encounters Are Made Alike

Maoz and her colleagues (Maoz, 2011, 2018; Mor, et al., 2016; Ron, Suleiman, & Maoz, 2020) prominently note that not all encounters with distant or nondistant others are made alike. It thus seems that elicitation of moral concern should be adapted to, considered and even negotiated in light of several factors including the nature and type of the interaction and its goal, the way in which the other is made present, the settings, affordances, and the actual, projected and imagined participants and audiences. The principles and strategies below are all derived from this general and foundational principle. We first more broadly address lessons that be gleaned in regard to mediated encounters, with an emphasis on digital mediation and conclude by more specifically discussing principles and guidelines for difficult, mostly face-to-face conversations with the outgroup in conflict.

The Unrecognized Power of Accidental, Unremarkable and Habitual Encounters

Recent thinking on media and morality stresses the power of accidental, seemingly trivial and routine encounters with others, postulating that fleeting, ephemeral engagement—the "ordinary stuff" of everyday digital life into which people are thrown and have to improvise responses—may be crucial to developing moral and political understandings of co-existence with others (Markam, 2020). Frosh (2019), for instance, claims that much scholarship on mediated suffering privileges intense viewer engagement with an isolated image or text in an impossibly undistracted viewing situation. This "attentive fallacy" means that most ordinary encounters with media—habitual, inattentive, unmemorable—are written off in advance as obstacles to genuine ethnical response. In contrast, Frosh suggests that it is precisely *through* making encounters with representations of others routine and unremarkable that media provide a baseline of habituation to the presence of strangers in the intimate spheres of personal life.

This long-term habituation reduces potential alarm and hostility in encounters with others because they are already generically familiar, part of the "furniture" of everyday representations. In this context, Frosh (2011) has coined the term "phatic morality," referring to the potential of simple accidental encounters with others—that are often not considered as "real" and meaningful encounters—to elicit moral response. The potential of such encounters is further illustrated and emphasized when considering the incidental encounter with images and texts about and from others through social media.

Filter Bubbles or Affective Contagion

The idea that media make encounters with others and their suffering ambiently present seems to contradict some key ideas about digital media. In particular, it is at odds with the charge that social media create "echo chambers" (Sunstein, 2009) and "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011) that reduce exposure to the different and the strange, and reinforce exposure to the similar: Theories of homophily and selective exposure have flourished in the digital age. While debate on this remains considerable, and some of the indications inconclusive (Flaxman, Goel, & Tao, 2016), there is increasing evidence that the "filter bubble" thesis is either not the case or has been greatly exaggerated (Messing & Westwood, 2014; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016).

In fact, social media users may accidentally come across a larger range of items than they would have encountered in mass media alone (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018): "citizen media has turned newssharing and news engagement via social media into a habitual practice for ordinary users, and has led to the establishment of a social media-supported ambient news network that enables serendipitous news discovery" (Bruns, 2018: 309). Such "incidental" consumption of images and texts from a range of sources by ordinary people means that the media's role in connective habituation to the presence of strangers—of others different to one's self and one's group—has not been technologically superseded in the digital age. Indeed, coupled with the fact that much exposure to others is still encountered through

mainstream "legacy" media like radio and television, it may even have been enhanced. This of course does not guarantee that moral concern and action will ultimately be generated from mediated encounters with others: It means that encountering others through digital media can produce *conditions* for the creation and mobilization of such moral response.

Confrontation: When and How

Different possibilities, modes, and models of encounters that require considering a broad range of moral responses have also been identified in research on intergroup encounters and conversations in conflict (Maoz, 2011, 2018; Mor et al., 2016; Sternberg, Litvak Hirsch, & Sagy, 2018; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020). In her work that predominantly focuses on face-to-face dialogues and encounters with the other group in conflict, Maoz (2011, 2018) defines and discusses the confrontational dialogue in which members of the minority group directly confront members of the majority group with claims about injustice, discrimination, and oppression (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). While this model can effectively guide difficult conversations in asymmetric situations (Maoz, 2011, 2018), one should also be aware of its limitations and drawbacks and use it with the needed caution—as a part or phase of a long-term, gradually unfolding dialogue process (Maoz, 2018; Mor et al., 2016). Research teaches us that directly and assertively confronting the more dominant group with discrimination and injustice toward disadvantaged groups might indeed elicit empathy and moral concern (Shani & Boehnke, 2017). However, and at the same time, and just as often, such a confrontation can cause a defensive response of backlash (Guffler & Wagner, 2017; Ron, et al., 2020), further polarization and a more extreme justification of the existing status quo (Maoz, Bar-On, & Yikya, 2007; Mor et al., 2016). It is therefore crucial to carefully consider the specific circumstances, the readiness of the participants in the conversation, and the nature of the intergroup relations when using confrontation to evoke moral concern.

Clearly, confrontation can have two faces: While it can cause engagement and emotional attachment, it can also cause opposition, verbal violence, pain, disconnection, and alienation. In addition, in settings of deeply entrenched conflict and radical asymmetry between the involved groups—even if in the short term the confrontation seems to be effective—these effects often do not last when re-entering the harsh reality of conflict and asymmetry. Venting in the protected bubble of the intergroup encounter can prevent minority group members from using this energy to try and bring about change in the "real world" while supporting the illusion that such confrontations constitute a transformative action (Maoz, 2018). However, as we know from previous research: Intergroup encounters seldom have a broad, sustained significant effect on the broader political and social reality (Maoz, 2011, 2018).

Encountering the Narrative, Suffering, and Agenda of the Other—When and How can this Work

Studies in the tradition of the narrative approach to intergroup encounters in conflict relate to the moments in which we encounter the narrative and suffering of the other and to what might determine our response to this essentially difficult encounter (Bar-On, 2008; Hammack, 2009, 2011; Maoz, 2011, 2018; Mor, et al., 2016; Ron & Maoz, 2013; Sternberg et al., 2018; Zigenlaub & Sagy, 2020). Research in this tradition prominently teaches us that such a difficult conversation should be embedded in a long-term, gradually evolving, facilitated dialogue process (Heykoop & Adoch, 2017; Ron & Maoz, 2013; Sternberg, et al., 2018) in order to enable overcoming threat and backlashes (Maoz et al., 2007) and attain some level of acknowledgment or recognition. Importantly, existing research enables us to learn from failures in which the presentation of the narrative and suffering of the outgroup in conflict triggered suspicion, distancing and even verbal violence (Maoz, et al., 2004, Maoz, et al., 2007; Mor et al., 2016). The main lesson seems to be that exposing people to the story and suffering of the outgroup in

conflict should not be treated like a "magic wand." Rather, in situations of conflict, the story of the other is likely to trigger suspicion at least as much as it is likely to evoke moral concern.

The above principles and guidelines are primarily concerned with what we should notice, reflect upon, and take into account when considering difficult conversations and encounters with others in conflict. A more nuanced understanding of such encounters and the different shapes they can take can enable us to identify ways in which elicitation of moral response can be unpacked, negotiated, and reconsidered in light of the nature of the direct, mediated, or even imagined difficult dialogue or encounter.

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