

Special Thematic Section on "Multiple Perspectives in Conflict Settings: From Diversity to Pluralism"

Support for "Normalization" of Relations Between Palestinians and Israelis, and how It Relates to Contact and Resistance in the West Bank

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Abstract

Since the launching of the Oslo peace process in 1993, the term 'normalization' has been used to characterize policies that aim to recognize the state of Israel and to establish 'normal' relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Whereas the Palestinian Authority has been supportive of normalization policies, numerous domestic and international critics have argued that these policies serve to perpetuate occupation and its consequences. We examine how Palestinians understand normalization, to what degree they support various forms of 'normalizing' relations with Israelis, and how contact with Israelis relates to support for normalization and motivation for revolutionary resistance against the occupation. Based on a cross-sectional survey conducted among an adult sample (N = 159) in the West Bank in 2016, we show that the understanding of normalization was multi-faceted, and that support for contact and collaboration across group lines (i.e., with Israelis) depended on the type of intergroup relations. On average, respondents were more supportive of relations within the political sphere, e.g. civilian policies and diplomatic coordination, than of interpersonal contact, cultural cooperation or security coordination. Support for most types of intergroup relations was related to decreased motivation for revolutionary resistance. In line with research on 'sedative' effects of positive intergroup contact in historically unequal societies, we found that past positive contact with Israelis was linked to decrease in Palestinians' motivation for revolutionary resistance through increased support for interpersonal contact and security coordination as forms of normalization.

Keywords: normalization, intergroup contact, Palestinian Israeli conflict, social change

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Over fifty years after the Israeli occupation of the 1967 Palestinian territories and a hundred years after the Balfour Declaration was issued to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians persists. Representations of the conflict among Palestinians have changed over time though. The signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 was largely embraced by many Palestinians as a promise for social change, an important step towards the establishment of the Palestinian state and peaceful relations with Israel (Maoz, 2004). The mutual recognition between the two groups; Israel's recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)¹ and

Palestinians' recognition of the state of Israel (on 78% of historic Palestine) legitimized normalization of interactions between Palestinians and Israelis (Shlaim, 1994, 2005; see also Kelman, 1999). Normalization, that is, "the process of building open and reciprocal relations with Israel in all fields, including the political, economic, social, cultural, educational, legal, and security fields" (Salem, 1994, as cited in Salem, 2005, para. 1), became the key aspect of the peace and reconciliation process (see also, Awad, Salem, & Obeed, 2007; Committee for the Defense of Arab culture - Cairo, 1993; Yaqeen, 2003). Rejection of "violence" and "terrorism" by the PLO and recognition of Israelis' right to live in peace and security were conditions for this process, Israel in turn recognized PLO as the representative of Palestinians (see Abu Mazin, 1994). Normalization was enabled by the PLO-run Palestinian Authority (PA)ⁱⁱ, established immediately after the Oslo peace agreement in 1993 (Kelman, 1999). A number of policies were introduced in order to "normalize" relations between the Palestinian and Israeli political entities, with the long-term goal of achieving a two-state solution. These policies encompass economic, political, diplomatic and civilian relations, as well as security coordination aimed at stopping armed resistance among Palestinians. Under the banner of nation-state building, the PA has supported and implemented normalization policies to prove to the international community that Palestinians have a genuine desire for peace, and to obtain the recognition of the state of Palestine according to conditions of international law (Ash, 2009). Following these policy changes, numerous civil society organizations from both sides have launched initiatives to spread the culture of peace and reconciliation through joint activities and dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.

Yet, 25 years after the Oslo Accords, segregation policies, expansion of the Israeli settlements, fragmentation of the Palestinian territory through a complex administrative division and overt presence of the Israeli security apparatus (e.g., check-points, separation wall), have led to continuous violations of Palestinians' human rights during this "peace process" (Hajjar, 2001). Consequently, normalization of relations between Israelis and Palestinians is widely criticized among Palestinians as perpetuating the status quo of the suppressive colonial regime, simultaneously dismantling revolutionary resistance (Samarah, 2011). In Palestine, revolutionary resistance implies a variety of actions aimed at dismantling the settler colonial structure (i.e., the socio-political and economic institutional structure that underpins the occupation), which can be violent or peaceful, and implemented collectively (e.g., collective protests, institutional boycott) or individually (e.g., internet advocacy, boycotting Israeli products). Although initially the term of normalization did not refer to all forms of relations with Israelis, in the post-Oslo era it has been increasingly used to condemn and stigmatize most social, political, economic and interpersonal interactions with Israelis on both institutional and individual levels, in particular by proponents of the growing anti-normalization mobilization (Pundak, 2012).

In short, normalization is today a highly controversial and politicized term, dividing the Palestinian political sphere in the West Bank between its proponents and opponents. While the proponents, in particular the ruling PA, emphasize importance of building normal relations with Israelis as a crucial step for international recognition of Palestinian statehood and the achievement of the two-state solutionⁱⁱⁱ, the opponents represent normalization as an ideology aimed at destroying desire for social change and revolutionary resistance to settler colonial policies.

Rather than resolving this ideological debate, the present article gives a voice to those mostly ignored in this controversial debate: the Palestinian people. While political science literature has analyzed different forms of normalization between Arab states and Israel, for example, economic, political, cultural, social and academic relations (Awad et al., 2007; Elmessiri, 1999; Yaqeen, 2003), Palestinians' understanding of the meaning of normalization is understudied. Thus, the first goal of our research is to examine how Palestinians define normalization and the degree to which they support different facets of normalization. Drawing on recent social psychological

research revealing that positive contact experiences with dominant groups reduce support for social change among subordinate groups (Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013; Dixon, Durrheim, Kerr, & Thomae, 2013; Pettigrew, 2010; Reicher, 2007), the second goal is to examine how contact with Israelis relates to support for revolutionary resistance on the one hand and to different forms of normalization on the other. By examining these questions with a cross-sectional survey in the West Bank, this research thus contributes to the growing body of intergroup contact research among subordinate groups by conceiving revolutionary resistance and normalization as two opposing routes to social change.

Support for Normalization and Intergroup Relations Among Palestinians

What constitutes normalization is a subject of continuous political debate. Different actors disagree on whether a certain form of intergroup relations constitutes normalization or not. For example, academic collaboration between educational institutions is condemned as normalization by the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and Birzeit university, but not by Jerusalem university. Some anti-normalization voices advocate for complete denunciation of any contact with Israelis, and that "Palestinians should not talk or cooperate with Israelis until the end of occupation" (see Pundak, 2012, pp. 46-53). Others support contact and collaboration and joint struggle with Israelis, as long as it is directed towards dismantling the settler colonial structure. This debate has an important normative and moral character: some anti-normalization actors, in particular, stigmatize and delegitimize "normalizers" as national traitors and collaborators with the colonizer (Samarah, 2011). It is, therefore, crucial to understand the forms of intergroup relations with Israelis that Palestinians support or condemn.

Previous studies have examined Palestinians' readiness for personal or social engagement in intergroup contact with Israelis. Most of these studies, however, focused on the Israeli society, examining the relationship between the disadvantaged indigenous Palestinian minority and the dominant Jewish majority (Diab & Mi'Ari, 2007; Hofman, 1972, 1982; Peres, 1971; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995; Shani & Boehnke, 2017; Smooha, 1984; Yogev, Ben-Yehoshua, & Alper, 1991; Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986). These studies have typically shown that members of the indigenous Palestinians in Israel are more willing to establish relations with the Israeli Jewish than vice versa. Much fewer studies have examined the representations of and readiness for intergroup contact or other forms of relations among Palestinians living in the Palestinian territories colonized in 1967 (West Bank and Gaza Strip). In addition to examining the Palestinians' readiness for social relations with Jews (Mi'Ari, 1997, 1998), to our knowledge, only Mi'Ari (1999) has empirically examined attitudes towards cultural normalization among Palestinians. Indeed, he surveyed Birzeit university students in the West Bank immediately after the signing of the Oslo Accord. Only a small minority of students was ready for social contact with Israelis, while, on average, students were more supportive of cultural normalization. These findings suggest that not all forms of intergroups relations are considered equally acceptable by Palestinians.

To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have examined support for normalization policies that are coordinated and implemented by the PA. Since the Oslo Accords, the PA became responsible for administrating most of the West Bank and Gaza Strip territories, where "Israel undertook to transfer power to "authorized Palestinians" in five spheres: education, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism" (Shlaim, 2005, p. 246). The PA participates in different forms of coordination with the Israeli government, such as civil coordination to grant basic rights to Palestinians (e.g., identity documents and travel permits). The PA also participates in security coordination with the Israeli military forces to stop acts of resistance against Israelis (Pundak, 2012). Indeed, the

PA is now increasingly criticized for actively crushing resistance to the Israeli occupation, and is seen as “intermediate party” in the conflict dynamics^{IV}.

To get a comprehensive picture of Palestinians’ understanding of normalization, we investigated endorsement of intergroup relations in multiple spheres (e.g., economic, health, governmental, political, security, social and cultural), which are sometimes labeled or stigmatized as normalization.

Normalization Versus Support for Revolutionary Resistance: The “Sedative Effect” of Contact Experiences

How is support for normalization linked to support for revolutionary resistance, and what is the role of positive intergroup contact? Discourses of both normalization and revolutionary resistance have the goal of changing Palestinian society. Yet, while normalization neglects the power asymmetry between the two sides, revolutionary resistance contests it. Accordingly, the anti-normalization discourse portrays normalization as antagonistic to revolutionary resistance: normalization is seen to change representations of the Palestinian-Israeli relations from rejection and revolutionary resistance to acceptance of asymmetric relations (Albzour, 2017). Recent social psychological theorizing on social change (e.g., Reicher, 2007), similarly points out the potentially demobilizing effects of fostering mutual acceptance and reducing animosities between asymmetric groups in societies characterized by historical patterns of inequality. A growing body of research shows that positive intergroup contact experiences can paradoxically contribute to perpetuating the status quo or even entrenching inequalities, by diminishing motivation of disadvantaged groups to challenge these inequalities (see Dixon & Levine, 2012). Focusing on Palestine, where intergroup relations are largely regulated by a system of colonial segregation policies that restrict the movement of Palestinians (e.g. permit system and checkpoints), we examine how Palestinians’ support for different forms of “normalized” intergroup relations link to motivation for revolutionary resistance.

Moreover, we examine the role of past contact experiences. While multiple studies have emphasized the beneficial effects of personal contact with outgroup members in fostering positive intergroup attitudes (Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Maoz, 2011; for Palestine see Mi’Ari, 1998, 1999), these benefits have been proven less prominent for subordinate minority groups than for dominant majorities (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Recent research has evidenced so-called “sedative” (Cakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, 2011), “ironic” (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009) or “paradoxical” (Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012) effects of positive contact whereby positive contact with a dominant outgroup reduces subordinate groups’ awareness of their disadvantage, and thus their support for social change (e.g., Saguy et al., 2009; Sengupta, Barlow, & Sibley, 2012). Thus, positive intergroup contact does not necessarily translate into more equal intergroup relations (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; Saguy, Tropp, & Hawi, 2013). For example, based on findings from New Zealand, Sengupta and colleagues (2012, p. 506) concluded that “for indigenous peoples, contact with the majority group may increase system-favoring ideology that excludes their own culture from representations of the nation”. In a study conducted in Israel, Saguy and colleagues (2009) in turn found that positive intergroup contact was related to reduced feelings of intergroup inequality among the disadvantaged group (see also Dixon et al., 2010), which then diminished their support for social change. In other words, an Arab “Palestinian” who had friendship experiences with an Israeli Jew saw Jews as fairer than those without such experiences. This then decreased desire for social change. In line with these previous studies, we expect that Palestinians’ previous experiences of contact with Israelis are linked to reduced motivation for revolutionary resistance.

Putting Allport's (1954) theorizing of the prejudice-reducing effects of contact and societal agenda into the context of de-segregation of 1950s in US, Durrheim and Dixon (2018) note that the shift of focus from changing economic and political structural realities to cultural change enabled by prejudice reduction actually precluded one of the four optimal conditions for contact: equal status. While settler colonialism in post-Oslo Palestine cannot be compared to the de-segregation era in the US, the reconciliation process is exposed to similar obstacles. By focusing on achieving out-group acceptance through planned positive contact interventions including West Bank Palestinians and Israelis that spread immediately after the signing of the Oslo Accords, it leaves intact the structural inequality and the dynamics of colonial power relations (Maoz, 2004).

Insofar as normalization implies fostering collaboration with Israelis, and thereby downplaying animosities, experiences of positive contact should relate to support for various forms of normalizing intergroup relations. We therefore predict that support for normalization mediates the relationship between positive contact and reduced motivation for revolutionary resistance. Previous studies among Palestinians have examined the role of indirect contact experiences for support for normalization. Specifically, Mi'Ari (1999) showed that students with experiences of extended contact (i.e., whose fathers were workers and had frequent contact with Israeli workers) supported more strongly cultural normalization and expressed more readiness for interpersonal contact than those without such experiences. Going beyond this research, we examine the role of past direct contact experiences with Israelis. Though cross-group friendship is considered the most effective form of contact for improving intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), developing friendships is extremely rare in a context of chronic colonial segregation. Therefore, in addition to friendships, we considered contact at work and in medical care in Israeli hospitals and clinics, as in these settings positive interactions are plausible (Mi'Ari, 1999).

To summarize, in the present study we examine how Palestinians in the West Bank understand the concept of normalization, to what degree they support various forms of relations between Palestinians and Israelis, and whether different underlying dimensions of normalization policies and practices emerge in these representations. Moreover, responding to the call to "show how intergroup contact can serve as an instrument of power" (Durrheim & Dixon, 2018, p. 2), we examine the relationship between support for normalization and revolutionary resistance, and the role of previous contact experiences for endorsement of normalization vs. resistance. We hypothesized that support for normalization is negatively related to motivation for resistance, and that Palestinians previous experience of positive contact with Israelis is related to reduced motivation for resistance through increased support for normalization (see Figure 1).

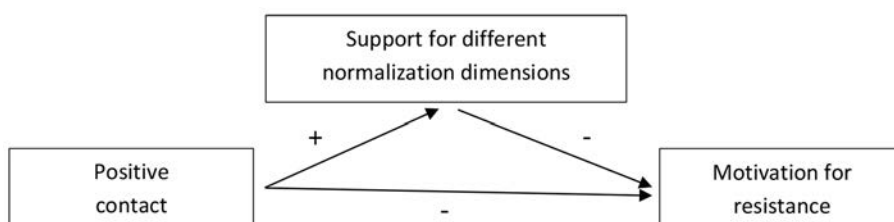


Figure 1. The hypothesized relationships between positive contact, support for different dimensions of normalization and motivation for resistance.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A cross-sectional survey was administered in 2016 among a sample of 159 Palestinian adults in the West Bank^V. The survey was part of the Pluralistic memories project (see <http://wp.unil.ch/pmp/>). Respondents were recruited by a local research institution using randomized network-sampling (see Gile & Handcock, 2010; Mouw & Verdery, 2012). First, 24 seed respondents were selected through convenience sampling, and asked to mention their network members. Three persons were randomly selected from each network to participate in the survey. The procedure was repeated in three further iterations, where only one person was randomly selected among each respondent's network. While this procedure does not result in a representative sample of the population, it allows for a more diversified sample than convenience or non-systematic snowball sampling. Data was collected in cities, villages and camps (29%, 44%, 27%, respectively) in three Palestinian regions (i.e., governorates) from the north, central and south of West Bank (33%, 33%, 34%, respectively). The questionnaire was administered in Arabic in face-to-face interviews. The sample consisted of 59 female and 100 male respondents ($M_{\text{age}} = 42$ years, $SD = 12.06$, 77% were married). Respondents rated their economic class: 4% of respondents described themselves as poor or somewhat poor, 76% as belonging to the middle class, 17% to upper middle class and 3% as rich. Regarding the level of education, 50% of respondents had a university degree, 26% had finished secondary school, 21% finished primary school and 3% had no formal education.

Measures

To examine how Palestinians understand *normalization*, the respondents were asked to describe normalization in an open-ended question: “*how would you describe and define the notion of normalization?*”

To assess *Motivation for revolutionary resistance*, the respondents indicated their agreement with the statement “*I do not have the motivation or the desire to engage in revolutionary resistance*” (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 6 = *Strongly agree*, the item was reverse coded; see Table 1).

Predictor and Mediators

To assess previous experience of *positive intergroup contact*, respondents were asked how often, on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*), they had experienced three types of relations with Israelis: friendship, and contact in work settings and in the context of medical care. The mean score computed across the three items indicated that contact was rare (see Table 1).

To assess respondents' support for various forms of intergroup relations with Israelis, sometimes labeled as normalization in the Palestinian public sphere, we developed a 15-item scale (see Table 2). In addition to adapting items that Mi'Ari developed to assess cultural normalization (Mi'Ari, 1999) and social distance (Mi'Ari, 1997, 1998), we included items tapping other forms of normalizing relations, such as those related to institutional, political, economic, security and health spheres. These items were developed by reviewing local discourses on normalization in scientific and political writings. We asked the respondents: “*to what degree do you support these forms of relationship?*”, with a response scale ranging from responses from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*). The construction of these mediating variables is reported in the Results section.

Table 1

Means (Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations Between Intergroup Contact, Support for Normalization and Resistance)

Intergroup relations	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Positive contact	1.49	.70	.670	-					
2. Motivation for resistance	3.15	1.45	-	-.190*	-				
3. Civilian policies	3.62	.99	.776	.143	-.211*	-			
4. Diplomatic coordination	3.63	1.12	.665	.056	-.031	.411**	-		
5. Cultural cooperation	2.48	.95	-	.124	-.244**	.447**	.242**	-	
6. Interpersonal relations	2.25	.91	.797	.215**	-.223**	.496**	.187*	.503**	-
7. Security coordination	2.09	1.15	-	.319**	-.363**	.165*	.130	.435**	.320**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

15-Item Scale of Forms of Intergroup Relations

1.	The participation of Palestinian politicians in local or/and international conferences in which the Israelis participated separately (adapted from Mi'Ari, 1999).
2.	The attendance of joint delegations of Israeli and Palestinian politicians in local and/or international conferences.
3.	Official civil coordination between Palestinian and Israeli politicians in order to issue ID cards/Visas/Travel documents/permits for Palestinians to visit prisons or tourist attractions or religious localities inside Israel.
4.	Israeli-Palestinian security coordination for Palestinians' security forces to help abort (stop) acts of resistance.
5.	Joint academic research between Palestinians and Israeli scholars.
6.	Palestinian students from the 1967 territories study in Israeli universities (Mi'Ari, 1999).
7.	Israeli Jewish students study in Palestinian universities (Mi'Ari, 1999).
8.	Joint youth social and art organizations and clubs between Israelis and Palestinians such as Seeds of Peace Foundation. Adapted and developed from (Mi'Ari, 1999).
9.	Economic projects and trade between Israelis and Palestinians, coordination with Israel for economic aims, including: continued supply of electricity, water, gas and fuel to the Palestinians.
10.	The establishment of agreements allowing Palestinian workers an easy access to employment in Israeli markets.
11.	Treatment of Palestinian patients in Israeli hospitals, especially when no other alternative is available in Palestinian health care system.
12.	Having Israeli friends (Mi'Ari, 1998).
13.	Having Israeli friends who are anti-Zionist.
14.	Working with Israeli colleagues in the same office (Mi'Ari, 1998).
15.	Getting married to an Israeli Jewish person (Mi'Ari, 1998).

Note. Scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) in supporting these relations.

Results

We performed our analysis in three steps. In the first step, we examined how respondents define the concept of normalization, by conducting a content analysis of the descriptions provided by participants in the open-ended survey question. In the next step, we examined respondents' support for 15 types of intergroup relations that have frequently been labelled as normalization in the Palestinian public sphere. The aim of these analyses was to get a complete picture of the respondents' understanding of the concept of normalization, from their spontaneous definitions to their support for concrete intergroup relationships considered as normalization. Finally, we examined the relationship between support for normalization and resistance, and the role of the past positive contact. We hypothesized that respondents perceive normalization and resistance as antagonistic, and that positive contact is related to reduced support for resistance through enhanced support for normalization.

How Do Palestinians Define Normalization?

To assess the respondents' understanding of the concept of normalization, we performed a thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of their responses to the open-ended question "*How do you describe and define the notion of normalization?*". Two criteria guided our analysis. First, we examined whether respondents indicate a valence for their definition of normalization. We coded the answers in three a priori categories: positive, neutral or negative descriptions. Second, we examined the kind of intergroup relations perceived as normalization. All responses that specified a concrete intergroup relation were coded in one a priori category "intergroup relations".

The analysis involved three steps. First, the first author coded all survey responses in Arabic according to their valence (in one of the three a priori categories) and whether they mention concrete intergroup relations (in one a priori category). Next, she grouped the responses in each category in broader thematic arguments. Finally, the frequency of the responses for each category was computed. The results of the thematic analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Of the 159 participants responding to the open question, 14 (9%) said they did not know what normalization meant. The first step of the content analysis regarding valence of normalization showed that Palestinians have different views towards normalization. Seventy-three respondents (46%) defined normalization in negative terms, as national betrayal and defeat, or as immoral relations with the occupier (see Table 3). Fifty-six respondents (35%) defined normalization in a neutral way, for example, involving the establishment of normal relations between the two sides, reciprocal relations between two countries and between Palestinians and Israelis, as well as coordination between the two sides for coexistence. Only 16 respondents (10%) represented normalization positively, for example that both Israelis and Palestinians benefit from the relationship, with positive economic consequences, or as a means to facilitate Palestinians' goals.

Using the second coding criteria, we found that 89 respondents (56% of all people who responded to the open question) referred to normalization in terms of intergroup relations. Among these 89 respondents, 43 respondents (48%) defined normalization broadly as relations between the two sides, without specifying concrete types of relationships (e.g., "normal relations", "mutual interactions", "relations with Israelis"). A further 23 respondents (26%) stated that *any* form of relationship with Israelis is normalization (e.g., "normalization is a relationship with Israelis in all fields"). Finally, only 23 respondents (26%) specified concrete types of relationships, mostly in economic relations, social relations and friendships, and security coordination (see Table 3).

Table 3

Content Analysis for the Definition of Normalization (N = 159 Respondents)

1. Valence of normalization (N = 145; 91%)	
1.1. Negative normalization (N = 73; 46%)	
Sub-themes	
1.1.1. <i>Empowering the colonizer</i> (N = 38)	
e.g., "acceptance of Israelis and the occupation", "helping the occupier reach their goals", Israelis' forcing Palestinians to make relations with them", "making normal relations with the occupier under colonization"	
1.1.2. <i>Assimilation and loss of identity</i> (N = 15)	
e.g., "makes Palestinians take over Israeli thoughts and culture", "changing thoughts to forget Palestine"	
1.1.3. <i>Defeat</i> (N = 6)	
e.g., "Palestinian concession and loss of rights"	
1.1.4. <i>National betrayal</i> (N = 4)	
e.g., "national betrayal"	
1.1.5. <i>Demobilizing resistance</i> (N = 3)	
e.g., "breaking down resistance, bow and surrender"	
1.2. Positive normalization (N = 16; 10%)	
e.g., "relations beneficial for both Israelis and Palestinians", "positive economic consequences"	
1.3. Neutral normalization (N = 56; 35%)	
e.g., "establishment of normal relations between the two sides", "coexistence"	
2. Normalization as relationships (N = 89; 56%)	
Sub-themes	
2.1. <i>Normalization as relations without specification.</i> (N = 43)	
e.g., "comprehensive relations", "normal relations", "mutual interactions", "joint relations for Israelis' interests", "positive mutual relations", "constructive relations with Israelis", "convergence with the Jews through relationships", "immoral relations with Israelis", "mutual relations for both sides' interests", "relations for the needs of Palestinians".	
2.2. <i>All relations with Israelis as normalization</i> (N = 23)	
e.g., "normalization is a relationship with Israelis in all fields" "any relationship with Israelis is normalization".	
2.3. <i>Specific behaviors and relations as normalization</i> (N = 23)	
Type of normalization	Frequencies (number of respondents)
Economic and trading relations	13 (9 reported economic relations and 4 trading)
Social relations and friendships	8 (7 reported social relations, 1 friendships)
Security coordination	4
Cultural relations	3
Political relations	3
Governmental agreements and coordination	2
Peace activities	2
Work relations	1
Artistic and Vocational relations	1
Health care relations	1
Educational and scientific relations	1
Civil coordination	1
Youth relations	1
Tourism relations	1

Note. Don't know (N = 14; 9%).

Overall, these findings suggest that the respondents perceive normalization in normative terms, with almost half of respondents perceiving it negatively, as national betrayal and immoral relations. Yet only a minority of respondents indicated concrete relationships constituting normalization.

Support for Different Types of Intergroup Relations

In the next step, we examined respondents' support for 15 types of intergroup relations frequently labeled as normalization in the Palestinian public sphere. An exploratory factor analysis EFA yielded a multi-dimensional representation of normalization (KMO = .766). Four factors (Eigenvalue > 1) explained 32.9%, 13.1%, 8.4% and 7.8% of the variance respectively (see Table 4). We opted for an EFA, instead of a confirmatory factor analysis CFA, as the exploration of the phenomenon of normalization—theoretically and empirically—is the very subject to the current study.

Table 4

Factor Loadings Based on Principal Component Analysis With Matrix Rotation for Normalization Scale

Intergroup relations	Factor 1 Interpersonal relations	Factor 2 Civilian policies	Factor 3 Diplomatic coordination	Factor 4 Cultural and security coordination
Married to an Israeli Jewish	.787			
Israeli colleagues	.744			
Israeli friends	.658			
Anti- Zionist Israeli friends	.688			
Israeli Jewish students in Palestinian universities	.575	.410		
Agreements for easy access to Israeli labour market		.782		
Palestinian patients in Israeli hospitals		.731		
Palestinian students in the Israeli universities		.668		
Joint academic research	.485	.614		
Economic projects, and trade		.544		.566
Palestinian politicians in conferences			.823	
Joint delegations in conferences			.764	
Official civil coordination		.313	.655	
Joint youth social and art organizations	.361			.806
Israeli-Palestinian-security coordination				.741

Note. $N = 159$. Loadings > .30 are reported in the table. Loadings in bold are included in indicators.

Factor 1 was labeled Interpersonal relations, as the five items loading on this factor captured respondents' support for various forms of close interpersonal relations. Surprisingly, it also included an item on contact at university (*"Israeli Jewish students study in the Palestinian universities."*). We suspect that the respondents may have interpreted this item as potential for close interpersonal social relations. The second factor was labelled Civilian policies with five items expressing the utilitarian relations that allow Palestinians to meet their basic daily life needs within the economic, health and educational spheres. The third factor, labelled Diplomatic coordination included three

items. As the three factors yielded good to moderate internal consistency, composite scores were calculated (see Table 1).

The final, fourth factor combined two different categories of normalization: security coordination and cultural normalization. These two forms of normalization relations are the most known and controversial in the Palestinian public sphere. They receive constant criticism by opponents of normalization, who warn of the dangers of normalization for both resistance and the youth's cultural awareness of the Palestinian cause^{vi}. In the analyses that follow, we kept these two forms separately due to their very different nature^{vii}. Endorsement of security coordination was addressed with the following item: (*"Israeli-Palestinian security coordination in order for the Palestinian security forces to help abort (stop) acts of resistance."*). Endorsement of cultural normalization, in turn, was tackled with the following item: (*"Joint youth social and art organizations and clubs between the Israelis and the Palestinians such as Seeds of Peace Foundation."*).

Next, we examined respondents' support for these five dimensions of normalization. The most supported forms of the five dimensions of normalization were Civilian policies and Diplomatic coordination, followed by Interpersonal contact and Cultural cooperation. Security coordination received the least support (see Table 1 for means). Paired-sample t-tests revealed differences in the endorsement of the five dimensions of normalization. Civilian policies ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .99$) received more support than Interpersonal relations ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .91$), $t(156) = 17.9$, $p < .001$, and Security coordination ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(152) = 13.52$, $p < .001$. Diplomatic coordination ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.12$) received more support than Interpersonal relations ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .91$), $t(156) = 13.29$, $p < .001$. No other differences in endorsement of normalization emerged.

Support for Normalization and Revolutionary Resistance: The Role of Intergroup Contact

Finally, we examined the relationships between support for different facets of normalization, revolutionary resistance, and positive contact. Table 1 reports correlations between the indicators. As predicted, normalization and resistance were largely perceived as antagonistic: we found a statistically significant negative correlation between motivation for resistance and all types of intergroup relations except support for Diplomatic coordination. As predicted, positive contact was negatively related to motivation to resistance. Only partially confirming our predictions, positive contact was linked positively to two facets of normalization only: support for interpersonal relations and security coordination.

In the next step, we examined whether the negative impact of past positive contact on motivation for resistance is mediated by the respondents' support for normalization, as shown on Figure 1. We used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4) (Hayes, 2013) to test the indirect path via support for normalization, employing the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples and examining 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Considering the small sample size, we have tested the potential mediating role of each normalization dimension in separate analyses. For each analysis, we controlled for age, gender and whether the respondents live in a refugee camp, as these may shape respondents' motivation for resistance (with young men from refugee camps being predominantly involved in acts of resistance in Palestine; Veronese, Castiglioni, Tombolani, & Said, 2012). We report the unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients in Table 5.

Table 5

Path Analysis Using Multiple Regression Analyses

Model / Outcome	Predictor	B	SE	Standardized coefficients	Indirect effect [95% CI]	R-square (N)
1						.08* (148)
Civilian policies	Positive contact	0.19	0.12	.13		
Motivation for resistance	Positive contact	-.31	.17	-.15		
	Civilian policies	-.29*	.12	-.21*	-.06 [-.15, .01]	
2						.02 (149)
Diplomatic coordination	Positive contact	.14	.13	.07		
Motivation for resistance	Positive contact	-.39*	.17	-.19*		
	Diplomatic coordination	-.03	.11	-.02	.00 [-.07, .05]	
3						.09* (146)
Cultural cooperation	Positive contact	.20	.14	.11		
Motivation for resistance	Positive contact	-.30	.17	-.15		
	Cultural cooperation	-.29*	.10	-.24*	-.06 [-.17, .03]	
4						.08* (148)
Interpersonal relations	Positive contact	.24*	.11	.19*		
Motivation for resistance	Positive contact	-.29	.17	-.14		
	Interpersonal relations	-.33*	.13	-.21*	-.08* [-.18, -.002]	
5						.15* (148)
Security coordination	Positive contact	.50*	.13	.30*		
Motivation for resistance	Positive contact	-.18	.17	-.09		
	Security coordination	-.43*	.10	-.35*	-.22* [-.40, -.08]	

Note. Non-standardized regression coefficients (standard errors), standardized regression coefficients, indirect effects (95% confidence intervals, CI), and R-square (sample size). All models control for age, gender, living in a camp.

* $p < .05$.

We found significant indirect effects for two facets of normalisation (as the correlation analysis above suggested): support for interpersonal social relations, Indirect effect (IE) = $-.08$, Confidence intervals 95% CI [$-.18, -.002$], $p < .05$, and security coordination, Indirect effect (IE) = $-.22$, 95% CI [$-.40, -.08$], $p < .05$. As hypothesized, past contact increased support for these normalization dimensions, consequently reducing motivation for resistance.

Overall, our findings suggest that resistance and normalization are seen as antagonistic means for societal change, and that positive contact with Israelis shapes preferences for these means: it was related to increased support for normalization, and thereby to decreased motivation for revolutionary resistance. However, we found this pattern only for two dimensions of normalization: support for interpersonal social relations and security coordination, the most controversial and rejected forms of relations within the Palestinian society. Past contact was not significantly related to other normalization dimensions.

Discussion

In this study, we investigated how Palestinians understand normalization, currently among the most contentious and intensely debated political issues in the Palestinian public sphere. First, the analysis of an open-ended

question revealed a multifaceted representation of normalization among our Palestinian sample. This representation has a normative dimension, as almost half of the respondents perceive normalization as a negative phenomenon, describing it as national betrayal and collaboration with the colonizer. This suggests that for many Palestinians, normalization is a term used to delegitimize and condemn different forms of intergroup relations and their proponents. However, our results further show that there is no consensus about which types of intergroup relations are seen as normalization. We made an original contribution to the debate on normalization by developing a scale to assess support for various types of intergroup relations, including a set of policies administered by the PA. We found the lowest support for interpersonal relations with Israelis and security coordination by the PA, and highest support for diplomatic coordination and civilian policies. Overall, normalization was not perceived as a "one-facet policy", nor did it refer to a general understanding of intergroup relations. Instead, the concept of normalization in the West Bank is complex, reflecting the reality of settler colonialism and the necessity to meet everyday needs in such a context. In particular, our study shows that intergroup relations, that potentially improve living conditions and/or are seen as a necessity (e.g., relations in economic or health sphere), are perceived more positively than others.

Second, while normalization is a multi-faceted concept, it is perceived as antagonistic to revolutionary resistance. For all dimensions of normalization, except for diplomatic coordination, we found a negative relationship with support for revolutionary resistance. In line with the anti-normalization discourse, the greater the support for normalization the lower the support for revolutionary resistance. Indeed, as our content analysis showed, opponents tend to perceive normalization as demobilizing the collective struggle for liberation and playing into the hands of the colonizer. This finding resonates with social psychological literature on demobilizing consequences of fostering mutual acceptance and reducing animosities among disadvantaged groups (e.g., Reicher, 2007).

Finally, our results show how positive contact with Israelis shapes individuals' support for normalization and revolutionary resistance. In line with the literature on "ironic", "sedative", "paradoxical" or "Reicher" effects of positive contact (e.g., Saguy et al., 2009; Cakal et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2012; Pettigrew, 2010), we found that respondents who had positive contact with Israelis are less motivated to engage in revolutionary resistance. Our findings are, thus, consistent with prior research from the post-apartheid era in South Africa, where "among Black South Africans, more contact was associated with less collective action and less support for policies benefiting the in group directly" (Cakal et al., 2011, p. 620). Our results further show that even in a deeply segregated society—with segregation policies between Palestinians in 1967 territories and Israelis, akin to apartheid policies—some Palestinians have positive contact with Israelis, and that this experience relates to decreased support for revolutionary resistance.

As a novelty to the previous studies, our results show that the impact of positive intergroup contact depends on how people understand different forms of intergroup relations. The sedative effect of contact was mediated by the respondents' support for two types of normalizing intergroup relations: interpersonal relations and security coordination. Put otherwise, we did not find a significant indirect effect for all types of intergroup relations and policies, but only for the two least accepted forms of normalization: interpersonal social relations with the occupier and security policies that prevent revolutionary resistance. These findings indicate that the sedative effect of intergroup contact depends on the perceived normativity of specific forms of intergroup relations. In particular, they suggest that intergroup contact produces sedative effects only to the extent that it involves interactions beyond what is seen as "normal", necessary or inevitable. Future studies should further examine the role of perceived norms in explaining sedative effects of intergroup contact.

Overall, our findings have important implications for social psychological theorizing on social change. Going beyond the focus on individual attitudes and prejudice towards outgroup members, we examined support for a variety of policies that regulate intergroup relations, largely defined and imposed by the powerful side as part of the “peace process”. These policies are justified by the discourse of normalization and reconciliation as procedures that should end occupation and create an independent Palestinian state. Across disciplines of social sciences, reconciliation is frequently defined in normative terms, as a crucial aspect of peacebuilding and as a process that is beneficial for both sides (see Bar-Tal, 2000). Our findings indicate the importance of a contextualized approach to reconciliation, that takes into account the power dynamics: indeed, without structural change, reconciliation can also be a device to preserve exploitation and protect the exploiters (see Opatow, 2001).

The power struggle and mobilization *within* the disadvantaged group are frequently overlooked in social psychology. Our Palestinian sample was divided between the supporters of normalization, promoted by the PA as a mean of peacebuilding towards the establishment of the independent state, and its opponents, who perceive normalization (and the PA’s role in it) as perpetuating the status quo and demobilizing collective devotion to revolutionary resistance. Accordingly, we found an antagonistic relationship between support for normalization and revolutionary resistance: those who support normalization are less motivated to participate in revolutionary resistance. Demobilization of disadvantaged groups is frequently explained in psychological terms (see Durrheim & Dixon, 2018, for a review). However, this antagonistic relationship is not just rooted in psychologically processes, but also shaped by a political construction of the meaning of normalization and resistance. That supporters of revolutionary resistance against colonialism perceive normalization as perpetuating the status quo is at least partly a result of an active mobilization by anti-normalization advocates and organizations (e.g., the BDS movement, <https://bdsmovement.net>), which gained prominence with the obvious failure of the “peace process” and the ongoing suffering of Palestinians. As our results show, what constitutes normalization, which types of intergroup relations are condemned and which not, is far from consensual. Moreover, in the Palestinian public sphere, the boundaries between normalization and revolutionary resistance are not always clear, but actively debated and contested. For instance, the Palestinian-Israeli joint struggle towards a two-state solution is considered as revolutionary resistance by some political actors, while it is considered as normalization by others.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the contributions of the current research, some shortcomings need to be noted. First, the default limit of cross-sectional studies is the impossibility to draw firm causal conclusions regarding sedative effects. Insofar as we tested models, which have been empirically established in multiple contexts in prior research, we feel this limit does not call into question the conclusions of the current research. Moreover, the first explorative part of our research focusing on the definition of normalization is an innovative contribution in its own right. Second, the sample size was small and unrepresentative. To guarantee more political and social diversity in the representations of normalization, in future research, we aim to examine the relations between contact and normalization with a representative sample of West Bank Palestinians. Third, we measured support for revolutionary resistance with one item comprising all means to dismantle the settler colonial structure and its enforcers (including the PA). Our findings may have differed had we measured support for specific means of resistance (e.g., peaceful resistance or joint Israeli-Palestinian resistance) or towards a specific goal (i.e., the two-state solution). Indeed, the proponents of normalization and the peace process – in particular, the PA – regularly call for or show support for peaceful acts of resistance (e.g., demonstrations) that target Israeli policies seen as an obstacle towards the two-state solution. Future studies should further explore support for various means and goals of resistance, and their link

to support for normalization. However, our results show that, despite this complexity, Palestinians have come to see normalization as antagonistic to revolutionary resistance.

The current study was among the first to investigate in the West Bank consequences of previous experiences of direct positive contact with Israelis. Future research should assess the quantity and quality of previous contact in a broader range of contexts; for example, in the markets, social media, checkpoints and prison (e.g., [Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011](#)). Crucially, the unsuccessful peace process, the transformation from the peace to the conflict ethos and the colonial setting pose challenges to the adaptation of concepts and measures from prior social psychological theorizing of intergroup contact and intergroup relations. The necessary conceptual developments open fruitful avenues for future research that account for the stance of the Palestinian people, the principle sufferers in the current situation. Finally, our findings also have important implications for research on the sedative effect of positive intergroup contact in societies with entrenched group inequalities: they call for more research on people's understanding of different forms of intergroup relations, and in particular on the perceived normativity of intergroup contact, as an important contextual moderator insufficiently considered to date.

Notes

i) PLO was established in 1964 as "a leadership mobilized for the forces of the Palestinian Arab people to fight the liberation battle and as a shield for the rights, aspirations and way of victory of the people of Palestine" (the first item of the Declaration of the First Palestinian Arab Conference). PLO's right to self-determination (Palestinian National Charter Article 26) "...was recognized by Arabs, regionally and internationally as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" ([Ishtayeh, 2008](#), p. 586).

ii) Palestinian Authority "...is the Palestinian self-rule authority, which the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed to establish" ([Ishtayeh, 2008](#), p. 336).

iii) In general, PA supports normalization, but this support varies as a function of the political situation regarding the relationship with Israelis.

iv) The term "intermediate party" refers to PA's mediator role in civil, security, health and political spheres between Palestinian people and Israeli government. The Oslo Accords transferred power from the Israeli military rule (of the West Bank and Gaza Strip) to the elected PA leadership, in preparation for a comprehensive peace in accordance with UN Resolutions 242, 338, ([Ishtayeh, 2008](#), p. 338). Though after a quarter of a century peace has not been achieved, the PA continues in this role.

v) In total, 330 respondents were interviewed, but normalization and contact measures used in this study were administered only to half of the sample.

vi) Examples from the social media debates and attempts to stop these forms, in Arabic: ([Alray, 2014](#); [Quds Press International News Agency, 2017](#); [Safa Palestinian Press Agency, 2017](#)).

vii) We performed the main (regression) analyses also with the two forms kept in a single factor, and found the same pattern of results as for security coordination only, thus further corroborating our decision to separate the two indicators.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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