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**Ethos of Conflict as the Prism to Evaluate the Northern Irish and the Israeli-Palestinian
Conflicts by the Involved Societies: A Comparative Analysis**

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Abstract

The present study compared participants' evaluations of their own conflict with their evaluation of another conflict. These evaluations were examined through the prism of the ideological ethos of conflict (EOC), which was seen as the major contributing factor in the development of the biased perceptions, divergent understandings, and emotional responses previously observed among groups in conflict. The participants in the study were students: Protestants and Catholics from Northern Ireland, Jews and Palestinians from Israel, and an additional group of Swiss students. They were presented with four scenarios: Two scenarios presented separately the views of Catholics and Protestants about the conflict in Northern Ireland and two presented the views of Jews and Palestinians about the conflict in the Middle East. They were followed by a questionnaire that assessed emotional responses, attributions, and conflict assessment. Participants demonstrated greater bias when evaluating their own conflicts than the other one, as a function of their level of adherence to the ethos of their conflict. The results showed consistently, and without exception, that individual's ratings of their own conflict were significantly associated with their level of EOC's acceptance as an ideology, but responses to another conflict were not. They imply that the EOC serves as a lens that is used to judge one's own conflict in a biased way.

Keywords: Intergroup conflict; ethos of conflict; ideology; perception bias.

Public Significance Statement

Previous research has shown the vast majority of members of societies immersed in intractable conflicts develop conflict-related societal beliefs (i.e., ethos of conflict), which then serve as a prism through which they interpret the conflict reality. The current research shows that adherence to the ethos of conflict biases perceptions only of own conflict, but not of other conflicts, indicating that it is context-specific belief rather than a general worldview.

Introduction

Intractable conflicts are violent, long lasting and initiated by human beings. Living in this context has determinative durable effects on the wellbeing of the individual society members and of the society as a whole. These types of conflicts, which involve society members and occupy a central position in public discussion and public agenda supply information and experiences that force society members to construct a functional socio-psychological repertoire of narratives. These narratives are based on the themes of the ethos of conflict (EOC) that are developed by societies engaged in intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013; Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Halperin, & Zafran, 2012). They enable society members to cope with the challenges of the bloody and lasting conflict. But it is well documented that members of the groups involved in intractable conflict who hold an ethos of conflict, evaluate events, information, and experiences of the conflict in a selective, biased and distorting way (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). Such a view becomes one of the major sources of the continuation and escalation of intractable conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2013; Kelman, 2007; Kriesberg, 2007).

The present study has two main goals. Firstly, it aims to empirically examine if the intergroup biases, found among societies members when they judge and evaluate issues related to their own conflict, are also observed when the same society members judge and evaluate other conflicts, in which they are not involved. Secondly, it aims to explore the impact of holding the ethos of conflict on the view of own conflict and whether the ethos of conflict moderates the perception of conflicts in other societies.

Ethos of conflict (EOC) is defined as the configuration of shared central themes (societal beliefs) that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society at present and for the future in the contexts of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013). This major narrative is composed of the

following eight major themes about issues related to the conflict, the ingroup, and its adversary: (1) The theme *about the justness of one's own goals*, which outlines the contested goals, indicates their crucial importance, and provides their explanations and rationales; (2) The theme *about security* stresses the importance of personal safety and national survival, and outlines the conditions for their achievement; (3) The theme describing *positive collective self-image* attributing positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society; (4) The theme focusing on *victimization* presenting ingroup as the sole victim of the conflict; (5) The theme *of delegitimizing the opponent* that denies the adversary's humanity; (6) The theme *of patriotism* that generates attachment to the country and society, by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice; (7) The theme *of unity* that refers to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflicts to unite the society's forces in the face of an external threat; finally, (8) The theme *of peace* that refers to peace as the ultimate desire of the society.¹

The ethos of conflict themes do not refer to specific issues or topics that are raised in particular situations, but constitute a general ideological system that serves as a general prism to evaluate and judge events, experiences, leaders and other related issues to the conflict. In this respect, it is proposed that the ethos of conflict corresponds to the conception of ideology developed by Jost and his colleagues (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Ideology can be defined as an organized construct of beliefs, attitudes and values that provide a general worldview about a present and future reality, which creates a conceptual framework that allows human beings to organize and comprehend the world in which they live, and to act toward its preservation or

¹ The detection of the eight themes is based on extensive systematic studies in the Israeli Jewish society involved in intractable conflict (see Bar-Tal, 2013; Oren, 2019). In addition, these themes were found to be dominant in other societies engaged in intractable conflict such as among Serbs, Kosovars, Albanians, Croats, and Bosnians (MacDonald, 2002), among Hutus in Rwanda (Slocum-Bradley, 2008), and among Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Hadjipavlou, 2007; Papadakis, 1998, 2008).

alteration in accordance with this standpoint (Eagleton, 1991; Jost et al., 2009). It reflects a top-down cognitive process that provides meaning and order to the absorbed information coming from experiences and external sources (Nosek, Graham, & Hawkins, 2010). It also strengthens unity, perceived interdependence and solidarity as it creates a shared view of the conflict reality following common experiences including common socialization.

As ideology, the ethos of conflict provides a very simplistic and one-sided picture that serves as a prism for viewing the conflict reality and processing information about the conflict (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011). Research in Israel (Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv & Dgani-Hirsh, 2009) demonstrates the functioning of an ethos of conflict. The study found that when Israelis were shown ambiguous pictures of encounters between Jews and Palestinians, the more they adhered to the ethos of conflict, the more they perceived Palestinians as violent, attributed Palestinian aggressiveness to internal and stable causes, and engaged in positive stereotyping of Jews and negative stereotyping of Palestinians. This tendency has been found in different societies involved in intractable conflict such as Northern Ireland (Hunter, Stringer, & Watson, 1991), Cyprus (Hadjipavlou, 2007), Rwanda (Melvern, 2006), Chechnya (Wood, 2007) and so on. In general, these findings indicate that the described conceptual framework is found in every intractable conflict regardless of its nature: it can be religion driven, or ideology driven or ethnicity driven or nationality driven (see Bar-Tal, 2013)

Moreover, the adherence to the narrative told by the ethos of conflict is driven by what Ross and Ward (1996) define as *Naïve Realism*: the conviction that one's own views are objective and unbiased, while the other's views are biased by ideology, self-interest and irrationality. This conviction prevents serious consideration of the other's supposedly biased views and leads to the formation and maintenance of a one-sided perspective. In turn, this perspective deepens

misperceptions, misunderstandings, and disagreements and thus leads to increased antagonism, animosity and hatred, and then to violence between the groups' members. Thus, it is not surprising that when the opportunity to settle a conflict appears, this narrative of an ethos, which is acquired by many society members, becomes a barrier to peaceful conflict resolution because it underlies the disagreements and magnifies them (Bar-Tal, Oren & Nets-Zehngut, 2014).

In intractable conflicts, the perceptual, cognitive and emotional system is influenced by the context, and growing up with intractable conflict is viewed as an imprinting experience that carries powerful weight on the way individuals make perceptions, impressions, interpretations, evaluations, and judgments within their society (Bar-Tal, Diamond, & Nasie, 2017). Thus, we argue that experiences of conflict may have differential impact on the perception of groups in conflict (see Nasie, Reifen Tagar, & Bar-Tal, 2020). Specifically, we hypothesize that while most of individuals are unable to evaluate and judge the conflict in which they are involved personally (a conflict of their society) without being biased and favoring their ingroup, they are able, in many cases, to carry out a relatively unbiased appraisal of a conflict and its participants in which they are not part (not their conflict).

In the absence of previous research, we hypothesize that biases in favoring one side, the ingroup, in the conflict, over the rival group in evaluating events involving (proximal) conflict (one in which a person is a participant) are greater than responses to non-involving (distal) conflict (one in which a person is an observer). Also, we argue that those with higher (vs. lower) adherence to an ethos of conflict would show greater bias favoring their ingroup when assessing events that took place as part of the conflict they are involved in. At the same time, we hypothesize that the ethos of conflict would be insignificant when assessing events that took place as part of another conflict, in which the participants are not part of it. In the current study, we aim to explore how

students who have grown up in Northern Ireland (Protestants and Catholics), Israel (Jews and Palestinians) and Switzerland (a group uninvolved in either of the conflicts) view contrasting scenarios associated with conflicts in both Northern Ireland and Israel.

Interpreting conflict: External perspectives

Given the body of research on the misperceptions and biases associated with international conflict (e.g., Jervis, 1988), intractable conflict (e.g., Eshel & Moran, 2002) and intergroup conflict (e.g., Hastorf & Cantril, 1954), it is surprising to note that there has been very little comparative research that examines whether and how involvement in one conflict impacts views of other conflicts, as a result of an ideological orientation. Small scale studies by Moore and Heskin (1983) and Moore and Tyson (1990) tested hypotheses drawn from balance theory (Heider, 1958) to predict differential support for groups in conflict in the Middle East, Northern Ireland and South Africa by students living in these conflict zones and peers from Australia and America respectively. These studies, which employed open-ended questionnaires, did not directly compare ratings of groups in the proximal (involving) and distal (non-involving) conflict, but compared responses to the distal conflict with a control group's ratings of these conflicts. Moore and Heskin (1983) found an overall tendency to support minority groups in the Middle East and Northern Ireland as well as a 'mutual positive sentiment' between Israeli Arab and Catholic Irish groups. In contrast, almost none of the Jewish respondents chose to favor either side in the Northern Ireland conflict.

Identification of the hostile media effect (Vallone, Ross & Lepper, 1985) stimulated research on the views of partisan populations living outside a conflict zone and their nominally neutral peers. Vallone et al. (1985) observed that both pro-Israeli and pro-Arab American university students rated television accounts of the 1982 massacre in the refugee camps at Sabra

and Shatila in Lebanon as biased against their side. Their unaffiliated American peers, who had some knowledge of the conflict, held views of media bias midway between the views of the two partisan groups. Crabb (1989) also used media accounts of aggressive incidents associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to explore the perception of a distal conflict by American partisan and uninvolved observers. He found that there was no difference in neutral observers' ratings of the justification of fictional aggressive actions performed by Israelis and Palestinians, but a Jewish rating group rated Israeli aggression as more justified than Palestinian aggression, and this pattern was mirrored by the Arab rating group. Although the neutral observers in Crabb's study did not show any obvious biases in their response to violent conflict, Vandello, Goldschmied and Richards (2007) point to a quite widespread propensity for uninvolved observers of intergroup conflict to be biased in favor of the less powerful group or the underdogs. Further research (e.g., Kamans, van Zomeren, Gordijn & Postmes, 2014; Vandello, Michniewicz & Goldschmied, 2011) noted that an underdog group's perceived moral advantages are undermined, when the group's use of violence is not viewed as justifiable by the uninvolved observer.

Additional research (Cohrs, Uluğ, Stahel & Kishoglu, 2015; Kempf, 2011; Stahel & Cohrs, 2015) has focused on the social representations of conflict by outsiders rather than their interpretations and judgments of conflict. These studies report a range of shared societal beliefs about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Using the Q-methodological approach, Stahel and Cohrs (2015) found four distinct conflict representations among their informants. They noted that two of these representations reflect a partial spillover of the themes associated with those of Israeli Jewish and Palestinians central narratives represented by their ethos of conflict. In addition to identifying the Swiss respondents' spillover beliefs about the actual adversaries, Stahel and Cohrs (2015) identified two other distinct conflict

representations. One viewpoint, a ‘dovish’ pro-Israel view, emphasizes a negotiated two–state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The other is a conciliatory view, in which human rights principles are highly salient. Overall, the Swiss study lent partial support to Kempf’s (2011) findings in Germany and Austria, which also showed a spillover of conflict's ethos from conflict parties to conflict outsiders. It seems that there are circumstances when apparently uninvolved observers' judgments of conflict can be tempered by the spillover from a distal conflict. In any event, we expect that observers ,who are not directly involved in the conflict, will not exhibit a very emotional bias in their judgments but their interpretation may be influenced by potential spillover of the experience of one conflict on the interpretation of events in a distal conflict.

Conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Ireland

The long-standing conflicts between Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland and Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East have been frequently presented as typical intractable conflicts that last for a long period of time and involve violence. Both of these conflicts involve minority communities that differ from the majority in their religion and national aspirations and both have a history of broken peace initiatives proposed by outside nations. Currently, Northern Ireland is much further along the road to a peaceful resolution than Israel. Although armed conflict and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland has largely ended, a series of independent peace monitoring reports (Nolan, 2013, 2014; Wilson, 2016) have recorded that problems of social segregation and political mistrust remain and isolated incidents of sectarian and political violence still occur, as the two communities are largely divided symbolically, politically and to a large extent socially. Paramilitary groups associated with both the Protestant and Catholic communities have been officially disbanded, but have not disappeared (Wilson, 2016). Efforts to deal with the troubled

past continue, but political disagreements on the pathway to reconciliation highlight the fragility of peace in a society in transition (Anthony & Moffett, 2014).

In contrast, the Jewish-Palestinian conflict that lasts over 100 years old is still going on, in spite of a number of attempts to resolve it peacefully (Morris, 2001; Tessler, 2009). The Palestinian minority constitutes about 20% of the population of Israel. The great majority of this minority identifies with the aspirations and the goals of the Palestinian nation and is empathetic to the fate of the occupied Palestinians, who live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after they were conquered and occupied in the 1967 war (Ghanem, 2001; Reiter, 2009). This minority is subjected to institutional discrimination by the Jewish majority and feels alienated by the Jewish nature of the state. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as a major dividing factor between Jews and Palestinians in the state of Israel and is a source of mutual threats and distrust, especially in view of the fact that Jews have settled the area of the West Bank, with the intention to stay there. The continuation of the conflict thus greatly influences the relations between these two communities (Alon & Bar-Tal, 2017).

The historical and ongoing links between Palestinians and Irish Republicans, on the one hand, and between Protestant loyalists and Israeli Jews, on the other hand, are explored in the academic literature relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland (e.g., Arar, 2017; Hanley & Millar, 2009; Hill & White, 2008; Miller 2005). In addition, the links between local communities in the region and the conflict in Israel have been made visible with the flying of Palestinian flags in Catholic Republican neighborhoods and Israeli flags in the Protestant loyalist neighborhoods (Hill & White, 2008). In contrast, it is difficult to locate research evidence on how the Northern Ireland conflict is viewed officially or unofficially in Israel. Although the conflicts in Northern Ireland and in the Middle East regularly feature in the media in both of these countries there is little

evidence to establish the general public's level of knowledge about the external conflict or the attitudes of student groups to the events in these countries.

The current study: Design and predictions

In the present study, Catholic and Protestant students from Northern Ireland, Jewish and Palestinian students from Israel and a Swiss sample² of students were presented with a questionnaire, which included four scenarios. Two separate scenarios presented the views of Catholics and Protestants about the conflict in Northern Ireland and two separate scenarios presented the views of Jews and Palestinians about the conflict in the Middle East. In addition, participants were presented with three vignettes that pertained to each of the four groups (Catholic, Protestant, Palestinian and Israeli-Jews). One that referred to the core of conflict (essential story), another related to a symbolic act of each group that intensifies the conflict and the third described a violent act. Those are three different aspects that together provide the holistic picture of the conflict.

We hypothesized that two different types of variables would influence the ways individuals perceive their own conflict in comparison to their views of other conflicts. The first factor refers to personal involvement with the conflict. Ego involvement is a powerful variable that influences attitudes. Sherif and Cantril decades ago explained that ego-involving attitudes were, “attitudes that have been learned, largely as social values; that the individual identifies himself with, and makes a part of himself; and that have affective properties of varying degrees of intensity” (1947, pp. 126–127). The second and major determinant is the level of adherence to the ethos of conflict of one's own group, which represents a conflict supporting ideology (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). The

² Stahel and Cohrs (2015), noted that Switzerland was a particularly appropriate context for their research on socially shared conflict representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as, unlike other Western governments, its official policy towards both the Israeli and Palestinian sides is neutral.

ethos of conflict, as noted, serves as an epistemic system of description, explanation and justification to carry on the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013). Empirical studies have shown time after time that individuals who hold an ethos of conflict are ideologically oriented supporters of the conflict (e.g., Pliskin, Halperin, Bar-Tal, & Sheppes, 2018).

In our study the four groups (i.e., Catholics and Protestants from Northern Ireland, and Jews and Palestinians from Israel) are compared with the neutral Swiss group. The Swiss live in a peaceful society and are not directly involved with the two conflicts. Nevertheless, it is possible that its members were exposed to the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Israel via the media and therefore some of them could form an evaluation of the two conflicts. But we assume that they should not be as biased toward (preferring or rejecting) either of the sides in their perceptions of the protagonists in the scenarios as those directly involved in the conflict. In sum, our principal expectations for this study are: (a) Participants in the study will demonstrate greater ingroup favoring bias in response to the scenarios about their own conflicts than they will show in response to scenarios from another conflict; (b) the level of adherence to the ethos of conflict will have a greater impact on their responses to their own conflict, than to responses to other conflicts, which will be manifested in more ingroup favoring bias; and (c) conflict outsiders from a society that has not experienced conflict (i.e., Swiss participants) will be less biased toward any of the involved sides in judging a distal conflict than those from societies involved in conflict.

The participating students were asked questions based on the scenarios describing conflicts in the Northern Ireland and the Middle East. We focused on three types of responses to the conflict-related information: (1) *Emotional response* to assess the immediate “gut” reaction of the participants to the different scenarios. It was assumed that scenarios of own conflicts will be appraised as more meaningful to the individuals and will be shaped by the ethos of conflict as a

key determinative factor (see Halperin, 2016). (2) *Target group assessment* to assess the protagonist group of each of the different scenarios (see Sande, Goethals, Ferrari, & Worth, 1989); and (3) *Conflict assessment* to assess the general perceptions of each of the two conflicts that were presented: Northern Irish and the Middle Eastern (Kelman, 2007).

Method

Participants

The participants in the study, carried out during the year 2013, were 543 university students from three countries ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.29$, $SD = 4.66$): 278 Northern Irish students, 162 Catholic and 116 Protestant, were recruited from a range of disciplines within one university in Northern Ireland; 213 Israeli Jewish students, 117 Israeli-Jewish and 96 Palestinians citizens of Israel, were recruited from one Israeli university and one Arab college in Israel; and 52 Francophone Swiss students were sampled from a Swiss university (See Table 1 for *ns* and demographics for each group).

Table 1. Total participants per group and demographic information.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Demographics</i>
Catholics	$n = 162$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.09$; $SD = 3.11$; 60.5% women)
Protestants	$n = 116$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.25$; $SD = 4.62$; 63.8% women)
Swiss	$n = 52$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.19$; $SD = 6.56$; 86.5% women)
Israeli-Jewish	$n = 117$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 26.25$; $SD = 3.59$; 59.0% women)
Palestinians citizens of Israel	$n = 96$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 25.28$; $SD = 4.10$; 66.7% women)

Materials and Procedure

Following approval of the university ethical committee, local researchers in each university setting asked for student volunteers to complete the questionnaires after or before classes or seminars. The students were informed that the purpose of the study was to find out how young people think about and deal with social and political issues. Students were provided with a participant information sheet and were assured that their responses to the questionnaires would be anonymous. Students who agreed to participate in the study were asked to fill out the questionnaire individually at their desk or table. The administration of the questionnaire took place in a group of 10-15 students for the convenience of the researchers. Following the administration of the questionnaire, the groups were debriefed about the study.

The questionnaires were in English, Hebrew, Arabic and French. They were translated into each language and back again. These questionnaires were in four parts. Section one included questions on the participant's background and community identification. Sections two and three involved two Catholic-Protestant and two Palestinian and Israeli-Jews vignettes respectively with their associated responses. The ethos of conflict scale was included in section four. There were three versions of the questionnaires based on three types of scenarios agreed by the research teams in the Northern Ireland and in Israel (see online Appendix).

The questionnaires that included the four scenarios were randomly assigned to participants (Catholic, Protestant, Palestinian and Israeli-Jews), in one of the three themes: One third of the participants were exposed to scenarios that represent the *essence of the conflicts*, i.e., the very basic and fundamental disagreement between the two sides on a particular issue from the perspective of each group in the conflict (e.g., the disagreement over Jerusalem from the perspectives of the Israeli-Jewish and the Palestinian groups). The second third of the participants were exposed to

the scenarios that represent *symbolic activities*, i.e., provocative and strange acts by each of the group that most outside observers will find incomprehensible and unnecessary. A final third of the participants were exposed to the third scenarios representing *violent intergroup events*, i.e., specific violent and deadly acts that were carried out during the conflict by each of the involved groups. We developed versions for these three themes for each side of the conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. They were about 150 words long, and were pilot tested within each country and across the regions to establish the clarity of the content, and to balance its length and focus (see online Appendix for additional information).

The Northern Irish scenarios, reporting the Catholic and Protestant viewpoints, and the Middle Eastern scenarios, reporting the Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian viewpoints, were presented in sections two and three of the questionnaires. In Northern Ireland and in Switzerland the Northern Irish section was presented before the Middle East one. In Israel, the Northern Irish and Middle Eastern sections were presented in counterbalanced order. After each of the four scenarios, participants were asked to assess their emotional and cognitive responses to the scenario. After each of the two sections on the conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Ireland, participants were asked to respond to items comparing the sides in the conflict on a number of dimensions.

Dependent variables

Emotional response was measured with eight items assessing the extent to which (from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *to a great extent*; unless indicated otherwise, all items were measured using the same scale) participants felt different emotions (i.e., angry, proud, joyful, humiliated, threatened, upset, guilt, and shame) after reading each of the scenarios. We reversed scores to the scales relating to positive emotions (proud, joyful) before averaging the emotions to create a single score for emotional response to each of the four scenarios ($\alpha = .72 - .81$), such that the higher the score

the more negative participants felt. We then subtracted the emotional response score of each of the majority groups (i.e., Protestants and Israeli-Jewish) scenario from the scores of each of the minority group (i.e., Catholic and Palestinians) scenario to create a single score representing emotional response bias toward one of the sides in each of the conflicts. Thus, for each conflict, a positive score represent bias in favor of the majority group, while a negative score represent bias in favor of the minority group.

Target group assessment was measured with four items assessing the extent to which participants thought different adjectives represent the target group of each scenario (i.e., irrational, violent, good natured, and peace loving). We reversed the scores in response to the positive adjectives (good natured, and peace loving) and averaged these adjectives to create a single score for target group assessment to each of the four groups ($\alpha = .71 - .77$), such that the higher the score the more negative participants assessed the target group. Similar to the emotional response, we then created a difference score for each of the two conflicts, such that positive scores represented group assessment bias in favor of the majority group (i.e., Protestants and Israeli-Jewish), while negative scores represented bias in favor of the minority group (i.e., Catholic and Palestinians).

Conflict assessment was measured with nine items asking participants to compare the sides in each conflict (from $-3 = Catholics / Palestinians$ to $3 = Protestants / Israeli-Jewish$)³ on a series of issues for each of the two conflicts ($\alpha = .88 - .93$), i.e., which side contributes more to the continuation of the conflict? Is more just in his actions? Is more moral? Is more biased in its contention? Is considered as the victim? Is considered as the aggressor? Has suffered more? Is a victim that needs more protection? Has suffered trauma from the conflict that has been more

³ Recoded for the analysis from a scale ranging from 1 to 7.

severe?). These items were averaged in a similar way to the previous scales, such that a positive score indicated a bias toward the majority group (i.e., Protestants and Israeli-Jewish), while a negative score indicated bias toward the minority group (i.e., Catholic and Palestinians).⁴

Moderating variable

Ethos of conflict (EOC) was measured with a 16-item scale (Bar-Tal et al., 2012) that was developed in Israel to assess the extent to which (from 1 = *very strongly disagree* to 6 = *very strongly agree*) adherence to the ethos of conflict of each group in the conflict regions (Catholics, Protestants, Israeli-Jews, and Palestinian; α s = .64 - .88). The scale was translated and adapted to the Northern Irish conflict. Swiss participants did not complete this scale because it is irrelevant to society members who are not involved in a bloody conflict. The scale's 16 items comprise each of the eight ethos themes, with one item that is consistent with the theme, and a second item that is contradictory, and was reverse coded. Following recoding reverse items, the mean of all sixteen items was computed to create a scale variable where higher values equate to a stronger adherence to EOC (examples of two EOC items for Jews are: "During the 100 years of Arab-Israeli conflict, Jews were usually victims of Arab aggression"; and "Jews have just as many negative characteristics as Arabs").

Results

Preliminary analysis.

Table 2 reports means for the study's variables as a function of being part of a particular conflict or not. As can be seen in the table, as we hypothesized, participants tended to show more bias when they assessed their own conflict compared to when they assessed a distal one. To

⁴ Conflict assessment was measured with one additional item (i.e., Which side is perceived by the **international community** as just?) that was removed from the final scale, as factor analyses indicated it did not load to the same factor (see online appendix and Table S1).

examine our focal question regarding the differential effect of the ethos of conflict when groups assess their own (vs. others) conflict, we decided to simplify the statistical analysis and collapse across conditions.⁵ Thus, we first ran a series of one-way ANOVAs to examine whether the conditions had an effect on any of our dependent variables. We found that the condition had a significant effect on all DVs (all $ps < .007$, but one, i.e., target group assessment of the conflict in the Middle East, $p = .135$; see complete information in the online appendix), indicating, by and large, that the scenarios with the violent events led to less bias in favor of the majority group (i.e., Protestants and Jewish-Israelis) in both conflicts, compared to the essence of the conflict and symbolic activities conditions. Thus, we controlled for the condition throughout the statistical analysis by creating two dummy variables that reflect the comparisons between (1) the essence of the conflict and the violent intergroup events conditions; and (2) the essence of the conflict and symbolic activities conditions. See Table S2 for means, SDs, and bivariate correlations for all study variables.

⁵ Research shows that 4-way interactions are difficult for individuals—even if experienced—to process and understand (Halford, Baker, McCredden, & Bain, 2005).

Table 2. Means and SDs of all dependent variables divided by participants' groups.

	Emotional	Emotional	Target group	Target group	Conflict	Conflict
	response:	response:	assessment:	assessment:	assessment:	assessment:
	Northern Ireland	Middle East	Northern Ireland	Middle East	Northern Ireland	Middle East
Catholics	-1.06 (1.47) ^{a,*}	-.02 (.76) ^a	-1.53 (1.57) ^{a,*}	-.06 (1.24) ^a	-.73 (.77) ^{a,*}	-.09 (.82) ^a
Protestants	-.08 (1.25) ^b	.15 (.65) ^{a,*}	.24 (1.49) ^b	.22 (1.19) ^a	.16 (.74) ^{b,*}	.07 (.81) ^a
Swiss	-.18 (.62) ^{b,*}	-.19 (.63) ^{a,*}	-.39 (.98) ^{c,*}	-.21 (1.20) ^a	-.26 (.66) ^{c,*}	-.49 (.99) ^{b,*}
Jewish-Israelis	-.02 (.62) ^b	.88 (1.23) ^{b,*}	-.23 (1.01) ^{c,*}	1.28 (1.77) ^{b,*}	-.22 (.61) ^{c,*}	.35 (1.00) ^{c,*}
Palestinians	-.22 (.84) ^{b,*}	-1.22 (1.51) ^{c,*}	-.96 (2.07) ^{d,*}	-2.86 (1.98) ^{c,*}	-.58 (1.35) ^{a,*}	-2.05 (.93) ^{d,*}

Note: SDs are in parentheses. Means not sharing the same superscript within each dependent variable are significantly different from each other. * indicates that the mean is significantly different than 0, indicating positive bias toward the majority group (i.e., Protestants and Jewish-Israelis) if positive, or toward the minority group (i.e., Catholics and Palestinians) if negative.

Main analysis.

To test the effect of the participants' EOC moderated by their group on the three DVs (i.e., emotional response, target group assessment, and conflict assessment) across the two conflicts, we used a mixed-linear model (generated using the lmerTest R package; Kuznetsova, Brockhoff, & Christensen, 2017). The comparison between conflicts was treated as a within-subject variable (Northern Ireland and Middle East), participants' group as a between-subject variable (Protestants, Catholics, Israeli-Jews, and Palestinians), and EOC (centered at the mean) as a continuous between-subject variable. Below we provide the main results of the analysis, for complete information, see online appendix.⁶

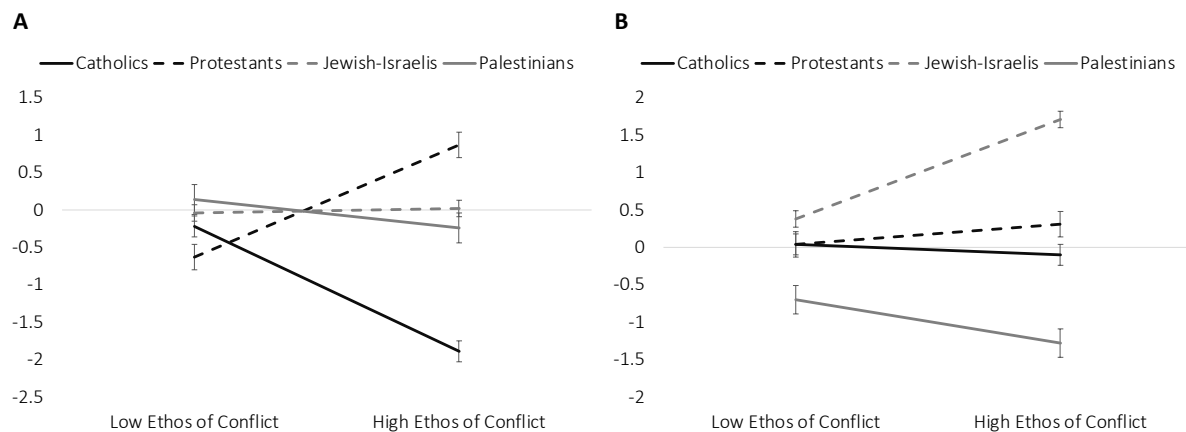
Emotional response.

⁶ The online appendix and Table S2 includes the available results for the Swiss participants who were not asked to complete the EOC scale. These results are referred to briefly where appropriate in the text.

The model (Conflict \times Group \times EOC) revealed a significant three-way interaction ($F(3, 452) = 20.03, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$; see Figure 1). The three-way interaction was examined using simple slope analysis for the two conflicts separately, examining the two-way interaction between participants' group and their EOC. Then, focusing on each group separately, we examined the extent to which EOC predicted bias in emotional response toward one of the groups within each conflict. First, when examining the conflict in Northern Ireland, we found a two-way interaction between participants' group and EOC ($F(3, 457) = 37.65, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$; see Figure 1A). Examining this interaction using simple slope analysis revealed that while for Catholics EOC predicted more ingroup favoring bias toward Catholics ($b = -1.23$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = $[-1.51, -.95]$, $SE = .14, t = -8.69, p < .001$), and for Protestants EOC predicted more ingroup favoring bias toward Protestants in the conflict ($b = 1.10$, 95% CI = $[.76, 1.44]$, $SE = .17, t = 6.36, p < .001$); it did not significantly predict bias for both Israeli-Jews and Palestinians ($b = .05$, 95% CI = $[-.17, .27]$, $SE = .11, t = .42, p = .675$, and $b = -.28$, 95% CI = $[-.67, .10]$, $SE = .20, t = -1.44, p = .150$, respectively). When we examined the conflict in the Middle East, we again found a two-way interaction between group and EOC ($F(3, 460) = 20.29, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$; see Figure 1B). Simple slopes analysis revealed a reversed pattern, such that while for both Catholics and Protestants EOC did not predict bias in emotional response ($b = -.10$, 95% CI = $[-.37, .17]$, $SE = .14, t = -.72, p = .469$, and $b = -.19$, 95% CI = $[-.15, .53]$, $SE = .17, t = 1.11, p = .267$, respectively); it did significantly predict ingroup favoring bias toward the Israeli-Jews among Israeli-Jews ($b = .97$, 95% CI = $[.76, 1.19]$, $SE = .11, t = 8.88, p < .001$), and more positive bias toward the Palestinian side among Palestinians ($b = -.42$, 95% CI = $[-.79, -.05]$, $SE = .19, t = -2.25, p = .025$). Finally, it should be noted that one-sample t -test indicated that Swiss participants

showed more bias in their emotional reaction favoring the minority group (i.e., Catholics and Palestinians) in both conflicts (both $ps < .045$). See Table S2.

Figure 1. The results of the three-way interaction between the assessed conflict, participants' group, and their EOC on emotional response, separated by the conflicts in Northern Ireland (A) and in the Middle East (B).



Note: Error bars represent SEs.

Target group assessment.

The model (Conflict \times Group \times EOC) revealed a significant three-way interaction ($F(3, 460) = 42.14, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$; see Figure 2). First, when examining the conflict in Northern Ireland, we found a two-way interaction between participants' group and EOC ($F(3, 456) = 33.56, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$; see Figure 2A). Examining this interaction using simple slope analysis revealed that while for Catholics EOC predicted more ingroup favoring bias toward Catholics ($b = -1.42$, 95% CI = [-1.80, -1.03], $SE = .19$, $t = -7.28$, $p < .001$), and for Protestants EOC predicted more ingroup favoring bias toward Protestants in the conflict ($b = 1.61$, 95% CI = [1.14, 2.08], $SE = .24$, $t = 6.79$, $p < .001$); it did not significantly predict bias for both Jewish-

Israelis and Palestinians ($b = .17$, 95% CI = $[-.13, .48]$, $SE = .16$, $t = 1.12$, $p = .262$, and $b = -.33$, 95% CI = $[-.86, .20]$, $SE = .27$, $t = -1.21$, $p = .227$, respectively). When we examined the conflict in the Middle East, we again found a two-way interaction between participants' group and EOC ($F(3, 461) = 53.88$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .26$; see Figure 2B). Simple slopes analysis revealed a reversed pattern, such that while for both Catholics and Protestants EOC did not predict bias in group assessment ($b = .11$, 95% CI = $[-.26, .48]$, $SE = .19$, $t = .57$, $p = .566$, and $b = .10$, 95% CI = $[-.36, .56]$, $SE = .24$, $t = .42$, $p = .674$, respectively); it did significantly predict ingroup favoring bias toward the Israeli-Jews side among Israeli-Jews ($b = 1.48$, 95% CI = $[1.18, 1.77]$, $SE = .15$, $t = 9.83$, $p < .001$), and more ingroup favoring bias toward the Palestinian side among Palestinians ($b = -2.25$, 95% CI = $[-2.75, -1.74]$, $SE = .26$, $t = -8.76$, $p < .001$). Finally, one-sample t -test indicated that Swiss participants showed more bias in their target group assessment favoring the Catholics ($p = .005$), but not toward the Palestinians ($p = .209$). See Table 2.

Figure 2. The results of the three-way interaction between the assessed conflict, participants' group, and their EOC on target group assessment, separated by the conflicts in Northern Ireland (A) and in the Middle East (B).



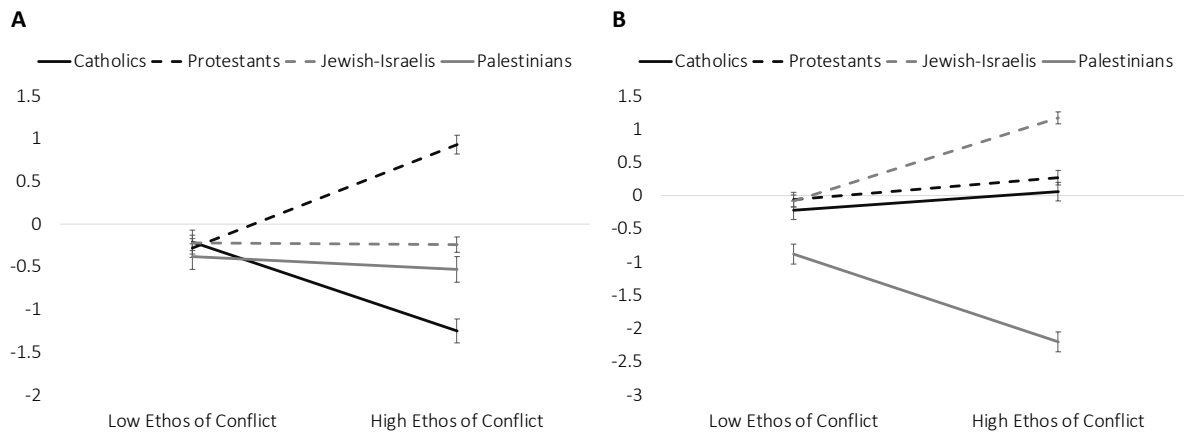
Note: Error bars represent SEs.

Conflict assessment.

The model (Conflict \times Group \times EOC) revealed a significant three-way interaction ($F(3, 468) = 32.20, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .10$; see Figure 3). First, when examining the conflict in Northern Ireland, we found a two-way interaction between participants' group and EOC ($F(3, 462) = 29.35, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .16$; see Figure 3A). Examining this interaction using simple slope analysis revealed that while for Catholics EOC predicted more ingroup favoring bias toward Catholics ($b = -.77, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.99, -.55], SE = .11, t = -6.89, p < .001$), and for Protestants EOC predicted more ingroup favoring bias toward Protestants in the conflict ($b = .88, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.62, 1.15], SE = .14, t = 6.50, p < .001$); it did not significantly predict bias for both Israeli-Jews and Palestinians ($b = -.01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.19, .16], SE = .09, t = -.14, p = .889$, and $b = -.11, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.42, .19], SE = .15, t = -.73, p = .466$, respectively). When we examined the conflict in the Middle East, we again found a two-way interaction between participants' group and EOC ($F(3, 460)$

= 40.95, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .21$; see Figure 3B). Simple slopes analysis revealed a reversed pattern, such that while for both Catholics and Protestants EOC did not predict bias in group assessment ($b = .21$, 95% CI = [-.01, .42], $SE = .11$, $t = 1.87$, $p = .062$, and $b = .25$, 95% CI = [-.02, .51], $SE = .14$, $t = 1.79$, $p = .074$, respectively); it did significantly predict ingroup favoring bias toward the Israeli Jews side among Israeli-Jews ($b = .92$, 95% CI = [.75, 1.09], $SE = .09$, $t = 10.46$, $p < .001$), and more ingroup favoring bias toward the Palestinian side among Palestinians ($b = -.97$, 95% CI = [-1.26, -.68], $SE = .15$, $t = -6.51$, $p < .001$). Finally, one-sample t -test indicated that Swiss participants showed more bias in their conflict assessment favoring the minority group (i.e., Catholics and Palestinians) in both conflicts (both $ps < .006$). See Table 2.

Figure 3. The results of the three-way interaction between the assessed conflict, participants' group, and their EOC on conflict assessment, separated by the conflicts in Northern Ireland (A) and in the Middle East (B).



Note: Error bars represent SEs.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate whether experience of a long and bloody conflict and adherence to an ethos of conflict (EOC) provides a lens for viewing intractable conflict-related events in both one's own conflict and one in which the party is not involved. The relationships between intergroup conflict, the adherence to an ethos of conflict and partisan judgments favoring the ingroup had been demonstrated in the research literature (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2009, 2012; Oren, Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal, 2015), but whether the EOC and biases in perception generalized to another non-involving conflict remained to be established. In general, it can be asked whether participants in an intractable conflict, who naturally are very often biased in their beliefs and attitudes of their own conflict, are able to judge another intractable conflict relatively objectively.

In exploring the effect of involvement in a conflict on perceptions and attributions (all the dependent variables) across societies and scenarios, this study found that, as anticipated, participants tended to demonstrate greater bias in evaluating and judging their own conflicts than another conflict taking place elsewhere as a function of their level of adherence to the ethos of their conflict. We found that the results were consistent, such that, without exception, individuals' ratings of their own conflict were significantly associated with their EOC scores, but responses to another conflict were not. This means that the ethos of conflict as a lens was used only to judge their own conflict. It should also be noted that when the groups were divided according to their EOC scores it was apparent that those with low EOC scores, reflecting lower levels of endorsement of the conflict narrative, viewed the scenarios less through the distorting prism employed by those with higher scores, and were much less biased when they assessed their own conflict.

This is a very important observation that re-validates the proposed conception suggesting

that ethos of conflict is a powerful barrier to conflict resolution among those who are ideologically involved in conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013). Ethos of conflict serves as a conflict-oriented ideology that leads to motivated reasoning, resulting in biases, and distortions (Kunda, 1990). The study shows that this way of perceiving and judging is deeply related to the acquired prism (i.e., ethos of conflict).

Ethos of conflict, as an ideology, describes, interprets and explains the conflict and the related issues by making assertions and assumptions about the nature of the conflict, the conditions related to it, the goals that are needed to win the conflict, the image of the rival and own group (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). Accordingly, it functions as a system of interpretations that is accepted in times of conflict because it satisfies basic human motives to understand the world and to avoid existential threat (Jost et al., 2009). It reflects genuine attempts to give meaning and organize the experiences and the provided information that are part of life in the context of intractable conflict, as well as conscious or unconscious tendencies to rationalize the way things are, or alternatively, the wishes of how they should be. People need a frame of understanding of social reality with direction, orientation and perspective—ethos of conflict provides them with all these. Moreover, it is a determinative factor in affecting the evaluation and judgment of the different proposed solutions to resolve it.

Much of the research and politics in Northern Ireland and the Middle East reflects an assumption of binary division between two fundamentally distinct communities. In practice, there is a substantial middle ground in Northern Ireland that has been identified as rejecting the traditional religious categories and national identities (Hayward & McManus, 2019). The size of this group varies across surveys and the focus of analyses. Analysis of those who identified themselves as ‘neither’ in relation to one of the two main political and ideological traditions

(unionist or nationalist) in Northern Ireland concludes that it revealed “above all else, the complexity of Northern Ireland society and the inadequacy of the ‘two communities’ thesis” (Hayward & McManus, 2019, p. 15).

Binary categorization of Jews and Palestinians also fails to take into account group diversity and variation as demonstrated in this study and previous research. In relation to the ethos of conflict, Lavi, Canetti, Sharvit, Bar-Tal and Hobfoll (2014) reported that Jews and Palestinians with weak adherence to their groups’ ethos of conflict differed significantly in their responses to violence. In contrast, exposure to violence did not impact on the high levels of threat and negative emotions reported by those from both communities with a strong adherence to their ethos of conflict. These results may sound encouraging to some extent, but although we do not have specific data about the Protestant and Catholic populations’ adherence to an ethos of conflict, the problem is that in the case of the Middle Eastern conflict we have evidence that the great majority of the Jewish population, Jewish leaders and the major political parties in Israel completely adhere to the ethos of conflict (Oren, 2019). There are indications that the Palestinian population has a similar view (Shaked, 2018). This picture of the Middle East explains, to some extent, the lack of progress in the peace process and the continuation of the violence.

The current polarization of political opinion and the associated media partisanship has led to an upsurge in research on the association between motivated reasoning, biased perceptions or social judgments based on group identifications and their associated ideological beliefs (e.g., Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). The present study, that involved the same participants rating their own and another conflict, indicates that adherence to an ethos of conflict provides a prism for viewing one’s own conflict but unlike more general ideologies such as Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), there is no evidence that it distorts judgments

of another conflict. The research, therefore, confirms the notion of Bar-Tal et al. (2012) that EOC is a unique cognitive ideological element that provides a particular outlook on the conflict (see an example in Bar-Tal et al., 2012). It joins other conservative constructs, such as RWA, in providing a particular worldview. But, while RWA is general and provides an outlook that is generalized to various situations and issues, EOC is unique in its conservative perspective focusing on the view of the conflict in which a society is involved (see Bar-Tal et al., 2012, p. 56). Further research is required to explore the relationships between RWA and the EOC, with regard to intractable conflicts.

A sample of Swiss participants, who were included in the study to represent a region that had not experienced conflict, provided some support for the underdog effect (Vandello et al., 2011). This was demonstrated by their bias in favor of the less powerful Palestinian minority group in the Middle East, and a trend in support of the minority Catholic community in Northern Ireland. Support for the underdog effect in their ratings of the distal conflict was also shown by Catholics, Palestinians and Israeli-Jews. In general, this is not a surprising finding, because nations tend to support and empathize with the weaker parties that are the underdogs in violent conflicts (Horowitz, 2000). This tendency was missing with regard to the attribution traits of the Protestants.

The study employed three different types of scenarios in order to determine if the responses to violent scenarios differed from the reactions to scenarios that involved the description of the particular essence of the conflict or its specific symbolic features. In general, the contents of the scenarios had an effect on the study's participants. With regard to emotions, the symbolic narrative of the Catholics in Northern Ireland elicited more positive bias. It is possible that media wide accounts of the Protestant community's marches through Catholics' areas and their places of worship had an effect on the judgments. Also, with regard to the Middle Eastern conflict, the

analysis of emotions showed that the act of terror of the Palestinians against innocent Israeli Jews is more salient than the retaliation that caused the death of innocent Palestinians. The evaluation of the conflict by outside observers presented with the violent scenarios also showed less positive bias toward Palestinians. With regard to the target group assessment, the participants showed less positive bias in the violent condition. Again, the terrible Catholic terror attack that resulted in the death of innocent civilians, including women and children, reduced the positive bias in the evaluation of this group in this condition. The same result was found with regard to the evaluation of the conflict.

We acknowledge that the study has certain limitations that should be taken in the account. First, it was carried out with university students rather than representative samples of the population. In this respect we should point out that recently the first author with his colleagues published a book, which reported long in-depth interviews carried with 98 Israeli Jews coming from different societal strata. It showed that ethos of conflict, acquired in the process of political socialization from an early age, plays a determinative role in viewing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Abromovich, 2020). Second, the Swiss group was relatively small because of problems in recruiting students in Switzerland. Third, the Palestinian group consisted of Palestinian citizens of the Israeli State and not of Palestinian of the Palestinian authority who live under Israeli occupation. Their evaluations may be different. Still, the study opened an interesting and challenging key question about the factors that affect evaluations and judgment of conflicts and especially the differences in how individuals perceive their conflicts and other conflicts. In the globalization era and the deep involvement of the international community in world conflicts these questions are very important and have practical implications. We showed unequivocally that the ideologically fueled ethos of conflict has a determinative effect on one's

views of one's own conflicts but not on views of other conflicts. So, it is not surprising that we consider it as one of the central socio-psychological barrier to conflict resolution of the own conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013). The challenge is how to overcome this barrier and change the destructive ideology. We are currently engaged in meeting this challenge, by developing intervention methods that can overcome the barrier of the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal, & Hameiri, 2020; Bar-Tal, Hameiri, & Halperin, in press).

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