(1) Research in the social and behavioral sciences attempts to expand knowledge and promote understanding of inter-group relations and interactions in complex contemporary societies. Earlier research on inter-group contact centered around its outcomes and effects. In the last two decades the prevailing approach has focused on the analysis of inter-group dynamics in meetings held under controlled conditions, while taking into account the political context, diverse identities and power relations between the groups (Ron & Maoz, 2013, Maoz, 2011, Maoz 2000, Bekerman, 2002' 2009, Maoz & Bar-On, 2002).

In light of the reality noted above, however, we question whether this strategy provides an adequate perspective and method to explain the inter-group relations, dynamics and interactions characteristic of today's complex world.

This paper emphasizes the need for an innovative approach to elucidate inter-group relations in the context of diverse and divided societies. Such an approach focuses on understanding inter-group relations, dynamics and interactions as they evolve spontaneously in real-life situations, rather than in prearranged inter-group encounters under controlled conditions.

(2) The research literature presents two central approaches to examining inter-group contact and planned encounters.

Initially, only effects and outcomes that take place during inter-group contact were examined. These studies did not consider the context in which the encounter took place, nor the dynamics and the processes that occurred within the inter-group encounter.

Effectiveness in improving the inter-group relations and reducing prejudice occurs when the encounter takes place under the conditions established by the hypothesis of the encounter, even when not all the conditions are fully present, according the findings, which indicate and support this (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew &

Tropp, 2000; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In addition, the encounter under study took place under optimal conditions (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005, 2007).

As such, in order to address the lacunae found in the first approach, an additional approach was developed which chose a qualitative and ethnographic methodology for examining inter-group contact. Studies such as these, focused on processes, effects, behavior patterns and dynamics around the inter-group encounters and within them -- under the non-optimal conditions that exist in divided societies. The studies addressed asymmetry of power relations, identities, patriotism and culture that take place in encounters between groups involved in conflicts which are violent, protracted and asymmetric. Most of the study was carried out in Israel, defined as a divided society with an asymmetric, violent and protracted conflict.

(3) As indicated, the above research approach examined elements that had not been examined in the earlier approach. Yet most of the studies addressed encounters which were planned and organized and not natural encounters that occur in a day-to-day reality. It is therefore interesting to understand how the aspects that were surveyed in the present approach manifest themselves when the inter-group contact takes place in real life. In other words, how do asymmetry, power relations, identities, patriotism and culture affect the behaviors and perceptions of members of groups for which the contact between them has been forced upon them and requires ongoing cooperation as part of a group that functions in the context of a society involved in an unyielding conflict.