Review of Networked Microgrid Protection: Architectures, Challenges, Solutions, and Future Trends

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Abstract—Design and selection of advanced protection schemes have become essential for reliable and secure operation of networked microgrids. Various protection schemes that allow correct operation of microgrids have been proposed for individual systems in different topologies and connections. Nevertheless, protection schemes for networked microgrids are still in development, and further research is required to design and operate advanced protection in interconnected systems. Interconnection of these microgrids in different nodes with various interconnection technologies increases fault occurrence and complicates protection operation. This paper aims to point out challenges in developing protection for networked microgrids, potential solutions, and research areas that need to be addressed for their development. First, this article presents a systematic analysis of different microgrid clusters proposed since 2016, including several architectures of networked microgrids, operation modes, components, and utilization of renewable sources, which have not been widely explored in previous review papers. Second, the paper presents a discussion on protection systems currently available for microgrid clusters, current challenges, and solutions that have been proposed for these systems. Finally, it discusses the trend of protection schemes in networked microgrids and presents some conclusions related to implementation.

Index Terms—Adaptive protection, microgrid cluster, microgrid, multiple microgrid, networked microgrid, real-time simulation, smart grid.

I. INTRODUCTION

N ETWORKED microgrids (NMGs) are a particular case of microgrid clusters (MGCs), where a group of mi-

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crogrids (MGs) is close to each other and physically interconnected by nodes in DC or AC. They have different voltage levels and can exchange energy between them with a distribution system [1]. NMGs optimizes use of energy resources, guarantees system reliability, improves power quality management [2] and resiliency [3], [4], introduces more flexibility [5]–[7], and enhances electricity grid availability [8], [9]. Therefore, it is expected NMGs will be essential components of future smart grids [5], [6], [10].

Interconnection of these MGs in different nodes causes frequent changes in network topology [9], increasing network fault occurrence and complicating operation of system protection and network [11], [12]. Furthermore, challenges in operating individual or single MGs also extend to NMGs. These challenges include power flow bi-directionality, shortcircuit current variation, and integration of several distributed energy resources (DERs). In addition, protecting NMGs requires interconnection of single MGs at different voltage levels, multiple nodes, and higher short-circuit currents in interconnection mode.

Protection schemes are used for safety and reliable operation of MGs. Currently, some protection schemes use different conventional protection techniques that ensure operation of MGs in different fault zones without communication systems. Conventional protection schemes are inexpensive and simple to use; however, they are efficient only for specific topologies and types of faults because of the dynamics and changing characteristics of MGs [13]–[16]. Other protection schemes use relays with optimization techniques [17]–[19], hybrid tripping characteristics [20], communication systems [21]– [24], and adaptive algorithms [25]–[28]. Furthermore, other protection technologies have been used, such as micro-phasor measurement units and superconducting current limiters [29], [30]. However, none of these include protection schemes for NMGs.

Protection schemes for NMGs have been recently suggested in literature, as those presented in [31], [32]. Protection schemes for NMGs have been used to detect internal and external faults [33]–[35]. Other protection schemes use advanced algorithms to identify system topology, operating conditions, fault current level [36], centralized adaptive protection with overcurrent relays [37], and multi-functional relays with communication and integration of protection settings [38].

Existing literature also suggests different protection coordi-

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nation methods. For example, the authors of [39] discussed a method that uses clusters to reduce the adjustment group number for adaptive coordination of overcurrent relays (OCRs) using a k-means clustering method. Protection systems that employ this coordination method may be able to work independently of control center operation, achieving decentralized protection. The authors of [40] studied a protection coordination scheme that uses numerical directional overcurrent relays (DOCRs) with single and dual settings. They formulated coordination as an optimization problem solved by the interior point method. Tests showed this scheme is an effective protection coordination system for this type of NMG.

Using different protection schemes for single MGs in different operation modes is effective. However, more work needs to be done on scalability and security of networks that integrate multiple MGs with different architectures and interconnection devices. A recent report addressed future needs for design of NMGs [41]. They emphasized the need to design protection systems that provide core criteria to assure security and coordinated performance of NMG. Therefore, a suitable protection scheme for these systems will translate into more significant benefits for interconnected networks of the future.

This paper presents a comprehensive review of various architectures and topologies applied to NMGs and their corresponding protection schemes. We also discuss challenges and solutions recently considered in literature and provide suggestions for future work. The rest of this document is organized as follows: Section II introduces the concept of multiple microgrids and their operating architectures. Section III discusses challenges to their protection and proposed solutions. Section IV discusses future trends, and Section V provides some conclusions.

II. NETWORKED MICROGRID

There are three types of interconnected MGs: Multi microgrid (MMG), MGC, and NMG. In [42], the authors define an MMG as a "higher level structure, formed at the medium voltage (MV) level, consisting of several low voltage (LV) microgrids and distributed generator (DG) unit connected on adjacent MV feeders". In [43], the authors define an MGC as "two or more electrically coupled microgrids controlled and operated in a coordinated fashion". These structures can improve reliability, stability, and power quality because of the connection of several DGs to the distribution system [44]. The MGC can be conceived as a subsystem of an MMG, where several MG are electrically coupled to form a cluster; these clusters can also be connected with another cluster made up of several MGs. However, an NMG is a particular case of an MGC and is define as "Interoperable groups of multiple advanced microgrids that become an integral part of the electricity grid while providing enhanced resiliency through self-healing, aggregated ancillary services, and realtime communication" [45].

An NMG can also be defined as "a system that contains a connection of two or more microgrids with the ability to exchange energy with each other and with a distribution system" [9]. These systems form a cluster of interoperable and interconnected microgrids that can operate with fixed or dynamic boundaries [46]. Fixed-boundary NMGs allow interconnection under normal conditions and require disconnection from the main grid under fault situations. On the other hand, NMGs with dynamic boundaries can be connected to a distribution feeder through a different point of common coupling (PCC). They can change the electric boundaries dynamically and organize the DERs and loads through a boundary switch.

NMGs are also different from hybrid microgrids (HMGs). HMGs combine AC and DC configurations, while NMGs can bring together several HMGs. NMGs also have clear advantages in their operation and implementation. They reserve and share energy in critical conditions, lower the chances of a system collapse, minimize emergency load-shedding requirements, and enhance overall system reliability [47]. Their hierarchical architecture improves grid operation flexibility while reducing control complexity [48], and they strengthen their resiliency in local and regional areas [4], [48].

Despite all these advantages, protection coordination is more difficult when multiple MGs are interconnected in different nodes and topologies, increasing the fault occurrence. Before addressing these challenges and offering potential solutions for these protection impacts, we must assess what architecture and topologies we can discover and predict. Next, we provide details on the architecture and topologies of NMGs.

A. Architecture and Topologies

There are three basic NMG architectures: serial microgrids on a single feeder, parallel microgrids on a single feeder, and interconnected microgrids with multiple feeders [49]. However, it is possible to analyze these architectures according to their constitutional electric form: AC, DC, or hybrid; their voltage level classification: low voltage (LV), medium voltage (MV), or MV/LV hybrid; and their phase-sequence constitutional forms: single-phase or multi-phase [50]. In [51], the authors classified, identified, and analyzed different multimicrogrid architectures. They classified MMG according to interconnection of MGs, electricity transmission, and interconnection technology. In addition, they compared architectures, their costs, scalability, protection, reliability, stability, communications, and different business models for their implementation. According to them [51], future work on NMGs should consider different architectures with any interface technology and use both technologies (AC and DC).

In 2021, NMGs were classified according to network formation [52]. a) Star-connected: MGs can be connected to a common bus to form a star network, and all MGs are connected to the main grid through a common bus. b) Ringconnected: MGs can be connected to comprise a ring and share power with their neighbors. These are typically used in LV residential networks. Moreover, c) mesh-connected: similar to ring-connected NMGs, but they have additional redundant lines to avoid main loop failures, and they are typically used in MV and HV power networks.

In Figs. 1, 2, and 3, we can see typical architectures considering network formation, constitutional electric form,



Fig. 1. Star or parallel AC NMG architecture.



Fig. 2. Interconnected or meshed DC-NMG architecture.



Fig. 3. Ring hybrid-NMG architecture.

and voltage grade classification. Fig. 1 shows star or parallel AC NMG architecture, Fig. 2 shows interconnected or meshed DC-NMG architecture, and Fig. 3 shows ring hybrid-NMG architecture.

Given these architectures, different topologies have been proposed. In [53], X. Zhou *et al.* proposed an autonomous coordination control strategy for an MG cluster structure. This MG cluster comprises AC and DC systems, multiple AC/DC converters, and DC converters. This cluster also includes a power exchange unit (PEU) and energy storage batteries, which are all connected to form an energy pool (EP). This model permits mutual power support among each MG, controls voltage deviation, and improves utilization of DERs.

A novel design for NMGs with hybrid AC/DC connections was presented in [54]. This model has a hybrid unit of common coupling (HUCC) for the NMG to achieve flexible integration and optimal use of DERs. In this design, four MGs were connected via AC lines to the distribution network and interconnected to each other via DC lines of the HUCC. This connection gives the structure higher control, asynchronous interconnection, major flexibility, fewer electromagnetic issues, and more DER integration capacity.

In 2019, the authors of [55] developed a simulation test system with a hybrid AC/DC microgrid in a grid-connected mode with a modified version of the IEEE-14 distribution model. Three different configurations are considered:

1) MG series configuration with a DC bus, where all DER and loads are connected through converters.

2) MG-parallel configuration with an AC bus, where generation system and loads are connected directly.

3) Switched configuration, in which DG or distribution grid can supply load, and DC and AC MG are linked by two inverters.

This test system can be used to perform research on control strategies, test different protection schemes and isolated scenarios, and simulate dynamics of different sources. The authors indicated the need to develop real-time automated tools and use intelligent and adaptive protection in AC and DC.

In [56], S. Jena and N. P. Padhy presented a hierarchical distributed cooperative control strategy in a networked hybrid AC/DC microgrid cluster using a back-to-back converter. This model has sources, storage, and loads for each MG cluster. A back-to-back converter control (BTBC) is used to interconnect AC and DC MGs. An interlinking converter (ILC) is used to exchange power between AC and DC MGs based on droop control. This structure can reduce AC/DC power conversion losses by providing different voltage levels for integrating resources.

Furthermore, in 2020 [57], M. Cintuglu *et al.* created a framework for real-time implementation and experimental validation of the cyber-physical secured distributed state estimation (SDSE) for an NMG. Communication and interoperability architectures within each MG are established by IEC 61850 with DER data model extensions. Each MG service area has its own energy management system, protection relays, and DER controllers in this model. A supervisory controller for each DER assesses connection status using an additional interface to IEDs through peer-to-peer (P2P) communications.

Communication between MGs is established using industrial grade 4G LTE routers, and local measurement of data is collected from remote Terminal units (RTUs) and IEDs using IEC61850 GOOSE analog and breaker status messages. The model for this system was designed in MATLAB-Simulink/SimPowerSystem. In addition, the authors created a model of an NMG in power-hardware in a loop configuration, physically representing controllers, electrical elements of the NMG, and associated communication infrastructure. In 2020, the authors in [58] explored flexibility and resiliency of a multi-layer and multi-agent architecture to achieve P2P control of NMGs. This model is considered an AC-NMG with multiple LV MGs, integrated into an MV network through LV/MV transformers. They also used a static transfer switch (STS) to isolate the NMG from the main grid. The communication system contains an upper-level communication network among MGs and a lower communication network among DGs within each MG. Results prove the agents can work effectively in this environment and help to achieve P2P architecture.

In 2021, the authors in [59] presented an autonomous and scalable energy management system architecture for NMGS using machine learning and cloud computing. The algorithm presented in this model solves the economic dispatch problem by considering variable load and power source changes.

In 2022, the authors in [60] presented a scalable and reconfigurable hybrid AC/DC MG clustering architecture with a corresponding decentralized control method to facilitate networking of a hybrid AC/DC MG and to achieve flexible power coordination. This model is comprised of an energy network unit (ENU) that interfaces with AC and DC sub-grids and external power grid, forming the MMG.

In this design, only one common mainline is needed for AC power transfer in grid-connected mode and DC power transfer in island mode, which eliminates complexity of power networks and line costs. This structure requires neither a master MG controller nor high-bandwidth communication links between different controllers. This proposed architecture could improve use of DERs and local energy consumption, achieving greater energy cluster compensation and consumption ratios and improving reliability.

Three different MGs are shown in Fig. 4's NMG structure: Village 1 (DC MG), Village 2 (Hybrid MG), and Village 3 (Hybrid MG). AC node serves as conduit connecting hybrid MGs to the grid. Moreover, DC Links connect the MGs to one another. Inclusion of a cluster of hybrid microgrids with a variety of generating sources (solar, wind, and batteries), as well as DC and AC loads, is a benefit of this topology. Similarly, it makes it possible to incorporate several transmission energy types into the same interconnection network and can decrease losses in distribution links using DC. Lack of standards and real-world implementation expertise that could specify proper voltage level and operation management is one of this scheme's drawbacks. This is a schematic illustrative example, though, and it may be helpful to analyze it further to explain its advantages. For instance, it may serve as a test case to evaluate how protection devices react to failures that happen internally and externally in various types of microgrids and in distribution links, respectively.

Table I summarizes topologies previously described.

III. NMG PROTECTIONS: CHALLENGES, ADVANCED APPROACHES, AND SOLUTIONS

A. Challenges

There are still challenges associated with protection of single MGs that have been addressed using different approaches, including intelligent algorithms, optimization, control techniques, communication systems, and intelligent equipment. NMG complicates protection schemes because it must operate reliably for both single MGs and a set of interconnected MGs, regardless of type of topologies or architectures [61], [62]. In addition, they should be operating faster and with



TABLE I SUMMARY OF THE NMG TOPOLOGIES

Topologies	Electric Transmission	Interconnection mode	Advantages	Reference
Meshed	Hybrid (AC/DC)	Interlinking converter.	Power support and Plug and Play.	[53]
Star	Hybrid (AC/DC)	Transformers/Power	Higher control, Asynchronous Connection, Flexibility, and More DER	[54]
		converters.	integration capacity.	
Star/Ring	Hybrid (AC/DC)	Transformers/Switches.	Benchmark for different studies in NMGS.	[55]
Star	Hybrid (AC/DC)	Interlinking converter.	Reduce Conversion losses, provide different voltage levels, and power	[56]
			sharing between clusters.	
Ring	AC-NMG	Intelligent Electronics	Distribute implementation and physical model of NMGS in PHIL.	[57]
		Device (IED)		
Star	AC-NMG	Transformers.	Peer-to-peer (P2P) control architecture, distributed and hierarchical networks.	[58]
Star	Hybrid (AC/DC)	Transformers/Switches.	Cloud Computing Architecture Real-time energy management system.	[59]
Star	Hybrid (AC/DC)	Interlinking converter.	Decentralized control method, flexible power coordination AC/DC. Enhance	[60]
	-	-	system reliability and improve the use of local consumption of the network.	

greater selectivity despite diversity in electrical transmission links (DC, AC, or AC/DC) and interconnection technologies. Fig. 5 shows the general features that need to be considered for an NMG protection system.

Multiple-Microgrid (MMG) or Networked Microgrid (NMG)					
	Types of operation modes				
Grid-connected	Isolated	ed or interconnected			
Types of architectures					
Star or parallel	Ring Meshed or interconnected				
Electrical transmission or path					
DC transmission	AC transmission AC/DC transmission				
Interconnection technologies					
Transformers	Power electronics based DC or AC CB				

Fig. 5. General features of NMG's protections.

In NMGs, fault current levels vary due to power flows from several MGs and DGs to intermittency in generation and variable load demand [39]. It is also known fault currents in an NMG are higher than those in a single MG [63]. Therefore, it is challenging to design protection schemes that allow interconnection of multiple networks immune to these changes [64].

The design process of NMGs and MGs could be complex [65]–[67]. Existing tools to design protection systems for NMGs are limited. There is no unanimity in protection method used. Variability of size, distance, connections, sources, and location between MGs introduces many operational scenarios, independent variables, and protection schemes. Lack of standard procedure for analyzing protections in NMGs also contributes to high implementation costs. While DC-NMGs carry the issues of single DCMG, like lack of phasor and frequency information, rapid fault rise, breaking DC arc, lack of standards, lack of design guidelines, and lack of practical experience [68]. AC-NMGs need more comprehensive coordinated adaptive protection that can adjust protection settings according to operation mode [27].

The following section addresses challenges of NMGs according to their interconnection system (operation mode), transmission type (direct current, alternating current, or hybrid), and interconnection technology (via inverters or transformers).

1) Challenges According to the Interconnection System

Each MG constituting the interconnected system can have different DERs. That means each protection scheme is unique for each MG and configuration. Interconnections of these MGs require protection schemes that guarantee isolation of the fault area and allow supply of energy according to the type of interconnection or network formation. Bi-directionality of power flow, blinded protection, and unauthorized resynchronization are some challenges in NMGs.

Type of interconnection of NMGs will play an essential role in the protection scheme. For example, in a star or parallel NMG, operation of the system is similar to that of a traditional radial power system but with the added complexity of bidirectional power flow. Therefore, protection coordination is simpler and guarantees good selectivity. In addition, protection coordination is more complex for other interconnections of NMGs and requires communications systems. For example, ring and mesh NMG architectures have several fault contribution paths and various short-circuit levels according to topology, making it challenging to locate and isolate faults. Moreover, complexity of their interconnections increases implementation and operation costs.

Formation of the network in an NMG changes according to operation modes [52]. Changes in operation modes must be considered, and preplanning must be performed [1]. As a result, design of a protection system (PS) is a challenging task as it must respond appropriately to faults in various topologies within different scenarios [69], [70]. One issue is a variation in short-circuit currents (SCC), which depends on current configuration of the grid. For example, when operation is in island mode, magnitude of the SCC is too low [71], [72]. Another issue is related to bidirectional power flows in the grid, where operation of conventional protection schemes is not suitable, and protections must be adjusted to operating modes of the MGs [73]. Therefore, a communication or adaptive system is necessary to allow them to adjust to these changes.

One of the essential requirements to achieve a coordinated operation of NMGs with reliability, security, selectivity, and accuracy is to provide a proper protection coordination system [9], [40]. Protection coordination is also affected by unexpected changes in network topology and different power flow patterns [27], [46]. Different topologies are possible, and their frequent changes in operation mode could impact magnitude and direction of fault currents, causing the need to update protection settings constantly. These continuous updates can cause some problems in protection coordination. Therefore, adaptive protection could be the best solution to these issues.

2) Challenges According to the Electrical Transmission

NMGs can be classified according to their transmission type as AC-NMG, DC-NMG, or hybrid-NMG. Next, we discuss challenges according to operation: grid-connected, island, and multi-microgrid modes.

a) AC-NMG Challenges: For protecting AC-NMGs, the most notable challenges in the grid mode include:

1) Faults tend to have high current levels, and arc flashes can be of considerable concern [74].

2) Unwanted protection tripping can be caused by bidirectional power flows [75].

3) Loss of mains between main grid and the MGs [76].

4) Protection equipment selection needs to consider a higher number of variables, such as nature of the load, variable fault current levels, different voltage magnitudes, and faster tripping ranges [76].

In island mode, the most critical challenge is low current contribution to the fault, which depends on interconnection technology of the source and number and type of distributed energy resources of each MG. Including different distributed generation sources in these systems causes substantial variation in fault current [77]. DGs can also cause problems such as blinding of protection, false tripping, and failed reclosing [37]. Penetration of synchronous DGs induces lower short-circuit currents that impact overcurrent relays and makes protection coordination difficult [78]. This limited short-circuit capacity will cause a notable drop in fault current level of the MG [75]. Therefore, detecting island mode operating condition is essential for correctly operating protections [75].

Operation of traditional protection schemes fails in the multi-microgrid mode. Fault location and variable fault current characteristics are essential in developing an effective protection scheme in this operation mode. In multi-microgrid mode, fault current level is higher compared to a single microgrid or single grid-connected MGs [44]. Amplitude and direction of fault currents are constantly changing and can be quite different from each topology [1]. Variable fault current depends on different control strategies of the inverter that interfaces each distributed generation [33], and whenever a fault occurs, disconnection of all DGs will make operation of the MG impossible under fault conditions [37]. Other challenges are dynamic changes in topologies, unbalanced conditions, low voltage, low inertia, detection of the NMG's points of connection, high-cost technologies, need for a highly reliable communication system, and lack of standardization.

b) DC-NMG Challenges: For protecting DC-NMGs, the main challenges in grid mode are: i) grounding issues, ii) interruption of current, and iii) lack of natural zero-crossing current. In DC systems, grounding is necessary to detect faults.

Issues in grounding and fault current amplitude reduction have a direct effect on voltage sag and value of the fault current [12], [68], [76]. Interruption of current in a DC system produces contact erosion of the circuit breaker (CB) and decreases useful life of the equipment [71]. Lack of natural zero-crossing does not allow AC-CB to extinguish the electric arc produced in opening of an AC breaker [68], [79]. In a DC system, rise in fault current imposes a severe time limit on fault interruption [68], and uncertainties and varying topologies make detection and diagnosis of the fault more complex due to low fault current [80]–[82].

Challenges in the island mode are related to change in fault current contribution and detection of faults. Different fault characteristics, such as pole-to-pole and pole-to-ground faults, cause various fault current contributions. Location and characteristics of faults are critical in developing an effective protection scheme. In DC microgrids, fault detection is more complex because of lack of frequency, phasor, and sequence components [81]. Relays must be set according to fault current variations or consider an adaptive protection algorithm to solve this problem [83].

Locating the fault in a multi-microgrid mode is also a challenging task. Location of high impedance faults (HIF) and accuracy of locating faulty places in DC-NMG because of distance between each DCMG and use of underground cables could make quick system restoration and maintenance tasks more difficult after faults [84], [85].

c) Hybrid-NMG Challenges: For protecting hybrid-NMGs in grid-connected mode, challenges are the following: i) short response time of the DERs, ii) unbalanced nature of MG, iii) interlinking devices between AC and DC nodes [55], and iv) location, modeling, and actions for different faults for hybrid systems. All of them need to be analyzed in an NMG [86].

In island and multi-microgrid modes of a hybrid NMG, protections will need to consider challenges of presence of both DC and AC. A multicriteria protection strategy is needed, considering concentration of high loads [50], different short-circuit current contributions [87], [88], lack of natural zero crossing currents, severe magnitude of fault current, and standard gaps in protecting DCMGs [61], different voltage levels, uncertainties in power sources, and behavior of the energy demand [47].

3) Challenges According to the Interconnection Technology

Each MG in an NMG can be interconnected using various technologies, including power transformers, power converters, and AC or DC circuit breakers (CB) or switches [89]. Next, we discuss challenges of each of these interconnection technologies.

Interconnection requirements for using power transformers are less restrictive, cheaper, and most frequently used in traditional power systems, and they use mature technology and have lower protection requirements. However, they do not have the high controllability to integrate a higher number of resources and are sensitive to short-circuit currents, voltage surges, and undervoltage events [51]. Power transformers can tolerate a fault between 2 and 5 seconds and are protected through fuses or relay protection devices. High penetration of distributed sources and expansion of interconnected MGs increase the level of system fault current and nominal value of transformers and protection equipment [1]. On the other hand, interconnection through power converters needs a faster response than a transformer during a fault condition and requires more accurate protection. This technology is sensitive to overloads and has high protection requirements [51].

Power converter or inverter-based MG sources in an NMG limits fault current contribution of each DG source in a microgrid to only two to three times maximum load current [90]. Inverter-based MG system in an NMG would also have to overcome reverse power flow and different fault current contributions according to interconnection technology that makes operation of protection devices slow or unresponsive in a fault event under different operation modes. Moreover, DG sources in these systems have rapid dynamics, unbalanced nature, low capacity of energy storage, lack of inertia, and short response time; all these need to be addressed using effective protection schemes [55].

Alternatively, interconnection between MGs in an NMG could be done through switchgear, such as circuit breakers (CB), contactors, and switches [89]. NMGs involve different architectures and multiple components that increase the possibility of fault occurrence, and a proper selection of interconnection switchgear will be needed. Furthermore, electrical transmission (AC-DC) plays an essential role in switchgear selection. A DC system requires a reliable and fast protection system to ensure fault clearance and maintain safety for the rest of the system [12], and traditional CB for DC faults has drawback of slow operation.

Figure 6 shows the main challenges discussed in literature. All these difficulties demonstrate the need for more research into NMGs to implement them and lower their operating costs. Tables II, III, and IV summarize challenges found in AC, DC, and Hybrid-NMGs, including references discussed in literature.

B. Advanced Protection Approach and NMG Protection Solutions

Conventional protection schemes in NMG may cause transient incidents and loss of selectivity coordination [91]. On the other hand, communication-based protection schemes, such as adaptive and wide-area applications, are challenging to design or implement, have high implementation costs, and require secured communication systems and an extensive communication infrastructure [92]. Furthermore, protection schemes using intelligent computer approaches like artificial neural networks (ANN), or machine learning (ML) might experience latencies or data loss due to high information processing speeds.

Advanced protection schemes for NMGS also require coordination strategies that optimize many variables, making protection coordination more complex. Nevertheless, advanced protection techniques are considered the best answer for NMGs. The following section discusses advanced protection methods and solutions suggested in literature to address some of these issues.

1) Communication-based Protections

Fast, discerning, and dependable operation of MG protections are made possible by communication-assisted digital relays and communication protection schemes based on IEC 61850. These include the generic object-oriented substation events (GOOSE) message standards, and sample value messages (SVM). Unlike the first, the second makes network topology-based adjustment decisions [91].



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Challenges	References	Description/Consequences
High-current levels.	[74]	Low source impedances and very high fault current availability. The faults need to
-		be isolated from both sides. Arc flashes concerns.
Selection of the protection	[76]	Proper selection considering fault current level, voltage magnitude operation, speed
equipment.		range, and nature of the load.
Loss of mains.	[76]	Loss of direct connection between the utility grid and either the microgrid or the
		multi-microgrid.
Low-fault current contribution.	[9],	Changes in short circuit levels and the fault current contribution of inverter-based
	[75], [76],	resources (IBRs). Slow operation or potential failure in the operation of the
	[90]	protection. Drop in MG fault level.
Bidirectional power flows.	[75]	The paths of the power flows are bidirectional. Loss of protection coordination.
		requires different protection strategies.
Malfunction of traditional	[76]	Reclosers and fusers may not provide sufficient protection coordination.
protection schemes.		Mis-operation of protection relays. Bidirectional power flows.
Unbalance conditions and	[75]	Imbalance between energy supply and demand, low inertia, and transition between
power mismatch.		different modes of operation.
Detection of the NMG	[72]	Dynamic Changes in the network topology. Several connection statuses of the PCC.
connection.		
High-cost technologies.	[75]	High cost of protective devices/technologies.
Need for highly reliable	[75]	Reliable communication links and fast processing units. Prior knowledge about MG.
communication.		
Lack of standardization.	[75]	The plug-and-play interaction of various components in the grids requires proper
		standardization regarding implementation.
	Challenges High-current levels. Selection of the protection equipment. Loss of mains. Low-fault current contribution. Bidirectional power flows. Malfunction of traditional protection schemes. Unbalance conditions and power mismatch. Detection of the NMG connection. High-cost technologies. Need for highly reliable communication. Lack of standardization.	ChallengesReferencesHigh-current levels.[74]Selection of the protection equipment. Loss of mains.[76]Low-fault current contribution.[9], [75], [76], [90]Bidirectional power flows.[75]Malfunction of traditional protection schemes. Unbalance conditions and power mismatch.[75]Detection of the NMG connection.[72] (75]High-cost technologies.[75]Need for highly reliable communication.[75]

TABLE II CHALLENGES IN AC-NMG PROTECTION

TABLE III CHALLENGES IN DC-NMG PROTECTION

	<u> </u>	D (D
Operation modes	Challenges	References	Description/Consequences
	High-current levels	[82]	The fault current levels exceed the nominal rating of the existing CB. Loss of
			coordination.
	Lack of phasor and frequency	[68]	Difficult to detect and locate faults.
	information.		
	Rapid faults current increase.	[84]	Strict time limits for fault interruption. Damage in the cluster components
	Breaking the DC arc and [79], [83]		Contact erosion of CB. Decreased lifetime of the device. Fire hazards.
	interrupting the current.		
Grid-connected	Grounding issues.	[12], [68], [81]	Voltage sag and different values of the fault current. Difficult to detect the PG
			fault. Personal and equipment safety issues. Corrosion triggered by leakage
			current. Increase stress on different components. Lack of service reliability
			and continuity.
	Lack of natural zero-crossing	[79], [83]	Cannot eliminate the arc in the breaker opening. Expensive and slow solutions.
	current.		
	Uncertainties and varying	[83]	More complex fault detection. Changes in the direction of the fault.
	topologies in an NMG.		
	Fault current contribution	[68], [76]	Direction and nature of fault current. Variation in short circuit level.
Island	Fault detection.	[68], [80]–[82]	Low fault current. Unchanging in the current direction at fault inception
Island			angle. High uncertainties and varying topologies of microgrids. Rapid increase
			of the fault current.
	Fault location and fault	[84]	Change in the amplitude and direction of fault currents. Variable fault current
Multi-microgrid mode	characteristics.		due to different control strategies of inverter interfaced generations.
	Lack of standards, guidelines,	[68], [76]	Lack of guidelines and well-defined protection standards. Lack of practical
	or practical experience.		experience.
	Power flows pattern.	[81]	Circulating current may flow between the storage devices and VSC. Power
			oscillations of renewable sources. Power balance fluctuation.
	Operation conditions.	[81]	Reduced stability margins. High build-up current and peak magnitude. Need
			for a quick fault detection scheme.

The authors of [93] presented a protection that is "topologyagnostic, scalable, self-healing and cost-aware," which works in the presence of high penetration of inverter-based resources (IBRs). This scheme protects both: grid-connected and island modes. A microgrid is divided into multiple zones separated by breakers, and protection is designed using GOOSE messages with IEC-61850 communication protocol. Zonal protection is designed for one zone, which sends GOOSE messages to trip breakers and to identify the fault if there is a change in current direction. This scheme also includes backup protection that could open or close other breakers to isolate the fault without affecting operation of the whole area. Next, we review two communication-based protection schemes, adaptive protections, and wide area protections.

a) Adaptive Protections: Adaptive protection is a set of steps or functions using communication protocols that allow changing protection settings according to system requirements.

There are two types of adaptive protection: centralized and decentralized. Centralized adaptive protection incorporates all information status of the DG units and circuit breaker status through centralized control, which is located at the point of common coupling (PCC). Under the status of DG units, protection equipment will update its settings to detect any faults. In decentralized adaptive protection, decision-making

	TABLE IV	
CHALLENGES	IN HYBRID-NMG PROTE	ECTION

Operation modes	Challenges	References	Description/Consequences
-	Different fault current levels.	[71]	Variability of sources. Generation intermittency. Slow and failure in the operation of
			the protection.
Grid-connected	Variable load demand.	[71]	Unreliable operation. Load-shedding.
	NMG protection planning and	[65]	Many independent variables. Different sizes and types of connections of MG.
	design.		
	Unbalanced nature of the MG.	[71]	Uncertainties in the power sources and the energy demand behavior.
	Use of interlinking devices	[55]	Variability of distance location between MGs.
	between the AC and DC nodes.		
	Fault location, modeling.	[71]	Analysis and actions to take according to the type of fault. Low short circuit currents.
	lack of standards, guidelines,	[76]	Current solutions of single-MG have not been scaled to multiple microgrids. Lack of
Island and	or practical experience.		standard procedures.
Multi-Microgrid	Influence of both AC and DC	[71]	High loads. Different contributions to the short-circuit current. Lack of natural zero
	MG challenges.		crossing current. Severe magnitude of the fault current. Standard gaps in the protection of DC- NMGs.
	Operation conditions.	[86]	Different voltage levels. Variability of size. Variability of connections. Many
	-		operational scenarios.
	High implementation cost.	[88]	Need communication infrastructure.

and information analysis is done locally in the DG or IED units. This protection must detect changes in system operation and modify settings locally to respond and isolate the fault [94].

Adaptive protections are suitable for faults during island or grid-connected modes and can effectively address communication problems, low fault current, loss of coordination, and other problems according to modification of the microgrid characteristics [95]. However, they need extensive communication infrastructure and may fail in looped MGs [92].

Due to low fault current levels in islanded mode, protection coordination in adaptive protection schemes is one of its challenges. This problem might be resolved with help of AI and ML technologies [96]. The authors in [97] propose an online adaptive protection scheme by using fuzzy logic and Genetic Algorithm (GA). GA resolves the network's coordination issue concerning its overcurrent relays, and the fuzzy logic rule determines topology of the network and the best set of parameters for each topology. Using benefits of AI, this security method makes use of synchronized information. Communication problems with this type of approach require further research.

In [37], the authors presented a new centralized adaptive overcurrent protection scheme with an inverse definite minimum time (IDMT) overcurrent relay for multi-microgrids to isolate the faulted section. The scheme has a central controller (CC) and a MG central controller (MGCC) that monitors current levels at PCC and power flow directions from different DGs, establishing thresholds for each relay. Results show the proposed scheme allows faster tripping times compared with other studies and allows operation of healthy sections for different NMG topologies.

Most adaptive protections have been implemented in single MGs. It would be beneficial to consider using intelligent computer approaches such as ANN-based, metaheuristic, or fuzzy and multi-agent approaches when implementing these to NMGs [72]. Additionally, adaptive protection for NMGs will need to include online relay coordination algorithms [75]. Adaptive protections indeed constitute good options for NMGs as they consider dynamic changes in the status of DGs and

CBs for relay settings, operate faithfully in all conditions, and enhance reliability of overcurrent protection in DC-MGs [98], [99]. Some examples of implementation of adaptive protections are discussed next.

The authors in [100] considered an adaptive protection system using a neural network technique (convolution neural networks (CNN)) and a metaheuristic optimization algorithm (gorilla troops optimizer (GOT)) to detect, classify, and locate faults. Current and voltage measurements are transformed into images the protection system uses to evaluate variation in operation mode, topologies, load, and DG penetration. The authors show integrating CNN and GOT techniques effectively detects, classifies, and locates feeder faults in the proposed NMG model. In [36], three new protection algorithms were introduced to identify system topology, operation conditions, and fault current level in an AC-MG. This adaptive protection was applied in active distribution networks with large penetration levels of inverter-based DERs.

The authors in [101] used a machine learning technique, support vector machine (SVM), to estimate circuit topology in an adaptive protection system. In this system, IEDs first estimate status of the circuit breaker and tie lines and then identify circuit topology. The authors in [102] used a modified version of the original IEEE 13-node test system as a single MG. To identify fault location and clearance, they used an adaptive protection center (APC), implemented with Arduino AT Mega 2560 and connected to the internet with an Ethernet Shield: WIZnet W5100. In addition, they used a remote system via the Internet of things (IoT) to monitor system status and load characteristics. This solution was used in individual MGs. However, it must be evaluated in NMGs or more extensive networks.

The authors in [103] considered a decentralized adaptive scheme using agent systems for MG protection coordination with uncertainties in its operation and its topologies. This protection strategy used an online decision-making process composed of a group of agents near the fault location to negotiate with one another the best protection coordination strategy in event of multiple faults. Offline settings stored in agent's memory were used for protection coordination. This approach is useful for various faults and does not necessitate using an offline database. This solution can also clear simultaneous faults, and it does so by utilizing a wide variety of agents. It would be interesting to apply these strategies to NMG and demonstrate them in an experimental model to evaluate its performance.

In [104], the authors implemented a framework for evaluating impact of operational uncertainties on an MG centralized protection scheme, such as communication latency and magnitude and duration of fault current. Reliability indices, including System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI) and Expected Energy Not Provided (EENS), were obtained using a Monte Carlo simulation algorithm to assess the protection scheme's reliability. They employed a hybrid simulator framework that considers both MATLAB and Java Agent Development (JADE) platform to evaluate effectiveness of this approach. Real-time communication link performance was simulated in JADE, while the MG model was created in Matlab.

The authors in [27] developed a digital coordinate adaptive protection scheme for an AC microgrid. This method uses various digital protection devices (PD) with different protective modules. i) Directional over-current relays (DOCR) to protect PCC and feeders. ii) Differential current-based relays (DFRs) to protect lines. iii) Communication-based and local trip commands to protect DG units. Additionally, they used adaptive protection coordination involving both offline and online steps. In the offline stage, they adopted various settings for protective modules. When doing online calculation, they identified any system changes and executed a new set of settings for each protective device. As a result, under various fault scenarios, reliable, selective, and coordinated protection was created. The latter five have not been implemented in NMGs. However, they could potentially be extended to these.

b) Wide Area Protections: Wide-Area Protection Systems (WAPS) is an advanced protection strategy often used with conventional protection devices. These protections use phasor measurement units (PMUs) to detect and localize line faults in a shorter and more accurate time. They provide flexible relaying schemes, fewer load-shedding events, and well-coordinated control actions. This protection system can manage disturbances or outages and offer adaptive relaying in collaboration with local protective devices [105]. Integrating wide-area protections in an advanced system provides capabilities for monitoring and coordinating different protection devices and performing complex protection algorithms. This system also provides a high-speed wide-area communication network [106], [107]. A global cloud-based framework for a wide area is a solution for large deployments of smart devices and protection equipment in NMGs [108].

Next, we discuss protection schemes using intelligent computer approaches, coordination strategies with optimization techniques, and other tools or new devices used in NMGs.

2) Computer-based Intelligent Techniques

Digital relays have enabled more advanced protection systems that use machine learning tools and digital signal processing methods [69]. The most popular machine learning tools used in protection systems are support vector machines (SVM) and artificial neural networks (ANN). Applying these techniques for protecting NMGs provides fault detection in island and grid-connected microgrid modes and decision-making about changes in the protection settings according to network topology.

A fault location method using SVMs for DC-NMGs was discussed in [84]. This method uses a current sensor located at one end of the faulty line. The fault and fault features are applied to the SVM to detect high-impedance faults (HIF). The results indicate that this method is more accurate than other methods for these types of faults. Furthermore, it has the advantage of being communication-free, which lowers costs and improves fault location accuracy. Future work with these methods should address applications in other topologies and architectures of the NMGs and use other variables, such as voltage waveforms.

3) Coordination Strategies with Optimization Techniques

The main goal of an optimization technique in protection coordination is to evaluate the best coordination and best settings for the chosen protection strategy [109]. Additionally, with optimization techniques, protection can turn off generators and optimize energy usage [77]. Some optimization techniques used in NMGs include heuristic and metaheuristic algorithms such as particle swarm optimization (PSO) and grey wolf optimization (GWO) [110]. Other techniques are linear and quadratic programming [111], and multi-agent systems [52].

Different authors have examined various optimization strategies for microgrid protection coordination and adaptive protection. The authors in [110] used an optimization algorithm that imitates the hunting mechanism of gray wolves (GWO) to achieve coordination of DOCRs in an AC-MG. In [111], the authors proposed protection coordination for an adaptive relay with optimal settings, integrating two optimization methods: nonlinear programming (NLP) and PSO. In [112], the authors presented a coordination scheme for MGs that uses a rate of change of fundamental voltage (ROCOV) relay and the NLP optimization method. The proposed coordination scheme is not affected by short-circuit currents variation or network topology changes. The authors in [70] proposed an efficient protection coordination scheme for NMGs using numerical directional overcurrent relays (DOCRs) with single and dual settings. An interior-point algorithm was used to solve the protection coordination problem.

The authors in [75] reviewed reliable coordination strategies based on advanced optimization algorithms (AOA) for AC-MGs. Their review includes ant colony optimization (ACO), cuckoo optimization algorithm (COA), PSO, genetic algorithm (GA), and teaching learning-based optimization (TLBO).

Related work in NMGs is [113], where the authors used a stochastic programming model, the Bender decomposition, to design a strategy that examines in real-time, island mode of NMGs. They also used a deterministic mathematical model, the analytical target cascading (ATC) model, to achieve a decentralized operation schedule for each MG and to detect mismatches between load and power generation in island operation mode. This combination results in a reliable NMG.

4) New Devices and Tools

A protection scheme for NMG using fault current limiters (FCL) was recently proposed [114]. The authors solved operational problems of changes in level and direction of fault current and provided one set of directional overcurrent relay (DOCR) settings valid for different operation modes in an NMG using FCL. This solution limits excessive fault currents without requiring extra communication infrastructure. Protection coordination was formulated as an NLP problem and solved using a hybrid optimization approach with appropriate protection coordination time. They used this method both in series and parallel architectures and implemented HIL to validate performance of the protection scheme. Use of this solution in different NMG structures, such as hybrid NMG, must be validated. Adaptability and plug-and-play capabilities of NMG must be assessed using these tools.

M. A. Yaqobi and colleagues in [12] used a bidirectional semiconductor breaker insulated-gate bipolar for isolated DC-NMGs. This circuit breaker can quickly interrupt a short-circuit current to maintain DC-MG's operation. The authors in [115] presented another solution combining control strategies with protection schemes for DC-NMGs. In this solution, voltage source converters (VSC) of DC/DC regulate instantaneous power transfer and cancel interactions between interconnected DC microgrids. They used a protection scheme based on Fuzzy Inference Systems (FIS) for faster fault detection. This scheme requires high-speed communication and synchronization. It would be ideal for testing this solution in hybrid MMGs under different topologies.

The authors in [116] designed a microgrid testbed for protection and resiliency using a real-time digital simulator (RTDS) platform. They studied different protection schemes and communication delays for real-time operation and validated their performance using hardware in the loop (HIL). This testbed was performed in an IEEE 13-node distribution system, focusing on inverter modeling and inverter behavior during faults.

Another real-time HIL test of adaptive protection for AC-MGs was proposed in [117]. In this test, the authors evaluated performance of an adaptive protection algorithm with a centralized control using GOOSE messages in a radial AC-MG. They found Ethernet communication helped achieve fault detection, isolation, and adaptive settings. Figures 7 and 8 present evaluation of different solutions for protecting NMGs regarding reliability, selectivity, speed, sensitivity, economics, simplicity, and scalability.

We established a classification system based on each property's key characteristic. Reliability also includes dependability and security, and key characteristics to consider for the NMG protection solution should be capability to protect different models, use of communication infrastructure, computational burden, and cybersecurity. We chose two features for selectivity: fault detection, classification, and location capacity, and detection of internal and external faults; for speed, coordination optimization performance and sampling time; for sensitivity, ability to protect the system in various operation modes and fault detection for smallest fault levels; for economics, solution's investment cost; and for simplicity

Reliability 5 4.5 Scalability and Selectivity simplicity 0 Economics Speed **Conventional Protection** AP+Computer intelligent tecniques AP+Communication-based technology Sensitivity Wide area protection Advanced algorithm Coordination strategies New devices or tools

Fig. 7. Evaluation of solutions for AC-NMG protection.



Fig. 8. Evaluation of solutions for DC-NMG protection.

and scalability, capability to be easily implemented. We used the findings and recommendations from literature study to evaluate each of these items, assigning a score of 1 to the item with lowest score and a score of 5 to the item with highest score.

We can see while protection schemes based on communication and intelligent algorithms are scalable, selective, sensitive, and reliable, traditional schemes are cheap but not very scalable. As a result, when choosing a protection scheme for NMGs, these properties should be considered.

Tables V, VI, and VII show important references for applying advanced protection strategies based on interface technologies AC, DC, and AC/DC NMG.

C. Protection Standards

Currently, protection of single MGs and interoperability of MGs are guided by national and international standards. Use of MGs has led to continuous development of these standards. However, it is worth noting there are no specific standards for protecting NMGs. However, it is critical to

 TABLE V

 Advance Protection Approaches for AC-NMGs

Item	Reference
Conventional protection	[16], [33], [37], [63], [112],
	[118], [119]
Adaptive protection and	[7], [23], [24], [27], [70],
Communication-based technology	[78], [100], [101], [120]–[124],
Wide area protection	[107]
Advanced algorithm	[36], [125], [126]
Coordination strategies with	[40], [127], [128]
optimization techniques	
New devices or tools	[114]

TABLE VI Advance Protection Approaches for DC-NMGs

Item	Reference
Conventional Protection	[34]
Adaptive protection	[129]
Advanced algorithm	[84], [115], [130]
New devices or tools	[12], [131], [132]

TABLE VII Advance Protection Approaches for AC/DC-NMGs

Item	Reference
Adaptive protection	[133]
Advanced algorithm	[19], [86], [134]
New devices or tools	[135]

provide a sustainable, reliable, and safe energy market for NMGs, and to develop standards to improve protection-related NMGs' design, communications, and operations. Next, we discuss current standards applied to design, communication, and operation of protections for single MGs.

1) Protection-related Design Standards

There are two standards for design of protections of MGs, IEEE Std 2030.9-2019 and IEC TS 62898–3-1:2020 [136]. A third standard, IEEE P2030.12/D1.4, is still in draft. As stated above, no standards are developed for design of multiple MG protections.

a) IEEE Std 2030.9-2019 IEEE Recommended Practice for the Planning and Design of the Microgrid: This guide provides a method for internal design and external connection and best practices for implementing typical AC MV MG protections. This standard recommends and explains type of protection used for the busbar and feeder on both utility and MG sides and PCC, power source, and distribution transformer on MG side. This standard does not consider interconnection of multiple MGs and the possibility of having different operating topologies or various types of electrical transmission (AC-DC or hybrid).

b) IEC TS 62898-3-1:2020 Microgrids – Part 3.1: Technical Requirements – Protection and Dynamic Control: This standard was developed by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) to cover requirements for AC MG protections, specific protection systems, and dynamic control issues in MGs. This guide addresses specific challenges for protecting the systems of non-isolated and isolated MGs. It introduces different approaches for short-circuit protections (overcurrent, directional overcurrent, distance, differential), system protections (under/over voltage protection, frequency protection), and communication-based protections (centralized protection systems) [137]. Extending this standard to decentralized and advanced protections for interconnected MGs is a great opportunity.

c) P2030.12 Guide for the Design of Microgrid Protection Systems: A standard draft was published on June 28, 2022, [138] and its final version is expected to be approved before December 2022. This standard will cover design and selection of protective devices and coordination between them for different operation modes (grid-connected and island modes and during the transition between modes). The standard includes communication-based protections (centralized and decentralized) and other protection types [136]. This guide does not consider protection of NMGs, but extending it to this framework would be ideal.

2) Protection-related Communication Standards

a) IEC 61850 – Communication Networks and Systems in Substations: IEC 61850 is an international standard for communication in substations, which enables high-speed automated protection applications across different zones (process, field, and station) in a smart grid architecture model (SGAM). This standard integrates protection, control, measurement, and monitoring functions of smart grid architecture [139]. IEC 61850 covers all communication-related aspects inside substations for automation and protection. More recently, working groups in IEC TC57 have extended IEC 61850 to include DER for communication between both ends of line protection [140]. The common data model used in IEC 61850 promotes smooth communication among DERs and NMGs. As a result, adaptive and decentralized protections for NMGs could be easily implemented using this standard and IEC 61850 standard [117].

b) Other Standards for Sub-Networks: In NMGs, it is necessary to identify different subnetworks that form communication architecture. Types of subnetworks include Field Area Network, neighborhood network, inter-substation networks, intra-substation networks, wide area network, and metropolitan area network. Standardized communication technologies are used within different subnetworks and between them for interoperability. Fig. 9 presents mapping of a communication network and standardized communication technology in SGAM [141]. The yellow highlighted is the protectionrelated communication network in a microgrid and NMG. For mapping details, please refer to [141].

3) Protection-related Operation Standards

Protection requirements are different depending on operation modes. In island mode, protection should disconnect the faulty portion of the microgrid with minimum disruption to loads, while in grid-connected mode, protection should be coordinated with utility network protection to minimize network impact [142]. Protection of NMGs should also consider impact on interconnected MGs. Therefore, standards for MG control, testing, application, and interconnection, such as IEEE 2030.7-2017 and IEEE 2030.8-2019 [143], could also be used to guide implementation of protection in MGs and NMGs [136].



Fig. 9. Mapping of standardized communication technology in the protection-related communication network of NMG.

IV. FUTURE TRENDS IN PROTECTION OF NMG

A. Communication Infrastructure

Interconnecting multiple microgrids will necessitate more reliable communication systems that allow communication between different protective devices [36], [71]. Types of interlinking devices can directly influence which type of protection scheme is more effective and suitable, but interlinking devices must also be effectively protected [144], [145]. A high-speed communication architecture is also required to achieve fast, selective, secure, and reliable protections [92], [146], [147]. A cost-efficient communication framework [76] must be designed and implemented along with protection infrastructure to create effective communication channels [88]. Accurate data transfer, proper energy utilization, and detection of island mode operation, data traffic, and latency issues must also be considered in designing protections for NMGs [148].

Development of communication infrastructure for protecting NMGs should consider mobile relays, evaluating communication delays, latency, and data loss between agents, and using 5G technologies. This will require more research before implementation. Implementing IoT-based protection schemes should help migrate conventional protection strategies to modern protection frameworks. In addition, IoT-based support can be integrated into protection devices of NMGs [102], [121], [149]. Field tests considering dynamic communication links, failures, and cyber-attacks should be implemented to improve interconnection and adaptive protections in NMGs [72].

B. Fault Location

Fault location and diagnosis in hybrid NMGs will require more investigation. Good references in the framework of non-NMGs are [80], [125], [134]. Research in this subject needs to explore types of faults that occur at different locations, fault direction identification, and fault tolerance of the protections of NMGs. Developing protection schemes for NMGs could consider advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) to collect information about faults or status of the circuit breakers. Control strategies in protection applications should address detection of internal faults, operational behaviors of DGs, and interconnection and interaction among adjacent MGs. Moreover, research should be focused on developing innovative techniques to accelerate detection of fault periods in invertedbased NMGs in island mode with or without communication systems.

C. Protection Coordination

Protection coordination methods and short-circuit calculations for different operation modes of NMGs are additional areas that need further exploration. For protection coordination of NMGs, ideally, studies could consider adaptive protection schemes based on machine learning and optimization approaches based on mixed-characteristic curves of directional overcurrent relays. Convex optimization approaches could also be considered for determining a strict optimal point for DOCR relays and their application to interconnected MGs with meshed topologies.

D. Hierarchical Protection Strategies

Protections that combine advanced control and protection techniques require good communication infrastructure with specialized ride-through capabilities that make information about system resources available online [46]. These protections could also consider using hierarchical protection strategies with balanced DER technologies and adaptive relay settings to address low-fault-current issues and improve fault detection in the presence of DERs.

E. Adaptive Protection Schemes

Dynamic changes in operation modes of NMGs create the need to redesign the protection scheme. Changes in topologies with different technologies make protection structures and operations more complex. Adaptive protections are a suitable alternative for NMGs as they facilitate effective integration of an MG into an existing main grid or multiple microgrids. However, it is still necessary to consider additional factors, like selectivity, sensitivity, reliability, cost-effectiveness, and efficient operation, before implementing these types of protections [150]. In addition, an adaptive protection design should be robust enough to deal with system fault behavior in NMGs regardless of their structure.

Both real-time simulation tests and real-time operation of adaptive protections in NMGs need to be studied to determine their proper operation and performance. Real-time simulation tests should be conducted to study how adaptive protection handles dynamic variations in the source of generation, e.g., wind and PV sources, and with synchronous and induction motor loads. Real-time operation of an NMG using decentralized adaptive protection like a multi-agent system (MAS) could be an interesting application since this system should handle changes in operation modes and dynamic interactions of protection in interconnected microgrids [151]. Furthermore, future research should focus on studying impact of communication failures on performance of adaptive protections on real-time NMGs [52].

The study of advanced microgrid protection systems for NMGs should be prioritized. Studies should be focused on determining suitable decentralized protection schemes, how to increase their flexibility and modularity [126], and potentially, consider exploring use of artificial intelligence (AI), deep learning (DL), and data mining applications [152], [153]. For example, experience in [120] suggests application of AI and machine learning (ML) techniques in adaptive protection schemes will most likely improve accuracy of estimating dynamic fault currents [126].

Adaptive decentralized protections have several qualities that make them good candidates for protecting more distributed interconnected networks. They are flexible and modular and can handle additional MGs and variable loads without changing protection devices. Furthermore, they rely on a communication infrastructure that allows them to be more effective in control and decision-making tasks. Adaptive protection can also use methods that divide the system into zones or clusters that allow them to match available relay settings to existing network topologies [144].

F. Monitoring and Control Protection Schemes

Monitoring devices is another area of interest. Research on using wide-area protection to build an adaptive monitoring protection system for NMGs remains in the early phase [75]. Adopting a SCADA system for data collection and using micro PMUs in centralized protection architectures in NMGs are appealing options to study [92]. On the other hand, studying close-loop wide area protection will provide opportunities for implementing decentralized adaptive protections. Furthermore, more work is needed on advanced sensors and faster communication networks [154].

Protections that use devices with fast-acting grounding, solid-state technology, and intelligent electronic devices should improve operation of grids with dynamic topologies like NMGs. For example, solutions like intelligent all-in-one adaptive protections and control schemes that integrate all required operations in an NMG could be developed.

G. Real-Time Simulation Test

Future work could consider a HIL testbed approach in protection schemes in NMGs. Study of protection schemes with different test capabilities for low and medium voltage networks in NMGs would require developing a specific HIL testbed with transit simulations for relays with non-standard curves with variable settings and under different setups and topologies [155]. Additionally, HIL testing of adaptive protections using real IEDs and IEC61850 communication could be another area of future study for their practical implementation. An example where HIL testing is used is [156]. For any NMG topology, it is critical to consider carrying over real-time simulations to estimate time required to update signals to all relays during a fault and to assess relay coordination during a communication failure [157]. All these must be followed or complemented with field evaluation of adaptive protection schemes in NMGs with digital relays, communication capabilities, and supervisory software.

H. NMG Protection Design

It is also necessary to design a multicriteria protection plan that takes into consideration: 1) bidirectional and variable fault current, 2) power-export restrictions, 3) network structure and type of topology of NMGs [158], 4) response time of protection, and 5) protection of equipment from synchronization failures [154], 6) impact of the regulatory environment and ownership model of NMG [159]. Design of NMGs' protection standards should include a multicriteria protection plan and consider addressing and proposing solutions to issues or gaps in advanced protection systems. For example, existing gaps include absence of standards for DC circuit breakers, fuses, and grounding equipment required for reliable operation of a DC-NMG [160].

Figure 10 shows trends in NMG protection. VOYANT tools were used to create this figure.



Fig. 10. Trends of MG-Protection.

V. CONCLUSION

In this document, we reviewed different architectures and topologies of NMGs that have been discussed in literature and that might be used to study networked protection systems. In addition, we reviewed literature on advanced microgrid protection systems, as they offer the most suitable path to developing protections for NMGs. The review focused on pointing out challenges present in developing protections for NMGs, potential solutions, and areas of research that need to be addressed for their development. We presented a comparative table that summarizes challenges in protecting NMGS and a radar chart that assesses proposed solutions and their advantages, taking selectivity, reliability, simplicity, economics, scalability, and speed criteria into consideration.

According to reviewed literature, the main challenges faced in designing and operating protection systems for NMGs are the following. i) Location of faults in the presence of multiple connections and disconnections. ii) Existing gaps in developing and implementing fast and appropriate communication infrastructures. iii) Lack of standards for DC protections, which are needed to implement hybrid NMGs.

Future research should focus on carrying over tests that study performance of protection schemes designed to handle dynamic topologies and communication failures. However, implementation of NMGs also depends on development of regulations and standards designed to guide users in selection of appropriate protection schemes. Guides for design of a protection scheme for NMGs should consider criteria like selectivity, modularity, flexibility, reliability, fastness, dynamic high-speed communications, accuracy, and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, guides should include design of hybrid protection schemes that combine use of DC and AC.

Implementation and the operation of NMGs cannot happen unless reliable, secure, and economically reasonable protection systems are developed. Therefore, more research on implementing suitable protections schemes for NMGs is clearly needed.

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