



The subjective experience of power: Its implications for the maintenance of and resistance to power in relations among Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel

Journal of Sociology

1–17

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DOI: 10.1177/1440783318808904

journals.sagepub.com/home/jos**Yael Ben David**

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Abstract

The current research sheds new light on the power dynamics between a national majority and minority in the context of inter-group conflict, specifically Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. Drawing on Giddens, it broadens the dualistic approach to power suggested by the literature to demonstrate how the manifestation of power depends on the interpretation actors give to their social positioning in different life contexts. Drawing on 32 in-depth interviews with undergraduate students on their daily experience of power, four themes emerge reflecting the co-creation and alteration of power dynamics through reflexivity and agency: *insecure power*, *ambivalent power*, *subversive power* and *internal power*. The results provide empirical support for the role of agency and subjectivity in the manifestation of social power. The discussion explores the various ways in which these themes come into play in the socio-political context of Israel.

Keywords

intersectionality, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, social power, structure-agency, structuration

The literature that explores power dynamics between majorities and minorities in general (e.g. Moscovici et al., 1976; Scott, 1985; Stallybrass and White, 1986), portrays a dual picture in which a person's position in a given power hierarchy determines how power will be practised. Research that addresses inter-group contact between Jewish and

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Palestinian citizens of Israel shows how the hegemonic Jewish majority, backed by institutional forces operating on its behalf, exercises power through authority and ownership in a shared space, while the Palestinian minority, who are more mindful of their social identity, rely on social cohesion and their Otherness as sources of alternative power (Maoz, 2004, 2011; Saguy et al., 2008; Suleiman, 2004). This dualistic understanding of power and resistance to power is inherent in a structural approach to human behaviour as a mere product of predisposed social hierarchy. This approach portrays only part of the picture, as it does not take into account the implications of subjective interpretation and reflexivity of individuals, in a particular time and space, on the ways in which power dynamics manifest in everyday interactions.

The current research sheds new light on the possible complexities in the power dynamics between a national majority and minority in the context of inter-group conflict. Drawing on Giddens' structuration approach (1979, 1984), I aim to broaden the dualistic approach to power suggested by the literature. Assuming the role of agency and reflexivity in constructing the meaning of power in the social world, I argue that structural position is not the sole determinant of power dynamics, and that the manifestation of power very much depends on the interpretation actors give to their social positioning in different life contexts.

This point will be demonstrated through the particular case of Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. Particularly, the research explores the subjective experience of power of undergraduate students who operate in a shared living space, such as a university campus where Jewish and Palestinian students study together.¹ The research analyses the daily power experience of these actors in light of their positionalities within intersecting power hierarchies, and closely observes gender and ethno-nationality as two basic axes that constitute inequality generally, and in the Israeli context in particular.² The research contributes to understanding the correspondence (or lack thereof) between structural position and how it is enacted by social actors, observing the implications for how power is maintained and challenged in the context of the power relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel.

The first part of the article reviews empirical evidence from previous research on the power dynamics between majority and minority groups, and particularly in the Israeli context. It presents Giddens' (1984) structuration approach, and draws some theoretical guidelines for the analysis. The second part presents four themes that emerged from the daily experiences of power recounted by the interviewees, reflecting the incongruity between structural position and internal experiences of power: insecure power; ambivalent power; subversive power and internal power. These themes demonstrate the complexities in how power dynamics manifest between Jews and Palestinians in Israel in everyday interactions. The third part discusses the implications of the four themes on how power is maintained and challenged within the power relations between Jews and Palestinians in Israel.

Literature review

Inter-group conflicts are based on and maintained by power asymmetry that is constructed and preserved by the mutual influences of culture, structure and action (Webel and Galtung, 2007). The hierarchical social structures based on race, class and gender are fertile ground for legitimizing hierarchies between people (Galtung, 1990).

Although Israel is a Jewish state, the Arab Palestinian minority constitutes approximately 20 percent of its population. Influenced by the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Jewish majority perceives the Palestinian minority as a threatening and subversive element within society, one that must be controlled and treated with suspicion (Cahanov, 2010). Throughout the history of the Israeli state and up to the present day, the Palestinian minority has suffered from systemic discrimination in many spheres, including education and health services, investment in municipal infrastructure, and economic development. Palestinians also encounter discrimination on an interpersonal basis in workplaces, the housing market, shared residential areas, and during daily encounters with the Jewish majority population (e.g. Smooha, 2013).

Discrimination against the Palestinian population is based on contextual and historical factors. Prominent among these are the definition of the state as a Jewish state, the regional history of the conflict in the Middle East, and Jewish collective memory, particularly of the Holocaust, which has made a strong imprint on Israeli society. These factors fuel and are fuelled by collective feelings of fear and threat, which are provoked by any occasion that might threaten the dominating position of the Jewish state within the region (Bar-Tal, 2009).

Intersecting power hierarchies of gender and ethno-nationality

Gender is another principal site where domination is established in the Israeli context; it strongly intersects with the ethno-national axis of discrimination. Gender inequality is amplified by the militaristic discourse that permeates Israeli society, and through the culture of domination that characterizes Israel as a society in conflict (Berkowitz, 1999; Herzog, 1998; 2004). 'Security' discourse creates gender-specific roles, in which Jewish men are charged with the most crucial mission of guarding the safety and security of the country as soldiers, while women are expected to support the national project as mothers and wives. Conditioned to fulfil a specific role to earn their participation within the collective, Jewish women are placed in a complex position: they are invited to share the dominating power of Jewish men but from a specific non-dominating position; they are not completely incorporated, but neither are they merely excluded (Berkowitz, 1999; Herzog, 1998).

Within Palestinian society, the traditional Arab kinship and cultural system designates Palestinian men as dominant within the community. Despite the many changes the Israeli Palestinian community has undergone, a patriarchal structure continues to be a central characteristic of Arab culture as a whole, and of Israeli Arab society in particular (Afshar, 1993; Hasan, 2002). Thus, in addition to being subjugated in the ethno-national hierarchy of Israeli society, Palestinian women are caught up within multiple systems of domination: in their family, in the community, in the class system and in the state (Abu-Oksa Daoud, 2002; Hasan, 2002). It is important to note, however, that while feminist literature notes the oppression in Palestinian women's lives, it also emphasizes women's agency and creative forms of resistance (Ahmed-Kasem, 2002; Erdreich and Rapoport, 2002; Herzog, 2004). According to Sa'ar (2007), the structural tension created between various power regimes allows Palestinian women in Israel to navigate between systems of domination, and develop their agency within the structural setting. Building on this

view, gender is seen as a fundamental element that must be considered if we are to gain a more inclusive perspective of the subjective experience of power.

Empirical research on the power dynamic between national majority and minority

Although sociological research suggests a more complex account of power and agency that results from intersecting power hierarchies of gender and ethno-nationality, the empirical research that addresses the power dynamic between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel portrays a dual picture of power and resistance to power. Rouhana and Fiske (1995) asked Jewish and Palestinian high school students in Israel how they perceive their power, and found that both groups thought that Jews have more institutional power through control over resources than Palestinians, and that Jews exercise their power through a sense of entitlement and ownership in the public space. This coincides with the research addressing whiteness, suggesting that the power of privileged individuals blinds them from thinking and considering the role of the social order in their being. Social mechanisms operate asymmetrically on their behalf, enabling them to manifest power unconsciously (Twine and Gallagher, 2008). Rouhana and Fiske also discovered that Palestinians were perceived as having a greater power to endure in the face of injustices, to protest against them and to integrate as a collective. The authors termed this as 'social integrational' power, consistent with the broader literature that highlights the power of the powerless (e.g. Moscovici et al., 1976; Scott, 1985; Stallybrass and White, 1986). In a similar way, studies on inter-group contact between Israeli Jews and Palestinian students concluded that Jews exercise power by managing the meetings and setting the agenda for the discussions, while the Palestinians use their minority position and their experiences of colonization to challenge Jewish claims in the group discussion (see Maoz, 2004, 2011; Saguy et al., 2008; Suleiman, 2004).

The empirical research addressing inter-group contact does not address the possible complexity of individuals' multiple, sometime contradictory, social positioning or subjective interpretations of different identities and/or life contexts. How does having varied power positions in different life experiences, in social or communal contexts affect how individuals and groups conceive, exercise and challenge power?

Structuration perspective, agency and power

Giddens' structuration theory provides an integrative framework that considers how structure and agency intertwine. According to Giddens (1984:15), we should not 'conceive structures of domination built into institutions as grinding out "docile bodies" who behave like automata', but rather see how structures are co-created and co-influenced by human agency. In other words, structures are not external to the individual but internal in the sense that it is in the knowledge of situated actors, who by their actions reproduce and also alter structural properties. Contrary to the structuralist view of individuals as 'dopes' who are overdetermined by structures, Giddens views humans as purposive agents who act through a process of reflection that serves as a tool for accomplishing human interactions (Giddens, 1984).

In his theory of structuration, Giddens emphasizes how actors, through their actions, position themselves within a network of social relations, highlighting the interpretational and relational aspect of social positioning (in contrast to social position). Nonetheless, they do it with their own interpretation. This in turn points to the importance of agency, suggesting that structures are reproduced – but may also be altered – by agents through social interactions. According to Giddens, agency is the way in which power is enacted, utilizing individuals' ability to make choices and act differently, and create spaces of control within their actions vis-à-vis people considered powerful (Giddens, 1979). The concept of agency proposed by Giddens highlights the power inherent in a subjective interpretation of a given situation, for creating power and control in a given time and space.

By analysing the daily power experiences of individuals using the structuration approach, the current study observes how power is conceived, exercised and challenged by Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel through their interpretations of their power. This includes uncovering the actions taken by individuals to establish their power or to resist power, and inquiring about the interpretative process that stands behind these actions in a specific time and space. Particularly, the research tracks the process by which individuals exploit their resources for the reproduction of autonomy and dependence in social interaction. In this way, we can learn about the ways in which power dynamics are reproduced, as well as challenged, by social agents in day-to-day experience.

Methodology

Participants and procedure

Data was gathered by conducting 32 in-depth interviews with Jewish and Palestinian women and men, from varied ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. All were undergraduates at a major Israeli university, ages 19–28 (typical in Israel), and were drawn from several academic disciplines. Despite the unequal proportions of Jewish and Palestinian students at the university,³ the participants were selected with a view to ensuring equal proportions with respect to gender and ethno-nationality, because the study aimed to examine these two intersecting axes closely, and provide a greater platform for voices that are usually unheard in this regard. Among the Palestinian students, eight were Muslims; seven were Christians; and two were Druze. Within these religious traditions, two described themselves as religious; ten as traditional; and three as secular. Among the Jewish students, one described him/herself as religious; one as traditional; and 13 as secular. Altogether, 20 of the students were originally from the centre of the country, and the others came from the periphery in the north or south.

Participants were reached in various ways: (a) via advertisements displayed around the campus on bulletin boards; (b) via mutual friends and colleagues; (c) via students who participated and connected me to their friends. All participants were offered a coupon for free coffee and pastry at the university cafeteria as token of gratitude at the end of the interview. The advertisement invited participants to be interviewed about their daily experience of power. The aim was to recruit a variety of people, not only those who are motivated to talk about their power.

Before the interview, participants completed a consent form and were provided with a short explanation about the purpose of the research, as it was presented in the advertisement. At first, participants were asked to free associate about the word 'power' ('*Ko'ah*' in Hebrew). Then, they were asked to provide examples from their daily lives of situations in which they felt they had power. In addition, they were asked to share stories which illustrated the feeling of not having power. Participants were not instructed to concentrate on their gender or ethno-national identity. This open invitation encouraged participants to relate anything they felt relevant to their sense of power within their community, families and Israeli society. In most interviews, the subject of social identity and its implications for the daily experience of power came up naturally. Among the Jewish interviewees, it came up mostly in examples drawn from their army service. Among the Palestinian interviewees, the influence of their identity as Palestinians on their power was almost always addressed, because their minority social position has a great effect on their daily lives. Women often related to their gender identity as affecting their power. However, in the few cases where the subject of social identity did not come up, interviewees were asked directly at the end of the interview to think about their power also as group members of the Israeli-Jewish/Palestinian collective. The interviews, each 1–2 hours in length, were recorded and then transcribed. All of the interviews were held in Hebrew. It is important to note that all participants were fluent in Hebrew, which is the language of instruction at the university.

Data analysis

The interviews were analysed using Giorgi's (1975) phenomenological analysis of dominant themes, following five stages: (1) reading the text without predisposition; (2) dividing the text into natural meaning units; (3) reading each unit according to the research question, i.e. "how do interviewees experience their power?"; (4) delineating major themes from the interviews (each interview contained between three and five major themes); and (5) collecting dominant themes across the interviews. A theme was considered dominant if at least four interviewees (regardless of their gender or nationality) mentioned it. The four themes discussed in this article were selected from the dominant themes identified in the interviews.

Author's positionality and its effect on the research data

The positionality of author (who also conducted the interviews), in terms of gender and ethno-nationality, was taken into consideration. First, the use of Hebrew as the interview language and the fact that the interviews were held on campus were considered as highlighting the power asymmetry between the Palestinian interviewees and the interviewer. Therefore, this subject was addressed openly at the beginning of each interview with a Palestinian interviewee, and they were invited to reflect on how they felt regarding the asymmetrical use of language. The discussion often led participants to think and talk about their experience of power regarding the particular issue of language, as described in the results section.

In addition, realizing that the interviewer is always part of the constructed stories that are told (Josselson, 2013), intervention during the interview was minimized, and participants

were provided with space to narrate their own experience without interruption. During the analysis, stories recounted during the interviews were interpreted in the particular context they were told. The contextualized interpretation of the data will be addressed in some parts of the results section.

Findings

From analysis of the interviews, four major themes emerged, which reflect the co-creation and alteration of power dynamics through reflexivity and agency: *insecure power*, *ambivalent power*, *subversive power* and *internal power*. Each theme will be presented with examples of how it manifests in the inter-group context drawn from the subjective experience of interviewees. All names given below are pseudonyms.

Insecure power

The theme of insecure power reflects a situation in which a person is in an advantaged social position but lacks a sense of control over his/her power. The theme was salient among those who were positioned in multiple privileged power positions, in terms of gender, ethno-nationality and class: particularly Jewish men, but also Jewish women. This theme reflects how being part of a majority group can both reinforce and induce a sense of personal insecurity.

For example, when asked to describe the meaning of power she feels as a Jewish Israeli, Inbal, a 22-year-old female, talked about her daily experience on the university campus:

- Inbal: We [the Jews] are the dominant group here, in Israel ... but we need to understand that we are surrounded by Arab countries. I am fearful when I walk beside minority group members [meaning Palestinians] at the university. I also don't like hearing Arabic. At the university, I don't like hearing Arabic. It makes me feel uncomfortable ...
- Interviewer: Why?
- Inbal: It doesn't feel nice! I feel that I fear that they [the Palestinians] will take over us. That they don't understand their place ...

In Inbal's view, Palestinians who speak their own language on campus are undermining the power and control of Jews in Israel. Inbal highlights the fact that this happens at the university, marking the Jews as the landlords of the public space, and the Palestinians as intruders, demonstrating how power is exercised by the majority (Rouhana and Fiske, 1995). However, Inbal's experience of power is accompanied by fear and a sense of threat. The Palestinians who speak Arabic on campus are reclaiming ownership of the space, thereby shaking her sense of power, inducing a fear of losing control.

The fear of what might happen if power gets out of hand plays an important role in the reproduction of dominance, as demonstrated in the story told by Erez, a 23-year-old Jewish male. Erez told me about his military service, when he served as an Israeli-Palestinian

coordination officer in Gaza Strip. He described a situation in which he, as a young officer, had to ban products from going into Gaza. This was very hard for him, and he referred to the acts of the Israeli army in Gaza as brutal power. I asked him why Israelis have to use such power against Palestinians, he replied:

Erez: If we look at it from above then we are ... we have no other choice ... the [coercive] power of the Jewish group comes into play in different aspects [in society] ... this brutality is just the way things are ... because there is no other choice.

Interviewer: Why?

Erez: Because if not, the other group ... will flip it ... to say it straight, they will rape us ...

Erez was put in a position of great power at age 19, and had to make decisions that affected thousands of civilians in Gaza. It appears that the sense of insecure power, reflected in his fear of a 'flip', serves as a basis legitimizing having such absolute power over others, and expresses a deep fear that the coercive power Jews exercise over Palestinians might turn against them if they act differently. Erez expressed his fear of rape: if we do not maintain our superiority, the Palestinians will rape us. Erez's analogy applies to the harsh and violent acts of Jewish Israelis against Palestinians. Moreover, it reflects how his interpretation of his dominating power position is in fact connected to his intersecting gender and ethno-national positioning and that these both affect his experience of power (Herzog, 2004).

The theme of insecure power reveals how individuals' reflection on their power position, particularly a sense of lacking control over their power in fact leads them to tighten the reins of dominance, thereby reproducing and structuring the power relationship because of their fear of losing power.

Ambivalent power

The theme of ambivalent power reflects a situation where a person in an advantaged social position tries to belittle his power in various ways. The theme particularly appeared in the way Jewish interviewees related to their relationship with Palestinians. For example, Liron, a 25-year-old Jewish male talked directly about this tension when he described his feelings regarding a Palestinian woman who studies with him:

There is a Palestinian woman in my class ... from the first moment I discovered she was Palestinian I really wanted to connect with her ... to show her that I'm weak. I mean ... the trivial opinion is that I as a Jewish Israeli and she as an Israeli Arab means I am stronger than she is. I think I could take down most of the barriers ... the stereotypes. I managed to dismantle the power I supposedly have.... This is how I handle it, I try to cancel power in front of anyone who feels threatened ...

Liron expressed the tension he feels between his structural power position, and his desire to be liked and accepted by the Palestinian Other. He described how the mere

Palestinian identity of that woman, motivated him to become friends with her. By doing so he hopes to cancel the power he 'supposedly has' (in his words). According to Liron, his objective power is a stereotype, and not indicative of who he truly is. In terms of structuration theory, we see how Liron negotiates between his internal knowledge of what is expected from his social position as a member of the majority group, and his feelings in this regard. The ambivalence this provokes leads him to blur that power through friendship. Observing the interpretative space allows us to explain the gap between the structural and the actual. It reveals the complexity of power dynamics that may occur not only through direct control but also through friendship.

The experience of ambivalent power was salient among Jewish women, who are privileged because of their Jewish identity, but are also expected not to act dominantly because of their gender role (Herzog, 1998; Berkowitz, 1999). This puts them in a situation where they are more prone to feel dissonance between being in a high power position and their social self, leading them to deny their power.

Smadar, a 28-year-old Jewish female, is a law student who is socially active in several social struggles, particularly workers' rights. She proudly told me that her social activities give her a sense of power. However, when asked about the meaning of her Jewish identity for her power, she dismissed the idea that her power derives from privilege:

I think that this whole thing about privilege is that by the end of the day ... the purpose is to divide people by nationalities and the concept was born to make people feel they belong and that we are equal because we belong to the same nationality – we are not! Because some take a bigger slice of the cake and we are left with crumbs ... it sounds a little bit Marxist I know ... but I don't feel any power from being a Jew ... I think it is false consciousness.

Smadar attempts to efface her Jewish identity and emphasize her class identity; she considers the attempt to identify her as Jewish a capitalist manipulation to take advantage of her as someone from the middle class who, in that sense, does not have power. The ambivalent sense of power comes into play because she is well aware of the power relationship between Jews and Palestinians (and therefore of her own power as a Jew), yet refuses to see herself as powerful. Instead, she highlights other identity dimensions that put her at a disadvantage. When asked about the meaning of her gender identity for her power, she gave varied examples of how she is discriminated against as a woman. It seems that Smadar feels dissonance between her identity as a social activist and her universalistic values, and the fact that she is also part of a privileged group in Israeli society. She resolves this by discounting any emotional and practical meaning of belonging to the privileged majority group, while highlighting other identity dimensions that reduce her dissonance.

Smadar is aware of the structural constraints but still maintains an interpretative space in which she gives meaning to her various power positionings. The example demonstrates how the subjective interpretation of power positioning is essential in order to understand her behaviour in choosing which of her rights she actualizes, and which obligations she ignores (Giddens, 1979). However, dismissing her privilege does not erase it but rather reproduces it, by strengthening her ability as a majority group member to practice power unconsciously (Fine et al., 1997; Twine and Gallagher, 2008).

Subversive power

Subversive power is rooted in a special skill, personality trait, social consciousness or knowledge that provides a person some advantage over others, who are in a higher position in terms of their social status. Their relative advantage allows them to be distinct and bold, and establish a sense of superiority. The experience also takes the form of a struggle, resisting authority, and challenging existing power relations. This theme coincides with previous research that addresses the power of minority group members to resist the status quo (Maoz, 2004, 2011; Suleiman, 2004).

The theme of subversive power was salient among interviewees who are in low power positions in some contexts of their lives, particularly among Palestinian interviewees referring to their relationship with Jewish Israelis. Safa, a 23-year-old Palestinian female, told me about her experience of power when serving as a translator at a summer camp:

I once felt power in an unexpected way when I served as a translator between languages. We were at a summer camp, and there were people who spoke Hebrew, Arabic and English. I was the only one to speak all three of them fluently. I felt I had power because all the others were dependent on me in order to communicate properly.... Once you speak the language well you have an advantage over other people.... I speak Hebrew, and therefore I can read the Bible.... I know more and therefore I am better than the others ...

Safa describes how her knowledge of three languages gave her an advantage over other people at the camp, who were dependent on her in order to communicate. Although she did not address the power relationship between her and the Jewish participants directly, she highlighted her knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish culture as giving her a particular advantage, implying that the Jews in the camp depended on her as a mediator.

This example demonstrates the role of agency: how the interpretation of the situation may alter the power dynamic in a specific time and space. Within that particular situation, Safa experienced herself as knowledgeable, which put her in a place of superiority over others who might enjoy greater social privileges and status than she does in other contexts. Safa referred to her experience of power as unexpected, implying that it is not trivial to feel powerful that way (hence, the structural constraints). At the same time, she managed to position herself as powerful in that situation, thereby demonstrating agency.

The salience of this theme among the Palestinian interviewees could be also due to the context of the interview, and to my own positionality. In some cases, I felt that my identity provoked an attempt to gain superiority over me, with some of the Palestinian interviewees basing their notions on historical facts and general knowledge; others interrogated me on my studies and research. In the interview, Adham, a 20-year-old Palestinian male, explained that his family is a source for his power. He reinforced his position by stating:

I read a research report about how in Europe children leave their parents when they reach 18 and [that] the percentage of psychological problems there ... people fall into depression at a rate much higher than here, because they leave their parents. It's something that really makes an impact. Those relationships.... There are Jews that also leave their parents at the age of 18. There are lots of Jews like that. Right? If I am not mistaken.

By stressing family cohesion in Arab society as opposed to the western world, especially Jewish society in Israel,⁴ Adham pointed to an advantage he has as a Palestinian over young Jews in general, and indirectly over me. He even asked me to confirm this, seeking approval from me as an authority, who would thereby acknowledge weakness, allowing him to establish an advantage. In that sense, I served as a basis for validating his power. The choice to tell me these stories was in itself an act of challenging power, because it reflects the flexibility of power that can be gained using other means (like knowledge, expertise, social and family cohesion), not only through status and social position.

Internal power

Internal power reflects how being attentive to oneself in hard times or threatening situations creates alternative spaces of control through which one can establish a sense of power. The theme was prominent among Palestinian women who experience double marginality through their intersecting gender and ethno-national identity (Ahmed-Kasem, 2002; Herzog, 2004). The salience of this theme among these women provides additional evidence of Sa'ar's (2007) notion regarding the opportunities that are inherent in this position. As some stories revealed, Palestinian women manage to identify non-trivial situations in which they felt power where they are ostensibly supposed to be powerless.

Nadera, a 26-year-old Palestinian female, for example, explained how autonomy and choice might be established in an oppressive or hostile space. She told me about a time when she was on a bus, and speaking Arabic on the phone with a friend. She soon realized that everyone on the bus was looking at her. She told her friend, and the friend asked if she wanted to end the conversation. Nadera refused. She chose to continue speaking Arabic despite the people staring at her:

I told myself that if I remain silent and don't speak in my language then it [racism] is going to work. Like, the power that is applied is something that will work and I am not willing to lend it a hand. I will use my language everywhere. I will actually give my language power.

Nadera described a situation in which she encountered discrimination and hostility due to her Palestinian identity. Her description of the moment of choice in which she decided to 'give her language power', reflects power that is enacted through agency. By appropriating her language to herself, she created an autonomous space in which she was not dependent on others to validate her power, and became an active agent exercising that power. It is important to note that Nadera told me this story shortly after I asked her how she felt about us speaking Hebrew during the interview. Her immediate response was that it didn't matter to her, but her choice to recount this particular story in this context can be understood as another way to create a space of control and agency in an asymmetrical power dynamic.

In another example, Ragda, a 21-year-old Palestinian female reflected on her sense of power as minority group member:

It doesn't matter that I am a minority [as a Palestinian], but that I have this sense of power ... so it doesn't matter to me that I'm a minority, it could ... no. I will say this sentence once again. It doesn't matter that I am a minority but I have this power that allows me to say what I want, and to get what I want ... at least to think about it. It might not happen in my generation but maybe 20–30 years ... yes. There I feel I have power. It doesn't matter that there is a greater control over me ... I would still try to achieve what I want, what I think ...

In her words, Ragda emphasizing how the mere thought and will is in itself power. She is well aware of power relations and that 'there is greater control over her' – but still, she finds a space of control and choice in her thoughts and will. She recognizes her independent thought as power, demonstrating the idea of power as the manifestation of agency through choice (Giddens, 1979). It is also interesting to observe the form of her speech. She repeats the sentence three times. Articulating it again and again – in front of me, a member of the majority group. This is, in itself, an act of power.

The ability to experience power in difficult or threatening situations reflects an ability to think about power outside of power, and about how spaces of autonomy can be created within the structural context of domination. The theme of internal power elaborates on the power asserted by members of minority groups, and demonstrates how resistance can be initiated not reactively, but rather creatively through an internal connection to one's own will and goals.

Discussion

This study demonstrates the role of agency and meaning-making in the operation of power in the social world (Giddens, 1979, 1984). It shows how the existence of interpretative space in which individuals reflect on the structural context reproduces and also alters the ways in which power is structured by group members in the context of the conflicted relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel.

The findings reveal four different themes that elaborate on the dual perspective on majority–minority power dynamics, demonstrating its complex manifestations. It appears that the salience of these themes is contingent upon the multiple power positionings of individuals. Two themes, *insecure power* and *ambivalent power*, are salient in situations where a person has objective power as a member of the majority group, but an unstable or even absent subjective sense of power. Both themes were salient among privileged individuals, particularly Jewish men. This may be explained by the fact that, in this sample, Jewish men benefit the most from their power positioning, in terms of both gender and ethno-national identity. This theme demonstrates how the power of the majority, which is contingent upon external forces such as social hierarchy, manifests through feelings of internal insecurity, ambivalence and denial of power. The theme of insecure power is salient in Israeli society, emerging from the context of ongoing conflict that seemingly affects people's perception that the social order is fragile. Insecure power also serves as a practice for maintaining the superiority of the Jewish collective, as evident in the rhetoric used by the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to encourage the Jewish Israeli public to vote for him. On election day 2015, he tweeted: 'The Arab voters are moving in huge quantities to vote ... go and vote for me and we will establish a national government that will keep Israel safe.' Netanyahu won the election, and many

political commentators assert that his popularity derives from the way he uses a rhetoric of fear (Al-Gharbi, 2015).

The theme of ambivalent power was salient among Jewish respondents, women in particular. It seems that this power experience corresponds with the tendency of women to avoid power, and express it in implicit ways, sometimes through victimhood (Eagly, 1987). It also reflects the ambivalent power positioning of women in Israeli society (Berkowitz, 1999; Herzog, 1998): their perception of power as dominance-based contrasts with their gender role according to which women should not exert power, leading them to deny power or sublimate it in various ways.

The experience of ambivalent power is also related to the context of conflict, and may reflect the dissonance privileged people sometimes feel between their power position and their self-image as good, moral people (Shnabel and Nadler, 2008). The practice of power denial reflects the social phenomenon of competitive victimhood, which is particularly evident in Israeli society. It is observed in Israelis' tendency to view themselves as victims in their relationship with the Palestinians despite their being the powerful side in terms of social, material and institutional resources (Shnabel and Noor, 2012). Competitive victimhood among members of a privileged group may reflect their wish to restore a positive self-image and sense of morality. The experience of ambivalent power is rooted in internal dissonance between self-perception and objective power; it would be interesting to examine further its salience among left-wing voters who hold universalistic values.

Both insecure power and ambivalent power allow individuals to avoid facing the moral consequences of being in an advantaged power position, and thus reproduce and structure dominance (Giddens, 1984). However, while insecure power provides a justification for retaining power and control regardless of the consequences, ambivalent power allows a person to keep his/her power without feeling it. In both cases, individuals avoid responsibility for the consequences of having an objective power, and preserve the status quo.

The other two themes, *subversive power* and *internal power* reflect a situation in which a person lacks power, but does have a sense of subjective power. Although both themes exemplify the alternative power that is often attributed to the Palestinian minority (Maoz, 2004; Rouhana and Fiske, 1995; Suleiman, 2004), there are differences in their basis of validation. While subversive power is validated in the presence of an authority or hegemon, internal power is concentrated within the person, his/her strengths and capacities regardless of external factors.

Both subversive power and internal power were salient among people who experience marginality in different contexts of their lives (gender, race, class or some combination of these). Subversive power was found to be especially salient among Palestinian men, which might be explained by their particular, contradictory power positioning: in the patriarchal Arab society men are required to be dominant and superior, but they are also second-class citizens who suffer marginality in every aspect of their public and social life in Israel (Afshar, 1993; Hasan, 2002). This might create a strong obligation to hierarchy and social position as dictating power. The authority that they are trying to resist is in fact embedded also in their own perception of power, and in the ways in which they resist the hegemonic power. In this sense, the experience of subversive power reveals the dialectics between power and resistance. It is an act of agency and resistance, while simultaneously revalidating the hegemonic power that is being resisted.

The theme of internal power was particularly salient among Palestinian women, consistent with feminist literature that describes marginalised women's sense of agency generally (Hill-Collins, 2002; hooks, 1995), and of Palestinian women in particular (Herzog, 2004; Sa'ar, 2007). Contrary to the claim that women use power implicitly through victimhood (Eagly, 1987), these women proudly told me about situations of power in which they were active agents, not passive victims. The salience of internal power among the Palestinian women interviewees might also relate to the fact that the interviewees were all successful women who had been accepted to the university and were gaining a higher education, despite the varied barriers erected by their families, community, and the state. It seems that their effort to acquire a higher education despite their marginalised status, and the pressure put on them by their families and community, leads them to see themselves and their own will as sources of power in the face of external constraints. Their privilege as highly educated people is thus a source of power that is rooted in their abilities and persistence, despite their life conditions. In this sense, their power has a positive, liberating meaning.

Subversive and internal power represent different practices of resistance used by minority group members to alter power relations. Subversive power is represented in the literature that describes how members of minority groups generally (e.g. Scott, 1985), and Palestinian citizens of Israel in particular (e.g. Rouhana and Fiske, 1995) use alternative resources such as education and knowledge to create individual mobility, or social awareness and group cohesion for building power as a collective opposed to Jewish hegemony. For example, the National Committee for the Heads of Arab Local Authorities was established by Palestinian leaders and organizations in 1982 to coordinate the political activity of the many groups that operate in Palestinian society in Israel. The committee is not recognized by the Israeli authorities, and its main activity is initiating political protests and strikes protesting violations of Palestinian rights in Israel and protecting those rights in an explicit attempt to alter the power balance for the Palestinian collective.

The experience of internal power may be seen in the concept of '*Sumud*', which means 'persistence' in Arabic, and refers especially to standing firm and remaining on the land. *Sumud* as an ideology and strategy was initiated by the Palestinian leadership after the war of 1967 (Kimmerling, 2009). It is primarily manifested by remaining on the land in face of the occupation and harsh conditions. It expresses a firm stance of the Palestinians regarding their right to the land, their persistence over time, and not giving up despite repression.

Conclusions

In this article, I argue that the dynamic between the subjective, interpersonal meaning of power and the macro, broader power mechanisms elaborates on the structural, dual perspective on power dynamics between a national minority and the majority. Observing the subjective interpretations of power positioning has implications for the ways power is maintained and challenged by social actors. These symbolic meanings of power need to be considered in order to fully understand the practices used to justify and maintain superiority, as well as to identify different practices of resistance to power, which may take an external form in the presence of the hegemon, or the internal form of building inner strength and resilience.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Niza Yanay for her advice and comments and to Shoshana Michael-Zucker for linguistic editing. The author also thanks member of the 2016 Davis Institute's writing group for their thoughtful comments on this paper: Hadas Cohen, Malka Greenberg, Tal Nitzan and Inbal Wilmsky.

Funding

The author is grateful to the Kreitman Fellowship Foundation for the Kreitman Doctoral Fellowship, and to the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Truman Post-doctoral Fellowship. The author also wishes to thank the Tammy Steinmetz Centre for Peace Research, the Walter-Lebach Institute for Jewish–Arab Coexistence and the Ban-On family for their generous awards, from which this work has greatly benefited.

Notes

1. University is often the first time that Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel encounter each other (at least in a civilian context; some Jewish Israelis encounter Palestinians during their military service), because most public spheres in Israel are segregated.
2. I acknowledge that there are other dimensions of inequality such as socioeconomic background. However, the current study concentrates on these two dimensions.
3. According to a report published by the Israeli Council for Higher Education in October 2016, 15.2 percent of the students in Israeli academic institutions are Palestinians, of whom 66 percent women. The report points to a dramatic increase in the number of Palestinian students in the last two decades, now more than double the 7 percent in 1997.
4. In the eyes of many Palestinian Arabs, the Jewish sovereign is perceived as part of the western world. In particular the Ashkenazi Jews, who came from Europe, share cultural properties with the West and are considered as settler-colonizers (see Wolfe, 2006).

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