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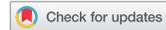
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“We don’t have to talk about how I feel”: emotionality as a tool of resistance in political discourse among Israeli students – a gendered socio-linguistic perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates how the gendered patriarchal mechanisms that exclude women from the political sphere are being produced, re-produced, and challenged in interpersonal political conversations by concentrating on the discursive mechanisms that construct the way young Israeli women and men talk about politics. The research is based on a yearlong intra-group dialog process. The group met for weekly sessions during two semesters, in which the group members discussed and expressed their thoughts and feelings regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) demonstrated how the political space is being marked, defined and delimited through gendered discursive practices. We present the different roles participants take in the group, and in particular the different strategies women use in face of disciplinary discursive mechanisms. The process revealed that the development in the group discussion was strongly intertwined with the change in the positioning strategies of the female participants. In particular, we found that women deployed emotionality as a tool of resistance that challenges gender binaries and masculine dominance. Our conclusion highlights the importance of the daily interactions in creating, sustaining and changing the political discourse of a society in conflict.

KEYWORDS Gender; discourse analysis; power mechanisms; politics; sociolinguistics

Introduction

One of the key components that sustains ongoing violent conflicts lies in the positivist-gendered dichotomy of the public and the private sphere (Peterson 1999; Yuval-Davis 1997), and the discursive practices that are identified with each of these spheres (Aharoni 2014; Berkovitch 1997; Herzog 1998, 2004; Sa’ar, Sachs, and Aharoni 2011). The public sphere is characterized by rational,

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evidenced-based talk, while emotional and subjective talk is perceived as personal and thus as belonging to the private sphere. This allows societies in conflict to legitimize political violent actions through rationalization (Van Leeuwen 2007), and allows society members to distance themselves emotionally from pain and suffering inflicted on the Other (Bandura 1999; Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2014; Peled-Elhanan 2010; Shnabel and Nadler 2008). The construction of the public sphere as rational is co-produced by and contingent upon white supremacy and patriarchy. Within the public sphere, the rational political actor is in fact a white male, while women are seen as secondary to the political arena through their association with the private and emotional realm (Peterson 1999; Yuval-Davis 1997).

This analysis addresses how discursive power mechanisms that exclude women from the political arena come into play in inter-personal political discussions held among a group of undergraduate Jewish-Israeli students, women and men who met regularly and discussed political issues as part of an academic course that dealt with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Observing inter-personal interaction allows us to track how mechanisms that operate at the societal level are being initiated, re-created, challenged and resisted. Our aim is to use the dynamic and developmental nature of inter-personal interaction, in order to avoid stereotyping and replicating of gender differences, and to reveal the various practices of resistance to discursive power mechanisms, particularly the use of emotionality in order to reclaim the link between women and political talk.

In continuation of various feminist works that use ethnographic and narrative methodology in order to challenge gender binaries revealing multiple voices of both women and men in this context (e.g., Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah 2016; Sasson-Levy 2003), we chose to concentrate on the micro-level of inter-personal interactions in order to assess the complexity and multiplicities of gendered power mechanisms. We seek to assess not only how they are being produced and re-produced, but also how they are being challenged and transformed. In order to do so, we rely on Foucault (1978) and Butler's (1990, 1993) perspective on power and resistance, and on methodological frameworks of critical discourse analysis (Lakoff 2003; Van Dijk 1993), showing how disciplinary mechanisms are being initiated and at the same time resisted by subjects through language, linguistic style and discourse patterns. We aim to show how the very same disciplinary mechanisms that separate between public and private manners of speech may actually serve as a fertile ground for initiating resistance, and may carry the potential for transformation of the political discourse, resulting in greater acknowledgment of the suffering of the Other.

Literature review

Ongoing conflicts are based on and maintained by a mutual influence of cultures, structures and actions. In order to understand why conflicts are

maintained, we need to look at the deep cultural assumptions and structural contexts in which they occur (Bar-Tal 2013; Sagy, Adwan, and Kaplan 2002; Webel and Galtung 2007). Regarding structures, social hierarchies that are based on race, class and gender serve as fertile ground for the naturalization of conflicts as they legitimize hierarchies between people (Eisler 1994). This in turn is co-enforced by cultural assumptions and discursive mechanisms that are inherited in the constitution of the modern state as androcentric, and on the knowing subject as a white man (Peterson 1999; Yuval-Davis 1997). As a result, oppositional gender identities with supposedly essentialist differences are constituted, positioning women and men in separate, oppositional realms of society. While men prevail in the public sphere and serve in the front line as soldiers and as political decision makers, women are expected to be in the private sphere, and to serve as mothers of the nation, breeders of children and supporters of men (Nicholson 1992; Pateman 2014). This split constructs women as passive participants in armed conflicts, narrows their identities, denies their agency and marginalizes their citizenship by limiting them to the roles of mothers and non-combatants (Berkovitch 1997; Sa'ar, Sachs, and Aharoni 2011; Yuval-Davis 1997).

Women's participation in the political sphere – the Israeli context

In Israel, that is constituted by the protracted Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the voice of women is almost absent from the centers of national decision making, in general, and from decision making in security matters, in particular (Steinberg 2013; Tzameret-Kertcher et al. 2016). Since the establishment of the Israeli state and until recent years, the average percentage of female Knesset members was 8.3 percent. In recent years, there is an increasing trend and today the percentage of female Knesset members is 22.5 percent. However, only one percent of the membership of the Security and International Affairs Committee and the Security Cabinet are women, an extremely low presence relative to their presence in the general population (51 percent).

The limited presence of women in politics in Israel is due to various discursive mechanisms that are grounded in a deep cultural assumption that Israel is facing a constant existential threat (Herzog and Shamir 1994). In this regard, feminist authors point out that the way “security” is being framed and defined determines the status of women (Aharoni 2014; Berkovitch 1997; Herzog 1998, 2004; Sa'ar, Sachs, and Aharoni 2011). Security is being conceived solely at the national level, excluding from the discourse other aspects, such as nutritional security and personal security, which are identified with the private sphere and with women, who are (together with children) the primary sufferers of the lack of these kind of securities during violent conflicts (Francis 2010).

The security discourse not only constructs a binary of public and private spheres of life, but also dictates differentiated manners of speech within each sphere. In her analysis of the discourse in Israeli secondary school history books, Peled-Elhanan (2010) demonstrates how utilitarian and instrumental discourse serves as an effective tool for dealing with massacres that were conducted by the Israeli state, thus preparing Israeli youth for military service and taking part in an ongoing occupation. This use of instrumental discourse is aligned with the tendency of perpetrators in conflict situations to morally and emotionally disengage from victims in order to deal with threats to moral social image and to preserve a positive sense of self (Bandura 1999; Shnabel and Nadler 2008). In this way, patriarchal social order preserves the ongoing violent conflict through splitting rationality and emotionality.

Though women in Israel are marginally represented in the political arena, and their allocation to the private sphere is highly prioritized by society (Berkovitch 1997), they are entering the political sphere through their military service, which is compulsory for both women and men. Today, Israeli women can serve in the front line as combatants; however, the Israeli army is still a territory where masculinity identified by power and authority is the norm (Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2014; Sasson-Levy 2003), and women tend to be assigned to non-combatant positions. In her study, Sasson-Levy (2003) shows how women who serve in “masculine” roles adopt various discursive and bodily masculine practices. The author points at the twofold interpretation of their performance, as these practices can be seen, on the one hand, as a subversion of gender dichotomy (Butler 1990), yet on the other hand, as an adherence to an androcentric social order. While in the army women are welcome to serve in roles traditionally occupied by men as long as they keep with the masculine ground rules, research has shown that attempts to participate in the political sphere in ways that challenge the patriarchal order are not tolerated, and women who dare to cross this line are being severely punished. Helman and Rapoport (1997), for example, discuss women who participated in public demonstrations against the occupation as part of their activity in Women in Black,¹ an organization that used to conduct weekly regular demonstrations in central junctions in various parts of the country. These women were constantly vulnerable to harassment from passersby and drivers, who cursed the women, calling them whores and telling them to go home to their husbands. The harassers delivered the message to women that their place is at home and not in the public sphere, and that they belong to their husband and children as dependent members of their families.

The constant standing of these women reflects another practice of reclaiming the public space: the use of feminine markers of identity as tools for political change and the disruption of the gender dichotomies between the public and the private spheres and the common social order within

Israeli society (Butler 1993). Women in Black was followed by additional Israeli women organizations such as “Machsom Watch,” “Women Coalition for Peace” and “Women Wage Peace.” Although these movements are different in their views, strategies and feminist consciousness, they all strategically use their identity as women in order to reclaim their position in the public sphere. Women’s participation in the Israeli public sphere portrays two practices of resistance: First, through mimicry of traditional masculine roles within the public sphere, women subvert the masculine regime (Butler 1990). However, by doing so, women also collaborate with the androcentric norms (Sasson-Levy 2003). Second, perhaps the more radical, through reclaiming of the public sphere, women strategically use markers of feminine identity within the public sphere, and by doing so challenge gender dichotomies (Butler 1993).

In our research, we explore how participation in the political sphere is manifest through interpersonal interactions. We aim to address the limitations and the opportunities of both women and men who participate in political discussions within the context of a hyper-masculine society. Within the constantly changing nature of interpersonal interactions of group dynamics, we attempt to address the complex positioning of both women and men, as well as various forms of participation that may not only reiterate but also transform patriarchal discourse. We focus in particular on different practices in which resistance is enacted, the forms it takes, and the kinds of reactions it provokes.

Practices of gendered exclusion from the political discourse: an interpersonal point of view

The feminist research points to the necessity of using methodology that uncovers multiple voices that shed new light on power relations within the patriarchal structure (Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah 2016; Sa’ar, Sachs, and Aharoni 2011; Wibben 2011). While most feminist research uses ethnography and narrative inquiry, separately investigating subjective experiences of both women (Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2014; Sasson-Levy 2003) and men (Kaplan 2006), there is room to investigate how these mechanisms gain meaning in interpersonal dynamics. In the current research, we therefore chose to observe and analyze interpersonal interactions, allowing for not only the detection of gender inequality in the political discourse, but also learning about how this inequality is formed and reformed through the performance of social actors (Giddens 1984).

Interpersonal interactions: a gendered perspective

Research focusing on discourse analysis of conversations between women and men demonstrates several practices that form and reiterate patriarchal social orders. Such research (West and Zimmerman 1987) demonstrates

that gender-based power relations, as an emergent property of interaction – men’s advantageous discursive position, as indicated through their greater tendency for interruption and their lesser engagement in interactional maintenance work – does not merely reflect, but actually produces, male dominance as an effect of discourse. There are different social expectations about the way men and women should express themselves linguistically. Men are expected to be direct, whilst women are expected to be indirect. While the latter does not necessarily create a disadvantage for women, it is the basis of a familiar double bind. If a woman is indirect, she is perceived as manipulative, whilst if she is direct she may be called a shrew (Lakoff 2003).

Furthermore, the organization of conversation reflects the power discrepancy between men and women, emphasizing how language and linguistic styles preserve power mechanisms and hierarchies. Spender (1980) found that typically men dominate the conversation 80 percent of the time. Further, when male active participation decreases below 70 percent both men and women assess the result as “women dominating the conversation.” This striking pattern was further validated in several studies (Coates 2015; Zimmerman and West 1975). Zimmerman and West (1975) suggested that one way in which men maintain dominance is by forceful interruption of women. Solnit (2014) accentuates the latter gendered behavior and its consequences on silencing and disempowerment in her essays on “mansplaining.” Her perception of the dismissal of women’s credibility is a symptom of a phenomenon which prevents women from speaking up and being heard in public.

Another facet of gender differences in speech is apparent in the expression of emotions through language. While both women and men are subject to boundaries in the emotions that they may express, the constraint on both seems designed to intensify the pre-existing power gender imbalance (Lakoff 2003). Research has shown that women use verbal expressions of emotion significantly more than men do (Turgeman-Goldshmidt and Weller 2000). However, these gender differences do not imply that the genders experience different levels of emotion, but rather, women are more emotionally expressive. Women self-report that they convey their emotions more than men and are more articulate in talking about their feelings (Brody 1985).

Conventional discourse patterns have been shown to be disrupted by women’s entrance into domains traditionally regarded as exclusively male (Lakoff 2003), challenging the current work to investigate whether these conventional patterns are manifested within the dynamics of a mixed-sex group discussing politics. In line with the suggestion (Tannen 2003) that within the group, members attend to strategies which build solidarity between them as well as strategies that reinforce, or undermine, a power differential between them, we expect to see these dynamics manifest within the group setting that was established in the current particular case study. Although the traditional literature on gendered discourse focuses on how differences

between women and men reflect power relations, it simultaneously maintains these differences by categorizing and dividing, thus overlooking possible complexities in the process through which masculine dominance is upheld through speech. In the current study, we adopt a critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk 1993; 2015). We deploy a CDA to analyze the practices in which masculine dominance appears to be natural and legitimate, as well as the practices by which speakers resist to domination. Following Van Dijk (1993), one cannot portray a clear picture of villains and victims, but rather a complex process in which dominance appears to be “jointly produced” and challenged through intricate forms of social interaction, communication and discourse. In our work, we use CDA in order to reveal this complex, non-dichotomous dynamic re-production of masculine dominance, as a social construction that isn’t necessarily enacted by men alone (see: Peterson 1999).

Observing the dialectical relations between context, linguistic style and topics (Van Dijk 1993, 2015) in dynamic yearlong group discussions enables us to detect not only the structural characteristics of power mechanisms that preserve masculine dominance in political discourse, but also to see how these mechanisms form and develop. Three major questions guided us in the inquiry. (1) What characterizes political discourse within the group? This question referred to the primary assumptions, definitions and boundaries of the political arena that were prominent and accepted by the group members. (2) What are the positioning strategies each member adopts in relation to the political arena? This question focuses on the cognitive and emotional aspects, as well as choices that different group members made within the discussion. Finally, (3) in what ways do gendered power mechanisms work in order to discipline group members in the discussion, and what kinds of practices of resistance are being used in face of these mechanisms?

Methodology

Participants and procedure

Sixteen group meetings between 24 Jewish-Israeli undergraduate students at the Department of Education in Ben Gurion University of the Negev were the source of the research data. Participants included seventeen women and seven men (average age 25.2 years). All students participated in a yearlong seminar (two semesters), that was dedicated to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and to the encounter with Palestinian narratives. The course consisted of guest lectures on topics that are related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, identities in conflict and narratives in conflict, power relations and reconciliation. All lectures were followed by processing meetings that included in-depth discussions. The lectures were given by academic experts to the subject who are not necessarily Palestinians. In addition to the class meetings, the course

included two Palestinian-led day-trips to historical sites that were relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the tours, participants directly encountered with Palestinians who told them their narratives. The course was facilitated by the first author (female facilitator), together with another male facilitator. The main task of the facilitation unit was to encourage participants to talk freely about what comes to their minds following the lectures and generally reflect on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and their relation to it. The facilitation unit tried to encourage participants to express their multiple perspectives and to create a safe space for maximum and open participation (for a detailed description of the course see Ben David et al. 2017).

Analysis

Data analysis was based on transcriptions (of the group meetings and tours) that were made by two research assistants that observed the group through a one-sided mirror. Additionally, insights from the debriefing meetings that were held among the facilitation unit following every session were analyzed by the researchers.

We conducted CDA in accordance with Van Dijk's (1993) parameters of analysis, integrated with initial categories derived from our three major research questions. We also referred to practices of legitimization that are done within the discourse in order to attribute acceptability to social actors or actions in face of controversial actions, accusations or doubts (Van Leeuwen 2007). Legitimization is accomplished by persuasive or manipulative discourse, which describes actions as beneficial for the group, reinterpreting these actions as being moral or at least justified (Van Leeuwen, 2007). We addressed them under the sub-category of argumentation. The categories were divided according to context and text. In terms of context, we addressed (1) the broad societal context of masculine discourse regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; (2) the specific group context, referring to setting, group developmental stage and events that occurred during the process; and (3) specific individual context, referring to social identities and background. Text was divided into three sub-categories as follows: (1) content, referring to primary assumptions regarding the political and topics that were raised in the discussion; (2) argumentation – how participants build their arguments and how they legitimate and validate their talk; and (3) rhetoric, referring to linguistic style, and the use of specific words and metaphors. In the analysis, we wanted to see how these categories developed in the group process and identify turning points according to the qualitative change in the discourse in light of these categories. Our analysis revealed the dialectical relations between context and text: how the discussion was being monitored, and by whom; what topics were raised and by whom; what was considered as valid information; what practices were used in order to preserve and resist

discourse limits; and how the group dynamics was influenced by a transgression from the discourse norms. We analyzed the data using ATLAS TI version 7.

Results

Analyzing the group process, we identified three main turning points in the group discourse according to our three research questions. We present the results accordingly and address their significance in the context of the political. In places in the text where we felt names are needed for the sake of clarity, we used pseudonyms.

Rationality and reason: baseline assumptions and positioning in relation to the political

The first meetings of the group were dedicated to a general introduction to the subject, and to a personal introduction between the participants. In terms of context, discourse boundaries were set according to androcentric cultural assumptions according to which men are considered as authoritative in the political arena (Peterson 1999; Yuval-Davis 1997). The discussions in these meetings were led mainly by the male participants in the group, who dominated the conversation, and thus, replicate previous findings (Coates 2015; Spender 1980). The group dynamics at this stage reflected the primary assumption held by most of the group members: that political discourse should be rational and analytical, without any expression of emotions.

In the opening meeting the participants were asked to tell why they chose to take part in the course. Their responses revealed similar underlying assumptions regarding what is considered “political.”² However, a variation was found regarding the positioning of women and men in relation to these assumptions. For example, Erez, one of the male participants, replied:

It is clear why this seminar was chosen. Everything that has to do with politics interests me. I saw a program on Jews and Palestinians on television and this is exactly what this course is about. I find it interesting ... what is less interesting is that I am already on the other side of the political map. I know a bit about the others' suffering but it is interesting to see whether this will give me something more ... I place myself on the left side of the political map and, of course, this workshop has a political context because it is not only about the other's suffering, but an attempt to create a platform for some action ...

In terms of content, Erez perceives the political as a collective action that occurs on the societal level, and not as a personal or an interpersonal thing. This idea is also reflected in his argumentation, in which he confidently positions the encounter with the other as a means for political action and not as an end in itself. Hadas, one of the female participants, presents a similar definition of the political:

I was afraid that the subject [of the course] would be superficial [and that it would contain] political contexts ... after I saw the syllabus I understood that an encounter [with Palestinians] was planned, indicating that there was another layer in the course. It was meaningful to know that there was a Palestinian group and that there was a deeper thought [given into the course design] ... It is important for me to meet and not just to have an opinion, rather than seeing it in the news or reading it in the newspaper.

In terms of content, Hadas identifies two distinct layers of the political and the personal: content that is provided by the media, as opposed to a face-to-face interaction. Her definition reflects a split between the cognitive and the emotional: while the cognitive (attitudes and opinions) is associated with the political, the personal is associated with the interpersonal encounter. While both share similar assumptions regarding the political, Erez and Hadas rhetorically position themselves differently in relation to it. Erez starts his talk with a confident statement that he knows what this course is all about, whilst Hadas uses reserved rhetoric ("I was afraid"). Erez is confident in the political domain and expresses his political ideology with certainty and knowledge, whereas Hadas perceives the political as superficial, and prefers not to deal with politics. Further demonstration of the distinct positioning between women and men can be detected among others. For example, Oren, a male participant says:

What interests me in this course was meeting with Palestinians ... Half a year ago I participated in a meeting of the Bereaved Families Circle.³ We saw a film that dealt with acknowledging the others' suffering, bereaved families and these are related to the course, which attracted me.

Unlike Erez, Oren's words reflect an attraction towards an interpersonal and a more experiential encounter with Palestinians. However, he is validating his position regarding the course and indirectly regarding the political, by highlighting his personal experience and knowledge on the subject, expressing confidence in what the course is about. This rhetorical pattern of confident positioning in relation to the political is found among several male participants in the group. In contrast, women position themselves as insecure and hesitant, by expressing a lack of confidence regarding their political knowledge, as exemplified by Anat, who claims to inherit her political stand from her parents:

I took the course because my knowledge is very limited and unlike Erez, who presented a solid political stance, I hold a political stance but not from knowledge, rather than from my parents and the environment.

Anat identified Erez as the knowledgeable source, reflecting male authority. She positioned herself in opposition to him, disowning any political knowledge.

In sum, we see how the public-private split (Nicholson 1992; Pateman 2014) is reflected and re-produced in the distinct rhetorical positioning of

the male and female participants, demonstrating gender differences in discursive style (Lakoff 2003; Tannen 2003). We also see how the discursive mechanisms that define the political arena as belonging to the public sphere are reflected in the way the topic is constructed by all participants.

Resistance within the ground rules of political discourse

At the sixth meeting, disagreements between group members started to evolve, and few women begin to take an active and leading role in the discussion. However, group discussions stayed within the initial ground rules of reason and rationality. An example for this pattern occurred in a group discussion that was held on a day in which a very famous cultural icon⁴ passed away. The group discussed his great influence and expressed their sorrow for his loss. Meirav, one of the female participants, challenged the mainstream point of view in the group and claimed that his great influence was due to his belonging to an elite group in society, and pointed at the way power constructed feelings and respect for someone. She mentioned the name of a great religious figure that according to her did not receive the respect he deserved due to the disadvantaged groups that he represented. An argumentative discussion started, in which pros and cons were presented using strategies of reason and validation regarding the mentioned controversial issue.

Meirav: “... when I went to study in Beit Midrash⁵ and sat there for a very long time, I was exposed to the Rabbi Ovadia Yossef⁶ as a hero of a generation in which no one else reached his greatness. And the dissonance between what he truly was, his great religious creation, to how he was represented in the media, it was very painful for me. And then when he died I was in shock that they put sad songs (on the radio) and that people were even sad because of it ... it was so strange ...”

Female participant: “It shows how the media is the center of our reality, and how our thoughts are a by-product of what we hear and see.”

Some participants, male in particular, responded to Meirav:

Male participant 1: “Wait a minute. If we believe everything we read ... there are things he said that can’t be ignored.”

Male participant 2: “I don’t know who Rabbi Ovadia Yossef is for me; he didn’t have any part in my belief. I acknowledge that he was a significant man for three or ten million people but I don’t see myself as part of this ten million ...”

Male participant 3 (Lior): “I had a dissonance too but maybe from the other side. I know him as a man and he really is a great symbol for religious people, but I heard him calling for racism between Ashkenazim and Mizrachim.”⁷

- Merav: "Great, that is what they (the media) choose to show you..."
- Lior: "I really want to understand why he was so great for so many people, and excuse me for saying 'these people' ..."
- Merav: "But Lior, maybe you don't know why he is so important."
- Lior: "I know that I don't understand."
- Merav: "So go and learn why he is so important, what do you want me to say to you?"

In terms of the group context, this discussion presents the first conflict that the group encounters in the process. Interestingly, Meirav, as a Mizrahi woman who comes from a religious background, is the focus of this conflict. For many participants in the group, she represents the "Other" in the room. This discussion reflects an intersecting power dynamic between a Mizrahi religious woman and Ashkenazi secular males. In other words, Meirav is being disciplined by three male participants, and indirectly accused of racism by supporting the supposedly racist Mizrahi Rabbi Ovadia Yossef. In terms of argumentation, Meirav is using masculine ground rules of rationalization to make a stand and to make her distinct statement legitimate. Rhetorically, she begins by declaring her knowledge and personal experience, rather than directly expressing her anger and pain. In doing so, she complies with the common assumption held by the group of how to talk politics. As a woman who claims to be knowledgeable and credible in the political arena, she undermines the assumption that men own political knowledge, thus triggering male participants in the group, demonstrating the disciplinary reaction women face when they position themselves as independent and knowledgeable (Lakoff 2003; Solnit 2014). The male respondents object to her claim to the "truth," in an attempt to weaken her validation. The men use various rhetoric styles in order to discipline Meirav. Male participant 1 uses the plural "we" suggesting an authoritative approach and thus maintaining masculine dominance. Male participants 2 and 3 create a distinction between "us" and "them" in order to establish domination (Van Dijk 1993). It is apparent that the three male speakers mark themselves as belonging to a particular group which are the "we," as opposed to the "these people" who are the Others that represent the Mizrahi, religious and less sophisticated sector of society. Their tone is arrogant and derogative.

When encountering attempts to discipline her, Meirav resists by pulling the ground rules of knowledge against Lior, claiming that he is the one lacking the knowledge, and sending him to "go and learn." In this sense, her positioning in the discussion reflects the twofold mechanism of resistance and compliance to masculine social order (Sasson-Levy 2003). In sum, the discussion demonstrates the power struggle over truth, in which the speakers (both

women and men) attempt to establish their position through rationality and knowledge. At this stage of the course, one can already perceive the dynamic nature of how power is structured and altered through agency (Giddens 1984).

Conflict and split between the rational and the emotional

Towards the middle of the course, another turning point in the group discourse was detected as emotions begin to surface, in particular by a “pioneer” female participant. At this particular discussion, the group discusses the deeds of the Israeli army in the West Bank. The atmosphere was tense, and participants were active throughout the discussion. Avner, one of the male participants, provoked the group by stating that if he had been Palestinian he would have joined Hamas. Drawing parallels between the Israel Defense Force (IDF) and the Palestinian resistance forces, Avner led the group into a loud discussion. In terms of context, being a male combat soldier, Avner is perceived as an authority with much freedom to say his opinions. Even when challenging the group by his provocative statements, Avner easily gained respect from the group, which was shocked by his provocative statements on the Israeli army, and accepted his authority as someone who served in the front line and had first-hand experience (Van Dijk 1993).

Dina, a female participant, appalled by this comparison, entered the discussion. She directly objected to Avner, claiming that the deeds of the IDF were justified, and that Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) were terrorists. Other male participants joined the discussion and tried to prove her wrong by providing first-hand accounts that the IDF was carrying out horrible and immoral acts, but Dina insisted:

- Dina: “I am not saying that I don’t understand them. I do, but I do not think that killing people and carrying out terror attacks is the way. I really understand their pain and what they are going through, but I would never have become like that.”
- Male participant: “The thing is that you don’t see the acts that we do there as murder ... ”
- Dina: “I see it as a response.”
- Male participant: “We need to understand the objective picture. There is a need to see that these things happen and we are stronger than them and are doing crazy things all the time ... It is like the Big Brother, cameras everywhere. When an Arab raises his head, two soldiers jump on him.”
- Dina: “But it is out of fear.”
- Male Participant: “The question is not just out of what it is, but what is behind it.”
- Facilitator: “Dina, I want to understand more. You started to say something and Avner interrupted you. Please tell us where this fear is coming from.”

Dina: "I look at my fear and remember the first time I arrived to Beer Sheva and there were sirens. Who even heard about sirens? Today every time a motorbike passes by, I am frightened to death. This is for me a siren."

Dina expressed a clear voice that departed from the representative of the masculine authority, stressing that the IDF's actions were justified and even moral. Moreover, she validated her stance with rhetorical use of emotional language, directly expressing her feelings of fear. Unlike Meirav, who chose to challenge the group within the ground rules, using knowledge-based arguments, here we can see a much more radical resistance to the discourse, which uses emotionality and not facts in order to justify and establish a political stand. Nonetheless, Dina constantly uses apologetic rhetoric, reflecting what is considered feminine rhetoric (Tannen 2003).

The group reacted strongly to Dina. No less than three male participants attempted to question her stand. At a certain point in the group discussion, in which Dina was not given a place to speak out, one of us who was facilitating the group felt a need to use her authority as the facilitator in order to make room for Dina to express her feelings, that otherwise wouldn't be heard. The male participants, who reacted to Dina, tried to bring her (and the group) back to reason. They asked her to "consider the objective picture" and to "pay attention to the dry facts", using rational arguments in order to legitimize their speech (Van Leeuwen 2007). In terms of content, they communicated at length about their own experience as soldiers, demonstrating firsthand expertise. They dismissed her pain and fear as illegitimate, childish even. In terms of rhetoric, we see a recurring use of "we." Similar to the previous example, the use of "we" serves both as a practice of establishing authority (as in "we need to see the objective picture"), but also as emotional distancing from the deeds of the IDF that were done by some of them personally (as some of the male participants disclosed). We see here how the practice of rational talk and depersonalization goes hand in hand, serving as a way to avoid dealing with oneself as a perpetrator (Bandura 1999; Shnabel and Nadler 2008), and to create legitimation in face of doubts that are expressed towards the masculine authority (Van Leeuwen 2007).

From emotional distancing to emotional engagement in face of the other's suffering

In the following meeting the group visited Ramle and Lida, two Palestinian cities from which most inhabitants had been evacuated during the 1948 war. The Palestinian tour guide, Hassan, exposed the students to difficult events, including a massacre in a mosque that had occurred during the conquest of Lida. For most of the students, Hassan's Palestinian narrative was new. They had never heard this side of the story, told by a Palestinian with

a strong political awareness, in a non-filtered way. In terms of context, the story addressed transgressions that were done by Israelis to Palestinians, thus positioning the participants as perpetrators. During the initial part of the discussion, which followed the tour, participants expressed anger toward Hassan and accused him of presenting an inaccurate narrative. In terms of content, the group attempted to delegitimize the factual basis on which he based his stance and turned instead to a discussion of the solution that he proposed of a non-national state. In this stage, the group discussion demonstrates an attempt to create an emotional distance from the suffering of the Other (Bandura 1999; Shnabel and Nadler 2008). Rhetorically, the discourse was very argumentative and the participants initially focused on facts, as opposed to emotions. At a certain point, the facilitators conveyed to the group that some of the female participants were not talking at all. Although the silent women did not respond to the invitation to take part, an apparent change in the discourse was detected. Female participants took a more active part in the discussion and expressed emotional voices that had not been heard before. In this sense, the facilitators' authority enhanced female participants' access to the discussion (Van Dijk 1993).

- Gali (female participant): "I feel that from the beginning of the discussion, the discourse is a little bit distant because it is difficult for us to accept what Hassan said during the tour. For example, the massacre at the mosque is hard to contain so we translate this discourse into identity and the non-national state solution."
- Avner: "What do you want to say about the massacre?"
- Gali: "It is horrible. I do not have anything to say about it, but this was the guts of the tour."
- Avner: "It is not. It was a gimmick the way that Hassan presented it."
- Gali: "When I heard that the Jews, who are supposed to have a value for life bombed the mosque with 250 in it, I asked myself – who does such a thing?"
- Avner: "I think he succeeded in what he was trying to do – to turn a particular event into a generalized one. In each complicated situation, there are irregular events. Had there been a legal procedure for such irregular events, the problem would have been solved."

At this point, a number of female participants joined the discussion and expressed their emotions, emphasizing their pain, shame and fear regarding the events that underlie the political solutions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and to the rational discussion about it. For example, one of the female participants noted that "... the fact that they want a non-national state [a state that is not based on nationality: neither Jewish nor Palestinian]

deters me for I fear that they want to kill us and expel us. That really scares me. The fact that they want shared living calms me.”

It is interesting to note that in the same session, a significant shift in the discussion was detected, from a reactive stance of emotional distancing and delegitimizing of the Palestinian guide argument through rational talk, to a transformative stance of emotional engagement. In the above discussion, Avner is trying to shift the discussion to Hassan and turn the accusation towards him as manipulative. By maintaining a balance of accusations, Avner reflects the destructive dynamics of conflict preservations (Webel and Galtung 2007). At the same time, Gali is explaining the psychological difficulty the group is experiencing, inviting the group to directly refer to the emotional consequences of their encounter with Hassan. Rhetorically, Gali is expressing herself clearly and confidently. In this sense, she challenges the traditional discursive positioning that is asserted to women (Tannen 2003). An additional transformation in the gendered positioning is evident at this point, as several other female and male participants join in and express the emotions that override the rational and controlled political discourse. In this sense, emotionality is not only used by women as a practice in which they reclaim their voice in the discussion, but it serves as a transformative tool that allows both women and men to acknowledge the pain experienced by the group as a result of their encounter.

Towards an integrated and inclusive political discourse

In the last two meetings of the course the group started to directly address the role of emotions in political discourse, and their initial assumptions regarding what was political, and its effect on the group dynamic. In the context of the course ending, the content raised in the group relates in retrospect to the discourse boundaries within the group, such as who were the dominant speakers, who did not have a place, and the rules and regulations of group discourse.

- Male participant: “Particularly in our society there is an attempt to separate between emotions and politics because we are against the suffering of human beings ... If human life were the most important value, those passing through the checkpoints would not be killed. The segregation is not a good thing because we put political attitudes above our values (and emotions) and the two cannot be separated.”
- Female participant: “... emotions exist prior to any political discourse. At the tour, I felt things that were not necessarily within a political context when I said that I identified not necessarily with a Palestinian, but rather with the person standing in front of me. I think we should talk about emotions, not only in the political context, because I think there is room to talk about it.”

In this dialogue, the two participants explicitly address the relationship between politics and emotions. The male participant distinguishes between political discourse to an emotional and value-laden discourse. He acknowledges the inherent problem in emotionally charged political discourse as having the potential of inducing moral questions. The female participant who joins the discussion suggests that emotional and politics are inseparable, inviting the group members to discuss their emotions in the political context. At this point, several female participants responded and agreed with the notion that emotions should be addressed and discussed, as an integral part of the political discourse. The power balance changed as the emotional and female voices received more power and female participants insisted on talking about emotions, even though resistance was conveyed:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Male participant: | "I do not think that we are not talking about emotions. I just think that the emotion is not explicit, but rather is expressed through the things that we say. We don't have to (explicitly) talk about how I feel." |
| Female participant: | "Why?" |
| Male participant: | "Because the other's suffering is complex." |
| Female participant: | "Why can't you say how you will feel?" |
| Another female participant: | "I sat in the tour and felt awful. I listened and felt as if I was in a Holocaust memorial ceremony." |
| Another male participant: | "For me every day I was in the army, especially in the West Bank, was a negative emotional burden. I could not live with it and I do not know whether I can go to reserve again. When I get called to the army, I feel a weight ..." |

The above discussion among the male and female participants demonstrates an implicit struggle regarding the place of emotional talk in political matters. In terms of content, the first male participant emphasizes the negation of explicit emotions. Emotions are inherent and do not require direct attention. This is also being reflected in his rhetoric: "We don't have to (explicitly) talk about how I feel," distancing between the collective and "public" levels of speech and the individual, private and emotional speech. This male participant attempts to mark the boundaries between the two spaces; the political and the private, by stating that emotions are private and do not belong within political discourse. Following his words, some women insist on talking about emotions and confront him. They persistently ask him regarding his inability to express his emotions.

The dialogue reflects a power shift, in which women interrogate men. At this point, another male participant joins the discussion and provides the answer to that question. He shares his emotional experience in the army, focusing on how he feels rather than on what he does. This is in contrast to previous talk about the army in which men primarily shared the actual

actions and not the emotional experience that underlie them. His words reflect the necessity of emotional distancing in order to collaborate with a situation of ongoing violence. According to Peled-Elhanan (2010), this is precisely what facilitates and enables soldiers to take part in military violent actions.

There are two intertwined processes taking place in these last sessions. First, the discussion takes a turn from factual rhetoric, judgment and blame (self and other) to reflexive observation of the emotions and thoughts that were provoked by facing the "Other." The group discourse becomes more inclusive, enabling more and more voices to be heard and more legitimacy to express emotions and doubts. Guilt and the others' suffering surface and induce a genuine sadness in face of reality. Second, the gendered dynamics in the discussion shifts. First, female participants take it upon themselves to speak up, reclaiming their place in the political discourse. Second, both male and female participants share their emotional experience concerning the political, experiences that were not accepted in previous discussions. Even though the silent women are still present, there is an openness to letting women's voices be heard. These two processes unfold simultaneously as inclusivity supports participation, leading to a broadening of the political discourse within the group.

General discussion

The current research demonstrates how interpersonal political conversations are a space which reflects deep cultural assumptions of a society in conflict. Moreover, the research highlights the importance of interpersonal space in sustaining and also challenging these cultural assumptions that preserve conflict. Particularly, we show how gendered power mechanisms that are fundamental in societies in conflict (Peterson 1999) manifest, but also how resistance to these mechanisms emerges and promotes change in the balance of power. The dialectics among topics, rhetoric and linguistic style which participants use to position themselves in the discussion, and the context in which ideas are expressed provide an added value to understand the multi-layered nature of gendered interpersonal dynamics. Additionally, forms of agency and the reciprocal relationship between the personal and the social are used by the participants. The analysis reveals that the political space is primarily perceived as a public space that is based on knowledge and facts and not on emotions and subjective experience. The analysis also reveals how the practices of women's exclusion that occur in the public sphere (Aharoni 2014; Helman and Rapoport 1997; Herzog 1998; Sa'ar, Sachs, and Aharoni 2011) are being manifested within the group dynamic, creating a hierarchy of knowledge between those who are on the "battle front" and have first-hand experience, and those who are on the "home front,"⁸ and have less

knowledge and experience. In this context of hierarchized discourse, both women and men were limited in their participation, particularly in their inability to express their emotions regarding the political. While in the beginning of the course men dominated the discussions with confident and factual rhetoric, women in the group were estranged, and were required to use masculine discursive practices in order to participate at all.

Throughout the process, it was revealed that the development in the group discussion was strongly intertwined with practices of resistance to the masculine discourse that was reflected in the way female participants chose to position themselves. The first form of resistance that was observed conveyed female dominance in the political using masculine ground rules. This form of mimicry of traditional masculine roles within the discussion subverts the masculine regime but at the same time collaborates with the androcentric norms (Butler 1990; Sasson-Levy 2003). However, as the course unfolded, a more radical form of resistance emerged, as pioneer female participants expressed emotions. Specifically, at the meeting in which this turning point took place, one of the female participants chose emotional language as a basis for legitimizing her political opinion, thus reclaiming emotions within the public sphere (Butler 1993). In the latter sense, emotionality is a political tool of resistance that challenges masculine dominance and ground rules. This incident eventually led to a change in the group discussion that consisted of more emotional voices leading to a more integrated and inclusive discussion.

In the group dynamics, we detected two simultaneous processes of engagement and inclusion. Throughout the course participants expressed greater emotional engagement and acknowledgement of the Other's suffering that was accompanied by a greater participation and broadening the scope of discussion, allowing both women and men to speak up and express their voices and feelings regarding the issues at hand. The latter supports the theoretical argument which claims that emotional presence as opposed to instrumental talk (Peled-Elhanan 2010) and psychological distancing (Bandura 1999; Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2014) fosters greater acceptance of the Other and their suffering (Shnabel and Nadler 2008). In this context, women served as agents of change and had a crucial role in this transformation, utilizing their social accessibility to emotional talk (Lakoff 2003). The latter argument gains support and was interestingly highlighted by a male participant who used the word "we" regarding feelings. The use of "we" was repeated on several occasions by various male participants. We propose that this use indicates men's positioning in society as both gatekeepers and front-liners. As gatekeepers, they express dominance by using the collective form of speech; and as front-liners they emotionally distance themselves from the emotional consequences of inflicting pain on others in the context of violent conflict.

From the beginning of the process until the very end, there were several female participants who chose to remain silent. The choice to be silent can be interpreted as another form of resistance. According to Yalom (1995), silence within group dynamics can also be interpreted as establishing autonomy and creating a reflexive space where the participant has the opportunity to learn and benefit from the others' conversation. In the context of group participation, this has significant meaning. For the most part, women tend to accept societal norms and feel obliged to comply and please. We suggest that by choosing to be silent, they may be choosing to be autonomous and self-oriented, rather than guided by others. Additional support to this notion was seen in a course that took place in the following year, in which several women declared silence in response to a discussion in which one of them was insulted for her political opinions. They said that they would not talk until they felt emotionally secure. This form of resistance can be detected in the broader political context, in which minority groups choose not to collaborate and/or to conduct boycotts against the hegemon (Sharp 1973). An example for this can be seen in the Israeli–Palestinian context, in which many Palestinians are taking part in a growing movement that strives against normalization of the relationship with Israel ("Tatbia"). The movement bans collaborations that perpetuate power asymmetry and don't lead to the ceasing of the occupation. It also encourages boycotting of Israeli products among Palestinians.

The transformation in the political discourse analyzed here was also due to the structure of the course in general and the work of the facilitation unit in particular. First, the facilitation unit took it upon itself to foster multiple voices within the group discussion while challenging and questioning primary assumptions and norms that evolved in the group and reflected the deep structure and culture of a society in conflict. Within this framework, gender power relations were identified as prominent and serving as a key tool in the process and progress of the group. Additionally, the open atmosphere and processing that took part within the unit was also due to the inclusion of one female and one male facilitator, who addressed these gender issues and reflected on them openly. The two facilitators constantly investigated the meaning of gender in their own relationship as co-facilitations, and saw it as a crucial part of their role.

This research highlights the importance of the daily, interpersonal interactions in creating, sustaining and changing the political discourse of a society in conflict. Specifically, it sheds light on the multiple forms, and constant evolvement of resistance to disciplinary mechanisms. It highlights the importance of taking into account the role of gender in political discussions. Moreover, it emphasizes the need of women to see themselves as political actors who can lead and influence political change within the communities to which they belong. Specifically, one does not have to be a public figure,

a politician or a parliament member in order to be an agent in transforming the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal 2013) that is present in every aspect of everyone's daily lives in societies in conflict in general, and in Israel in particular.

Notes

1. Women in Black is an Israeli feminist movement that was established in 1988. Their main activity includes regular demonstrations against the Israeli occupation in the West Bank. The protests are held in public places around the country.
2. In Hebrew, the Political (Ha'politi) is a common expression, and usually refers to all that has to do with politics and the political arena.
3. The Bereaved Family Circle is an NGO that was established by both Israeli and Palestinian families who lost their relatives as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The purpose of the NGO is to object to the occupation and to promote peace and the end of violence.
4. The Israeli musician Arik Einstein, who was from Ashkenazi origin and for many people, symbolized the "good old Israel".
5. A Jewish study hall.
6. Ovadia Yosef was a politically influential former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel. He was the founder and spiritual leader of Israel's ultra-orthodox Shass Party.
7. Mizrahi Jews are those from Arab countries who came to Israel mostly in the 1950s, following the establishment of the state. The Israeli state founders, who were mostly Ashkenazi-Jews from Eastern European countries, widely stereotyped Mizrahi Jews as inferior. Though highly integrated into Israeli society, discrimination against Mizrahi-Jews is still common (see Chetrit 2009).
8. The term home-front is used in Israeli jargon in order to describe the role of all citizens as supporters of the soldiers who are in the battle. Particularly, it is used in the context of women and their role as supporters and mothers of the nation (see: Herzog 1998).

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