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'Hitlahamut': A term for unreasonable populist public talk in Israel

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Abstract

This research follows the tradition of Ethnography of Communication to discuss *hitlahamut*, an Israeli term for a distinctive type of public talk. After presenting the denotive meaning, I define the act and style hitlahamut encodes, using analysis of the type of talk it describes. The data are taken from phone-in interactions and online op-eds and news. Hitlahamut defines a self-centered emotive, exaggerated style of the confrontational and divisive message, and it encodes hostile relations between the participants. I then connect this term with other Israeli terms for talk and with terms for public talk elsewhere, suggesting that hitlahamut describes unreasonable criticism, enabling participants not to engage with the content of the criticism due to its (perceived) style. In addition, hitlahamut describes populist discourse (from both left and right) due to its combination of aggression and emotive style with divisive language and problematic argumentative content.

> *To Tamar Katriel, whose teaching, writing, and guidance are the opposite*
> *of the term I describe below.*

In the tradition of Ethnography of Communication (EoC henceforth; see Hymes, 1974), the study of terms for talk is central. Terms for talk are terms that a community uses to describe specific patterns and practices of communication (Carbaugh, 1989; Katriel and Philipsen, 1981). Carbaugh (1989) suggested studying different terms for talk,

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comparing their meanings regarding their action, relations, style and their importance to communicative, societal and identity-related processes. This research line does not remain at the emic level: 'The goal of theorizing within this perspective is to provide an analytic language for in-depth explorations as well as cross-cultural comparisons of naturally occurring social interactions and culturally recognized discursive formations' (Katriel, 2015: 747). Therefore, EoC research provides an understanding of the cultural perspective of communication and of communication in general. This article continues this tradition in the Jewish-Israeli culture.

Israel received much attention in EoC and in the study of terms for talk. For example, Katriel and Philipsen (1981) compared the term for talk 'communication' in the United States to the lack of a comparable term in Israel at the time. Following that work, Katriel (1986; and especially 1991/1999) continued describing myriad terms for talk and their social significance in the Israeli context. She described the term *dugri* (Katriel, 1986), the ritual it creates, its functions and the style it encodes: In face-to-face interaction, *dugri* with its underlying element of solidarity grants the speaker permission to engage in criticism. Katriel connected the term to the Zionist ethos and showed the development of this term and its demise. Katriel (1986, 2004) showed that dugri has morphed into two forms, each leaving one aspect of the dugri behind. The more significant of the offspring of dugri to this research is *kasah*, bashing, which leaves aside the need for solidarity implicit in *dugri* and focuses on direct unabashed opinion-based criticism. This unabashed criticism is connected to the term for talk that this article focuses on, *hitlahamut*, since both terms stress verbal aggression without any redeeming or protective solidarity.

I follow the tradition of analyzing terms for talk (e.g. Katriel, 1986). After discussing the dictionary meaning, I present the cultural meaning of the term *hitlahamut*. I illustrate what discourse is termed *hitlahamut* and the function of the act of labeling something *hitlahamut*. The discussion connects *hitlahamut* to the Israeli speech economy and to terms for public talk and participation elsewhere. This connection is then taken back to political theory, and I suggest that *hitlahamut* is one term for populist discourse (Laclau, 2005).

Public participation is a vast area of research. Habermas (1989) presented a historical-normative perspective on participation. In his formulation, the middle-class-based premises for democratic discussions focused on two key elements of rationality and consensus. By contrast, Mouffe (2000) suggested antagonistic and agonistic discourse as essential to public participation in democratic discussion. Habermas (1989) also demanded a rational discussion, whereas Laclau (2005) discussed Populism, a very different unreasonable form of public discourse: a divisive discourse in which some elite members construct a 'people' to make a combination of demands, which Laclau stresses are inherently *not* connected to each other. Since the demands are unconnected, the populism lies in the empty connection that the populist leader fills between the demands. I argue that *hitlahamut* is an emic (Hymes, 1974) term for specific elements in Israeli populism, as opposed to the use of the term 'populism' itself, which in Israel probably denotes pandering to the lowest denominator. Considering the political theory regarding participation, this article takes an Israeli term for talk to discuss the type of participation and the political system it denotes in Israel.

In recent years, EoC researchers looked at public speech acts and their terminology. Katriel (1985) discussed the Israeli *kiturim* 'griping', a term for both private and public

talk that focuses on sharing complaints about social life. Similarly, Sotirova (2016) found that in Bulgarian the term *Oplakvane* refers to comparable speech acts. In both cultures, the complaints remain at the verbal level, and no further social action follows the discussions the terms for talk describe. Elsewhere, Boromisza-Habashi (2012) described the ritual involving hate-speech in Hungary and suggested that this term almost encodes a term for public talk in this culture. These terms suggest problematic public discourse that focuses on the lack of rationality or functionality in the democratic process. Symmetrically, Tracy (2011) described a form of a US public discourse she termed 'reasonable hostility'. In her data, participants negotiate the need to be critical, via hostility, and the need to maintain civility and functional democratic engagement via the 'reasonable'. *Hitlahamut* is closer to *griping, oplakvane* and *hate speech*, having little reasonability in it, and theoretically it has some features of populism.

The dictionary meaning and origin of *hitlahem*

First, I will discuss the definition and origin of the term, before showing its actual usage and meaning in Israeli culture. The dictionaries define only a verb form:

> Hitlahem – hitkatesh, halam, vehika ze et ze
>> Clashed, hammered, and beat each other. (Even-Shushan dictionary[1])
>> 1. roesh, corem: dfikot hapatish hitlahamu beroshi.
>> Noisy, grating: the hammer's beating hitlahamu in my head. (New Hebrew)
>>> (Sapir dictionary)

These definitions stress the clashing of the term *hitlahem*. Thus, the denotation is usually one of non-verbal action. Moreover, the example from Sapir dictionary, regarding the hammer *mitlahem* in one's head seems to me, as a native speaker, to be outdated. Neither dictionary discusses the term as describing talk.

The popular linguist Ruvik Rosenthal wrote about the origin of the term. He refers to the biblical use of the term and states that its meaning and origin are unclear.[2] As with other terms for talk, the basic verbal form, *hitlaham*, is expanded to other linguistic forms:[3] a derived noun, *hitlahamut*, and an adjective form, *mitlahem*, neither appears in the dictionaries.

The closest words to *hitlahamut*, both for their jingle meaning and in their lexical meaning (Burke, 1966: 73–74) are *hitlahavut* and *hitlahatut* (see Table 1). Some authors discuss the jingle meaning *hitbahamut* as the most relevant to *hitlahamut*. These words all share strong emotions attached to them.

Table 1. Jingle and lexical words close to hitlahamut.

Word	Meaning
hitlaha**m**ut	this article
hitlaha**v**ut	Enthusiasm
hitlaha**t**ut	Excitement (from heat)
hit**b**aha**m**ut	Bestialization

Like most terms for talk, *hitlahamut* is not easily translated into other languages. The closest English word to *hitlahamut* might be 'ranting', which may capture the style of talk; however, rant does not necessarily carry the negative cultural implication of *hitlahamut*. 'Rabble-rousing' is another option, yet it is a noun and does not capture the action that *hitlahamut* delivers. Similarly, 'rabid' as an adjective describes the style of *hitlahamut* without its action. Neither 'rabid' nor 'rabble-rousing' receive a status of a term for talk, although 'rant' may indeed be a term for talk in American English. Hence, going forward I will use *hitlahamut* (and its different derivatives) and will not translate it into English.

The dictionary definitions and the translation cannot give the emic meaning of the term *hitlahamut*. Hence, the remainder of this article explores this meaning, answering the following research question: what is the cultural meaning of the term for talk *hitlahamut* in Israeli culture?

I use data from radio phone-in interactions and from online commenting to answer this question. The data were mainly collected for other projects (see Dori-Hacohen, 2012; Dori-Hacohen and Shavit, 2013), and after noticing *hitlahamut* a number of times in the data, I turned my attention to analyzing this term. The online commenting data are taken from a systematically crawled corpus (see Weizman, 2015), and I searched for the term and its derivatives in it and in another tool for scraping all media content in Israel. In addition, some data were collected using the scavenging technique (see Dori-Hacohen and Shavit, 2013: 363), focusing specifically on this term, to identify what it means.

What is hitlahamut?

Hitlahamut is a term for talk. It carries a deep symbolic meaning (see Katriel, 2015), and portrays social relations and interpersonal relations. It is used as an index (Silverstien, 1976) of talk, meaning it points to a specific type of talk, explains it or even creates it. *Hitlahamut* works similarly to *dugri* in its indexical work (Katriel, 2015: 757), and therefore *hitlahamut* is a meta-pragmatic index. However, when participants use the term, they do not usually explain what the basis for their use of *hitlahamut* is: we can therefore interview members to ask them about the meaning of a term for talk (see Katriel, 1986). Alternatively, we can find instances in which the term *hitlahamut* is used, and then see the type of talk and its features that may justify labeling it as *hitlahamut*. Based on seeing what type of talk is labeled as *hitlahamut*, I discuss the unit of talk this terms refers to (Carbaugh, 1989), and suggest it refers to both the action and the style.

We start with the radio data since a dialogue enables seeing the exchange of talk. Specifically, a host refers to talk as 'not *hitlahamut*', as opposed to the usual talk in the show.

    1.   TST 13/12/2004, host: Dalik Volinitz, caller: Ruth[4]

```
1. H:   at yoda'at betoxnit kazot,    shehakol   ba e mitlahem
        you know in such a program, that everything in it is
        mitlahem
2.      veze, meod samaxnu lishmo neshama tova kamox.
        and that, we were very happy to hear a good soul like you.
```

   The host compliments a caller who talks in a non-*mitlahem* way, using 'mitlahem veze' (*mitlahem* and that) (1:1–2), which does not clarify what he means by *mitlahem*. The contrast he develops is between *hitlahamut* and *neshama tova* 'good soul', which he attributes to this caller. This caller presented in a clear and reasonable way a personal problem of someone she knew, and asked the authorities to solve this problem. She also criticized peoples' lack of caring, and talked in a non-confrontational, positive way. This call may be the first clue to what *hitlahamut* is by way of opposition: unreasonable, unclear, confrontational, negative talk that is not about solvable problems. This view characterizes *hitlahamut* as a term for talk denoting style: 'a way of organizing native labels for alternative ways of speaking and the rules for selecting them' (Carbaugh, 1989: 100) and also for the action, practical action in the world. One can talk in a *mitlahem* or non-*mitlahem* way.

   Moreover, the host says that the show is full of *hitlahamut* (1:1–2). We can listen to that specific show, looking for features that led to this host's characterization. For example we may look if there are specific elements that the host can term *hitlahamut*. Indeed, that show was unique, specifically its opening interaction. In it, the host also used *hitlahamut*, to counter what he perceived as the caller's *hitlahamut*. The first caller was a regular caller (Dori-Hacohen, 2012), whose first substantive turn was as follows:

2.   TST 13/12/2004, host Dalik Volinitz, Caller: Yehoshua

```
Caller:
    ahx, tir'e, ani xay po kvar kama shanim. lo rak po. hamacav e
    lo pashut. mesubax. shaalu oti al ma hanose, az amarti, sof
    maase bemaxshava txila. haoyev hu axzar, mexoar, racxani, lo
    yaazor lanu shum davar. hem lo rocim shalom. lo rak po. lo rak
    benam leven acman. hem lo rak son'im yehudim, son'im gam
    bedu'im, ve'et hadruzim. ve'et haravin hanocrim, ve'et
    hashi'im. ve'et hasunim. ve'anaxnu mesaxim lidehem. exad
    mehagormim shemeodedim, ah, ah, be beke'ev ani omer lexa et
    ze, meodedim otam leteror, ze gormim mipo? ma omer lanu
    haramatkal? zorkim alav boc. umi mi ose et ze? aruc exad, aruc
    shtayim, aruc eser, galey cahal, reshet bet. ma shebishvilo
    boc. bishvil haam, amxa, xelek miitanu, harov kim'at, ze sakin
    bagav. kshe'ani shome'a, axrey pigu'a kashe shel xayalim,
    meraaynim et ha et hamumxim lerecax, vehaaxzarim beyoter
    beoyveynu. meraaynim otam bexol hataxanot.

    Oy, look, I have lived here for a few years. Not only here.
    The situation is e not simple. Complex. I was asked what the
    topic is, so I said, the end demands thinking first (a proverb).
    The Enemy is cruel, ugly, murderous; nothing will help us.
    They do not want peace. Not just here. Not only between
    themselves. They hate not only Jews; they hate the Bedouins,
    and the Druze, and the Christian Arbs, and the Shiites. And
    the Sunni. And we play to their hands. One of the elements that
    encourage, uhm, uhm, with with pain I tell you that, encourages
```

```
their terrorism are elements from here. What does the Chief of
Staff tell us? He was thrown mud at. And who, who does that?
(TV) Channel 1, Channel 2, Chanel 10, Army Radio, Radio 2nd
Channel. What mud is for him, for the People, the Folk, some
of us, the majority almost, it is a knife in the back. When I
hear,  after  a  terror  attack  against  soldiers,  ((they))
interview the uhm the murder experts, the cruelest among our
enemies. They are interviewed in all the stations.
```

This turn can be described as *hitlahamut* for a number of reasons and can be seen as violating Grice's (1975) maxims for the cooperative talk.[5] One maxim is the maxim of manner: talk clearly. The caller violates this maxim since the coherence of the turn is weak: it starts with a general title (that the 'situation is complex',) then the caller moves to talk about the enemy, then he moves to talk about the media and toward the end of the turn he talks about interviewing the enemy on the media. Yet, he shifts from one topic to the next without clear topical or linguistic connectors. This weak coherence and unorganized talk lead the host to respond to this turn with 'what are you talking about?' (Not shown here). The lack of coherence may suggest an uncontrollable flow of talk. Hence, the caller may be talking in an out-of-control way, and *hitlahamut* may refer to this style. So the first clue to *hitlahamut* is lacking coherence, which may suggest lacking control of one's talk as a stylistic feature.

There are other features of *hitlahamut* recognizable in this turn. *Hitlahamut* encodes the following elements in the defined talk: divisive talk, emotive talk, emotional language and excessive language. With regard to divisive language, Yehoshua creates a marked they/we discourse (Wodak, 1996) in which the Israeli side is the good side, and the other is the evil. For this construction, he uses the 'opposing general we' (Dori-Hacohen, 2014) and the evil other ('nothing will help us'). He also talks for the people, the majority, or the 'folk', a populist term (as I discuss below), and claims to represent this folk, again creating divisive language. This division is between the folk and the media. In Yehoshua's turn, there are two divisions: we, good-Israelis, versus bad (unnamed although probably Arab-)Enemy, and we, the folk, versus they, the media.

Yehoshua uses highly emotive language. Emotive language is language whose goal is to stir emotions in its audience. He uses extreme adjectives when describing the enemy: 'cruel, murderous, ugly'. He uses harsh metaphors to describe the media's discourse: first, he quotes the Chief of Staff, saying he 'throws mud'; second, he sharpens this metaphor to backstabbing.

The excessive language can be found in the repetitions that violate Grice's maxim of quantity: say what you need in the amount needed, no more, and no less. For example, when he presents himself as a speaker for the nation, he repeats four terms: 'people, folk, some of us, the majority almost' before presenting these groups' feelings. Specifically, Yehoshua uses excessive lists, moving from one list to another: first, the list of three adjectives for the enemy (cruel, ugly, murderous); then, he uses a list of who the enemy hates. This list contains six substantive parts ('not only Jews, Bedouins, Druze, Christians, Shiites, Sunni'). He uses another long list later on with a 5-parts list of media ('channel 1, 2, 10, Army radio and second channel'). Hence, his talk is excessive and exaggerated.

On top of the divisive, emotive and excessive language, Yehoshua uses emotional language. Emotional language encodes statements of emotions within the turn of talk. Yehoshua starts the turn with an '`oy`', a response cry (Goffman, 1981). Then, he explicitly says that it is hard for him to say the things he says ('`with pain, I tell you that`',). These emotions are evident in the incremental production of his talk. Thus, he adds adjectives to a prior sentence ('`complex`' is added to the prior sentence). On top of the increments, he talks in short-burst sentences of three words throughout his turn. This truncated way of talking creates poetic verses (Jakobson, 1971), and their goal is to draw attention to the talk.

Another central element of *hitlahamut* is the critical position. In this turn, the criticism is toward the media and the enemy. This criticism combines elements that are not necessarily connected: the murderous enemy and the traitorous media.

This turn creates a public yet personal critical position that is based not on rationality or even level-headed emotions, but on extreme emotions, as encoded both in form and content, and on the divisiveness of 'us'-the folk versus 'them'. These features are enacted via the flaunting of Grice's maxims. Based on this turn, *hitlahamut* symbolizes the combination of these elements: excessiveness, emotional style, emotion in content and divisive content of good versus evil. Some of these features relate to the style (emotive talk, excessive language), yet others relate to the act (the divisive language, the emotional language). The combination of these features leads to a style that is almost out of control with an act that is critical yet emotive.[6]

Although not following this turn, the host in this interaction uses *hitlahamut.* After some clarification questions, the host replies to the caller's accusation of the media as backstabbing the nation. When he does, he uses *hitlahamut*, yet, in an ironic vein. Here are parts of the host's counter-argument turn:

3. TST 13/12/2004, host Dalik Volinitz, Caller: Yehoshua

```
Host:
  bo bo ani elex begadol. e ani shniya ani etlahem kalot. anaxnu
  hekamnu po medina, kedey, be'emet lihiot or g e or lagoyim,
  laasot po medina axeret. kedey lishmor ad hasof, al hamusar
  shel eh xayaleynu.

  Let, let I'll go high. Ah I for a second I I'll+etlahem a bit.
  We we+built a country here, so really to be a light unto the
  nations, to have here a different country, to keep the morality
  of our soldiers all the way to the end.
```

The host presents his counterargument as a 'high' argument. Then he describes his argument as '`I I'll+etlahem a bit`'. This is an ironic expression for a couple of reasons: first, the first-person and the first-person inflicted *etlahem* are ironic, since, as we will see below, *hitlahamut* is often used for accusing someone else of wrongdoing, and here the host does not appear to be sincerely admitting wrongdoing; second, this use encodes self-restraint, which is ironic since, as presented above, *mitlahem* encodes an excessive, emotional, almost out-of-control message, and therefore one cannot *etlahem* '`a bit`'.

Following this framing, the host presents an emotional argument which uses excessive and divisive language. The host creates an 'Israeli we' (Dori-Hacohen, 2014), especially since he personally could not have established the country, having been born after it was established. Hence, the host presents an exaggerated 'we' that represents the entire Israeli nation, repeating the caller's divisive approach. Then, he stresses his frankness and follows it with a loaded biblical metaphor ('or lagoyim, to be a light unto the nations', Isaiah, 42:6, 49:6). This inter-text is emotive and tries to invoke a moral feeling among the Jewish-Israeli audience. Following this proverb, the host talks about the moral uniqueness of the country to explain the soldiers' moral actions, and he uses the extreme language 'all the way to the end'. Thus, in reply to the caller's argument, the host frames his argument as 'etlahem a bit' as opposed to the caller's real *hitlahamut*, and as opposed to the host's usual role of creating reasonable discussion. Moreover, he shares many of the caller's features: emotive language, loaded metaphors, inclusive exaggerated 'we' for creating an emotional and emotive discussion, yet unlike the caller, a positive one, invoking shared morality and not a divisive stance.

The host, being ironic about his *hitlahamut*, tried to create a more subdued, less excessive and emotional discussion than the caller, yet he failed. Although I do not present the 9 minute-long (out of the 55 minute-long show) interaction, during it the host is (over) taken by the caller's style, and to some degree, they create a *mitlahemet* interaction. Their interaction continues to be highly emotional, and the host fails to control it: despite asking the caller not to talk about the Holocaust, they argue about comparing the production of the show to the Holocaust. Furthermore, after the host tried to end the interaction, he insulted the caller (calling him a liar or paranoid), showing he lost control and was overtaken by his emotions. The interaction continued with high emotions and little content from both sides before the host ended it abruptly and said 'sorry' after it ended. Then, the host took a second and a half of silence (a major 'mistake' in radio production, see Goffman, 1981: 165) before turning to the next caller. The host failed in creating a reasonable discussion, and the caller's emotions and style took over the interaction. I suggest that his compliment to the last caller (ex. 1) is still riddled with the residues of this first call; when the host said in the last call 'everything in it is *mitlahemet*' it was due to the impression that this first *mitlahemet* call had created.

These excerpts and the short summary of this interaction present the notion of *hitlahamut* as it is practiced and understood by ordinary people. It shows it is a style and an act. It is a highly emotional style with some aggressive elements to it, which is combined with a confrontational act of criticism that is based on a ('populist') division with little reasonable support.

Hitlahamut is also used in the political realm, to symbolize an act that involves a style, as can be seen in (4). To give some background, the following segments relate to the deputy minister of Defense, who criticized the Prime Minister (PM henceforth) during a military operation.

4.   Hitlahamut as a ground for dismissal:

```
Gormim besiat halikud gibu et hahaxlata ve'amru 'dani xaca et
hakavim haadumim bahitlahamut shelo hayom neged rosh hamemshala,
```

```
velaxen hu lo hotir lebinyamin netanyahu brera. hu takaf oto kmo
ish   opozicia'.  gormim  bexirim  axerim  bamiflaga  …  amru:
'lenetanyahu lo hayta brera, ki dani avar et hagvul'.
Sources in the Likud party backed up the decision and said: 'Dani
crossed all the red lines in his **hitlahamut** today against the
PM, and therefore he left Benjamin Netanyahu no choice. He
attacked him as an opposition member'. Other high-ranked party
members … said: 'Netanyahu had no choice because Dani crossed
the line'.
```
<div align="right">(https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART2/597/059.html)</div>

The PM fired the deputy minister, a member of his own party, due to the latter's criticism. Sources from within the party justified the PM's action and based it on the deputy minister's *hitlahamut*.[7] *Hitlahamut* is used to characterize talk, and it helps to justify actions. *Hitlahamut* is joined with other descriptors of the deputy's talk as too harsh and extreme (`'crossed all the red lines' 'crossed the line'`), and causes its speaker to leave the in-group and join the out-group (`'as an opposition person'` read divisive and treacherous). This *hitlahamut* left the object of the criticism (the PM) no options but to react with action and not with a discursive retort, suggesting that *hitlahamut* cannot or should not be answered discursively.

In this case, we have the text of deputy minister Danon's criticism of the PM. He criticized the PM for negotiating a cease-fire during a military operation that had not yet achieved its goals.

5. The text that was defined as *hitlahamut*:

```
haskama  shel  rosh  hamemshala  lehafsakat  esh  axshav  tehave
**stirat lexi lexol toshvey yisrael** uveikar letoshvey hadarom,
shehayu muxanim leshalem mexir **kaved** tmurat hesegim **mashmautiyim**
mul **haxamas. Shum kosmetika lo teyape taut kasha zo'**. Danon
hosif: 'im hatocaa hi xazara le'amud anan 2012, **vetoshvey
yisrael stam** savlu – az lo **asinu klum**. hafsakat esh crixa
lihiyot rak le'axar **sheyisrael** tasig **hesegim mashmautiyim**
beofen **dramati** vexa'ele sheyimneu mehaxamas u'sh'ar irguney
hateror bircu'at aza et hayexolet lishloax tilim al **ezraxey
yisrael'.**
```

```
'A PM's agreement to a cease-fire now will be a **slap in the
face** of **all Israeli residents,** and especially the residents of
the south who were ready to pay a **heavy** price for **substantial**
achievements against the **Hamas. No cosmetics will beautify
this big mistake'.** Dannon added: 'if the result is a return to
"Amud Anan 2012" [a prior operation – GDH] and the **residents
of Israel** has suffered in **vain** then **we did not do anything.** A
cease-fire should only be after Israel achieves **major** results
in **dramatic** fashion, such that will prevent the Hamas and the
other terrorist organizations in the Gaza strip the ability to
shoot missiles on **Israel citizens'.**
```
<div align="right">(http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4543608,00.html)</div>

This reported talk was defined as *hitlhamut*, so we can look in it for features that can be described as *hitlahamut*. The text includes divisive language that focuses on Israel versus its enemy, the terrorist[8] groups. In this divisive language, the deputy minister talks on behalf of the Israelis `all Israeli residents` and `Israel citizens`. The divisive language enables the deputy minister to implicitly accuse the PM of giving in to the enemy, against the Israeli interests (recall backstabbing from ex. 2).

There is emotive language, with some excessive adjectives (`heavy`, `substantial`, `major`, `dramatic`). These adjectives are accompanied by loaded metaphors such as a `slap in the face`, and `no cosmetics will beautify this mistake`. The message is repetitive, since the addition (following `Dannon added`) is similar to the message before the addition. The message also is exaggerated in its expectations: Israel cannot create a situation in which all `terrorist` organizations are unable to fire missiles at Israeli citizens.

This message can be termed *hitlahamut* due to its divisive language, emotive and emotional language, its excessiveness (in the repetitions) and its unrealistic goals. As with the caller's turn, Danon broke the maxims of quantity (said too much), manner (said it in an extreme and offensive way) and quality (requesting something that he knows cannot be achieved, and hence saying something that is not true). All these features are the features that *hitlahamut* signifies. However, it is termed *hitlahamut* for political reasons, to justify the PM's decision to fire the deputy. Although the political action of labeling this message *hitlahamut* is intentional, this labeling would have been difficult without the features that are culturally accepted as *hitlahamut*, and hence I analyzed this text as *hitlahamut*.

What unit of talk does the term *hitlahamut* define? *Hitlahamut* represents an emotive, emotional and excessive type of talk (both form and content) that borders on being out of control (verbal or written) communication that takes a confrontational perspective toward someone with regard to public topics. It works on the act and the style level (Carbaugh, 1989). It is a message that flaunts various, if not all, of Grice's cooperative maxims. Talk which is defined as *hitlahamut* includes a critical element in it, yet this critical element is based on emotions and not on logic or argumentation.

However, when discourse is defined by others as *hitlahamut*, this definition decreases the need to respond to the criticism. Instead, the focus is switched to the type of communication and renders it almost impossible to answer discursively. Following labeling theory (Scheff, 1970), once a discourse is labeled *hitlahamut* it requires no reaction. This can be turned into a strategic ploy, meaning, instead of responding to an argument, one can label it '*hitlahamut*' and eliminate the need to engage with that discourse. Hence, in defining talk as *hitlahamut*, the party which defines it takes a negative stance toward the message and uses the style to chastise or criticize an unhinged form of communication, while ignoring the content of the message.

Further findings from the online commenting corpus

The corpus of online commenting (Weizman, 2015) helps to find some other functional levels of *hitlahamut* (following Katriel, 1991 view of terms for talk). The term *hitlahamut* is collocated with 'siax' (discourse) or 'daat kahal' (public opinion). In one instance, *hitlahamut* comes next to the Baron Munchausen, the infamous excessive fiction teller.

Thus, as argued above, the term defines a specific discourse. Moreover, the collocation 'siax politi mitlahem' (*mitlahem* political discourse) was often cited in the online commenting corpus. Since it takes a negative stance toward the specific discourse, *mitlahem* also collocates with other negative adjectives, such as 'maamar populisti *umitlahem*' (a populist *mitlahem* article). This collocation with populist shows that there is a difference between the two terms, a point I return to shortly.

The corpus also leads to the discovery of some additional features of *mitlahem*. I focused above on the excessive, emotive and emotional elements that this term for talk encodes. We saw the contrast between being a good soul and *mitlahem* (ex. 1 above). Another contrast is between *mitlahem* and realistic or reasonable. I referred to this point above when discussing the *mitlahem* discourse as one flaunting Grice's quality maxim: state what you know is true, or what you can prove is true. Commenters in the online commenting corpus stress the contradiction between *hitlahamut* and reality:

6. *mitlahem* as anti-reality

A. keycad maamar **mitlahem** shekaze vexo menutak mehameciut yaxol
    lihiyot maamar maarexet shel iton merkazi beisrael?
    How come an article so *mitlahem* and so detached from reality
    can be an editorial of a central newspaper in Israel?

B. maamar mecuyan, uvdati, velo **mitlahem.**
    an excellent, factual and not mitlahem article.

Both segments, taken from comments to online journalistic opinion articles, stress the relations between *hitlahamut* and facts. In 6A, the commenter chastises an editorial for being unrealistic and counter-factual and calls it *mitlahem*. In 6B, we see the opposite case: the commenter compliments an article for being factual and good, and 'not *mitlahem*'. Thus, the term *hitlahamut* stresses not only on the emotional, excessive and emotive elements of a discourse, but these features make it unrealistic. The corpus was collected before the popularizing of the terms 'fake news' and 'alternative facts', yet *hitlahamut* seems to suggest these notions since it reflects a disconnect from reality which is effected by someone's skewed emotional position.

Hitlahamut and its communicative environment

The online corpus presents another way in which *hitlahamut* is used. *Hitlahamut* is collocated with 'right-wing' (5 times out of the 138 in NRG.co.il), as in the following examples:

7. Right-wing *hitlahamut*

A. kol **hahitlahamut** haofyanit shel megivey hayamin …
    all the typical **hitlahamut** of the right-wing commenters …

B. matay haahablim **mitlahamey** hayamin yavinu sheKerri codek …
    when will the idiots right-wing **mitlahamim** understand that
    Kerry [Former US secretary of state] is right in …

In both comments, the commenters connect the political affiliation of the people they write against with *hitlahamut*. Thus, *hitlahamut* defines the communication of the other political side, and more often, the left defines the right-wing discourse as *hitlahamut*. As Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013) argued, the main goal of the online commenting arena in Israel is to create a space in which opposition between identities is created, rather than an exchange of arguments between the two sides. Thus, *hitlahamut* defines the other side's political talk, and it casts it as extreme, unreasonable and unrealistic. These leftist commenters, therefore, do not need to engage with the content of the right-wing commenters, since they cast it as *hitlahamut*. This usage resembles the use of the term by politicians (ex. 4–5 above), when the people around the PM defined the deputy minister's discourse as *mitlahem*, and therefore, avoided the need to respond to its contents (in that example, a right-wing PM's circle defined an even more right-wing deputy's position as *mitlahem*).

Hitlahamut is also connected with other slurs (*ahablim*, idiots, ex. 7B), as part of the aggressive *tokbek* discourse. Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013) defined the term for talk *tokbek* and said it is designated for the online commenting arena and its overtly aggressive tone. Many commenters use *hitlahamut* to describe the online commenting arena in Israel as well (in Nrg.co.il out of 138 *hitlahamut* occurrences, 5 were collocated with tguvot, 'comments'.)

8. *Hitlahamut* as defining online commenting

A. `hatguvot` **`hamitlahamot`** `miyamin umismol moxixot shehamemshala`
    `osa et hadavar hanaxon`
    `The` **`mitlahamot`** `comments from the` **`right and left`** `prove that the`
    `government is doing the right thing`
B. `lo mekubalot alay` **`hitlahamut`** `hatguvot lemata tox kedey`
    `hashmacot`
    `I do not accept the comments'` **`hitlahamut`** `below together with`
    `the slandering…`

Both commenters reject the discourse that other commenters created by defining it *hitlahamut*. In 8A, the commenter refers to the comments from both the left- and the right-wing as *hitlahamut*. Thus, he shows that the discourses that *hitlahamut* defines are not the property of only one political side. This text also positions this commenter in the middle, a moderate whose opinion is reasonable (as opposed to the *hitlahamut* from both sides). Similarly, in 8B, the commenter connects *hitlahamut* with slandering, another type of negative discourse.

Hitlahamut and *tokbek* go hand in hand. In the Israeli media landscape, as crawled and documented by 'Yifat Digger'[9] between 2006 and 2018, the collocation 'tokbek mitlahem' appears 171 times. The *tokbek* as a communicative arena is one of aggressive tone, where political identities are created; no political exchange is created and instead an exchange of insults rules the interaction. *Hitlahamut* defines a discourse which achieves exactly that: aggressive, extreme, unrealistic and one which needs no rebuttal.

Hence, like *tokbek, hitlahamut* is another term for talk for a dysfunctional democratic culture, one in which instead of having a deliberative democratic discussion (open to all,

and especially open to changing of opinions), the discussion is closed by the terms for talk and definitions of communication that takes place within it. Relatedly, both terms connect to *kasah* (Katriel, 1986, 2004) as I discuss shortly.

While *hitlahamut* may define the *tokbek* arena, some commenters argue that the entire Israeli discourse has become *mitlahem*. The background of the following editorial is an incident known as 'The Azaria affair'. This name refers to the legal and political processes and discussions triggered by a video capturing of an event in which a Palestinian, who had intended to stab Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers, was killed by a soldier, after the Palestinian was apprehended and while he was lying on the ground handcuffed. The surname of the soldier who killed the Palestinian was 'Azaria', and he was prosecuted, found guilty and served a prison sentence for killing the Palestinian. The filming, the killing, its political responses, the court martial, the sentence, the soldier serving his time, the lack of military and civil pardon to the soldier and the soldier being eventually released from jail, each led to a wave of extremely divisive discourse. One side of the discourse condemns the killing, justifies the court martial and its results, while the other side supports the soldier and his actions. The soldier's supporters presented him and themselves as the 'Folk', claiming to be the authentic majority, basing this claim partially on his middle-eastern Jewish family and low economic status. This discourse created a division between the 'People' on the one hand and the IDF, usually perceived as the emblem of the Israeli people, and its higher command, on the other. Here is how one editorial addressed the discourse around the trial:

9.   Israeli discourse of Hitlahamut

```
aval parashat el'or azarya tafsa oto be'idan sho'ne legamre.
lo shel xilukey deot mikcoiyim legitimiyim, ela shel hitlahamut
vehitbahamut shel politikaim, shel xalal manhiguti, shel
hitparkut hamamlaxtiyut veshel populism xasar axrayut shematxil
bapolitika'im veyored la'ezraxim, kshehu mekabel baderex od
veod shxavot shel hakcana ve'alimut milulit bilti-nisbelet.
but the 'Elor Azarya Affair' caught the IDF in an entirely
different era. An era not of legitimate professional differences
of opinion, but one of the politicians' hitlahamut and
bestialization, of a leadership void, of the breakdown of
statism and of irresponsible populism that starts with
politicians and trickles down to citizens, and it receives on
its way more layers of extremism and unbearable verbal violence.
                        (http://www.themarker.com/markerweek/1.3220460)
```

Sami Perec, the author of this article, was the editor of the 'The Marker' news site. In this role, he describes the Israeli discourse regarding the Azaria Affair revolving around the relations between the IDF and the public. He accuses the politicians of 'hitlahamut and bestialization', which is a phrase built on the jingle meaning (Burke, 1966),[10] the rhyming of *hitlahamut* and *hitbahamut*, and captures the author's views of the discourse the politicians create. Moreover, the entire description explains these two terms: breakdown of shared norms, lack of leadership, extremism and unbearable verbal

violence. As I presented above (moving from ex.2 to ex.4), the *hitlahamut* discourse is shared by both politicians and citizens.

As one term for talk always relates to others, *hitlahamut* relates to other terms for talk that were discussed in the Israeli society. As Katriel (1986, 2004) described, the Israeli society moved from being a *dugri* society, one which shares the ethos of solidarity (the `statism` in ex. 9) and which allowed criticism toward each other, to a fragmented society which lacks '*gibush*' (crystallization, Katriel, 1991). The demise of *dugri* led to the rise of *kasah* (bashing, Katriel, 2004), that heightened the unmitigated criticism and aggression of *dugri*, without keeping the solidarity that *dugri* used to have. Hence, according to Katriel, *kasah* captures violent social relations denoted by the metaphor of a boxing match. Indeed, the editorial refers to '`unbearable verbal violence`', which is *kasah*, and this description is collocated with '*hitlahamut* and bestialization'. Similarly, Perec equates *hitlahamut* and *hitbahamut* with the decline of statism discourse. Noy (2015) suggests that statism discourse is one of formality and reasonableness, and hence *hitlahamut*, unreasonable discourse, stands in opposition to statism, as indeed was discussed above.

Moreover, *hitlahamut* shares the aggressiveness with *kasah*; however, it also shares the speaker-centered style of the *dugri*. Dugri speech was a speaker-centered style that was based on argumentative positions and on opinion-sharing (Katriel, 1986). *Hitlahamut* is also a speaker-centered style, but it is built on emotions and expressivity. *Hitlahamut* does not imply a well-established position since it is excessive in style and is based on emotions. It differs from talking too long about a specific point in a mild manner: Israelis might refer to such talk as 'lehishtapex' ('spills one's guts out') or 'laxfor' (to dig too deep into the discussion) – terms for talk that *hitlahamut* does not fit into easily.

Thus, *Hitlahamut* is tightly connected to the social processes of moving away from social solidarity to a fragmented society, from *dugri* to *kasah*, from *crystallization* and *statism* to fragmentation. *Hitlahamut* comes to define the discourse on the other side of society as a *kasah* discourse. Hence, a *kasah* discourse may be defined as *hitlahamut*, by those opposing the content of the criticism. The term *hitlahamut* refers to and recreates the Israeli speech economy of violent communication patterns that lacks the elements of listening and respect, aspects which are demanded from functional public discourse (and see Dori-Hacohen and Shavit, 2013 for a similar argument regarding the *tokbek*). *Hitlahamut* defines an emotive, excessive, extreme and unreasonable critical public position that requires no discussion and that creates no democratic exchange of opinions.

Hitlahamut and the unreasonable public participation

I described the term for talk *hitlahamut* as defining public discourse which is confrontational, unreasonable and excessive, both in form and content. Although it seems obvious, the term relates mainly to current affairs and to larger societal issues, and it is not designed as a term for private, semi-private or face-to-face interactions regarding non-public topics. However, this can be a result of the data used for the article, and not an inherent element of the term for talk (indeed the dictionary definitions suggest usage at the interpersonal level).

This argument connects *hitlahamut* with other terms for talk for civic participation. The usage of *hitlahamut* to label the other side's discourse as extreme and excessive, and hence

in need of no rebuttal, resembles the use of 'hate-speech' in the Hungarian arena (Boromisza-Habashi, 2012). Boromisza-Habashi describes how the term 'hate-speech' is used to create a ritual, in which each a political side accuses the other side of producing hate-speech. These accusations eliminate the need for substantive dialogue, since each side stresses the other's argument as extreme and unfounded, based on their form and content.

Hitlahamut is also interestingly related to 'reasonable hostility' (Tracy, 2011). Tracy (2011) demonstrated how ordinary citizens, participating in public hearings regarding civic issues, including education hearings and same-sex marriage hearings (Tracy and Hughes, 2014) create a hostile message yet construct it in a way that is still perceived as reasonable. Therefore, Tracy argues, citizens create a public discourse that shows their interest in the topics without creating antagonism or extremism in expressing their opinions. Tracy commends this type of discourse as beneficial for public discourse. *Hitlahamut* stands in direct opposition to reasonable hostility. *Hitlahamut* defines a discourse that is unreasonable hostility. It stresses that the discourse has many features that are unreasonable: excessiveness, emotional, emotive and divisiveness. The divisive element of *hitlahamut* emphasizes the hostility yet without creating any reasonable buffering, *hitlahamut* suggests that it is hostility and division above all, hostility so unreasonable that one cannot refute or even address it.

Another difference between the two terms is that reasonable hostility was mainly described with regard to ordinary citizens' participation in public discourse, whereas *hitlahamut* defines the participation of both ordinary citizens, as in the comments arena, and of politicians (ex. 4, 9).

Reasonable hostility may be a way to execute what Mouffe (2000) called agonistic public discourse; *hitlahamut* defines what Mouffe saw as antagonistic public discourse. Agonistic discourse allows public discourse that addresses social conflicts and may resolve them either via consensus or compromise; antagonistic public discourse leads to the dismantling of the society in which it takes place, due to a breakdown of norms and the shared ethos – the exact phenomena the last excerpt (ex. 9) described. Although Mouffe did not suggest ways of discerning between the two types of discourse, *hitlahamut* and reasonable hostility may allow reflecting on them. Yet, while *hitlahamut* is an emic term, used by the participants to describe the discourse (albeit not their discourse, but their rival discourse), reasonable hostility is a term Tracy coined, and we are yet to find the equivalent emic term (if it exists!) to describe the discourse Tracy defined.

The discussion of *hitlahamut* versus reasonable hostility as an example of antagonistic versus agonistic discourse brings *hitlahamut* closer to the theory of public discourse. In (9), Perec connects *hitlahamut* with populism. He argues that *hitlhamut* is a manifestation of '`irresponsible populism`'. While he uses the mundane non-theoretical meaning of populism, I would like to argue that *hitlahamut* is an emic term for populism, as Laclau (2005) described the term.

Before connecting *hitlahamut* with the theory, I will try to distinguish between *hitlahamut* and *populism* in the way the Israeli discourse constructs them. *Hitlhahmut* was presented as a term that describes excessive emotionally based confrontational public position. Populism in Israel, at least for me, is used to describe a position that panders to the lowest denominator in order to receive as much public attention and acceptance as possible (see Hamo, et. al., in-press). Populism refers to a position that is based not on rationality nor on

emotions but on (an imagined) popular appeal. Unlike *hitlahamut*, which is based on excessive emotions and extreme style, populism does not need to have an extreme style but receives the (imagined) people's acceptance and it lacks a critical element.

These differences show how *hitlahamut* and populism, as used in popular discourse, refer to different elements in the theory of populism. Populism in Israeli public discourse refers to the theoretical element of presenting a fragment of the public as the whole public. However, *hitlahamut* captures different elements in the theory of populism. For Laclau (2005), populism is not a static political movement that is associated with one side of the political spectrum (usually right-wing nowadays). For him, populism is more a style and type of discourse whereby an agent, who is part of the hegemonic system, but not at its center, takes different democratic demands and combines them together under 'Folk' or 'populist' terms to gain power. This agent combines the different demands to create an internal division within society between an imagined elite and an imagined populace, creating a 'we-they' discourse that is based on a combination of unrelated demands, whose main connection is through the populist discourse. The populism is vacant of true meaning other than the combination of demands, yet it is bigger than the demands themselves. Therefore, populism is empty of substantive meaning.

The data above show that *hitlahamut* describes these populism features and that some members even see the connection between populism and hitlahamut (ex. 9). Consider (2), in which the caller moved from criticizing the enemy to criticizing the media: these are two different democratic demands that the caller combined in his raw emotive way. There is no rational connection between criticizing the enemy and criticizing the media. The caller creates a divisive language with a 'we' and different types of 'them', via highly emotional language. He uses various terms to present himself as the popular voice: `haam, amxa, xelek miitanu, harov kim'at, (the People, the Folk, some of us, the majority almost.)` Symmetrically, in (3) the host answers by stressing the national element of his talk and its morality as a counter-*hitlahamut* move, showing that the 'we-they' element of populism is central to *hitlahamut* yet the combination of demands can be broken down, and that there is no inherent connection between the enemy and the caller's view of the media. In (4–5), different demands and discourse were defined as *hitlahamut*, but still, the division and extremism were central. The later excerpts suggest that *hitlahamut* defines discourse with weak factual bases (hence it combines different elements of reality in a non-persuasive way), akin to the theory of populism. Following the theory, (8a) shows that at least some commenters accept that *hitlahamut* can be found among those with both right and the left political leanings. It is the style and lack of definitive content that creates *hitlahamut*, much like the features Laclau defines in populism. The 'Azaria affair', discussed in (9), was indeed a breakdown of the demands at the root of populism: the 'folk' demanded to acquit the soldier, whereas other parts of the Israeli public (including the political right-wing) saw no justification for the soldier's actions. Much of the pro-soldier discourse was typed as populist (lacking morality and clear bases) and as *mitlahem* (as in 9), yet these populist voices came from what Laclau (following Marx) called 'lumpenproletariat', the element in the political system that felt rejected and outside of it, and to which populist discourse gives space by changing the political playground.

However, *hitlahamut* is used for labeling. It is used to allow participants not to respond to the content of the criticism but instead to comment on the style. This risk also exists,

as Laclau argued, in calling some social movement populist, since this label allows ignoring the actual demands of that particular movement. If one ought to fight populism, one needs to remember the particular democratic demands and look for them within the populist demands, and not wash away all discussion of critical stances as *hitlahamut* and populism.

Conclusion

This article described the Israeli term for talk *hitlahamut*. Like other Israeli terms for talk, this term describes and defines a problematic form of communication. I showed that when the term was used, the discourse that it indexed was based on a number of key elements: divisive discourse between a good 'we' and some bad 'other', usually Israelis being the good and Arab/Enemy being the other or an elite-folk division; emotive language whose goal is to stir emotion in the audience and emotional language showing the speaker himself is emotional; excessive use of language either by repetition and the use of (excessive) lists; and at times unrealistic demands. *Hitlahamut* labels a discourse as unworthy of response due to these elements, which leads to the discourse being perceived as almost out of control, in other words, as a populist *kasah* discourse. These features help the definer of *hitlahamut* to point to this discourse as being unreasonable, especially in the public context. In analytic terms, *hitlahamut* discourse is a message that violates many of Grice's cooperative maxims. I also connected this term with other terms for talk, both in the Israeli culture and with terms for public talk in other cultures. I argue that *hitlahamut* is the emic representation of the theoretical concept of populism (according to Laclau, 2005).

This research has its limitations. Future research may look at these terms and may try to quantify their usage and their relations to each other. In addition, future research may look for similar terms for talk in other cultures. Thus, I suggested that 'rant' may be a similar term for talk in the American context. Similarly, I did not map the entire playing field which *hitlahamut* contributes to, although I connected it to *dugri, kasah* and *tokbek*. The Israeli field is more likely to have other newer terms for talk as the country and its culture change. Yet, this future research should share the assumptions of this research, rooted in the EoC premise: cultures have their own ways of talking about themselves and their communication patterns. These terms for talk capture the local understanding of the culture and its communicative values. I described how in Israel, *hitlahamut* encodes treating some public discourse as unreasonable and populist hence unworthy of response in a culture that shuts down democratic exchanges. This culture, I claimed in a prior article, is moving toward being a 'culturally defective democracy' (Dori-Hacohen, 2016), and *hitlahamut* is another term for talk that encodes a communication process which facilitates the production of such culturally defective democracy. Although there might be processes to counter the one *hitlahamut* captures, this research ends in a pessimistic notion that much of the Israeli political discourse is moving toward being defined as *mitlahem*, although this conclusion is yet to be verified.

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Notes

1. All translations are mine.
2. http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART/997/957.html
3. Hebrew is a root-based language; meanings are created from the interplay of root and pattern that are then conjugated in different forms for various functions.
4. The data are presented in its simplest form. X represents the sounds and letters of khet and khaf, C represents tzadik.
5. I paraphrase Grice's maxims in a minimal way and do not repeat them for space reasons.
6. This act resembles 'getting on rude': 'persons's words are annoying, loud, aggressive, and self-assertive', (Carbaugh, 1989: 98).
7. The English coverage of this event used 'irresponsible' or 'sharp' when the *hitlahamut* was used in the Hebrew reporting.
8. I use the participants' terms, and do not intend to decide if Hamas is a terrorist group.
9. I am grateful to the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University and to Yifat Media company for having the access to this database.
10. Indeed, it is a common collocation, appearing 29 times in the media landscape, as I found in Yifat Digger.

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