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Gonen Dori-Hacohen

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Gonen Dori-Hacohen

INTRODUCTION

mi shebadak et hatguvot ba'internet, kikar ha'ir shel yamenu

Anyone who checked the comments on the internet, the current city square

Ofer Shelakh, http://www.ynet.co.il/home/0,7340,L-363–2781769,00.html, 08.10.2003

hatok-bek hu zirat hatguvot shel golshim be'atarey internet isra'elim, uverosham Y-net shel "ye-diot axronot." . . . hatok-bek hu rak lix'ora emca'i lekidum diyin ciburi besugiyot bo'arot.

The toke-bek is the arena of comments of internet surfers in Israeli internet sites, heading by Ynet of "Yedito Axronot." The tok-bek is only allegedly a tool for promoting public debate on burning issue.

Roegl Alper, http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.940574, Haaretz News Paper, 23.01.2004

Hatokbekim, tguvot hakor'im shebe'atar hainternet shel "yediot akhronot" veakhar kakh shel "maariv" hekhelu behanhagatam, nir'u keme'ein hide park virtu'ali. Khagiga lademokratya velekhofesh hadibur.

The Tokbekim, readers' comments in the internet website of "Yedi'ot Axronot" and then later "Maariv" started using, looked as some virtual Hyde Park. A celebration of Democracy and freedom of Speech.

Baruch Kimerling, http://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/1.1020523, Haaretz newspaper, 21.06.2005

These three quotes are taken from news articles that leading Israeli commenters and scholars have written regarding the Israeli online commenting arena. For Shelakh, currently a Parliament Member of the progressive "Yesh Atid" party, online commenting is the metaphoric city square, where people gathered to discuss and debate public issues. For Alper, a renowned author, the commenting arena, he calls *tokbek*, is a potential arena for public discussion. For Kimerling, one of the leading Israeli sociologists of the 20th century, the *tokbek* presents a potential of

democratic process and freedom of speech. These commentators framed the Israeli online commenting arena, the *tokbek*, within the larger discussions of civic engagement, public deliberation, and democratic life. This framing is shared by both practitioners of this arena and outsiders observing this communication process. Therefore, this chapter uses this communication arena and the term for talk that captures it, the *tokbek*, within its larger speech economy, in light of discussions of public deliberation and civic engagement.

Discussions of ordinary people's talk about current affairs and politics are central to many streams of thought in the social sciences and in communication. Habermas (1989) may be taken as the originator of these discussions. As a German sociologist educated in the Frankfurt school of thought, Habermas used empirical comparative–historical analysis to find out how what Shelakh calls "the city square" developed to have democratic discussions. The 18th- and 19th-century England, French, and nowadays German, city squares were filled with coffee shops and saloons, and these places and the discussions in them created a "public sphere." In this public sphere citizens openly discussed the actions of the government, in order to improve it. The open discussion was several-fold: First, the discussion was open for all participants who wanted to participate; second, the participants were open to change their minds following a rational discussion; third, the open access presumed equal status to all participants. This openness allowed a free argumentative discussion among equal citizens, who become critical of the government in order to change and improve social life.

Habermas's description of the public sphere led to much further research on the participation of ordinary people in public discussion about politics, yet the demands for openness, both of access, open-mindedness, and process of discussion remain a staple of public deliberation. Many of the discussions of the public sphere (including Habermas's own work, ironically) are perceived as theoretical, not to say idealizing the forms of public talk, and therefore ungrounded in actuality. In previous research I demonstrated that Israeli radio phone-in shows, an arena for ordinary citizen participation in mediated political talk, resemble the Habermasian ideal (Dori-Hacohen, 2012). Unlike radio phone-ins, which received no term for talk, Israeli online commenting arena, where citizens have free access to comment about political (and other) topics, received, as Alper noted as early as 2004 (before most other cultures had these commenting arenas), a term for talk—"hatokbek" the *tokbek*. This chapter follows the tradition of the Ethnography of Communication (originating in Hymes, 1972) and Carbaugh (1989), who focused on emic terms for talk and on collecting these terms to understanding their cultures.

Following the *tokbek*, this chapter studies emic terms for political talk. I use a two pronged approach to doing this: I describe the *tokbek* and move from it to discuss the Israeli speech economy and how it facilitates non-deliberative political talk (here I can be taken as an emic member, being an Israeli). Then I suggest two other terms for talk from other cultures that share some of the meanings of terms for political talk. I suggest that the Israeli speech economy, as depicted in the *tokbek*, and its equivalent from Hungary and Bulgaria designate terms for talk that lead to non-deliberative political discussions, as opposed to the one suggested by Habermas (among many others I have no space to relate to here). Whereas the theories emphasize deliberation at the centre of political discussions and tightly connect talk to action (Arendt, 1998), the emic terms describe arenas that are voided of deliberation and from action.

THE ISRAELI SPEECH ECONOMY FOR NON-DELIBERATIVE ACTION-LESS POLITICAL TALK

I would like to start with the Internet, which some theorists (cf. Dahlberg, 2007) have suggested has democratic potential—having many participatory affordances, egalitarian forms for

discussions, and autonomy from governmental impositions—all conditions for a functioning public sphere. Indeed, Israeli Internet sites have had a feature that only later became popular in other countries: the "comments section." This commenting section may become the epitome of the public sphere—ordinary people discuss public affairs from their perspective as citizens, at times even critically, which then may lead to action. Within the subgenre of Internet journalism, as Alper and Kimmerling noted above, and especially regarding political topics, such responses received their own term for talk: *tokbek* (sing.) or *tokbekim* (pl.) and a *tokbekist* (the author of a tokbek). The *tokbek* stands in stark contrast to theorists' demands of democratic public deliberation as it depicts non-deliberative action-less political life.

The Social Phenomenon and the Cultural Meaning of *Tokbek*

As Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) argued, *tokbek* refers to a technological feature that started in the mid-1990s. In terms of webpage structure, an article is usually followed by a series of advertisements and a commenting template that invites readers to insert new responses. The actual comment thread appears below this commenting template. Each *tokbek* has a title and a commenter's name and place of residence. Below these parts, there is a place to deliver the primary message of the response.

Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) have identified two recurring oppositional terms at the *tokbek* that mark paradigmatic personifications of political agendas: the *leftist* and the *rightist*. These political sides, like most politics in Israel, center on the relations between Israel and its Palestinian and Arab neighbors regarding the Territories Israel gained during the 1967 war: the "left" is dovish in negotiating towards a peace agreement including leaving the Territories; the "right" is hawkish, rejecting such negotiating and prefers keeping the Territories for security and religious reasons. These *tokbek* identities are mutually constitutive through various rhetorical and linguistic forms. This opposition, which organizes the *tokbek* discourse as political exchange, reveals a fundamental schism in the Israeli society. The *rightist* and the *leftist* types of personhood, as Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) argue, believe to have nothing in common in terms of a shared history and sentiments for the state. Some of Dori-Hacohen and Shavit's features are summarized in Table 24.1, representing the views each side holds of the other.

The form of exchange Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) found for the *tokbek* is a "communicative ritual" (cf. Philipsen, 1987, p. 250). However, as they argue, unlike many rituals, which create shared functioning societies:

> the *tokbek* ritual is unique in the sense that it symbolizes the radical absence of a "sacred object,"
> i.e., an organizing normative principle to which the participants adhere. Thus, the *tokbek* ritual

Table 24.1 The Semantic Field of Opposition between Leftists and Rightists

Personhood	Leftist *(as portrayed by* rightists*)*	Rightist *(as portrayed by* leftists*)*
Section of population	Elite	Commoner (*ha'Am*)
Historical comparison	Diaspora Jews	Fascists (Nazis)
Nationalism	Too little: dissolving the national state	Too much: expanding the state to its destruction
Sentiment	Too peaceful and naïve	Violent and murderous

(adapted from Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013a, p. 370)

reveals a contradiction between content and form because within it, social integration is organized around a shared sense of disintegration.

(Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013a, p. 371)

This ritual, at least on one website, NRG.co.il, became formulaic, that is, the commenters themselves started acting the same way posting similar repetitive *leftist* or *rightist tokbekim*. The same comments repeat themselves in different stories, and following a *leftist tokbek*, the same *rightist tokbek* may appear, and vice versa. This repetition is noticed by other participants, who then remark on this repetitive exchange, as demonstrated in Excerpt 1:

Excerpt 1

1.   12. bibi ubenet hem ha'iyum harecini beyoter al bitxon Yisra'el—lo Da'esh velo Iran. (l''t)
     Bibi and Benet they are the most serious threat to Israel security—not Isi''s and not Iran. (n''c)
     20:47 15/01/15
2.   >muxamad, maspik lehacif et haatar. (l''t)
     Muhammad, enough with flooding the site. (n''c)
     22:00 15/01/15
3.   >ata mecif kol katava vekore lexol mi shelo xoshev kamoxa "aravi". ata umlal. (l''t)
     You flood every article and call whoever thinks not like you an "Arab". You are wretched. (n''c)
     22:15 15/01/15
4.   >ani mecif et axotxa. vehi nehederet be'od ata mevale im harav alon. sotte. (l''t)
     I flood your sister. And she is wonderful while you are enjoying with Rabbi Alon. Perv. (n''c)
     07:59 16/01/2015

(*NRG website*, http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/670/036.html)

The *tokbek* ritual starts with an initial act of "political statement" that carries necessary commentary about the political identity of the writer. The author of comment 12 (1:1) reads an article and then responds by referring to the prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu by his nickname "Bibi" and to the minister of economy by his last name, and claims that these two Right-wing leaders are the threat to Israel security (1:1). This statement (it is not an argument since it lacks any reasoning), presents its author as *leftist*, since he (for reasons I explain below, I refer to *tokbekists* as men) harshly and unabashedly criticizes the Right-wing leaders.

The thread continues when another *tokbekist* responds to comment 12. The second *tokbek* (1:2) refers to the first *tokbekist* as "Muhammad," a reference that was made possible partially because of the former *tokbekist's* lack of identity (cf. Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013b). The second *tokbekist* claims that Muhammad "floods" the site with his comments. Both moves are aimed to delegitimize the first author: by referring to him as "Muhammad," the second respond tags the prior commenter as an "Arab" and therefore at the extreme (read illegitimate) left in Israel; moreover, in certain parts of the Israeli society being called an Arab is an insult; by claiming "flooding the site" he suggests the prior commenter does not respond to this particular article but acts automatically as a *leftist* writer, regardless of any specific content. Both elements undermine a *leftist tokbek*; hence this *tokbek* constructs a *rightist* author. This is the second and the last move in the *tokbek* ritual, establishing the second identity and explicitly presenting the opposition between the *leftist* and the *rightist tokbekists*. These two moves, of writing a *leftist tokbek* followed by

a *rightist tokbek* (or vice versa) can then continue, and Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) argue they do endlessly throughout the *tokbek* discourse.

Since this pattern is now recognized by the participants themselves, the next move in this thread points to the repetition (1:3). The second comment (1:2) can be found after many *leftists tokbekim* at nrg.co.il, therefore the third *tokbek* (1:3) uses the same accusation the second *tokbek* accused the first one—of writing the same comment regardless of the *tokbek* or the article throughout the site. Then, he describes the prior *tokbek* move of referring to whoever disagrees with him as an "Arab." Thus, the third *tokbek* points to the repetitive patterns of the second *tokbek* to undermine that position. Since the *tokbek* ritual is one of affronts, this *tokbekist* calls the prior "wretched." Therefore this is a *leftist tokbek* opposing a *rightist's* move against another *leftist*.

The last *tokbek* (1:4) responds to the *rightist tokbek* (1:2) as well. This *tokbek* is belligerent with sexual insults. I will not decipher them now, however, the reference to "Rabbi Alon" shows this commenter refers to the second *tokbekist* as religious, which is usually thought of as *rightist* in Israel. This *tokbek* also ends with a personal insult—"perv."

This excerpt, and others like it (discussed in Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013a,b), exemplified the *tokbek* ritual in which *rightists* and *leftists* exchange insults and use the *tokbek* arena mainly to present their identities. The comments have no valid arguments or attempts to create argumentative discourse. Neither side tries to establish a logical, reasonable, or even polite discussion. On top of presenting a *tokbek* ritual and its features, this excerpt also presents how the participants are aware of the repetitive elements of the *tokbek*.

Looking at the interaction in the *tokbek* in light of theories of public discussion, we can see it falls short of meeting the theorists' conditions. In the *tokbek* arena, as described above and in details in Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a), there is an exchange of political texts, which is a ritual of two political moves—mutual attacks and insults of the other side. Analyzing the communicative moves called for by political theorists such as Habermas (1989) suggests that in a political deliberation process there should be an exchange of at least three moves: presentation of first opinion, of a second different one, and then either a conclusion or a counter to the second one. In this process all moves are based on argumentation and on openness to change opinions. The *tokbek* does not meet these requirements: no argumentative process takes place and the interaction has two moves, not three. Therefore, the *tokbek* cannot be seen as a deliberative arena but an arena for political exchange. Moreover, since it is focused on talk, and not action, the *tokbek* has little effect on political life or can lead to little social change, since it is a self-contained system. The *tokbek*, as a term for talk, denominates a political discussion without deliberation and without social action (Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013a). As we see next, this term and its meaning fit well within the Israeli speech economy.

The *Tokbek* and its Relations to Other Israeli Terms for Talk

Quite a few Israeli terms for talk were described in past research, mainly by Katriel (1986, 1991), and the main one discussed by Katriel was the *dugri*, and its development into *kasah* and *firgun*. Other researchers study other terms for talk, relevant to our discussions are: the *sticker*, the *freier*, and Katriel's *kiturim* (griping), and I will discuss them and the speech economy they create.

The Sticker *and the* Tokbek

One can connect the *tokbek* to the *bumper sticker* (Bloch, 2000, Salamon, 2001), a mode of communication that was quite popular in Israel until recently. Unlike the USA, in Israel the bumper sticker was mainly political (Bloch, 2000), thus enabling a car owner to present a political identity

in public. As Bloch summarizes, the *bumper sticker* is a means for citizens to express their membership in cultural community (membering, to use Philipsen's, 1989 term), while being open to the entire population to participate (Bloch, 2000, pp. 72–73).

These features hold true to the *tokbek*. Everyone can write a *tokbek*, and it is a means for the participants to express their political affiliation. Moreover, much like the *sticker* (Bloch, 2000, p. 73) the *tokbek* has wide range of tones: although the abusive is the leading tone, one can find ironic, humorous, and at rare times, enlightening *tokbekim*. As Salamon (2001) and Bloch (2000) suggested, the *sticker* can be made out of hybridization of prior stickers and can use prior slogans to develop new positions. Both elements exist in the *tokbek*: *tokbek* can use hybrid language (being serious and non-serious at the same time, using various modes of persuasion, cf. Kohn & Neiger, 2007). Moreover *tokbek* writers refer back to prior comments to flip the position presented in them: recall the word "flood" (excerpt 1) and how the different *tokbekists* used it back and forth.

Bloch also argued: "the vast amount of interaction between the stickers provides unlimited scope for an ongoing dialogue." (2000, p. 49) However, this dialogue, unlike the *tokbek* dialogue, is imaginary. This argument is based on analyzing communicative moves, following the one I presented above. Unlike the *tokbek*, which has some dialogic aspect to it, the sticker presents one move—the presentation of an opinion or identity, without any actual second move, therefore no dialogue is created.

Although the sticker has one move of presenting an opinion, and the *tokbek* is a ritual of two oppositional moves, they share a basic premise. Both are used to present a political identity, while avoiding any deliberative democratic process, argumentation, or openness to change of opinions. The *tokbek* to some degree replaced the *sticker*, which are less visible in current Israel. Yet, this argument needs further research, and the demise of the sticker may be due to the increase of political violence in Israel (which Salamon hinted to [2001]). In the past, for presenting a political identity one could choose to put a bumper sticker on one's car; currently one can participate in the *tokbek* ritual to achieve the same goal.

The Tokbekist *Is Not a* Freier

I stated earlier that the *leftist* and *rightist* believe they share substantively very little, yet they share an Israeli cultural identity—being an Anti-"*Freier*" (Bloch, 2003).

The *Freier* is another Israeli term for talk, more specifically a term for personhood. Bloch (2003) discusses many features of the "Anti-*Freier*" and explains that in Israel the danger of social situation is to be seen as "Freier." The *Freier* is a weak, conforming, and feminine loser. The *tokbek* discourse is rooted in and is a manifestation of the anti-*Freier* identity. Much like the driving scene in Israel that Bloch described (2003), there is little respect to the other participants in the *tokbek* arena. Therefore, the tone of the *tokbek* is aggressive, and is getting harsher through the years, a point that awaits a diachronic study of the *tokbek*.

The combative tones of the *tokbek* fit the competition in which the anti-*Freier* must participate. The competition is repeated in the *tokbek*, where *leftists* and *rightists* are in a battle none of them win, since it continues endlessly. Losing an argument may be taken as a sign of *freier*, therefore *tokbekists* cannot concede a point. Moreover, since arguing assumes some notions of accepting or respecting the other side, the anti-*freier* cannot argue; he as the *tokbekist* must explicate his truth, while disregarding other opinions. Indeed, as illustrated above (ex. 1), this is the *tokbek* discourse—no arguments but only claims and statement of facts are used; each author presents his position, regardless of opposite opinions, and accompanies it with an insult towards those disagreeing with him. An anti-*Freier* cannot argue, and indeed *tokbekists* rarely do.

This competition together with the anti-*freier* machismo features explain much of the masculine, not to say sexist, tones of the *tokbek* discourse (and my referring to *tokbekists* as men).

Take for example 1:4 above: its author insinuates that he has sexual relations with the prior author's (1:2) sister, that the prior author is a homosexual, and calls him pervert, an insult. Thus, in the *tokbek* dominating your enemy's females is a victory; being feminine, not to say presenting a "non-normative" sexual identity is always an insult, since hegemonic masculinity is required and expected. Relatedly, feminine voices are chastised more harshly than masculine ones, a point that deserves further illustration in future research.

As Bloch argues, the anti-*freier* phenomenon leads to a lose-lose situation and Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) share this view as depicted in the *tokbek*. The conclusions from the *freier* framework fit well with that of the *tokbek*. As Bloch concludes:

> The freier frame represents a dissolution of the very notion of communication itself. Its use brings about a situation in which actors are no longer motivated toward social interaction, but toward satisfying intrapersonal needs, as individuals coddle their own egos with no thought for the other and worse, to the their detriment.
>
> (2003, p. 154)

The *tokbekist* is therefore an anti-*freier*, and indeed, the communication between anti-*freier* in this arena leads to: "the communicative premise that the participants in this ritual share is that no communication can take place between their two groups" (Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013, p. 374).

The Tokbek *Is a Bashing Ritual*

In their analysis, Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) relied heavily on Katriel's (cf. 1986, 2004) work. Katriel described the rise and deterioration of the Israeli term for talk *dugry*, which demised to two forms, the relevant of them is *kasah* (bashing talk) in contemporary Israeli public discourse. In her words *kasah is*:

> Forceful speech marked as *kasah* does not carry the attenuating impact of a shared, legitimating code. Rather, it is interpersonally directed as a put-down, unmitigated by the invocation of a cultural frame that might warrant its aggressiveness. *Kasah* as brute force tends to be associated with the growing factionalism and radicalization of Israeli social life, which implies an absence of a consensual system of symbols and meanings.
>
> (Katriel, 2004, p. 208)

The underlying metaphor of the *kasah* is that of a boxing match much akin to the exchange of *tokbeks* between participants. Recall excerpt 1: from the very first comment, the style of the *tokbek* is direct and aggressive. The first *tokbekist* takes the Right-wing leaders to be the biggest threat to Israeli security—an extreme position, which poses a threat to the face both of these leaders, and especially for their followers, who read the *tokbekim*. This aggression toward the *rightists* is answered, and this thread continues as a bashing ritual. From name calling (from "Muhammad" to "miserable" and then to "perv"), to mirroring accusation, the thread presents a ritual of disrespect, akin to a verbal boxing match. Indeed, as Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) argued, the online public discourse marked by the cultural term *tokbek* is a *kasah* fest that communicates radical pessimism about its very communicability, which mirrors the social relations anti-*freier* personhood creates and which makes this political discussion lack any reasoning or consequences regarding actions.

The Tokbek *as a Griping Ritual*

Whereas the tone the *tokbek* follows is of the *kasah*, its function may be related to another term for talk: *kiturim*, the "griping ritual" (Katriel, 1991). It is a ritual in which citizens meet and

discuss political topics or social problem to vent their opinions, reaching the conclusion that little can be done to promote change. Katriel suggested many etymologies for the word "kiturim," one of them is shared by the next *tokbekist*:

Excerpt 2

http://www.themarker.com/markerweek/1.2455241#

49. Toda lesSharon veRotem, aval xevr'e, ma yihiye? namshix lehit'acben **velixtov tokbekim** kedey lehoci **kitor** uvashavu'a haba nashuv lexayeynu veniten lahem leham-shix laxmos velirmos

Thank you to Sharon and Rotem, but guys, what will happen (be)? We will continue to get upset and to **write tokbeks** so to **get out steam**, and next week we will have return to our lives and will have allow them to continue rob and trample

vaad pe'ula 15:04 / 10.10.2014 Steering (literally action) Committee

This *tokbek* relates to an article about the extravagant wedding ceremony of the former chairperson of Israel's largest trade union, and how he hosted all the capitalists and well-to-do businesspeople in Israel, including all the rich politicians. The article hinted to the corrupt Israeli economy, in which politicians (including trade union leaders), businesspeople, and regulators divest public funds. Unlike many appreciative *tokbekim*, this *tokbek* scolds the other for using the *tokbekim* to "get out steam" in Hebrew "lehoci kitor," which resembles *kiturim*, griping. For this *tokbekist*, writing *tokbekim* is a form of griping, since it enables complaining about social problems without doing much about them. Indeed, this *tokbekist* states it explicitly, as he accuses the other participants of doing nothing to change the situation—and even his name "steering committee" (vaad pe'ula in Hebrew) suggests action is needed, which the commenter argues *tokbekim* are lacking.

Similarly, the next comment accuses the commenters of griping, although not in so many words:

Excerpt 3

http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4215946,00.html

8. naxon, amiti urecini . . . . . . aval. . . yisra'el, Isra'eli karagil. . . . yikre'u, yixtevu kama tokbekim. . . .veyakhzeru lehitlonen velivkot

Correct, true and serious. . . . . .but. . . . Israel, Israeli As usual. . . . (they) will read, (they) will write some tokbekim . . . and (they) will return to complain and crying

This *tokbekist* accuses all other *tokbesists* of basically griping in this arena. The griping ritual allows for a highly engaged citizen to do very little other than talking about the problems. The *tokbek* enables its writer to participate in a political scene, to express an opinion, to present a political identity, even to negate others' political identity, and to take no further political action, as this commenter, with the generic Israeli name, suggests. Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013a) suggested that the *tokbek* can be the extension of the griping ritual, in giving its participants a sense of political agency, much like the sticker, without any political action (other than membering). As exemplified in excerpt 2, and as the writer of excerpt 3 explains, much like the griping ritual, the *tokbek* does not lead to social change. Griping and the *tokbek* are therefore akin to whining, crying, and changing nothing. Hence, the griping ritual and the *tokbek* ritual enable their participants to feel politically engaged, while doing very little to promote change.

The Israeli Speech Economy and Non-deliberative Political Talk

In the Israeli speech economy, the *tokbek* is a term for talk that relates to many other terms for talk that center around public talk and relations of people in public; all share some elements of aggressive non-deliberative no-change social relations. The *tokbek*, as part of the *kasah* style, are rooted in the anti-*freier* personhood, therefore Israelis must participate in a bashing ritual whose main goal is to present a political identity (like the sticker). This speech economy creates no opening to communication (especially in the American sense, Katriel & Philipsen, 1981) and enables whining and complaining about social life without transformation, either personal or social, and therefore contributes to a stagnant social and political life.

This picture follows prior research of Israeli terms for talk. Katriel argued that the Zionist *dugri* style opposed the diasporic Jews' separation between action and talk and transformed the new Israeli into a doer and actor in the world (Katriel, 1986). Alongside the deterioration of *dugri*, symbolizing the diminishing of traditional Zionists views, the Israeli speech economy returned to stress talking without acting in the world, thus (a)voiding politics (at least according to Arendt, 1998). This speech economy has terms that share politics of reasonless presentation of identities, with no listening to other opinions, and without any action. The goal of the *tokbek* and the sticker is to present an identity, not to discuss it nor changing the political realm (Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013a). The griping ritual enables concerned citizens to talk yet to not do. These terms are rooted in the anti-*freier* personhood and in political exchange use the *kasah* tone. The Israeli speech economy has terms for political talk that share the lacking of deliberation or motivation for social change.

Putting this speech economy in a critical light, we may connect these terms with some ideal view of political deliberation. From this perspective, this speech economy enables public participation, even a political one, yet not a deliberative one. The Israeli speech economy stands against the deliberative view of democracy. According to both the consensual view of public deliberation (Habermas's public sphere is the cornerstone of this theory, 1989), and the agonistic view of public deliberation (Mouffe, 2000 represents this view), a democratic political deliberation should be open to transformation of opinions, meaning its participants need to be open to change their mind and opinions following the results of the discussion. Moreover, at least according to Habermas, and Mouffe does not dispute this view, the deliberation should be based on some rationality, if not on reason. All of these are missing from the Israeli speech economy when it comes to terms for political talk. Thus, these terms for political talk allow much political ado about nothing.

TERMS FOR NON-DELIBERATIVE POLITICAL TALK ELSEWHERE

Whereas the Israeli picture may seem bleak, it may be so only when compared to Western-theoretical perspectives. Bringing in terms for political talk from cultures that transformed to democratic governance recently shows similarities to the Israeli speech economy. That is, other cultures also share terms for political talk that lack the deliberative element and emphasize politics without rationality, deliberation, or action. These societies share terms for talk that enable engaged public life with little democratic values. I follow Carbaugh's (1989) and Philipsen's (1989) work comparing terms for talk and ways of talking in different cultures. Although this is an etic comparison, Carbaugh distinguished various elements to compare terms for talk. Out of his elements, I will focus here on the function the terms of talk encode, on the tone they entail, and on the social identities they create and enable. The terms I am about to compare all share the

function level—the function of the terms is to create civic engagement, that is public participation by citizens regarding public affairs. The tone of the speech events the terms encode is one of heated engaged discussion, and the identities they create are of the concerned citizen, at time with distinguished political affiliation. The efficacy of the communication behind the term is debatable, the communication processes behind the terms are useful to maintain a social status quo, and whether such a status quo is good is up for the reader's discretion.

The *tokbek* and the Israeli speech economy correspond to research on hate-speech in Hungary and to *oplakvane* in Bulgaria. These terms and way of talking represent the societal function of ordinary (and non-ordinary) people discussing public topics in mundane or mediated situations. Moreover, all these terms focus the public talk on the talk itself and not on political action or change, therefore their efficacy is questionable.

The *Tokbek* and/as Hate Speech

The *tokbek* can be seen as hate-speech, yet without the sanctions hate-speech receives (although there are discussions how to, even legally, "civilize" the *tokbek*). This view of *tokbek* as hate-speech suggests, as Boromisza-Habashi argued (2015), that hate-speech is context and cultural sensitive. Indeed, there is no equivalence term in Israel to "hate-speech" (dibur-sin'a is a literal translation, which sounds funny to a Hebrew speaker, and divrey sitna is too archaic). The racist (calling another commenter "Muhammad" as an insult or as a mere de-legitimation move) or the misogynistic ("perv" and the debasing hint of homosexuality) texts above, and similar expressions, are not viewed as legally (or normatively) problematic. Thus, although the *tokbek* discourse promotes hate among different groups (not only *leftists* and *rightists*), stereotypes, and biased group relations, they do not fall under a legal definition of censored talk in Israel or "hate-speech."

The promotion of hate relates to the tone of the *tokbek*, which is similar to that of the hate-speech. Both share an engaged, even heated tone of interaction. Additionally, as Boromisza-Habashi (2012) explains, hate-speech comes to denominate belligerent public talk, although what counts as belligerent is contested. Boromisza-Habashi (2012) suggests that both style and content can be seen as part of hate-speech. If one looks closely at the *tokbek* discourse, most *tokbek* would fit one definition or another of "hate-speech." Recall excerpt 1, in which homophobic and racist comments were made out in the open without sanctions or outrage: *tokbekim* are moderated after publication, and unlawful or problematic *tokbekim* are taken down. Therefore the *tokbek* presented above and other aggressive comments (see Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013a,b; Kohn & Neiger, 2007) are acceptable in this domain.

Not just in style and content, but in *social identities*, there is a resemblance between the discourse denominated by hate-speech and the *tokbek*. Boromisza-Habashi (2012) describes the basis of hate-speech as follows: "Once a speaker chooses a model of identity offered to him or her by agonistic discourse, the discourse also 'tells' the speaker how the identity can be used to relate to other relevant identities" (2012, p. 49). The set of identities the hate-speech is based upon in Hungary mirrors those in Israel—"Leftists" and "Rightists" although, of course, with different histories. Moreover, the bashing style of the *tokbek*, which is used by both political sides, resembles the use of the accusation of hate-speech, which is exercised by both political sides in the Hungarian society. It seems that the motive to engage in discussions about hate-speech is mainly to present oneself as belonging to the correct political camp.

This opposition between political identities may explain the ritualistic way in which hate-speech is at times enacted. When Boromisza-Habashi discusses occurrences of hate-speech he

presents a ritual of hate-speech. In this ritual one participant (say a *rightist*) accuses the other political side of using hate-speech, and then the table is turned and the other participant accuses the first participant of using hate-speech towards the other side (cf. Boromisza-Habashi, 2015: excerpt 2). This ritual of accusation resembles the *tokbek* ritual since both rituals mainly solidify each participant's identity. Moreover, Boromisza-Habashi (2012) shows how using hate-speech enables both political sides in Hungary to achieve presenting the other side as extreme and radical. Accusing of hate-speech creates an empty political discussion, as arguments may be termed hate-speech, therefore demanding no further rebuttal.

Thus, the hate-speech label may create political identities for the participation in a ritual-like heated tone of communication process. This process may lack argumentation and social change, much like the *tokbek*. In this process, the hate-speech resembles the *tokbek* in reducing what may be a space for political deliberation to a space for political exchange; reducing the communication process to a ritual with two moves, that repeats the current standings of the participants and is based on their political identities of "leftists" or "rightists."

Hate-speech is one way of talking (and I assume others exist in the Hungarian speech economy) that enables a Hungarian society, like the Israeli one, to continue functioning with a major political–historical schism in it, without solving the tear and without moving towards changing the political situation and the social problems in that society. Using hate-speech, much like the *tokbek* and griping, enables citizens to participate in what seems to be a vibrant and stimulating political life, yet one that lacks deliberative process or motivation for social change.

Tokbek and *Oplakvane*

Since the Israeli speech economy creates political engagement and exchange without deliberation and change, and since similar things can be said about hate-speech, it is interesting to compare this function to the Bulgarian case, as Sotirova (2013) writes:

> Bulgarians have been in a period of transition for so long, with the constant expectation of change (marked by significant alterations in policies, politics, governments, alliances, and institutions), that this has only left the population with a bitter taste and no observable (to the individuals themselves) changes in the status quo.
>
> (this volume, p. 23)

The term of talk that enables this keeping of the status quo while talking about social and political situation in Bulgaria is *oplakvane* (Sotirova, this volume). Much like the Israeli griping ritual, *oplakvane* is a ritual of narrating corrupt public life, about which participants themselves can do very little. The goal of the *oplakvane* ritual is not to offer solutions to Bulgaria's social or political problems, but instead to assert that the social situation in Bulgaria remains as problematic as it is right now and no change can be seen for its future. The tone of *oplakvane* and griping is more moderate than the *tokbek* and hate-speech, but these terms also create the concerned citizen as a social identity for their participants.

It is this lack of change while being talkative about politics that put *oplakvane* and *tokbek* (see excerpts 2 and 3 above) and griping in the same group of terms for public talk. They capture a discourse that creates political engagement without political change: citizens talk but do not argue but agree about political issues, yet the discussions lead to no political change. These terms for talk are there to help their societies, societies with problematic and weak democratic structures and traditions, to keep their malfunctioning political structure intact.

CONCLUSION

These terms for talk in Hungary and Bulgaria and the Israeli speech economy as a whole promote stagnancy over social change while creating politically engaged environments. One could argue their efficacy is in enabling a stagnant political structure in their respective cultures while showing political involvement. They change the ideal of democratic deliberation from being oriented for social change, therefore based on argumentation, openness, and at least three moves in the interaction, to political exchanges that preclude argumentation, openness, and social change. These terms enable politics without change, since this politics is about the social identities of the participants; the talk remains at the talking level and does not lead to action.

Putting the *tokbek* within the Israeli speech economy shows how the *tokbek* is an extension of the sticker, its function resembles that of the griping ritual, but it has a bashing tone to it and is rooted in the anti-*frieir* personhood. In this description I highlighted the similarities between the terms for talk, but there are differences. The griping ritual has no bashing elements and therefore is different from the *tokbek*. The sticker has physical elements that *tokbekim* lack, and the anti-*freier* was argued to operate mainly at the social and interactional level, not the political level. Yet, in spite of these differences, the Israeli speech economy seems to accommodate and create many terms for talk that encode paradoxical communication—communicating without believing in the ability of communication, due to the deterioration of social cohesion (Katriel, 1986, 2004). Since the social and political issues in Israel are complex, and since no cohesion for social change can be found, Israeli politics remains stagnant, and the same political problems linger without change for generations. Therefore, the culture comes up with mechanisms, captured by the terms for talk griping and *tokbek*, which enable the continuation of the stagnant political life, while letting citizens feel they meaningfully participate in political life.

Lack of social cohesion that leads to and is a result of stagnant social and political life is not unique to Israel, nor is the lack of political change and the void of social change due to civic life. Societies with stagnant political life need mechanisms for their citizens to participate in political life without changing them. The *tokbek*, griping, *oplakvane*, and hate-speech all contribute to this function with their unique cultural meanings (which I did not highlight here, for example the more sensitive relations of hate-speech in Hungary as compared to Israel). They enable political life without change. In Israel, Bulgaria, and Hungary, terms for political talk all capture politics that is void of action and change; it is political exchange and not political deliberation.

Studying emic terms for political talk and their speech economy suggests a divide between actual political talk and theoretical political discussions. The emic terms highlight the lack of elements, which theorists stress are the essence of democratic politics: deliberation and change. For theorists, political talk is a process of looking for the societal good by logical argument about public good (Habermas, 1989); the emic terms highlight no reasonableness. For theorists political talk is a first step towards social action (Habermas, 1989, Mouffe, 2000) since it is oriented to changing the world (Arendt, 1998). The emic terms stress talk for its own sake, lacking referential power. Future research may find cultures in which the terms for talk fit the theoretical demands or may find other mechanisms and terms for talk that allow for the creation of non-deliberative action-less politics. Additionally, we can further elaborate on the speech economies behind the terms for political talk, or flesh out differences in the terms for political talk. Finally, one can look at the social structure that leads up to the creation of these terms for talks, and look to improve social and political life by promoting social action at the expanse of these stagnant terms for talk and their communication processes.

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