

The Political and Civic Potential of Popular Women’s Magazines: The Israeli Case

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In light of growing interest in the role of market-oriented journalism to enable political and civic discourse, this study examines Israeli popular women’s magazines, in which consumerism is key, asking whether this genre also has the potential to further such discourse. The study examines the relationship between women’s magazines and the public sphere in Israel by means of microlevel analysis of examples of the encounter between the two domains. The corpus was derived from two periods of social protest, the early 1970s and the summer of 2011, and includes items from the two largest-circulation magazines. The analysis reveals a dynamic process of ideological struggle demonstrating oppositional power and a transformative role, as well as two coverage practices that enabled the conflicting ideological discourse: use of the personal story to paint the bigger picture and a blend of coverage conventions identified with “popular journalism” with conventions identified with “quality journalism.”

Keywords: mediated public sphere, popular women’s magazines, social protest

Women’s magazines are a remarkably resilient media form (Duffy, 2013). They have maintained high levels of popularity across time and space, despite significant economic and industry challenges, particularly the “digital revolution” (Favaro & Gil, 2018). They therefore offer an excellent opportunity for diachronic study.

Over the years, the dominant research perspective on popular women’s magazines has been cultural, framing them as a site for ideological discourse (e.g., Forster, 2015; Ritchie, Hawkins, Phillip, & Kleinberg, 2016; Winship, 1987). But the study of this genre of popular journalism cannot focus on content alone. The magazines are powerful commercial organizations, and as such their economic-political production should not be ignored. However, as their content is dominated by advertising (Gill, 2007; Gough-Yates, 2003), and there is typically a link between the editorial and commercial content (Duffy, 2013; Earnshaw, 1984), they are not generally considered a form of journalism that presents its readers with meaningful information that makes a democratic contribution (Ytre-Arne, 2011).

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Recently, journalism scholars have been dealing with the growing and diverse genera of market-oriented journalism, such as consumer and lifestyle journalism, in an effort to understand how this phenomenon may be reformulating central tenets of journalism itself, as well as the effect this may have on audiences (Hanusch, 2012a). Yet, although popular women's magazines are also market-oriented, they have received little attention in this context. Nonetheless, it has been argued that this seemingly trivial form of journalism can be viewed as part of the mediated public sphere; consequently, its political and civic potential can be evaluated (Fursich, 2012; Hanusch, 2012b; Hartely, 2000).

This article attempts to combine both the cultural and the political perspectives, examining the relationship between popular women's magazines and the public sphere in Israel by means of microlevel empirical analysis of examples of the encounter between the two domains. It focuses on a specific political context: social protest. On the surface, this sort of content, which promotes values of equality and social justice, should be especially challenging for popular women's magazines as an ultracapitalist product; therefore, its reflection in these magazines is a particularly intriguing subject of study.

The corpus for the current study was derived from two periods of social protest in Israel. The first was in the early 1970s and the second in the summer of 2011. Both protests, which to a certain extent echoed global movements, are often discussed together and have attracted a great deal of academic attention.

The analysis relates to two distinct aspects. The first is the ideological perspective. It asks two questions: What themes were covered by the women's magazines around political-social events? And what social actors were given voice in the coverage: What are their gender, class, ethnicity, social status, and so on? The second aspect is the characteristics of the coverage: What tools did the magazines use to negotiate the political-social content? In addition, the study considered differences in the coverage of the two protests.

The following theoretical section provides a more detailed picture of the research approaches adopted for the study of popular women's magazines in general and Israeli women's magazines in particular. This is followed by the analysis of texts published during the protests in *La'isha (For the Woman)* and *At (you in the feminine form in Hebrew)*, the two oldest and largest-circulation women's magazines in Israel. Examination of these texts is based on critical discourse analysis and identification of characteristics of the coverage formats employed.

Polysemic Ideological Discourse of Popular Women's Magazines

In general, the trajectory of research on popular Western women's magazines coincides with shifts in the academic literature and feminist political projects (Duffy, 2013). The dominant perspective relates to the ideological constructions of women that potentially impose or, at best, reflect patriarchal restrictions on women's lives (Forster, 2015). Second-wave feminist writers claim that women's magazines serve as an ideological mechanism for restricting women to the domestic world as part of the system of patriarchal repression (Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, & Hebron, 1991; Ritchie et al., 2016). Writers such as Friedan (1963) and Ferguson (1983) criticize the ideological power of "the cult of femininity" in these magazines and call for a more realistic representation in line with the ideology of the feminist movement (Gough-Yates, 2003).

The adoption of Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony and the advent of cultural studies as a legitimate field of research led to a deeper examination of aspects of women's lives, increasing and diversifying the approaches taken and the theories applied to women's magazines (Ritchie et al., 2016). In an analysis of British magazines, Janice Winship (1987) describes how they exhibit survival skills in coping with the feminine dilemmas relevant to each period, a strategy she terms an "ideological juggling act" (Forster, 2015). Winship's study marks an important change in the approach to women's magazines by identifying them as ambivalent and contradicted texts and therefore potentially subversive, as well as repressive (Forster, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2016).

Nowadays, this ambivalence stands out in the context of recent widespread interest in feminism in Anglo-American popular culture (Banet-Weiser, 2018), as notably promoted by women's magazines (Favaro & Gil, 2018). The interest in "emergent feminisms" is accompanied by a lively debate on their ideological authenticity, raising the question of the radical social transformative potential of popular spheres, such as commercial women's magazines. The global feminist trend has yet to be studied in the Israeli context, but there are signs that it is penetrating the local popular media in general and women's magazines in particular.²

The current study also draws on Gramsci's notion of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). In this spirit, it not only relates to popular women's magazines as purveyors of ideology, but also recognizes their highly diverse and flexible form, as well as their contradictory nature. Moreover, it draws on the claim that women's magazines constitute a venue for political negotiations in civil society between the interests of domination and submission (Gough-Yates, 2003). It should be noted that the term *politics* is used here in its common meaning,³ and specifically in the context of social protest.

Women's Magazines as a Mediated Public Sphere

Cultural studies have broadened the study of journalism to include practices on the margins (Hanusch, 2012a), such as women's magazines, and journalism studies discuss the public relevance and democratic impact of market-oriented journalism from a public sphere perspective, arguing that it can be evaluated for its political and civic potential (Fursich, 2012; Hanusch, 2012a; Hartely, 2000). Public sphere theory, however, has rarely been applied to the analysis of women's magazines (Ytre-Arne, 2011).

The current article adopts a broader understanding, or redefinition, of Habermas's (1962/1989) public sphere theory, which conceives of a literary public sphere that includes popular culture (McGuigan, 2005), and refers to the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective modes of communication. Furthermore, it advocates an attitude of critical intervention, which combines the best of populism with the best of radical subversion, producing a genuinely critical and potentially popular stance (Herkman, 2010; McGuigan, 2005).

² For example, after a long period of near silence in Israeli women's magazines about violence against women, in recent years *La'isha* has published three special issues dedicated to the subject.

³ Not in the sense employed in the feminist postmodern cultural critique of Nancy Fraser (2009) and others.

Recent studies of Nordic women's magazines specifically draw on public sphere theory because of the publications' historical role in negotiating Nordic welfare state standards. It is argued that Finnish women's magazines function as part of the political public sphere by commenting on ongoing debates, offering a public forum for citizens, and giving visibility to political personalities (Saarenmaa & Ruoho, 2014). In the Norwegian context, it was found that women's magazines display a decline in explicitly political journalism alongside an increase in journalism with implicit political dimensions (Ytre-Arne, 2011, 2013).

Popular Women's Magazines in Israel

As popular women's magazines are regarded as a genre of little value in Israel (Herzog, 2000), study of them is still in its early stages. The distinction between the general press, mainly directed to men, and women's magazines characterized the Hebrew press as early as the prestate period as part of the cultural dichotomy differentiating between the public and the private spheres (Herzog, 2000). Moreover, ideological women's magazines associated with political parties preceded the commercial magazines that first appeared in the 1940s.

La'isha, the most popular and longest running privately owned commercial women's magazine in the country, came into being in 1947, shortly before the establishment of the State of Israel. Founded by the daily paper *Yedioth Aharonoth*, it immediately became very popular (Rubin, 1987). *At*, a close competitor, was launched in 1967 by the daily paper *Maariv*. Both magazines sought to resemble glossy Western women's magazines, and promoted bourgeois culture and modernization in the young Zionist-Socialist state, focusing on consumption and consumerism (Narunsky-Laden, 2007).

In the 1960s and '70s, *At* appealed to "the modern" Israeli woman who was purportedly educated, upper class, and "open minded," that is, a proponent of the feminist movement; and *La'isha* presented itself as more of a magazine "of the common people" (Rubin, 1987). Although no survey of the profile of the magazines' readers in the first part of the 21st century has been conducted, given the changes in society and in the magazines themselves, we can assume there are no meaningful differences in the characteristics of their audiences today.⁴

In view of the historical circumstances in which *La'isha* and *At* emerged, in contrast to the capitalist development behind the evolution of other magazines in the West, both Israeli publications set themselves a national goal: to construct the identity of the Israeli woman in a new and developing society (Herzog, 2000; Lachover, 2011; Leiden, 2000). For example, in its inaugural issue, *La'isha* promised its readers "to reflect the unique roles and problems of the woman in the Hebrew public in its homeland" (*La'isha*, 1, July 23, 1947, p. 1). *La'isha*'s self-perception as an institution for the national socialization of Israeli women is also reflected in its establishment of some of the prominent national women-oriented rituals, such as the national beauty contest (which still takes place today) and the national homemaker contest, and its role in introducing Mother's

⁴ Unfortunately, no academic or nonacademic data exist that might provide insight into the professional or marketing characteristics of the magazines, such as the nature of their readership or editorship practices. Similar to Western women's magazines, during the 1960s and '70s, the editors of both magazines were men, whereas even then most of the writers were women.

Day into the Israeli public sphere (Herzog, 2000). The self-declared national role of both magazines has been particularly prominent during war times. Similar to American women's magazines in both World Wars (Zuckerman, 1998), during the Six-Day War in 1967, *La'isha* and *At* supported the national aims and called on their readers to enroll in the war effort (Lachover, 2011). One example is the militarized assimilation (Robbins & Ben Eliezer, 2000) of the most traditional feminized ceremony, the annual beauty contest, which was held that year in Jerusalem and staged as a military victory party (Lachover, 2011).

Nevertheless, both magazines were, and still are, primarily economic projects designed to attract as broad a readership as possible and to focus on "feel-good" contextual content (Herzog, 2000). It is this tension between their historical-national mission and their capitalist interests that makes the study of their role as a public sphere in the context of social protest particularly interesting.

It should be noted that, like most Israeli print journalism, both magazines have seen a drop in readership as a result of the growing popularity of digital women's magazines (Katz, 2019), particularly in the last five years (S. Goldstein, personal communication, January 28, 2019).⁵ Still, *La'isha* and *At* remain the most popular print women's magazines in Israel, and *La'isha* is the most widely circulated magazine of any type in the country (Mann & Lev-On, 2017).

The Current Study

As noted, the corpus for this study was derived from two periods of social protest. The first was in the early 1970s, a stormy era in the young Israeli state that was marked by social activism, especially in the context of ethnicity and class, which echoed Western social movements (Zameret & Yablonka, 2008). The most prominent group at the time was the Black Panther Movement (BPM), Mizrahi (literally *Eastern*) Jews,⁶ who demonstrated against economic and ethnic discrimination and partially succeeded in changing the government's socioeconomic policy (Bernstein, 2008). Although BPM did not have any direct gendered context,⁷ this period also saw the emergence of the Israeli feminist movement inspired by the second wave of the women's movement in the West (Freedman, 2003) and influenced as well by the local culture and society (Safran, 2006).

The second instance was the protest for social justice in 2011, allied with social movements in different political contexts throughout the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas at the time (Monterescu & Shaindlinger, 2013), which received a great deal of media attention. The protest erupted in mid-July and lasted three months. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets calling for a redefinition of national priorities and protesting against the continuing rise in the cost of living and the deterioration in public services. The 2011 protest had a distinct gendered aspect. Not only did it bring the civil agenda and ideals, such as parenting issues, to the fore,

⁵ Sigal Goldstein is the founder and director of *Onlife*, the most popular digital women's magazine in Israel, founded in 2010 (<https://www.onlife.co.il/>).

⁶ The term refers to Jews who immigrated to Israel from Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa (see Shohat, 1999).

⁷ Although it has recently been discovered that women also took part in BPM, it was mainly a male movement struggling for class equality (Hazan, 2013; Lir, 2017).

but it was led mostly by young women (Herzog, 2013). It is therefore especially intriguing to examine the political-gendered role of women's magazines in this context.

The corpus for this study consisted of all items in the two popular Israeli women's magazines that focus on aspects of social protest in the two periods. Items were chosen based on explicit mention of the social protest in the headline or subhead. The first section of the corpus included 102 items drawn from the 288 issues of *La'isha* published between 1970 and 1975 (*At* did not cover this protest). The second section included 23 items from the August 2011 issues of *La'isha* and *At* (two and 21, respectively).⁸ In both periods, all items were written by staff writers at the magazines. The analysis relates to both verbal and visual aspects of the items in the corpus.

The study employed the well-established cultural-critical approach to journalism research that examines media content by means of critical discourse analysis, as developed by van Dijk (1988). Critical discourse analysis is especially common in the study of women's magazines (e.g., McRobbie, 2000; Winship, 1987), and is used to examine the structures and serial nature of the arguments and narratives, as well as the cultural meanings they reflect and imply (Gill, 2007). As this study relates to social protest texts, I looked for relevant themes along with ideological reference to gender, ethnicity, and class, focusing on general ideological frames rather than linguistic details (Fursich, 2009). I also sought to identify the different coverage formats employed, such as investigative reporting, and the types of narratives (e.g., personal or social).

The Ideological Discourse: From Recruitment to Exploitation of the Social Protest

The social protest in the 1970s was covered only by *La'isha*. At first glance, in this period, the publication appears to have been a typical popular women's magazine. Nonetheless, among items on Miss Israel or Hollywood stars and the next chapter in a serialized novel, the magazine regularly devoted articles to the increasing socioeconomic hardship in Israel and the protest it sparked (Chetrit, 2004).

Items on the protest appeared on the front pages of the magazine and were spread over several pages and accompanied by photos. They evidence two main themes: the distress and complaints of families coping with poverty, and discrimination against female factory workers and their struggle for equal rights. Although the large majority of the heroes of these items were of Mizrahi descent, *La'isha* totally ignored the ethnic context of the struggle (Chetrit, 2004). The texts expressed sympathy for those who were suffering and appreciation of their efforts to lead a respectable life despite their difficult circumstances.

One article about a family with 18 children, for example, describes the manner in which the children and home are cared for with so few resources: "In the Aseri family, clothes are passed down from one child to the next, mended, and altered. But each child's clothes are clean and tidy . . . and the meager house is sparkling clean" (*La'isha*, 1264, June 28, 1971, p. 22). The stories stress the high moral standards of the impoverished citizens and hard-working women. An article about the harsh economic conditions of families in the town of Yahud, for instance, states, "It appears that all its young people are in high school and not a

⁸In 2011, *La'isha* and *At* ran complementary digital platforms with limited activity. As they functioned mostly as a public relations tool, the study relates only to the print editions of the magazines.

single one isn't in school. Good for them! And there is almost no juvenile delinquency in Yahud" (*La'isha*, 1291, January 3, 1971, p. 8).

La'isha did not cover the demonstrations of the Black Panther Movement, which were typically violent. However, it did relate to other actions promoting the same agenda, such as demonstrations by young couples throughout the country protesting the lack of affordable housing (e.g., *La'isha*, 1264, June 28, 1971, pp. 9–10; *La'isha*, 1267, July 14, 1971, pp. 22–23).

Although coverage of socioeconomic hardship was not limited to women, with some of the items centering on men or families, the discrimination and protest of female factory workers were framed as gendered issues. The articles presented the women's harsh working conditions and their justified struggle for higher wages, opportunities for promotion, and license to join a union.

The magazine focused on the leaders of the protests, presenting them as strong, brave women who, despite their tough lives, had stepped up in an effort to better themselves. One article, for example, tells the stories of three outstanding individuals who challenged the status quo. One, Aviva Zino, a divorced mother, launched the battle to allow women in an electronics factory to be represented in the workers' union. She is described as

a simple production worker, who was put in charge of the factory's welfare services five months ago, although she never finished eighth grade. In the factory they call her a born leader because she has a rule: "First the worker—then my boss." (*La'isha*, 1495, November 14, 1975, p. 20)

The coverage in *La'isha* in this period included criticism of socioeconomic conditions in Israel as directly expressed by the heroes of the articles themselves. For instance, Shmuel Atias, who was unable to afford decent housing for his family, is quoted as saying,

On the one hand, throughout town and all over Israel there is a campaign to encourage large families, but on the other hand young people are prevented from taking the first step toward bringing children into the world: getting married. (*La'isha*, 1199, March 30, 1970, pp. 4–5)

However, social criticism, including allegations against state authorities, was also expressed by the magazine itself. In the following example, the reporter criticizes the pressure to increase the national birth rate in response to the "demographic race" between Jews and Arabs in the young State of Israel (Yuval-Davis, 1989), while the needs of large families are neglected:

The council to encourage large families, established with great fanfare by the Prime Minister's Office, has never taken an interest in the fate of a family with 18 children. Knesset member Zina Herman, who was elected largely thanks to her activity in women's organizations and her demand to raise the birth rate, has never visited the home of Shlomit Aseri. . . . All over the world, families with 18 children are considered national

heroes. They are applauded, exempt from taxes. . . . In Israel in 1971 . . . it's as if they're saying that having 18 kids is a sin. (*La'isha*, 1264, June 28, 1971, pp. 22–23)

Moreover, *La'isha's* criticism of socioeconomic conditions went so far as to include support for the BPM, as evidenced by this example:

"They're not nice people," ruled the prime minister after a meeting with the Black Panthers. But the Panthers do not try to be nice. They are tired of being good kids who bow their heads and swallow their bile. They want to break out of their meager homes opposite the new apartment buildings. They are tired of knowing they will have to keep dragging their poverty with them, that there is no way to escape it, no hope. . . . We live in a country that loudly campaigns for a higher birth rate, but turns its back the minute it has to support the families. (*La'isha*, 1261, June 7, 1971, p. 22)

Coverage of the social protest in *La'isha* in the early 1970s therefore challenged the hegemonic social perceptions that dominated public discourse at the time, maintaining, instead, that citizens in distress were victims of the social order (Chetrit, 2004). The magazine described how such people in general, and women in particular, were struggling, and at times succeeding, to create a decent life for themselves despite their limited resources. In contrast, although its rival, *At*, expressed deep awareness of global liberal feminist ideals, it totally ignored the hardship and social protest at home.

The protest in the 1970s was viewed as radical, ethnic, and class-oriented, and was identified with the lower class. Consequently, it did not gain the support of the mainstream Israeli public (Chetrit, 2004; Lev & Shenhav, 2010). On the other hand, the protest in the summer of 2011 was launched by the middle class, and its leaders made an effort to distance it from anything that could be considered political. As a result, this protest resonated with the heart of the Israeli consensus (Shenhav, 2013), garnering public and media support. The women's magazines joined in this trend.

Nevertheless, although the protest erupted in mid-July and lasted several months, its coverage was restricted to one August issue published by each of the two magazines. The lead on *La'isha's* cover referred to the delay in the magazine's response, reading, "They started the revolution without me (but now I'm really into it)" (*La'isha*, 3356, August 8, 2011, p. 1). Yet, despite the promising lead, the cover resembled that of a typical August issue, featuring a model "checking the limits of the bikini in a very wet fashion shoot," (*La'isha*, 3356, August 8, 2011, p. 1) precisely the sort of journalism that aroused the criticism of second-wave feminists (e.g., Friedan, 1963; Wolf, 1991). Inside were two items relating to the protest, both of which expressed the magazine's support, whether for political, philosophical, or emotional reasons.

Whereas *La'isha* referred to the 2011 protest in a traditional issue, *At*, in highly atypical fashion, published a special edition. Dedicated entirely to the social protest, it framed it as gendered by use of the title "Women and Revolutions" and the slogan "I and you will change the world," a quote from a popular Israeli song in which the masculine pronoun "you" was replaced by the feminine form. Rather than displaying a beautiful model or the latest fashionista or reality star on the cover, it featured Daphne Leef, the initiator and leader of the protest, whose simple and naive appearance was in stark contrast to that of the typical

cover girl. The issue related to international, local, historical, and current aspects of social protest, as well as different types of social oppression, such as gender, nationality, and class.

The special edition not only honored Leef as an “inspiring woman,” but also broadened the discourse to nonhegemonic voices, including, for example, a profile of Shira Ochayon, a radical Mizrahi feminist leader not represented in the mainstream protest. Moreover, it expressed feminist criticism of the protest’s conservative perception of motherhood that ignored nonhegemonic women, such as single mothers.

To conclude, although like other popular women’s magazines, *La’isha* mainly targeted bourgeois women (Forster, 2015), at the time of the protest in the 1970s, it offered valuable insight into the life of other sectors of the population, such as the poor and the working class. These people were not presented as the “other” (Clawson & Trice, 2000) or as some exotic group, and the magazine expressed support for their protest. I therefore contend that it problematized serious social political issues and functioned as a political public sphere for its readers in this period. Advocating the discussion of values such as equality and social justice, alongside traditional capitalist and commercial values, is a reflection of ideological diversity, demonstrating *La’isha*’s ability to adjust to a changing agenda and the needs of women at different times (Gill, 2007; Winship, 1987).

In addition, analysis of the coverage reveals differences between the two magazines, as well as shifts over time. In the 1970s, like other Western women’s magazines, *At* was preoccupied by the liberal feminist movement (Forster, 2015). *La’isha*, on the other hand, related to and supported the local protest of the lower class, and did so in a subversive manner. The radical message was “hidden” among the routine content, and the issues of economic distress, class, and gender were emphasized while the ethnic aspect of the protest was ignored. In contrast, in 2011, when the protest was trending among the middle-class target readers of the two magazines, both of them, and especially *At*, appear to have lent it their support primarily as a marketing strategy.

Characteristics of Coverage of the Protests

This section deals with two major characteristics identified in the coverage of social protest in the two Israeli magazines: the unique use of the personal story, and the blending of different conventions of journalistic coverage.

Use of the Personal Story to Paint the Bigger Picture

The personal stories typical of women’s magazines (Ballaster et al., 1991) also appeared in the context of social protest. This stands out particularly in *La’isha*’s coverage in the 1970s, which consisted primarily of lengthy narratives relating the stories of individuals and families in distress, who were quoted directly. The reflective perception of the magazine’s role in presenting these stories can be seen in an article on one such woman, which opens with the words: “Shoshana Rubin’s dreams are dead. She is left with only despair, silence, and pride. . . . She does want to tell her story: shamefully, stammering, in fragmented sentences, with a smile of acceptance” (*La’isha*, 1261, June 7, 1971, p. 22).

The personal stories painted a picture of the life of people in similar circumstances. Unlike routine news coverage of the poor (Iyengar, 1990), the personal stories in *La'isha* were connected to the broader context, often concluding with a general statement. Thus, the above item ends with the words: "Shoshana Rubin is only a symbol. In the narrow streets of the neighborhood you can find a similar story in every house" (*La'isha*, 1261, June 7, 1971, p. 22). Elsewhere, we are told that production worker Doli Akrish "is not unusual. There are thousands of workers like her doing the most menial jobs that pay the lowest wages" (*La'isha*, 1492, November 17, 1975, p. 21).

Over time, the consistent use of detailed personal stories accompanied by visual images created a rich mosaic of the complex social reality. Even the articles whose titles related to the broader context center around personal stories brought together to tell a bigger story. For example, "The Squatters" deals with the struggle for housing of a number of young couples in Ashdod (*La'isha*, 1264, June 18, 1971, pp. 9–10). In other cases, a series of articles shared a common theme, such as three items titled "The Israeli Female Worker: A Second-Class Worker," which focused on the conditions of women in factories and their fight to improve them. According to *La'isha*, the three pieces "cover the problem from all angles" (*La'isha*, 1491, November 10, 1975, p. 20), a goal achieved by combining the testimony of individual workers describing their own experience, with organizational data revealing the systematic discrimination of women in factories.

The genre of popular women's magazines is characterized by an intimate rhetoric constructed by a unique blend of tone, format, esthetic, and other features (Duffy, 2013). Illouz (2007) notes that women's magazines "avidly seized upon a language which could accommodate both theory and story, generality and particularity, non-judgmentality and normativity" (p. 10). By focusing on the personal story, *La'isha* managed to deal with a weighty political issue without forgoing the essential quality of intimacy.

In 2011, coverage of the protest in both magazines similarly centered around personal stories, but this time the general statement was lacking. Also in contrast to *La'isha's* coverage in the 1970s, the stories told were not those of the weaker sectors of the population, but rather of strong women. *La'isha* gave the stage to its own staff, with the main article on the subject consisting of six short columns by its female writers offering their personal response to the protest, with no reference to any broader context. *At* presented the stories of the female activists leading the protest, but chose not to include an editorial column that related to these women as a whole or made any political statement in the name of the magazine.

Blending Journalistic Conventions

The second prominent characteristic of the coverage of social protest is the blend of conventions identified with "quality journalism" together with conventions identified with "popular journalism." One outstanding example is *La'isha's* use in the 1970s of an undercover investigative reporter. For three days, a staff writer took on the identity of a production line worker in a food canning plant in order to depict life in the workplace. In the subsequent article, she describes the harsh physical, economic, and social conditions she encountered. However, the article is written in the form of a humorous account of a day in the life of a factory worker, including anecdotes about insects and amusing cynical descriptions of the lack of hygiene and disrespectful treatment by the managers. The spirit of the piece is clear from the very beginning:

After the first ten minutes, my back already hurt. . . . After another ten minutes, there were scratches on my arms, my legs ached, and my back was broken. We still had seven hours and 40 minutes to go. How would this eternity ever pass? (*La'isha*, 1218, August 10, 1970, p. 17)

The light tone of the item not only makes the subject more accessible to the reader, but also moderates the harshness of the social reality and inequality it exposes. Moreover, the cynicism cushions the article's radical feminist and Marxist criticism. For example, censure of the nationality-based inequality among the workers—the Palestinian women were ordered to clean the plant at the end of the workday, although they earned less than the Jewish women—concludes with a remark that tempers the criticism: "The workers [Arab women from the occupied territories] who were threatened by the department manager lowered their eyes and smiled to themselves" (*La'isha*, 1218, August 10, 1970, p. 19).

Another manner in which journalistic conventions were blended was by adapting the conventions of "popular journalism" to the serious content of social protest. In the 1960s and '70s, *La'isha* published an annual list of the 10 Women of the Year. This sort of quantification reflects a journalistic paradigm that uses numbers to represent power (Roeh & Feldman, 1984) and is typical of popular culture (Neiger, 2010). Whereas in other years, *La'isha* chose women who were successful in the political or artistic arena, in 1971, the Women of the Year project served to make a forthright social statement. The accompanying text related to the "poverty, ethnic discrimination, intolerable need, and bitterness that gave rise to the Panthers and reminded a satiated public that everything is not ideal in our country" (*La'isha*, 1275, September 13, 1971, p. 6). Heading the list was the Israeli woman struggling with economic hardship, and the magazine addressed her directly: "The real heroine of this year is you. An anonymous heroine, with no glory and no acts of heroism. A drab heroine" (p. 6). In second place were Shulamit Zabari, an activist in the Black Panther Movement, and Aliza Marziano, the mother of the movement's leader, Sa'adia Marziano. Thus, whereas the general press depicted the Panthers as a national threat (Chetrit, 2004) and shunned the women involved with the movement (Hazan, 2013), *La'isha* expressed support for the Panthers, who "succeeded in transforming inferiority, bitterness, vengefulness, and disadvantage into the symbol of a new class. It is no longer shameful to be poor. A panther is beautiful. It is strong. It fights" (*La'isha*, 1275, September 13, 1971, p. 6), and dubbed the female Panthers as heroines.

Blurring the lines between the traditional content of commercial women's magazines and critical political content thus also led to the blurring of the lines between coverage conventions and an intermingling of the two. Whereas *La'isha's* texts from the 1970s demonstrate how this intermingling promotes political discourse, coverage of the 2011 protest in *At* reflects the magazine's marketing aims. One prominent example is the dressing of a commercial fashion project, typical of women's magazines, in supposedly ideological garb. The fashion shots for the August 2011 issue were taken on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, the focal point of the main consensual arm of the protest, where a tent city had been set up by citizens demonstrating against the lack of affordable housing.

But although the models were shot in the middle of the encampment, they were clearly passive, alienated from the protest and the people around them. The text on one of their T-shirts read LOVE

SOMEONE, an expression of self-preoccupation. Hence, although the setting of the fashion shoot was the social protest, it did not reflect any social distress or grievances, but rather individualism and commercialism. The cover line referred to "cheerful days of protest," framing the encampment as a sort of Woodstock, a carefree social gathering and not a political demonstration. The fashion shoot, therefore, exploited an ideological event to further a commercial purpose.

Discussion and Conclusions

In light of the growing interest in the role of market-oriented journalism to enable political and civic discourse, the current study examined commercial women's magazines, in which marketing and consumerism are key, seeking to learn whether this genre of journalism also has the potential to further such discourse. Unlike most studies of women's magazines, which view them as a cultural arena for a fight between feminist and patriarchal ideologies, this study examined them as a potential civil society site for political debate, specifically in the context of social protest in Israel.

Like other Western women's magazines, *La'isha* was launched as an openly capitalist and consumerist space, as well as a pronational space (Herzog, 2000; Lachover, 2011). However, in the early 1970s, it presented its bourgeois readers with advocacy of the ideology of the social protest, at times even going so far as to explicitly publish support for the Black Panthers, along with antigovernment criticism. In contrast, the mainstream Israeli press at the time was hostile toward the movement, actually expressing moral panic (Lev & Shenhav, 2010). Depicting a reality of hardship and social protest is fundamentally opposed to the essence of a commercial magazine, which seeks to endow its readers with a pleasurable experience and foster a mentality of consumerism and the intention to buy the advertised products (Duffy, 2013; Steiner, 1995). Thus, *La'isha's* support for the protest in the 1970s, alongside the absence of coverage of the protest in the more elitist *At*, demonstrate that although women's magazines are perceived as a peripheral genre, they are capable of giving expression to ideologies that are not necessarily hegemonic (Lachover, 2011).

The research findings demonstrate that analyzing women's magazines must relate to their role in the cultural-social historical context. Hence, women's magazines produced in capitalist countries serve as consumerism vehicles directed to bourgeois middle-class women (Gough-Yates, 2003). In contrast, Soviet women's magazines played a role in the propaganda of the "new Soviet woman" from the 1920s to the end of the Stalin era. These magazines encouraged women to leave home, enter the public sphere, and become producers as well as consumers. They promoted an awkward blend of nonconservative and traditional understanding of gender. Women had to incorporate the skills that would enable them to work and to fight during war, but also to be romantic fashion models at home (Attwood, 1999).

Similarly, the coverage of the social protest in both Israeli women's magazines, and especially in *La'isha's* coverage of the 1970s protest, indicates their self-defined national role. This is particularly prominent in the dedication of *La'isha's* annual Women of the Year project in 1971 to the social protest movement. The traditional practice of crowning public figures who are symbols for all Israeli women reflects the magazines' self-perception of their national pedagogical role for women in Israel.

Israeli journalism research often discusses how, historically, the press is directly linked to modern nationalism and how journalists promote national narratives (e.g., Neiger & Zandberg, 2004; Soffer, 2015; Yadgar, 2004). The current study demonstrates the role of popular women's magazines in this respect, and reveals the way in which they expand the definition of national aims to nonhegemonic ideology in the context of social protest. This is not surprising given the gendered process of constructing the national identity of the Israeli woman through various social systems, such as the institution of motherhood (Berkovitch, 1997) and the army (Lomsky-Feder & Sasson-Levy, 2018).

The study therefore shows that this form of popular journalism has the potential for oppositional power and a transformative role. This conclusion is in line with theory challenging the ontological difference between popular culture and journalism in relation to its relevance to citizenship and democracy (e.g., Dahlgren, 1995; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). The current study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the public quality of popular journalism of a specific genre that has received little attention in this context: commercial women's magazines.

The results are also in line with the postmodern critique of feminist theoreticians who reject the notion of a priori boundaries between the private and public spheres, claiming that the boundaries are determined by a struggle for power that is not only structural, economic, political, and social, but also symbolic and cultural (Benhabib, 1992; Fraser, 1990). At the same time, however, the findings suggest that the oppositional power of commercial women's magazines is limited. As we have seen, *La'isha* restricted its coverage to the more consensual aspects of the protest, the distress of impoverished families and female factory workers, virtually ignoring the more radical aspects, such as the strong ethnic dimension and the militant demonstrations organized by the Black Panther Movement.

In addition, microanalysis of the texts reveals coverage practices that enabled conflicting discourse, that is, capitalistic, commercial, and consumerist discourse alongside a critical discourse of class and gender. Some of the methods employed are allied with the rhetorical measures of salience in news coverage, as proposed by agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Gilbert, 1986). Thus, for example, although articles on the protest were not relegated to the margins of the magazine, there was no mention of them on the cover, which serves to advertise it to potential readers (McLoughlin, 2000), where the usual capitalist messages were highlighted. Similarly, although the articles expressed explicit criticism of the government and its leaders, as well as direct support for the Black Panther Movement, this content was not alluded to in their headlines.

Other practices also enabled, and perhaps even derived from, the ideological contradiction. For instance, the protest in the 1970s was made accessible to the readers by means of a mosaic of personal stories into which a broader critical dimension was interwoven. In addition, it was presented through a blend of conventions considered typical of "popular journalism" and those considered typical of "quality journalism." These practices mitigated the polarizing and divisive elements, thereby limiting and moderating the criticism in a manner that reflects the tendency of women's magazines to walk a fine line between conservatism and progressivism.

From the chronological perspective, the study reveals a decline in the discussion of social protest in Israeli women's magazines from the 1970s to the second decade of the 21st century, reflecting a change in their civic-political role. Despite the limitations of a study that draws on only two examples, I would suggest that the decline is most likely associated with their self-perceived national role, particularly in the case of *La'isha* (Herzog, 2000; Lachover, 2011). In the early 1970s, *La'isha* was publicly condemned by the emerging Israeli liberal feminist movement for messages that, in its opinion, promoted the repression of women (Safran, 2006). As the current analysis shows, however, in this very period the magazine expressed support for a class-oriented social protest, and even afforded it a gendered context.

In contrast, in 2011, coverage of the consensual middle-class protest in both magazines was instrumental, aimed at serving marketing purposes. Embracing the social protest as a marketing strategy is similar to the routine embracing of feminist messages by contemporary women's magazines. Much like the cheerful, optimistic postfeminist discourse typical of commercial women's magazines today, in 2011, the Israeli magazines presented the social-political protest from an individualist vantage point, celebrating the success of specific women in a version of a can-do philosophy (Gill, 2007).

The results of this study suggest the need for further analysis of political and civic discourse in subgenres of market-oriented journalism, along with examination of the particular features of each genre and their changes over time. In addition, future studies of commercial women's magazines might focus on their coverage over the years of a range of other issues on the public agenda, such as welfare, education, taxation, legislation, the representation of female politicians, and so on. Following the entrance of women's magazines into an era of convergent media technologies, participatory culture, and new economic demands (Duffy, 2013), it would be especially interesting to examine whether these recent shifts have been accompanied by politicization or depoliticization of their content or a redefinition of the political.

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