Feeling at home in the occupied territories: Emotion work of the religious settler movement☆

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Religious settlers exhibit a strong desire to settle the entire Land of Israel despite resistance among the local Palestinian population and among opposition within Israel. The return to the Promised Land and the establishment of settlements elicit strong emotions that are connected to the socio-spatial identities of the settlers. Introducing the concept of emotion work the article focuses on the collective construction of emotions inside the movement and on active practices directed at the Israeli audience at large. Emotions are elicited and regulated in the political process in order to make and defend territorial claims. After discussing the concepts of emotional geographies, emotion regulation, and emotion work, the article analyzes the multi-layered passions of the settlers and strategies of creating an emotional attachment to the conquered territories in the Israeli public. Finally, the Second Intifada revealed tensions between the desire for the land and a contracting geography of fear. The article discusses how the settlers dealt with violence, threats, and experiences of conjoint emotions.

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1. Introduction

Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories remain an important obstacle to the realization of a two-state solution. The religious settlers are among the most arduous and devoted activists in defending and extending the settlement project. They adhere to the national-religious movement, which merged orthodox religion and modern political Zionism. The religious settler movement was influenced in particular by teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of the pre-1948 Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine. He considered the emergence of the Jewish State as the first step in the salvation process, which will culminate in the return of the entire People of Israel to all of the Land of Israel under full Jewish sovereignty. After the 1967 war, adherents of his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, transformed this belief system into concrete action and started settling in the newly conquered territories. Building settlements and homes has been a core activity ever since and is closely related to the collective and individual identity of religious settlers.

Despite the obvious success of the settler movement, their passion for the land and their political project were challenged in recent years by the contraction of territory during the Oslo peace process, experiences of terror and threat, the construction of the separation barrier, and the evacuation of settlements during the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005. These developments affected the settlers and the geography of settlements in different ways. On the one hand, acts of terror and threat against the settlers have altered the experiences and representations of space among settlers living in the occupied territory. After the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 tensions between the expansive desire for the land and a contracting geography of fear became apparent and revealed the complex and contradictory emotional construction of space. On the other hand, the geography of fear also had constraining spatial effects on the Israeli population in general. Settlements were increasingly perceived as dangerous spaces and travel became less of a routine. In order to not lose support, the settlers introduced different strategies of normalizing space, trying to influence the reading of settlements and the emotions they elicit among the Israeli population. This article contributes to a better understanding of the geography of settlements and the passion of Israeli settlers. By introducing the concept of emotion work, the article focuses on the collective construction of emotions inside the movement and on active practices directed at a broader audience.

2. Emotional geographies, emotion regulation and emotion work

Space and place are basic concepts within the study of geography. Tuan (2008: 136) has introduced a succinct definition that distinguishes between the two concepts. He argues that "space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning". Defining territory and giving meaning to it are considered to be constructive processes which turn abstract space into a meaningful place. Similarly, the concept of territoriality refers to the process of partitioning space into bounded areal units that are turned into a meaningful place. Schnell (2001: 222) argues that the construction of territoriality involves three distinct dimensions: Firstly, territoriality implies the physical presence of a group or population in a specific spatial unit. Secondly, control over the territory is exercised, and patterns of activity restructure the relations between the people and the environment. And thirdly, members of the community develop an identification with and belonging to the territory, thus reconstructing the socio-spatial identities in it.

2.1. Emotional geographies

The developing body of academic work in emotional geographies suggests that the process of turning space into place is closely intertwined with emotions. Studying the intersection between people, place, and emotion (Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Davidson et al., 2005), the field of emotional geographies draws attention to the shortcomings of using a "reductive" perspective which considers space to be "neutral, universal, apolitical, value and emotion free" (Smith et al., 2012: 2). Spaces are never void of emotions. Instead emotions alter the individual experience of space, and meaningful places have the power to elicit emotional experiences. Schnell (2001: 222) has therefore defined territoriality as a concept "that relates to the sense of attachment that human beings feel towards units of space as part of the arrangement of reciprocal relations between human and environment". In his discussion on territory and territoriality in nationalist thought, Penrose (2002) argues that space is the source of latent emotional power that can be released only when space is transformed into places and territories. He further distinguishes between two different sources of emotional power: First, direct and personal experiences of attachment to particular places have the power to evoke feelings of connection, pleasure and belonging. The concept of home as a 'sense of place' often designates such personal and intimate bonds that encompass feelings of being secure and at peace (cf. Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Fenster, 2004; Tuan, 2008). Since the sense of geographical attachment in nationalist thought is closely related to ambitions to possess it, experiences of being at home in a certain territory and the elicitation of feelings of belonging are important resources for territorial claims. Second, the connection to specific places can also be reinforced through history, memory, and myth. Narratives of the origin and past of communities and nations "occur in space and are usually associated with specific sites and/or landscapes" (Penrose, 2002: 282). These mythical landscapes reinforce the bond between people and specific territories and serve to legitimize territorial ambitions. Especially in conflict zones, the construction of places and territorialities is a highly contested process as it involves conflicting ambitions to possess the land. The construction of symbolic bonds is closely intertwined with strategies of physical occupation and social control. These contestations reveal the complexity of landscape, which, contrary to nationalist idealizations, is highly ambivalent, allowing for "belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear" (Blunt and Varley, 2004: 2). Consequently, space making is a highly political process.

Although the emotional power of territoriality has been increasingly recognized, the literature (especially in the case of the Zionist construction of territoriality) remains mainly confined to the materiality of landscape, such as in studies of settlements, monuments, checkpoints (cf. Kimmerling, 1983; Ophir et al., 2009; Parizot, 2009; Tzfadia and Yacobi, 2011), representations of space, such as in studies on knowledge of space, cartography, or toponymies (cf. Azaryahu and Golan, 2001; Azaryahu, 2003; Weizman, 2012), or spatial practices and lived experiences (cf. Fenster, 2004; Ochs, 2011), and insufficiently addresses the intersection of space, people and emotion. This may also be the consequence of methodological issues, as emotions do matter, but remain "paradoxically, both inordinately diffuse and all pervasive" (Smith et al., 2010: 3). In the following section, this article will develop the concept of emotion work, which helps to understand how discourses and practices move people to act and how feelings of attachment to specific territories shape identities and practices. This perspective specifically addresses the question of how collective emotions can be elicited and regulated in political processes.

2.2. Emotion regulation and emotion work of social movements

Arlie Hochschild demonstrated in the early 1980s that emotions and their display are subject to framing and feeling rules. People undertake deliberate attempts to feel as is considered to be "appropriate to the situation". Relationships, cultural norms, and social institutions therefore exert a major influence on when, why, and in which way emotions arise and are displayed (Hochschild, 1983). The argument of Hochschild extends not only to deliberate attempts to manage behavioural expressions (surface acting), but also to the evocation, shaping or suppression of emotions themselves (deep acting). This management of emotions can be achieved through cognitive and/or bodily and expressive means. Gross and Thompson (2007) have further elaborated on strategies to regulate emotions, emphasising cognitive strategies. While the suppression of emotions or the modulation of experiential, behavioural, and physiological responses "refer to things we do once an emotion is already underway", cognitive techniques set in before "emotion response tendencies have become fully activated" (Gross, 2002: 282). These antecedent-focused regulatory processes include the selection or modification of a situation, deployment of attention, and cognitive changes. The re-appraisal of a situation as part of the framing process therefore constitutes a fundamental strategy of regulating emotions. The same applies to emotions that are elicited by objects such as landscapes or settlements. It is not the place as such that has the power to evoke emotions but rather the appraisal of that place. These appraisals should not be individualized but understood as social processes of evaluation that incorporate social knowledge and patterns of interpretation that are provided by actors (see Manstead and Fischer, 2001).

These techniques of emotion work can be further differentiated: According to Gross (1999) and Hochschild (1979), distinctions have to be made, firstly, between the regulation of emotions and regulation by emotions. Not only do cognitive appraisals regulate the evocation and display of emotions, but emotions also influence an individual's cognition and behaviour. Emotions affect how people perceive new events or places and how they process and evaluate information. In his research, Joseph LeDoux (1996: 19) concludes that "emotions easily bump mundane facts out of awareness, but non-emotional events (like thoughts) do not so easily displace emotions from the mental spotlight". Moreover emotions influence how people define and prioritise their interests and preferences. Wendy Pearlman argues that emotions affect the ranking of desires at any juncture and thus tip the balance between conflicting desires, interests, and motivational structures (see Pearlman, 2013: