

Contested Discursive Framing of a Bank's Cooptative Joint CSR Model

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Abstract: There is a dearth of critical ethnographic research that focuses on the semiotic-discursive features of corporate social responsibility (CSR) framing in business and nonprofit (BUS-NPO) partnerships. This article contributes to CSR scholarship by combining ethnographic methods (participant observation, in-depth interviews, and textual materials) and semiotic analysis to demonstrate how a bank-NPO partnership is discursively framed in the context of agonistic interactions and its implications in terms of cooptation.

This article crystallizes two arguments. First, the bank's joint CSR initiatives represent a discursively framed and validated model of CSR as a commodity aiming at advancing bank interests at the cost of avoiding substantive and sustained social responsibility. Second, the joint CSR model, discursively framed as a cooptative partnership discourse, is effectively realized through the practices of the cooptative relationship between the bank and the NPOs.

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There is a dearth of ethnographic research that focuses on the semiotic-discursive features of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Using ethnographic methods (participant observation, in-depth interviews, and textual materials) and semiotic analysis of on-site negotiations between bank representatives and

nonprofit organizations (NPOs), this article critically examines the contested discursive framing of a bank's partnership model and the political implications of the contested dynamics, in which the joint CSR model is discursively framed in terms of cooptation.

During the last three decades, business-NPO (BUS-NPO) partnerships have become an essential element in CSR policy worldwide. The growth of BUS-NPO partnerships has been motivated by global economic-societal developments, including increasing public pressure on businesses to behave in responsible and accountable ways toward various stakeholders (e.g., customers, franchisees, suppliers, employees, NPOs, governmental authorities, and communities) and the proliferation of civil society organizations alongside governmental and private authorities. BUS-NPO partnerships also prospered in the context of the decline in government assistance, increased competition in private and non-private sectors, and heightened public demand for NPOs to act accountably (Bosscher 2009; Baur and Schmitz 2012; Laasonen, Fougère, and Kourula 2012; Herlin 2015; Cook and Burchell 2018).

The increase in BUS-NPO partnerships has also occurred alongside the spread of neoliberalism. Within such economic-political conditions, radical voices calling for social change, particularly in the context of anti-globalization movements, have been transformed into "a neoliberal reformist agenda emphasizing piecemeal change, framed within a capitalist framework" (Burchell and Cook 2013:745). Thus, within the framework of a CSR model underpinned by neoliberal reformist notions, relationships between business and civil society became consensual rather than conflictive (Burchell and Cook 2013).

Sociologists explain this change in light of dialectic movements in global capitalism (Shamir 2008), in which CSR represents the creative ability of firms to transform risks and public threats to corporate branding strategies into commercial opportunities (Shamir 2004).

One of the most prominent indications of the neoliberal reformist agenda in the CSR field is the business case approach (Saiia, Carroll, and Buchholtz 2003; Carroll and Shabana 2010). The underlying notion of the CSR business case is that firms can profit by doing good (Moratis 2014), whereas, in fact, firms that adopt the business case approach steer CSR through business growth rather than addressing substantive societal issues (Burchell and Cook 2013). Firms invest in CSR initiatives to reduce costs and risk, build competitive advantage, enhance brand reputation and legitimacy, and increase customer satisfaction and employee motivation (Kurucz, Colbert, and Wheeler 2008; Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010).

While the business case underpins most of today's management literature on the social responsibilities of corporations (Moratis 2014), it has recently come under increasing criticism. The leading concern is that, under the cover of business case ideas, CSR has evolved into a "marketable asset" (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010:618). With an instrumental and utilitarian focus, CSR has become a legitimate and unquestioned strategy for firms to maximize profits while ignoring societal and ecological issues (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010; Barnett 2019).

In their incisive criticism, Nijhof and Jeurissen (2010) argue that CSR has become detached from its ethical base. Firms not only engage in CSR opportunistically but also justify CSR using instrumen-

tal arguments (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010). Following Nijhof and Jeurissen (2010), Moratis (2014:661) stresses that the CSR business case is increasingly “ethically defective” as firms have commodified societal issues for profit-making (Burchell and Cook 2013; Moratis 2014).

Concurrently, evolutionary CSR models based on consensus have emerged in management literature to assist firms in breaking through “a glass ceiling” (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010:623) by incorporating “shared value” (Porter and Kramer 2006:82) into their CSR strategies, which interweaves economic considerations with ethical-societal values. The most inspiring BUS-NPO partnership model, “Collaborative Value Creation,” aims to reach the highest, transformative, “win-win” stage of collaborations for both firms and NPOs (Austin 2000; Austin and Seitanidi 2012a; 2012b).

The Collaborative Value Creation and other normative frameworks conceived by ethicists and management scholars (Porter and Kramer 2006; 2011; Kurucz et al. 2008; Moratis 2014) are analytic tools that conceptualize an ideal of CSR rather than showing “what it actually looks like in practice” (Brand, Blok, and Verweij 2020:4). Since an ideal “is always counterfactual” (Brand et al. 2020:11), a more “realistic” perspective is needed to explain how CSR is shaped in the context of asymmetrical BUS-NPO power relations.

Recent CSR studies based on a conflict view have suggested agonistic regulative frameworks designed to mitigate the impact of power asymmetries on BUS-NPO relationships, leading to the potential for NPO cooptation (e.g., two of them are referred to in the literature as “an agonistic pluralism” [Dawkins 2015:8] and “agonistic deliberation” [Brand et

al. 2020:4]). These agonistic regulative frameworks are based on the underlying premise that conflict dynamics play a constructive role in arbitrating between adversarial stakeholders (Dawkins 2015; Brand et al. 2020). Put shortly, conflict-based studies designed to normalize conflictual relationships by agonistic means paradoxically legitimate the established hegemonic power relation.

In addition to these normative studies assuming conflictual relationships as a problem to be solved (Dawkins 2015; Brand et al. 2020), few conflict-based CSR studies address the political implications of market-centered CSR in terms of cooptative relationships (Burchell and Cook 2013). Cooptation occurs when firms exercise hegemonic control over powerless stakeholders “at the cost of preventing more far-reaching, structural changes” (Hamann and Acutt 2003:262). Powerless NPOs succumb to the pressure of firms to depoliticize the CSR agenda, aligning it with neoliberal notions of corporate self-regulation (Shamir 2010). Thus, cooptation ensures the perpetuation of the status quo, suppressing NPO interests and discourses (Baur and Schmitz 2012; Laasonen et al. 2012; Herlin 2015).

Within this narrow field of critical research, there are only a few ethnographic studies that critically illustrate how CSR is constructed as a commodity in the context of agonistic social dynamics (Shamir 2005; Barkay 2011). Moreover, thus far, no ethnographic research has utilized semiotic analysis to critically examine how CSR is discursively framed in BUS-NPO partnerships, nor to investigate the political consequences of this framing.

The concept of discursive framing refers to contested negotiated meanings of words, phrases, metaphors, symbolic gestures, and other discursive

signifiers of a contextual discourse (Steinberg 1999; Cornelissen and Werner 2014). Inspired by the insights of the discursive framing literature (Steinberg 1999; see also Alvesson and Kärreman 2000; Keller 2012), this study analyzes the contested discursive framing of a joint CSR model during negotiations between bank representatives and NPOs.

This study focuses on two aspects of semiotic analysis: content and formal. (1) The content-related aspect addresses such questions as; What meanings of discursive signifiers are negotiated during the discursive framing of a bank's joint CSR model? What practices do actors engage in during negotiated interactions? I address these questions by analyzing the discursive practices of talk and rhetoric (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000) used by challengers and powerholders to subvert or maintain hegemony over key discursive signifiers (Steinberg 1999; Keller 2012). (2) The formal aspect of analysis addresses such issues as how, when, and by whom things are said, in what tone, and in what order participants speak during a conversation.

Based on the formal and content-based semiotic analysis, this study identifies the term "adoption" as a key discursive signifier that underlies the bank's CSR framework. By "adoption," bank management means that it assists disadvantaged groups through joint social-outreach programs staffed by employee volunteers and with financial sponsorship. However, the multivocality of "adoption" aligns with the different discursive strategies exerted by the bank representatives and the NPOs to frame "adoption" with their interpretations and intentions. Given the significance of the term "adoption" in the bank's CSR discourse, semiotic analysis of the term could contribute to a deep understanding of how the BUS-NPO partnership

model is discursively framed and what its implications are.

Accordingly, this article advances using a twofold argument. First, backed by the CSR business case, a bank joint CSR model, discursively framed as a socially responsible investment, is designed to increase brand loyalty, corporate reputation, and employee motivation rather than achieve public good. Second, embedded in agonistic social relations, the bank-NPO partnerships are not merely commodified but are also discursively framed as cooptative. That is, through the joint projects, the cooptative CSR framework has become a diluted type of BUS-NPO partnership.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. First, in the following three sections of the literature review, I will briefly review the literature to establish my argument. In the first section, I will review critical CSR literature on the effect of the business case approach on CSR commodification. I will also discuss how management literature on CSR theoretically deals with the problem of a lack of "shared value" in CSR practice. In the second section, I will review the conflict-based literature to understand the implications of market-centered CSR for the formation of cooptative relationships between firms and NPOs. Finally, to establish the semiotic analysis of this article, I will discuss the literature on contested discursive framing. Second, in the findings section, after a brief account of the research methods, I will demonstrate the contested discursive framing of the bank's joint CSR model through semiotic analysis of negotiations between the bank's and NPOs' representatives. Finally, in the discussion section, I will discuss the contribution to the literature, followed by a conclusion section that will discuss the political implications of these contested dynamics while suggesting a direction for future research.

Literature Review

The Reduction of CSR to the Business Case

The CSR business case, the ideological assumptions that underpin most of today's management literature on the social responsibilities of corporations, is rooted in and justified by the ideal of enlightened self-interest (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010). Corporate advocates of the CSR business case contend that corporate injustices are remedied by acting according to free-market dictates and logic and that corporate self-regulation is a key means for CSR implementation (Dawkins 2015).

Drawing from the classical economics notion of corporate self-interest, the CSR business case conflates two orientations: financial performance with corporate social performance for the common good (Moratis 2014). According to the business case, the CSR agenda integrates values of social responsibility, citizenship, and ethics with profitability (Burchell and Cook 2013). In this approach, firms focus on bottom-line profitability while pursuing societal and ecological goals. Profits and social responsibility are not considered mutually exclusive but rather evolve together, promising a win-win for businesses and civil society (Moratis 2014). The win-win business view has evolved into the more recent interconnected concept of "shared value" (Porter and Kramer 2006:82), "which involves creating economic value in a way that also creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges" (Porter and Kramer 2011:65).

Cook and Burchell (2018:166) have recently challenged this idea, arguing "that the notional 'win-win,'" which underlies the CSR business case, "is not inevitable and that too often the 'win' for the third sector is simply presumed rather than ana-

lyzed." In this vein, multiple CSR studies that examine the correlation between corporate financial and social performances have produced decidedly equivocal results (Kurucz et al. 2008).

As the leading approach in the management literature on CSR, the business case is increasingly criticized. Nijhof and Jeurissen (2010:618) argue that under cover of the business case, CSR has evolved into a "marketable asset." The commodification of CSR yields two profound, interconnected consequences. First, by "cherry-picking the social issues agenda" (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010:623), profit-oriented managers and entrepreneurs choose the most profitable CSR initiatives rather than addressing the most pressing societal-ecological issues that interest their diverse stakeholders (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010). From the perspective of the CSR business case, "Stakeholder demands are viewed less as constraints on the organization, and more as opportunities to be leveraged for the benefit of the firm" (Kurucz et al. 2008:5). Second, the CSR business case approach encourages firms to prioritize the challenges of their most powerful, influential stakeholders (Barnett 2019). This strategy leads to a narrow interpretation of CSR backed by superficial and ad hoc partnerships, especially with weaker NPOs (Barnett 2019). In the same vein, it results in neglect of cross-global issues (e.g., animal welfare, global warming, and rainforest destruction) that demand sustained responsibility (Barnett 2019).

In the meanwhile, transformative CSR models based on the consensus view have begun to emerge, reflecting scholars' attempts to instill the "shared value" principle in CSR (Kurucz et al. 2008; Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010; Moratis 2014). These models function as practical tools for managers and entrepreneurs to assess corporate maturity vis-à-vis a CSR develop-

ment scale that measures the degree of evolution of CSR (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010) and to guide businesses toward a greater balance between ethical performance and financial gain. These alternative models suggest the dissatisfaction of CSR scholars with the conceptual limitation of the business case and a desire to build "a more robust business case for CSR" (Kurucz et al. 2008:14).

The most influential type of transformative CSR model in the realm of BUS-NPO partnerships is based on Austin and Seitanidi's Collaborative Value Creation (Kourula and Halme 2008; Seitanidi and Crane 2009; Seitanidi, Koufopoulos, and Palmer 2011; Skouloudis, Evangelinos, and Malesios 2015), which depicts partnerships as a deterministic evolution from the lowest stage of philanthropy (employee volunteering and sponsorships) to the highest win-win stage for both firms and NPOs (Austin 2000; Austin and Seitanidi 2012a; 2012b).

According to the Collaborative Value Creation framework, a firm that reaches the model's highest stage undergoes transformation by instilling a "synergistic value" (Kurucz et al. 2008:2) principle into its CSR agenda. Through their cooperation with NPOs (Kourula and Halme 2008; Seitanidi et al. 2011), businesses address the needs and challenges of multiple stakeholders while also considering self-interest values (Kurucz et al. 2008; Moratis 2014). The more CSR initiatives incorporate principles of sustained effort and self-sacrifice, the more firms tighten their relations with key stakeholders. By transformative BUS-NPO partnerships, firms have access to key resources that facilitate achieving both their financial and social performance goals (Barnett 2019).

Knowledge sharing and mutual transfer of specialized capabilities are other means for reaching

transformative BUS-NPO partnerships. Through substantive cooperation with firms, NPOs acquire businesslike capabilities, enhance innovation, and improve performance and sustainability (AL-Tabbaa, Leach, and March 2014; Sanzo et al. 2015). Bosscher (2009) warns, however, that the commercialization of NPOs increasingly blurs the line between societal and private domains (Bosscher 2009).

Cooptative BUS-NPO Partnership Model

Critical CSR scholars caution that market-centered CSR poses risks to civil society (Hamann and Acutt 2003). A premise of critical CSR research is that BUS-NPO partnerships occur in the context of inevitable agonistic interests, power asymmetries (Hamann and Acutt 2003; Dawkins 2015), and potential cooptation (Bosscher 2009; Baur and Schmitz 2012; Laasonen et al. 2012; Herlin 2015). Baur and Schmitz (2012) contend that cooptation, commonly generated by philanthropic corporate sponsoring, leads to resource dependency of NPOs, comprising material and discursive dependency as two interrelated aspects of cooptation. In the context of asymmetrical power relationships, discursive dependency refers to the discourse of the subjected and powerless NPOs that are appropriated by corporate discourse.

Some conflict-based studies on CSR view the agonistic dynamics in which cooptative relationships between firms and NPOs are formed "as resistance" (Burchell and Cook 2013:751). According to Burchell and Cook (2013), adversaries strive to define CSR according to their interests to position their discourse hegemonically within the CSR partnership discourse. Thus, the meaning of CSR is not imposed absolutely by powerful firms but rather is challenged by voices that reject the corporate CSR interpretation.

Conflict-based studies usually consider NPOs “as agents of change” (Burchell and Cook 2013:752) and emphasize that they “need to maintain their critical vigilance of industry” (Hamann and Acutt 2003:267). That is, to have greater credibility and optimize their benefits, NPOs should be more proactive in their relations with companies, recognize the threat of cooptation, and protect themselves through diverse strategies (Burchell and Cook 2013) based on their interests to increase their bargaining power and rights (Hamann and Acutt 2003).

Still, by power resources, firms and their shareholders have a privileged power position relative to NPOs and, thus, a substantive role in defining CSR (Dawkins 2015). Firms appropriate the interests of NPOs in ways that align with the instrumental CSR agenda (Brand et al. 2020), which “emphasizes responsibility, but not at the expense of profitability” (Burchell and Cook 2013:746). Consequently, joint CSR initiatives increasingly turn out to be opportunistic and superficial, articulating firms’ efforts to gain profits while avoiding substantive socially responsible behavior toward NPOs (Hamann and Acutt 2003; Dawkins 2015).

CSR is framed as “a depoliticized framework of market-embedded discourse” (Shamir 2010:544) that paves the way to cooptative relationships depending on the benevolence and kindness of businesses. In the context of what appears to be a market triumph, the challenging voices and needs of NPOs have been “co-opted and appropriated into a discourse in which companies are seen as providing the solutions” (Burchell and Cook 2013:746). Voluntary compliance with CSR is consistent with the neoliberal idea of corporate self-regulation (Shamir 2005).

However, only a few critical studies use ethnographic methods to examine the symbolic construc-

tion of CSR in the context of “the power structure of society” (Bass and Milosevic 2018:195). For example, Shamir’s (2005) symbolic interactionist study shows how CSR, through an analysis of on-site CSR ceremonial events promoted by a corporate-friendly organization, is transformed into a risk management tool to increase employee loyalty and strengthen brand loyalty. Shamir shows how CSR is framed as a symbolic and practical commodity that firms invest in to yield managerial and marketing benefits. Another notable critical ethnographic study by Barkay (2011), who explored the CSR agenda of Coca-Cola Israel, showed that firm CSR initiatives were constructed as business-like tools while negating the particular needs of local community associations and disadvantaged groups.

Within the undertheorized body of critical CSR ethnographies (Demuijnck 2009; Moriceau and Guerillot 2012; Costas and Kärreman 2013), there is a dearth of research on the semiotic discursive features of CSR framing.

Discursive Framing of BUS-NPO Partnerships: Initial Framework

This section provides a brief conceptual review of the symbolic interactionist and constructivist sociological research traditions on contested discursive framing. Discursive framing is a meaning negotiation process of discursive symbols that usually occurs “in the form of competing politics of knowledge” (Keller 2012:59). Competing discursive framing is embedded in recursive power-based symbolic interactions between powerholders and challengers (Steinberg 1999; Kaplan 2008). While powerholders strive to create true claims, challengers seek to question the meaning of hegemonic discursive utterances, terms, and words (Steinberg 1999; Keller 2012).

Discursive framing is not natural but represents ideology because it serves as a conduit for hegemony (Steinberg 1999). By their social position, powerholders strive to inject a discourse with their preferred meaning and to enforce this meaning among the less powerful (Kaplan 2008). Through intensive and recursive attempts, powerholders seek to objectify and neutralize the meaning as if it were beneficial for all sides (Steinberg 1999; Keller 2012). In other words, powerholders “attempt to create in a ‘one-sided’ exchange, more of a monologue than a dialogue” (Steinberg 1999:746). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the effect of hegemonic discourse on the constitution of social reality and subjectivity may be uncertain, weak, or temporal (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000).

As “language in social use” (Steinberg 1999:743), discourse consists of fragmentations, contradictions, and gaps, making it multi-vocal and controversial. Words, phrases, utterances, and other signifiers have multiple meanings that are conveyed and interpreted in myriad and contested ways based on actors’ knowledge, intentions, and social-political standing. The controversial characteristic of discourse exposes and makes vulnerable the hegemony of discursive signifiers to subversive actions by the less powerful. Challengers consciously subvert powerholders’ discursive hegemony by injecting alternative meanings. As a result, meaning undergoes a transformation in the process of counter-hegemony (Steinberg 1999).

Power standing in the production of meaning can be accessible to various actors (Kaplan 2008). Powerholders and challengers use discursive practices of talk, rhetoric, writing, and argumentation (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000) to create “a more or less explicitly known, often incorporated recipe, or knowledge script about the ‘proper’ way of acting”

(Keller 2012:63). For example, an actor as a “politically conscious language user” (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000:1132), can intentionally disseminate ambiguous and ambivalent statements to mobilize others to act in their favor, which, in turn, enhances their power standing (Steinberg 1999).

However, the subversive attempts of less powerful groups can be weak and provisional “since challengers do not have the institutional bases or social standing to legitimize their oppositional meanings” (Steinberg 1999:751). Additionally, while challengers try to subvert hegemonic discourse, they are also influenced by it (Steinberg 1999), which attenuates their subversive attempts.

Methodology and Design

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the contested dynamics of the discursive framing of a joint CSR model by one of the largest banks in Israel cooperating with NPOs. Using ethnographic methods combined with semiotic analysis, the article addresses two research questions: (1) How is a bank-NPO partnership discursively framed during negotiations between the bank and NPO representatives? and (2) What type of CSR partnership model is discursively framed, and what are its implications for emergent joint CSR initiatives?

This study adopts an ethnographic method; underused in CSR studies, ethnographic research is necessary to explain the culture, practices, and interactions that underpin CSR (Bass and Milosevic 2018). The study gleaned qualitative data from various sources: participant observations, in-depth interviews, and textual organizational materials, including reports, emails, press releases, printed correspondence, and the bank’s webpage.

Key bank and NPO actors participated in 35 interviews averaging 75 minutes each. Representing the bank were: the chief executive officer, community relations manager, vice presidents, other executives of the Marketing and Publicity, Public Relations, and Human Resources Divisions, branch managers, and various employee volunteers. A series of interviews were also held with the bank’s community relations coordinator (CRC). Representing the NPOs were coordinators who had already taken part in the bank’s joint CSR initiatives. The interview questions focused on conceptual and practical topics regarding the bank-NPO collaboration. All the interviewees were Jewish, except two Muslim employee volunteers.

Table 1. In-depth interviews

Interviewee	Location	Times
Chief executive officer	Headquarters	1
Marketing and publicity division vice president	Headquarters	1
Marketing and publicity division executives	Bank offices	2
Community relations manager	Headquarters	2
CRC	Bank branches Bank offices	3 2
Former community relations manager	Bank offices	1
Human resources division vice president	Headquarters	1
Human resources division executives	Headquarters	3
Public relations division vice president	Headquarters	1
Bank bulletin editor (Human resources division senior employee)	Headquarters	2
Branch managers	Branches	5
Employee volunteers	Bank and branches	7
NPO coordinators	NPO offices Bank branches	2 2

Source: *Self-elaboration.*

Twelve additional on-site participant observations occurred in the same region at bank branches, at the NPO’s site, and at holiday CSR events near the bank branches. The participant observations included three negotiation meetings between the bank’s CRC and NPO representatives. This region was selected for fieldwork because its bank branches served as sites for the pilot CSR initiatives before implementation in branches in other regions. At the time of data collection, all 24 branches in this region had already taken part in CSR initiatives, except for the three examined in the study. The bank’s goal in the observed meetings was to recruit branch employees to participate in the CSR initiatives.

Typically, the bank’s CRC, an NPO representative, a branch manager, and a bank employee chosen to organize the CSR project participated in the negotiation meetings. Two meetings dealt with disadvantaged children and youth at risk, and one involved a school principal for Christian and Muslim pupils who were deaf, hard of hearing, or blind in an Arab city in northern Israel. The school principal was Muslim, and all other participants at the meetings were Jewish.

Table 2. Participant observations

Data source	Type of situation	Times
Negotiation meetings	Branches School (where a joint CSR initiative was deployed)	2 1
Managerial meetings	Branch management meetings Branch employee meetings	3 2
CSR Festive Events (bank-organized): Regional event honoring employee volunteers	Events hall	1
Bank event honoring employee volunteers	Lawns of exclusive events garden	1
Holiday events (NPO-organized): Hanukkah celebration	Events hall	1
Fundraising event	Concert hall	1

Source: *Self-elaboration.*

Table 3. Negotiation meetings

	First negotiation meeting	Second negotiation meeting	Third negotiation meeting
NPO characteristics (beneficiaries and activity)	A national NPO that dealt with youth at risk who had dropped out of normative educational and familial frameworks. The NPO supplied disadvantaged youth with food, temporary shelters, immediate medical support, and counseling targeted at reintegration into society.	A local NPO that dealt with disadvantaged children. The NPO usually cooperated with the municipality of a peripheral city in Israel. The city's population consisted mostly of immigrants from different historical waves of Jewish immigration to Israel (from Muslim countries immediately after Israel's foundation through more recent immigration from Ethiopia and Russia).	A school for deaf, hard of hearing, and blind pupils (Christians and Muslims) in a city with a bank branch. The employees of the bank branch and the city's residents were Christians and Muslims (except for the bank manager, who was Jewish).
Hours of fieldwork	2,5	2	3
Location	Bank branch	Bank branch	School
Source of contributions and financing	Governmental, corporate, and private Employee volunteering	Governmental, municipal, and private Employee volunteering	Governmental finance, religious philanthropic funds Volunteering of monks and the school staff

Source: Self-elaboration.

In an epistemological sense, the data analysis stems from a semiotic perspective (Steinberg 1999). The discursive framing of the bank's CSR model entails examining the content and formal aspects of semiotic analysis. (1) The content-related aspect addresses questions such as what the key discursive signifiers are that comprise the bank's CSR language, what their different and controversial meanings are to opposing actors, and what discursive practices actors exert during negotiations to subvert or perpetuate hegemony over key discursive signifiers. (2) The formal aspect addresses such questions as how, when, and by whom things were said, in what tone, and in what participant order during conversations. That is, who usually opens and who usually ends the conversation? Who usually poses issues or questions? What are the responses, and by whom? When are talkers interrupted, and by whom?

These two aspects of semiotic analysis identified the term "adoption" as a key discursive signifier. The

analysis also identified the bank and NPO discursive practices maintained or challenged the dominant meaning of "adoption" according to their interpretations and intentions.

Three main stages of semiotic analysis guided the inquiry. In the first stage, I analyzed the three negotiation meetings between the bank and NPO representatives. I reviewed each meeting and coded its content while tracing reiterated words, expressions, and rhetorical emphases. During this initial coding process, the word "adoption" emerged as a key discursive signifier of the joint CSR framework. I then recoded each meeting several times to identify the discursive practices the participants used to maintain or challenge the hegemonic meaning of "adoption." At this stage of analysis, multiple meanings of "adoption" and some discursive practices used by both sides in the negotiations were identified and organized in emergent subthemes, including discursive strategies involving the use of ambivalent

and vague rhetoric, and different interpretations of “adoption,” such as “adoption” as occasional sponsored events and “adoption” as “tutoring.”

In the second stage, I coded the content of the interviews, the remaining on-site observations, and textual materials while comparing the content of each unit of analysis with the underlying topics of the emergent subthemes. This stage of analysis stabilized and consolidated the initial subthemes. In the third stage of analysis, the established subthemes were encompassed by two main organizing themes: the controversial nature of the term “adoption” and the NPO representatives’ challenging of its hegemonic meaning.

The semiotic analysis of “adoption” in the three meetings served as a foundation for studying the discursive framing of the bank’s joint CSR framework in its embryonic stage in the context of power-driven symbolic interactions. The meetings also operated as an organizing construct for the findings presented in the next section.

Findings

The Bank’s Joint CSR Initiatives

CSR evolved as a key element of the bank’s “human banking” business strategy. The chief executive officer explained the reason for choosing this approach to CSR:

We sought internal stimuli to propel the bank forward. We found out that humanity is the predominant character of the bank owners and employees who historically were strongly connected to the community. In this sense, a human banking strategy fits like a glove.

Existing historical studies (Galia 2016) of the bank’s philanthropy show that the ideational roots of the “human banking” strategy emerged in the 1970s as a publicity campaign. Current myths about “human banking” are also rooted in longstanding benevolent traditions of the family that established the bank in 1935 (Galia 2017).

The bank’s CSR model has three general characteristics that are congruent with the business case goals of maximizing profits and enhancing reputation and legitimacy (Kurucz et al. 2008). The first is corporate philanthropy which involves employee volunteering and sponsorship, which reflects the lowest philanthropic stage in the Collaborative Value Creation framework (Austin and Seitanidi 2012a; 2012b), driven by profit-making as a top priority. Management declared that the bank was willing to sponsor joint CSR initiatives on the condition that they involved employee volunteering, as explained by the vice president of Marketing and Publicity: “We do not want to be just a rich bank that contributes money... We contribute money only for joint CSR initiatives in which our workers actively volunteer.” In interviews, senior bank executives proudly announced that the number of bank employee volunteers was much higher than in other Israeli companies. They also stressed that enlisting as many employee volunteers as possible is an efficient way to build “a responsible brand” (Kurucz et al. 2008:5), consistent with findings that firms focus on CSR inputs (e.g., number of employee volunteers, volunteer hours, and monetary contributions) rather than on outputs or the impact of CSR in a “community” (Veleva 2010; Barkay 2011). Furthermore, the bank’s joint CSR model focused on NPOs that served disadvantaged adolescents/children and children with disabilities. CSR initiatives involving children are more common than those directed toward older people: “For

most brands, 'young' is a better brand association than 'old'" (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010:624). Finally, the bank organized its CSR initiatives around Jewish holiday festivities.

Indeed, every CSR initiative included a modest budget for refreshments and holiday-related gifts for children/adolescents. The bank's CSR program occasionally manifested itself in three to five main Jewish holiday-related events per year, promoted by each branch in the pilot region. In some cases, the bank donated money or in-kind contributions (e.g., basic equipment for adolescent shelters or after-school child-care facilities). The bank's CRC required branch employee volunteers to photograph the events. The bank community relations manager and coordinator and three NPO coordinators noted that all bank managers and employees received these pictures through various communication channels, such as the official bank webpage. The intention was to excite employees, enhance their satisfaction, and encourage more employees to volunteer for CSR initiatives.

As mentioned, semiotic analysis of the negotiations identified the term "adoption" as a key discursive signifier underlying the bank's CSR model. The following sections analyze two aspects of the contested discursive framing of "adoption" to clarify the discursive framing of the contextual BUS-NPO partnership and the political implications of this process. The first section demonstrates how the discursive framing of "adoption" made the term controversial and incoherent. The second section demonstrates the consequence of the controversial meaning of "adoption" when challenged by NPO representatives. After a brief introduction, each section has three subsections, each focusing on one negotiation meeting and a brief conclusion.

Discursive Framing of the Controversial Meaning of "Adoption"

Actors employ multiple and often controversial rhetorical practices to convey or conceal their intentions regarding discursive signifiers while negotiating meaning. Thus, there is not necessarily any coherence between the senders' rhetoric and intentions and the receivers' interpretations (Steinberg 1999).

The findings show two controversial ways the term "adoption" was used during the meetings: the discursive gap between the statements by the bank CRC and her intention and the discursive gap between the coordinator's intention and the interpretations of NPO representatives. Moreover, the findings demonstrate how the CRC attempted to bridge the discursive gaps in the meaning of "adoption" through the discursive practice of ambivalent and vague rhetoric.

The First Negotiation Meeting

After a brief introduction, the NPO representative opened the conversation: "Before our meeting, I tried to think which joint CSR initiatives could be the most meaningful. We have programs of short-term and long-term voluntary tutoring initiatives." The bank CRC interrupted her: "I focus on 'adoption.'" This was meant to convey a clear message that she was interested in "long-term voluntary tutoring initiatives." She sought to create discursive identification between "adoption" and its meaning as "tutoring," which is typically the NPO representatives' term to describe their expectations of joint CSR initiatives.

The bank CRC succeeded. The NPO representative responded enthusiastically that the bank could em-

ploy disadvantaged youth in a long-term internship program:

I can tell you about a successful experience we have just undergone with some companies that employ adolescents once a week. The employee volunteers tutor them on what a working day is, how to keep the rules in the workplace... the adolescents can be paid or not.

The suggested CSR initiative showed the NPO representative's expectations of "adoption" as a meaningful and long-term relationship between bank volunteers and the young beneficiaries. The NPO representative assumed that her suggestion was aligned with the bank coordinator's intention and was stunned when the bank coordinator responded impatiently, "No, we cannot do it..." and immediately diverted the conversation. "Let's begin with the opening event of the renovated youth shelter, which can involve employee volunteers."

The CRC used ambivalent rhetoric—while speaking about "adoption" in the sense of "long-term voluntary tutoring initiatives," she meant "adoption" in the sense of employee volunteering at holiday events.

The Second Negotiation Meeting

The NPO representative introduced his expectations of the relationship between the beneficiaries and the employee volunteers in terms of "tutoring":

I believe that our goal is to assist disadvantaged children who have grown up in destroyed families. These children need close and stable relationships with the employee volunteers. Therefore, the joint initiative should be based on long-term and regular tutoring, once a week, or at least once every two weeks.

[During their interviews, three additional NPO representatives who had already collaborated with the bank also considered this type of relationship as "an ultimate partnership configuration between the beneficiaries and the bank."]

The bank CRC answered the NPO representative with satisfaction:

I am so delighted to hear what you say... I agree with you... my function is to connect your needs and the bank's good intentions and resources; and we, who depend on each other, come together as a great human chain.

The CRC described the relationship between the bank and the NPO as one of mutual dependence. She used flowery rhetoric to generate an atmosphere of agreement about the meaning of "adoption." Winning the NPO representative's trust was crucial to persuading him to accept the bank's meaning of "adoption."

She then immediately presented the bank's formula for successful joint CSR initiatives: "For each CSR initiative, we recruit two or three employees to adopt disadvantaged children in a form of rotation." She offered a specific CSR initiative that was based on employee volunteering at a sponsored holiday event: "On the upcoming Tu Bishvat [a Jewish holiday], a team of employees from this branch can arrive at an after-school child-care facility to distribute dried fruits to children [a holiday custom of Tu Bishvat]."

The CRC used ambivalent rhetoric, stating that she agreed with the NPO representative's suggestion of a joint CSR initiative involving "long-term and regular tutoring," yet presented a reductive meaning of "adoption" through employee volunteering in

sponsored holiday events as a platform for the bank-NPO partnership.

The Third Negotiation Meeting

The bank's CRC used the term "adoption" in a sentimental way: "I would like you to know that the bank has already adopted deaf, hard of hearing, and blind children. These children are charming; they show the employee volunteers the light."

She then presented the bank's joint CSR model in general terms: "Employees of each bank branch choose together what kind of volunteering they want to do and with whom; we then choose a suitable community partner." The school principal asked if by "adoption" she meant that the joint CSR initiative meant employee volunteering or monetary assistance. The CRC responded:

By adoption, I mean close and lasting relationships between the employees and the children. It is the most important for us...for example, if there is a festive event at the school, volunteer employees from the branch that adopt the school can attend and celebrate with the children...the bank will sponsor the event...

The bank CRC explained "adoption" ambivalently. She stated that "adoption" meant "close and lasting relationships," yet she also implied the meaning of "adoption" in a typical bank CSR context (i.e., employees celebrating with children in a bank-sponsored event). The contradictory answer of the CRC confused the school principal, who insisted: "What amount of money are you talking about?"

The principal's question clarified that she interpreted "adoption" as "monetary assistance," as a large part of her role was raising funds for the school. Her

interpretation stemmed from her knowledge, intention, and life experience. The CRC replied reproachfully (as she usually did, according to the interviews with three NPO coordinators) when she understood that the NPO representatives were requesting a donation from the bank:

Don't think that if it is a bank then the dollars immediately fall from the sky... I am talking about adoption of employee volunteers... like you want to take the children to a water park. If I have already rented the place and a bus, so why shouldn't I take the school's children there on this occasion?

The bank CRC again used ambivalent rhetoric, clarifying that the bank did not make monetary contributions and treating "adoption" as employee volunteers appearing at sponsored holiday events. She strove to associate the meaning of "adoption" with employee volunteering rather than the financial sponsorship.

Discursive Framing of the Controversial Meaning of "Adoption": Summary

During contested discursive framing, powerholders seek to establish hegemony over the meaning of symbolic signifiers (Steinberg 1999). The bank CRC sought to impose the bank's CSR agenda on NPO representatives using ambivalent and vague rhetoric and to bridge the gap between the bank's meaning of "adoption," that is, employee volunteering at bank-sponsored festive events and the NPO's interpretation, that is, long-term and binding "tutoring" by employee volunteers or monetary contributions.

The CRC tried to create discursive identification between "adoption" and "tutoring" to convince the

NPO representatives to embrace the bank's CSR model. In using ambivalent rhetoric about "adoption," the CRC aimed to strengthen and extend the term's meaning in a way that appropriated and neutralized "tutoring" while silencing the NPO representatives' discursive voices. Whereas ambivalent rhetoric caused confusion and uncertainty among the NPO representatives, it strengthened the power position of the bank coordinator in the meetings.

Ambivalent rhetoric regarding the meaning of "adoption" also appeared in the interviews with senior bank executives. In one case, the vice president of the Human Resources Division presented the bank's joint CSR model as a product of "a dialogue among varied stakeholders," implying a dialogue among partners of equal value. At the same time, he justified the bank's CSR model based on charity, inferring patronage and a one-sided attitude: "I think that charity is the most important element of the bank's activities in its relation with NPOs."

Paradoxically, the CRC's attempt to blur the discursive gap between competing meanings of "adoption" had an unintended consequence—the increasing exposure of the controversial meaning of "adoption" during the negotiations unexpectedly increased the term's vulnerability to the discursive challenges by the NPO representatives.

Challenging the Hegemonic Meaning of "Adoption"

At some stage of the negotiation meetings, the NPO representatives became aware of the semantic differences between their interpretation of the term "adoption" and that of the bank. The NPO representatives were also becoming aware of their power po-

sition in the discursive framing in the context of the asymmetrical-contingent relationship. Although the bank was materially much stronger, it completely depended on NPOs for implementing its CSR policy. Despite the hegemonic standing of the bank's CRC in the discursive framing, the NPO representatives tried to challenge the "adoption" meaning by using discursive practices of ambivalent rhetoric.

The First Negotiation Meeting

The bank's CRC insisted on focusing on the renovated youth shelter opening event as an initial CSR initiative: "Let's start with basic equipment for the youth shelter, and after that, we will talk about other projects." Using the term "adoption" for the first time, the NPO representative insisted on asking, "But what about long-term adoption?" suggesting she understood how the CRC was using "adoption." However, she used "adoption" literally to impress the bank representative while still interpreting it in terms of long-term tutoring. The CRC ignored the NPO representative's question and again spoke about the youth shelter opening: "You should make a list of what you need to equip the renovated youth shelter... Let's start with carpets and such things... the employee volunteers will bring them to the opening event."

The NPO representative shifted the conversation from the youth shelter, trying to broaden the meaning of "adoption" to encompass her particular interpretation:

Okay, I will get you a list of equipment in a few days, but the renovation will begin in a few months. In the meantime, we can try to recruit bank workers to adopt adolescents on a regular basis... Maybe the workers would like to play backgammon with the youths or

tutor them in computer games. It is very significant for them.

The CRC answered cynically: "If the employee volunteers go as far as that [i.e., a close connection with the youth], I will say hallelujah." Then she offered a financial training-based CSR initiative: "Otherwise, you can use the employee volunteers to lecture on banking. They would teach the adolescents what a bank account is, how to open a bank account, et cetera."

During the interviews, two NPO coordinators and the community relations manager pointed out that in some CSR programs, the employee volunteers taught disadvantaged youth how to manage money and which financial opportunities the bank offered its customers. The bank's community relations manager and the vice president of the Human Resources Division mentioned that one of the bank's expressed goals for these initiatives was to equip adolescents with important financial knowledge that would assist them in settling down in their adult lives. Furthermore, three NPO coordinators who had previously collaborated with the bank stated that they did not consider these bank CSR initiatives as a conflict of interest.

However, the NPO representative still insisted on using "adoption" in the sense of tutoring: "But beyond this one-time project, we really need employees to adopt adolescents, to tutor them in the youth shelter at least once a week." The bank coordinator dismissed this request with a laconic: "It is possible," and then suggested sponsored holiday events as "possibilities for 'adoption'":

We can also invite the adolescents to festive events at the bank. For example, to a Purim [a Jewish holiday] party

or similar events... the workers can celebrate the holiday with the youths... Trust me, there is no limit to the possibilities of our partnership...

The NPO representative and bank coordinator eventually agreed that employee volunteers would celebrate with disadvantaged adolescents at the coming Purim holiday event, which would be sponsored by the bank. They also agreed that the bank would sponsor the inauguration of the youth shelter and that employee volunteers would attend with refreshments and a new carpet or curtain as the bank's contribution.

The Second Negotiation Meeting

After the bank's CRC presented the bank's general CSR policy, the NPO representative challenged her by remarking: "You are talking about a material aspect of the partnership, but I mean joint initiatives that are based on supporting and maintaining tutoring of the adolescents." The bank coordinator tried to convince her that they were in agreement while repeating what she had said at the beginning of the conversation and adhering to the meaning of "adoption" that aligned with the bank's CSR agenda: "I suggest that some of the branch's employees adopt disadvantaged children at the after-school child-care facility on holidays, or do an arts-and-crafts session with the children, or any other needed activity, instead of participating in a team meeting."

The NPO representative sought to clarify his claim from the bank, but this time he used the term "adoption" in the literal sense for the first time:

We need branch employees to adopt the adolescents regularly, tutor them in how to use computer games or applications, and help them to do their homework. They can play ball games with them for fun after

school or go out with them to movies or restaurants in the evening or on weekends.

The bank representative rejected his request: “We cannot afford this... You should not have great expectations. I am attentive to your request, but reject it in advance unless employees initiate ‘adoption’ regularly by themselves.” She then emphasized: “We should make a connection between the daily demands of work and the community needs in order to create a perfect CSR initiative.”

Her interpretation of “adoption”—and thus a partnership with the NPO—implied that she prioritized the bank’s daily work interests over the community interests for binding and lasting CSR initiatives. Similarly, senior bank managers declared that they would approve joint CSR initiatives on the condition that they aided in advancing the banks’ business interests. The vice president of Human Resources explained the considerations for choosing CSR projects: “I would prefer that the bank be a profitable business, and less of a favorite, than going bankrupt while being popular due to its CSR initiatives.”

The CRC and NPO representative eventually agreed, in principle, that employee volunteers would “adopt” an after-school child-care facility near the bank branch. They planned that during the upcoming Tu Bishvat, employee volunteers would plant seedlings with the children and share dried fruit. During their interviews, the bank’s CRC and manager, and an NPO coordinator all said that a few months later, the bank sponsored a Purim Adloyada (a Jewish holiday carnival) in cooperation with the municipality in whose jurisdiction the “adopted” after-school child-care facility was located. Bank employee volunteers and disadvantaged children celebrated together at the festive carnival.

The Third Negotiation Meeting

Most of the educational and leisure volunteer activities in the school whose students were deaf, hard of hearing, or blind were conducted by the school staff and nuns from the nearby monastery. In the meetings with the bank representative, the school principal indicated that she needed monetary assistance for existing school initiatives, not employee volunteers.

The principal described a typical school program to demonstrate that she needed a financial contribution: “We have already begun an olive pressing initiative, and it is continuing until the end of the year. The children visit an olive grove; they pick and then press olives.” The bank coordinator ignored the principal’s request, presenting joint CSR initiatives as enjoyable activities: “Let’s say you decide to do an arts-and-craft activity with the children. You can tell me, ‘This activity should cost, for example, NIS 400, and I need two or three employee volunteers to adopt the children.’” In addition, she emphasized that the bank contributed money in return for publicity of the CSR initiatives: “You initiate the joint activity, the bank contributes the money, and the employee volunteers are photographed with the children.”

The school principal, who now realized the CRC’s meaning of “adoption,” for the first time used “adoption” in the literal sense, appropriating the term for her purpose of raising money for computerizing the school’s Braille library: “We need a contributor who will adopt the Braille library. We have begun to computerize it.” In response, the bank coordinator offered the assistance of employee volunteers: “We can recruit some of the bank’s information technology employees to adopt the library, help-

ing in computerizing it if needed." The principal gently refused, insisting on monetary assistance: "I have a blind teacher who helps with Braille in the library... and a computer teacher who helps to computerize the library...if you are interested in adopting our school, financial help is highly appreciated and beneficial."

The CRC clarified that the bank could not afford to contribute a large amount of money. The school principal tried to stretch the meaning of "adoption" by linking "adoption" with a donation, and the bank coordinator adhered to "adoption" as sponsorship-related employee volunteering:

It could be, but not at this stage...If in the coming months you ask for about 1,000 to 2,000 NIS for presents to the children at holiday events, then it is okay. For example, at Rosh Hashanah and Pesach [Jewish holidays] events, employee volunteers can adopt a group of 20 needy children by distributing food packages... You do not need to identify 200 children, only the worst cases.

The bank representative proposed a CSR initiative based on Jewish holidays, although the school staff and pupils were Muslims and Christians, demonstrating that its CSR model took place regardless of the ethnonational affiliation of the NPO and its beneficiaries. The principal agreed that employee volunteers from the nearby branch would celebrate during the upcoming Hanukkah with the children at the school.

During her interview, the CRC reported that a few days after the meeting, the manager of a branch near the school, accompanied by some employees, visited the school to share bags of Hanukkah candy with the students. The school organized an

event in which the pupils sang and played music in honor of the bank guests, who hung a sign with the logo of the bank in the school. During their interviews, the branch manager and an employee reported that the visitors were excited after the event and decided to "adopt" the school. This bank-sponsored Hanukkah event was not unusual. Every Hanukkah, the bank held holiday events across the country for blind people who were "adopted" by employee volunteers; this was related in the interviews by two branch managers and the CRC, as well as during participant observations during Hanukkah celebrations involving employee volunteers and beneficiaries.

Challenging the Hegemonic Meaning of "Adoption": Summary

At some stage of the meetings, the NPO representatives challenged the hegemonic meaning of "adoption" using ambivalent rhetoric. Each NPO representative, as a "politically conscious language user" (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000:1132), used the term "adoption" flexibly for their interests; they also continued to interpret "adoption" in terms of "tutoring" (in cases 1 and 2) or monetary contributions (in case 3).

The NPO representatives' ambiguity suggested that they were not bested by the bank's hegemonic meaning of "adoption" but rather were aware of their discursive power; that is, the language that the NPO representatives were exposed to did not "stick" (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000:1132). Nevertheless, the NPO representatives preferred to avoid an open confrontation that probably would have reduced their chance to mold the meaning of "adoption" to suit their purposes. Thus, by embracing "adoption" outwardly, they conveyed a deceptive message to

the bank's coordinator that they shared a common understanding of "adoption."

Despite the subversive attempts of the NPO representatives, the findings showed that the bank's CRC succeeded in imposing "adoption" during the meetings in concert with the bank's CSR model, negating and silencing the discursive NPO voices.

The findings also showed that NPO representatives who had already collaborated with the bank were ambivalent about the bank's CSR model. In one case, an NPO coordinator even praised the bank's CSR program: "I think that the bank has an exemplary CSR initiatives agenda compared to other Israeli corporations," and gave examples of an existing initiative: "The bank employee volunteers celebrate with disadvantaged children during Purim, they give them Purim baskets [a Jewish ritual], and they raise money for poor children." The NPO, diminished, agreed to collaborate with the bank's CSR programs and finally succumbed to the hegemonic meaning of "adoption." While the CRC appeared successful in imposing the bank's CSR notion of "adoption," the literature might have another explanation for this: NPO representatives who strove to challenge the dominant interpretation of "adoption" were probably "partly captive to the truths" (Steinberg 1999:753) that were constructed.

Discussion

Drawing on ethnographic methods and semiotic analysis, this article demonstrated how a bank's collaborative CSR model was discursively framed in the context of agonistic interactions and examined the implications of the contested discursive dynamics of the cooptative bank-NPO relationship.

To examine the discursive dynamics of the bank's joint CSR model, the article analyzes how a key signifier of the bank's CSR language—the term "adoption"—is discursively framed during negotiations. "Adoption" emerged as a rhetorical tool designed to present the bank as socially responsible toward a "community" while at the same time disguising its instrumental CSR approach. The bank's representatives use "adoption" extensively to emphasize that it adopts disadvantaged children and youth in the sense of caring for and nurturing deep and sustained relationships. At the same time, the bank offered the NPO the opportunity for CSR collaboration designed to serve the bank's interests. The NPOs representatives did not generally use "adoption" literally, instead using "tutoring" to articulate their expectations of sustained and meaningful partnerships between the bank and the beneficiaries. The article shows a discursive struggle between the two sides to frame the term "adoption" in alignment with their interpretations and intentions.

Cooptative Joint CSR Initiatives Model

Inspired by symbolic interactionist and constructivist sociological research on discursive framing (Steinberg 1999; see also Alvesson and Kärreman 2000; Keller 2012), the findings present two analytical dimensions of the contested discursive framing of the bank's CSR model in its cooperation with NPOs.

The first dimension of the contested discursive framing was reflected in the CRC's attempts to reinforce the bank's interpretation of "adoption" by using discursive practices of ambivalent and vague rhetoric. Paradoxically, the CRC's attempts to blur the different meanings of "adoption" have the un-

intended consequence of increasingly exposing the contradictions in the meaning of "adoption," making it vulnerable to challenges by the NPO representatives.

The second dimension of the contested discursive framing portrayed the NPO representatives as "politically conscious language user[s]" (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000:1132) who were not cowed by the hegemonic discourse (Steinberg 1999). On the contrary, they sought to challenge the hegemonic meaning of "adoption" by using discursive practices of ambivalent rhetoric.

Nevertheless, the CRC succeeded in imposing the bank's meaning of "adoption" in its CSR model. This silenced the NPO representatives and, in turn, their beneficiaries' discursive voices. Consequently, the CRC neutralized the NPO representatives' meaning of "adoption" as "tutoring" and monetary contribution.

Paradoxically, the NPO representatives contributed to reinforcing and legitimizing the hegemonic meaning of "adoption" by their willingness to cooperate under the conditions of the bank's partnership model (although it is probably because NPOs desperately depend on a voluntary workforce and monetary contributions to survive). As a result, the bank's CSR model was depoliticized and became cooptative in the sense that it stripped away the potential opposing and subversive meanings, presenting only the bank's economic interests. Thus, although the bank's CSR model became dominant by appropriating and silencing the NPO and their beneficiaries, it eventually reflected a diminished type of partnership, which this article conceptualizes as a cooptative joint CSR model.

Contribution to the Literature

By adopting an ethnographic approach combined with semiotic analysis, this article makes an important methodological contribution to the CSR literature (Bass and Milosevic 2018). This approach contrasts with the dominant normative- and ethics-oriented view of CSR advanced by business ethicists and management scholars that focuses on developing regulative models geared toward the ethical implementation of CSR while improving relations with stakeholders (Kurucz et al. 2008; Moratis 2014; Dawkins 2015; Brand et al. 2020).

This study's findings support the contention that normative approaches to CSR tend to idealize CSR and, as a result, risk moving away from how CSR is realized in practice (Brand et al. 2020). Using Collaborative Value Creation (Austin 2000; Austin and Seitani 2012a; 2012b) as a measurement of CSR maturity, this article found that the bank's CSR model represented the lowest stage of philanthropy based on employee volunteering and sponsorships. This article validates the literature that claims that although corporate philanthropy is considered the least worthy type of BUS-NGO partnership in the Collaborative Value Creation framework, it is the most common type of partnership in practice (AL-Tabbaa et al. 2014; Sanzo et al. 2015).

Within the conflict-based body of CSR scholarship, there is little ethnographic research that critically demonstrates how CSR is framed as a commodity in asymmetrical power relationships (Shamir 2005; Barkay 2011). This article helps fill this research gap by showing that the bank's joint CSR model based on community outreach and employee volunteering is instrumental to advancing human resource management and branding strategies.

However, there is a dearth of symbolic interactionist research using the ethnographic method that addresses the semiotic discursive features of CSR framing. Inspired by the insights and gaps of critical CSR studies, this article advances a twofold argument. First, the bank's approach discursively framed and validated CSR as a commodity aimed at serving bank interests by engaging in occasional, superficial, and self-serving CSR initiatives that lacked substantive and sustained collaborations in the interests of its NPO partners and their beneficiaries. Second, considering the little research on market-centered CSR in terms of cooptation (Burchell and Cook 2013; Brand et al. 2020), this study shows how the bank's joint CSR model, discursively framed as a cooptative partnership, is realized through the cooptative relationships between the bank and the NPOs.

Finally, this article seeks to enrich the existing historical literature about the bank in question by completing the missing pieces of its biography. Historical studies showed that the "human banking" framework, which underpinned the bank's CSR, had existed in the bank's culture since its inception in 1935 (Galia 2017; 2020). The founder and his sons, who ran the bank after he passed away, incorporated financial and societal considerations into philanthropy and volunteering during the 50 years of their ownership (Galia 2016). Although the founding family left the bank 37 years ago, current management used the well-known family legacy to advance its CSR agenda, employing rhetoric that reflects the common faith that the bank is drawing on a long-standing culture of benevolence and giving. This study has demonstrated, however, that the bank's CSR model was discursively and socially framed as a strategic tool, "increasingly stepping aside from its moral foundation" (Nijhof and Jeurissen 2010:619).

Conclusions

This article finds that the bank's emergent cooptative joint CSR model has two political implications. The first involves the reproduction of power relations between the bank and NPOs, and the second entails the reproduction of Israel's hegemonic ethnonational discourse.

The cooptative joint CSR model articulates and simultaneously perpetuates power differences between the bank and the NPOs. The bank discursively framed the cooptative joint CSR model according to its interests—to gain as much instrumental benefit as possible through limited monetary contributions and occasional volunteering. Furthermore, the use of the term "adoption" to underpin the bank's CSR initiatives has political implications for the bank and its relationships with the NPOs. The literal meaning of "adoption" signifies possession or appropriation of something or someone. That is, "adoption" indicates patronage-based relationships that are expressed through sponsorships rather than in transformative partnerships (Austin and Seitanidi 2012a; 2012b).

The cooptative joint CSR model, organized around Jewish holidays, implies longstanding ethnonational tensions between Jews and Arabs in Israel. By emphasizing particular national-religious symbols, the CSR initiatives contribute to the reproduction of the hegemonic ethnonational discourse in Israel. In a similar vein, Barkay (2008) showed that CSR initiatives in many Israeli corporations focus on contributing to Israeli military units, Jewish immigrants, and victims of terror.

The third meeting between the bank CRC and the principal of the Arab school has great significance for future research. Although the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exceeds the scope of this article, a potentially relevant research question is: What is the effect

of Israeli ethnonational tensions on the discursive framing of CSR initiatives based on partnerships between Israeli corporations and Palestinian NPOs? That is, NPOs whose officials and beneficiaries are Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Finally, this study focuses on one particular bank's CSR program. There is an obvious need for further comparative research to explore the dialectic discursive power relationships between businesses and NPOs in the CSR realm.

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