**Scientific Abstract: Navigating Gender Ethics in Unsettled Times: How High-Tech Managers Deal with Ambivalent Gender Regimes in Israel and the U.S.**

Our unsettled times are characterized by growing threats to democracy and a glocal backlash against gender equality. In this cultural moment, gender norms are in flux. Major sociocultural forces clash regarding the ethics of gender equality, particularly in the aftermath of #MeToo. In the US, Trumpian nationalist conservatism has led to the overturning of the constitutional right to abortion and the end of affirmative action in college admissions. These tensions have spread beyond the US context and take on various local manifestations, including in Israel where an extreme rightwing coalition has adopted an explicitly antiliberal and anti-genderism agenda. The prolonged Israel-Hamas war has strengthened anti-progressive, nationalist, militarist and hyper-masculine trends, which may widen social and gender inequalities. The proposed study examines how this clash around gender is articulated at the organizational level in two different cultural contexts, Israel and the US. How do mid-level managers in high-tech organizations interpret this clash, operating as they are part of an environment characterized by (formal) support of equality (e.g., through DEI initiatives and statements of business equality ethics) as well as and deeply rooted inequality regimes? What interpretive schemes, narratives, and meanings do they apply regarding ethics of gender equality?

The proposed study addresses two major theoretical lacunas. First, critical management studies (CMS) usually address ethics from a feminist perspective. Despite its importance as an alternative to hegemonic practices, this perspective offers moral and ethical standards. To propose a more nuanced theoretical picture of perceptions of ethics and gender equality, I challenge the normativity assumption in this literature by relying on the cultural sociology of morality. These theoretical lenses will allow me to use discursive strategies (e.g. scripts, narratives, repertoires, and symbolic boundaries) to learn about moral self-regulation in organizational and cultural contexts. Moreover, it will help reveal tensions that hinder and promote social change at work. Also, in the cultural sociology of morality, reference to gender as a moral question that varies across contexts has been neglected. Little is known about organizational and cultural differences in the gendered moral positioning of women and men in the workplace.

The second lacuna is related to the limited scholarly attention paid to contemporary construction of femininities and masculinities in organizations through the focus on unsettled times. This study highlights how such moments prompt increased reflexivity as culture becomes more visible to social actors. Research on masculinities in the contemporary workplace exists but are less significant in terms of their impact on the study of gender and organizations. Combined with the comparison between different organizational and cultural contexts, gender comparison is particularly important to understand how the discourse of social ethics is differentially shaped through power and status that operate differently vis-à-vis exclusion and inclusion mechanisms in different work environments.

In examining these issues, the proposed study will use inductive qualitative methods to reveal participants’ perceptions and categorization systems. In-depth interviews will be conducted with 120 mid-level managers in high-tech corporations and start-ups in Israel and the US. I expect the proposed study to make a novel conceptual, theoretical, and empirical contribution to contemporary sociological body of knowledge of gender and organizations.