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The ethics of Israeli militarism: soldiers' testimony and the formation of the Israeli soldier-subject

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2015

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis argues that ethics plays a crucial role in sustaining Israeli militarism. It shows how ethics has become important both in motivating soldiers to participate in military service in Israel and in constraining political activism against Israel's military engagements. The research is based on several months of fieldwork in Israel/Palestine, comprising interviews with key informants and participant-observation.

Ethics and war are often intuitively understood as existing in antagonism with each other. The argument of this thesis, however, is that ethics can very easily facilitate the use of military violence, especially when ethical activity is used primarily as an opportunity to shape soldiers as subjects. This gives rise to a situation of militarism, in which processes of subject formation and military preparation intertwine and soldiers' experience of themselves as subjects depends on their ethical performance in war. The thesis draws on existing literature concerning militarism – both in the study of Israel and in International Relations theory – which it combines with theoretical insights developed from the later work of Michel Foucault and psychoanalysis.

The thesis offers several empirical studies to demonstrate its argument. It analyses the ethical code of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), the teaching of military ethics in the IDF, and the role of ethical pedagogy at Israeli pre-military academies. It also investigates the work of the Israeli veterans' activist group, "Breaking the Silence", which attempts to use a moral critique voiced through the testimonies of soldiers in order to campaign for the end of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Throughout it draws attention to how ethical practice, and especially testimony, contributes to militarist subject formation.

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Introduction

“Briefly, my aim is to examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy[...], which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function.” (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*)

In November 2014, a story appeared in an Israeli newspaper about the recently appointed commander of the officer training school of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), General Avi Gil (Yehoshua, 2014). The article reported that, as part of his changes to the curriculum, Gil had decided to teach IDF officer cadets about the work of the organisation “Breaking the Silence” [*Shovrim Shtika*]¹. Breaking the Silence is a well-known Israeli NGO staffed by IDF veterans, whose work is very controversial in Israeli society. It gathers testimonies from soldiers who served in the occupied territories and, using these testimonies, campaigns for the end of the occupation on the grounds that it is immoral. Gil had asked the cadets to read some of these testimonies as part of their preparation for officer roles. He was immediately attacked by right-wing groups for his decision. For Breaking the Silence, however, this was a media coup. In an opinion piece responding to this development, its executive director was quick to draw parallels between the values of an IDF officer and the values of the organisation:

“This week the commander of Bahad 1² reminded me of ten years ago, of the days when I myself commanded cadets in an officers’ course. As staff at the officers’ school, we saw our mission as to educate the cadets in professionalism and values. First and foremost on the list of the values I taught stood truth. We talked about “speaking the truth”, “reporting the truth”, “taking responsibility”. At the school there was a zero tolerance policy on harming this value. A cadet who lied – he wouldn’t be an officer. A cadet who hid something – he wouldn’t be an

¹ A note on transliteration: throughout this thesis I have adopted the style of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* when transliterating Modern Hebrew, with the exception of some proper names in wide circulation.

² “Bahad 1” is a Hebrew acronym for *bsis hadrakha 1*, the IDF officer training school.

officer. Like then, so today I believe that it is preferable to strive for the truth than to attempt to deny it.” (Novak, 2014a; my translation)

She further revealed her aspirations for the curriculum change:

“The commander of Bahad 1 decided this week, knowingly or not, to open a small window to the cadets into the reality of the occupation. If he perseveres with this, and is not subdued by the calls for silence from the right, I wait to see the results with bated breath. Perhaps from this exposure an understanding will arise among the young commanders that there is no moral or enlightened way to rule over another nation. Perhaps after understanding that, they will themselves demand – as soldiers and officers – to go back and carry out the mission for which they enlisted to the IDF: to defend the state, not to occupy and oppress.”

This small episode presents a condensed example of the web of interactions that I want to explore in this thesis. It poses two questions: firstly, why did the commander of the IDF officer school think that it would be pedagogically useful to expose his cadets to testimonies designed to demonstrate the immorality of the occupation they were about to help enforce? Secondly, why did the executive director of Breaking the Silence believe that this development represented a promising political opening? What I will show in this thesis is that these two questions are in fact two sides of the same question: how is ethics implicated in the production of militarism in Israel?

While the answer to this question is complex, this thesis will show that such an answer cannot avoid passing through the question of testimony, the practice by which speaking subjects place themselves in a relationship with truth and with their experience. The remarks cited above make this immediately plain: in Israel, there exists a strange continuity between a military ethical pedagogy of speaking the truth, and an activist ethics of testimony. The contention of this thesis is that this connection tells us something important about the changing nature of Israeli militarism, both its hold on the soldiers who serve in the IDF and its resilience against strategies of public critique. This argument is inspired by the words which form the epigraph to this introduction, in which Foucault identifies a productive tension between silence and spoken criticism in the incitement to discourse about modern sexuality

(1998: 17–36). It is from a similar tension surrounding discourse about war in Israeli society that militarism draws its strength, binding individual subjectivities to military experience through the carefully orchestrated disclosure of its truths. This thesis will examine the ethical activities which make this possible.

In doing so, it will also contribute to an understanding of the relationship between ethics and war. We live in the era of the so-called “ethical turn”, in which claims which would formerly have been contested politically are now frequently debated in a language of depoliticised morality (Bourg, 2007; Rancière, 2006; Vásquez-Arroyo, forthcoming). This new language is simultaneously universalising and individualising: on the one hand it abstracts away from concrete political antagonisms, often directing our attention towards a decontextualised plane of “humanity” (Rancière, 2006: 7–9); on the other it valorises a return to the individual self, away from collective struggle or institutions, as a means of cultivating the values on which this moralising discourse depends (Bourg, 2007: 9–10). Didier Fassin has summarised these developments nicely:

“A significant evolution of contemporary society has been the banalization of moral discourse and moral sentiments in the public sphere, the insistence on suffering and trauma in the interpretation of a multiplicity of social issues, the focus on human rights and humanitarianism in international politics, as well as the invocation of ethics in a wide range of human activities, from finance or development to medicine and research, from the rediscovery of bodily practices of the self in religious and secular worlds to the social expectation of the subject’s autonomy...” (2014: 433)

The military implications of these broader societal developments have been considerable. Scholars have demonstrated how the invocation of humanitarian principles in military interventions and practices has often had the paradoxical effect of further legitimating and encouraging acts of violence (Coker, 2001; Douzinas, 2003; Fassin, 2011; Weizman, 2012). Several studies have also analysed the use of anthropological and empathetic understandings of “culture” and “human terrain” in mediating and legitimating the violence of occupation (González, 2007; Gregory, 2008; Zehfuss, 2012). Laleh

Khalili has further observed the primacy of “happiness” in the practice of counterinsurgency, arguing that moral and technocratic efforts at social improvement by occupying forces work to “erase politics from the calculus of war-fighting” (2014: 25).

This growing importance of ethics to the work of contemporary militaries can be witnessed not least in the growing body of practitioner-orientated scholarship discussing the teaching of military ethics to soldiers (Cook, 2004; Challans, 2007; Sherman, 2007; Robinson et al., 2008; Wertheimer, 2008) and in the establishment of an academic journal specifically dedicated to this field, the *Journal of Military Ethics*. This increasingly regularised pursuit of military ethics draws on long-standing intellectual traditions, especially “Just War Theory” (Walzer, 1977; Rodin, 2006). Yet it has also aligned with recent changes in the character of war, not least the shift to “irregular” modes of warfare such as humanitarian missions, counterinsurgency, or the increasing use of robotics and remote technology (Carrick et al., 2009; van Baarda and Verweij, 2009; cf. Der Derian, 2009). It has also dovetailed with changes in the motivational and organisational cultures of militaries, which increasingly supplement traditional hierarchical and disciplinary modes of organisation with a neoliberal and biopolitical emphasis on cultivating the personal, psychological, and mental capacities of soldiers (Cowen, 2008: 198–229; Howell, 2015). Surveying these developments, one begins to suspect that militaries are not simply paying heed to ethics: they are positively suffused with it, in ways that shape their practice profoundly.

Based on a study of the Israeli case, it is a central claim of this thesis that this turn to ethics has become useful for practitioners of military violence and corrosive of the critical and political capacity to engage with and resist that violence. Ethics, which is typically but misleadingly imagined as a reliably effective limit on war that can constrain its occurrence and excesses, can in fact offer powerful support to militarism at a number of levels. In the specific context explored in this thesis, ethics has become a facet of the on-going colonial dispossession of Palestine through Israeli military violence. It is of course important to be clear that this is not an intrinsic tendency of ethics. Rather, it is a consequence of the specific way in which ethics has been deployed in the service of Israeli

militarism. The aim of this thesis, then, is to capture this specificity with a view to revealing the limits and possibilities of ethics for constraining the violence of war.

The Israeli military often describes itself as “the most moral army in the world”. Indeed, this was a phrase that I encountered many times during the research for this thesis. Two instinctive and opposed reactions characterise typical responses to this claim: the first affirms its truth; the second rejects it out of hand as a propaganda claim. Unsurprisingly, neither of these views quite captures the significance of this belief. Without question, it has been a useful and cynical, if unsubtle, claim to make in apologist Israeli public relations, or *hasbara*. Yet at the same time it is also true that a great many Israelis genuinely believe in or at least aspire to this claim. We will meet many of them in the pages to come. This does not just include the general public: it includes military personnel, philosophers, educators, and even some anti-occupation activists. When placed alongside the colossal violence exercised by the IDF, this is a significant puzzle. It suggests an extremely strong ideological system which must surely have a powerful impact on Israeli militarism. Reflecting on this claim, what this thesis aims to explore is not whether in practice the IDF is a moral army, but rather when and how it became important to make this claim, and what the consequences of this have been.

In one sense, this claim is not new at all. The Israeli belief in a moral army is older than the IDF itself. One of its founding myths is the story of the “*Lamed He*”, the 35 *Palmaḥ* soldiers who were killed in an ambush in the 1948 war because, according to David Ben-Gurion’s apocryphal eulogy, they showed mercy on an elderly shepherd who then reported them to the local Arab militia (Ha’aretz, 2009). The IDF’s much-vaunted value of “purity of arms” is often traced back to this episode. The mythology of the moral Israeli soldier has been re-affirmed time and again throughout the annals of the state, not least in the production and public circulation of soldiers’ testimony. It received its clearest expression and widest audience after the 1967 “Six Day War”, when a group of kibbutz members gathered together to record and publish their recollections of the war and their reflections on its moral implications in the anthology, *Siaḥ Loḥamim* (“Soldiers’ Talk”) (Shapira, 1968; translated

into English as Near, 1970). Indeed, as will become clear, it is most commonly through the voice of the soldier that this long-standing belief in a moral army has sustained itself.

However, this long history notwithstanding, this thesis seeks to situate this growing concern with being a “moral army” in the context of the wider set of ethical practices that layer this claim with meaning. It observes a growing regularity and intensity in the significance of ethics for Israeli militarism and argues that ethics has become an integral part of the production of militarist subjectivities in Israel. There are five different dimensions to this claim which are explored throughout the thesis. Firstly, ethics has become an important part of a new mode of the military governance of IDF soldiers. The IDF is increasingly interested in more than simply the technical capacity of soldiers to perform well on the battlefield. It promotes a regime of governmentality aimed at the formation of soldiers as ethical subjects who monitor and strive to enhance their conduct and who believe strongly in the righteousness of the army for which they fight. Ethical capacity has been added to physical fitness and battle-readiness as a feature of all-round military preparedness. These shifts are intimately related to the ways in which the IDF has re-organised itself in response to changing social realities, not least the growth of neoliberalism and the changing models of organisational culture and individual motivation it brings. These changes have fostered a kind of militarism in which what one does during military service becomes a barometer of character; it speaks a truth about the soldier as a subject.

Secondly, ethics has acquired a specific role in the ideological legitimisation of military violence in Israel. This role is not as straightforward as propaganda or whitewashing and neither does it aim at the legitimisation of specific military acts or categories of acts. Rather, it generates a pervasive ideology of ethical soldiering that inculcates a belief in the IDF as a moral army with strong values. Significantly, this frequently includes rather than precludes engagement with the moral difficulties and dilemmas that soldiers face during military service. However, it is important to be clear that this emphasis on military ethics is not aimed at a reduction in the level of violence used against Palestinians. Rather, it is tailored to produce IDF soldiers imbued with a sense of their moral mission. Indeed, military ethics

is used to promote this ideological belief *alongside* the enormous violence wielded by the IDF precisely in order to maintain soldiers' motivation to participate in it.

Thirdly, ethics has proven particularly useful in the IDF's intensifying and increasingly violent pursuit of counterinsurgency warfare (Catignani, 2009; Khalili, 2010, 2013). This mode of warfare, in which the aim is not to defeat the enemy in a pitched battle but to intervene violently in the surrounding society to isolate and deprive it of support, often necessitates prolonged periods of contact between the occupying force and the occupied civilian population. It also relies on a relatively decentralised structure of decision-making in which individual officers and even soldiers are required to make choices with potentially significant tactical, strategic, and moral implications. All of these requirements make counterinsurgency a demanding and often frustrating task for troops, not least in the Israeli case (Ben-Ari, 1999; Catignani, 2009: 17–27; Grassiani, 2013). Ethics provides the IDF with useful resources for all of these challenges by helping to facilitate and regulate the violent encounter between occupier and occupied in counterinsurgency.

Fourthly, soldiers' testimony has assumed a privileged importance in the range of ethical techniques of the self deployed in Israeli militarism. As conceived in this thesis, testimony concerns the placement of the subject and truth in a relationship through practices of speech, writing, and recording. Soldiers' testimony in Israel has appeared in a wide range of literary and cultural forms, as novels, memoirs, anthologies, and academic work, as well as in political activism. Most recently, a "new wave" of Israeli cinema (Morag, 2013) has focussed on the experience of soldiers in coming to terms with the moral implications of their military activities, with the participants ranging from the lowest ranks to leaders of the General Security Services. Indeed, this genre of soldiers' testimony has become sufficiently widespread to acquire a (usually pejorative) label in Israeli society, *yorim vebokhim* ("shooting and crying"). However, this thesis argues that the production of soldiers' testimony as a cultural artefact is only one dimension of its much broader significance for Israeli militarism. The deployments of testimony as an ethical technique in Israeli militarism are diverse and their complex contribution is irreducible to a simple formula. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that this polymorphous

activity is crucial for understanding the ways in which ethics works to produce soldiers as militarist subjects.

Fifthly, and finally, ethics has played an important role in disciplining political contestation against Israel's military engagements. This is not only because it has de-politicised the discourse by which they are judged. It is also a product of the way that ethics produces militarist subjectivities which are less capable of effective political activism. An important part of this process is the way that ethics helps to make militarism *unconscious*, producing fantasies of moral occupation which distract from the structural and political conditions enabling violence and which focus scrutiny on the conduct and shortcomings of the individual soldier. This prioritisation of guilt over anxiety, as I term it in this thesis, also disciplines activism by translating political acts into ethico-pedagogical interventions. In this way, as in the example which opened this thesis, the testimonies and educational activities of "Breaking the Silence" are often more effective in buttressing militarism than in mobilising against the occupation.

Having stated my overall argument, in the rest of this introduction I will proceed to place this research in the context of relevant scholarly literatures on militarism, firstly in Israel and secondly in International Relations. I will then present the theoretical basis on which its argument is made, explaining my central concepts of ethics and subject formation and identifying their possible contribution to militarism. I will then describe the research methodology used to substantiate my argument in later chapters, before introducing the overall structure of the thesis.

Approaching Israeli militarism

The earliest scholarship on the Israeli military focussed on the institutional level. The main interest lay in explaining the nature of the relationship between the army command and the civilian government at the level of high politics (what is usually termed "civil-military relations"). The major debate was between "traditional" scholars who argued that, despite the huge importance of the military in Israeli society and politics, the IDF remained subject to civilian control (Horowitz and Luttwak, 1975; Horowitz, 1982), and "critical" scholars who argued that the social interpenetration

between the army command and elite politicians undermined this outward appearance (Peri, 1985).³ However, an important and contrary development in scholarship on the Israeli military was the intervention of political sociology during the 1980s, which developed a “new critical” approach that applied the concept of militarism to the study of Israeli society (Barak and Sheffer, 2010: 19–21).

This effort was led by Kimmerling, who began his work by examining the effect of constant war on Israeli society and who then developed his observations to assess the societal and cultural importance of participation in the military (Kimmerling, 1984, 1993, 2005). Kimmerling argued that militarism was a powerful feature of Israeli society which structured social relations and political decisions. Distinguishing three main types of militarism – “praetorian”, “cultural”, and “cognitive” – he argued that while Israel had never been subject to rule by the military (praetorian militarism), it had experienced a period where the military dominated and structured cultural life and social institutions (cultural militarism) and was still inclined to view policy options through a military lens (cognitive militarism) (Kimmerling, 1993).

Militarism proved a fertile concept for scholarship about the Israeli military, even though it attracted controversy for its supposedly pejorative connotations (Peri, 1996b). The historian Uri Ben-Eliezer wrote a history of the emergence of militarism in Israel during the pre-state period and its early years, especially during the 1948 war (1998). Ben-Eliezer’s concept of “civilian militarism” was indebted to Kimmerling’s notions of cultural and cognitive militarism, as well as to theoretical debates on the concept from other parts of the world (1998: 1–15). Ben-Eliezer argued that the military had accepted its subservient role in the state apparatus because the political establishment had accepted its determination to resolve the “Arab question” by force. The concept of militarism was also taken up by the sociologist Yagil Levy, who has consistently argued that Israel’s situation is characterised by a “materialist militarism” in which the social benefits of military participation determine the willingness of various social groups to devote themselves to military service (1997, 1998, 2007, 2012).

³ These debates are surveyed in more detail by Barak and Sheffer (2010: 14–41) and Asaf David (2013).

Extending these historical and sociological insights, anthropologists also became interested in Israeli militarism. They refined and added empirical weight to the concept, showing the importance of the military for identity and culture in Israel. Eyal Ben-Ari, drawing on his own experience as a soldier during the First Intifada, examined the dynamics of soldiers' identity, and especially expressions of masculinity, in IDF combat units (1998, 1999, 2001). Furthermore, Edna Lomsky-Feder and Sara Helman argued that compulsory military service and the reserves system helped structure the "life-stories" and "life-worlds" of Israelis (Helman, 1999; Lomsky-Feder, 1999). These scholars suggested that an understanding of Israeli militarism necessitated an examination of its cultural and discursive underpinnings. Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari made the argument that Israeli militarism could be understood as a form of "hegemony", a cultural script propagated for the benefit of an elite social group and disseminated for ideological consumption by all sectors of society (1999: 11). Augmenting this analysis, other scholars became interested in how embodied practices related to military norms (Weiss, 2002), how myth-making and the memorialisation of the dead contributed to militarism (Azaryahu, 1999; Ben-Yehuda, 1999; Brog, 2003; Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman, 1997; Zerubavel, 2006), how military participation helped to construct notions of citizenship (Helman, 1997, 2001), and how gender, racial and class identities structured the military division of labour in the army and society (Sasson-Levy, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2007, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 1985).

Scholars also reintegrated these observations back into political science, arguing that the social and cultural dimensions of militarism are of great significance in explaining the way conflict is justified and brought about in Israel (Ben-Eliezer, 2001, 2004; Helman, 2001; Sela, 2007). Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer developed an analysis of Israel's hybrid civil-military "security networks", leading them to suggest that Israel is "an army which has a state" (David, 2013: 330–335; Barak and Sheffer, 2010, 2013). More compellingly, however, Levy (2010) has argued that, while the state retains formal "operational control" of the military, patterns of militarism mean that it often lacks practical "effectual control": in Israel, he says, there is not an army [*tsava*] which has a state but "militarism [*tsva 'iyut*] which has a state" (quoted in David, 2013: 336). Scholars have therefore often used the concept of

militarism to explain changing patterns of war and peace in Israel/Palestine, suggesting that the cultural and material strength of militarism is a major determinant of the use of violence.

During the 1990s, these scholarly assessments were inflected by the pervasive optimism for a negotiated settlement of the long-running conflict. They often argued that changing patterns of societal militarism presaged a transition to “de-escalation” (Ben-Eliezer, 1998: 223–229; Ezrahi, 1997; Kimmerling, 1993, 2005: 89–129; Levy, 1997: 166–211; see also Peled and Shafir, 2002: esp. 231–259, 335–348). The expectation was that, as Israeli society grew more diverse, individualist, and market-oriented, the social underpinnings of a collectivist cultural militarism would weaken and the appeal of war as a policy option would diminish (Kimmerling, 1993: 202). Accordingly, scholars observed that those secular Ashkenazi⁴ Jewish citizens who formerly constituted the backbone of the Israeli military now represent a declining proportion of military casualties (Levy, 2007: 117–125, 229–235). They have also begun to demand greater individual, rather than collective, rewards for what is increasingly regarded as the inconvenience of military service (Levy et al., 2007). Levy has characterised this as a breach of the traditional “republican equation” which had traditionally been made between military service and its social rewards (Levy, 2007: 29–67). This has been accompanied by the growing phenomenon of “conscientious objection”, especially since the First Lebanon War and predominantly among secular Ashkenazim (Linn, 1989; Weiss, 2014). Military service and military operations also became more likely to become the target of social and political discontent (Helman, 2001; Levy, 2007: 128–145, 2012: 71–108). Initially, all of these trends appeared to suggest a likely decline in the level of societal militarism.

However, the collapse of the diplomatic process and the escalation of violence since 2000 forced scholars to adjust their analysis. The picture of a hegemonic and monolithic cultural militarism primarily supported by secular Ashkenazim no longer seemed to account for the continued resort to military violence. An account of a post-hegemonic militarism was required. Three major developments in Israeli militarism were subsequently emphasised to explain this: new models of military mobilisation; a shift in the social basis of IDF manpower; and decreased exposure of IDF

⁴ Ashkenazi (pl. Ahkenazim) refers to Jews of European descent.

soldiers to the risks and tasks of occupation. Firstly, a new model of encouraging military mobilisation has been adopted. Scholars have observed that the IDF begun to move away from an emphasis on conscription and the reserves system towards a model of professionalisation and competition in the labour market as means of recruitment (Cohen, 1995; Ben-Eliezer, 2004; Levy, 2007: 147–179). While this transition remains incomplete in many respects and has occasionally been reversed (Libel, 2013), its effects have still been significant. There is a growing tendency to incentivise, rather than oblige, military participation from the population (Levy et al., 2007; Harel, 2013).

Secondly, this has been combined with a greater willingness to encourage the military participation of a wider number of social groups in military service, especially the national-religious. This latter development has attracted an especially large amount of scholarly attention and tends to be a major focus of discussions about the future direction of the Israeli military. Recent years have not only witnessed huge increases in the number of national-religious soldiers and officers in the ranks, but also significant changes in military structures and procedures designed to accommodate them, such as new educational institutions, new units, and an enhanced role for the military rabbinate. The work of Stuart Cohen and his students has been particularly significant in charting the entry of national-religious soldiers into the IDF (Cohen, 1997, 2013; Rosman-Stollman, 2014).

Levy has argued that the national-religious have begun to supplant secular Ashkenazim as the leading participants in “materialist militarism” (2007: 78–115). He has further suggested that this has implications for the capacity of the state to exercise “effectual control” over soldiers whose ideological preferences may differ from the will of the government, especially in the context of contentious missions such as the dismantling of settlements. Levy has even gone as far as suggesting that the IDF has experienced “theocratisation” in recent years (2014). While not all scholars share this view, others have written about the likely effects of these developments on cohesion in the ranks and political control over the military (Cohen, 2013: esp. 109–142; Rosman-Stollman, 2014).

Thirdly, the IDF has sought to compensate for declining levels of combat motivation by carefully

managing the exposure of its soldiers to risk and to the tasks of maintaining the occupation. Levy has argued that the shifting social basis of IDF manpower has produced a “death hierarchy”, in which the lives of secular Ashkenazi soldiers are valued the most because of the high level of societal opposition to their deaths (2012: 71–108). By contrast, other groups are more readily risked either because of the continued support that exists among their communities for the necessity of military sacrifice (as with national-religious soldiers) or because of they lack the social power necessary to mobilise (as with citizens living in the south of Israel). At the bottom of this hierarchy stand Palestinians, who are increasingly viewed as expendable in military operations for the sake of preserving the lives of those higher up the hierarchy (2012: 147–180).

In addition, the difficulties entailed in contentious military tasks such as occupying and policing Palestinian civilian centres has encouraged the Israeli military and political leadership to favour strategies of occupation at a distance. This has involved the use of proxies (such as Palestinian security forces, the South Lebanese Army, or even Hamas – see Gordon, 2008: 196–196, 223–226; Khalili, 2013: 105–115); innovations in the architecture of occupation (such as large “humanitarian” checkpoints where the contact with civilians is minimised, or elaborate regimes of curfew, confinement, and blockade – see Hanieh, 2006; Khalili, 2013: 183–196; Ophir et al., 2009; Weizman, 2007: 139–160); and the use of increasingly remote and deadly forms of military violence, such as airstrikes and drones (Weizman, 2007: 237–259; see also Ron, 2003: 113–188). Together, the death hierarchy and new modes of occupation have facilitated the perpetuation of a variety of what Michael Mann has called “spectator-sport militarism”, in which aversion to military deaths need not interfere with the continued importance of war-making for social relations (Mann, 1987; see also Shaw, 2002).

These three developments are an essential part of the way in which scholars have sought to explain to continuing strength of militarism in Israel in recent years, and this thesis does not seek to deny their importance. However, it does recast a number of the assumptions implicit in this scholarship in order to provide a fuller analysis of Israeli militarism which is able to take account of the centrality of ethics. Firstly, the thesis foregrounds not the social structure underpinning Israeli militarism but rather the changing governmental strategies through which it seeks to produce militarist subjects. Ethics has had

an important role to play in these strategies, and its contribution cannot be fully captured through attention to social structure. Secondly, the thesis emphasises complementarities in the ways that religious and secular soldiers have been integrated into Israeli militarism (cf. Dalsheim, 2011: 3–33). Important differences notwithstanding, it is innovations in ethical practice which have facilitated the continued military participation of both groups, opening the ground for increased religious involvement in militarism but also re-ordering the secular contribution in important ways. Thirdly, the thesis views Israeli militarism as possessing a much higher tolerance for moral and motivational ambiguity than existing accounts might suggest. In particular, it does not interpret increased opposition to the occupation or particular military operations, or growing uncertainty about their morality, as necessarily indicating a decline in militarism. In fact, it argues that ethics has been crucial in negotiating these ambiguities and converting them into a source of strength rather than weakness.

Much current scholarship on Israeli militarism overlooks its resilience at a deeper subjective level, and misleadingly implies that it has simply become more mercenary (necessitating a re-ordering of the risk and rewards of military service) or increasingly confined to religious nationalists (often portrayed as more ideologically “extreme” than the rest of society). Some more recent work has already made progress in complicating this picture through attention to the production of militarist subjectivities. Ben-Ari and Lomsky-Feder have explored the ways in which discourses of trauma and war psychology have normalised war, pathologised dissent, and thereby buttressed militarism, while also negotiating its damaging consequences for individuals (1998, 2010). Most relevantly, Sasson-Levy, Levy, and Lomsky-Feder have indicated, through an analysis of women’s testimony to *Breaking the Silence*, how anti-occupation discourse among women veterans can reproduce elements of militarism (2011; see also Natanel, 2012). In this thesis, I aim to push these lines of inquiry further through concentration of the role of ethics in militarist subject formation. The analysis reveals Israeli militarism to be a much more pervasive and tenacious phenomenon than previously suggested, capable of absorbing and re-appropriating dissent and ambiguity.

Militarism in International Relations theory

Militarism is undergoing a revival as concept in the field of International Relations, having enjoyed a

scholarly history in the field of political sociology for much longer. Surveying its place in the discipline of IR Stavrianakis and Selby identify five possible definitions of the concept – as ideology, as a behavioural phenomenon, as military build-up, as a set of institutional relationships, as a sociological process – and argue that the last of these is the most productive (2013: 11–16). Although I concur that militarism should be conceived of as a sociological process and I agree that it should not be understood narrowly as a set of beliefs glorifying war and military activity, for important reasons I also retain the concept of militarism as ideology. Below I offer an account of the development of the concept of militarism and explain my reasoning for this position.

Early scholarship on the role of the military in society produced the “civil-military relations” paradigm, which posed the question of how militaries interact with the civilian state and how the balance of power between them was maintained (Huntingdon, 1957; Janowitz, 1960). The earliest and most lasting formulation of the concept of militarism, however, predates this. Alfred Vagts’ *History of Militarism*, which is still widely cited today, introduced a concept of militarism which challenges the civil-military distinction:

“Militarism is... not the opposite of pacifism; its true counterpart is civilianism. Love of war, bellicosity, is a counterpart of the love of peace, pacifism; but militarism is more and sometimes less, than the love of war. It covers every system of thinking and valuing in every complex of feelings which rank military institutions and ways above the ways of civilian life, carrying military mentality and modes of acting and decision into the civilian sphere.” (Vagts, 1959: 17)

In this passage Vagts firstly suggests that militarism is not the exclusive preserve of the military, thereby distinguishing it from the professional “military way” that Huntingdon speaks of and suggesting that it exist among civilians. The crux of Vagts’ concept, however, is that militarism is a general social phenomenon that implies, not love of war, but first and foremost the state of being in thrall to war, of being influenced by and caught up in military ways. In my view, the most conceptually lucid scholarship on militarism has been that which broadly accepts the contours of this

definition and seeks to apply it to contemporary politics.

The work of the sociologist Martin Shaw has also been crucial in clarifying the concept of militarism. Shaw sought to apply the notion of militarism to an explanation of demilitarisation at the end of the Cold War (1991). Shaw agrees with Vagts in distinguishing between “war preparation” (building arms, improving military capacity) and militarism. Militarism, he argues, describes “the relationship between war preparation and society” (1991: 11) and denotes “the penetration of social relations in general by military relations” (2013: 20), measuring the “influence of military organisation and values on social structure” (1991: 11). In a helpful clarification, Shaw uses the terms “militarisation” and “demilitarisation” simply to describe an increase or decrease in the level of militarism. Shaw therefore seeks to extend Vagts’ original understanding of militarism as “system of thinking” and “complex of feelings” to a wider range of social practices, such as economic production, popular culture, or gender relations.

Shaw also fundamentally agrees with Vagts in arguing that militarism does not necessarily entail the glorification of war. However, he views Vagts’ definition as too narrowly focused on “ideology” and therefore liable to cause analytic problems. He opts instead for a version indebted to Michael Mann’s definition of militarism as “a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity”(Mann, 1987):

“It is sociologically unenlightening to restrict the meaning to ideology: the core idea is the ‘carrying’ of military forms into the civilian sphere, and this is not merely a matter of ‘mentality’ or ‘attitudes’ but (as Mann notes) of ‘social practices’. Moreover the military forms which are carried may not necessarily ‘rank military institutions and ways above the prevailing attitudes of civilian life’, let alone ‘glorify’ war in a simple sense. While the differences between ideologies which glorify war and those which don’t are significant, glorifying and non-glorifying ideologies may equally justify war and military power, and in this sense have the same core social function.” (Shaw, 2013: 19–20)

Instead, Shaw proposes to distinguish between militarism and “militarist ideologies”:

“The ideological impact of war-preparation is only one part of its influence on society. We may distinguish therefore between militarism, in general, and *militarist ideologies*, which are belief systems that give a high value to military activities.” (1991: 12)

However, there is a danger that this distinction misinterprets the relationship between ideology and social practice. It risks invoking an outmoded concept of ideology which reduces it to an epiphenomenal set of beliefs with only a contingent relationship to material reality. Yet, at least since Althusser, theorists have had a concept of ideology which is of necessity implicated in “ideological apparatuses”, i.e., sets of institutions and practices which produce and sustain ideology (Althusser, 1971). As such, for Althusser, ideology *is* a material practice, one which forms “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1971: 152–159). It is therefore impossible to conceive of social practice without ideology, which plays a central role in maintaining social structures. Moreover, it is crucial to add that, for Althusser, ideology interpellates individuals *as subjects*, making subject formation – rather than sets of ideas – the crucial factor to be appreciated (1971: 160–165).

We do not need to adopt an Althusserian distinction between “science” and “ideology”, between “real interests” and their misperception, to maintain this position. In his psychoanalytic reconstruction of the concept of ideology, Žižek explains that the crucial question is not the truth or falsity of the beliefs which make it up, but rather “the way this content is related to the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation” (2012: 8). By this he means that it is the subjective engagement with ideology which is the essential dimension of its efficacy: the way that certain beliefs – true or false – entice the desiring subject into continued participation, leaving the basic structure of domination undisturbed. These beliefs may be true, but it is not their truth which determines the subject’s belief in them. This leads me to the following modification of Mann’s otherwise excellent definition: militarism is a set of attitudes and social practices which make war and preparation for war seem appropriate activities, *not for reasons of political necessity in the given circumstances but because subjects have been ideologically conditioned to desire them*. I therefore fully endorse Shaw’s understanding of militarism as a sociological process. Where I differ is in maintaining that militarism

is inherently rather than contingently ideological: it always includes an ideological cathexis of war and military activity.

The value of the concept of militarism is that it has been enormously productive in charting the military significance of an array of social practices not normally studied as artefacts of war-making or war-preparation or as sites of the ideological legitimization of violence. It has reconfigured our understanding of the boundaries of “the military” itself, moving scholars away from studying its formal institutional locale in “civil-military relations” and towards an appreciation of the thicker social field in which war-making and war-preparation take place. This has prompted a reconceptualisation of earlier definitions of militarism, such as the following formulation once offered by Michael Klare:

“[militarism is] the tendency of a nation’s *military apparatus* ... to assume *ever-increasing control* over the lives and behaviour of its citizens; and for *military goals* ... and *military values* ... increasingly to dominate national culture, education, the media, religion, politics and the economy at the expense of civilian institutions.” (1980: 36, emphasis in original)

Indeed, “the military apparatus” should no longer be considered a discrete institutional stratum which imposes its way of thinking on the rest of society. This “apparatus” should instead be understood in its full Foucauldian sense as a *dispositif*, as a mechanism of power which transcends any particular set of institutions and takes hold of individual subjectivities through a wider array of quotidian social relations (see, amongst other work, Foucault, 1979: esp. 195–228, 1980: esp. 194–209, 2006: 63–91). Militarism is, in short, a form of governmentality, one which not only operates *on* subjects, but also *produces* them (Foucault, 2002b; Butler, 1996: esp. 1–31, 63–131).

Feminist scholarship in particular has been crucial in demonstrating the role of subject formation in militarism through its role in differentiating and consolidating gendered identities. Cynthia Enloe has shown the ways in which subjects are produced and coded as masculine or feminine depending on their differential participation in war (2000). She and other scholars have demonstrated that gendered subject formation – both within the ranks of the army and throughout wider societies – is essential to

the perpetuation of militarism (Enloe, 2007; Hutchings, 2008; Segal, 2008; Sjoberg and Via, 2010). Relevantly for this thesis, several feminist studies have also shown the importance of educational settings for the propagation of gender norms which strengthen militarism and undermine possible resistance to it (Altınay, 2004; Conway, 2012). Most pertinently of all, Elshtain's classic study of military ethical discourse argues that the principal paradigm for considering the role of ethics in war, "Just War Theory", rests on an inherently masculinist discourse which is concerned with producing the male soldier as a "just warrior" and domesticating the female civilian as a "beautiful soul" (Elshtain, 1995; see also Sjoberg, 2006; Owens, 2010).

Studies of the Israeli case have already produced some of the most significant feminist literature on militarism. Yuval-Davis' seminal study of the relationship between gender and nationalism draws extensively on her analysis of Israel, especially in discussing the gendered nature of militaries and warfare (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 93–115, see also 1985). Likewise, Sasson-Levy's work on the Israeli military has shown how, for male Israeli soldiers, participation in the IDF becomes attached to an individual project of achieving a masculine gender identity (Sasson-Levy, 2008). This also has serious implications for women soldiers, who must modify their bodily and discursive practice to fit in with the IDF's masculinised gender regime and who are frequently subject to harassment and exclusion (Sasson-Levy, 2003, 2007). Sasson-Levy's work shows how the prevailing normative framework of the IDF – and militaries in general – remains a masculine one, in which a certain construction of maleness becomes the privileged ideal, notwithstanding the increasing involvement of women. Indeed, as Elshtain's study of military ethics anticipates, the subject at the heart of the ethics of Israeli militarism is a masculinised one, even if the participation of women is often central to its production.⁵ Building on these feminist insights, I argue that this sensitivity to processes of subject formation in militarism needs to be extended to incorporate wider practices of subjectivation, not least ethical self-

⁵ This bias was unfortunately also reflected in the research for this thesis, in which the vast majority of my respondents were men. As a result, although I have remained attentive to the gendered dynamics of this discourse, I have been unable to properly examine the implications of these findings for women's militarism. In conscious recognition of this, I have adopted masculine pronouns throughout when referring to the ethical subject of Israeli militarism.

fashioning, in producing this gendered militarist subject. It is to the theoretical basis for such an investigation that I now turn.

Militarism, ethics, and subject formation

Defining ethics

How can ethics be a militarist practice? Ethics and war are often intuitively imagined as a kind of antagonistic pair, in which greater emphasis on one necessarily comes at the expense of the other. Ethics is therefore commonly conceived as a possible effective limit on war which might constrain its occurrence and excesses. However, this relationship is far from automatic. Rather, it is an assumption based on a certain simplistic understanding of ethics as an active set of norms, norms which are often imagined as pacifistic or non-violent. Before being able to account for the links between ethics and militarism, therefore, a clearer concept of ethics is needed which is grounded in relevant social theory.

Ethics is often equated with morality, but this is a matter of some controversy. Acknowledging these disagreements, many scholars either opt to leave this question open or decide that their interchangeable usage prevents any consistent distinction between them (for the former approach, see Fassin, 2012: 5–6; for the latter, Hutchings, 2010: 7–8). In this thesis, however, I adopt the position that ethics and morality are at least *analytically* separable. In this, I am following the theoretical innovations made in the anthropology of ethics, where this distinction is central (Fassin, 2012: 6–7; Faubion, 2012a; Laidlaw, 2013: esp. 110–119). For the purposes of what follows, morality is the domain concerned with determining and achieving the good. Ethics, by contrast, is a set of practices carried out by the self on the self which are aimed at enabling the subject to behave effectively in a certain way. Put more succinctly, ethics is a practice of subject formation.

The theorist who has done the most to explicate this point is Michel Foucault, whose later work on ethics emphasises practices of subjectivation over the moral content of a normative system or the actual moral behaviour of individuals (Foucault, 1998b: 1–32, 2000a; for overviews, see Faubion, 2012b; Laidlaw, 2013: 92–137). In his study of ancient sexuality, for example, Foucault's focus is not on the set of normative prohibitions which operated in Greek or Roman society or on how far these

were observed. Rather, he draws attention to the ways in which subjects attempted to cultivate themselves as sexual beings through careful regimens of diet, exercise, and study. Likewise, many anthropological studies have used this Foucauldian approach to study the formation of subjects, and especially pious subjects, through ethical practice (Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind, 2006; Faubion, 2012a).

In practice, of course, there may be considerable overlap between ethics and morality. Deciding on a moral good and implementing it in practice will necessitate ethical work. Likewise, ethics commonly includes reference to some version of morality. However, ethics can also be directed to non-moral goals (such as professional excellence, self-enhancement, or political objectives) (Hutchings, 2010: 5–6). Indeed, there is no *a priori* reason why the *telos* of ethical practice cannot be preparation for participation in war. It is perfectly possible to imagine a set of ethical practices which would be aimed at producing, not a sexual subject, or a pious subject, but a soldier-subject. It is at this point that ethics might converge with a militarist project. It is therefore analytically important for this thesis to insist on the possible distinction of ethics from morality. This is not because in the case of Israeli militarism one finds them separately. Rather, it is because it is only as part of a set of wider ethical practices designed to produce soldier-subjects that the importance of the invocation of morality can be properly appreciated. This wider process of subjectivation holds the key to a critical understanding of its militaristic effects.

Thus far, the importance of this insight has largely been ignored in scholarship on the role of military ethics, much of which is primarily aimed at (and often written by) practitioners and policymakers. In this literature, military ethics is conceived of as central to military training and the professional development of soldiers, helping to improve discipline, compliance, and effectiveness (Robinson et al., 2008; Wertheimer, 2008; Carrick et al., 2009). In addition, however, scholars have also argued that military ethics education can make an extra “moral” contribution beyond this. Distinguishing between “functional” and “aspirational” approaches, Wolfendale argues that the latter model also prioritises the development of soldiers’ autonomous “moral character” as “virtuous people” (Wolfendale, 2008: 161; see also Challans, 2007; Carrick, 2008: 188; Berghaus and Cartagena, 2014). However, this

distinction assumes that the only “functional” contribution ethics makes is in ensuring “correct behaviour” (Wolfendale, 2008: 165). In fact, military ethics can also make significant ideological and motivational contributions beyond this. The “functional” contribution of ethics is therefore not simply an aspect of military governance narrowly defined as compliance building, but also a facet of a broader regime of *governmentality* in which the production of a sense of “moral character” is crucial to the formation of soldier-subjects. To grasp this, morality must be understood as embedded in a wider regime of ethical subjectivation, and ethics must be understood as an aspect not just of the military profession, but of *militarism* as well.

Ethics as a feature of militarist governmentality

Foucault describes governmentality as an exercise in “the conduct of conduct”, whereby the production of subjects through a close management of individual behaviour becomes the decisive intervention in the exercise of power (Foucault, 2008a: 87–114, 2002b). Ethics, in which subjects take it upon themselves to direct their own conduct through self-cultivation, therefore has great significance in the functioning of these relations of power (Foucault, 2000d). Foucault makes this quite clear in his lectures on “The Hermeneutics of the Subject”:

“...if we take the question of power, of political power, situating it in the more general question of governmentality understood as a strategic field of power relations in their mobility, transformability, and reversibility, then I do not think that reflection on this notion of governmentality can avoid passing through, theoretically and practically, the element of a subject defined by the relationship of self to self... [P]ower relations, governmentality, the government of self and of others, and the relationship of self to self constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics.” (2005: 251–252)

However, this connection between ethics and governmentality has generally been overlooked in Foucauldian studies of contemporary liberal militarism. Scholars have instead tended to interpret militarism as a form of biopolitics, in which the imperative to “make life live” is guaranteed by the

use of violence to eliminate threats to the population (Foucault, 1998a, 2004; Reid, 2006; Dillon and Neal, 2008; Morton and Bygrave, 2008; Reid and Dillon, 2009; Evans, 2010; Basham, 2013: 4–8). This has been combined with an emphasis on the role of disciplinary techniques and embodied practice in the shaping of soldiers as agents of this biopolitical project (Basham, 2013; Higate, 2012; McSorley, 2013). Militaries are accordingly understood as disciplinary structures *par excellence* whose function is to produce “docile bodies” capable of exercising violence on behalf of the state. Through careful training and socialisation, processes of surveillance, instruction, repetition, and drills, these soldier-bodies become the object of an intense “anatamo-politics” in which movements, sensibilities, and emotions are carefully controlled. Such processes also acquire powerful gendered, racial, and class dimensions which layer identities with military significance (Basham, 2013; see above for examples from the Israeli context).

The important contribution of this work notwithstanding, it is also necessary to combine this biopolitical and anatamo-political perspective on militarism with a focus on the role of ethical conduct. Studies of governmentality in other domains have begun to indicate the ways in which this might be happening. They have observed that, especially in neoliberal forms of government, individuals are increasingly made “subjects of their lives” (Burchell, 1995: 29–30) through the promotion of value systems and a culture of freedom in which they are made responsible for conducting themselves (Burchell, 1995; Rose, 1995, 1999; Foucault, 2008b; Dean, 2010: 19–21, 26–27). This greater margin for freedom in the conduct of individuals has increased the prominence of ethics as a component of liberal modes of government. It is my argument that militaries have not been exempt from these trends, least of all the IDF. Understanding Israeli militarism as a form of (neoliberal) governmentality therefore requires attention to these micro-practices of ethics as well as to interventions at the level of populations or bodies. What is needed is an examination of the relationship between ethics as a “technology of the self” (Foucault, 2000c) and militarism as a “political technology of individuals” (Foucault, 2002a).

Closer examination of Foucault’s later lectures at the Collège de France gives an indication of the kinds of ethical practices which such an analysis would explore, and it is worth surveying some of

them here as a basis for the investigations I conduct in later chapters. In “Security, Territory, Population” Foucault traces the genesis of modern forms of governmentality in the Christian pastorate. He repeatedly emphasises that the “individualising power” of the pastorate founds the modern Western subject. Indeed, he argues that the pastorate acted as

“a prelude to governmentality through the constitution of a specific subject, of a subject whose merits are analytically identified, who is subjected in continuous networks of obedience, and who is subjectified through the compulsory extraction of truth” (2008a: 185)

We can recognise here the form of subjectivity which Foucault first outlined in volume I of the *History of Sexuality*, where he describes the modern Western subject as the product of an “incitement to discourse” about one’s conduct, of the exhaustive expression of inner truths (Foucault, 1998a: 17–36, 2014).

Foucault specifically identifies the form of governmentality operating in modern militaries as a descendent of the pastorate. He argues that over time the nature of the military had changed such that

“[...] waging war became not just a profession or even a general law, but an ethic and the behaviour of every good citizen of a country; [...] being a soldier was a form of political and moral conduct, a sacrifice, and devotion to the common cause and common salvation directed by a public conscience and public authority within the framework of a tight discipline; [...] being a soldier was no longer just a destiny or a profession but a form of conduct.” (2008a: 198)

Following Foucault, we might expect military ethics to provide an opportunity for the accentuation of these pastoral functions of the military. Soldiers would be required not only to renounce their wills in pursuit of proper military conduct, but also to berate themselves for their moral failures in war. The pastoral “incitement to discourse” would invite soldiers’ confessions, and ask them to locate and judge the truth of themselves in their military-ethical performance. Indeed, one could argue that the “shooting and crying” genre of soldiers’ testimony in Israel has performed precisely such a role. There is some truth to this interpretation; indeed, as I explain in the section on methodology below,

this was the hypothesis I originally pursued in this research. However, what my findings show is that this analysis of the “shooting and crying” genre does not easily extend to most practices of Israeli military ethics, nor even to most instances of soldiers’ testimony. Instead, understanding the role of ethics in militarist governmentality requires a broader analysis of the ethical practices at work, incorporating a wider range of Foucault’s insights and modifying some of his assumptions about the relationship between ethics and power. Crucially, this means appreciating that militarism should not simply be understood as a form of pastoral power, and that non-pastoral modes of ethics can also contribute to militarism, rather than necessarily challenging it.

Foucault’s later investigations into the history of ethical practices led him to discern patterns of ethical behaviour which did not conform to the pastoral model. In particular, his study of classical Greek and Roman, and especially Stoic, ethics led him to argue that not all ethical systems were premised on the analysis of the inner truth of the subject’s conduct. Foucault observed that the famous Greek dictum to “know yourself” (*gnonai seauton*) was always inextricably bound up with the importance of the “care of the self” (*epimeleia heautou*) (2005: 31–78). This mode of ethics was therefore concerned with how the subject is constituted in relation to external truths through practices of self-care. The ethical question posed by the Stoics was not just “what have I done?” but, moreover, “how can I care for myself such that I am able to know the truth and act accordingly?”

Especially in his lectures on “The Hermeneutics of the Subject”, Foucault reconstructs in great detail the techniques of self-care prescribed by Stoic ethicists such as Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius (2005: esp. 315–487). He discusses their methods of listening, reading, writing, and speaking, and their methods for testing and examining themselves, all of which are forms of *askesis*, or asceticism. Foucault contrasts this form of asceticism with the traditional picture of Christian self-abnegation and self-renunciation that Nietzsche had most famously criticised. Instead, Foucault suggests that Stoic asceticism was characterised by the pursuit of self-enhancement through the exercise of the self on the self. The aim of this ethical work of *askesis* is to provide the individual not with a set of commands which must be obeyed but instead with the Stoic practice that Foucault identifies as *paraskeue*. *Paraskeue* is a repertoire of practices which will enable the subject to recall a

truth (taking the form of *logoi*, or discourses) and to attain the resolve to act upon it appropriately, no matter what the adversity faced, in moments of ethical deliberation (2005: 320–321).

Aside from practices of exercise and preparation, *askesis* also appears in Foucault's late work as a form of truth-telling, "truth-telling addressed to the subject and also truth-telling that the subject addresses to himself – to be constituted as the subject's way of being" (2005: 327). It should be apparent that, for Foucault, this is very distinct from his conception of the Christian confession. The important truths to be told are not primarily *about* the subject, they are *directed to* the subject in order to help bring about a transformation. Significantly, this does not preclude recounting one's past actions and experiences, which remains an important aspect of an ascetic regime. However, this self-examination is undertaken not in order to discern an inner truth but in order to assess one's progress towards desired goals or to consider how one might have acted differently.

Occasionally, this process of self-examination will require a degree of frankness, candour, and even courage. At this point, Foucault notes the importance the Stoics attached to *parrhesia*, the practice of frankly or courageously speaking the truth to others. This is often interpreted as a practice of "speaking truth to power" – and indeed there are several points at which Foucault explicitly analyses it as such, especially in his final lectures (2010, 2012). However, it is important to note that Foucault identifies *parrhesia* as a pedagogical as well as a political technique. *Parrhesia* usually aims at bringing about a moral improvement or transformation in the subject. This can take the form of giving advice or instruction, drawing others' attention to the truth, but it can also be undertaken by someone who discloses their own past actions or experiences. This can be with the aim of inviting pedagogical commentary from an authority, and thus improving oneself, or with the aim of encouraging others to draw lessons from one's own experience (Foucault, 2005: 362–411, 2010: 43–45, 139, 154, 334–335, 345–346, 357–374). *Parrhesia* is therefore a part of the wide range of activities encompassed by the "government of self and others", meaning that its public and political salience can vary. It can involve the more intimate practice of what Foucault calls "psychagogy" (2012: 73–153), the improvement of the soul through practices of care, or it can comprise a more explicit challenge to public authority.

As I will demonstrate in later chapters, this conceptual framework of self-care and asceticism is particularly important for understanding the significance of ethical practice, and especially soldiers' testimony, for the functioning of Israeli militarism as a mode of governmentality. This may appear a surprising claim, particularly since Foucault appears at several points to suggest that asceticism would be effective in frustrating structures of obedience such as the modern military:

“There is, I think, a profound difference between the structures of obedience and asceticism [...] Asceticism is a sort of exasperated and reversed obedience that has become egoistic self-mastery. Let's say that in asceticism there is a specific excess that denies access to an external power.” (2008a: 207–208)

In these and other remarks (e.g. 2000d, 2005: 251–252) Foucault often appears to identify the ascetic care of the self as a possible mode of resistance to political power (Dean, 2010: 47), making its contribution to a regime of military governmentality seem unlikely. However, the possible role of asceticism in militarism makes more sense when its emphasis on constant self-improvement is considered. As Nancy Sherman (2007) has argued, Stoic ideas can provide powerful motivational tools for soldiers in this respect.

Moreover, in the Israeli case there are several specific conditions underpinning the importance of asceticism. The first is the historical legacy and cultural significance of many of these practices. One can trace the origins of a culture of asceticism in the IDF back to the pre-state *Palmaḥ* militia (Almog, 2000: 209–225). Likewise, Sasson-Levy has identified the importance of a sense of “self-control”, including emotional restraint and bodily discipline, to the construction of a masculine military identity among IDF soldiers. Insofar as testimony is concerned, the cultural standing of the (male) IDF soldier as an outspoken moral critic is also significant here. Katriel and Shavit have observed the affinities between *parrhesia* and the Israeli proclivity for “straight-talking” known as speaking *dugri*, along with its militarist significance⁶:

⁶ It is also significant that *parrhesia* has been adopted as Hebrew word, meaning “in public”.

“In the Greek polis, fearless speech was reserved for men-citizens of proper class who could profess personal, moral and social qualities that grounded their assertive stance and legitimated their public critique. In Israeli culture, somewhat similarly, speaking *dugri* has been associated with the idealised and highly gendered image of the Israeli-born Jew, the Sabra, which became the hallmark of the new Jewish-Zionist (masculinist) identity during the Israeli nation-building era, and later with Israel’s militarist ethos and the soldierly role.” (Shavit and Katriel, 2013: 93; see also Katriel, 1986)

A second condition underpinning the significance of asceticism is the impact of neoliberalism on the organisational culture of the Israeli military. As discussed above, and as Foucault himself observed, in neoliberal modes of governance the importance of individual freedom and practices of self-cultivation is accentuated. Indeed, as Hamann suggests, there is a possible tension in Foucault’s project here in that “[his] emphasis on the care of the self and aesthetics of existence in his later works lends itself quite nicely to neoliberalism’s aim of producing free and autonomous individuals concerned with cultivating themselves in accord with various practices of the self” (2009: 48).

Finally, a third condition encouraging the role of asceticism in Israel’s military ethical practice is its increasingly violent pursuit of counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgency requires new strategies of military governance in which obedient command structures must be supplemented by the initiative and decisions of soldiers. In addition, counterinsurgency poses significant motivational challenges for militaries because of the difficulties associated with violent encounters with a civilian population. As I discuss in chapters 1 and 2, asceticism has been an important facet of the way in which the IDF has sought to cultivate soldiers as responsible subjects who can withstand the motivational attrition involved in such operations.

There are therefore several reasons why Foucault’s understanding of the care of the self provides a compelling diagram for many of the ethical practices of self-cultivation at work in Israeli militarism. However, contrary to some of Foucault’s own suggestions, it is also clear these ascetic practices are complementary to, rather than disruptive of, the structures of obedience characteristic of modern

militaries. While understanding militarism as governmentality certainly elucidates the role of ethics in the formation of the Israeli soldier-subject, a purely Foucauldian framework has difficulty in fully accounting for the co-existence of asceticism and contemporary militarism. Such a co-existence exposes tensions in Foucault's critique of neoliberalism and challenges his suggestion that ascetic ethics form the basis of resistance to structures of power. Although these tensions may not necessarily be irreconcilable, I have also found it productive to complement a Foucauldian approach with a focus on militarism as ideology. Foucault was famously resistant to the term ideology, which he tended to associate with a vulgar Marxist account of base/superstructure relations in which ideology is effectively a kind of misperception (Vighi and Feldner, 2007: 142–145). However, as I will now explain, insights from the psychoanalytic critique of ideology can elucidate the processes of ethical subject formation at work in Israeli militarism. Most significantly they can also help explain how an ethical culture of self-care might arise within deeply embedded structures of military discipline and violence.

Psychoanalysis, ideology, and militarism as unconscious

Psychoanalysis starts from the premise that human motivation cannot be explained purely with reference to the conscious thought of the actors involved. Instead, it emphasises the importance of unconscious desires and drives. In the Lacanian variation of psychoanalysis (the version which by and large I will use in this thesis) the unconscious is structured like a language: its desires are inscribed in linguistic associations which have been derived from a socially given Symbolic order.⁷ The situation of the (speaking) subject in this Symbolic order is therefore the crucial point of departure for Lacanian psychoanalysis (Lacan, 2007a: 197–268). Distinct from the specular realm of the Imaginary (in which we picture our ego in a visual way), the Symbolic realm is the social world of language (Lacan, 2007a: 75–81, 543–575; see also Chiesa, 2007: 13–102). Lacan's early teaching shows how the Symbolic is always in a position of excess over what it describes: the language we inherit determines what we say and what can be said about the world (Lacan, 2007a: 6–48, 412–444; see also Fink, 1996: 3–34).

⁷ In keeping with Lacanian convention, I will capitalise the terms Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real in this thesis when invoking their technical psychoanalytic meaning.

This is more than a naïve linguistic determinist or social constructivist point, however. For Lacan, this fact also tells us something about the *desire* of the speaking subject. The Symbolic is the language in which we *must* articulate our desires to other people from an early age. Because this language is not *our* language, we are necessarily alienated in using it and must compromise in some sense on our desires (Lacan, 2004: 203–215). In Lacan’s enigmatic terms: “all desire is the desire of the Other”, by which he means (in one sense) that the Symbolic guides us in what to desire. In simple terms, this alienation leaves a gap between our original desire and that offered to us by the Symbolic (Lacan, 2004: 203–213; Fink, 1996: 49–68). This is a gap which cannot be fully covered and it is this excess which Lacan terms “the Real”. Because the Real expresses something about our desire which can never be made actual in the social world, Lacan teasingly refers to the Real as “impossible”, as always-already barred from our experience. In his later teaching, he focuses more and more on the crucial question of the tension generated by this impossible Real.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this tension arises from the inconsistent nature of the Symbolic, its inability to provide a consistent answer as to what it wants from us. It stands to reason that if *everybody* is alienated in the Symbolic, then there is no constant, reliable articulation to which it can be reduced: “there is no Big Other”, Lacan says. This shows how a transition can occur from *alienation* to *separation*, the latter describing a situation of *anxiety* about what the Other wants from us (Lacan, 2004: 213–215). Lacan sums this up in the anxious question “*Che vuoi?*” – what do you want? (Lacan, 2007a: 690). Not only, therefore, do we make a radical compromise on our desires by entering into the Symbolic realm: we also will never be able to satisfy our desire *even in these compromised terms*.

It is this situation – this subjective predicament – that can tell us something new about ideology. It is the contribution of Slavoj Žižek to have shown how ideological formations take advantage of such a predicament and how we can become trapped by our own desires in an ideological snare (Žižek,

2008a, 2008b).⁸ For Žižek, the Symbolic can take the form of social norms that keep the political *status quo* in place. From this perspective, we can understand nationalism, religion, sets of beliefs, and various other political discourses as Symbolic frameworks through which we attempt to articulate our desires. These discourses often provide a “master signifier” (e.g. the nation, the sovereign, “communism”) that structures other instances of signification and around which other signifiers coalesce (Žižek, 2008b: 111–122). In this, Žižek is not far from other forms of discourse analysis in which such languages become widely shared and powerful forms of social mediation that shape acceptable modes of thinking. However, as a Lacanian, Žižek also insists that the Symbolic realm always fails to cover an excess produced by the desiring subject. Ideological formations cannot purely survive on the basis of their Symbolic instantiation. They must necessarily engage the Real of our desires and attempt to grapple with this un-Symbolised excess (Žižek, 2008b: 122–144).

This may sound like a weakness in ideological formations (and ultimately we might hope that it could form the basis of one). However, Žižek has shown that in fact it is in this respect that ideology is so powerful. Once it begins to manage and discipline our engagement with the Real ideology can disguise the gap in the Symbolic and harness “the hidden kernel of enjoyment” to its purposes (Žižek, 2008b: 144). Fantasy plays a crucial role in these ideological manipulations of the Real. Since the Symbolic cannot fully symbolise the desires of the subject, fantasy intervenes to smooth over the anxiety prompted by the encounter with its inconsistencies and incompleteness. The mechanism of fantasy makes the satisfaction of desires seem plausible by presenting desires which cannot be fully rendered Symbolically (cf. Kapoor, 2014: 1133–1135).

Understanding this mechanism means making a crucial Lacanian distinction between the (always-already lost) object of desire and the object *cause* of desire. Lacan calls the object cause of desire the *objet a*, something which provokes feelings of desire in the subject without fully presenting an object for this desire (Lacan, 2004: 263–276; Fink, 1996: 59–61). The *objet a* functions as a lure – it is not what you want, but it makes you feel that you are being led in that direction. This is a fundamental

⁸ Other important work linking Althusser’s theory of ideology and the Lacanian theory of the subject was carried out by the scholars of the *Cahiers Pour L’Analyse* project (see especially Alain-Miller, 2012; for useful overviews see Hallward, 2012; Bosteels, 2011: esp. 45–76).

property of the *objet a* and a fundamental facet of fantasy: the closer one gets to it, the further away it seems; the more one attempts to explain it away, the stronger the desire appears to return. It therefore simulates the experience of desire without ever providing its object; Lacan calls this “surplus enjoyment” or *jouissance*. Fantasy is therefore an essential part of how an ideological process obscures the inconsistencies of the Symbolic order and makes participation in it enjoyable (Žižek, 2008a: 1–54).

This excursus into psychoanalytic theory is important for grounding the argument made in subsequent chapters. The claim of this thesis, already outlined above, is that Israeli militarism takes the form of an ideology: it conditions subjects to desire war and military participation. Furthermore, this thesis argues that ethics has a crucial role to play in sustaining this ideology. Although these ideological contributions are manifold, they could be summarised under two broad headings. Firstly, Israeli military ethics produces a Symbolic order in which certain key values and discourses associated with war-fighting and military activity are presented as the expression of the soldier’s desire. The task of ethical pedagogy, as I will show in later chapters, is partially to make soldiers *want* to implement the proclaimed values of Israeli militarism, and thus to embed them in the unconscious. Secondly, ethics helps to sustain a set of unconscious fantasies which cover over the inconsistencies of this Symbolic order when it is confronted with the Real of the colonial violence of occupation. It provides an array of techniques and activities for the soldier-subject to carry out which generate surplus enjoyment and which distract from the fundamental, structural, and constitutive impossibility of ideas such as “purity of arms” or “moral occupation”. As later chapters in particular show, these ideological elements of the ethics of Israeli militarism do not go unchallenged. However, as I shall also argue, what makes these elements so strong, and their effects so enduring, is that they are *unconscious* and therefore extremely difficult to dislodge.

Research methodology

Most of the data presented in this thesis comes from interviews and participant observation, combined with discourse analysis of additional primary written material. The methodology is therefore qualitative and interpretive. In this section, I explain how I came to undertake this research and the

approach I used while conducting fieldwork. I have narrated my research methodology in this way in order to explain how the project emerged over time in response to my findings. As Kapiszewski, Maclean, and Read have argued, “iteration (the updating of elements of research design as information acquired in the field is analysed) is critically important to the way in which field research contributes to the generation of political knowledge and development of theory” (2015: 18). My research is the product of an iterative process which began from an interest in soldiers’ testimony, rather than pre-conceived and comprehensive survey of Israeli military ethics. That it ended up producing an analysis of the overall contribution of ethics, including doctrine and pedagogy, to Israeli militarism is a product of findings and connections made in the field, rather than a hypothesis generated in the abstract.

The idea for this thesis originally came from an interest in the phenomenon of soldiers’ testimony in Israel, and especially in the organisation Breaking the Silence. I had first encountered this group in 2009, shortly before they released their booklet of testimonies about Operation Cast Lead, when I went to see a lecture by their co-founder, Yehuda Shaul, in Jerusalem. Like many who encounter their work, I was initially very impressed with what I saw. I took my interest in the organisation further by choosing to write an MPhil dissertation about the group. It was only while reading their testimonies alongside the literature on Israeli militarism that my views became more circumspect and the germ of this thesis developed. I noted very strong continuities between the tropes of Israeli militarism and the language of the testimonies I was reading. I observed that the testimonies preserved, and were perhaps even trying to rescue, the classic themes of Israeli militarism as an expression of Jewish, Israeli, and masculine identity. Combined with my growing interest in the work of Michel Foucault, and particularly his *History of Sexuality* project, I began to formulate an argument about soldiers’ testimony as an incitement to discourse – a form of confession aimed at rehabilitating militarist identities. I was essentially working to produce a theoretically sophisticated version of the “shooting and crying” critique.

From the vantage point of having written this thesis, I now realise that this earlier argument was an over-simplification and is in many ways unfair to the organisation (even if it retains some kernel of

truth). Nevertheless, at the time I was driven to pursue the hypothesis further, particularly because I noticed that *Breaking the Silence* were not an isolated example. As I have indicated, their work is part of a long-standing history of soldiers' testimony in Israel (much of which, as I argue later, was equally concerned with the problem of "silence"). I sought to substantiate my theory about the connection between testimony and militarism with reference firstly to this longer history, but also by placing it in social and institutional context. I wanted to know what had generated this practice and to analyse the wider functions it performed for Israeli militarism.

While developing the research methodology for this thesis, I was driven by my continued interest in Foucault's ethical theory. As explained above, Foucault's analysis of the speaking subject was only one part of his wider interest in how subjects are constituted through practices of ethics. For me, this was highly suggestive: it meant that understanding the wider context for soldiers' testimony in Israel would also necessitate an interest in ethical subject formation. My awareness of the discourse of the IDF as "the most moral army in the world" only strengthened this intuition. At that time, my analysis was still guided by the impression that soldiers' testimony functioned primarily as a form of confession. My expectation was that my fieldwork would yield evidence suggesting that Israeli militarism functioned as something like a pastoral mode of power, fixing the subjectivity of soldiers in relations of power through the compulsory extraction of the truth of their experience. I therefore decided to pursue a research methodology which would help to explore the connections between the practice of giving testimony and the institutional forms of (what I imagined to be) a pastoral apparatus of governmentality.

This precipitated a reasonably coherent plan for my fieldwork in Israel. First of all, I was interested in gathering evidence of as many different examples of soldiers' testimony as I could. Of course, soldiers' testimony is very often produced or recorded in written (or even video) form. A very simple part of the fieldwork would therefore be data collection involving looking for books, films, and other publications which would provide material for analysis. Secondly, though, I was interested in observing soldiers' testimony first hand to investigate the settings and affective environments in which it was produced. I expected that participant-observation at events such as tours and lectures

organised by Breaking the Silence would provide me with many opportunities for this. Thirdly, I was interested in interviewing those involved with producing and collecting soldiers' testimony to ascertain their motivations. In particular, I wanted to know whether their interactions with what might be considered pastoral institutions might have been formative of their intention to give testimony. I speculated that such institutions might include army education, welfare, trauma therapy, the legal system, or human rights NGOs, but I wanted to be guided by my interviewees. I then envisaged that a final part of the fieldwork would involve investigating how and why these institutions or practices have encouraged soldiers' testimony, most likely through further interviews with key informants.

The fieldwork, which lasted from October 2012 to May 2013, contained many surprises (not least of which was the occurrence of Operation Pillar of Defence in Gaza in November 2012). However, the model described above was, with adjustments, by and large the model I pursued. What changed significantly were the working hypothesis and the theoretical orientation underpinning it. In the early weeks of the fieldwork I took to attending as many events organised by Breaking the Silence as I could. I also used this as a way to meet different activists and arrange interviews. This part of the fieldwork included tours to Hebron (of which I eventually attended about a dozen), public lectures, visits to particular institutions, and special events. From very early on in the process, several of my key assumptions were being challenged. The activists I encountered did not correspond to the idea I had of what testifiers would be like. Most of them considered themselves to have very strong political motivations for what they were doing, and many were hostile to the suggestion that their decision to give testimony arose from feelings of guilt. Furthermore, interviews with testifiers did not yield clear suggestions as to what kind of pastoral institutions I should look to analyse.

However, the fieldwork also yielded a few unexpected early insights which were to prove fundamental to the development of my argument. The key element was my discovery of the relationship between Breaking the Silence and what are called pre-military academies [*mekhinot kdam-tzva'iyot*]. These academies offer a year of voluntary informal education to high-school graduates before enlistment to the IDF. Breaking the Silence offer lectures and tours to a large number of these academies, which means that quite a common feature of their curricula is exposure to soldiers'

testimony. After watching one such lecture at an academy, I became very interested in these institutions and found that, back in 2009, one of them had been embroiled in a controversy for organising an event featuring testimony from its graduates who had served in Gaza. Interviews and further fieldwork at several of these academies led me to discern a strong role for soldiers' testimony in their ethical pedagogy.

The observation of this link became a crucial guiding discovery for the rest of my fieldwork. I soon became intensely interested in how wider practices of ethics in the IDF both encouraged but also made use of the practice of soldiers' testimony. In hindsight, this realisation dawned agonisingly slowly. Indeed, I probably did not grapple with its implications fully until one evening when, after I had introduced my work to a group of pre-military academy students, their teacher commented that I was clearly also interested in *education*, even though I had not mentioned it in my summary of the research. Over time, I gradually became aware that ethics education at pre-military academies was contiguous with a wider set of pedagogical strategies and approaches being deployed in the IDF itself, which prompted my interest in the IDF ethical code and the ways in which it is taught to soldiers. I therefore expanded my pool of potential interviewees to philosophers, educators, and military personnel who had been involved with IDF military ethical pedagogy.

The more of these interviews I conducted, the more I realised that it is impossible to understand the doctrines and teaching of Israeli military ethics without reference to soldiers' testimony, and likewise impossible to understand soldiers' testimony in Israel without reference to the doctrines and teaching of military ethics. Moreover, in these interviews I also began to encounter modes of giving testimony which did not match my model of confession and pastoral power at all: the educators I spoke with eschewed this understanding of what testimony was for, and several of them even criticised *Breaking the Silence* for indulging in this practice. At the same time, as my interviews with activists continued, I was beginning to rewrite my account of the work of *Breaking the Silence*. I increasingly viewed it as a more complicated phenomenon than the straightforward label of confession with which they are often maligned would suggest. However, I also began to notice other ways in which the work of the organisation had become implicated in the ethics of Israeli militarism.

By the end of the fieldwork, therefore, I had made the crucial analytic connection between testimony and wider ethical practices which I had sought to make in my original research plan; but I had not made it in quite the way I had envisaged. I had found it through observation and encounter, rather than interviews with testifiers, and I had observed it unfolding as an on-going tension between pedagogy and activism rather than in any sequential relationship between the two. Moreover, I had been forced in the process to re-evaluate several assumptions about the nature of the mode of ethics I was studying. Responses from testifiers in interviews, as well as indications from educators at academies and in the IDF, suggested that the pastoral model was not at all appropriate for understanding the role of ethics in Israeli militarism. In fact, and somewhat disquietingly for someone who had begun the project from a Foucauldian premise, the mode of ethics conformed much more closely to an ethics of the care of the self. This discovery revealed to me the inadequacy of interpreting militarism purely as a form of governmentality, and led me to embrace the additional theoretical explanations drawn from psychoanalysis and the critique of ideology I have outlined above. The result was not only a more sophisticated understanding of how militarism works, both in Israel and in general, but also an appreciation of the shortcomings of certain ethical approaches as a means of resisting militarism.

Chapter outline

It remains to outline the contents of the five substantive chapters which follow. In the first chapter I examine the doctrinal and philosophical architecture underpinning Israeli military ethics. The analysis centres on the process by which the ethical code of the IDF was drafted in the 1990s and early 2000s and on the formulation and interpretation of the key value of “purity of arms”. It is based on interviews with philosophers and military figures who were involved in the process of writing the code, as well as on articles by these individuals which address key debates in military ethics in Israel. The argument made in the chapter is that the “Spirit of the IDF” (as the ethical code is commonly known) is a document which has articulated different versions of what kind of ethical subject the Israeli soldier should be. It charts a shift from a discourse of “professionalisation” in the first version of the document to an approach in the revised code which placed greater emphasis on the judgement

of the individual soldier but which also made a greater attempt to shape soldiers' moral character and Jewish-Israeli identity. This shift is analysed in terms of the wider trends in the organisational culture and educational approach of the IDF. Its implications for recent philosophical debates about Israel's successive assaults on the Gaza Strip are also assessed. The chapter also begins to trace the emerging role of soldiers' testimony in military ethical pedagogy and in debates about the morality of warfare in Israel. Overall, the chapter argues that IDF ethical doctrine aims to strengthen biopolitical militarism through a neoliberal emphasis on the cultivation of the soldier as a free individual and ethical subject.

The second chapter moves on to discuss ethical pedagogy in the IDF. It analyses the ways in which Israeli officers and soldiers are encouraged to relate to the values expressed in the ethical code. The analysis is primarily based on interviews with academics, educators, and military figures involved in education in the IDF. I examine the pedagogical approach in ethics classes and courses arranged for senior IDF officers, as well as the use of more innovative techniques such as theatre-based education with regular soldiers. Throughout the chapter I stress that ethical education in the IDF is concerned with shaping soldiers as ethical subjects, particularly through ascetic practices of self-examination and above all through testimony solicited from soldiers themselves about their military experiences. I also analyse the ideological function of ethical pedagogy in the IDF and its role as an integral element of counterinsurgency warfare.

The third chapter is also concerned with ethical pedagogy but focuses on a different site of educational intervention. It examines the work of Israeli pre-military academies in shaping soldiers as ethical subjects. I make the argument that, contrary to existing literature which portrays these academies as primarily a religious phenomenon, a far more productive approach to understanding their work is as institutions which are concerned with the moral and ethical development of their students. This approach has the benefit of taking a holistic view of both religious and secular pre-military academies, and not over-emphasising the division between them. It also highlights continuities between formal ethical education in the IDF and informal education at these academies, particularly insofar as the aim of both is the formation of soldiers as ethical subjects and insofar as the characteristic approach taken in both is a strong emphasis on testimony as a pedagogical technique.

The chapter is based on interviews with the staff of a range of academies in Israel, personal visits to a variety of academies, and on participant observation of classes held there.

The fourth and fifth chapters of the project then take the thesis in a different direction, but also back to where the research began. They are concerned with the work of Breaking the Silence, which I argue should be considered just as much a facet of the ethics of Israeli militarism as those elements considered in previous chapters. This is because, despite the latent political objectives of the organisation, its testimonies and campaign offer a critique of the occupation which is primarily articulated in a moral register. Moreover, the importance of testimony as the principal *modus operandi* of the organisation represents another sense in which military experience in Israel is registered through ethical practice. Indeed, I point out several intriguing continuities between the approach of Breaking the Silence and ethical pedagogy in the IDF and pre-military academies, which both rely heavily on soldiers' testimony. The chapters are based on discourse analysis of written testimonies, interviews with activists, and participant observation at lectures and tours organised by the organisation.

In the fourth chapter I devote attention to the process of gathering testimonies and reflect on the consequences of this for those who testify to Breaking the Silence. I assess the diverse motivations of those giving testimony and examine the effect the process has on their political trajectories. I also examine internal debates within the organisation about the purpose of the testimonies project, particularly the question of whether the aim of testimony should be to bring about a political transformation in the testifier. I show that, despite the often vigorous attempt to reduce the personal dimension of the testimony process, this element often comes to supersede the public information objectives of the project. Using psychoanalytic theory, I argue that the ethical practice of testifying to Breaking the Silence remains caught in an oscillation between affects of guilt and anxiety which has been bequeathed to the soldiers by the ethics of Israeli militarism. I acknowledge that this has occasionally produced important political and personal openings for the testifiers concerned.

However, my conclusion is that overall these ethical responses limit the political effectiveness of the testimony process.

In the fifth and final chapter I look at the educational and public campaigning activity of Breaking the Silence. I argue that the moral discourse employed by the organisation often ends up suppressing the more fundamental political questions it seeks to raise. In particular, I look at how its educational activity in pre-military academies (where they are very active) is often transformed from a political discussion into an opportunity for students at these academies to prepare themselves ethically for military service. As such, the chapter demonstrates not only how the ethics of Israeli militarism limits the effectiveness of political activism, but also how ethics is then able to make that activism useful for militarism. These two chapters therefore work together to demonstrate that the ethics of Israeli militarism constrains and appropriates forms of political contestation against military rule, even when ethical approaches are mobilised by ostensibly radical groups for political purposes.

Chapter 1: The Spirit of the IDF

Prologue

On 14th October 1994, delivering his speech in acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made the first public use of the IDF ethical code. Its principal author, Professor Asa Kasher, had provided Rabin's advisers with an extract of the document at their request several months before the text was finally approved.¹ Rabin spoke as follows:

“The history of the State of Israel, the annals of the Israel Defence Forces are filled with thousands of stories of soldiers who sacrificed themselves - who died while trying to save wounded comrades; who gave their lives to avoid causing harm to innocent people on the enemy's side.

In the coming days, a special Commission of the Israel Defence Forces will finish drafting a Code of Conduct for our soldiers. The formulation regarding human life will read as follows, and I quote:

‘In recognition of its supreme importance, the soldier will preserve human life in every way possible and endanger himself, or others, only to the extent deemed necessary to fulfil this mission.

The Sanctity of Life, in the view of the soldiers of the Israel Defence Forces, will find expression in all their actions; in considered and precise planning; in intelligent and safety-minded training and in judicious implementation, in accordance with their mission; in taking the professionally proper degree of risk and degree of caution; and in the constant effort to limit casualties to the scope required to achieve the objective.’

¹ Author interview with Asa Kasher.

For many years ahead - even if wars come to an end, after peace comes to our land - these words will remain a pillar of fire which goes before our camp, a guiding light for our people. And we take pride in that.” (Rabin, 1994)

This speech tells us something about the importance of the IDF ethical code for Israel’s self-presentation and self-perception. This is not simply evident in the choice of this particular value, “human life”. It is present in Rabin’s portrayal of the IDF as the avatar of the nation and, moreover, as the ethical subject which must absorb, practise, and be judged by such values. If Israel is to prove its dedication to the value of human life, this speech suggests, it is the IDF which must be shown to express them. Indeed, it is striking that, elsewhere in his speech, Rabin consistently makes use of *military* examples to support his claims and, paradoxically, to demonstrate his commitment to peace:

“As a military man, as a commander, I issued orders for dozens, probably hundreds of military operations. And together with the joy of victory and grief of bereavement, I shall always remember the moment just after making the decision to mount an action: the hush as senior officers or cabinet ministers slowly rise from their seats; the sight of their receding backs; the sound of the closing door; and then the silence in which I remain alone.

That is the moment you grasp that as a result of the decision just made, people will be going to their deaths. People from my nation, people from other nations. And they still don't know it...

As a former military man, I will also forever remember the silence of the moment before: the hush when the hands of the clock seem to be spinning forward, when time is running out and in another hour, another minute, the inferno will erupt.

In that moment of great tension just before the finger pulls the trigger, just before the fuse begins to burn; in the terrible quiet of that moment, there’s still time to wonder, alone: Is it really imperative to act? Is there no other choice? No other way?

And then the order is given, and the inferno begins.”

It should be made explicit, if it is not already obvious, that in these words *Rabin is testifying*. This is the same Yitzhak Rabin who, only a few years previously as Minister of Defence, had ordered that Israeli soldiers should *break the bones* of Palestinian demonstrators during the First Intifada (Peri, 1996a: 341, 354). Through his testimony, however, the impression we receive of his tenure as a General is rather different. This was the first of many moments I shall explore throughout this thesis when the IDF ethical code has occasioned soldiers' testimony and re-inscribed the past in this way. Through such moments of testimony recalling moral judgements, an interior space is carved out inside the soldier, the space of reflection, restraint, and decision. This is the space in which Rabin, "the military man", is left with his moral agony, and in which he must confront "the silence in which I remain alone". Indeed, says Rabin, "of all the memories I have stored up in my seventy-two years, what I shall remember most, to my last day, are the silences. The heavy silence of the moment after, and the terrifying silence of the moment before." It is this silent space which has formed Rabin as a subject and it is here, furthermore, that the ethical code he is announcing will do its work.

Introduction

Military ethical codes are often presented as mechanisms for restraining the violence of war. In the Israeli context, this has undoubtedly been a common argument. The IDF ethical code (also known as "The Spirit of the IDF", *Ruah Tsahal*) is a constant reference point in apologist accounts of Israeli state violence, both in the pronouncements of the IDF Spokesperson and in the wider media. The code is presented as evidence of moral military conduct and a commitment to reduce the level of casualties, especially civilian casualties. More critical observers have noticed the incongruence between the proclaimed values of the ethical code and, for example, the high number of civilian casualties in Israel's recent military assaults on Gaza. For some, this incongruence is demonstration that the ethical code of the IDF is ineffective and widely ignored, the implication being that greater enforcement and accountability are necessary (Sagi, 2011; see also Harel, 2009a).

Another set of critical observers see the code and its practical interpretations differently. They do not view enforcement as the main issue. Instead, they view the entire edifice as an exercise in the justification and legitimization of violence (Al-Khalidi, 2010; Chamayou, 2015: 127–134). No matter

how well enforced, they argue, the ethical code is designed so as to allow for the deployment of force in a way which suits Israeli military and political objectives. These arguments are closely aligned with the critique of the practice of state “lawfare”, whereby states develop legal arguments designed to vindicate the pursuit of war (Hajjar, 2006; Halper, 2010, 2014; Jones, forthcoming; Weizman, 2009, 2010, 2012: 99–138). These critics view the Israeli experience as an attempt to reconfigure the boundaries of international humanitarian law (IHL) to suit state and military interests. Accordingly, they also observe a convergence between ethics and law, or a “judicialisation” of ethics (Chouchane, 2009).

These critiques touch much more closely on the true function of the IDF ethical code than apologist accounts. Yet they miss an important dimension of Israeli military ethics, which is its role in the formation of soldier-subjects. Analysing the IDF ethical code requires an answer to the question: for whom was it written? Existing critiques make it clear that the code was certainly *not* written to save Palestinian lives – quite the contrary. What is less clear, however, is the intended *audience* for these elaborate doctrines. In the view of those drawing comparisons with “lawfare”, it appears to be some combination of the international community, foreign and domestic public opinion, and to a lesser extent the military itself (for whom these doctrines seem to be acting as a mere enabler). My view, however, is that the IDF ethical code was primarily written for soldiers and, more specifically, that it was written to cultivate them as ethical subjects.

My argument has some limited affinities with the account presented by Eyal Benvenisti and Amichai Cohen about the origins of IHL (2014). They argue that IHL was not developed for moral reasons to limit the violence of war but rather for pragmatic reasons to solve a governance problem in the military and political hierarchy. By establishing a universal standard for the evaluation of soldiers’ behaviour, IHL gave governments and senior military officers more effective tools for monitoring and restraining them. Likewise, in my view, the IDF ethical code is not the product of a benevolent moral attitude to Israel’s enemies but is instead a part of an ensemble of governing technologies designed to address a range of motivational, organisational, and ideological problems faced by the IDF. The solution to all of these problems has been to cultivate the Israeli soldier as an ethical subject.

As discussed in the introduction, militarism has often been understood by scholars as a form of biopower in which the imperative to “make life live” is guaranteed by the use of violence to eliminate threats to the population.² Writing about military ethics, scholars have often argued that more deliberative and personal modes of ethics do not suit this mode of biopolitical governmentality. Schwarz notes the tendency for biopolitics to produce a “codification” of ethics:

“When the socio-political mandate that informs the norm is centred on a calculable humanity and focused on the abstract idea of the survival of mankind, it is perhaps not surprising that contemporary theories about ethics, specifically in the context of war and just war theory, are turned into something calculable and predictable, framed as formulas or algorithms with which to determine ethical behaviour.” (Schwarz, 2013: 145)

This tendency is often associated with a growing role for machines in war-fighting, and in particular the rise to prominence of drone warfare (Schwarz, 2013: 185–208). In the case of the IDF ethical code, Anat Matar has further argued that its biopolitical tendencies are evident in the way that it assumes a perfect circularity between its values and the behaviour of soldiers (2006: esp. 4–11). She makes clear this codification is not a form of law but “superlaw”, a set of expectations without legal force but which work to homogenise ethical decisions and “conquer the individual” (2006: 9).

These observations are telling but they are also insufficient. For biopolitics does not always depend on a flattening of individual ethical behaviour. Regimes of military ethical governance also seek to engage the soldier as a subject, which requires them to cultivate and not diminish soldiers’ individual ethical faculties. In this sense, it is important to understand the principles behind the ethical code not only as biopolitical but also as *liberal*, in that they seek to promote and direct individual freedom. The prominence of ethics signifies that a biopolitical project of “making life live” has taken on a liberal character in making free subjects care for themselves. As Graham Burchell observes:

“Liberalism, particularly in its modern versions, constructs a relationship between government and the governed that increasingly depends upon ways in which individuals are

² See above, 32.

required to assume the status of *being the subjects of their lives*, upon the ways in which they fashion themselves as certain kinds of subjects, upon the ways in which they practice their freedom...” (Burchell, 1995: 29–30, emphasis added)

Moreover, as Foucault originally observed in “The Birth of Biopolitics”, and as scholars have elaborated since, insofar as governmental projects no longer simply assume the existence of such freedom but instead take active steps to promote it, they become progressively more *neoliberal* in character (Foucault, 2008b: esp. 51–74, 129–158; Rose, 1995; Dean, 2010: 43–44). It is of course true that this new reliance on the freedom of the individual soldier has the potential to cause instability. Burchell continues:

“...to the extent that practices of the self are what give concrete shape to the exercise of freedom, that is to say, are what give a concrete form to *ethics*, there opens up a new, uncertain, often critical and unstable domain of relationships between politics and ethics, between the government of others and practices of self.” (1995: 30, emphasis in original)

Indeed, the introduction of the ethical code did create challenges in managing the consequences of these new practices of freedom. However, this instability has been a source of dynamism rather than weakness. The cultivation of the Israeli soldier as an ethical subject did not merely “solve” once and for all the problems it originally sought to address. Rather, the problem of how to produce ethical soldiers has been continually posed and answered anew in different and often contradictory ways. This instability is in fact a product and facet of this governmental strategy: it is the means by which ethical disagreement, ethical crisis, and even ethical transgression are a made part of this ensemble of governing technologies and a marked feature of Israeli militarism.

In this chapter, I examine three successive moments in the production of IDF ethical doctrine and explain in each case how biopolitical militarism has drawn strength from a neoliberal emphasis on the cultivation of the soldier as a free individual and ethical subject. Firstly, I examine the process by which the IDF ethical code came about, showing how its origins, features and development were influenced by a neoliberal drive towards the professionalisation of the IDF in the 1990s and how the

basic principles of the first version of the code reproduce classically liberal and biopolitical assumptions. I argue that ethics was central to the way in which these trends and logics were manifested.

Secondly, I examine the process by which the code was redrafted in 2000-2001, locating the impetus for this in the instability produced by the emphasis on the freedom of the individual soldier. I argue that the nationalist and religious tenor of the drive to reform the code were only the surface appearance of an acceleration of the neoliberal tendencies inherent in the turn to ethical governance in the IDF. Moreover, I argue that, despite the augmented role the redrafted code gave for individual discretion, it was in many ways *more* demanding of the soldier than the initial version. In these first two sections, I also begin to explore the ways in which psychoanalysis can explain the ideological hold of the ethical code over soldier-subjects.

Thirdly, I examine the recent philosophical debates which have taken place in Israel about the value of “purity of arms”, particularly in the context of Israel’s successive assaults on the Gaza Strip since 2008. I argue that the biopolitical logic underpinning IDF ethical doctrine in this period also depends on a vision of the Israeli soldier as an ethical subject. Rather than any substantive or consequential disagreement about the value of preserving Palestinian lives, the major source of this philosophical debate has been differing interpretations of what *kind* of ethical subject the Israeli soldier should be. Although this chapter will only directly address the question of testimony towards the end, overall it will lay out the rudiments of the soldier-subjectivity which grounds the possibility of testimony as it is explored in later chapters. It will argue that the ethical code, and especially the changes made to it after 2001, opened up a space for testimony in ethical discussion and military ethical pedagogy.

Drafting the IDF ethical code

The first recommendation to produce an ethical code for the IDF was made in 1991 by Major General Ilan Biran after he returned to Israel from a year studying with the US Marine Corps.³ In a letter he sent to the then Chief of Staff, Ehud Barak, Biran recommended, among many other things, that the

³ The account of the drafting of the first version of the ethical code in the following two paragraphs is derived from the author’s interview with Asa Kasher.

IDF should develop a code of ethics similar to the code of the Marines. Barak was enthusiastic about the idea and, after an initial feasibility review, a committee was made responsible for the drafting of the document, led by the head of the IDF Human Resources Directorate, General Yoram Yair. The rest of the committee comprised the Chief Education Officer, the Judge Advocate General, and the philosopher Asa Kasher from Tel Aviv University. Kasher undertook the greater part of the work to prepare the text of the code and he is widely credited as its principal author.⁴

The preparatory committee worked from 1992-1994 before submitting a final draft to the General Staff. The code was structured in three parts, with a preface describing the sources and purpose of the code, followed by a list of basic values and their definitions, and finally a more detailed series of norms to guide behaviour in specific circumstances. After some minor revisions arising from a consultation process, the General Staff finally approved the document in December 1994. It came into being as “The Spirit of the IDF: Basic Values and Principles”.⁵ Eleven basic values constituted the core of the document: pursuit of the mission, responsibility, integrity, personal example, human life, purity of arms, professionalism, discipline, loyalty, representation, and camaraderie.

The immediate context for the introduction of the code of ethics was the wider process of professionalisation in the IDF led by Ehud Barak. By the early 1990s, the IDF faced growing problems of manpower and budget. Due to the wider socio-economic trends associated with neoliberalism, the secular Ashkenazi elite which had traditionally provided the IDF with its main combat troops had turned away from military participation and towards the market as a source of social advancement (Levy, 2007: 147–179). Likewise, the defence budget had been steadily cut from 25% to 13% of GDP in the decade to 1995 (Cohen, 1995: 241). Responding to these trends, Barak wanted to move the IDF towards a professional model, a “small and smart army” rather than a “people’s army” (Ben-Eliezer, 2004; Cohen, 1995). Recruitment became more selective, the reserves

⁴ Kasher had been working with the army as a teacher of military ethics for a number of years already, even though his main academic specialism was originally not ethics but the philosophy of language. His involvement in the process of drafting the code of ethics would mark a major step in the evolution of his career towards his present status as a public intellectual, a trend which culminated in his receipt of the Israel Prize in 2000. Kasher’s influence on military ethics in Israel has been both marked and controversial and consequently his thinking will warrant significant attention throughout this chapter.

⁵ See Appendix A.

were cut, and administrative staff were laid off. A new management culture developed, which Ben-Eliezer has described as “influenced by neo-liberal managerial-business-marketing ideology”, incorporating such approaches as Total Quality Management (2004: 55–56). Barak also attempted to rein in the large number of non-military social programmes undertaken by the IDF, famously claiming that “those who do not shoot will be cut” (Ben-Eliezer, 2004: 55–56).

Meanwhile, the IDF’s attitude towards those who did shoot changed. The IDF began to regard itself as a competitor with other sources of employment and therefore introduced market principles to encourage greater enlistment to combat units, including increased pay and a client-based approach towards soldiers (Ben-Eliezer, 2004: 57–58; Levy, 2007: 147–149). The individual soldier was viewed less as a member of a collective national project, and increasingly as *homo economicus*, as an individual who would freely choose to become a soldier because it would give him an opportunity to enhance himself through military participation. As Foucault stresses, this approach is characteristic of neoliberalism (2008b: 225–233, 267–280). To increase the attractiveness of soldiering as a choice, the IDF also pursued a strengthening of corporate identity and the development of professional standards. In particular, attempts were made to enhance the officer corps through new and revamped training programmes (Libel, 2010, 2013: 283–284, 2014: esp. 91–93).

The introduction of an ethical code, aimed not just at officers but all soldiers, was perhaps the clearest manifestation of the neoliberal drive towards professionalisation. This is firstly evident from the fact that it was inspired by the code of the US Marines, where an enhanced focus on ethics had been a key feature of professionalisation since the 1970s (King, 2013: 427). This impression is confirmed if one examines the principles behind the first version of the ethical code, which can be gleaned from Asa Kasher’s published writings on the matter as well as from the text itself. A close analysis of these materials shows that the ethical code is strongly inflected by classical liberal political theory, a biopolitical rationale for the use of state-led violence, and neoliberal models of organisational culture.

Kasher’s basic conception of how an ethical code should operate derives from his claim that the IDF should be understood as a professional military operating in a liberal-democratic society (1996).

Although these claims are automatic for Kasher, they are both contentious – even within Israeli society. The IDF had long been considered a militia-like “people’s army” before the attempts at professionalisation in the 1990s; and this view of the IDF remains popular. Likewise, the claim that Israel is first and foremost a democracy is contested on several grounds, not simply from an anti-Zionist perspective but often from a nationalist point of view which stresses the importance and even primacy of its Jewish character (see also Yiftachel, 2006; Azoulay and Ophir, 2012). Kasher is able to bypass these difficult historico-political questions by restricting his understanding of democracy to a highly procedural, liberal conception. Democracy for Kasher is defined essentially by the mechanisms it uses to resolve social conflicts. When these conflicts concern the status of individuals, they are resolved through a rights-based legal process. Conversely, when these conflicts touch on group concerns, then decisions are made by majority rule. Questions of power and popular sovereignty are explicitly expunged from his account (1996: 20–30, 214).⁶ For Kasher, Israel’s Jewish character merely derives from the fact that its population is (for reasons he chooses not to dwell on) majority Jewish, and not from its constitution (2003).

The role of the military in such a democratic society is, according to Kasher, to make it possible for individual citizens to enjoy the rights they hold, the right to life being paramount among them. This emphasis on the right to life is a symptomatic liberal concern, showing not only the importance of the citizen as a rights-bearing subject but also as the object of biopolitical power (Foucault, 1998a: 133–160, 2004: 239–264). These obligations require the liberal state to preserve the life of its population, if necessary through the use of military force. As Kasher stresses, building an army and fighting wars is in fact a “moral duty” of the state (1996: 39–41). However, this creates a paradox, since in Kasher’s conception the soldiers who are sent to defend the population are also considered “citizens in uniform”, whose lives also need protecting. This biopolitical justification for the use of force therefore finds expression in *two* values of the ethical code: “pursuit of the mission” (defined as protecting the

⁶ This understanding of democracy has strong affinities with the political philosophy of John Rawls, who is similarly averse to considerations of power and historical context (see Rawls, 1999; for critiques, see Geuss, 2005: 29–39; Mouffe, 2005: esp. 80–108).

population) and “human life” (which requires the IDF to safeguard human life as far as possible in its missions).⁷

What is most curious about the inclusion of these biopolitical dimensions in the ethical code, however, is that soldiers thereby become both the subject and object of this liberal duty of care. Consider the following passage from Kasher’s textbook, *Military Ethics*:

“By means of its norms the army says to the soldier: you are also important to us. It is not just upon you to protect the lives of others meticulously because their lives are important to us, but also to protect your own life because your life is also important to us.” (1996: 52; my translation)

The state’s biopolitical obligations are constantly redoubled inside the soldier-subject here: soldiers must defend citizens, but they are also citizens themselves; the lives of soldiers must be protected by the state, but soldiers are also responsible for carrying this out. By instantiating these duties in an ethical code for soldiers, the state therefore attempts to fulfill them by cultivating soldiers who are, in Burchell’s words, “subjects of their lives” – simultaneously living beings, armed professionals, and ethical actors (1995: 30). The zone of ethical reflection inside the soldier becomes the space where the biopolitical rationale for the use of military violence is folded back upon itself, thereby producing a subject in its signifying order.

Ethics therefore subtends the biopolitics of Israeli militarism; but it does not do so in the way that is commonly imagined. The ethical regime inaugurated by the ethical code deliberately leaves room for a deliberative ethical subject, whose very freedom is the condition for the success of this governing strategy. Scholars have often assumed that biopolitics depends on “calculability”, reducing the scope for genuine ethical decisions and seeking instead to guarantee certain outcomes. In an incisive piece, Anat Matar observes this tendency in the very *grammar* of the ethical code (2006: 4–11). It makes incessant use of Modern Hebrew’s “future-imperative” tense, thereby conflating what will be with what is expected (Matar, 2006: 9). The clearest example comes in the preface:

⁷ See Appendix A. For the difficult relation of these arguments to the value of “purity of arms” see below.

“The Spirit of the IDF is the code of ethics according to which all the IDF’s soldiers, officers, units and forces *will* comport themselves, and it *will* serve in molding their patterns of action. They *will* educate and critique themselves and their fellows in accordance with the Spirit of the IDF.”⁸

Matar further, and rightly, insists that there is a biopolitical logic to this grammar. It takes on the quality not of the law, but of a much stronger “superlaw” that aims to “conquer the individual”. It is a language which does not prescribe as such but which instead purports innocently to render explicit what is already true by definition (a language which, in other words, is characteristic of analytic philosophy) (Matar, 2006: 7). However, one should not be tempted into concluding that this circularity removes the role for ethical subjectivity. In fact, even the stark statement quoted above acknowledges the necessity of education and critique. The individual who is “conquered” in such statements does not thereby disappear; in many ways, he acquires an enhanced importance.

To understand this more fully, we need to examine Kasher’s view of the pedagogical contribution of the ethical code. Explaining its function to me, Kasher put this in the following way:

“a code of ethics is an upgrade of the relationships with value systems and with identity and with norms within the organisation. Even if you don’t have a code of ethics they are there. But they are implicit and they could vary from one person to another and some persons could even have wrong conceptions. When you have a code of ethics it’s shared to a significant extent and you can show why certain marginal conceptions are wrong and should be gotten rid of. And it’s shared by everyone, so it’s an upgrade.”⁹

This “upgrade” process is a vital part of becoming a “professional” in Kasher’s view. Indeed, the central role Kasher accords to professionalism is crucial for understanding, firstly, how ethical subjectivity acquires a role in the biopolitics of Israeli militarism and, secondly, how the ethical code relates to the wider neoliberal transformation taking place in IDF organisational culture in the 1990s.

⁸ See Appendix A [emphasis added].

⁹ Author interview.

In Kasher's view, being a professional has several conditions. The first is having specialist knowledge, the second is the ability to apply that knowledge in practice, the third is striving to improve proficiency, the fourth is understanding the justification for the use of these practical procedures, and the fifth is a sense of the purpose of the profession in wider society (Kasher, 2005: 68–75). A professional code of ethics makes these understandings explicit and in a sense completes the work of acquiring professional identity. An important aspect of this view is that the role of a professional code is not to impose a certain vision of what the professional standards should be:

“The subject of matter of professional ethics is commonly held to consist of principles and rules of the form “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not”, meant to regulate activity in a certain professional arena. To my mind, this is a wrong portrayal of professional ethics.” (Kasher, 2005: 73–74)

Kasher instead claims that the values of the code are “products of [professional] understanding, not its constitutive ingredients” and, in a sense, are therefore reflections of the prior free choices of the individuals they seek to guide (Kasher, 2005: 74). In order to make this impression convincing, however, it is necessary to generate a sense of involvement in and ownership of the ethical process on the part of the soldier. The code must invite soldiers' free participation as ethical subjects, encouraging them to implement the code as a reflection of their own decision (cf. Rose, 1995: 57–60; Dean, 2010: 43–44).

The most obvious way in which this effect is achieved is that the ethical code has no legal authority or enforcement mechanism: it only has meaning insofar as soldiers are prepared to use it themselves. Yet the content of the code is also important for achieving this. For Kasher, this means that the values of the ethical code must seem achievable and therefore relatable to the soldier. He describes these values as embodying a “practical ideal”:

“a ‘practical ideal’ is a set of values or principles that lends grounds to reasoned decisions, that are *practical*, not just in the sense that these are actions and patterns of behaviour but also in the sense that these are decisions that are not beyond the capacity of any normal individual,

in a standard situation, within the professional context of his activity. In order to implement any decision pertaining to right behaviour – as inferred from the practical ideal – such a person must *know* what the decision is and *want* to implement it. The term ‘ideal’ does not purport to place the right behaviour on the horizon and thereabouts, where it cannot be reached, but one can always approach it. The term “practical ideal” emphasizes the following: ‘I know’ and ‘I want to’ means ‘I can’.” (Kasher, 2002a: 102–103, emphasis in original)

Significantly, this position does not imply that soldiers must simply internalise and act upon given commands. The subjective element is much stronger than this: the soldier *must want* to implement the practical ideal. By acknowledging the importance of this “I want to”, Kasher has indeed touched upon, as all ethical systems must, the importance of the question of the subject’s desire. He is outlining a theory of governance, contrasted explicitly with one based on law (either Israeli or international), which emphasises the willingness, rather than simply the obligation, of the soldier-subject to regulate his own behaviour. Žižek observes the “post-modern” tendency for the superego to demand not obedience but enjoyment: the subject must no longer simply obey the law regardless of his preference but rather pursue what authority demands as if it were the product of his free choice (2008c: 313–399, esp. 344–45). With the adoption of Kasher’s ethical code, the IDF manifested precisely this tendency: the public Symbolic law of Israeli militarism was to be made unconscious and enjoyable. Indeed, this innovation is the subjective index of a shift from the model of a conscript “people’s army” to a more professional, and perhaps ultimately “all volunteer”, IDF.

From the point of view of governance, however, it is a great risk simply to rely on the free decision of the subject to guarantee compliance with an ethical code or to reach the appropriate conclusion regarding its implementation. The challenge becomes one of encouraging adherence to and identification with the values of the code while still allowing for soldiers’ free experience of themselves through ethical activity. This was especially difficult in a setting where, as in the 1990s, the demographic composition of the IDF was becoming more diverse. Kasher’s proposed solution to

this challenge was the creation of a list of 34 detailed norms to supplement the 11 basic values.¹⁰ These norms have three basic functions according to Kasher: showing how the values should be expressed in practice (“the patterns of expression”); showing the extent to which they should be expressed (“the levels of required expression”); and helping to resolve dilemmas between competing values (1996: 185–229). By circumscribing the ethical process in this way, Kasher aimed to guide the free decisions of soldiers. Indeed, these norms would assist with the cultivation of a specific ethical faculty which would inform these decisions, a faculty which Kasher refers to as *shikūl da‘at* [judgement, or discretion].

The Hebrew term *shikūl da‘at* translates poorly into English. Although “judgement” is an accurate rendering of its sense, the two words that combine to make the Hebrew term do not translate well separately for this purpose. *Shikūl* can be understood to mean “consideration”, but it also has the connotation of “weighing” different possibilities, opinions, and decisions. *Da‘at* translates as knowledge or wisdom and conveys the sense that this judgement is informed and taken from a position of understanding. The ethical faculty of *shikūl da‘at* is of crucial importance for understanding military ethics in Israel, even though its precise meaning and scope are subject to some disagreement. Kasher’s vision of its role is a relatively restrictive one. Although he acknowledges that it is impossible to fix one way of doing something in advance and that the soldier’s free judgement therefore assumes crucial importance, he stipulates that judgement should be constantly informed by the “practical rules” [*klalim ma‘asīyim*] provided by the thirty-four norms of the ethical code:

“It is important to understand that practical rules do not take the place of judgement [*shikūl da‘at*]. On the contrary, they are designed to enhance it. In order for there to be judgement [*shikūl da‘at*], it is necessary for there to be consideration [*shikūl*], and it is necessary for there to be knowledge [*da‘at*]. The practical rule is a part of that knowledge [*da‘at*]. Judgement [*shikūl da‘at*] is carried out with the help of the practical rule. Just as it is impossible for there to be a practical rule not followed by judgement [*shikūl da‘at*], so it is

¹⁰ See Appendix A.

impossible for there to be judgement [*shikūl da'at*] without a practical rule before it.” (1996: 188; my translation)

However, Kasher acknowledges that the difficulty of relying on this faculty of judgement is precisely that this personal involvement of the soldier in the ethical decision risks escaping the bounds imposed by the norms. When the norms are no longer taken into consideration, the decision ceases to be the result of judgement [*shikūl da'at*] and becomes the product of unreliable “personal deliberation” [*hitlabtut 'ishit*]:

“Personal deliberation [*hitlabtut 'ishit*] is not invalid, it could even have strong personal value, but it is important to understand that it does not have any professional or moral value in itself[...] If the personal deliberation [*hitlabtut 'ishit*] leads to a correct outcome, it is likely that it will have a psychological value from the point of view of the natural inclination of the soldier to act according to it. Despite this, if the personal deliberation [*hitlabtut 'ishit*] leads the soldier to an incorrect outcome, which, for example, risks loss of life in circumstances where endangering life is forbidden, then this positive psychological value is dwarfed[...] by the negative content of the mistaken decision and by its bad consequences.” (Kasher, 1996: 216; my translation)

This dangerous personal excess of subjective involvement in the ethical process, which he acknowledges is unavoidable, is precisely what Kasher is attempting to constrain through his conception of professional ethics. *Hitlabtut* (which can also be translated as “wavering” or “having doubts”, as well as “deliberation”) must be disciplined and channelled into more objective judgement, no matter how painful it makes the decision: “there is no escape from judgement [*shikūl da'at*], however professional, moral, principled, difficult, profound, and shocking it must be” (1996: 228).

As Foucault observes, the unavoidable tension between “freedom” and “security” is a classic dilemma of liberalism, a tension manifested in Kasher’s thinking as a trade-off between a stronger personal investment of the soldier in ethical decisions and a lack of uniformity in implementation and standards (Foucault, 2008b: 65–67). By seeking to marshal the free decisions and judgements of the individual

soldier in the new IDF ethical code, Kasher therefore made a typically neoliberal contribution to the project of professionalising the IDF and rejuvenating Israeli militarism. He attempted to incorporate a new kind of governing strategy, one which sought not only to involve soldiers in Israeli militarism as obedient bodies or a national collective but also to invest them as subjects in its proclaimed values. Yet he also introduced a necessary instability in making use of this subjective element. Kasher's highly ambitious project was highly likely to come up against alternative conceptions and to struggle in capturing the variety of possible militarist subjectivities. Indeed, no sooner had Kasher's code been accepted by the General Staff and announced with great fanfare in Rabin's speech than the effort to alter it began in earnest.

Redrafting the IDF ethical code

Kasher presented his code widely before it was first adopted, seeking feedback and possible improvements. One such presentation was attended by Colonel (later General) Elazar Stern, then head of *Bahad 1*, the principal training institution for IDF officers. Stern was a member of Israel's national-religious community and was a prominent figure in new generation of religious soldiers entering the ranks of the IDF. During the question and answer session, Stern raised his hand and commented that what struck him about the proposed code was that there was nothing specifically "Jewish" about it. He asked Kasher why "love of the land" [*'ahavat ha'arets*] was not among its basic values, since this seemed to him a key aspect of soldiers' motivation to serve in the IDF (Stern, 2012: 191). Over time, a wave of criticism in this vein developed with Stern at the forefront.¹¹ It did not come simply from a religious perspective, however. In an article published in the right-wing *Tekhelet* (*Azure*) magazine in 1997, Tzvi Hauser (then an instructor in the IDF's Leadership Development Institute, and later cabinet secretary to Benjamin Netanyahu) set out a strong statement against Kasher's code from a secular right-wing point of view (Hauser, 1997: 47–72). He also upbraided Kasher for failing to include "love of the land" as a value (1997: 54–59). Yet Hauser went further, accusing the code of representing the spread of "post-Zionism" in the IDF and the weakening of Jewish Israeli identity:

“...the main failing of Spirit of the IDF is the fact that it is purposefully devoid of any Zionist

¹¹ Author interview with Ya'akov Castel.

or Jewish content. The code is designed in such a way that the army of every democratic country in the world could adopt it without changing a word. The new IDF code does not reflect or demand any sense of commitment to any of the central tenets of the Zionist idea: It mentions nothing about the loyalty of the army to the Jewish state and Jewish national sovereignty, nor does it provide any expression at all of the country's bond with world Jewry... As far as actual ideological content, the code obligates the IDF to uphold and defend the "democratic character" of the State of Israel—and nothing more. It embodies no values such as "patriotism" or "love of the land," and therefore signals an abandonment of the basic points of consensus that were the ideological heritage of the IDF up until the publication of the code." (Hauser, 1997: 53)

Kasher's response to these accusations was threefold. Firstly, he argued that it was not possible for a code of ethics to mandate the object of a soldier's love. Secondly, he argued that the inclusion of the values of "human life" and "purity of arms" showed that Jewish values had a certain influence over the document. Thirdly, he rejected altogether the necessity for the code to be "Jewish" or "Zionist" in character. He argued that professional ethics, in his conception, does not require such a character but instead demands fidelity to the principles of "democracy", since that has the strongest influence on the nature of the society in which the profession must operate.¹²

Initially, the General Staff accepted Kasher's arguments. Once the code was announced, however, the backlash grew in intensity. Stern immediately drew up his own separate code of ethics for the officers at his academy ("The Values of an Officer"), arguing that while he accepted Kasher's code he would also demand additional standards from officers, including "love of the land". He also wrote a letter to the new Chief of Staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, criticising what he called "The Neutral, Universal, and International Code" (Stern, 2012: 192–193). Within a year the controversy had grown and even entered electoral politics. In the context of the Oslo Process, the decision to exclude "love of the land" was widely interpreted as abandoning a commitment to annexing the occupied territories of the West Bank. The National Religious Party added a promise to introduce "love of the land" into the code to

¹² Author interview with Asa Kasher; see also Kasher (2002b).

its manifesto for the elections of 1996 and even made this demand during negotiations to enter Netanyahu's first coalition government. Faced with this pressure, Lipkin-Shahak convened a meeting over the issue where it was agreed that, although the code should remain unchanged for five years until 2000, it would then be possible to review it if problems had arisen.¹³

In the interceding years, Stern was gradually promoted through various ranks of the IDF and in 1999 was appointed Chief Officer of the Education and Youth Corps, giving him responsibility for the ethical code (Stern, 2012: 152–153). Immediately after the elapse of five years in 2000, he decided to open the code for review, seizing the opportunity “like a blessing from heaven” (Stern, 2012: 193). Stern informed Kasher of his intention to form a wider team to review the code and attempted to include him; but Kasher was opposed to any major revisions and after some initial meetings the two men clashed badly. According to Stern, when the decision was made to embark on significant changes Kasher simply got up and left the room, “slamming the door behind him” (2012: 194).

Stern delegated organisational responsibility for the committee to Colonel Ya'akov Castel, the head of the IDF education department within the Education and Youth Corps.¹⁴ He also appointed several academics and military figures to the committee, many of whom were chosen through personal connection.¹⁵ The group included Professor Avi Sagi (who was Stern's youth movement leader), Professor Daniel Statman, Professor Shaul Smilansky, Professor Moshe Halbertal, and Major General Yishai Beer. Most of the academics involved were specialists in either moral or Jewish philosophy. Moreover, as far as I am aware, the committee was all male. This core team, with the assistance of other contributors at various points, set about a lengthy consultation and discussion process.

Taking Kasher's code as a starting point, they worked to reformulate the text, discussing minute details for hours in lengthy meetings that occasionally “started in the early evening and adjourned at sunrise” (Stern, 2012: 195). Stern and Castel were also greatly concerned that the document be seen as representative of both the IDF and wider society. Accordingly, drafts were circulated to focus groups across the army, ranging across the different branches and among different ranks, and to

¹³ Author interview with Asa Kasher.

¹⁴ Author interview with Ya'akov Castel.

¹⁵ Author interview with Avi Sagi.

several representatives in civil society from a range of social groups. This included literary figures associated with the Israeli left (such as Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua) and figures associated with *Gush Emunim* and the settler movement (such as Yosef Ben-Shlomo).¹⁶

After one and a half years of discussions, the new code was finally adopted in 2001. The document made three major kinds of changes to the original.¹⁷ The first was in the language of the values, changes which were mostly stylistic in nature but which occasionally also affected content.¹⁸ The second was the inclusion of three “fundamental values”, set above and apart from the basic values. And the third was the removal of the detailed 34 norms which Kasher had written. Together these revisions reflect a significant change in the thinking underpinning the document, especially in its attitude towards the soldier as an ethical subject. Indeed, this change in the pedagogical approach represented a much more significant departure than the changes in normative content or concessions to any specific political or religious agenda.

Despite Stern’s commitment to including “love of the land” and connecting the code with “Jewish values”, as well as the influence of the national-religious movement in pushing for its alteration, most of the changes made did not especially reflect national religious demands. It is true that the sought-after “Jewish” elements were introduced. However, their place in the document is carefully circumscribed and the result is hardly a transformation in its character. Israel is now identified as a “Jewish and democratic state” in the preamble, whereas it was not before. In addition, one of the fundamental values is “patriotism and loyalty to the state” [*ahavat moledet yene’amanut lamedina*]. Yet this is not the “love of the land” [*ahavat ha’arets*] formula that was originally demanded. The committee instead opted to use a formulation suggested by A.B. Yehoshua, “patriotism” [*ahavat moledet*, or “love of homeland”, more literally translated].¹⁹ In the precise wording of this value, Israel is defined as “a democratic state which constitutes a national home for the Jewish people”, which is in fact a slight departure from the language of Israel’s Basic Laws. Although this is only a

¹⁶ Author interview with Ya‘akov Castel.

¹⁷ See Appendix B.

¹⁸ Most notably the value of “purity of arms”; see below.

¹⁹ Author interview with Ya‘akov Castel.

semantic difference given the document's lack of legal force, the alteration was made because of the perceived need to motivate Druze and Bedouin troops.²⁰ It underscores the point that the code was not simply adjusted to reflect national-religious demands. The aim, at least in theory, was to increase the range of possible subject positions from which the code might be embraced in reaction to the growing social diversity in the army.

The difficulty, however, was finding a means to constrain this diversity even as greater room was made for its inclusion. The convenor of the steering group made precisely such a point in interview:

“if in the past there was one hegemonic ethos, that permeated everyone [*ethos eḥad hegemoni, shekulam ḥulḥlu ‘alpiy*]... in the ‘90s, there was the beginning of disagreements over what the correct values were in Israeli society. So when you enlist lots of people from different ideological communities, with different systems of values, and they naturally bring these values inside the army, and you give them means of violence, you give them a weapon, then you have to create a kind of mental and ethical regulation [*leyatser ‘eyzeh ‘asdara menṭalit ‘erkhit*] according to which everyone will act. Otherwise everyone will act according to the values which they bring from home, which is something very problematic in a military system.”²¹

Whereas Kasher had attempted to respond to this difficulty through the creation of a set of norms, the approach of the new committee was different. Instead they decided to abandon these norms and to focus on simplifying the code and making its language less formal. In addition, rather than elaborating specific rules to help decide on cases where there appeared to be a conflict between basic values, three much broader “fundamental values” (defence of the state, patriotism, and human dignity) were included to help soldiers navigate such dilemmas. The apparent puzzle which needs to be solved, however, is how this relaxation of the format and style would still be able to achieve the goal of “creating a kind of moral and ethical regulation”.

A perception which many of the members of the committee shared was that the previous code was not

²⁰ Author interview with Avi Sagi.

²¹ Author interview with Ya‘akov Castel [my translation].

accessible enough for the soldier and did not sufficiently engage him as an ethical subject.²² Committee member Avi Sagi, who as a reservist in the Education Corps had attempted to teach Kasher's code, commented that:

“...it was so unfriendly to the officer. Many of them told me it is better to learn how to deal with computers than with this code. Soldiers and officers have to receive decisions in the conditions of battle, in conditions of warfare, and they have to use judgement [*shikul da'at*]. They have to make use of their own considerations regarding the specific situation they confront. And this is a problem that the old code didn't allow for. The earlier code turned the officers (mostly - less the soldiers) from being a subject to being an object. They gave the data to the computer and received the right answer. That was the problem that we, that I encountered as a reservist who had to explain this.”²³

Ya'akov Castel, the convenor of the committee, concurred on this point when he described the purpose of the change in tone:

“the practical meaning of this is to give much more weight to the discretion [*shikul hada'at*] of the commanders. If I am a commander in the army and I need to act, according to the perspective of Asa Kasher, if I learn my profession in a serious way, I will come to the one appropriate answer and all the commanders will come to the same decision. There is just one appropriate, legitimate answer. In the second perspective, two different commanders – or more than two different commanders – will arrive at different solutions, and they will both be appropriate. So it's not chaos. The spectrum is limited. It has limits. But still the weight of the judgement [*shikul hada'at*] of each commander in dealing with it is much greater in the second perspective. The first perspective turns them into automatons [*auṭomaṭim*] to a certain extent.”²⁴

From these statements we can see that the drafters of the new ethical code wished to grant a greater role for the soldier's faculty of “judgement” [*shikul da'at*]. Although Kasher also sees a role for

²² Author interviews with Moshe Halbertal, Avi Sagi, and Ya'akov Castel.

²³ Author interview [my translation].

²⁴ Author interview [my translation].

individual judgement, and he further denied in interview that he believed that there can be only one correct answer in dealing with dilemmas, it is clear that the abandonment of the norms and the changes in the code's language were seen as a move away from his more restrictive understanding of *shikūl da'at*.

However, the intended result of this decision was not that the standards would be lowered and soldiers could act more as they pleased. This is where a simple language of greater or lesser freedom fails to account for the consequences of the inner structure of the ethical subject and “the psychic life of power”. As Judith Butler has made clear, individuals can be made more compliant not only, or even primarily, through the wider dissemination of stricter norms. Instead, it is their subjective constitution and their resultant willingness to exercise power *over themselves* which constitute the crucial factor (1996: 106–132, 167–200). The motivation behind making the tone of the document less formal was precisely so that it could be more readily applied by soldiers themselves in assessing their own behaviour and therefore that its injunctions would be more keenly felt. Indeed, part of the reason why so many extensive consultations with soldiers took place was to ensure that this effect would be achieved. Avi Sagi described the purpose of these meetings with soldiers as follows:

“The question was how to translate the values in such a way that the soldier will be able to use them, to interpret their own situation in the framework of the values. That was the question. The dialogue was very important. It was not important in the way that one soldier or officer will say to us: I don't accept, I don't agree with the value of human dignity. That wasn't the question. [It] was always a question of translation and interpretation. And the writing of this code in a familiar way, in a friendly way. That was the point.”²⁵

What is clear from this statement is that, despite the greater role for the soldier, the values of the code remained non-negotiable. The changes in tone were not designed to grant soldiers greater leniency in implementing the code but rather to ensure soldiers would in fact be more inclined to apply its standards to themselves.

²⁵ Author interview.

Elazar Stern himself touches upon the way in which a less formal language can actually be more exacting for the soldier. Emphasising firstly “the need to simplify some of the texts and make the code easier for regular soldiers to comprehend”, he then illustrates his point with reference to a particular value:

“I suggested we replace the term “integrity” that appeared in the code with “honesty”. Integrity, as far as I understood the term, is something that depends on others who observe you. Honesty on the other hand is something more personal; it is about you opposite the mirror. It’s sharper and deeper.” (2012: 195)

Stern’s trick here is to pretend that he is not referring to “something that depends on others who observe you”, as he claims Kasher’s code does. Instead, he argues that this impetus to behave honestly can come from within. Psychoanalysis, however, tells us that no subject can exist without a socially derived Symbolic order in which his or her desire can be expressed. Even the personal mirror image of which Stern speaks depends on a prior Symbolic identification.²⁶ This “ego-ideal” which the soldier must live up to is therefore no different in content or origin to Kasher’s image of professional excellence. The only difference is that Stern’s version is more internally entrenched within the subject and more aligned with the soldier’s tendency to judge himself in the mirror. It makes the claim that the subject is pursuing self-realisation in pursuing standards which are unique and internal to him, exercising his own “judgement” at every stage, while simultaneously offering a list of immutable values whose content is entirely socially given.

This greater emphasis on the soldier’s Symbolic identification with the values of the code has significant consequences. Whereas Kasher’s code offered a “practical ideal”, a target which the soldier could always reach if he wished, the second code actively inscribes a gap between the soldier and ideal behaviour in its ethical architecture. One minor but revealing change made (at the suggestion of Moshe Halbertal and Yishai Beer) to the opening words of the preface makes this clear.

Kasher’s original version had read:

²⁶ “It is only after the emergence of the ego-ideal *qua* symbolic identification that the subject is properly individuated at the level of the Imaginary, and his ego is consolidated” (Chiesa, 2007: 81).

“The Spirit of the IDF is the moral and normative identity card of the IDF as an organisation, which stands [*zo ha'omedet*] as the foundation for all actions carried out by all men and women soldiers in the framework of the IDF...”²⁷

After revision, however, the current version now states:

“The Spirit of the IDF is the moral and normative identity card of the IDF which it is appropriate that should stand [*'esher ra'ui shete'amod*] as the foundation of the activities of all men and women soldiers in the framework of the IDF...”²⁸

Ya'akov Castel considered this alteration to be of immense importance:

“It's a big difference... As soon as you say ‘it is appropriate that it should act like this’ you are saying that it is an educational document... You are constantly educating the soldiers to reach this standard, with the clear knowledge [that] there is a gap [*pa'ar*], there will always be a gap between... common human behaviour [*hahitnahagut ha'enoshit haroyahat*] and the appropriate standard [*haraf hara'ui*]. We will try to reduce this gap as much as possible – that is our role, as an institution and as commanders.”²⁹

This recognition of the residual, irreducible gap in the subject has several important effects. Firstly, it extends rather than limits the authority of the ethical code. In psychoanalytic terms, it enhances the role of the superego, the punitive internal demand to obey, since the demands of the code are by definition impossible to meet. In fact, in the classic logic of the superego, the more one attempts to obey it, the guiltier one feels. Secondly, the ethical process no longer depends on successful compliance to be effective and engaging. Whereas Kasher's code posited a circularity between existing practice and the values of the code, the new code can function perfectly well, perhaps even better, if its standards are regularly not met. Thirdly, this gap creates a crucial opening for testimony in the ethical process. Speech becomes the medium in which this gap can be registered, as past failings are recalled, analysed, and learnt from, thus sealing off the failure and reaffirming a renewed

²⁷ See Appendix A.

²⁸ See Appendix B.

²⁹ Author interview [my translation].

commitment to succeed.

This is the true significance of the new “Jewish” elements in the code. By drawing on national and religious symbols, the new version not only addresses the challenge of pluralism in the IDF by providing focal points for common loyalty. It also strengthens individual identification with the values of the code by providing a cultural anchor (one could say “master-signifier”, or “quilting point”) for its values (cf. Chiesa, 2007: 88–96; Žižek, 2008b: 95–110). The new fundamental value of “love of homeland” should be interpreted in just this way: not only is the “homeland” intended to provide a shared reference point for all soldiers, it is also deemed capable of commanding such loyalty that it can be the object of their “love” and thus an intense point of Symbolic identification. For Kasher, by contrast, it is hopeless to demand love from soldiers, since it does not constitute a “practical ideal”.

A value such as “love of the land” makes it possible to see how, in spite of its familiar language and its greater role for the discretion of the soldier, the new code ends up demanding a much higher standard from him. Indeed, on this basis it can be argued that the neoliberal logic present in Kasher’s code is much more pronounced in the second version. The strategy is paradoxically to depend *even more* on the subjective involvement of the soldier and his free personal decisions. By aiming to implant its standards even deeper inside the soldier himself and by mobilising the inevitable gap that appears between its impossible standards and actual behaviour, the new code took this neoliberal tendency to its extreme and produced a much stronger ideological edifice as a result. It is only with these important differences in mind that we will be able to approach its most contentious value and to understand what underlies the philosophical debate surrounding it.

“Purity of arms”

The most vaunted and emblematic of the values of the IDF ethical code is undoubtedly “purity of arms” [*tohar haneshek*]. In Kasher’s original, the value appears as follows:

“The soldier will use his weapon and his power to vanquish the enemy only to the degree required, and will exercise self-restraint in order to prevent unnecessary harm to human life,

body, honour and property.”³⁰

Its meaning is further elaborated beneath:

“Purity of arms among IDF troops means the restrained use they make of their weapons and their power in the implementation of missions, only to the extent necessary for their attainment, without unnecessary harm to human life, body, honour and property, whether to troops or civilians (especially the defenceless), during war and security operations as well as during times of peace and tranquillity.”

In the new code, however, the value acquired a stronger definition:

“The soldier will use his weapon and his power only for the fulfillment of the mission, and only to the extent required, and he will maintain his human image even in combat. The soldier will not use his weapon or force to harm non-combatants or captives, and will do all he can to prevent harm to their lives, bodies, dignity, and property.”³¹

Particular attention was paid to the reformulation of this value in new version of the code because, in the view of the committee members, Kasher’s original language was at best “misleading”³² and at worst “simply dangerous”³³. These concerns related to the way in which this value related to the key principles of *necessity* (restricting targets to those necessary for achieving legitimate military objectives), *distinction* (distinguishing between civilians and combatants), and *proportionality* (using force proportionate to the military value of the target) in evaluating the use of military force. These three principles are crucial features of the international humanitarian law of armed conflict (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1977: 21–31; Hajjar, 2006: 23), but they also reflected wider moral concerns. Moshe Halbertal’s own understanding of the requirements of morality in

³⁰ See Appendix A.

³¹ See Appendix B.

³² Author interview with Moshe Halbertal.

³³ Author interview with Avi Sagi [my translation].

warfare incorporates these principles, for example (Halbertal, 2013).³⁴ Kasher's version of "purity of arms" does emphasise "necessity" but blurs the "distinction" between civilians and soldiers ("whether to troops or civilians") and does not make an explicit demand to reduce disproportionate force, even where the target is deemed legitimate.³⁵

In response, Kasher claims that his code does in fact incorporate these requirements. He argues that, since these are principles of international humanitarian law, regard to them is paid in the requirement made by the twenty-first and twenty-second norms of his code (which were later abolished) to obey the laws of war.³⁶ He further argues that his code is stronger than the laws of war because it requires that force be used only when necessary even against other soldiers, and not just civilians.³⁷ He justifies this on the grounds that soldiers are in fact "citizens in uniform" and therefore deserve the same protection. However, this position also has the possible implication that one might prefer the lives of soldiers over civilian life in certain cases. By contrast, the new version of the code draws this distinction more sharply, and puts a requirement on the soldier to reduce the harm to civilians as far as possible. This requirement exists even if it exposes the soldier to extra risk (Halbertal, 2013). Indeed, it is the starkest example of the way in which the new version, although more relaxed in tone and more trusting of the "judgement" of the soldier, makes more exacting demands than the original.

Disagreements over the meaning of this value have acquired much greater significance as a result of the debates surrounding Israel's recent assaults on the Gaza Strip, in which the high number of civilian casualties has generated international controversy. The three principal engagements (Operation Cast Lead, December 2008-January 2009; Operation Pillar of Defence, November 2012; Operation Protective Edge, July-August 2014) have successively intensified, but also entrenched, a pattern of philosophical debates about what purity of arms should mean both in theory and in practice. In particular, these debates have received their impetus from a piece co-authored by Asa Kasher and

³⁴ Halbertal prefers to use the term "responsibility" rather than strict "proportionality" when explaining the requirements to soldiers and officers, since proportionality is generally decided at more senior levels of command; but he still attaches importance to the latter (author interview with Moshe Halbertal).

³⁵ Author interview with Daniel Statman.

³⁶ Author interview with Asa Kasher.

³⁷ Whether he is correct depends on one's interpretation of article 35 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1977: 21).

Major General Amos Yadlin (former head of IDF military intelligence) when they worked at the IDF National Security College, in which they seek to adjust the requirements of the military ethics of “fighting terror” (Kasher and Yadlin, 2005). This article further blurred the distinction between soldiers and civilians by arguing that Israel has a greater duty of care towards its soldiers, citizens, and other civilians under its “effective control” than to civilian bystanders in hostile areas (cf. Al-Khalidi, 2010; Khalili, 2013: 62–63, 206–207). This argument, originally devised as a doctrine justifying targeted assassinations, has had significant influence on IDF thinking about military ethics and the question of “purity of arms”. Indeed, although the document was never formally accepted by the IDF, widespread claims have been made that it has underpinned ethical doctrine during recent Israeli attacks on Gaza (Harel, 2009d).

However, it is important to be clear about the precise contribution that IDF ethical doctrine makes in this context. In practice, it is far from clear that ethical codes make a serious difference in the heat of battle. At an intuitive level, of course, it is possible to imagine that an ethical code might help to diminish the level of violence. However, determining the extent of such a nebulous contribution presents an almost insurmountable epistemological and methodological challenge. The IDF for its part has conducted serious studies of this sort.³⁸ Indeed, the available evidence suggests that any professed concern to avoid harm to civilians has had little to no impact on restraining IDF conduct in recent operations. Successive independent investigations have made it clear that IDF conduct in Gaza in recent years is inconsistent with international humanitarian law and the standards of the IDF ethical code, even in its more relaxed interpretations (for a sample see: Amnesty International, 2014; B’Tselem, 2009, 2013b, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Physicians for Human Rights, 2015; UNHCR, 2009, 2015).

Moreover, there are also strong grounds for a very different conclusion: that the ethical considerations made in the light of the code might in fact increase the level of violence overall. Eyal Weizman (2009) has argued that the complex modelling which militaries conduct of the likely civilian casualties resulting from a given action frequently bears little resemblance to practical outcomes. What such

³⁸ Author interview with Asa Kasher.

laboured calculations are more likely to achieve, he suggests, is simply the impression that such operations are morally or legally justified (2012: 99–138). Perversely, the outcome might be that such “targeted” strikes will be more readily resorted to and that the number of “accidental” civilian casualties will accordingly increase (cf. Owens, 2003). Indeed, as Craig Jones has demonstrated, the growing influence of Israeli military lawyers in providing targeting advice has had the effect of streamlining the legal justification of violence (Jones, forthcoming). However, while these arguments suggest that ethics might not be effective in restraining violence, they still do not help to specify the real function of military ethical doctrine in the facilitation of war, which is distinct from that played by “lawfare”.

To understand this contribution properly, it is necessary to recall the original purpose of the IDF ethical code, which had nothing to do with a desire to lower the level of civilian casualties. Instead, as has been shown above, the immediate context for its emergence was an agenda to turn the IDF into a more professional body and to motivate soldiers to serve more effectively by cultivating them as ethical subjects. Accordingly, the debate surrounding the value of “purity of arms” has been far more consequential for the formation of the Israeli soldier as an ethical subject than for the actual conduct of warfare and its human cost. The questions which need to be answered when considering the value of “purity of arms”, therefore, are: what kind of ethical subject does this value, in all its various guises, presuppose and valorise; and how, in the context of the recent Israeli assaults on Gaza, has this idea of ethical subjectivity become militarily useful?

As demonstrated above, the ethical subject of the IDF ethical code is in the first instance the free individual of neoliberal governmentality, whose “judgement” is the crucial ethical faculty. In the writings of Israeli military ethicists, however, this ethical subject appears useful not only in the context of the changing nature of the IDF as it becomes more “professional” or socially diverse: it also helps with the fighting of counterinsurgency warfare. In their interpretation, insurgents such as those Israel faces in Gaza have adopted a strategy which explicitly aims to undermine Israel’s ethical capacity to justify its use of military force. Hence, insurgents choose to attack civilians rather than just soldiers, and moreover they choose to disguise themselves among the surrounding civilian population,

making it harder to uphold the principle of distinction. According to Halbertal, the aim is to undermine the moral resolve of their opponent by “goading Israel into an overreaction” (2009). This would lead to “the shattering of Israel’s moral legitimacy in its own struggle” (2009).

What is interesting about this view is that it presents soldiers’ ethical motivation as a strategic resource. It is concerned with more than simply international legitimacy or legal deniability (though these may well be separate goals): it directly posits the importance of ethics for the winning of asymmetric warfare. As Halbertal tellingly puts it, “in a democratic society with a citizen’s army, any erosion of the ethical foundation of its soldiers and its citizens is of immense political and strategic consequence” (Halbertal, 2009). Accordingly, he redescribes the classic counterinsurgency strategy of separating the insurgent force from the local population (usually achieved through practices of confinement - Khalili, 2013) as an ethical process:

“Rather than being drawn into a war of all against all and everywhere, Israel has sought to isolate the militants from their environment: to mark them and ‘clothe’ them with a uniform, and to force them to a definite front. The moral restraints in this case are of great strategic value.” (Halbertal, 2009)

Viewed from this perspective, the principle of distinction, so crucial to “purity of arms” and the law of armed conflict, is therefore nothing more than the application of counterinsurgency strategy to moral principles.

This close affinity with the approach of counterinsurgency extends to the level of tactics as well. For what this process requires in practice is not simply doctrinal clarity but the careful and intricate deployment of soldiers as ethical subjects. Because of the nature of this new battlefield, the clear distinction between the insurgent and the civilian population must be actively inscribed by the diffuse efforts of individuals:

“In a traditional war, the difficult moral choices are made by the political elites and the high command, such as whether to bomb Dresden or to destroy Hiroshima. But in this new kind of micro-war, every soldier is a kind of commanding officer, a full moral and strategic agent.

Every soldier must decide whether the individual standing before him in jeans and sneakers is a combatant or not..." (Halbertal, 2009)

Military ethicists writing in other contexts have also noted the significance of the rise of the "strategic corporal" (Carrick, 2008: 192). Likewise, Halbertal observes that in "micro-war" the ethical activity of each individual soldier becomes a vital constituent of the military apparatus. Just as the challenges of urban warfare spurred the IDF to develop "swarm" tactics that reasserted control over the space of a hostile city through small teams tunnelling through the walls of houses (Weizman, 2007: 185–220), so asymmetric warfare in general requires ethical swarming, the multiplication and intensification of ethical effort to maintain "moral legitimacy". Moreover, one can see how the neoliberal model of ethics one finds expressed in the ethical code has a vital role to play here: by implanting a new region of "freedom" and "judgement" inside each soldier-subject, and by dispersing responsibility to them, troops will become much better equipped to fulfil this function.

Yet it is not simply the case that soldiers must be depended upon as individual ethical agents purely because of this tactical dimension. The soldiers themselves are the *telos* of this process: it is their "ethical foundation" which is the strategic resource and which motivates them to fight. Hence it is unsurprising that the normative criteria for what constitutes "purity of arms" in asymmetric warfare privilege the interior world of the soldier ahead of tangible outcomes or political or legal criteria. The main point of distinction between the views of Kasher and his critics, as has been mentioned, is the extent to which measures must be taken to reduce harm to non-combatants in a given operation. Regardless of their positions, however, the crucial reference point for all participants in this debate remains the same: they evaluate the morality of an act of war according to the intentional disposition of the soldier.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to examine the body of moral philosophy on which these philosophers draw and from which this tendency originates, namely "Just War Theory". The nucleus of Just War Theory developed in early Christian theology in the works of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. More recently it has undergone a renaissance after the enormous success of Michael

Walzer's restatement of the theory in his *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977; for alternative perspectives, see Owens, 2010). Just War Theory distinguishes between *jus ad bellum* (rightness in going to war) and *jus in bello* (rightness in fighting war), with "purity of arms" clearly falling into the latter category. The consequences of such a distinction are enormously de-politicising, providing a framework for discussing military ethics which focuses on purity of intent in isolated, decontextualised incidents. Such an analytic move may seem defensible in a liberal context; but it is completely at odds with, for example, the theory of anticolonial insurgency warfare, in which the political nature of each soldier's commitment and each military occurrence is stressed.³⁹ In making this distinction, therefore, Just War Theory already has a highly circumscribed understanding of warfare and the role of the soldier as an ethical subject.

The moral co-ordinates of Just War Theory are even more constrained when it comes evaluating these intentions. Here the central principal is known as the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE). Considering that this notion is an unreconstructed borrowing from Catholic theology, its intellectual weight in these debates is quite remarkable (for a critique, see Scanlon, 2008). Simply put, it holds that an action is not evil if the genuine intention behind it is good, even if the same action has obvious and predictable evil effects, so long as the act is proportionate to the achievement of the good intention. As Helen Kinsella has demonstrated, DDE (as originally expounded by Augustine and Aquinas) was developed well before the principle of distinction between combatants and civilians emerged (2011: 34–37). As she argues, the doctrine's greater concern with "the innocence of the soldier than with the innocence of the one who may be killed" (2011: 35) leaves a "startlingly ambiguous and flimsy legacy" (2011: 36) for the principle of distinction. Furthermore, contemporary scholars' attempts to rectify this legacy have merely compounded the problem. Walzer adds a further caveat to DDE, also widely accepted in Just War Theory, that any double effect should be accompanied by a "double intention" – that is, an intention to perform a justified act of war, *and* an intention to increase proportionality by reducing the harm to non-combatants. This focus on intention, present in the

³⁹ The classic statements of such a view were made by Frantz Fanon (2001) and Mao Zedung (2000). Although Walzer does grant the validity of guerrilla struggle, he does so purely on the condition of its compliance with *jus in bello*. "Terrorism", by contrast, is not so favourably regarded (Walzer, 1977: 176–206).

original formula of the doctrine and redoubled in Walzer's restatement, is then highly solipsistic, depending entirely on the internal mental considerations of the soldier, rather than the external effects of his actions. Israeli military ethicists, whether more or less permissive in their interpretation of "purity of arms", all rely on DDE to make their case.

This is significant not only because it narrows the range of disagreements between Kasher and his critics but also because it shapes the way in which those disagreements manifest themselves. By lending primacy to the question of intention, these debates push the principles of distinction and civilian immunity into the background. Indeed, while there is certainly a substantive difference between Kasher and his critics, this difference is much more consistently related to their different conceptions of the role of the soldier as an intentionally acting ethical subject than to the degree of their concern for Palestinian civilians. These different conceptions can be derived directly from the differing approaches embodied in the two versions of the ethical code. As demonstrated above, the new version of the ethical code sets standards which the soldier will in many cases not be fully able to meet and, moreover, allows for a greater diversity of acceptable courses of action according to soldiers' "judgement". Thus it is impossible to know (much less agree on) whether a soldier has indeed done "all he can" to prevent harm to civilian's "lives, bodies, dignity, and property". Kasher, by contrast, cannot permit this uncertainty because it could not form the basis of a "practical ideal". Accordingly, his standard is less demanding of the soldier, since this makes the requirements on him more legible and clear.

That this is the main source of their disagreements is evident in the content of the written debates between them. Responding to critics of their doctrine in the *New York Review of Books*, Kasher and Yadlin are at pains to reiterate the compatibility of their view with the terms of DDE:

"...when a military force faces a mixed population of combatants and non-combatants in a territory not under its effective control, we follow Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars*: 'Double effect is defensible' when 'the actor... seeks to minimise [evil involved], accepting costs to himself.' IDF Operation 'Cast Lead' included a variety of effective efforts to minimise

collateral damage, including widely distributed warning leaflets, more than 150,000 warning phone calls to terrorists' neighbours, and non-lethal warning fire – unprecedented efforts in every respect. In our understanding of double effect 'cost' does not require jeopardy.” (Kasher and Yadlin, 2009)

However, when critics of Kasher attack his position, they tend not to rely on the claim that civilians' lives should be privileged over those of soldiers and instead focus attention back onto purity of intent, which remains the decisive question. Hence Halbertal argues that collateral damage can only be justified when it takes on the character of preferring one's own life to that of another (as would be the case, for example, in not sharing food when both you and a friend are starving), rather than the character of intentional killing (which is “such a terrible act that a person has to sacrifice his life and not do it”) (Halbertal, 2013). Therefore, he argues, opting to proceed with an operation that will kill civilians when alternative, riskier means are available is immoral because such a decision involves preferring intentional killing over risking the lives of friendly soldiers and civilians. In the case of collateral damage, only after risk is assumed can it be said the death is not intentional and is therefore akin to preferring one's own life:

“The attempt to bring collateral damage closer to the permitted status of preferring life becomes possible only if efforts are made to reduce this damage as much as possible. However, in contrast to preferring life, in collateral damage the attacker assumes part of the responsibility for the death of the attacked because his actions caused the death. Therefore, while we do not demand that a person endanger himself to save the life of his friend, it is absolutely possible that we will demand that he endanger himself to avoid hurting his friend through collateral damage.” (Halbertal, 2013; my translation)

According to this argument, then, the risk is not taken because soldiers' lives should be risked ahead of the lives of civilians: the risk is taken because it is the only means available to demonstrate the required purity of intent.

Kasher and Yadlin's response to this criticism is also revealing. They argue that allowing risk to fall upon friendly soldiers or citizens is also an intentional act of killing:

“[this] objection rests on the distinction between killing and letting die. In one course of action, the state lets some of its citizens die, while in the other course of action, the state kills some of the bystanders. If killing is always morally worse than letting die, then the state ought to follow the first course of action rather than the second [...] Our rejoinder is that under the present circumstances the distinction is of no crucial moral significance. Imagine yourself having to make a choice between pushing a blue button and pushing a green one. If you push the former, a missile is going to fire killing the terrorist and some bystanders. If you push the latter, no missile is going to be fired and the terrorist will explode in the mall. *The moral focus of the situation is on the level of your decision.* A decision to let citizens die is as morally significant as a decision to kill the terrorist and the bystanders. From the point of view of a democratic state, a decision to let citizens die when they can and should be effectively protected is *tantamount to a decision to kill them*. It is as morally wrong for the state to let its citizens die under such circumstances as it is morally wrong to kill them.”
(2005: 20, emphasis added)

This strange thought experiment demonstrates clearly that it is the moral character of the intentional decision of a soldier which remains the privileged focus of their attention.

Yet it is not just at this level of imagined abstraction that the question of the soldier's intention remains crucial to the debate. The actual conduct of past operations has been subject to scrutiny by philosophers on these grounds. Kasher offered a lengthy defence of Operation Cast Lead in which he referred in detail both to his co-authored article with Amos Yadlin and to the ethical code of the IDF (Kasher, 2009).⁴⁰ In a letter replying to this article, Daniel Statman attempted to probe more deeply into the conduct of soldiers during the operation (2010: 3–8). Citing media reports and the collection of testimonies gathered by Breaking the Silence about the campaign, Statman suggested that soldiers

⁴⁰ Kasher wrote a similar piece after Operation Protective Edge in 2014, in which he rehearses exactly the same arguments (Kasher, 2014).

were often reckless with regard to protecting civilians' lives. He quotes several soldiers and officers, including one who was told: "this is a war and as in war there is no consideration for civilians, anyone who sees something – shoot" (2010: 4).

Statman reiterates his belief that soldiers must be prepared to risk their lives to protect civilian bystanders and he directly addresses Kasher's claim that the state has a special duty towards its soldiers ahead of these civilians. Kasher makes the point that a state cannot be expected to risk its soldiers' lives to help the civilians of another state during a natural disaster and therefore cannot be expected to make a similar effort in reducing collateral damage to civilians (Kasher, 2009: 65). Statman replies that the comparison with a natural disaster overlooks the intentional role of Israel in causing the death of civilians during Operation Cast Lead:

"Although a state is permitted to refuse to provide help to people who are not its citizens if this imposes a burden or heavy risk, one cannot derive from this that it is permitted *to harm* those same civilians in order to advance its interests or defend its soldiers or civilians." (2010: 5; my translation, emphasis in original)

Once again Statman is invoking the importance of the prohibition on intentional killing, rather than disputing the principle that states are allowed to prefer the lives of their soldiers. Kasher makes this clear in his response to Statman in which he explicitly invokes the importance of the distinction between killing *intentionally* [*bakavana*] and killing *knowingly* [*bayod'in*] (2010: 8–9). According to Kasher, if prior warnings are given and sufficient care is taken, then the responsibility falls upon the civilians who failed to leave and the target who stays in their vicinity. The intention to kill/be killed is now *Palestinian*, whereas the Israeli soldier proceeds *merely with the knowledge* that they will die. Kasher accepts that this latter scenario may have regularly occurred during the operation, but he challenges Statman to provide evidence of an active Israeli intention to kill civilians:

“Does Statman *know* (from a trustworthy source, not from the foggy tales of ‘Breaking the Silence’) that there was an incident in which soldiers killed the neighbours of a terrorist with prior intention, as distinct from the intention to kill the terrorist?” (2010: 9; my translation)

This challenge sits uneasily with Kasher’s other published remarks (cited above) about the difference between killing and letting die. Previously he had argued that acting in such a way that might possibly allow a “terrorist” to attack Israeli civilians in future is tantamount to killing those Israelis intentionally. Faced with the imminent prospect of certain Palestinian civilian deaths as a result of Israeli military action, however, Kasher insists that no such Israeli intention exists. The underlying reason is obvious, of course: Kasher prefers the life of an Israeli to the life of a Palestinian, no matter what he may proclaim to the contrary (cf. Kasher and Yadlin, 2009).

It is tempting to argue, following Agamben, that the entire exercise of distinguishing between intentional killing and letting die is inherently biopolitical (Agamben, 1998: 45–101). Some subjects (Israelis) can only be intentionally killed; others (Palestinians) can only be allowed to die. It is this civilisational hierarchy, one might argue, which separates Kasher from his critics. What should not be overlooked, however, is that such a biopolitical determination must find expression in ethical terms. It is not simply that the Palestinian bystander can only be allowed to die: the necessary, and more important, corollary of this is that the Israeli soldier can never intentionally kill him. A biopolitical perspective on this question can only take us so far, therefore. What it misses is that this production of “bare life” is in fact merely the projection of an ethical vision (a vision which is necessary because the sovereign soldier is also a *subject*) in which the preservation of the soldier’s purity of intent is paramount. The Palestinian bystander is never truly “bare life”; he is only variously projected as such by the differing imaginaries of Israeli military ethics. Crucially, it is the way in which these philosophers position the soldier as an ethical subject which is the crucial factor in modulating this projection.

This can be most clearly seen in the fact that Kasher’s response to Statman criticises his reliance on Breaking the Silence testimonies. I suggested above that the more demanding requirements of the new

ethical code would create an augmented role for testimony in the ethical process as a way of mediating the inevitable failure to meet these standards. Statman's use of *Breaking the Silence* testimonies in his evaluation of Operation Cast Lead is direct evidence of this new possibility. Indeed, both Statman and Halbertal claim to read *Breaking the Silence* documents very carefully and find them to be reliable sources of information in evaluating the performance of the IDF.⁴¹ Kasher, by contrast, has little tolerance for them. He takes a different approach when evaluating IDF operations. In his moral assessment of both Operation Cast Lead and Operation Protective Edge, for example, he repeatedly stresses that the use of non-official (i.e. non-IDF) sources to assess military actions is inherently unreliable (2009: 45, 2014).

Despite this assertion, in both articles Kasher nevertheless declares that *he* is in a position to clear the IDF of wrong-doing: "the data collected so far permits us to conclude that a significant part of the criticism directed at Israel and the IDF during and after the operation was, to say the least, based on flimsy evidence" (2009: 46). This turnabout is revealing. It shows that Kasher is almost unable to contemplate an internal investigation of IDF conduct which would reveal major shortcomings. This is not the only time he has expressed such confidence. In an interview for the *Jerusalem Post*, he was even clearer:

"...it doesn't matter where an accusation comes from, the IDF must take a look at it. The IDF must look into every story from B'Tselem, every story from MACHSOM Watch, every story from Amnesty International. Not because I rely on them. I don't. But you don't have to rely on them to do your work properly. Look into every story. There's a tiny, microscopic proportion that has some basis, so look, check, find out." (Jerusalem Post, 2011)

Whereas Statman views 'Breaking the Silence' testimonies as indicative of a wider culture of problematic behaviour, Kasher views such claims as fabrications to be exposed and, on a very small number of occasions, as evidence of isolated defects to be corrected. The consequence is that, when faced with the accusation that the IDF intentionally killed civilians, Kasher simply rejects this as

⁴¹ Author interviews.

formally impossible. Professional, official investigations do not find – could never find – widespread evidence of this. The whole point of Kasher’s original ethical code was that it would embody a “practical ideal”, reflecting existing practice to a great degree. But if investigation or testimonies reveal that the code was widely ignored, then this ideal would no longer be practical; indeed, the IDF would no longer be professional or ethical. To ensure that this never happens, therefore, Kasher constrains his definition of intentional killing as much as possible and expands the number of occasions on which civilians are merely “let die” as bare life.

This “microscopic” role for testimony stands in stark contrast to the omnipresent, constitutive gap between ideal standards and actual behaviour in the redrafted ethical code. Thus, for Kasher’s critics, it is entirely conceivable, even helpful, that testimonies should emerge which show that intentional killing occurred, and it is therefore not as necessary to circumscribe the conditions in which it could be said to have happened. Indeed, the fact that such episodes are examined through testimony is all the more evidence that the IDF is acting properly. For example, despite the concerns voiced in his letter, Statman still feels compelled to re-affirm that: “I feel completely honestly that the IDF is one of the outstanding armies in the world in the area of morality in warfare, if not the best – and despite this there is still room for improvement” (Statman, 2010: 3). This approach to testimony as a means of improvement and as a mode of ethical activity is certainly more challenging than discrediting testimony altogether, as Kasher does. Yet it is precisely this willingness to engage with testimony as an ethical technology that gives Israeli military ethics its power. It allows for a more flexible manipulation of the soldiers’ ethical faculties and their deeper subjective involvement in military activity, which is after all the purpose of the ethical code. It also has the serendipitous effect of neutralising the political critique which motivates many Breaking the Silence testimonies. Testimony is re-appropriated as purely ethical activity, as a means to help the IDF improve and fight better, despite testifiers’ often explicit aims to the contrary. It is this polyvalent deployment of the concept of “purity of arms” which allows it to perform such a central role in Israeli militarism.

Conclusion: The “New Spirit” of Militarism

In their path-breaking study of the changing legitimization strategies employed in advanced capitalist societies, Boltanski and Chiapello highlight a number of developments which provide clear parallels to the changing role of military ethics in the IDF. They argue that the capitalist mode of production requires a “Spirit” to maintain itself, which they define as “the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism”, the “set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps to justify this order and, through legitimating them, to sustain the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 8, 10). The “Spirit of the IDF” performs precisely the same role with respect to Israeli militarism.

Boltanski and Chiapello note transformations in the Spirit of the capitalism which are, roughly speaking, contemporaneous with the developments in Israeli military ethics I have surveyed in this chapter. They argue that the reaction against the bureaucratised, rationalised re-organisation of capitalism which took place in the 1960s produced a critique which stressed the importance of the development of the individual in a non-hierarchical setting. Instead of crumbling under this critique, however, capitalism reorganised itself to reflect such concerns through a new management culture in the 1990s. These management theories emphasised the importance of personal autonomy and freedom for motivating employees (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 57–99).

Consequently, capitalist firms encountered the same dilemma we have seen Israeli military ethicists grappling with: how to control an organisation of liberated individuals, a dilemma which is all the more acute in a military setting. New management culture arrived at the same solution as the IDF ethical code:

“the only solution is for people to *control themselves*, which involves transferring constraints from external organisational mechanisms to people’s internal dispositions, and for the powers of control they exercise to be consistent with the firm’s ‘general project’.” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 80, emphasis in original)

Indeed, although Kasher's code began this process, its efforts were subsequently deemed insufficient on precisely these terms. It was attacked for its impersonal style, its lack of ideological depth, and for its overbearing constraints on individual judgement. In response, the new code further entrenched this neoliberal mode of governance and devolved even more responsibility to the individual level. Yet in doing so it in fact strengthened individuals' commitment to militarism, just as the new management culture had bound its employees further to capitalism:

“the new mechanisms, which demand greater commitment and rely on a more sophisticated ergonomics, [...] precisely because they are more human in a way, also penetrate more deeply into people's inner selves – people are expected to ‘give’ themselves to their work – and facilitate an instrumentalisation of human beings in their most specifically human dimension.” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 98)

As we shall see in the next chapter, this idea of the soldier's “human image” is in fact crucial to the pedagogical techniques developed to implement the ethical code. Indeed, it should be no surprise that Boltanski and Chiapello also refer to the primacy of corporate “ethics” in achieving this new configuration of individual autonomy with institutional control.

Boltanski and Chiapello's argument about the dialectic of critique and reform in contemporary capitalism also has applications in understanding the debate about “purity of arms”. In particular, the manner in which a formerly political critique expressed in soldiers' testimony was then used as a means for evaluating and enhancing ethical performance shows how militarism has been reinvigorated by this process. That testimony itself is a product of the reflections of the soldier on the conduct of battle, and not of those subject to their violence, underscores the privileged importance that the interior world of the soldier attains in the ethical vision of Israeli militarism. Furthermore, it is the peculiar fate of testimony that reveals how this “New Spirit” of Israeli militarism is strengthened by the practice *within* the formal military sphere of ethical techniques that might otherwise be directed in opposition to it. As we shall see as this thesis progresses, this has the effect not only of implanting

testimony in the IDF as a militarist ethical practice but also of re-inscribing soldiers' testimony in wider society in ways which serve to drain it of political significance

Chapter 2: “Keeping a human image”: military ethical pedagogy in the IDF

Introduction

In the first chapter I analysed the doctrinal architecture that underpins the ethics of Israeli militarism. I made the argument that the ethical code of the IDF and its accompanying interpretations were not designed with the aim of reducing the level of violence used against Palestinians, but rather were developed as part of an ensemble of governing technologies that aimed to form Israeli soldiers as ethical subjects. As such, military ethics should not be viewed as a constraint on the IDF but instead as an enabling factor in the resort to force. The simplest sense in which this is commonly thought to be the case is that ethical doctrine can function as a kind of imprimatur, as a ready-made bundle of justifications for the use of violence. This invites the critique that military ethics facilitates an unthinking routinisation of violence by providing bureaucratic legitimacy, thus becoming a facet of what Arendt called the “banality of evil”. The implication is that by restoring conscious reflection and ethical deliberation to the use of violence such tendencies can be diminished (cf. Challans, 2007).

In this chapter I argue that such a critique is misplaced when considering the function of military ethics teaching in the IDF. For while military ethics might partly be about the production of deniability, in the Israeli case it has primarily implied the intensification of ethical effort and the deeper involvement of soldiers as subjects in the ethical facets of military activity. Crucially, even when the confrontation with moral dilemmas is direct and sometimes highly affecting, nothing inimical to the functioning of militarism necessarily takes place in such an encounter. On the contrary, it is in fact these moments that can be the most militarily useful experiences.

My approach in this chapter is to show, through an examination of the various means by which ethics is taught in the IDF, how Israeli officers and soldiers are encouraged to relate to the codes and doctrines discussed in chapter one. By focusing on these pedagogical techniques, I thereby emphasise that what military ethics depends on is not simply doctrinal clarity or careful justifications but processes of subject formation. It is through the work of the self on the self, the task of self-examination, and above all the practice of giving testimony that soldiers come to experience

themselves as subjects. To reiterate, this process is militaristic in that subject formation is thereby carefully channelled through military activity, with the consequence that it is the military sphere which becomes the privileged arena for ethical endeavour. What is more, this process is so effective precisely because it does not depend on the level of success in reducing the number of transgressions. By emphasising subject formation, Israeli military ethics can tolerate success and failure in equal measure, and perhaps even exhibits a bias in favour of the latter.

Guiding the analysis in this chapter are three inter-connected theoretical claims. The first claim is that Israeli military ethics must be understood as an integral element of *counterinsurgency* warfare. Israel's long-term involvement in counterinsurgency, and particularly its more recent and violent intensification, should serve as the context for understanding the development of the IDF's ethical pedagogical techniques. Counterinsurgency requires soldiers to deal directly with civilians by encouraging their compliance, by disciplining them with violence, and frequently by confining them in various ways (Khalili, 2013). Although Israeli counterinsurgency is qualitatively different from US, British, and French models in that it does not aim to secure the long-term political loyalty of Palestinians (Khalili, 2013: 10–25), the importance of the “intimate”, “face-to-face” encounter between coloniser and colonised, between occupying soldier and local civilian, nevertheless remains crucial in facilitating Israeli military occupation (Khalili, 2014: 7; see also Gregory, 2008). This proximity between soldiers and civilians in counterinsurgency turns the character of the individual soldier into an important site of pedagogical intervention.¹

Moreover, since it is regular soldiers rather than officers who are more likely to find themselves in the “seam of encounter” with civilians, ethical pedagogy targeted at lower-ranking soldiers often takes more embodied forms in which bodily dispositions, manners, and emotions come to play a greater role.² Indeed, it is in such instances where the gendered nature of the ethical subject being produced can most clearly be seen. Khalili (2011) has demonstrated the centrality of gender to the practice and

¹ In his study of Israeli counter-insurgency, for example, Sergio Catignani emphasises the importance of dealing with “ethical dilemmas” in maintaining what he calls “combat motivation” (Catignani, 2009: 116–119).

² Later in this chapter I will frequently use the term “seam of encounter”, which I borrow directly from Khalili (2011).

discourses of counterinsurgency. In this chapter, I argue that this also extends to the militarist practices of subject formation characteristic of the ethics of counterinsurgency. Military ethical pedagogy in the IDF works to produce an ethical subject who views himself as masculine in his capacity for rational deliberation and judgement, but who also tempers this with an empathetic emotional intelligence which is problematically associated with femininity. Despite these pretensions to affective sensitivity, however, it is also crucial to restate, as Khalili does (2014), that such an ethical disposition – no matter how elaborate – will inevitably come up against the irreducible political kernel of the situation, which is the inherent violence of occupation. Given the necessary incapacity of ethics to eliminate this violence, it is important to be clear that the ultimate beneficiary of this ethical pedagogy is the Israeli soldier, not the Palestinian civilian.

My second theoretical claim concerns the need to interpret the techniques of ethical pedagogy in the IDF as practices of *asceticism*. My understanding of asceticism as an ethical approach is derived from the work of Michel Foucault, who describes asceticism as the activity of constant self-improvement through practices such as mental preparation (or *paraskeue*), self-examination, and truth-telling (*parrhesia*).³ He stresses, as I do, the importance of understanding ethics as a field of practice which is constitutive of the subject. However, I also argue for the need to problematise Foucault's assumptions when studying military ethics in the IDF. In particular, I want to cast doubt on the possibility that an ascetic "care of the self" reliably interferes with hierarchical and violent structures of power such as the military. Instead, I will suggest that ascetic practices can just as easily co-exist with a structure of military violence, in particular insofar as they blend with a neoliberal project of entrepreneurial and ethical self-cultivation. This solipsistic focus on the self is in fact the reason why the structural violence of the IDF remains untouched by these ethical practices.

Indeed, my third theoretical claim in what follows will be that this asceticism functions primarily as an *ideology* which works to obscure and thus sustain this structural violence. I adhere to the view of Slavoj Žižek that ideology depends on a minimally dissociative attitude on the part of the subjects involved, rather than their complete and uncomplicated loyalty (Žižek, 2008a: 3–45, 2012: 1–34). Full

³ See above, 32–37.

identification with the military machine is not, I argue, the aim of Israeli military ethics. This is where a view of military ethics as merely a justificatory gloss on the use of force falls short. Instead, it is precisely in soldiers' *dis-identification* with the violent regime they serve which enables them to function effectively as militarist subjects. The purpose of military ethics is to cultivate and mobilise this dis-identification, to make soldiers feel that they retain their humanity despite their complicity in violence. As Boltanski and Chiapello argue in their study of the new spirit of capitalism, it is in this "specifically human dimension" (2005: 98) that the ethics of Israeli militarism seizes hold of soldiers as subjects. This depends not on the endless justification of any and all military activities but conversely on the tension between the human and the soldier, between the man and his uniform. It is this very failure of these two spheres fully to coincide that animates the entire ideological edifice. This important insight is encapsulated in the title of this chapter, a translation of a Hebrew aphorism which appears in the "Spirit of the IDF": *lishmor 'al tselem ha'enosh*, keep a human image.

The institutional framework of ethical pedagogy in the IDF

Studying ethical pedagogy in the IDF presents an immediate challenge because of its decentralised structure. There is no dedicated body in the IDF whose exclusive concern is ethics and, because of its amorphous nature, teaching ethics is necessarily inseparable from wider educational tasks. As well as being an independent area of interest, ethics can variously appear as an aspect of operational, legal, cultural, disciplinary, and even religious education and training. This decentralisation is also a product of the changing organisational culture of the IDF. Not only are there many overlapping formal bodies who concern themselves with ethics, each with their own particular interest and emphasis, there are also an increasing number of formal and informal external organisations and individuals who contribute to ethical education. In recent years this neoliberal trend towards the privatisation of IDF education has accelerated. According to the Israeli State Comptroller's Report into education in the IDF in 2011, the number of educational activities involving external civilian organisations rose from approximately 700 in 2008 to around 2,050 in 2010. The range of external organisations involved also grew from a "limited" number in 2009 to "dozens" in 2011 (Israeli State Comptroller, 2011: 1599). This organisational complexity, combined with the difficulty of research access, make a

comprehensive survey of ethics training in the IDF a very difficult task.⁴ Rather than attempt such a survey here, I have opted for an approach which aims to highlight recurrent patterns across a range of institutions and levels. In order to orientate the reader, I will begin with an overview of the key bodies involved in these pedagogical activities.

Operating at the most general level is the IDF Education and Youth Corps (hereafter: “the Education Corps”). This branch of the IDF is responsible for a vast array of educational activities, covering a wide range of topics. Concerning ethical education, the principal role of the Education Corps can be said to be fourfold: firstly, it produces educational material for use by officers in educating their units; secondly, it provides officers with training in how to educate the soldiers under their command; thirdly, it trains education officers who are then attached to particular units and work to support the commander; fourthly, it arranges for the involvement of external organisations to support education inside the IDF.⁵ The work of the Education Corps is, however, subject to a major constraint, which is a universal educational principle in the IDF: all education which soldiers receive must originate from their commanding officers, or else must take place under their supervision.⁶ The role of the commander in guiding and controlling the education is therefore paramount and the discretion commanders exercise constitutes another reason for the variability of ethical pedagogy in the IDF.

With this in mind, attention must also be paid to the ways in which officers themselves are educated. The most important among these institutions is “Bahad 1” where all officers (both combatant and non-combatant) must complete a course, followed by specialised courses in their own corps. Added to this list must be the military colleges, which provide more in-depth education to higher-ranking officers. The three principal colleges to be mentioned here are: the Tactical Command College (*Mekhlala lePiḳud Ṭakṭi*, or *Malṭaḳ* for short), which provides training to company commanders; the Command and Staff College (*Beit Sefer lePiḳud uMaṭe*, or *Pum* for short), which provides courses for majors and lieutenant colonels; and the National Security College (*Mikhlelet haBitaḥon Le‘umi*), where the most

⁴ For example, a notable feature of this changing institutional landscape has also been the expanding role of the Military Rabbinate. Although this development is significant, I have been unable to include it in this study.

⁵ Author interview with Roni Sulimani. The subdivision is my own.

⁶ Author interview with Roni Sulimani.

senior officers in the IDF are taught together with members of the Mossad and Security Services (Libel, 2010). At these more senior levels of instruction it is more likely that explicit courses on ethics will be taught, although the exact structure and nature of these is subject to frequent change. At all levels, the teaching staff comprise military and non-military personnel from both within and outside the college or school. Academic staff from Israeli universities will often be called upon to deliver lectures and classes, including entire courses, as will senior officers from across the IDF who take an interest in the topic. Many of these instructors are active in several institutions at once and are often asked to teach on an *ad hoc* basis.

Another important dimension to this institutional background is the reformulation of IDF pedagogical doctrine which took place in 2004. This reform was initiated by the then Chief of Staff, Moshe Ya'alon (later appointed Minister of Defence in 2013), and came to be expressed in the document *Yi'ud veYihud*, which roughly translates as "Identity and Purpose".⁷ The reform was inspired by Ya'alon's perception of declining combat motivation and the consequent need to restore soldiers' sense of Jewish-Israeli identity. In this he drew on his belief that the "People's Army" ethos should be restored to the IDF, returning it to its militia-like roots (Libel, 2013: 285–287). He interpreted his efforts as part of a scaling back of the creeping professionalisation of the 1990s (Ya'alon, 2006). Ya'alon tasked General Elazar Stern, the IDF Chief Education Officer, with developing a strategy and Stern quickly brought Professor Benjamin Ish Shalom, the Director of the Jewish educational charity, *Beit Morasha*, into the process. Ish Shalom had a formative impact on the document and its implementation, and sat on the final committee which approved it. The Education Corps was given the formal responsibility of implementing the strategy in co-operation with external organisations, principally Ish-Shalom's *Beit Morasha*. In encouraging such collaborations, this new strategy has therefore been a key element in the increasing privatisation of IDF education. In keeping with a neoliberal rationality, a new emphasis on the inculcation of values was combined with the wider societal distribution of responsibility for delivering these outcomes (Lemke, 2001: 201–204; Rose, 1999: 137–166).

⁷ The phrase *Yi'ud veYihud* is taken from the title of a well-known essay on the IDF by David Ben-Gurion.

The *Yi'ud veYihud* strategy emphasises the importance of developing the Jewish-Israeli identity of soldiers, and their sense of the values that underpinned their motivation to serve in the IDF. It mandated the inclusion of the study of Jewish tradition and thought in officers' schools and in military college syllabi and was fully integrated into officer training at all levels. In particular, it emphasised that officers needed to acquire the tools to pass these values on to their soldiers and underscored the importance of the role of the commander as an "educator in uniform". A specific programme, called *Maḥzabim* (a Hebrew abbreviation for "education for IDF leadership in Jerusalem"), was established in 2007 to focus on improving the educational capacity of commanders and to encourage them to discuss values with their units (Libel, 2013: 287). Col. Ya'akov Castel, the former head of the IDF education department who had also overseen the redrafting of the ethical code, led this programme.

Some scholars have interpreted the *Yi'ud veYihud* strategy as evidence of the growing influence of religious nationalism on the IDF (Levy, 2014: 15–16; Libel, 2013). This is accurate, but also risks obscuring the degree to which ethics formed a crucial element of the programme. In many ways, this document represented the pedagogical corollary of the changes made to the ethical code in 2000–2001. Both processes were driven in large part by Elazar Stern and should in this sense at least be seen as a coherent whole. But ethics is also woven into the very fabric of the programme. To begin with, it was the moral difficulties entailed in maintaining the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, especially during the Second Intifada, which contributed to the perceived need to develop the strategy. Discussing the logic behind the document in a newspaper interview, Benjamin Ish-Shalom remarked:

"IDF soldiers are presented these days with missions of great gravity [*mešimot cevadot mishḳal*] that require dealing with complicated conditions such as standing at checkpoints, arrest operations that expose them to immediate danger, guerrilla war, war in which civilians are injured and the distinction between the battle front and the home front is not clear. A war in which a soldier fights in Jenin in the morning and goes out with his friends to the shopping mall in the afternoon. This situation needs spiritual improvement." (Arutz Sheva, 2004; my translation)

Moreover, the emphasis the programme places on values naturally means that the reinforcement of Jewish-Israeli identity occurs through ethical work. The current director of the Jewish and Israeli Identity programme at *Beit Morasha* emphasised to me the inseparability of values and identity.⁸ Furthermore, the ethical code of the IDF is referred to in the *Yi'ud veYihud* document as a major source of the values underpinning Jewish-Israeli identity.⁹ Indeed, in a joint interview given with Benjamin Ish-Shalom, Moshe Ya'alon stressed that the aim of the programme was to give values such as “purity of arms” and “human life” a clear grounding in Jewish tradition (Makor Rishon Dyokan Magazine, 2006). In a similar way to the addition of “Jewish” elements to the text of the ethical code, therefore, the *Yi'ud veYihud* programme was designed to provide a cultural anchor for these values and thus to encourage Symbolic identification with them. Describing its purpose and outcome, Ya'alon was furthermore clear that it was ethical discussions which the training ultimately aimed to generate:

“The program exposes participants to important knowledge. It also legitimizes the discussion of values for those soldiers who already possess a firm grounding in values and equips them with tools that enable them to transmit those values to the soldiers under their command. Now, when a platoon commander has a discussion with a soldier, it is about ethical issues...The discussions of commanders, platoon leaders, and soldiers who attend this program are not academic. The program raises ethical issues that are translated into practical matters – such as rules of engagement, conduct in the field, and combat. It enables them to understand the concerns underlying these regulations.” (Makor Rishon Dyokan Magazine, 2006)

Despite its clear prioritisation of the strengthening of Jewish-Israeli identity, then, the design and implementation of this strategy relates very closely to issues of ethical pedagogy and was moreover directly aimed at alleviating the moral difficulties of fighting counter-insurgency warfare. Furthermore, the rationality underpinning it was in keeping with a broader neoliberal emphasis on promoting values and moral character in soldiers through increased contact with private charities,

⁸ Author interview with Shai Herskowitz.

⁹ The contents of the document are summarised in the 67th Annual Report of the State Comptroller (2011: 1605).

religious communities, and educational foundations. Throughout this chapter, I shall continually underscore the importance of interpreting *Yi'ud veYihud* through this analytical lens. I begin by analysing the ways in which officers are taught before moving on to a discussion of regular soldiers' encounter with ethical pedagogy.

Teaching ethics to IDF officers

In the first chapter I observed that the two iterations of the IDF ethical code represent two overlapping but distinct and often competing ethical visions. The first is the vision championed by Asa Kasher, which emphasises the status of the soldier, and especially the officer, as a professional (Kasher, 2008). The second, advanced originally by Elazar Stern and the coterie of philosophers who worked to redraft the code, instead stresses the educational and personal challenge of ethics, portraying ethics as a constant struggle for self-improvement and moral rectitude. Both of these views remain influential in the IDF, not least because very many of the individuals who were involved in drafting and redrafting the "Spirit of the IDF" are also frequently involved in teaching military ethics to officers. Asa Kasher has taught in all three of the major colleges mentioned above for a number of years.¹⁰ At the National Security College he taught a course of lectures until 2009, after which time he has often been asked to give individual lectures; he also has regularly given lectures at the Staff and Command College and the Tactical Command College. Daniel Statman taught a course at the National Security College for two years and frequently gives lectures to officers in a variety of other forums.¹¹ Moshe Halbertal, Avi Sagi, and Yishai Beer are also regularly invited to speak at colleges, officers' schools, or in conjunction with other organisations.¹²

Kasher's emphasis on the importance of professional training in ethics is both highly influential but poorly realised in practice. On the one hand, one can without doubt detect the influence of this language in the approaches of the staff of military colleges. His textbook "Military Ethics" is still a fundamental guide for educators in the IDF and his personal teaching has cemented this influence.

¹⁰ Author interview.

¹¹ Author interview with Daniel Statman.

¹² Author interviews with Moshe Halbertal, Avi Sagi, and Yishai Beer.

Describing the work of the Tactical Command College, its commander emphasised the importance of ethics to the professional development of the officer:

“We develop the foundation of the profession of the officer in its normative aspect [*bahebat ha'erchi-normati*], in other words cultivating appropriate behaviour for a Jewish-Israeli officer in all situations; and thus in the professional aspect, in other words examining the facts in a professional way. In this way, the decisions of the officer in situations of difficulty will be ethical [*erchiot*] and professional as one.” (Davidi, 2004: 35; my translation)

Likewise, Lieutenant Colonel Amira Raviv, in summarising the teaching of ethics at the Staff and Command College, emphasises that “working in the field of ethics advances the professionalism of the officer” (Raviv, 2004: 53; my translation). Yet professionalising ethical pedagogy has progressed unevenly. As Tamir Libel (2010) has made clear, the regularisation of professional training in the IDF is only a recent phenomenon and remains incomplete. Kasher himself laments this reality: “The very idea that an organised military force should have professionals, people who are professionals in education, professional in education of ethics, professional in terms of instruction of values, is alien to the IDF.”¹³ However important the emphasis on professionalism may be rhetorically, it continues to struggle in practice.

In opposition to this valorisation of professionalism, the approach associated with the *Yi'ud veYihud* strategy aims to strengthen the status of the IDF as a “People’s Army”, often through a re-emphasis on supposedly Jewish or Zionist values (Libel, 2013). Beyond its ambition to strengthen cultural and religious identification, however, I want to emphasise that this approach is fundamentally shaped by an *ascetic* ethical disposition. In particular, rather than focussing on compliance with professional standards, this pedagogical strategy encourages officers to work on themselves to improve their moral character and to develop ethical faculties. In keeping with the second version of the ethical code, it is at once more trusting and yet more demanding of the officer, stressing the possibility of constant self-improvement. Below I offer some examples of how asceticism is manifested in this approach.

¹³ Author interview.

The easiest way to grasp the essence of this pedagogical strategy is to contrast it with the views of Kasher. Kasher recognises these rival approaches as a non-professional and naïve application of moral theory to military activity – an attempt to “shape character” rather than “shaping [...] behaviour as people in military uniforms”.¹⁴ Referring back to the importance of having detailed norms in the ethical code, Kasher stresses the importance of agreed and clear standards:

“you can talk to them... for hours and days and weeks about human dignity... it’s not enough. You have to do something else... in order for them to act properly. One thing you should do is to have norms in your code of ethics and not just... abstract values. Norms that would say ‘okay, under such circumstances, this and that is what is required’. It’s like a regulation, like rules of engagement, like a command; not a value, [...] something that hovers above your head, put in very abstract terms.”¹⁵

This is very different from the more ascetic approach of other teachers of military ethics. For example, Moshe Halbertal’s view on this question is precisely the reverse: “the challenge is to make these rules part of the inner world of each soldier, and this takes more than just formulating the norms and the rules properly” (Halbertal, 2009). Halbertal’s aim is to produce “a certain understanding of the depth of the principles... of their sense and what they stand for and why...” This is to be achieved “with a good narrative imagination, imagining life complexities, and building trust in judgement”.¹⁶ He even invokes the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, to describe the faculty he wishes to cultivate. Halbertal is clear that this requires an extremely demanding ethical process:

“In discussing the code of ethical conduct with Israeli officers, many times I encounter the following complaint: ‘Do you want to say that, before I open fire, I have to go through all these moral dilemmas and calculations? It will be completely paralyzing. Nobody can fight a war in such a straitjacket!’ My answer to them is that the whole point of training is about performing well under pressure without succumbing to paralysis. This is the case with battlefields that have nothing to do with moral concerns. Do I attack from the right or from the left? How do I

¹⁴ Author interview with Asa Kasher.

¹⁵ Author interview.

¹⁶ Author interview with Moshe Halbertal.

respond to this new tactic, or to that? And so on. This is why moral considerations have to be an essential part of military training. If there is no time for moral reflection in battle, then moral reflection must be accomplished before battle, and drilled into the soldiers who will have to answer for their actions after battle.” (Halbertal, 2009)

What Halbertal has in mind here is a recognisably ascetic form of ethics, one which is fully contiguous with more conventional military training and is aimed at preventing the “paralysis” of the officer in combat. It involves a careful process of repetition, discussion, and elucidation. In fact this approach appears very similar to the Stoic practice of *paraskeue* that Foucault identifies in ancient ascetic culture:

“In the ascesis, the *paraskeue* involves preparing the individual for the future, for a future of unforeseen events whose general nature may be familiar to us, but which we cannot know whether and when they will occur. It involves, then, finding in ascesis a preparation, a *paraskeue*, which can be adapted to what may occur, and only to this, and at the very moment it occurs, if it does so.” (Foucault, 2005: 320–321)

Indeed, given that *paraskeue* literally means “preparation”, it is striking that in IDF jargon ethics training is considered an aspect of “mental preparation” [*hakhana mentalit*]. According to Foucault, a crucial element of this process is absorbing certain precepts and sayings (*logoi*) for use in moments of ethical deliberation. Quoting Seneca, he argues that in the *paraskeue* the ethical subject will have these *logoi* “driven into him, embedded in him”; they will be “phrases that he has embedded in his mind by repeating them” (2005: 323). The aim of teaching the IDF ethical code is precisely the same. The basic values of the “The Spirit of the IDF” function as *logoi*, with ethical pedagogy encouraging their absorption. Indeed, Daniel Statman, another Israeli philosopher teaching military ethics in the IDF, appeared to confirm this, emphasising to me that the ethical code must be “drilled in the minds” of soldiers, and turned into a “common language”.¹⁷

¹⁷ Author interview

Outside the ruminations of philosophers, this ascetic outlook is echoed in the words of senior military personnel who regularly give lectures on military ethics to officers. Major General Yishai Beer, who served previously as Judge Advocate General and worked on the panel to redraft the ethical code, describes his view of the ethical process in direct contrast to a legalistic approach.¹⁸ Criticising the trend for the increasing involvement of military lawyers in approving specific military actions (Jones, forthcoming), he argues that a focus on law encourages only a minimum level of compliance and may give rise to a more permissive attitude once legal authorisation has been assured. Instead, he believes that moral training should be used to raise standards. Indeed, he is proud of the fact that, in its most recent draft, the Spirit of IDF makes no reference to Israeli or international law at all. Beer uses the metaphor of the driver of a car to justify his position: just as a driver should be in control of both the accelerator and the brake to ensure maximum effectiveness, so the officer should be in charge of both the application and the restraint of force. Beer's metaphor is notable for the way it interiorises the ethical process within the individual subject, creating an internal economy of force and restraint rather than an external legal or bureaucratic framework. It is the individual as a full moral and strategic agent who acts as the conduit for decisions, once again privileging the officer's personal judgement as a site of pedagogical intervention.

Another military figure frequently called upon to give lectures to officers is Colonel Ben Tzion Gruber, deputy commander of an armoured division and a personal friend of Moshe Halbertal.¹⁹ Gruber also gives public speeches in the United States and in Israel, using a similar array of carefully selected videos (many of which come from UAV cameras over Gaza) to those he uses in lectures within the IDF.²⁰ Gruber fully adheres to Halbertal's view of "collateral damage" questions, using the same language of necessity, distinction, and responsibility, and even claims to have influenced the philosopher himself.²¹ Strikingly, one of Gruber's central metaphors for his pedagogical contribution is also vehicular. He describes his role as augmenting a soldier's "brake-pads" [*refidot*], implicitly invoking Halbertal's concept of soldiers' "ethical foundation". This image also reprises Yishai Beer's

¹⁸ The following two paragraphs are based on the author's interview with Yishai Beer.

¹⁹ Author interview with Ben Tzion Gruber. Gruber claims to give about 50 lectures per year in the IDF.

²⁰ I observed Gruber giving one such talk to journalists in Tel Aviv on 1st May 2013.

²¹ By contrast, he described Asa Kasher as "a disaster".

notion of an internal economy of force and restraint within the soldier-subject, emphasising the importance of an inner ethical substance. This is ascetic work precisely in the sense that it requires self-augmentation, an enhancement of one's internal capacity for self-control. Indeed, it is important to recognise that this ascetic process is also a gendered, masculinising one. Sasson-Levy has shown that the construction of masculine identities among Israeli soldiers depends on a tension between "thrill-seeking" and practices of "self-control" (2008: 305–309). This example suggests that the gendered pursuit of masculinity through bodily discipline also extends to ethical self-regulation.

Crucially, for Gruber the principal aim of this ascetic self-cultivation is preserving the humanity of the soldier rather than protecting civilians. Each time a soldier uses violence, Gruber contends, his ethical brake-pads erode slightly and through a process of gradual attrition can eventually disappear altogether. This leaves behind a soldier who is no longer a human, but "an animal". Gruber told me that he drew directly on his own experience to develop this metaphor: "you [...] lose something when you shoot, and when you kill your first enemy, you are not the same. I know this: you are not the same. You never killed someone. I killed a lot. I am not the same guy for sure."²² Here we can begin to understand the ideological importance of asceticism for "keeping a human image", for allowing officers to dis-identify with the violence they exercise in order to continue functioning as military agents.

Having established the fundamental elements of the approach of military asceticism, I will now proceed to identify the practical techniques through which this ethical vision is realised. Lt. Colonel Amira Raviv describes the development of the approach adopted by the Staff and Command College as follows:

"[W]e learnt that ethical education is not successful in activating internalisation processes [*tahalichei hapnama*] when the officer listens to lectures or to moral preaching; on these occasions he becomes just a passive element... It seemed that the way to create the most meaningful change was discussion based on incidents that the students brought from their

²² Author interview.

own personal experience, or examples close to them, on dialogue, on the exchange of opinions, on persuasion and on experience using simulations and role play.” (2004: 55; my translation)

In order to facilitate such activities, she also stressed the importance of “creating an atmosphere of open-mindedness [*petiḥut maḥshavit*] and critical thinking” (2004: 55). She further mentions the importance of self-examination and of “discussing positive episodes, as well as negative episodes – courageously and without bias. The whole way, we check ourselves in the light of [ethics] – whether we reached the goals we set ourselves, and whether there is room to improve” (2004: 55). The ascetic drive is obvious in these remarks, as is the atmosphere of frankness characteristic of *parrhesia*, the practice of candid truth-telling. It would seem from these comments that testimony by the officer is an important way of immersing him in the ethical process, of practising the relation of values to past behaviour, and of creating the impetus to improve. Indeed, this was confirmed in several of my interviews with those teaching ethics to IDF officers.

Moshe Halbertal appeared to take a very similar approach to soliciting testimony in teaching the value of “purity of arms” to officers. He discussed his main pedagogical aims as follows:

“I want them to come out with four very simple questions²³ they can ask themselves and teach to their soldiers. That’s one thing. In the end it’s not a philosophy seminar, so people have to internalise it and work with it. For a philosopher it’s a big challenge to crystallise things. And also, while doing it, emphasising first of all that it’s both professional and reasonable. And second that these principles are not going to disturb their capacity to reach their military goal but actually will be very constructive and helpful. And then... also listening very carefully. I learned a lot from them, listening very carefully... It’s always an hour and a half, two hours’ discussion. It’s not a lecture.”²⁴

²³ The four questions relate to his principles of necessity, distinction, responsibility, and proportionality – the last being added only in situations where sufficient information is available. See chapter one.

²⁴ Author interview.

In this context, Halbertal stressed that the “Spirit of the IDF” was in large part designed as “a critical tool... a tool for self-examination”.²⁵ He also emphasised that discussing officers’ past experiences was intended as an opportunity for self-improvement, not about exposing past trauma or guilt:

“It’s done in the spirit that they might have missed something, that they want to listen... it’s not confessional... It’s really not about: “look I’ve done this terrible thing, how should I atone for that?” I don’t think they’re going to do that in this forum, if they are going to do that at all.”²⁶

This underscores my argument that these ethical techniques are fundamentally ascetic, rather than pastoral, in their contribution to militarist governmentality. The principal aim is not exposing failures or generating confessions, but contributing to a sense of self-cultivation.

However, this does not preclude the possibility that difficult episodes might be discussed to this end. According to Yishai Beer, the discussions about officers’ past experiences he has had while teaching ethics have been “extensive and emotional”.²⁷ Generally, however, the most difficult accounts to discuss are those in which an officer claims that he or a comrade risked harm for the sake of saving civilian lives, and not episodes of violence against Palestinians:

“...some of them have some guilt feelings and want to receive some kind of confirmation from me as if I’m some sort of Catholic priest giving clemency. I cannot. If you have a story, present it, let’s talk about it but I... It never occurred to me that someone told me “Hey, I murdered a civilian” or “I killed a civilian”. They don’t talk like that. But they tell the stories. Basically... most of them are about risk they’ve taken not to kill the innocent. So they want to receive some kind of confirmation from me that what they have done is fine because they know that I have also a military capacity, so I can give them my professional perspective regarding that.”

²⁵ Author interview.

²⁶ Author interview.

²⁷ The quotations in the following two paragraphs are drawn from the author’s interview with Yishai Beer.

Again, therefore, Beer's primary concern was not confession but eliciting what he called "living examples" through discussion in order to relate the contents of the ethical code to practice. His classes specifically concern the importance of "human dignity", one of the three fundamental values in the Spirit of the IDF. He begins by discussing the importance of respecting the human dignity of friendly soldiers before broadening the discussion to include enemy combatants and civilians. The continuing tension between this human element and the military instinct was directly present in Beer's view of the role of ethical education:

"It's not, you know, intuitive for military commanders to think about your adversary's soldiers... I think it's very important. It's very problematic, but it's very important. It's problematic in the sense that soldiers are being trained to kill. They are hunters, you know. You teach a hunter how to hunt. It's quite complicated. But they are willing."

As I have already stressed, however, this "problematic" tension between the "hunter" and the "human" should also be viewed as productive: the very difficulty involved in relating these values to the reality of war, combined with the often emotional nature of these discussions, engenders an ideological process through which soldiers can understand themselves not only as hyper-masculine "hunters", but also as sensitive human beings.

A parrhesiastic ethics of testimony also facilitates this militaristic ideological process. Beer illustrated this point in another remark about a specific class he gave to officer cadets in training at "Bahad 1", as part of the IDF's *Maḥzabim* programme. Underscoring to me how open and frank he perceived his discussions with officers to be, Beer mentioned that the *Ha'aretz* journalist Amira Hass (well-known for her left-wing views) was observing his class and he claimed that she was "amazed" and "impressed by the openness of the discussion". In a notable turn of phrase, Beer then observed: "If Amira Hass can be in the audience of such a discussion, why on earth do you need *Shovrim Shtiḳa?* [Breaking the Silence]" Not only is Beer drawing a direct parallel here between his own work inside the IDF and the work of Breaking the Silence, he is also showing the ease with which the political message of group can be neutralised through reference to a shared aim of openness and moral

improvement. His remarks illustrate the ease with which soldiers' testimony can be and has been absorbed by the IDF as a militarist practice.

A comparison with the approach of Asa Kasher in teaching ethics should further underscore the specific role of testimony in asceticism. Despite his emphasis on professionalism and the importance of having trained professional instructors in ethics, Kasher is certainly not averse to drawing on soldiers' experiences to demonstrate the application of the values to practice. He views it as an excellent resource to be combined with professional instruction. Yet it is also important to stress that Kasher remains more reluctant to dwell on negative stories. He gave the following example of a written assignment he used to give to officers he was teaching at military colleges:

“I give them as a term paper the duty to write about someone's experience and analyse it. Most of the time they bring their own experience, and most of the time it's a bad experience, which means that they are afraid that they did not act properly, which means its self-criticism on grounds of the code, which I... Okay, the fact that they bring their own experience is excellent. But that's no problem, that comes as no surprise. I mean, they are all very experienced and why should they bring some story from an old book? They have gone through numerous incidents that are of much interest. Secondly, the fact that they come up with self-criticism is fine. It shows that they are frank, serious, sincere, that they take it seriously. I like it. However, what I dislike is the concentration on the bad aspects. The whole idea of ethics is to improve your activity, not to remove you from bad experience but to make you become closer to good activity. Rarely do they bring... an example of a battle about which a person was decorated. So they are more in the business of removing themselves from the bad than turning themselves closer to the good.”²⁸

Many aspects of military asceticism are present here – the Stoic practice of “self-writing” (cf. Foucault, 2000b), the focus on self-improvement, the endorsement of self-criticism, the importance of frankness and sincerity – but the crucial difference remains the level of willingness to incorporate

²⁸ Author interview.

discussion of negative incidents. Kasher would still prefer the emulation of heroic examples, rather than the exploration of past failings. Again, this is characteristic of his entire approach to ethics; it is the pedagogical corollary of his emphasis on the “practical ideal”. The officers’ lack of conformity to these expectations suggests a more demanding and difficult ethical process, which takes failure more seriously, is more likely to engage their interest.

To integrate the preceding points about asceticism and testimony, I will offer one further example – this time drawing on a specific programme, rather than the more diffuse work of different instructors. This is a course for senior officers convened by Colonel Ya’akov Castel called the *Lev Aharon* programme, which was established in 2006. It is based at the Shalom Hartman Institute, a Jewish education centre in Jerusalem, which also counts among its academic members several of the philosophers involved in drafting the latest version of the IDF ethical code (Avi Sagi, Daniel Statman, and Noam Zohar). The programme caters for officers between the ranks of Major and Brigadier General, as well as staff who teach at military colleges and officers’ schools. Between 1000 and 1500 officers now participate in the course annually and approximately 6000 had passed through it by 2013.²⁹ In accordance with the *Yi’ud veYihud* educational doctrine, the programme aims to strengthen officers’ Israeli and Jewish identity. However, to view the programme as a narrowly ethno-religious project is to miss its broader ethical and governmental framework. In keeping with a neoliberal rationale, this is achieved through the ascetic cultivation of individual values and moral character in an educational process which has been privatised to a religious educational foundation. The brochure of the programme makes this dimension especially plain and is therefore worth quoting at length:

“Targeted at secular and religious Jews as well as non-Jewish officers, the seminars focus on values and morality, exploring the gaps between different sectors in Israeli society, the idea of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, the history of the Jewish people, and Jewish heritage. The seminars enrich participants by introducing new viewpoints to their existing perspectives of Israeli society, providing them with new manners of understanding their culture, heritage, and personal relationship to Israel. The officers study two elemental IDF texts—the IDF

²⁹ Author interview with Ya’akov Castel.

Spirit, an outline of the moral responsibility of the IDF, and David Ben Gurion's *Yi'ud veYihud* on the commitment of the Jewish people to serve in the IDF and the responsibility of the commander as an educator.

Lev Aharon seminars, which consist of an orientation, core seminar, and post-seminar follow-up session led by distinguished academics and experienced senior officers, provide participants with a break from their regular, stressful, regimented schedule to critically and emotionally explore various facets of Israeli society. The transformative seminars often provide officers with their first opportunity for intimate, unguarded, honest expression within the military framework. Many senior officers report that they are extremely proud to serve in a military that makes this type of open discussion an integral service component for its leaders.” (Shalom Hartman Institute, 2012)

The ascetic emphasis on frank, open, and critical discussion and self-examination stand out from this description. Indeed, the course takes place over several months explicitly in order to allow time for reflection on recent practice – in other words, to encourage the possibility of testimony. Castel described this in detail:

“It is divided into three parts. There is an orientation day. Afterwards they go back to their units, to their homes, to their families, to their units, and come back to the central process for an intensive series of lessons, which lasts between five days and ten days in a row. After that they go back to their families and their units and we invite them for another day between three months and half a year afterwards in order to hear two things: what they say in retrospect about what they did/went through [*ma she hem 'avru*]; and, no less important, whether they did anything with it, whether it influenced them in a concrete way, in their actions, in their behaviour in the army.”³⁰

This is particularly the case in discussing the “Spirit of the IDF”, to which one discussion session is devoted per course. In groups of 10 to 12, the officers go over recent examples from their military

³⁰ Author interview [my translation].

experience and discuss them in the light of the code. If no examples are forthcoming, then the convenor will make use of a case study from a prepared bank of examples. Generally, however, Castel reported that discussions were quite frank. He referred to one example where an officer discussed his use of drones in Operation Cast Lead in Gaza:

“In Cast Lead, we had a case of dilemma which a commander had in this unit about the limits of the use he made of [drones] and the argument that there was between two commanders about whether to do a particular mission or not, between two pretty senior commanders, who considered an argument about a moral dilemma there is here between the military benefit [*to‘elet hatsva’it*] and the moral dilemma... It stirred me up [*‘oti ze rigesh*] that they brought it into the class. Ultimately [...] the person who dropped the bombs did what he was told, but he wasn’t sure that he acted in the correct moral way. He brought it into the classroom.”³¹

This particular example illustrates very well how the ideological impact of such ethical discussions is not contingent upon practical outcomes, or indeed on an uncomplicated justification of the violence employed. The very complexity and lack of consensus in this case contributes to the perception that this ethical reflection is powerful and meaningful, helping to achieve the desired consolidation of a value-based Jewish-Israeli identity.

This example is also noteworthy for its provenance in drone warfare, typically considered by critics to be a mode of violence which facilitates ethical disengagement (Coker, 2013: 109–145). It may be, however, that the call to recover a more reflective, “human” approach to the use of drones has already been anticipated by militaries themselves. For it is precisely this human element which the *Lev Aharon* programme appears to wish to cultivate, effecting the mechanism of ideological dis-identification I have referred to in this chapter. Castel was very keen to emphasise the “human” aspect of what the course achieves:

“It’s part of being a commander to be concerned with these questions. I really think that it makes them – and they testify to this – better human beings, more sensitive. They also say

³¹ Author interview [my translation].

that it makes them better parents to their children, which is very, very touching to hear from them, that it makes them better partners to their spouses. It influences them in many ways as people. The army is interested in their functioning as officers, but as a by-product here we develop many benefits to the people as human beings [*'anashim cabnei 'adam*], which is a great benefit in the state of Israel – it's important to society. Not in the military field but there is here improvement in many ways.”³²

I would submit that there is, however, a direct military benefit being garnered here, which paradoxically can only be achieved by this sense of distancing from purely military concerns. Such courses help officers to “keep a human image” and this is in fact the core of their ideological contribution to militarism.

Teaching ethics to soldiers

There is a great degree of variability in the nature of the ethical education that soldiers receive, depending on their precise unit and deployment, and on the preferences of their commander.³³ At a bare minimum, all soldiers will be exposed to the “Spirit of the IDF” document at some point in basic training and its values are supposed to form the basis of any discussion of ethical issues. In addition, all soldiers must carry a copy of the code as part of their uniform. After basic training, various sessions may also be organised to deal with issues as they relate to the particular deployment of the unit or in response to problems which arise. Commanders are in theory required to discuss the ethical issues which arose during a particular mission in the process of operational debriefing [*tahkir mivtza'i*] in what is known as ethical debriefing [*tahkir 'erkhi*].³⁴ In practice, however, this procedure is rarely undertaken.³⁵ This should reinforce the general point being made in this thesis so far that ethical pedagogy in the IDF is far more concerned with cultivating the soldier as an ethical subject than with changing actual patterns of violence or with ensuring accountability. Particularly significant in this respect is that the findings of operational debriefings are used by the Military Advocate General

³² Author interview [my translation].

³³ In this chapter I will mostly be concerned with soldiers in mandatory service, not with reservists.

³⁴ Author interview with Roni Sulimani.

³⁵ In a research paper produced by Colonel Atar Dagan as part of his studies at the National Security College, it was found that in only 2 out of 50 debriefings examined were ethical issues discussed (author interviews with Atar Dagan, Amos Harel, and Asa Kasher).

(MAG) and Military Police Criminal Investigation Department to determine if further investigation of an incident is necessary.³⁶ Consequently, it is more common to find detailed discussion of ethical concerns with soldiers in educational forums which are insulated to a certain degree from the actual use of violence and from disciplinary structures. In IDF parlance, ethics is much more a facet of *binyan hakoah*, building the forces, than *hafalat hakoah*, deploying the forces.

It is the responsibility of the Education Corps to develop the materials, educational tools, and lesson outlines for classes discussing ethics. The Corps determines the content and structure of these sessions, which are tailored to each specific rank and unit, and provides commanders with lesson plans, educational software [*lomda*], and case studies for use in running them.³⁷ It also trains commanders to hold discussions of these issues with their soldiers, as part of the *Mahzabim* programme to enhance the capacity of commanders as educators. Furthermore, the Corps facilitates the involvement of external organisations to run sessions under the commander's supervision. Despite the best efforts of the Education Corps to promote commanders as educators, however, the results of this strategy have been uneven. The Israeli State Comptroller investigated the success of the *Yi'ud veYihud* strategy in 2011 and found that, despite a high willingness on the part of officers, many did not feel that they had the ability to hold discussions about values and identity with soldiers under their command (2011: 1607–1611). In research conducted by the Education Corps, only around one quarter of officers surveyed reported having held such discussions with their soldiers (Israeli State Comptroller, 2011: 1608). Much more routine occasions for ethical pedagogy therefore occur during training and in subsequent sessions run by the Education Corps, often through privatised arrangements with external organisations. To illustrate key trends, in this section I will discuss aspects of basic training and pre-deployment training for soldiers serving in the occupied territories, the use of educational software

³⁶ For more information on the role of this procedure in the overall system of military and criminal investigations in Israel, see the second report of the Turkel Commission established to examine these procedures (2013: 335–346). Various human rights organisations have raised concerns that operational debriefings may be used to co-ordinate testimonies and evade legal sanctions (Yesh Din, 2011: 32–38). Responding to such concerns, the Turkel Commission recommended in 2013 that separate investigations by the MAG should occur concurrently with operational debriefing but still suggested that debriefings should be made available to the MAG (Turkel Commission, 2013: 378–383).

³⁷ Author interview with Roni Sulimani.

developed by the IDF School of Law, and the programmes run by *Beit Morasha* as part of its involvement in implementing the *Yi'ud veYihud* strategy.

The ethics component of the basic training and preparation of regular combat soldiers is designed primarily with the soldier, and not the Palestinian civilian, in mind. It is designed to protect the soldiers themselves from the moral consequences of their military service. Roni Sulimani, former director of the education department of the Education Corps, described his interest in educating soldiers in precisely this way:

“I think that the most important job of the education corps is to make sure that the spirit of the young people that come to the army will remain the same when they are out of the army. So the education corps is like a body guard of the spirit of the people who have served in the army. That was why I was so interested in it. In one way, the army has to deal with a socialisation process – that you have to become a soldier – and in [an]other way it has the role of making sure you don't become a war machine... The main important thing in... *Ruah Tsahal* [“The Spirit of the IDF”] is to protect our soldiers to remain human beings, even [on the battlefield], even in war. All of what the Spirit of *Tsahal* [the IDF] does is to protect our soldier not to do terrible things, even in war. This is a very important role.”³⁸

This understanding of the role of ethical education conforms to the ideological model I have described so far. Ethical pedagogy is designed to promote dis-identification between the soldier as a “human being” and the “war machine”, and to insulate soldiers from the psychological consequences of the violence they wield. The ultimate criterion remains the well-being of the Israeli soldier, not enemy combatants or civilians.

In his recent account of the deployment of a unit from the *Nahal* brigade to Hebron, the Israeli journalist Amos Harel observed the ethical training process which soldiers undergo. He notes that it first appears in basic training in the form of a week-long educational course which is supposed to cover cultural and societal issues (such as Zionism and state building) but which in practice focuses

³⁸ Author interview.

on “mental and ethical preparation [*hakhana mentalit ve ‘erkhit*] for activities in the territories” (Harel, 2013: 339). Indeed, just as the officer training described above emphasises the importance of learning to apply theory to practice through repeated discussion of examples, so regular soldiers are encouraged to think about examples drawn from practice in order to promote what is referred to as the assimilation [*haṭma ‘a*] of values.

Unlike in the case of officers, however, there is a much stronger emphasis on visual material and active, even bodily, participation. In the class which Harel describes, the platoon commander first discusses with his soldiers the precise meaning of “necessary force” in the value of “purity of arms”. After this, the soldiers are shown several videos, each produced by the Education Corps and IDF Theatre, which depict scenarios in which the values of the Spirit of the IDF are deemed relevant and occasionally come into conflict. In one video soldiers come across a wallet containing one thousand dollars in a Palestinian home which is about to be demolished. The commander then leads a heated discussion about whether it would be permissible to take the money (answer: no). What is striking about this example is how the issue of looting is foregrounded and thereby completely obscures the question of the house demolition, which remains an unexamined, neutral part of the scenario. Likewise, in another video, a soldier recounts how he and a friend beat and then strangled an arrested Palestinian who was sobbing too loudly. And a final scenario portrays soldiers abusing an elderly Palestinian at a checkpoint as revenge for a friend killed in a terrorist attack (Harel, 2013: 339–343). In all these cases, the discussion is designed to improve the smooth functioning of the military procedure at hand – whether it is demolition, arrests and detention, or maintaining checkpoints – and to shift the controversy to seemingly more individual, rather than structural, instances of violence.

The focus of such sessions becomes much more practical after basic training is complete and soldiers have been assigned to their units. Indeed, the closer that soldiers come to the “seam of encounter”, the more active and physical their involvement in ethical pedagogy. Prior to deployment at checkpoints or other locations in the West Bank, all IDF soldiers now undergo computer-based training developed by the IDF School of Law (Guiora, 2006; Adler, 2007). Contrary to the perceived role of military lawyers as effective only in justifying or legalising military operations from a distance, the IDF

School of Law is also interested in the ethical formation of soldiers. Indeed, in its practical manifestation this legal training is in fact subsumed by wider ethical objectives. The software, developed in a project led by Major General Amos Giuora during his time as commander of the School of Law, works to accentuate the active involvement of the soldier as a subject in the ethical process. In his words,

“The preferred solution was to avoid – unless field and operational circumstances dictated otherwise – ‘standup’ lectures to units whose soldiers were either in training or preparing for deployment, and instead to develop an interactive software, based on Hollywood movies and state-of-the-art graphics, to teach an eleven-point code of conduct. This code is based on international law and was formulated after careful analysis of other armies' practice.

Although other armies had indeed developed training material on this issue, means of effectively reaching the soldier were lacking. The client has to be ‘hooked’ to ensure - as much as possible - that a genuine learning process will take place. A training video with role-playing actors, as used in other armies, was found to be ‘unnatural’ and ‘staged’. The goal was to devise an educational tool that the audience could relate to, not only in the context of present experience from before their military service. That tool had to be entertaining at least in its approach; it had to have a ‘marketing edge’ to it, or the soldier might disregard it.”

(Giuora, 2006)

The use of language inspired by neoliberal organisational culture is evident in this passage – the soldier is a “client” to whom “entertaining” training must be “marketed” and who therefore chooses the moral pathway because he is incentivised. As Guiora adds, “the use of the word ‘client’ is intentional, since an educational mission that is not client oriented is a guaranteed failure” (2006). The training therefore strives to achieve a quintessentially neoliberal “congruence [...] between a responsible and moral individual and a rational-economic actor” (Lemke, 2001: 201).

What is also noticeable is the accentuation of the interactive element in this training. Although virtual, this software deploys a much more immersive approach to ethical training. The use of Hollywood

films³⁹ to illustrate certain dilemmas is designed to promote identification with the situation as well as to add an “entertaining” edge. Indeed, as one lecturer from the IDF School of Law has remarked, “I have personally found that there is nothing as effective as a movie clip with a plethora of explosions and machine gun fire to ensure the undivided attention of a class” (Adler, 2007: 47). This tactic of immersion is apparently crucial to the efficacy of the software, as an example shows:

“The segment shown from the movie *Platoon*, which depicts a My Lai-like incident, is powerful in its images and sounds. Soldiers are seen burning huts and throwing grenades into dug holes that may well be hiding places. Children cling to their parents and beg that they not be taken from them. Against this harsh background, the camera focuses on the commander walking away deep in thought.” (Giuora, 2006)

Following these clips, soldiers are shown animated scenes based on real events that have occurred under IDF Central Command, which controls the West Bank, and the software asks them questions about the best course of action. It is important to stress that these animations are therefore also a form of testimony. Indeed, as Giuora writes, “confronting soldiers with real-life dilemmas that either his unit or similar units have experienced was seen as the most realistic and potentially effective approach” (2006).

The embodied dimension of ethical pedagogy is accentuated even further when an additional tool is used to teach ethical values: interactive theatre. Theatre workshops in which soldiers are invited to play roles alongside actors is commonly used by the IDF to prepare soldiers for situations they are likely to face on particular deployments. Harel reports, for example, that the IDF uses theatre groups to run “simulations” in which soldiers pretend to be in a real-life encounter in the West Bank. Some of them take on the role of duty soldiers, while others might perform the role of settlers, left-wing activists, and even Palestinians. This can be used primarily as a technical tool without much consideration of ethical issues, as Harel reports in the session he observed. However, the IDF frequently uses interactive theatre as a means of ethical pedagogy as well. Indeed, in 2012, the

³⁹ The films used are: *Apocalypse Now*, *Rules of Engagement*, *Three Kings*, *Platoon*, *The Eagle has Landed*, *Kelly's Heroes*, *The Siege*, *The English Patient*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and *Casualties of War*.

Education Corps announced it would be expanding its use of such methods as a response to the growing number of controversial incidents involving Israeli and international activists (Walla! News, 2012).

In order to understand properly the role of theatre in ethical pedagogy in the IDF it is necessary to trace its origins, which once again lie with the *Yi'ud veYihud* programme. At the beginning of the launch of the new educational strategy, *Beit Morasha* was the major partner institution working with the Education Corps. Over the course of its activities in the IDF, *Beit Morasha* claims to have reached over 200,000 soldiers – as many as 25,000 per year (Beit Morasha, n.d.).⁴⁰ In recent years the pace of the work has slowed but many other organisations have continued programmes originally developed under its aegis, including theatre education.⁴¹ In 2004, an Israeli television actress, who had also been a member of the IDF theatre troupe during her military service, began working as an educator in the IDF with *Beit Morasha*.⁴² She experimented with drama-based methods with a group of officers as a means of exploring ethical issues and found them to be a successful way to involve the participants. The number of sessions was quickly increased and she began to work more and more with regular soldiers, often travelling to military bases in the West Bank to run workshops (in locations as diverse as Rama, Hawara, Itamar, and Yitzhar).

As her teaching methods developed, the workshops began to assume a regular format, which roughly proceeded as follows. A group of approximately 30 soldiers would take a day away from active duty and would join a session lasting three hours. After several warm up exercises designed to encourage participation and allow her to get to know the soldiers, they would each be asked to write down an ethical issue they had encountered or witnessed while serving in the unit. These anonymous notes were then handed in for her to read. Next, the soldiers would be divided up into six groups and each given a theme to work on. These themes included: humiliation at checkpoints, violence towards Palestinians, looting, handling the media, drugs and alcohol, and taking bribes. Occasionally, in

⁴⁰ A promotional video (in English, aimed at American donors to the organisation) about the work of *Beit Morasha* in the IDF is also available on YouTube (Friends of the IDF, 2012).

⁴¹ Author interview with Shai Herskowitz.

⁴² Unless otherwise stated, the following account is based on two interviews by the author with the educator in question, Michal Feuras, which took place on 7th March 2013 [hereafter, “first interview”] and 9th April 2013 [hereafter, “second interview”], in Tel Aviv.

response to a particular request from the commander, these topics might also reflect recent problems the unit had encountered. The soldiers were asked to develop short plays based on their experiences, which could either be something they were directly involved in or something they had seen. They assumed the roles not only of soldiers but also of Palestinians. After twenty minutes preparation time (during which time the supervisor would read the anonymous notes), the soldiers would each perform their improvised sketch in turn, followed by a discussion about the moral implications involved in light of the values of the “Spirit of the IDF”. The class would end with a summary from an officer who had been present throughout, who was usually a company commander or deputy company commander.

This exercise is perhaps the clearest example of the use of testimony as a form of ascetic “mental preparation” in the IDF. The use of theatre in this way is another form of *paraskeue*: the values of the “Spirit of the IDF” are being “assimilated” [*huṭmu*] through reflection on practice. Yet there are also additional features to this approach which reflect the particular position of regular soldiers and which accentuate the role of emotions, embodied behaviour, and crucially gender. The well-being of the soldier was a key concern of these sessions and the importance of protecting the human image of the soldier was a direct message which the convenor used to convey. She described this message, which is redolent with the language of maternal care, as follows:

“Okay guys, you came to army as pure as you can get. Okay, you are pure. And my job, the army’s job is after three years... because you will come out and you will be a citizen again... and my job is to make sure that at the end of the day when you look in the mirror you will be as pure as when you got here.”⁴³

This importance of the mirror image was in the convenor’s view equivalent to invoking the idea of settling accounts with God, but in a more pluralist metaphor. Avoiding the need to confess sins was also a key element in her rhetoric:

⁴³ First interview.

“...at the end of the day look in the mirror and say, even though the occupation is shit [...] even though I have to be here in this lousy checkpoint, I know that I did everything as I was supposed to do. I didn’t do anything morally wrong... And I can look at myself and be a whole person. And not going... afterwards and saying ‘*al ḥeṭ sheḥaṭati lefaneikha*’ [forgive me for my sins]...”⁴⁴

It is clear that such an approach leaves the fundamental political reality (“the occupation is shit”) untouched and unchangeable, displacing it through an emphasis on staying human. Indeed, her continued reference to the importance of remaining “whole with yourself” [*shalem ‘im ‘atzmekha*] or “with your actions” attempts to achieve an ideological and moral suturing of the inherent political antagonism of maintaining an occupation. This operation of suture, which is revealed in her illusive image of subjective completeness and moral occupation, is dependent on the carrying out of ethical work (cf. Alain-Miller, 2013: 91–102; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 47–92).

A crucial element of the way in which the convenor of these sessions would enhance their effectiveness was through the use of gendered language and through a manipulation of her gendered position. Generally, a major constraint on the effectiveness of the Education Corps is seen to be that education officers are overwhelmingly women and that therefore they struggle to gain the respect of soldiers. Yet this convenor was adamant that her position as a woman in fact helped her to ensure effective participation in the sessions. Like most women working in the armed forces, she certainly had to make some adjustments to her usual manner of self-presentation (Sasson-Levy, 2003: 448–451). This was especially the case because she was recognised by the soldiers from her work on television and because she was quickly identified with a left-leaning, Tel Aviv background. To compensate she would make a particular effort to use military slang, for example, and would rely heavily on her religious knowledge and her background in *Beit Morasha* to overcome resistance from the soldiers.

⁴⁴ Second interview. The Hebrew phrase comes from the Yom Kippur confessional prayer.

Yet these adjustments in her language were not designed to efface her position as a woman but rather to allow her to make more effective use of it. As Cynthia Enloe has documented at length in her work on the role of women in supporting roles in militaries, it is most often through their perceived femininity that women in military roles make their crucial contributions (Enloe, 2000: esp. 35–49). When pressed on how exactly being a woman helped her, the convenor of the theatre sessions responded as follows:

“I think it has to do with... I’m a very warm person and I didn’t come there to judge them. I was not judgemental. And... I don’t know if it’s... it’s kind of chauvinistic, or feminist, to say that I tried to get them in touch with their female point of view or whatever... I can’t really prove it... But I got told a lot that it was good that it was from outside, it was good that it was a female, it was good that it was civilian, and it wasn’t somebody that’s inside. It’s like you’re so used to the crazy, crazy situation [and then] you’re for three hours in a different place, with a different person, who speaks a different language, who makes you correlate things that you didn’t think about...”⁴⁵

There are many gendered elements to this statement which need to be analysed separately. Firstly, it is clear that she holds a perception that the soldiers needed to know that she supported them and that she was there to help and not to judge. On another occasion, she made clearer how her perceived femininity made this possible:

“I always used to tell them, I’m on your side. That’s very, very important to me: that first of all I think that what you are doing is very important and I really respect you, and I really appreciate the fact that you take care of me and my daughter, when I had a daughter, but before me as a civilian, and your parents and everybody.”⁴⁶

She therefore not only mobilised her position as a mother but also attempted to remind them of the (always gendered) context of their families in order to stress that she was there to support them. Rhetorical gestures such as this help to explain why soldiers were by all accounts very willing to

⁴⁵ Second interview.

⁴⁶ First interview.

participate in these theatre groups and were much more willing to discuss problematic behaviour than in the context of operational debriefing.

Secondly, it also seems that being a woman helped to underscore the recreational side of the theatre sessions. As she also commented, this atmosphere encouraged participation and openness:

“Usually there wasn’t any hostility because – think about it – you’re on duty for a long time and then comes this gorgeous actress from Tel Aviv (I’m joking!). Then I’m joking, and I’m playing with them. And I’m like: everything is going to be okay, you can tell me everything, we’re going to speak about everything openly.”⁴⁷

Thirdly, it is also possible to see that not only was her perceived femininity crucial to this process, but also that the soldiers themselves were being encouraged to adopt a supposedly more feminine disposition. It is the domestic, familial, and oedipal nature of the space created during these sessions that encourages testimony. More than this, however, it is supposedly feminine behaviour and supposedly feminine ways of “correlating things differently” which soldiers are being trained to take back to their military pursuits.

This last point needs greater examination, since it gets to the heart of the specificity of the sessions offered to regular soldiers as distinct from those given to officers. Whereas ethics training for officers tends to focus on developing repertoires of behaviour for particular scenarios and improving the ability to use discretion [*shikūl da‘at*] in applying values to practice, regular soldiers have relatively fewer opportunities to deploy such faculties. Thus, when the theatre sessions were used to train officers on a minority of occasions, the convenor altered the nature of the post-performance discussion to discuss alternate ways of doing things:

“If it was with the commanders, if somebody in the audience would say ‘Yeah, I would have dealt with it differently. I would have done this and that’ I would call them to the stage and

⁴⁷ First interview.

ask them to perform and show me how they deal with it. And then like train them or show them different aspects of being an officer, of commanding.”⁴⁸

Here the ascetic dimension of the training lies in the repetition and experimentation with different approaches. However, in the case of the sessions with regular soldiers, while the ascetic technique of self-examination is still being applied, the pedagogical process relied on a more overtly affective, gendered, and embodied processes. This reflects their position in the “seam of encounter” – in the face-to-face contact they would have with Palestinian civilians. The crucial faculty being cultivated was no longer *shikūl da‘at*, therefore, but a purportedly feminine sense of “empathy”, as the convenor of these sessions repeatedly emphasised to me.

To fully grasp the importance of empathy for this activity it is worth quoting at length her fullest comment on this matter. It illustrates why theatre is particularly well-suited to this task, as well as the potentially disturbing rationale behind its use:

“... it was something that my [acting] teacher, may he rest in peace... told us like one of the first lessons we had. And he told us: what is the most important thing that an actor should have? And everybody was like “potential” and “self-awareness” and “self-confidence” and then nobody guessed it and he says “empathy”. And I think that in order to be a better officer, a better soldier, a better person, a better everything... is *to understand the other person's point of view in order to make them or yourself do whatever it is necessary*. And now I’m going to say something that another teacher told me about empathy, [who was a] psychologist: the Nazis were very, very big in empathy. And why is that? Because empathy is not about being kind or... it’s about being able to be in the shoes of the other. And why were the Nazis very empathetic? Because when the Jews got to Auschwitz they were told... there was music on, okay? And they were told to bathe and get food and that’s [the] way, because they could be told as they got there “you’re going to be killed! Go to that side!” or whatever. The devious ways... that’s because they understood what a person that is travelling for so long in

⁴⁸ Second interview.

a train... what they are thinking about, okay? And not make them... to calmly take them to the gas chambers, okay? Now, that's about empathy... it has nothing to do with the soldiers in the checkpoints, they have nothing to do with the Nazis... But I think that the empathetic point of view is very, very important to understand what it's like to be a Palestinian that has to cross checkpoints all day long, and to be in... in a traffic jam, every day and to have his car checked every day and to have his kid watching or a Palestinian with his wife – to really understand what happens. And the soldiers were like... got to the empathetic point of view, or place, not the psychopathic way but the real empathic point of view.”⁴⁹

The disavowed but implicit comparison with the Holocaust, though striking, is not the central issue in this statement. It is in fact less surprising than it might appear. As beyond the pale and anti-Semitic as such comparisons are often held to be, historically speaking it has been common for Israeli soldiers to make these connections, as Ruth Linn (1991) has documented. The convenor of these workshops also noted the Holocaust came up “very often” in the theatre sessions she used to run, even without prompting from her. The description of Nazi death camps she gives is also historically inaccurate in many ways, and mostly draws on the widespread but mythological anxiety in Israeli society about why Jews went to the gas chambers “like lambs led to the slaughter” (Segev, 1993: 113).

Instead, the most relevant aspect of the above remark is the way in which empathy is posited as a means of control. It is described as a means of understanding the behaviour of Palestinians, and of accordingly learning to adapt one's own behaviour to reduce the friction between occupier and occupied. Empathy in this sense is supposed to act as a kind of checkpoint lubricant, aiming to make the task of maintaining military rule easier. Yet unlike mercenary anthropology, as deployed by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, the principal focus of the cultivation of empathy in these theatre sessions is not in fact a form of “cultural” education about the mores and sensitivities of Palestinian society (cf. Gonzáles, 2007; Gregory, 2008; Zehfuss, 2012). Rather, and perhaps ironically, empathy is produced by processes of introspection. It is the soldiers themselves who generate the perception of what it is like to be a Palestinian at a checkpoint, either by imagining it or by putting themselves on the

⁴⁹ Second interview, emphasis added.

receiving end of simulations of their own violence and humiliation tactics in the scene. The ‘Palestinian’ in these performances is therefore only ever a projection of a specifically Israeli imaginary. This is why it is important to stress that, however practical in intent these simulations are, they primarily function as solipsistic and depoliticised moments of (gendered) subject formation. This becomes even clearer when the techniques employed for promoting “empathy” in the post-performance discussion are examined:

“I was very manipulative because I was always used to remind them of their own family... I used to use their families to make them understand: would you like somebody in the supermarket, while they’re saying ‘*neshek*’⁵⁰ or ‘open your bag’ to say, ‘now, okay take your hands, now raise your hands, now spread your legs, now fall to the ground’, or to your little brother? Or to make them understand – now, there are kids who throw stones and are very, very... they make you mad, okay? I can understand the situation, okay? And they’re eighteen. But I used to ask them, ‘who here has a small brother or sister? Can you even imagine a cop – an Israeli cop coming to your brother or sister with their weapons on, speaking to them with their weapons after throwing whatever. Can you even imagine that happening?’”⁵¹

Once again, situating the soldier in the always-already gendered context of family relations is crucial to activating the empathetic response. Meanwhile, the political reality – that Israelis and Palestinians in the occupied territories live under completely different legal regimes which make some actions against an Israeli unimaginable and the same actions against a Palestinian routine – is completely effaced in such moments. It is “empathy” and not politics which appears to make the difference.

There is a final feature of these theatre workshops which merits attention. This refers to the pieces of paper collected at the beginning of the class, on which soldiers were invited to write about a moral issue they had faced during their recent service. Although these were anonymous, one of the purposes of this procedure was to check that the plays performed corresponded to the most pressing issue facing the unit. Moreover, the papers were used to check for the presence of what is known in Hebrew

⁵⁰ “Weapon”, the shorthand used by security guards in Israel to check customers for firearms.

⁵¹ Second interview.

as a *kesher shtiqa* (“conspiracy of silence”), which refers to a situation in which authority and personal dynamics within a group prevent problems and complaints from being discussed. In post-session debriefings with the commanding officer, the convenor of these sessions would always point out the existence of an apparent *kesher shtiqa* with the aim of helping the unit to work to resolve it. Silence was therefore perceived as an obstacle to military effectiveness, whereas sharing, reporting difficulties, and honesty (testimony, in other words) were considered advantageous to it. What is striking about this emphasis is its unintentional rhetorical resonance with the work of *Shovrim Shtiqa* [“Breaking the Silence”]. It is perhaps noteworthy that both this use of theatre workshops to explore moral issues and the first exhibition organised by Breaking the Silence began in the same year, 2004. When asked about this apparent similarity, the former director of the IDF education department who approved the programme took this as no surprise:

“... because [*Shovrim Shtiqa*] act out the way their culture is... from my point of view it’s good that soldiers are coming out and saying this is what there is in the army, make sure that the other soldiers who go to the army will not do the same. It’s okay. [And] It’s good if the Education Corps will do things that open into the inside and not outside.”⁵²

This apparent sinuosity between the work of Breaking the Silence and the work of the Education Corps is not, in my view, coincidental. As differently oriented as these organisations remain, their activities have common roots in the ethics of Israeli militarism and, as will be shown later, often have curiously similar consequences.

It remains to discuss the after-life of these theatre sessions, which were reduced in frequency in 2009 after a change in the personal circumstances of the convenor. The influence of this pedagogical approach to dealing with ethics did not cease after that. As the sessions had become more popular, demand rapidly outstripped the ability of the convenor to facilitate them and a more easily distributed form of the activity was devised. This was “dilemma theatre”, which involved developing scripted sketches (written by the same convenor and based on what she had heard from soldiers) which would

⁵² Author interview.

then be performed by the IDF's theatre troupe. Although less intensive in terms of the active involvement of combat soldiers, these sketches could be shown to much larger audiences and deployed much more flexibly. The actors were trained not only with the guidance of the convenor but also based on extensive observation at checkpoints, in order to improve their realism.

Some of the encounters depicted are shocking but nevertheless based on actual events. In one scene, for example, soldiers at a checkpoint force a good-looking young Palestinian woman to participate in what they call the "Miss Hawara"⁵³ beauty pageant, by getting her to lift her dress on the pretext of checking for explosives.⁵⁴ Officers were provided with copies of the scripts, as well as pre-prepared questions to facilitate discussion of the sketches afterwards. In the case of this example mentioned, and apparently because it needed underscoring, soldiers were asked how the actions depicted scene harmed the value of "human dignity" in the Spirit of the IDF, as well as "purity of arms". The inclusion of scenes such as this demonstrates that, no matter how secretive and dismissive the IDF appears in public and in foreign media about such episodes, it has few qualms about discussing them internally if it provides an opportunity to shape soldiers as ethical subjects. It is through carefully (and literally) stage-managed mechanisms such as these that the problematic political questions they raise can be neutralised through ethical work.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which the IDF teaches ethics to its soldiers and officers. Throughout, it has made the argument that this work should primarily be viewed through the lens of subject formation. In particular, I have emphasised the importance of asceticism as a military technology, a pedagogical approach which works to cultivate militarist subjects through ethical work. I have drawn attention to the role of mental preparation [*hakhana mentalit*] which works to relate theoretical values to practical experience through repetitive imaginative exercises, self-examination, and (above all) testimony. I have also observed that such activities conducted further down the military hierarchy tended to accentuate the embodied and gendered dimensions of ethical subject

⁵³ Huwara is a notorious checkpoint in the Northern West Bank.

⁵⁴ Discussion of this scene is based on author interviews with the writer/convenor and on the script of the scene viewed by the author.

formation, which is a reflection of the position of regular soldiers in their intimate encounter with the Palestinian population. Furthermore, I have argued that these practices constitute an ethical approach which is reminiscent of the “care of the self” described by Michel Foucault. I have dwelt on the comparisons between Foucault’s description of ancient ethical practice and ethical pedagogy in the IDF because it shows the omissions and problematic consequences entailed in adopting a purely Foucauldian approach when studying ethics. For while Foucault offers a useful taxonomy of ascetic praxis, the full nature of the role of ethics in militarism cannot be fully grasped without consideration of two further factors.

The first is the necessarily *ideological* function of ethical pedagogy in the IDF. As moments of subject formation, and not merely self-fashioning, the examples discussed above require attention to the ways in which subjects are necessarily alienated when participating in an ideological Symbolic order, and in which they must therefore reach some kind of accommodation with it which is never truly harmonious. This is especially the case when that Symbolic order takes the form of a violent, militarist, and colonial apparatus. The ideological strategy I have explored in detail in this chapter is the importance of “keeping a human image”, of maintaining distance despite implication. I have shown that this ideological process is in fact stronger when it engages directly with the problematic and troubling elements of serving in the IDF. When dealing with these more controversial actions (such as drone strikes and the humiliation of civilians) the strategy is not simply to silence the matter, even if that may well be the public response. The IDF also orchestrates the selective and carefully choreographed incitement of testimony in relation to such incidents, so that their problematic political implications can be obscured by making them the focus of ethical work.

Indeed, the second factor which risks being overlooked in a Foucauldian framework is precisely the role of this primary *political* antagonism in producing the ethics of Israeli militarism. As a tool of counterinsurgency, military ethics contributes to the effort to efface the political origins of the conflict it seeks to manage, emphasising instead the possibility of arriving at moral solutions. At best, however, this fundamental political antagonism can only be displaced and deferred. Ethical work alone, no matter how elaborate, will never solve a political problem. Indeed, the principal function of

promoting empathy and concern for the well-being of the enemy soldier or civilian is in producing an Israeli soldier-subject affiliated with the ideological military apparatus. The final words the convenor of the theatre workshops said to me in our interviews reinforce this point directly. Describing the soldiers she worked with as “like cancer or AIDS patients”, whose fundamental condition could not be improved because the political situation had no hope of resolution, she admitted that she viewed her role primarily as therapeutic, “like taking these terminal patients away to a desert island and waving them with palm fronds”.

Chapter 3: “Meaningful service”: ethics and pedagogy at pre-military academies in Israel

Introduction

Having examined the formal ethics teaching offered to IDF officers and soldiers in the previous chapter, this chapter will extend my argument about the role of ethics in Israeli militarism by examining the activity of pre-military academies (*mekhinot kdam-tzva'iyot*) in Israel.¹ In doing so, it will also provide contextual information about the growth and development of *mekhinot* and emphasise their increasing significance in Israeli militarism. Since *mekhinot* cater both for religious and secular students, the analysis will also address an issue of growing interest in the scholarly literature on militarism in Israel, which is the increasing prominence of national-religious soldiers in the IDF and consequent changes in the religious significance of military service (Cohen, 1997, 2013; Levy, 2014; Rosman-Stollman, 2014).

Following the arguments already made in this thesis, I will show that ethics is a crucial dimension of the experience of students at these *mekhinot* and that, as elsewhere, it plays an important role in their formation as subjects. Accordingly, I argue that *mekhinot* should be understood as *ascetic* institutions focussed on the practice of ethical self-cultivation, a process which is bound up with the production of national, religious, and – crucially – gendered identities. *Mekhinot* are formally independent from the direct control of the IDF, even though they receive considerable state funding, which means that they are one of the clearest examples of the privatisation and dispersal of ethical pedagogy beyond the formal institutional reach of the IDF. The fact that *mekhinot* have grown enormously in number and size in recent years is another reflection of a neoliberal governmental rationality favouring the autonomous cultivation of ethical responsibility and ideological motivation in soldiers. Indeed, the significant diversity of social groups catered for by *mekhinot* should underscore the strength and flexibility of this arrangement.

¹ *Mekhina* (pl. *mekhinot*) is the short-hand term used by Israelis to describe pre-military academies, which I will use throughout this chapter. Etymologically this term is derived from the verb meaning “to prepare”, which underscores their role as conduits for military service.

In this chapter, I offer a study which concentrates on the work of secular and mixed *mekhinot* but which also integrates its findings with the existing literature on religious academies and further fieldwork at religious *mekhinot*. I suggest that it is important to take a holistic view of *mekhinot* which incorporates both their religious and secular manifestations while being sensitive to their differences. Furthermore, I argue that it is by focussing on the ethical dimensions of the work of pre-military academies that the common elements of their contribution to Israeli militarism can be understood.

I begin by offering an overview of pre-military academies in Israel, describing their origins, growth, and development over time, situating this in the context of existing scholarship. I then begin to describe the general pedagogical approach of secular and mixed pre-military academies, observing the emphasis on ascetic self-cultivation. Next, I offer a discussion of the specific ways in which *mekhinot* deal with military ethics and teach the ethical code of the IDF. As elsewhere, I observe the importance of soldiers' testimony as a feature of ethical pedagogy. This is followed by a discussion of specific instances in which pre-military academies have solicited testimony from soldiers as a mode of ethical reflection. Finally, I make a comparison with parallel trends in religious *mekhinot* and suggest that, although the normative and religious context may well be different, the contrast between them is not as great as might be expected and that the practices of ethical subject formation at both sets of academies are in some ways comparable.

The origins and development of pre-military academies

Existing analyses of pre-military academies tend to portray them primarily as institutions facilitating the entrance of national-religious soldiers into the ranks (Cohen, 2013: 11–12, 70–71, 89, 92, 104, 134 (n. 6); Levy, 2014: 277–281, 285, 287; Rosman-Stollman, 2014: 104–123). This is in keeping with a sociological emphasis on the changing social structure underpinning military participation in Israel, which notes the growing presence of national-religious soldiers in the army and the changing institutional arrangements made to accommodate them (Cohen, 2013: 1–22, 41–58; Levy, 2014; Rosman-Stollman, 2014). As the traditional Ashkenazi secular elite has proven less willing to make sacrifices on the altar of the national-security state, this argument proceeds, they have been replaced with a more ideologically driven group of national-religious soldiers who increasingly determine the

direction and institutional make-up of the IDF. Yet while the growing role of the national-religious in the IDF is undeniable and indeed represents an important background for the developments analysed in this chapter, this analytic emphasis has downplayed the important role of more secular academies and overlooked possible points of comparison.

In her recent study of the settler community of Gush Katif during the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, Joyce Dalsheim invokes Freud's theory of the "narcissism of minor differences" to interpret the religious/secular divide in Israel (2011). She argues that secular discourses in Israel have exaggerated the differences between the secular and religious communities in order to vilify and shift blame to the latter. She also notes the strong continuities between the discourses of religious and secular Zionism as complementary manifestations of a shared settler colonial ideology (eg. 2011: 33–48). I would like to suggest that a similar process of artificial differentiation has taken place in the way the *mekhinot* have been interpreted. Closer analysis of their ethical pedagogy demonstrates that militarist ideology is just as powerful in secular academies as it is in their religious counterparts.

It is true that the origins of pre-military academies in Israel lie firmly within the national-religious movement. In 1987, the first *mekhina* was established in the Jewish settlement of Eli in the West Bank under the name *Bnei David*. This *mekhina* represented a new departure in the relationship between the national-religious population and the army, which had hitherto co-existed uneasily. Previously the most common avenue for religious soldiers to serve in the IDF was through institutions called *yeshivot hesder*. The *yeshivot hesder* allowed soldiers to combine religious study at a Jewish seminary with a shortened period of service in the military (usually serving together in particular units, and most commonly in the armoured corps) (Cohen, 2013: 59–71). The idea was to encourage them to serve in the army but in such a way as to allow them to practise and retain their faith. The *mekhina* in Eli proposed a different model, which was that religious soldiers would spend a prior year studying at a seminary and preparing for military service and would then serve a full three-year period in the army throughout its ranks (Rosman-Stollman, 2014: 104–107). Graduates were encouraged to serve in combat roles and to extend their service by becoming officers and commanders.

This new model for national-religious participation in the army proved enormously successful. It drew in many students and became attractive to the army, which thereby acquired a new pool of manpower. By 1996 five religious *mekhinot* had been established, sending hundreds of soldiers to the army each year. Following a decision to expand the programme to secular students, the first non-religious academy, Nachshon, was established in 1996, and was followed by Beit Yisrael (which mixes secular and religious students) and Rabin Academy in 1997. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin was an important factor in the decision to extend the programme, prompting calls for civic renewal which did not just include the religious. Secular academies also proved extremely popular and have grown steadily and exponentially ever since. In fact, in recent years the number of secular and mixed pre-military academies has outstripped that of the religious academies. From 2004-2012, the secular and mixed academies more than doubled their numbers from a starting point of 10. As of 2013 there were 24 secular and mixed academies (collectively referred to as general academies, or *mekhinot klaliyot*), as opposed to 22 “torah-based academies” (*mekhinot toraniyot*) modelled on yeshivas (see figure 1).

Since 2004, this rapid growth in the number of secular and mixed academies has also fuelled a huge increase in student numbers, a figure which recently topped 3,300 (Jerusalem Post, 2013; see also figure 2). This makes *mekhinot* the largest pre-army education programme in the country. There is currently rough parity between the number of students at religious academies and those at secular and mixed academies, which means that the national-religious are still strongly over-represented. However, present trends suggest that this balance may continue to shift in the direction of secular and mixed academies.

Figure 1: Israeli pre-military academies, 1997-2013

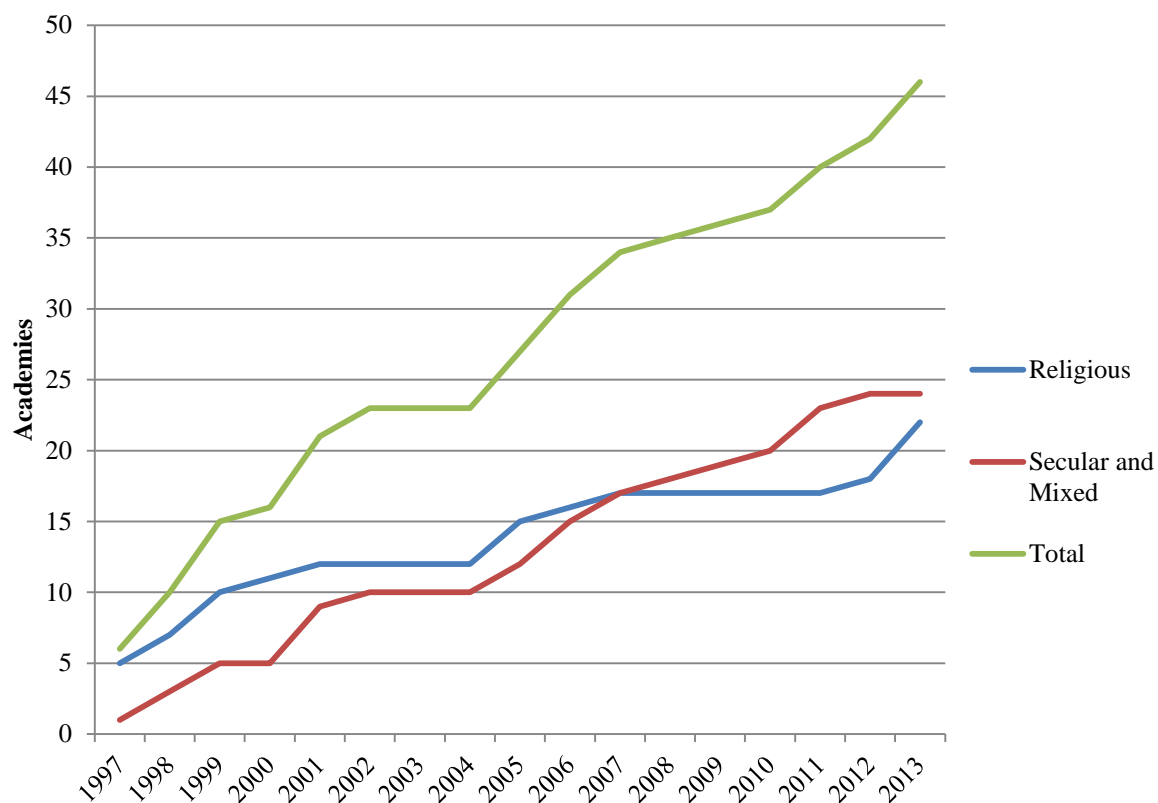
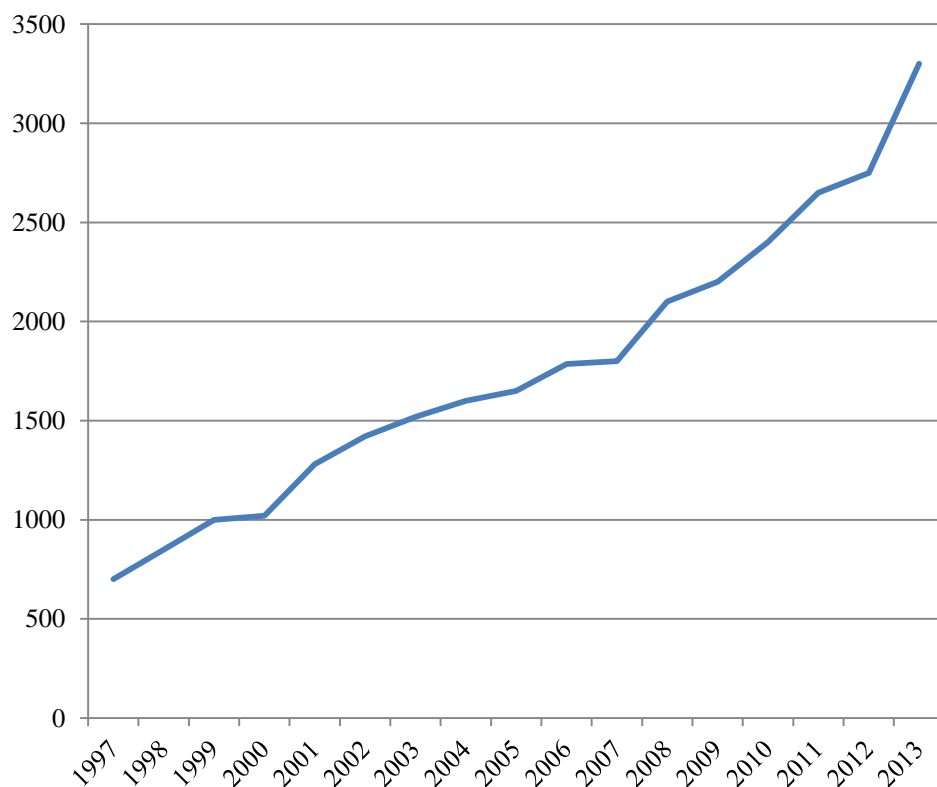


Figure 2: Students at Israeli pre-military academies, 1997-2013



Sources: 1997-2012, Education Ministry Document; 2013, Jerusalem Post.

For several reasons, one should exercise caution in using these figures as a barometer of the military influence of the national-religious compared with the old secular elite. Such a comparison maps very imperfectly onto the distinction these figures draw between religious and secular/mixed academies, and it would in any case be wrong to interpret this distinction as evidence of a sharp bifurcation or a lack of further subdivisions within each grouping. It remains true that students from national-religious backgrounds overwhelmingly gravitate towards religious academies, but religious academies also now cater to sections of Israeli society far beyond this kernel. In 2013 a new *mekhina* for Haredi students was established in a settlement in the Jordan Valley. There are also religious academies which seek out students from socially disadvantaged groups who have not necessarily had a strong religious upbringing, such as Kiryat Malakhi, Tammir, or Maskiyut.²

Likewise, the secular and mixed academies have influence with populations far beyond affluent secular Ashkenazim. Many academy staff did confirm to me that they seek students from “good families” and that the most prestigious academies still aim to produce an “elite”.³ Yet in recent years the army has grown increasingly interested in the capacity of academies to deliver extra manpower from “peripheral” groups in Israeli society (cf. Levy, 2007: 117–125, 229–236).⁴ The rationale behind this shift in preference is that, whereas most secular, affluent Israelis would have enlisted regardless of their attendance at a *mekhina*, academies have been successful at raising the rates of enlistment in other areas of society. This is particularly the case among Mizrahim⁵, Ethiopians, and those living in poorer towns in the South, who have lower enlistment and higher dropout rates. Accordingly, a number of academies now exist catering for disadvantaged or “peripheral” youth, including the Jerusalemite Academy, Gal Academy, Yemin Orde (which caters for immigrants, and especially for Ethiopians), Kerem-El (which is aimed at Druze students), and Asher Ruah Bo (which targets youths

² Author interview with Yokhanan Ben-Ya‘akov. Compare this evidence with the assessment of Stuart Cohen: “By definition, [religious mekhinot cater] exclusively to a constituency already committed to Orthodox Jewish observance” (2013: 134).

³ Author interviews with Dani Zamir (Rabin Academy) and David Nachman (Ein Prat Academy).

⁴ Author interview with Yokhanan Ben-Ya‘akov.

⁵ A Mizrahi (pl. Mizrahim) is a Jew of Middle Eastern or North African origin.

with a criminal record).⁶ Other academies have also attempted to widen their student bodies by offering scholarships or by arranging for their students to work at a kibbutz to generate revenue.⁷

The impression given by Cohen that religious and secular students remain almost hermetically sealed from one another in *mekhinot*, and that these institutions primarily function to accentuate this division, is also misleading (Cohen, 2013: 134). Several academies, including prestigious academies such as Ein Prat and Beit Yisrael, aim to attract a mixed population of religious and secular students and have made bridging this perceived divide a part of their objectives. Studies of scripture and Jewish thought are an integral part of their syllabi and opportunities are provided for collective worship and daily religious observance. Communal eating facilities are kept kosher and weekly Sabbath services are held. It is therefore not unusual for members of the national-religious community to attend these mixed academies. Crucially as well, the staff at these mixed academies are often religiously observant. Hoshea Friedman Ben-Shalom, the director of Beit Yisrael, is a descendent of a family of Hasidic rabbis (Ha'aretz, 2013). The director of Lakhish academy, Yaniv Mezuman, is national-religious and openly declared himself a "Jewish Home" voter to his students when I visited the academy the day before the Israeli elections.⁸

Even the most avowedly secular academies have contact with religious academies. When I visited the religious academy of Carmei Hayil at Beit Rimon to interview its director, I found a group of students from the nearby Rabin Academy in Tiv'on, known for its secular left-wing ethos, who were visiting in order to receive lessons in scripture.⁹ There are also structural and financial reasons driving these aspects of convergence. The Avi Chai Foundation, a Zionist Jewish charity, has donated to 19 secular and mixed *mekhinot* in Israel with the stipulation that they should study a minimum number of hours a week about Judaism and Zionism and that their staff should come from diverse backgrounds. Another sign of this potential co-operation is that the academies formed a joint leadership council in 2008, which is aimed at co-ordinating their activities and fund raising. Overall, therefore, this evidence

⁶ Author interview with Yael Domb (Jerusalemite Academy) and Yokhanan Ben- Ya'akov.

⁷ Author interview with Dani Zamir (Rabin Academy) and Ohad Shamama (Lakhish Academy).

⁸ Field notes, 20th January 2013.

⁹ Author interview with Reuven Mass; field notes, 22nd April 2013.

should underscore the importance of considering pre-military academies holistically, or at the very least of appreciating the variety that they contain and moving beyond a view of them as completely divided between religious and secular.

The influence of pre-military academies on the IDF

Mekhinot have certainly had a strong impact on the army. According to Education Ministry figures, the rate of enlistment to officer courses is 50% higher across the board at pre-military academies; the rate of enlistment to “high priority units” (principally combat units) is also 30% higher (Education Ministry, 2012). For national-religious soldiers they have been an effective pathway to full participation in military service. Many religious academies, especially the oldest and most prestigious academies, strongly encourage their students to join combat units and to assume officer and commanding roles.¹⁰ This has helped effect a sea-change in the social composition of the IDF and especially in its officer corps.

As a proportion of *mekhinot* graduates, the religious certainly remain over-represented, which may have contributed to the widespread impression that religious academies tend to prioritise military service more. However, the influence of *mekhinot* on the IDF is not confined to religious academies. It is true that the impact is somewhat attenuated at secular and mixed academies because they are also open to girls, for whom combat roles are much less accessible (although there is now also a dedicated religious academy for girls as well, called *Tsahali*). Some secular and mixed academies are also more ambivalent about pushing their students into certain military roles, and prefer to emphasise civil leadership.¹¹ Yet the available evidence suggests that secular and mixed academies can be just as influential in this respect. In data gathered by Naomi Evenshpenger from 2001 to 2004, the percentage of eligible students from academies who progressed to combat units, to junior command roles, and to the officer corps was measured and the results were published in an IDF journal (Evenshpenger, 2010: 62–69). At the time, the author was quite dismissive of the impact of *mekhinot* on the officer corps, and particularly the impact of secular *mekhinot*. This impression was primarily derived from the

¹⁰ Author interviews with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda Academy) and Yokhanan Ben Ya‘akov.

¹¹ Author interview with Yokhanan Ben Ya‘akov.

relatively small numbers of male graduates from secular and mixed academies (Evenshpenger, 2010: 66; cf. Cohen, 2013: 12). However, when grouped together the aggregate figures from her research indicate that there is not a wide gap between the patterns of military service of graduates of religious compared with secular and mixed *mekhinot*. The table below presents the median of these figures across all years:

Table 1: Data on military service of graduates of pre-military academies, 2001-2004			
	% entering combat units	% entering junior command roles	% entering officer corps
Religious	82	43	16
Secular/mixed	73	40	25

These figures clearly suggest that there is no drastic difference between each category, especially as far as commanding and officer roles are concerned. The fact that these data are now over ten years old also needs to be taken into consideration. Since this time, the secular and mixed academies have expanded enormously: both Nachshon and Rabin academies have roughly trebled in size, for example, suggesting that their contribution will no longer be insignificant if these patterns have persisted.

Another major way in which the influence of secular and mixed academies has been felt in the army is through programmes known as “Project Golani” and “Project Giv’ati”.¹² The aim of such projects is to channel students from the same academy into particular units in specific brigades in order to change their character and give students from a similar educational background an opportunity to co-operate during military service.¹³ This is especially the case when it results in the outcome that soldiers are commanded by officers who attended the same *mekhina* as them. The well-established academies such as Rabin and Beit Yisrael lead this programme but they have recently been accompanied by smaller and newer *mekhinot* such as the Jerusalemite academy.¹⁴ These projects are

¹² Golani and Giv’ati are both infantry brigades in the IDF.

¹³ Author interview with Yokhanan Ben-Ya’akov.

¹⁴ Author interview with Yael Domb (Jerusalemite Academy).

further evidence of the impact that secular and mixed academies have on the IDF and would suggest that this influence is likely to strengthen.

Ascetic institutions: cultivating the self at pre-military academies

If one wishes to grasp the guiding philosophy behind education at pre-military academies (both religious and secular), the key concept is undoubtedly “meaningful service” [*sherut mashma’uti*]. This phrase describes the desired experience which academies want their graduates to have in the IDF: military service which shapes them as individuals, has a lasting impact on their lives, and makes a positive and profound contribution to the work of the army. The concept appears on the website and prospectus of nearly every *mekhina* and is one of the major objectives of the entire programme. In the context of this thesis, this emphasis is very significant. It implies a clear fusion between the activity of self-improvement and the pursuit of military goals, which become reciprocal and mutually reinforcing objectives. The pathway to effective military service is ethical self-cultivation; likewise, military service is the means to cultivate the soldier as an ethical subject.

This is as true in religious as it is in secular academies. When I asked a teacher at Keshet Yehuda, a religious academy, to describe what was meant by the phrase “meaningful service”, he replied with the following analogy:

“One of the kids was telling me there’s a game on television called ‘The Golden Cage’ or something. The person can go in there and while he’s in there he can win prizes... I don’t want to compare to that because it’s much more than that, actually, when you realise that every minute you have in the army has great importance and meaning. And even if, you know, right now you’re preparing... you’re doing a very mundane task... but every task is not just an individual thing that you’re doing but you’re doing it for your nation, you’re dedicating your time now, you know, in the most vigour you have in life, when you’re young – you’re giving three years of your life for your nation. Hopefully, you know, if you go on in the army – and graduates do – that’s great but it makes the time much more meaningful. In other words, you take much more advantage of time. When I say meaningful: that they take advantage of

the time, that they see their time there as being, you know, a very positive experience and they use it in the right means.”¹⁵

Likewise, the response of a teacher at Lakhish academy (a broadly secular academy) was quite similar:

“I guess if you are an Israeli, one thing that I felt when I was in the army, that you wake up when you are 18 and you understand that somebody’s sending you to this post in the middle of nowhere. And you understood that for the last 18 years of your life, every night, somebody froze to death on this post. Every night. And it’s all around the country. And it’s everywhere. And you’re saying, wow, I wasn’t... I slept fine in bed, you know, I rested. But people did that and now it’s my turn. And I want [the students] to know that and I want them to do as best as they can to do that. When it’s your turn, do it not whiningly and trying to get away from that and doing as little of it as you can – like most people do, because it’s a burden. But take this burden and do it as well as you can.”¹⁶

Both of these teachers therefore note the connection between national service and ethical effort, suggesting that a powerful link is being forged here between national, civic belonging and individual work in this military rite of passage (cf. Helman, 1997; Sasson-Levy, 2008). Academies make a great effort to facilitate “meaningful service” by preparing their students for the army carefully. The law requires that a minimum of 8-10 hours a week must consist of preparation for military service, but most academies I visited do much more than this. This preparation can take many forms. It might involve visits to particular units and bases to inform students about which pathways they can take in military service, or visits from serving officers and soldiers to discuss their options. Several academies organise intense physical training, whereas others hold orienteering and navigation exercises. It can also include classes on leadership, IDF battle heritage (*moreshet krav*), and military ethics.

Preparation for “meaningful service” is not confined to these more technical aspects, however. It encompasses the entire programme of study, even where the content is not explicitly military in nature.

¹⁵ Author interview with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda).

¹⁶ Author interview with Ohad Shamama (Lakhish Academy).

It entails the promotion of values and a sense of identity among the students which can serve as an ideological basis for military participation. At religious academies a large part of the study programmes are modelled on that of a seminary, and includes scriptural exegesis, classes from rabbis on questions of faith and morality, collective worship, and everyday religious observance. This is combined with classes designed to deepen Jewish and Zionist identity and to provide “spiritual” preparation for the IDF (Rosman-Stollman, 2014: 107–114; and see, for example, Bnei David Academy, n.d.). The teachings of the religious Zionist thinker, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, are a very common inspiration for this approach.¹⁷ This inculcates the idea that earthly pursuits, such as service in the army, can have a redemptive and spiritual function and thereby acquire the character of a religious duty (cf. Aran, 1991: 304–323). Military service is presented as an expression of faith, as an opportunity for drawing and acting on one’s religious values.

This emphasis on values and identity is, however, no less present at secular academies. Although these values derive from different sources and are less religious in origin, locating and deepening them is still seen as a crucial aspect of military preparation. Secular academies often borrow the military jargon, “mental preparation” [*hakhana mentalit*], to describe this. Staff at several academies emphasised in interviews the need to reverse the influence of “post-modernism” or “globalisation”, which they associated with a decline in the level of civic commitment in Israeli society. Three examples of this attitude are given below:

“I think that the main thing, and I do it from my first lesson, is to ask them what are your values and what do you believe and how what you will do in the army will express your values. And that’s a big shock from people because, in our life, in post-modern life, it’s not so... not many people know how to say “what do I believe?” and if I believe in it today, who says I’ll believe in it tomorrow? So it’s very difficult to them and we try in a few lessons in all kinds of places to talk about those things.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Author interview with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda Academy) (see also Rosman-Stollman, 2014: 110, 112).

¹⁸ Author interview with Yael Domb (Jerusalemite Academy).

“...first of all I suggest to the students to live after they have values that their lives are based on – because this is where the Israeli secular boys and girls are growing up: what will be will be; we have religion but most of them don’t have values; today will be good here, tomorrow will be good in another place; where we have good beer and good money, there is our place. So first of all we are teaching them... that it’s more important that everyone will choose his values and to choose the things he is doing and the way he lives based on his values.”¹⁹

“... we take secular people and we just help them regain those values. Values of helping, values of being a part of the Jewish nation and not just a part of some community. We do that by studying Judaism, but not in a school way, but in a way that... if I had to say something about what we do here, it’s helping people find their identity. And identity for Israeli people is Jewish... mostly. So in this way people feel more close to their nation, to their people, to their heritage. And that makes them want to be a part of that, to help that, not just to gain values of doing whatever is good for me and, if it’s not good, then I’ll leave. Something that is very worldwide, I guess. Something that is a part of globalisation in a way and we try to reduce that a little bit.”²⁰

The programme of studies at Ein Prat academy gives an example of how these *mekhinot* work to strengthen the sense of identity and values among their students. Students are immersed in the study of Western and Jewish philosophy; they read and discuss Plato and Aristotle, followed by modern existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Camus. They also study modern Zionist thinkers in depth from Theodor Herzl, to Jabotinsky, Kook, and David Ben Gurion. The director of the academy, David Nachman, was clear about the purpose of this study:

“These studies are in order to build the identity of each... Students are coming here because they want to understand their identity as human beings, first of all, like every other place on the planet, and as Jews and as Zionists. That’s why we learn Western philosophy, which talks about life, about political philosophy. Judaism is common to all of us – it doesn’t matter if

¹⁹ Author interview with Dani Zamir (Rabin Academy).

²⁰ Author interview with Ohad Shamama (Lakhish Academy).

you're religious or non-religious. The sources are relevant for all of us. And then Zionist thinking or Zionist thought form the basis. And then when you go to the army then you understand better why do I have to go to the army and which kind of a soldier do I have to be... A Jewish soldier. We are teaching how a Jewish soldier has to act."²¹

Secular and mixed academies build self-cultivation into everyday residential life at the *mekhina*.²² At Rabin Academy, for example, there is a strong emphasis on what the director refers to as "self-conduct" [*nihul 'atzmi*], which involves the students learning to manage their own behaviour and to abide by the rules and timetable of the academy. No alcohol is allowed at the academy and the study day is extremely long, beginning at 7am and lasting until as late as 11 or 12 at night. Other academies have much more relaxed rules but place a greater onus on the students themselves to manage day-to-day activities. Students at the Reform *mekhina* in Jaffa, Telem, elect weekly leaders from among themselves to organise the day to day running of the academy who are given authority over the other students.²³ Policies such as this often have slightly chaotic consequences. For instance, when I visited Lakhish academy for the day lunch was delayed by several hours because the students had failed to organise it for the usual time.²⁴ All of these endeavours are attempts to help students practice for the responsibilities they will be given during military service, and to encourage them to conduct themselves.

One particularly striking example of the kind of ascetic approach used at pre-military academies is at Ein Prat. This prestigious *mekhina* is aimed at both religious and non-religious students and is located in the settlement of Kfar Adumim in the occupied West Bank, not far from the hotly contested "E1" zone. It has been very deliberately built on an outcrop overlooking the mountains of the Judean desert in order to inspire its students and concentrate their minds, which gives the whole academy an isolated, coenobitic demeanour. The classrooms and accommodation blocs have a pre-fabricated, semi-permanent feel which is reminiscent of the homes that populate hilltop "outpost" settlements in the

²¹ Author interview with David Nachman (Ein Prat Academy).

²² This is also true at religious academies. See also Rosman-Stollman (2014: 111) and below, 170-177, for further discussion.

²³ Author interview with Guy Immerman (Telem Academy).

²⁴ Field notes, 20th January 2013.

West Bank. Indeed, when I visited the academy in January 2013 it was expanding the settlement by adding new classroom buildings.²⁵

The director of the academy, David Nachman, is adamant that the purpose of his *mekhina* is to push students as hard as possible to improve themselves:

“I want to conclude all of what we do in one word – okay, what we do here is to burn something in the hard disk of everyone and what we burn is responsibility. Responsibility first of all, [for] each one’s life. Take responsibility [for] your life. Live a good life in a philosophical way, okay? A good life to do good, and to work hard and to demand more and more from yourself.”²⁶

The ascetic drive for constant self-improvement is also very palpable in the general atmosphere of the *mekhina*. Nachman continued: “Our slogan here is that if one does not try all the time to climb up more and more and stays in one place, he falls down. He must all the time try to be better. All the time. This is the way of life here.”²⁷ Indeed, in my conversation with one student I learnt that students strongly internalise this impetus. He described to me discussions he had with fellow students about how difficult it was to know when to miss a class because of illness, since it was impossible to determine with certainty that their absence would not ultimately be down to a lack of effort.²⁸

It is worth revisiting momentarily the resonances of this approach with Foucault’s late work on ethics, where he makes clear that a key feature of asceticism is “...a progression according to a scale of increasing difficulty. It is, in the strict sense of the term, an exercise, an exercise going from the easier to the more difficult, and from the more difficult to what is even more difficult” (Foucault, 2008a: 185). This is achieved through constant work of the self on the self, practising and testing oneself to achieve more in a kind of “egoistic self-mastery” (Foucault, 2005: 207–208). This emphasis conforms to the model already analysed by Sasson-Levy, in which the pursuit of “self-control” is an important aspect of the masculine identity of Israeli soldiers (2008: 305-309). Rather than the physical and

²⁵ Field notes, 28th January 2013.

²⁶ Author interview.

²⁷ Author interview.

²⁸ Field notes, 28th January 2013.

emotional discipline which Sasson-Levy discusses, however, this aspect of military masculinity is presented as moral, even spiritual. Moreover, unlike Sasson-Levy's account of the bodily violence of military training, this control is not imposed externally: the students exercise it *over themselves* through intense ethical work.

The observation of such an ethic of self-improvement at Israeli pre-military academies unsettles the distinction Foucault appears to draw between asceticism on the one hand and the self-renunciation characteristic of pastorate on the other.²⁹ A more fruitful approach may be to interpret both self-augmentation *and* self-renunciation as potential moments of the same super-egoic drive: as evidence that a subject is being formed who remorselessly pursues ideological objectives that have been internalised and cathected as its own. Such an individual would be reminiscent of the Lacanian desiring subject which Slavoj Žižek describes, a subject who is compelled to *enjoy* military service and to seek in militarism the (ultimately impossible) fulfillment of his being. It is also worth noting that this ideological function is fully compatible with the ambition of “keeping a human image”, as discussed in the previous chapter. This ascetic drive to improve is what underpins the belief that “meaningful service” in the IDF can contribute to one's flourishing as a human being. It is also what allows several pre-military academies to claim that they are more interested in their students' development as individuals and citizens than as soldiers, even when these academies are structurally constituted to produce more combat soldiers and more officers. David Nachman emphasised precisely this aspect of the education at Ein Prat:

“We don't want people to be soldiers, we want people to be human beings. And we have to be in the army and we have to defend ourselves but in my opinion [a] good soldier is at the beginning a good man. Okay? This is what we look for and this is, when you want to describe [the IDF], this is it. When you go to the best units, when you go to the officers' course, then you find that we choose the people not because they are strong or they are brave but first of all their personality, sensitivity, their ability to see [the] complexity of things, the ability to

²⁹ Compare above, 36.

understand the other side, that they are coming from a democratic and pluralistic environment.”³⁰

This emphasis on values and identity in shaping “meaningful service” creates a strong connection between the task of personal improvement and military performance. Nachman’s view that “a good soldier is in the beginning a good man”, a view which was echoed by another teacher at a religious pre-military academy, also suggests that a gendered production of military masculinity takes place through this ethical work.³¹ Notably, this masculine identity, rather than being primarily based on strength and courage, is once again tempered with the supposedly more “feminine” traits of sensitivity and empathy discussed in the previous chapter.

Yet it is also clear that these traits are also perceived to have clear military utility. Yokhanan Ben-Ya’akov, civil servant at the education ministry in charge of academies, also envisages the contribution of secular and mixed *mekhinot* in this way:

“The secular youth [*hano‘ar haklali*], they succeed because they become officers, and they are better officers – more moral, more responsible, more sensitive, more involved. They have much more responsibility – much more – and you can see it and you can feel it. The senior officers in the army feel it. They tell us – this one was at a *mekhina* [...] He learnt what responsibility is. He also went through a very deep educational process.”³²

It is crucial to remember that this ideological outcome, which is ultimately what lies behind the belief that the IDF is the most moral army in the world, does not simply appear. It must first be produced through constant ethical work. This is not least the case when classes specifically concerning the army and military ethics are concerned, which I shall consider next.

³⁰ Author interview.

³¹ Author interviews with David Nachman and Reuven Mass.

³² Author interview with Yokhanan Ben Ya’akov [my translation].

Teaching military ethics at secular pre-military academies

In this section I will discuss the various ways in which military ethics is taught at five secular and mixed academies I visited.³³ The approaches vary in each academy but it is nevertheless possible to discern common patterns, principal among them being the importance of soldiers' testimony. I will begin by discussing the ways in which the value of purity of arms is taught, followed by an examination of how academies deal with the question of leadership and authority relations, and concluding with the curious example of a teacher who tries *not* to teach ethics.

Purity of arms

On the evening of 6th December 2012, I attended a class at Rabin Academy in Tiv'on.³⁴ It was part of a series of classes taught by the head of the academy, Dani Zamir (a retired major in the paratroopers), on "leadership and worldviews", half of which concerns military ethics. Some eighty students were present. We gathered in a small hall on the site of the academy with heavy rain beating down on the roof of the building. Zamir was late to the class, and while we waited for him one of the students who entered the room received a rapturous applause. He had just been selected for the infantry unit he had desperately wanted to reach. By the time the class began, the room was excitable and it was getting late. Nevertheless, Zamir pushed ahead with his plan, which was to show a film to the students called, "To See I'm Smiling" (directed by Tamar Yarom), as a way of continuing their on-going discussion of the value of purity of arms.

"To See If I'm Smiling" is a deeply disturbing film. It consists of the video testimonies of six Israeli women who served in the IDF during the Second Intifada, interspersed with archive footage (see also Morag, 2013: 166–179). Breaking the Silence assisted the director with the research for the film. The women describe episodes of repeated violence and humiliation of Palestinians, and confess their involvement and complicity. They also discuss the difficulties that women face in the IDF and how participation in masculinised violence can be a way to gain acceptance from male comrades. The film discusses the after-effects of military service and violence on these six women, which range from

³³ Nachshon Academy, Lakhish Academy, Rabin Academy, Ein Prat Academy, and the Jerusalemite Academy. I will discuss the approach in religious academies in the final section of this chapter.

³⁴ The following account is based on field notes from 6th December 2012.

guilt through to difficulties in motherhood and alcoholism. The cinematic *coup de grace* from which the film derives its title occurs in the final scene. Meirav, who served as an IDF medic in Hebron during the Second Intifada, has recounted a story from when she worked in the morgue. The body of a Palestinian man in the morgue acquired a *post mortem* erection and she asked her friend to take a photograph of her next to him. In this final scene, wracked with guilt and welling with tears, Meirav examines the photograph for the first time in years – to see if she is smiling.

Students at Rabin Academy had begun watching the film with casual interest, with many of them checking mobile phones or chatting among themselves. Occasionally they had laughed at the more light-hearted moments of the film. But by the end of the screening, the room was silent and the students were watching intently. When the lights were switched back on, the unease and discomfort in the room were palpable. Zamir began to chair a discussion with the students. Several complained that the film was politically biased, misrepresenting the normal situation in the West Bank. Zamir responded that he didn't think the film made a political point at all. For him, the film is about how soldiers behave. He sees it as an educational opportunity to raise awareness and prepare his students to prevent similar stories from taking place during their military service. He believes the film is about ethics.

The approach of this class clearly demonstrates the importance of testimony for ethical pedagogy in academies. It shows, firstly, how testimony is a vital source of examples and discussion in attempting to encourage students to behave ethically. But, secondly, it also shows the powerful potential of using testimony to take episodes of appalling violence, to drain them of political content, and then to recycle them as opportunities for encouraging renewed military participation. Responding to his students' disquiet at the film, Zamir reassured them that accepting that these events took place does not necessarily harm the image of the IDF as the most moral army in the world. Indeed, he argued that, assuming the IDF is a moral army, part of earning that reputation is being prepared to talk about such things. This logic is potentially very powerful: taken to its conclusion, it enables one to believe in the idea of the IDF as a moral army purely on the basis of its soldiers' willingness to examine themselves

after committing acts of violence. It divorces this myth from political reality and guarantees its ideological efficacy on the sole basis of the affective and subjective rewards of ethical work.

Thirdly, the pedagogical strategy adopted in this class clearly demonstrates the continuing importance of gender for promoting testimony and ethical activity in general. It is highly significant that the film chosen for this purpose should be based on women's testimonies: it shows, as with the IDF drama workshops organised by *Beit Morasha*, that the production of soldiers' testimony is often coded as an activity which requires disposition (problematically) understood as feminine. It is also noteworthy that, in the ensuing discussion at Rabin Academy, the film's gender politics – which consist in highlighting the masculinised violence of the IDF – were completely occluded by the concern to produce more ethical soldiers. And cultivating such an ethical soldier necessarily also involves producing a gendered subject. Dani Zamir took precisely this approach by asking his students to treat each Palestinian at a checkpoint as if they were their father, inserting ethical reflection into the always-already gendered context of familial expectations. His approach shows that testimony and ethical activity in the IDF are a means of consolidating gendered identities.

I attended a similar class on purity of arms at the Jerusalemite Academy on 28th January 2013, which was led by the head of the *mekhina*, Yael Domb.³⁵ The class began with simple readings of extracts from the “Spirit of the IDF” and from Asa Kasher’s “Military Ethics”. The segment chosen from Kasher’s book emphasised how the value of purity of arms relates to all behaviour of a soldier, not just in battle. This interpretation makes it possible to generalise the value of purity of arms such that it becomes a constant imperative to improve one’s behaviour in any circumstance. In this way the demand for “purity of arms” becomes a generalised super-ego injunction to improve and fits perfectly in the wider ascetic culture of self-augmentation and self-discipline at pre-military academies. From what I encountered at this class, many students do in fact experience this. Reflecting on the formulation of the value, one student commented that he approved of the use of the term “purity”: “actually because [purity] is an extreme, it requires [the soldier] to aspire at all times to be moral [*musari*]”.

³⁵ The account is based on field notes from 28th January 2013 and copies of the hand-outs used in class.

Later in the class, Yael related the value of purity of arms directly to counterinsurgency and to the concrete context of the West Bank. She did so using a soldier's testimony given to B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights organisation. It read as follows:

“The common soldier is the one who makes all the decisions in the field. I have a weapon, and the person opposite me does not. That means I can decide for him what he will do. As long as he is at my checkpoint he is in my kingdom. I can decide if he will stand up, jump, walk, is given the run around, will bring me a bottle of coke from his car even though I haven't paid for it, everything. Even looting. I saw this kind of thing with my own eyes. If a Palestinian enters the Occupied Territories in a Coca-Cola truck the soldier says, “You know what, I'll do you a favour, I won't check the entire truck, just bring me two bottles.” The Palestinian is afraid and will bring him the two bottles. It happens all the time. I saw it myself. I once stopped a car to search it. The man had goods in the back of his car. I asked him what is in the boxes. He opened the boxes and I saw perfume bottles that cost around 300 NIS each. Then he said, “Take ten.” I asked him “Why, I don't want to take any,” and he said, “Take ten, what do you care, its o.k., we are used to it.” I told him that I was not going to take anything and that they could pass through. They were really surprised. They just smiled at me. They were not used to an IDF soldier addressing them and asking them how they are doing. And that an IDF soldier told them that they can go in peace - they were dumbfounded.” (cf. full testimony at B'Tselem, 2003)

At first, some students reacted very suspiciously to this testimony, refusing to believe its authenticity. Several were automatically inclined to doubt anything which came from an organisation with a reputation for criticising the IDF. Yael responded to these doubts by giving a testimony of her own, based on a friend of hers from the unit she served in who had also witnessed bribery at checkpoints. The students then seemed more inclined to accept the idea that bribery takes place and a discussion began. What is noticeable about this sequence is that, as in the class at Rabin Academy, getting students to accept that violent or exploitative behaviour takes place in the occupied West Bank is actually the pre-condition for encouraging ethical work. Through this pedagogical process, students

abandon a more inflexible attitude to such occurrences (denying that they exist at all) and replace it with a desire to prevent them during their own military service. The unsettling political implication – that bribery and exploitation at checkpoints is widespread and actually inevitable – is thereby masked by a renewed ethical determination to improve oneself by emulating the soldier who behaved properly. This is a much more effective ideological outcome: the contradictions of seeking a moral occupation are hidden by the ascetic drive of the individual. This strategy is actually quite explicit in some cases. An instructor at another *mekhina* put this very clearly to me:

“... you even take the slight chance that one of them will say, I don’t want to join the army – it’s too horrible. Because we show them the horrible sides of that. And there are. If you are in Hebron, it’s not nice for you. [...] And they see everything. But we believe it will not make them not want to join the army or be part of the Jewish nation but it will help them choose the more moral way.”³⁶

Returning to the class at the Jerusalemite Academy, another familiar theme concerned the gendered dimension of the ethical problem. Of the many responses in the discussion, one male student commented that many soldiers might engage in such problematic behaviour to be considered a *gever*, which is a complimentary Hebrew slang term for a macho male. Again, comments such as this reveal that it is a supposedly more feminine disposition which is perceived to be appropriate at checkpoints; it confirms that military ethical work also implies striving for a particular gendered identification.

Many of the above patterns can also be observed in the approach taken at Nachshon academy.³⁷ Daniel, a former paratrooper, teaches a class entirely devoted to studying the “Spirit of the IDF” document. This class is one part of three series of classes which concern “mental preparation”. One series is taught by Ze’ev Nativ, the head of the *mekhina* and a retired colonel in the IDF, and deals with IDF battle heritage (*moreshet krav*); another is a series of occasional lectures delivered by an external military officer on the “army and moral values” [*tsava vemusar*]; Daniel’s course is much

³⁶ Author interview with Ohad Shamama (Lakhish Academy).

³⁷ The following discussion is based on my interview with the teacher responsible for these classes, Daniel Berkeley.

more practically orientated and focuses on concrete situations in which the ethical code is deemed relevant.

The structure of the classes is to take a separate value from the Spirit of the IDF each week and to pose dilemmas to students based on real events occurring day-to-day in the West Bank. The emphasis is on student discussion. In the introductory week, for example, students are given three hypothetical examples and asked to discuss them: one from a checkpoint where a father with a sick child wants to jump the queue; one from a situation where stones are being thrown at a military jeep in Hebron; and another from a case of targeted killing. Occasionally these examples will be well-known stories (such as the death of Madhat Yusuf, a Druze soldier who bled to death while an effort to rescue him was delayed), which helps to generate discussion. In a recognisable pattern, the emphasis is on cultivating an ethical sensibility and practising decision-making through the use of examples, with the emphasis very much on the discretion of the individual soldier:

“I say to the students [*hanikhim*] all the time in the first lesson and throughout all these lessons that *Ruah Tsahal* [the Spirit of the IDF] does not give, you know, a clear answer to any question. It’s not a textbook. It’s not a DIY [guide]. Reality is much more complicated and every scenario has its own characteristics and challenges. And, you know, what they shouldn’t expect from *Ruah Tsahal* is to know exactly what to do in the situation. So every lesson sort of ends [...] in the message that, you know, the *hanikhim* are going to have to try and decide themselves what they think should have been done in different cases.”

Several of the examples also come directly from Daniel’s experience as a soldier serving in the West Bank, which means that testimony becomes a direct part of the ethical and pedagogical experience. He gave example he used to discuss the principle of purity of arms as follows:

“So when I was in commanders’ course we were called to do some combat emergency stuff. And... It wasn’t really combat. We were guarding the [...] Green Line, where a lot of, you know, illegal workers pass every day. Less and less now but then there was quite a lot. And what happened was we were working... we were there for like a week or a week and a half

and it was quite hard. We were living in tents and we were eating the combat food, which is basically the worst food in the army, and we found... we stopped some people on their way back from illegal work and after, like, sort of checking them and writing their things down and letting them go, one of them forgot a watermelon behind. And then someone from the platoon took the watermelon back to the tent and then we had a huge discussion if we should eat this watermelon for dessert or not. And, so that's a personal example I give the kids to deal with. I, myself, think there's no reason to eat the watermelon. And I say that to the kids in the end but many of them disagree. They think eating the watermelon is fine. Soldiers are working hard and it's been forgotten anyway, it's going to just sit there and rot and whatever."

What is so striking about this example is its utter remoteness from the usual considerations of collateral damage or civilian casualties. Indeed, it is not immediately obvious how it relates to "purity of arms", as it is normally conceived, at all. Daniel explained:

"...the message behind the value of purity of arms is make sure you don't turn your authority and your power in being armed into anything extra at all than the security of Israel. The minute there's anything extra, that is not necessary, that's you crossing the line and doing something that I think is immoral. So that's my explanation... It's a sort of silly example but I think because it's sort of silly I think it's quite good because it's sort of like taking it to the extreme."

This explanation shows not only that purity of arms can cover a wide range of activities, but also that purity of arms is at its core a value about purity of intent. Crucially, for the Palestinian who lost a watermelon, the deliberations of Israeli soldiers about whether to eat it are completely immaterial. What actually cost him the watermelon was a regime of confinement and surveillance preventing him from moving freely between home and work. Yet by converting the value of purity of arms into an extreme test of moral character, the structural violence of the Israeli occupation disappears into the background of a constant struggle for the self-cultivation of the soldier. This example shows that

purity of arms is a value which is very well suited to introspection, to self-examination, and to testimony – in short, to producing an ethical subject.

Yet this example also exposes a paradox in the value of purity of arms, which we can appreciate better by remembering that the soldier who seeks to comply with this value is also a subject who *enjoys*, one whose desire is structured around a fundamental fantasy. This fantasy masks the basic impossibilities of the Symbolic order in which this subject finds itself. In the case of the Israeli soldier-subject, this impossibility is the impossibility of being a moral occupier. It finds expression in the anxieties surrounding counterinsurgency warfare, where the legitimate enemy never fully presents itself and the insurgent force is always mixed and contaminated with its civilian surroundings. Full enjoyment of the military encounter – direct, heroic engagement with the true adversary, as would be discussed in classes on *moreshet krav* – is never possible. The militarist ideological apparatus must therefore produce fantasies for soldiers to enjoy, ways of desiring which are (in Lacanian jargon) capable of providing *surplus enjoyment* – enjoyment which is not dependent on achieving the desired outcome, but which privileges the (often failed, often irrational) gesture of striving for it.

This is why pursuing purity of arms can tend to proliferate into an introspective examination of all military actions, even those mundane deeds with little to no consequence. Indeed, it is these mundane actions of renunciation or self-discipline which ultimately acquire greater importance, since they are far easier to enjoy than challenging matters of life and death. Yet there is an irony here. The value of purity of arms states that soldiers must only use their weapon and authority for the pursuit of the mission and never for any additional personal purpose. Viewed from a psychoanalytic perspective, however, purity of arms clearly breaks its own rule: in adhering to this value, the soldier *does* derive an additional benefit which is “surplus” to the mission, which is precisely the enjoyment derived from having complied with this value. This is in fact the hidden kernel of militarism in “purity of arms”: military activity, pursued for its own sake, produces enjoyment which supersedes the purely instrumental uses of deploying force.

Anti-military militarists: teaching leadership and authority

When discussing with Ohad Shamama, an instructor at Lakhish Academy, how he approaches issues of military ethics, I was struck by the peculiar emphasis he placed on how soldiers should conduct themselves in relation to structures of authority. He was a former student of psychology and philosophy and therefore refers his students to several famous psychological experiments which explore human tendencies to conform and develop authority structures. In particular, he introduces them to the Milgram experiments (in which volunteers delivered simulated fatal doses of electricity to fake test subjects at the instruction of actors posing as scientists) and the Stanford Prison Experiments (in which volunteers who were randomly assigned to the role of prisoners and prison guards developed a violent and strict regime of power). The rationale behind his use of these examples is to show the potential consequences of structures of authority in the army:

“...those experiments are the big ones [where] we are talking about military ethics in this way. What will happen if they put this uniform on you? What do you become? Do you become people in the movies? [...] And what happens when you obey someone who has a uniform on? What kind of horrible things you can do by obeying those things? How far can you go?”³⁸

It is not immediately obvious why it would be useful to train future soldiers to be suspicious of authority, but Ohad was clear that in fact future commanders need to develop this attitude in order to think creatively about their roles:

“I’m trying to give them a way of acknowledging the power that conformity... that the surroundings have on you – either conformity, the group, or the commander and everything. And I want them to have the ability to think by themselves in a way. I mean, I tell them: think, don’t act at the time unless it’s really dangerous for somebody. But first think. Whatever you do, think. [...] In the army [...] you have commands and all day long people telling you what to do. And that becomes a part of you in a way. You do what you are told to do and you stop thinking, because of a lot of the commands are not really smart, or not important. You have to

³⁸ Author interview with Ohad Shamama (Lakhish Academy).

wash this and clean that and everything has to be perfect [...] You are not supposed to ask questions. But I want them to ask questions. And to be able to say something is wrong here because I want them to be the commanders. I want them to lead. And in the end, after they started leading, they will have to think about their commands and not just do the commands that people ordered them to do before.”³⁹

Developing this attitude of scepticism and independent thought is actually a part of producing a military subject. It also directly supplements the ideological model of “keeping a human image”, since it allows students to imagine that, despite their involvement in the unthinking military machine, they remain independent human beings capable of making moral choices. Ohad summarised it as follows: “when you are in a situation which is not humane, be the humane person inside, be the human inside”.⁴⁰

Cultivating this healthy scepticism can actually go as far as raising questions about the entire military structure itself. At the Jerusalemite Academy, the classes on “army and leadership” begin with a critical examination of the role of the military in Israeli society. The head of the *mekhina*, described the importance of this approach in similar terms to Ohad:

“... we are thinking about many questions like the relationship between the army and Israeli society. What does it mean that the army in Israel has such a main place in our society and that everyone must go to the army and a lot of money is spent on the army...? All kinds of questions. And I ask: is it the way that we want our society to go? What is the effect of those things on our lives and thinking...? The main thing is that we are trying to develop critical thought. Sometimes they say that it’s too critical and then when they need to go to the army it puts them in a bad place [...] But I think the main thing that helps them to understand things is that I was in the army many years, so I can be very critical... We can be very critical about the army but do our service and [ask] how we can do it in the best way. It means a lot when they decide where to go [in the army] and if they decide to go to the place that everyone

³⁹ Author interview.

⁴⁰ Author interview.

thinks is the best or if they go to where the army needs them and where they need people like them with critical thought that can do things differently.”⁴¹

At Rabin Academy, this encouragement of a “critical” attitude towards the army is an extremely important part of the education on military ethics. Dani Zamir, the head of the academy, is very clear to his students that they should be willing to refuse orders which they believe are immoral.⁴² There are already grounds for this in the IDF, based on the “black flag” doctrine whereby soldiers are obliged to refuse “manifestly illegal orders” – a doctrine which is widely taught in pre-military academies, as well as in the high-school curriculum. Zamir is especially emphatic about this point. This is based on his own experience of refusing an order during the First Intifada and consequently spending 30 days in a military jail. At the time, he had been ordered to escort a group of religious Jews who wished to visit the alleged site of Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus, which would have required the curfew of the entire city. What is perhaps distinctive about this decision is that it has something of a political basis; Zamir was clear with me that he refused on the grounds of the operation being against “the basic rules of Zionism”. It is nevertheless clear that the refusal had a strong moral component for Zamir and, indeed, this is how he teaches it to his students. In fact, he sees refusal and the challenging of authority much more as an ethical tool for the moral improvement of the IDF, than as a political statement. He explained how he presents the likely consequences of such a refusal to his students as follows:

“...there will be one of two things: the best thing is that your commander, or the IDF, will say, ‘well, right we don’t have to do anything to you’; the worst thing, ‘okay, maybe you are a moral man, but you have done something against the orders so we will send you to thirty days in prison’. So what? I told them, to me, to sit thirty days in prison for not doing something I don’t believe [in] was very good. I felt very good... But I told them the truth. The truth is that I’m not – I really don’t know in... the history of the IDF and as people have researched in these cases, I don’t know many cases where a soldier said to his commander ‘don’t do it, it’s not okay, you are doing something wrong’ and then they took him to court. What is

⁴¹ Author interview with Yael Domb (Jerusalemite Academy).

⁴² Author interview with Dani Zamir (Rabin Academy).

happening is simply the opposite: a group of soldiers becomes very enthusiastic about doing something wrong and someone that [went to] *mekhinat* Rabin or some other *mekhina* or someone who has moral values by himself is saying ‘Hey, what are you doing? Are you crazy? This is enough.’ People, you know, will maybe laugh about him and [say] you are a sissy and this. They will not do it [take him to court]. This is the reality. So after 15 years I can tell you that this is exactly what is happening. In the places where my graduates serve, war crimes don’t happen.”⁴³

This example shows that even an act as highly politicised as selective refusal can function as a facet of militarism when it is re-appropriated as an ethical practice. The ideological dividend is that soldiers are able to fashion themselves as autonomous individuals whose moral commitments find expression in their military service. It is also noticeable that this model of risky speech offered to correct the behaviour of others fits very closely with Foucault’s definition of *parrhesia*, the paradigmatic model for ethical behaviour in his conception of the “care of the self”.

In the above examples, refusal and criticism become corrective tools aimed at improving the work of the IDF and serve to make military participation all the more meaningful. Paradoxically this anti-military sentiment provides precisely the productive tension that militarism needs to function as an ideological system. Ohad put this point extremely well: “The *mekhina* is like the opposite of the army, in a way. It’s funny that the opposite of the army is supposed to make you a better soldier, but that’s the way.”⁴⁴

Not teaching ethics

One of the more interesting interviews I held with staff at pre-military academies was with Micha Shalvi, a teacher at eight different secular and mixed *mekhinot*, including Ein Prat. I had been directed to him by David Nachman, the director of Ein Prat, because I had asked to speak to the person who taught military ethics. I was particularly keen to interview him because I had been told that he presents the students with literature written in the form of soldiers’ testimonies, including S. Yizhar’s

⁴³ Author interview.

⁴⁴ Author interview with Ohad Shamama (Lakhish Academy).

novella *Khirbet Khizeh* (Yizhar, 2011) and his short story “The Prisoner” (Yizhar, 2007) as well as Nathan Alterman’s poem “About That” (Hever, 2010). All of these stories are set during the Nakba and discuss violence against Palestinians and IDF expulsions of inhabitants from villages. I wanted to investigate the ways in which these texts might be used for teaching ethics at pre-military academies.

I met with Micha at his apartment in Jerusalem and began to ask him questions about what he teaches. I soon learnt that he was unlike other teachers I had spoken with. When I pressed him on why he taught Yizhar and Alterman he seemed almost offended: “Look, okay, so we read it. So what?” And then, in describing his use of Hebrew literature of the Nakba, he summarised his approach as follows:

“When there’s a story or a poem that gives the impression that there were some unethical behaviours, it cleans the majority from taking responsibility... Now, the way that in the IDF and in the *mekhinot* they are dealing with ethics it’s as [if] the problem is out of the ordinary and we have to be... we have to learn them, so that we won’t be like this. And I’m teaching that it wasn’t out of the ordinary, it was the rule... And this is a state of mind that they don’t know what to do with. It shocks them and they don’t know how to deal with it... [Whether] it has any effect? I don’t think so.”⁴⁵

He was also remarkably pessimistic about the contribution his teaching makes to his students and perceived of himself as being thoroughly manipulated by the *mekhinot*, which he sees as part of the problem with Israeli society:

“The *mekhinot* are giving all these guys an ampula of Zionism and ‘we are the fine guys and we are okay... ah, so Micha comes and says “no, hmmm”... Every year I, when I finish or in the middle, I come to my wife and tell her, look, I’m fed up of being a fig leaf [...] For David Nachman it’s very important that I will be there, for public... You know, the hidden curriculum of education is more important than the curriculum. And me as a left-wing, non-religious persona, being a teacher there, makes the appearance, it makes it look very pluralistic. ‘We are single-minded? What do you mean? Micha Shalvi is teaching, he is the

⁴⁵ Author interview with Micha Shalvi.

ethical [‘*erkhi*] left-wing[er], one of the last...’ It’s very sophisticated. If I would leave, they will have just *datiyim*, just religious people, just people from the settlements, just people who talk about Judaism. They need me as a... and I know that they are using it. David Nachman sent you to me. I’m okay. ‘Micha’s dealing with it’.”

When I asked him why he still bothers to teach, he fell back on its convenience as a way of making a living in later life and on his fascination with how young people respond to his approach, especially the more right-wing youth who attend Ein Prat.

Yet it was also clear that his teaching does have an impact on his students, even if it is not the one he intends. Micha reported that every year several students tell him it is important he stays at the academy and he recounted several instances in which his classes had shocked and provoked his students. Indeed, when I spoke with two of them about the classes during a fieldtrip, they told me they found the classes very interesting, even if they disagreed with many of his views, and they were able to summarise some very complex ideas from one of his classes.⁴⁶ In contrast to what Micha asserts, I would argue that the drive to maintain a pluralistic appearance at *mekhinot* is more than just cosmetic public relations. Students *do* encounter a variety of views at *mekhinot*, albeit in a highly choreographed and limited way. Its consequences are carefully managed and channelled into cultivating a “sensitive” soldier who can think critically. Producing such a soldier, I would argue, is still a form of ascetic “mental preparation”. Micha is a man doing his best *not* to teach military ethics but who, thanks to the pedagogical pattern at pre-military academies, is actually struggling to avoid it.

Soldiers’ testimony at pre-military academies

Given the prevalence of the use of soldiers’ testimonies as examples when teaching military ethics and the close contact that continues between graduates and their academies, it is perhaps not surprising that *mekhinot* also work to produce such testimonies from their own staff and students. Ohad, the teacher at Lakhish Academy, offered me one example of how this can take place:

⁴⁶ Field notes, 10th March 2013.

“I brought a guy last year, who was a student from here, a graduate, who came to ask me about ethical problems he had in Hebron with his teammates. And I brought him here, I asked him to talk to them about that. He came to me because he wanted help... He came to me, he told me how hard it is there, how hard it is to stay humane there and how some of his teammates are kind of losing it and how it’s becoming harder and harder [...] It was very... I liked it. [The students] liked it too because that was [a student] who was here. They knew him and he comes from time to time and then he went and he told them, this is Hebron [...] this is what I’m going through there.”⁴⁷

In this case, the importance of testimony is elevated above the status of an example. The practice of recounting one’s experience becomes a part of the ethical work itself, a way of reaffirming the soldiers’ commitment to serving in the West Bank and of preparing future soldiers for the challenges they will face.

Inviting soldiers to speak about their experiences during military service is extremely popular with students. This is as true for soldiers from outside the academy as it is with their graduates. Indeed, as I will discuss in chapter 5, student demand is in large part responsible for the continued involvement of Breaking the Silence in *mekhinot*, despite the hostility of many academy staff. Student curiosity and also generates other sources of soldiers’ testimony. Perhaps the starkest example of this I encountered was the process whereby Micha Shalvi, the reluctant teacher introduced in the previous section, came to give a testimony to his students about his own military service in the 1973 war. Micha told me that he is usually reluctant to discuss this with students: he does not like to use his status as a veteran to make the points he would usually make through argument and discussion.⁴⁸ However, in this case he was unable to avoid it.

Several years ago, Micha gave his testimony to an artist, Avi Dabach, who used it to create a video poem, entitled “The Altruist”, which is now available on the internet (Dabach, 2012). His students at Ein Prat discovered the video while searching for information about Micha and asked him about it at

⁴⁷ Author interview with Ohad Shamama (Lakhish Academy).

⁴⁸ Author interview with Micha Shalvi.

their next class. After some initial discussions, it was agreed that the video would be shown to students at the academy's service on Remembrance Day. The key passage of the testimony reads as follows:

“At a certain point we crossed the Suez Canal, across it there were high ramps, and underneath the ramps, the bunkers. So inside it were the remains of the Egyptian anti-aircraft forces. When we were about to leave the place, everybody was already on their vehicles, I told my officer, look, there's someone here... so I threw two phosphorous grenades into that bunker. And from the bunker 5 soldiers came out, they weren't armed. They came out screaming like hell, terrible screams... I can still hear it. It was terrifying, because the phosphorous sticks to your skin and burns it. I didn't know what to do... I was in terrible shock... so I decided simply to shoot them. I remember the screams and the faces on the sand, five skulls on the sand. And then we just continued moving.”

Following this passage, Micha goes on to describe the episode which occurred immediately afterwards. His platoon boards vehicles ready to move on but for some reason his commander orders him to move to a different vehicle. After several attempts to board the same truck, he is finally forced to disembark. As he is running away, two shells hit the truck, which was full of ammunition, and seventeen soldiers are killed. Micha then describes his attempts to treat the wounded:

“...one of them... his helmet was mashed on his head, it was... mashed. I wanted to save him. In my foolishness I tried to take off the helmet. So I held his helmet, began to take it off... and I took off his scalp... I held in my hand a helmet with a scalp. It was... it was... They tried to tell me later that I didn't kill him, but...”

For the next twenty years, Micha suffered from what he describes as post-traumatic stress disorder. Towards its climax he planned to commit suicide by driving to the location of the shelling and setting his car on fire. His wife and former comrades intervened, he was hospitalised, and he began to recover. He told me that he realised during his recovery that the source of his trauma came not from the death

of his comrades but from the killing of the Egyptian soldiers prior to it, and this is what he conveyed to his students at the memorial service.⁴⁹

By chance, that same week Micha was also teaching his students about the Hebrew poetry of the 1973 war. Micha usually attempts to make the point to his students that, contrary to the usual Israeli narrative depicted in these poems, the October War was not a surprise but the consequence of the Israeli refusal to relinquish the territories occupied in 1967. But, thanks to his students' curiosity about this video, Micha also devoted considerable energy to identifying the sources of what he refers to as the "collective trauma" of Israeli society. He told me that his students were very impressed, particularly with his honesty about the deeply troubling aspects of his story: "they said that they never heard such a story with such openness [*petiḥut*]"⁵⁰ In what follows I would like to suggest that – in tension with the political critique that Micha wishes to voice – the valorisation of such "openness" is the primary contribution that such episodes of testimony make at pre-military academies.

At the Jerusalemite Academy, students are actively encouraged to raise questions about the morality of their military activity. The director even went as far to say that talking about problems that soldiers experience should be the main ethical approach:

"When I talk all the time about doing army service different[ly] it's exactly those things. You come when something happens and say, hey, let's do it differently, or you come afterwards – sometimes you cannot during, in Cast Lead, all kinds of things, you cannot say in the second that it happens – but to talk about it later, to investigate, if we need to punish people, something like that, the main thing is to talk about it."⁵¹

At another *mekhina*, Telem in Jaffa, students are encouraged to adopt this approach as a part of their weekly activity in the *mekhina*. This gives them an opportunity to practise testimony and self-examination outside the military context but in way which ultimately has had a direct bearing on their conduct during military service. A counsellor at the academy explained it as follows:

⁴⁹ Author interview with Micha Shalvi.

⁵⁰ Author interview.

⁵¹ Author interview with Yael Domb (Jerusalemite Academy).

“...what happens is during the year in the *mekhina*, the students become very used to sharing, because even in a technical way they close the week with a weekly summary [*sikum shavu'a*], which means that they all share what went on with them during the week and how they feel about it, not just what they think, and they give the weekly administrators some critique and everything is very nice and family-like. You know, it's like a group-hug... And then when they finish the *mekhina*, then it's all cut, like cold-turkey. They go to the army and experience tonnes of things. And, especially after a year like this, everything is just boiling up in their minds and they have nowhere to... to release it to. So what started happening a few years ago is they just started these Google groups... They send one email, I guess to everyone, and they just, every weekend, they just get home from the army and they just spill their hearts out – like pages long. And they send it to the whole group. And that way they feel like they are sharing again because they are so used to it.”⁵²

This kind of activity became so common at the *mekhina* that a decision was taken to make the current students aware of its existence. The emails were compiled anonymously and a booklet of testimonies was produced for use as an educational document. The purpose was to show the relevance of the ideas being discussed at the *mekhina* but also to set an example for the students to conduct similar conversations in future, so that it could act as a source of support during their military service. Revealingly, the name chosen for this booklet was *HaMekhina Shoveret Shtiqa* (“The Mekhina Breaks the Silence”). The counsellor was careful to emphasise that this was not a political endorsement of the organisation; rather, it represented an attempt to capitalise on the cachet of its name and to emphasise the importance of speaking to others as an ethical tool.

No example of the use of soldiers' testimony at pre-military academies in Israel is as clear as at Rabin Academy. Since it is among the oldest *mekhinot*, Rabin has many graduates who continue to serve in the IDF in a variety of units and capacities. This, combined with the educational philosophy of its director, Dani Zamir, has enabled the academy to hold several events where graduates of the academy are invited back to discuss problems, especially moral issues, arising from recent military operations.

⁵² Author interview with Guy Immerman (Telem Academy).

In the last decade, they have discussed the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, the Second Lebanon War of 2006, and most famously Operation Cast Lead in 2009. Zamir believes firmly that in organising such events he is following a well-established tradition in the IDF. He described it as “the most basic tradition in the heritage, the tradition of the IDF, from the day I was a soldier, from ’67, maybe from ’48: you finish fighting, you speak. You speak with the soldiers, you speak with the enemy, you speak about what happened”. This practice is also consciously associated with the concept of *siah lohamim* (which translates as “soldiers’ talk”), derived from an anthology of testimonies published under this title which were gathered from soldiers from *kibbutzim* across Israel who served in the Six Day War and wanted to speak about the moral dilemmas they faced (Shapira, 1968; translated as Near, 1970; concerning the selective nature of the English translation, see Piterberg, 2007: 232–238).

On Friday 13th February 2009, the academy (including parents and graduates) gathered to hear nine of its former students who had served in Operation Cast Lead.⁵³ Zamir introduced the event by emphasising that he wished the conversation to focus on the moral aspects of the recent operation. He also made it very clear that the soldiers were expected to contribute:

“I suggest that in the first rotation each person tells what he did, where he was exactly and whatever experience he came out with from this period. He might also say nothing happened and then I will make it difficult for him, so it’s preferable that he says something. That he describes a particular experience, some particular thing, particular memory or particular impression that he has following the operation.” (Rabin Academy, 2009)

What followed was a conversation which had a strong effect on the audience and which eventually would become the subject of international controversy. Two of the infantry soldiers who spoke described an episode in which an elderly Palestinian woman was shot for being in an area declared an open-fire zone as she approached a suspicious-looking youth. Several other incidents of violence and vandalism were also reported, to the extent that Zamir announced at the end the stories were

⁵³ The soldiers’ names have been changed in the transcript but they are all male.

“depressing”. Zamir was so shocked by the stories that he reported them to the IDF, which rejected the claims as false. Zamir then sought permission to publish the material from the Chief Education Officer, Eli Shermeister, which was granted. Within a few weeks, the transcript had made national and international news, including *Ha’aretz* and *The New York Times* (Bronner, 2009b; Harel, 2009b). Military police contacted the soldiers about their stories, and Zamir and his academy were pilloried in the Israeli media. The response was especially hostile from the religious right, who called for Zamir to be sacked and the academy closed. Significantly, however, Zamir also received the support of several religious academy leaders at this time, which was crucial in protecting his position.⁵⁴

The response of the IDF was also interesting. Despite an intense media campaign on the part of the IDF to refute the allegations, privately senior army officers were much more supportive. The IDF Head of Manpower and Resources, General Avi Zamir (no relation), met with Dani Zamir and reassured him that “your soldiers are okay, I want you to tell them... that they did the right thing, I’m proud of them, and we, as the IDF, are not going to stop them from being commanders and officers... and we are very proud of *mekhinat* Rabin”.⁵⁵ Zamir was also persuaded that the testimonies of his graduates were instrumental in bringing about a wider response from the IDF. The allegations were investigated by the military police, which found (as is common in such investigations) no evidence of wrong-doing, principally because it emerged the testimonies were based on hearsay and not on eye-witness accounts (Greenberg, 2009).⁵⁶ According to Zamir, the Education Corps, under the direction of Shermeister, also increased the number of classes on the ethical code following the publication of the Rabin testimonies.⁵⁷ This response would indeed be quite typical of the IDF. In terms of criminal accountability, very little was actually implemented. Instead, the emphasis was placed on intensified ethical pedagogy. This response satisfied Zamir, who remains very proud of the whole episode despite the trouble it caused him.

⁵⁴ Author interview with Dani Zamir (Rabin Academy).

⁵⁵ Conversation as reported by Dani Zamir.

⁵⁶ Several human rights organisations expressed concern at the speed at which this investigation was concluded. The Goldstone Report also noted similarities between the testimonies of the graduates and those of Palestinians interviewed in the course of its investigation (UNHCR, 2009: 181).

⁵⁷ Author interview with Dani Zamir (Rabin Academy).

However, concentrating on the public furore around this episode perhaps risks giving a misleading impression. In fact, most of the incidents described by the students were much more quotidian forms of violence, in line with the usual fare of ethical pedagogy in pre-military academies. Indeed, according to the transcript, the stories which generated the most controversy and debate in the audience were not the accounts of the killings of civilians. These appear to have been met with muted shock and perplexed questions from academy staff. Instead, the most contentious questions raised by these soldiers appear to have been whether or not they should have cleaned Palestinian homes after they had expelled the inhabitants and converted them into military outposts. In the section of the protocols where this is discussed, the transcript records three moments in the space of a page when there were “arguments”, “conversations”, and even “chaos” in the audience (Rabin Academy, 2009: 8). When Zamir heard of incidents of vandalism from the soldiers, he called it “simply the behaviour of animals” (Rabin Academy, 2009: 7). By contrast, one soldier was keen to emphasise that his unit had cleaned the houses which they had occupied and whose inhabitants they had evicted into live firing zones:

“I personally, when my platoon commander told me ‘tell them to fold the blankets and put the mattresses in a pile’, I didn’t take it easily, there were lots of shouts, not screams at the top of your voice because you had to speak quietly, but I really didn’t like this idea at the beginning. At the end of the matter, I was convinced and I understood that it’s really correct and today I really respect and even admire this man – the platoon commander – for what he did there [...] All the soldiers in my platoon did it really without pleasure, really not in good spirits, we didn’t wash it well, but we cleaned [...] I don’t think every army, the Syrian army, the Afghan army, would clean his enemy’s house, certainly not fold his blankets and return them to the cupboard.” (Rabin Academy, 2009: 8)

As with the story of the watermelon analysed above, it was the relatively prosaic and inconsequential matters of military ethics, such as whether to clean this house, which most animated the discussion at Rabin Academy. 3,500 residential dwellings were destroyed during this operation; but the cleanliness of this one house is nevertheless a source of pride for this soldier, not to mention a mark of distinction

from other armies. In this example, “purity of arms” takes on connotations of literal cleanliness, the concentration on objects rather than people suggesting an element of fetishisation in this fantasy. This ideological framing of Operation Cast Lead through testimony in which ransacked and depopulated houses in devastated urban landscapes are perfunctorily but meaningfully tidied thereby helps to mediate its violence and restore a sense of ethical purpose to the soldiers who participated in it.

Ethical pedagogy at religious pre-military academies

It is often insinuated that national-religious soldiers have fewer moral qualms about exercising violence than their secular counter-parts. Especially after Operation Cast Lead, there was significant commentary on the influence that the Military Rabbinate and the rabbis of *yeshivot hesder* and religious *mekhinot* have over the military. Evidence surfaced of rabbis having given strong encouragement to soldiers to fight before the operation. The unprecedented level of civilian casualties in that operation reinforced the impression that the influence of religious nationalists had contributed to a more relaxed attitude to civilian casualties (Breaking the Silence, 2009; Bronner, 2009a; Harel, 2009c; Lebel, 2013). Often cited was the controversial remark made by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner in a text circulated to soldiers before the operation:

“When you show mercy to a cruel enemy, you are being cruel to pure and honest soldiers. This is terribly immoral. These are not games at the amusement park where sportsmanship teaches one to make concessions. This is a war on murderers. ‘A la guerre comme la guerre.’”
(quoted in Harel, 2009c)

Yet, disturbing as such comments may be, they should not be taken as evidence of a lack of engagement with questions of military ethics among the national-religious. An analysis of pedagogy at religious pre-military academies shows that they are in fact deeply concerned with these questions, even if the approach may be different to that of more secular academies.

One major difference in the way religious pre-military academies deal with these issues relates to source material. They devote far less attention to texts such as the IDF ethical code. Instead scripture and *halakha* represent the main authority when discussing matters of military ethics. Until recently,

the number of Jewish sources available for discussing conduct in warfare were very limited, owing to the low level of Jewish involvement in militaries before the birth of Zionism (Cohen, 2013: 23–40). However, as Cohen has observed, the rise of national-religious soldiers in the IDF has been accompanied by a huge growth in the number and systematisation of texts by rabbis concerning military ethics which interpret Jewish law in this context (2007, 2013: 85–108). Indeed, it is striking that the main discursive innovations required to facilitate the entry of religious soldiers into the IDF have been ethical. The rabbis of religious *mekhinot* have been noticeably involved in this effort, including Rabbi Rafi Peretz (formerly of the *mekhina* in Atzmona, and current IDF Chief Rabbi), Rabbi Shlomo Aviner (principal of the Ateret Cohanim Academy in Jerusalem), and Rabbi Eyal Moshe Krim (also principal of the Ateret Cohanim Academy in Jerusalem, and author of a four volume work on ethics in warfare) (Cohen, 2007: 43, n. 20). Very often these texts concern how to maintain religious observance on duty, including the observance of dietary laws, keeping the Sabbath, interacting with women, and so on. Yet they also concern conduct towards other soldiers and towards the enemy.

Indeed, despite his widely publicised comments, Shlomo Aviner has been among the most actively involved in questions of morality in combat. Several of his lessons have dealt with these questions and have been published online through the Ateret Cohanim *yeshiva*, where the *mekhina* is based. In one lesson, Aviner discusses the question “is it permissible to kill a terrorist who takes shelter behind ordinary people?” (Aviner, n.d.) Discussing concrete examples, including the assault on Jenin in “Operation Defensive Shield”, Aviner concludes that it is permissible to do so. He does so by arguing that such civilians, even though they may be innocent and without intention to harm, have the status of a *rodef*, a *halakhic* term for someone who endangers Jewish life, because he provides shelter for those trying to kill soldiers (see also Blidstein, 1996; cf. Cohen, 2007: 56–57).

When I asked a teacher at Keshet Yehuda academy about how he dealt with questions of “collateral damage”, his conclusion was no different:

“If you are in battle and terrorists are hiding in a house behind a civilian population, even children, and they are shooting at our soldiers and they’re being wounded, what would the right reaction be? So some soldiers will tell you we can’t shoot because we’re going to damage civilians, even children. Is that the right approach or not? So that’s a very big decision that has, you know... it’s a dilemma, and it depends on obviously the reality in the field. If you can do it in any other way, you should attempt any other way but harming innocent children and civilians, but in reality there’s a very basic moral question here. Whose children are more important? Are their children more important, or my children more important? Because those soldiers fighting are our children [...] And I think any sane human being, when his house is being threatened or his children are being threatened, is going to prefer saving his own children.”⁵⁸

Disagreeable as we might find this conclusion, it is also clear that it is based on ethical reflection. Indeed, it is not dissimilar to the logic of secular Israeli military ethics, who have argued that the IDF has higher obligations to its soldiers than to civilians not under its “effective control” (Kasher and Yadlin, 2005).⁵⁹

Another purpose of teaching military ethics at religious *mekhinot* is to pre-empt and confront the potential difficulties soldiers may have during their military service. In the face of problems of conscience, teachers encourage soldiers to concentrate on the ethical purpose of what they are doing. The teacher at Keshet Yehuda academy described to me how he would do this in class:

“So in the *beit midrash* [study hall] I can talk to them about... how it can be that [there] are very good people who are moral people who may be amongst the population of our enemy. But when they’re in battle and they’re facing off these enemies they have to be able to know that... you know, their reactions cannot be dulled by that understanding... When you’re facing

⁵⁸ Author interview with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda Academy).

⁵⁹ See also above, 75-89.

off a terrorist and he's about to kill you or your friend, you don't try and look for the points of merit within him: you shoot."⁶⁰

In another of his lessons, Shlomo Aviner also emphasises the importance of taking ethical pride in one's actions in combat:

"A soldier kills a terrorist and afterwards feels bad that he killed a person. Is this bad feeling a sign of a gentleness or imperviousness? Certainly it is a sign of imperviousness... Moral people fight to destroy evil... [The soldier] must be very joyful that he kept this religious duty [*mitsva*]." (Aviner, 2012; my translation)

This clarification of the moral purpose of military activity helps to prevent the potential problems of motivation and conscience and fortifies ethical conviction in battle.

These examples illustrate some of the key differences with the approach of secular academies. The examples used are more abstract, dwelling far less on the actual details and consequences of violence. Insofar as it is broached, the violence is presented as a battle between good and evil, or a struggle against vilified "terrorism". The moral ambiguities are therefore less pronounced than at secular academies and equivocation is usually rejected as a sign of weakness. However, the positions of religious *mekhinot* on military ethics should not be reduced to their views on the question of harming civilians. As has been consistently argued throughout this thesis, the role of ethics in Israeli militarism should primarily be considered from the perspective of subject formation. When this approach is taken, some tentative comparisons suggest that asceticism and ideas of "purity" are also themes of pedagogy at religious *mekhinot*, even if they are articulated in different ways.

To begin with, the emphasis on ascetic self-cultivation is just as pronounced at religious academies. The teacher at Keshet Yehuda, for example, was keen to emphasise to me that being ethical was a crucial part of being an effective soldier:

⁶⁰ Author interview with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda Academy).

“... one of our goals is to push them into being officers and higher level positions in the army. How do we do that? The first idea... is focussing on the importance of being in the army, of having the right people in the army, and the national service that goes along with it. In other words, they are doing a great service to their nation by being, you know, good, strong, ethical soldiers, representing the nation of Israel in a positive way. And this is considered to us to be a *mitsva* [religious duty].”⁶¹

Yet his further remarks demonstrate that this ascetic self-maximisation is constantly integrated into the pursuit of “meaningful service”:

“...the understanding is I’m not going to the army to be a macho individual, in order to prove my worth [...] That totally shifts when I see meaningful service as also part of it. I’m not going there to reach my maximum potential. Along the way I may do that. I’m going there to do a service. What’s pushing me forward is an ideology and that ideology means I’m going to see my service in a different way [...] And that’s going to mean a totally different approach from someone who’s a macho gung-ho guy.”⁶²

Once again there is clearly a gendered dynamic to this ethical process. The masculinity of the soldier must be carefully restrained and modified in order to make a more useful military contribution. The insistence on service also helps to produce an explicitly ideological pattern of “surplus enjoyment”: military service is pursued rigorously for its own sake, but nevertheless rewards the individual precisely because of his (gendered) sense of ascetic discipline.

One of the main ways in which this sense of ascetic striving is achieved is through practices of self-examination. Questions of personal morality are often discussed in the light of the eighteenth-century text, *Messilat Yesharim* (“Path of the Upright”) by Rabbi Moshe Haim Luzzatto, which is widely taught in religious *mekhinot*, including at Keshet Yehuda, B’nei David, and Ateret Cohanim.⁶³ This text describes the key traits of righteousness and how to acquire them. Notably “watchfulness”

⁶¹ Author interview.

⁶² Author interview.

⁶³ Author interview with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda).

[*hizaharut*] is the first of these qualities to be discussed, and the text explicitly encourages self-examination (Luzzatto, 1966: 35–80). Such practices are not merely taught but also institutionalised at religious academies. At Keshet Yehuda, for example, a regular slot is allocated in the timetable to personal accountability [*heshbon nefesh*] where students are encouraged to review and evaluate their past actions in consultation with rabbis in order to improve.⁶⁴ As the teacher there commented:

“*heshbon nefesh* means personal accountability, right? I go through my behaviour and I see, do I hold the standards I expect of myself? In other words if I believe that speaking badly of other people is negative, I shouldn’t bad mouth people and speak negatively. Have I done that or not? If I’ve done that then what can I do to correct that behaviour? And... many different standards... again, those type of things where we try and bring a person to a higher level of accountability and ethical standing.”⁶⁵

It is also common for soldiers to consult with their teachers and rabbis from their *mekhina* during their military service as part of this culture of self-examination (Rosman-Stollman, 2014: 174–179). Rabbis frequently issue *responsa* based on these inquiries for all students to follow. Indeed, Cohen has noticed that information technology has permitted this practice to become extremely common through the use of SMS messaging and online forums (2007: 43). During Operation Protective Edge, for example, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner from Ateret Cohanim academy posted several rounds of SMS question and answers on his website, with topics ranging from dietary matters and fasting, to prayer, to the ethics of killing civilians (eg. Aviner, 2014). These activities then become an opportunity for constant supervision of one’s actions in consultation with an authority.

Although more diffuse and private than the forms of testimony at more secular academies, I would suggest that such encounters perform a similar function in maintaining ideological motivation to serve in the military. Indeed, these interactions have often proved crucial. One exception to the tendency of religious academies to minimise moral ambiguities was their response to the difficulties faced by national-religious soldiers during the disengagement from settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005.

⁶⁴ Author interview with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda Academy).

⁶⁵ Author interview.

Dalsheim has analysed the discussions taking place among the wider national-religious community at this time, observing that doubt and uncertainty were just as much a feature as resolve and determination (Dalsheim, 2011: 69–90). At that time, religious pre-military academies also held very intensive discussions about the morality of evicting Jewish settlers from land they viewed as theirs by divine inheritance (Rosman-Stollman, 2014: 148–162).⁶⁶ In the end, academies instructed their students to obey orders and continue to serve the IDF; but careful deliberation over the dilemmas it posed was an important part of this process. It is of course notable that it was the question of evacuating Jewish settlements, not violence against Palestinians, which provoked this process; but the overall ethical approach is at least comparable.

Additional comparisons regarding the theme of “purity” might also be drawn. Similarly to the invocation of “purity of arms” at more secular academies, the idea of “purity” as an extreme zero-point is common at religious academies and is often used for describing soldierly virtue. In one lesson entitled “Purity [*nekiut*] and the Victory of the Army in War”, Rabbi Eliazar Castiel of B’nei David academy cites Psalm 18, in which King David attributes his military victory to the “cleanliness of my hands” and “according to my righteousness” in the eyes of God (Castiel, n.d.). Castiel argues that military effectiveness depends on soldiers being “cleaner, purer, more precise” [*yoter neḳiyim, yoter tehuriyim, yoter medaḳdaḳiyim*] in order to maintain their motivation and the belief that they are doing “the work of God”. Although the more secular value of “purity of arms” is rarely invoked, it is possible to see how this emphasis reproduces a similar kind of surplus enjoyment through an ascetic super-egoic drive to improve.

Following the death of Hadar Goldin, a graduate of B’nei David Academy, in Operation Protective Edge, a speaker at his memorial service praised him precisely for this quality of “purity”:

“Our dear Hadar, you know what you were fighting for: not for quiet skies over the South and not for an iron dome [*kipat barzel*] or some agreement or another. You were fighting the war of the yarmulke of faith [*kipat ha’emuna*], the dome of heaven [*kipat shamayim*], the powers

⁶⁶ Author interviews with Michael Cohen (Keshet Yehuda Academy) and Yokhanan Ben Ya’akov.

of purity [*tahara*] against the tunnel dwellers, the cave diggers who do not know the sun's light, who sit in silence and are considered as nothingness." (Bnei David Academy, 2014)

By eulogising Goldin in this way, military participation in Operation Protective Edge – in which over 2,000 Palestinians were killed, many of them in the bombardment of Rafah which took place in the frantic search for Goldin – is constructed as a demonstration of ethical character. Moreover, the trait of purity is almost explicitly racialised in these remarks, through the direct comparison with Hamas fighters in tunnels. This ethical value, pursued through ascetic self-cultivation, thereby comes to constitute an ethnic and national marker, cementing the ideological belief in the IDF as a moral army.

There are again important differences in the way this theme of purity, and its accompanying ethnic and national significance, is broached at secular and religious academies. In religious academies, the "purity" of the soldier is achieved primarily before battle as a way of deepening faith and resolve and is axiomatically contrasted with the perfidiousness of the enemy. Conversely, in secular academies this contrast is more complex, arising from a messier encounter between the soldier and the enemy population. Purity is therefore usually demonstrated during and after battle through acts designed to distinguish Israeli soldiers from the enemy population (in, for example, refusing to eat a watermelon or insisting on cleaning a house). In each case, however, it is around this theme of purity that the ascetic emphasis on self-cultivation and the ideological emphasis on military ethics are able to coalesce.

Conclusion

The shared focus on military ethics absorbed through careful work of the self on the self reflects a common belief among *mekhinot* that the education they offer contributes to the morality of the IDF. This is also effective at producing a sense of shared purpose between religious and secular academies. Dani Zamir, director of the secular Rabin academy and chairman of the joint council of *mekhinot*, was adamant about this in interview:

"To tell the truth, I think that the Orthodox *mekhinot* that are very extreme in their view, their political view, of the political solutions, are doing excellent work in the ethical education of

their students. For example, there is no one who graduated from Orthodox *mekhinot* or from secular *mekhinot* who have done war crimes or refused to do something. I mean, it's a very successful programme [...] There is more lack of understanding between secular soldiers who went to *mekhinot* and those that went straight from school [...] than between soldiers from secular and Orthodox *mekhinot*.⁶⁷

Whatever the truth of his claims about “war crimes”, most striking is Zamir’s conviction that the shared focus on the ethical preparations for warfare is what unites religious and secular academies.

In this chapter I have shown how the culture of “meaningful service” in pre-military academies contributes to the ethics of Israeli militarism. This has provided a frame for understanding the contribution of both religious and secular *mekhinot*. Although each kind of *mekhinot* attaches differing significance to military service, they both emphasise it as an opportunity for self-realisation. They also pursue similar strategies of preparation for their students, which broadly take the ascetic form of mental and spiritual preparation. The sources for these exercises can be diverse, ranging from the “Spirit of the IDF” to *halakha*, but the ethical subject produced is in many ways comparable and often encourages similarly gendered, ethno-national, and civic identifications. Soldiers’ testimony and self-examination, in all their various guises, are also a common element of this ethical pedagogy, ranging from communal, public, and even ritualised events for recounting experience to more private, but no less far-reaching, consultations between soldiers and rabbis.

Deepening my psychoanalytic critique of militarist ideology, I have also emphasised the importance of the theme of “purity” as a shared *telos* of ethical work. Notwithstanding important differences in the way this theme appears at secular and religious academies, in both cases the emphasis on purity functions very effectively as a form of fantasy. This fantasy produces surplus enjoyment for the individual subject but also obscures the structural violence of war and occupation in favour of cosmetic moral change or religious self-affirmation. Through the cultivation of such fantasies, pedagogy at pre-military academies helps to consolidate a sense of the ethical purpose of military

⁶⁷ Author interview.

service and the identity of the IDF as a moral army. Ethical pedagogy is aimed at constructing, preserving, and restoring military service as a meaningful and therefore worthwhile activity.

Chapter 4: Between guilt and anxiety: giving and collecting testimony in Breaking the Silence

Introduction

This chapter will seek to assess the possibilities and limits of soldiers' testimony as a political tool in Israel. Thus far in the thesis, I have shown that practices of testimony giving are deeply implicated in ethical pedagogy in the IDF. I have argued that testimony participates in a depoliticised ethics which serves as ideological support for Israeli militarism. In particular, I have claimed that testimony is a crucial moment of subject formation and that the soldier-subjects it produces are more amenable to participation in military activity. My aim in the following two chapters is to show the consequences of this for modes of political contestation in Israel which attempt to make use of soldiers' testimony. I take as my central case study the activities of the veterans' organisation, Breaking the Silence [*Shovrim Shtika*], which has been gathering soldiers' testimonies since 2004 and attempts to use them to campaign for an end to the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. My study of Breaking the Silence is based on seven months of fieldwork in which I regularly observed the public activities of the organisation and interviewed many of its current and former activists, as well as on an analysis of the published written material of the organisation and its profile in the media. In this chapter, I will focus on the practice of collecting and recording soldiers' testimonies in the organisation; in the next chapter, I will analyse the development of its approach as an NGO, particularly focussing on their education programmes which use these testimonies to influence political debate in Israel.

I conceive of the work of Breaking the Silence first and foremost as an ethical activity, albeit one which is placed in the service of political goals. I will therefore analyse it in the same way as I have examined ethical practice in the IDF and pre-military academies, drawing attention to processes of subject formation. This approach allows me to highlight the continuity and mutual implication between ethical pedagogy in the IDF and the work of Breaking the Silence, as well as the respects in which the two depart. The aim is to show how ethical pedagogy in the IDF and the political campaigning of Breaking the Silence work together, though in different capacities, to produce the ethics of Israeli militarism. Put simply, my argument will be that soldiers' testimony in Israel is a

politically debilitating form of activism which, even when placed in the service of quite radical political objectives, imposes serious constraints on what can be achieved.

In this chapter, I begin by placing *Breaking the Silence* in historical context, showing that they are a successor movement to a long tradition of soldiers' testimony in Israel which has taken the form of both a literary genre and political activism. I then discuss the emergence of *Breaking the Silence* as a movement in 2004, describing it as an ethical response to the military realities of the Second Intifada. In the third section I will describe the process of gathering testimonies in detail and analyse the motivations of those who choose to give testimony. Fourthly, I will examine a debate which took place within *Breaking the Silence* about the role of emotions in giving and collecting testimony. In the final section, I concentrate on the political consequences of the testimony process for the soldiers who choose to go through it.

As the chapter progresses, the theoretical component of the analysis will grow stronger. My analysis of processes of subject formation remains grounded in the theories of Foucault and Žižek. However, engagement with the question of the political consequences of giving testimony will also incorporate the insights of Freud, Judith Butler, Wendy Brown, Jodi Dean and Alain Badiou. As the title of this chapter suggests, the soldier-subject produced through testimony to *Breaking the Silence* is a subject caught between feelings of guilt and anxiety. Insofar as the subject's experience moves closer to anxiety, I argue that the consequences of testimony become more politically productive, even occasionally escaping the confines of the ethics of Israeli militarism. However, I will also argue that this is a rare occurrence. Even where testifiers encroach on the experience of anxiety, it remains bound to an experience of guilt which constantly threatens to re-insert the soldier into an ethics dominated by the super-ego. Melancholia is a common manifestation of this pattern. Yet anxiety and super-ego are only two concepts of ethics, and (following Badiou) to these must be added the pairing of courage and justice. I argue that these latter concepts are absent from the ethics of *Breaking the Silence* and that, perhaps, this is the major source of its limitations.

“Silence” in historical context

Soldiers’ testimony as a literary genre in Israel began at least as early as 1948 (and perhaps earlier, see Almog, 2000: 108–112, 241–244). The most famous example from the Nakba is the work of S. Yizhar, whose novella *Khirbet Khizeh* and short story ‘The Prisoner’ describe fictionalised accounts of expulsions of Palestinians and the arrest of innocent civilians (2007, 2011). Other memoirs, including Uri Avnery’s *In the Fields of the Philistines* and *The Other Side of the Coin*, later published together (Avnery, 2008), and Netiva Ben-Yehuda’s *Between Calendars* (Feldman, 2000), also appeared shortly after the war. All three authors describe the Israeli soldier’s experience of 1948 and pay particular attention to the moral difficulties involved in fighting the war, particularly insofar as it necessitated violent contact with the Palestinian civilian population. Yizhar’s novella, despite its treatment of the supposedly taboo subject of expulsions during the Nakba, quickly became a classic of modern Hebrew literature. It was added to the Israeli national curriculum and in 1978 was controversially aired as a television film (Shapira, 2000). The moral agony and ultimate passivity of the protagonist of *Khirbet Khizeh* is the focus of the story, placing the soldier’s ethical experience at the centre of one of the canonical texts of Israeli war literature. Yet what also emerges from the book is a theme which carries through the entire history of soldiers’ testimony in Israel: silence. The difficulty of speech and the almost overbearing noiselessness of traumatic events pervades the narrative. Yizhar closes the novella with the following words:

“All around silence was falling, and very soon it would close upon the last circle. And when silence had closed in on everything and no man disturbed the stillness, which yearned noiselessly for what was beyond silence – then God would come forth and descend to roam the valley, and see whether all was according to the cry that had reached him.” (2011: 112–113)

For all of Yizhar’s prestige, however, the classic text of soldiers’ testimony is *Siah Loḥamim*, an anthology of recorded conversations, letters, and articles from soldiers who fought in the Six Day War of 1967 (Shapira, 1968; translated as, Near, 1970). The book acquired iconic status in Israeli society, giving the moral voice of the soldier a central place in the cultural reception of the war. The soldiers,

all *kibbutz* members and almost uniformly secular Ashkenazim, are recorded giving their thoughts about the war, with a special emphasis placed on their reservations and moral difficulties. They openly discuss their feelings towards Arabs, the morality of warfare (including “purity of arms”), and their joy at the Israeli conquest of Jerusalem. Indeed, in the English translation, as Gabriel Piterberg has demonstrated, the conversations were carefully edited to accentuate the impression of the conscience of the soldiers, leaving out more unsavoury stories from the Hebrew original (2007: 232–238).

What emerged most clearly from *Siah Loḥamim* was a seemingly authentic soldier’s voice, speaking in conversational Hebrew and employing soldiers’ slang, with apparently strong values and a moral sensibility. This figure is an authoritative one, masculine and educated, deserving of an audience because of the fact of his military service and participation in the war. Indeed, what seems to have been most profound about this book was the mere fact of these soldiers talking, as expressed in its Hebrew title. Once again, the theme of silence has a role to play here, for it is against this backdrop that the soldier’s voice acquires its privileged position. In the introduction to the English edition, one of the members of the editorial board of the volume is quoted as follows:

“The public exaltation which followed the war did not make it easy to give expression to the private emotions, the revolution in sensibility which it caused the individual. Our generation took off its uniform and buttressed itself in silence” (Near, 1970: 15).

It is this strong perception of societal silence which amplifies the significance of the soldier’s voice and elevates the truth of his discourse.

It was not until the First Lebanon War that this perception of public silence acquired a clearer political connotation. The difference between the officially announced goals of “Operation Peace for the Galilee” and the actual, much more ambitious plan for the conquest and political restructuring of Lebanon gave the experience of the soldier, who knew by his deeds that Israeli operations had extended far beyond the forty kilometre limit declared by the cabinet, a crucial place in the growing public criticism of the war. A group of soldiers returning on leave from their first deployment in the

war decided to hold a public meeting with journalists at which they described their experiences of the fighting.¹ To their surprise, the meeting attracted a very large audience and their testimonies from the war made a great impact in the Israeli press. They decided to form a protest group, using the telling name, “Soldiers against Silence” [*Haiyalim neged Shtiqa*] and they initiated a protest vigil outside the Prime Minister’s house (Levy, 2012: 52–54). Although a large part of the stated grievance of the organisation was opposition to the covertly enlarged scale of the operation, a key motivating factor for the principal soldiers involved was moral difficulties of the contact with civilians this entailed. This perception was particularly acute after the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila camps in Beirut. Indeed, for some soldiers, controlling the civilian population in Lebanon evoked comparisons with the treatment of the Jews of Europe.

At a time when the question of refusal to serve in the IDF was becoming more prominent, especially after the high profile refusal of Colonel Eli Geva to participate in the assault on West Beirut, this migration of the moral voice of the soldier in testimony into a clearer political domain was significant. It raised the prospect that the moral anguish of the soldier might not merely act as a critical yet obedient adjunct to militarism, but might actually attempt to challenge it. The dilemma faced by such an attempt, however – and it is a dilemma which is still very much alive – is the difficulty of using a soldier’s voice to criticise the military and political establishment when that same voice acquires its very authority from its military participation. This authority derives not only from its insider status. It also depends on a pre-existing perception of the Israeli soldier as an ethical subject, a legacy which the political use of soldiers’ testimony not only draws on as a legitimating resource but which in many cases also works to enhance.

The First Intifada also provoked a wave of new testimonies. Some of these appeared in the form of literature and poetry describing the moral difficulties of quashing the civilian uprising in the occupied territories (Mendelsohn-Maoz, 2011). One notable anthology was a collection of testimonies gathered by Ilana Hammerman and Roli Rosen (2002). Rosen, who conducted the majority of the interviews,

¹ The account below is based on my interview with Shuki Yoshav, one of the founder members of the organisation, and his published testimony (Hammerman and Gal, 2002: 48–54).

discussed her aim in the book as attempting to understand the mind-set of the soldiers who served in the Intifada (Hammerman and Rosen, 2002: 152–160). She deliberately chose a wide range of respondents, ranging from those who had eventually refused through to those who had beaten Palestinians and enjoyed it. Rosen also took great care to avoid the trappings of the “shooting and crying” genre, which she was fully aware was complicit in patterns of militarism. She nevertheless acknowledged the ethical questions that collecting this testimony raised. She became conscious that in order to get the best testimony she needed to appear sympathetic to the soldiers, often using her position as a woman to achieve this, and to privilege their voices and experiences in a certain way. In her judgement, and in the judgement of Hammerman, this was nevertheless a worthy price for the information and stories gleaned.² This trade-off between the militaristic consequences of encouraging soldiers to speak and the political gains to be made from exposing what they know and say about the realities of war nevertheless still defines the use of testimony as a political tool.

A key reminder of this in the case of the Intifada is a collection of short stories penned by Colonel Moshe Givati entitled “Conspiracy of Silence” (Givati, 1993). Although the accounts are fictional, it is clear that they are derived from actually occurring events. The collection concentrates on the moral dilemmas soldiers faced in policing the Intifada and it is intended as a pedagogical tool. (Indeed, Asa Kasher cites the volume in his textbook, *Military Ethics*.) In the title story of the book, Givati discusses the problematic consequences of a “conspiracy of silence” in one infantry unit stationed in Jabalya refugee camp. A new recruit to the unit is shocked when a fellow soldier shoots a Palestinian demonstrator after he disturbs their lunch by throwing stones. He demands that others report it but no one in the unit seems interested, despite the investigations of their superiors. Later, the unit is redeployed to the Lebanese border and one morning the soldiers fall asleep during a watch. Again, the recruit protests but they fail to report this incident as well and as a result Hizbullah fighters are able to ambush and kill some nearby soldiers. The lesson is clear: soldiers should report wrong-doing where they see it (though not because it will save Palestinian lives). Despite its simultaneous political deployment in activism and literature, therefore, testimony has also consistently remained a

² Author interview with Ilana Hammerman.

pedagogical tool within the IDF. This historical tension between the ethics of activism and the ethics of pedagogy in breaking these silences continues to define the politics of the organisation which most clearly represents this trend today.

The emergence of Breaking the Silence

Breaking the Silence was born in Hebron. It was founded by members of the 50th battalion of the Naḥal brigade, a unit which is regularly stationed in the city and which saw lengthy periods of active service there during the Second Intifada. Hebron is in many ways a unique city with regard to its position in the Israeli occupation. It is the only Palestinian city in the West Bank which has Israeli settlers living directly at its heart, which has resulted in a very severe regime of separation and sterilisation being applied to the city. Palestinians no longer have access to its commercial centre, which is under varying shades of curfew and traffic restrictions. This regime of military control began as a response to the disturbances following the massacre of 29 Palestinian worshippers by the radical settler Baruch Goldstein in 1994 and has been steadily tightened since. The city was the site of violent confrontations during the Second Intifada and experiences constant bouts of tensions and violence up to this day.

It was the experience of implementing this violent regime of military control which prompted members of the 50th Naḥal battalion to reflect on the morality of what they were doing. The Naḥal brigade is distinctive in that it makes arrangements for its soldiers to combine their military service with volunteering activities. Many of the soldiers who served in Hebron at that time were therefore involved in charitable work, youth movements, the Israeli scouts, or other educational projects. They tended to be left-leaning, though many also came from right-wing families, and to be strong believers in Zionism and the idea of the IDF as a moral army. It was this combination of ideologically motivated soldiers and the extreme violence of the Intifada which produced Breaking the Silence. One former activist who was present in Hebron during those early days described beginning of the moral response as follows:

“It starts with the small daily decisions that you take when you’re there in the platoon on the street in Hebron, for example... And then it kind of becomes bigger and you start discussing those things with your friends, with your commanders if possible. For example, you know that a certain patrol of the day goes through a school – a Palestinian school – and you fucking hate it. Just the shame... as an educator, as a person who sees himself as an educating figure, standing with a gun in front of a class, standing with a gun and a metal jacket, going into schools and seeing the hate in the kids eyes after educating kids for two years. And you don’t want to be there. And you know that the patrol goes to the school at a certain time of the day, so you try to do a different task in the platoon. You try to be on the watchtower instead of on the patrol. You try to be on the vehicle patrol instead of the foot patrol, so that you won’t have to go through school, for example. And then you realise that [others] don’t want to be on the patrol as well... And that’s in the very early stage. And then the discussions come up... You actually talk about it. ‘I don’t want to be on the patrol that goes to the school. I feel really bad. I can’t believe I’m doing this, 7-8 months after teaching kids about recycling and stuff, going into class with a gun.’”³

Following these efforts to avoid the most difficult duties with their like-minded friends, however, a further realisation took place: those who would replace them in these duties would be less conscientious and perhaps more violent. In particular, they began to notice that those who had come from the more right-wing nationalist youth movements were beginning to take on such duties:

“I think in this time, when we understood that we cannot just say we’re not going to do it and these guys started doing it – we knew exactly what they are doing, which is bad obviously, that’s where our sense of responsibility was created in us. We understood that avoiding was not a solution. This is where our activism was pretty much coming to life, let’s say – for me.

³ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

And then you find yourself doing the opposite thing. You find yourself asking the commander to be in the school.”⁴

The soldiers were therefore re-motivated to take on these duties by a classic feature of the ethics of Israeli militarism, which is the idea that good soldiers can make even the most violent of military activities more moral. In usual circumstances, as previous chapters have sought to show, it is quite possible to get this ideological mechanism to work. In the conditions of Hebron in the Second Intifada with members of the 50th Nahal brigade, however, this was much more difficult. One of the founding members of Breaking the Silence described the process whereby the fantasy of a moral occupation began to disappear:

“I mean, you stand at a checkpoint. You’ve got 800 people going through. And the first one... you know, I was a scout, I thought: I can be professional, I can be courteous here. We can make this a moral occupation. We can even hand out candies. We can be the most courteous... and explain. The first hundred people I tried to explain. I’d say, you know, “I’m sorry sir, there’s a curfew” or “my orders say the checkpoint’s closed today, try again tomorrow maybe, maybe my orders will be different”. And after 100 people I got a little tired and like... “sorry, curfew today – go home now”. And after three or four hundred people, you know, you’re standing there 8 hours at a time, 400 people go through. You’re going to get a few hundred people a day, especially if you’re in Hebron, back then... it was a busy, busy market. After four hundred people you say, “you know what? fuck off, it’s closed, go away”... [A]fter 800 people, you say, you know what I’m going to handcuff you, I’m going to blindfold you, you’re going to sit here for six hours, you’re going to learn your lesson, I don’t want to see you breaking curfew ever again. Because we can. You know, one red line at a time.”⁵

This recognisable process of attrition (or *shhika*, as soldiers term it) is certainly not unique to Hebron in 2001-2004. Indeed, Erella Grassiani has documented the widespread phenomenon of Israeli

⁴ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

⁵ Author interview with Micha Kurz.

soldier's gradually becoming numb to their prior moral concerns during the long, difficult routine of military service (2013: 73–89). Typical responses for many Israeli soldiers are apathy and fatalism, or the use of justificatory discourses such as having no alternative (Grassiani, 2013: 102–130). Yet in the more extreme circumstances of Hebron, and with soldiers who cared deeply about their ideological commitments and identities, these coping strategies were not adequate. Two different kinds of ethical response in particular became common for those early members of Breaking the Silence: guilt and anxiety.

Feelings of both guilt and anxiety reflected a deep discomfort with what the soldiers were doing in Hebron; but whereas guilt focuses attention on the soldier's own individual moral behaviour, anxiety is the outcome of questioning the whole system of values and meanings underpinning an individual's subjectivity. For some, the emphasis was clearly on guilt. When I asked one of the founding members of the organisation why he had wanted to establish it, he responded simply: "I felt guilty".⁶ Suggestions are also made that the leading figure in founding the organisation, Yehuda Shaul, had similar feelings. In an early video interview about the founding of the movement, revealingly entitled "Burning Conscience", one activist commented: "Breaking the Silence was founded because one day Yehuda Shaul could no longer look himself in the mirror" (Alternate Focus, 2006).

Very often, this feeling of guilt coincides with a continued belief in the reality, or possibility, of a moral army. The same founding member of the organisation who openly admitted to feeling guilty about what he had done, also professed his belief that the IDF remains a moral army – and he offered me several examples from his continued military service to attempt to prove the point.⁷ Likewise, the activist Noam Chayut records in his memoir that in the early stages of his involvement with Breaking the Silence he still believed in the idea of a moral army (Chayut, 2013: 174). Some soldiers took their earlier pattern of behaviour even further: as well as deliberately taking on the more difficult duties and attempting to do them in what they considered a more moral way, they also sought to enter

⁶ Author interview with anonymous founding member of Breaking the Silence.

⁷ Author interview.

commanding roles and to influence the behaviour of other soldiers.⁸ The idea was to redouble their efforts and take it upon themselves to attempt to make the occupation more moral. In this framework of guilt, where the Symbolic order of Israeli militarism remains intact, the soldier is more likely to question his own behaviour, to wonder whether he is a “rotten apple”, and to experience an associated sense of dejection and perhaps even self-abnegation.

Yet feelings of anxiety – of concern that the Symbolic order of Israeli militarism was collapsing around them, that what they used to believe about the IDF and even Israel as a whole may no longer be coherent or true – were also a large and growing component of the responses of the early Breaking the Silence activists. Some of this anxiety began to develop in Hebron itself, as a natural escalation of the conversations the soldiers had among themselves about what they were doing:

“Then these questions start rising consciously. I mean it goes a further step, where you don’t just say to your friend ‘I really don’t want to be on the patrol tomorrow, let’s find a way to be on the watch’. It turns to ‘I really don’t understand why Israeli soldiers have to go into a Palestinian school’. It goes a second... another step. ‘I don’t understand why we are [occupying] civilians. What’s the goal, what’s the point of doing this?’ And from there the sense of responsibility starts building up.”⁹

Interactions with the more violent settlers inside Hebron also contributed to this process. Many of the soldiers from a secular, more liberal background began to have difficulty identifying with the Israelis they were asked to protect. As one testifier describes it, this had a serious effect on the soldier’s identity as Jewish Israelis:

“...on the one hand you say to yourself fuck it, I’m supposed to guard the Jews that are here. On the other hand these Jews don’t behave with the same morality or values I was raised on. I reached a point in Hebron where I didn’t know who the enemy was anymore: whether it’s the Jew who’s going crazy and I need to protect the Arabs from him, or whether I need to protect

⁸ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

⁹ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

the Jew from the Arabs who are supposedly attacking...” (Breaking the Silence, 2005; cf. Grassiani, 2013: 94–96)

This experience of anxiety about their identity and role was therefore already developing in Hebron itself. However, it was the experience of taking their experiences from internal monologues and personal conversation to recorded, publicly available testimony which accelerated this process.

The first major step was the decision taken by the early activists, and especially Yehuda Shaul, that they should develop their experiences in Hebron into an exhibition. On being released from the army, they used the discharge money they had been given to record each other’s testimonies and collect new ones from friends, to collate their pictures of serving in Hebron, and to rent gallery space to display it all.¹⁰ The soldiers had exhausted all possible avenues to improve the morality of what they were doing within the existing political and military structure. The aim was now to show Israeli society what the military occupation of the West Bank entailed and to reveal its moral price. This message had some political content, but at this early stage it was still inchoate:

“We said there is no political objective. Our message was very clear: this is not political. This is about soldiers... because a soldier in Israeli society is like the purest voice: a) we all know they’re young children but (b) they’re the consensus. We’re all in a consensus around soldiers. So if soldiers would come out and say something... It was non-political. The point was that there’s no education, preparation to the army that can make this a more moral situation. This is the reality. This is what it means. Controlling men, women, children, old folk, there’s no way around it.”¹¹

A familiar trope surrounded this ambition, which was the belief that Israeli society does not sufficiently know what is entailed in occupation and that soldiers and the public do not want to speak about it. Very frequently, this impression came from the soldiers’ own difficulty in communicating with their families about their experience of military service:

¹⁰ Author interview with Micha Kurz.

¹¹ Author interview with Micha Kurz.

“Nobody wants to talk about this stuff. And it became very obvious... that people need to know. I needed my mother to understand, I needed my father to understand what was going on. People didn’t understand settler expansion and how our job wasn’t just to protect Israelis or protect the settlers: it was to support and enable their expansion. Without us they wouldn’t have succeeded... And I needed my mother to understand what it meant for us to be... you know, what does it mean to give a kid a gun and tell him to go and patrol a civilian operation. We noticed how people were going crazy.”¹²

In keeping with a well-established theme in the historical production of soldiers’ testimony, therefore, the organisation took aim at this perceived societal silence and hence acquired its name.

The exhibition in Tel Aviv created a media frenzy, attracting interest from journalists and politicians as well as members of the public. Following its initial success the exhibition travelled to Haifa and even briefly to the Knesset at the invitation of the then education minister (something which would be more or less unthinkable today). The activists began meeting with more experienced political campaigners, including the photojournalist Miki Kratzman and the documentary film-maker Avi Mograbi, who encouraged them to expand the project and collect more testimonies. The soldiers made more connections with like-minded individuals from other units and a strong drive began to gather a larger collection of testimonies. They also began to appear frequently in the media and developed a very active public relations campaign.¹³ Meanwhile, however, the questions which this huge media exposure generated among the individual activists began to mount. Micha Kurz, one of the founding members of the organisation, described his growing sense of anxiety:

“I was the most confused kid you’ve ever seen. I really didn’t have a clue what was going on around... Because the more we talked, the more people we met, the more questions we asked... there were no answers. The ground was falling apart. I thought we were this kind of

¹² Author interview with Micha Kurz.

¹³ I discuss the formalisation of Breaking the Silence’s approach as an NGO in more detail in the next chapter.

state. Democracy... Turns out we're not a democracy, turns out that being Israeli isn't that cool, turns out that there was a Nakba, turns out that this was unjustified..."¹⁴

For some, like Micha, this experience of anxiety rapidly became too much. He ceased to be an activist with the organisation and arranged to leave the country without returning for six years. Micha is no longer a Zionist and now works with a grassroots activism project in Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem. Other activists have experienced this anxiety to different degrees and with different consequences. Noam Chayut joined Breaking the Silence very soon after its establishment and also experienced a process of political transformation through his involvement with the organisation. He abandoned his Zionism but remained a Breaking the Silence activist. By contrast, many other activists – probably a majority – consider Zionism entirely compatible with their involvement with the organisation. For the founding member mentioned above who still believes in the IDF as a moral army, however, the organisation quickly became too radical. He left the organisation and is now pursuing a career in Jerusalem municipal politics.¹⁵

In short, all manner of political trajectories are made possible through participation in the organisation and the anxiety to which this can give rise. It remains very difficult to generalise about the political consensus among its members, both at senior and junior levels. Yet while there is no uniform or stable experience, a minimal set of shared tenets among all activists did emerge. Over time, these would be refined into a clearer, if still limited, political message. One activist summarised the basic insight to me in Hebrew as follows: *hakibush mashhit*, the occupation corrupts. There is no way for an occupation to be moral, no matter how hard one tries.¹⁶ Regardless of their personal political commitments, all Breaking the Silence activists share this view.

For practically every combat soldier in the IDF, arriving at this view requires going through at least a minimum degree of anxiety. As previous chapters have shown, the Symbolic order of Israeli militarism enshrines the possibility and desirability of a moral occupation. It produces ethical subjects who attempt to implement this ideal and who shape and prepare themselves to do so. Yet for a limited

¹⁴ Author interview with Micha Kurz.

¹⁵ Author interview with anonymous founding member of Breaking the Silence.

¹⁶ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

number, usually from a certain background and in certain conditions, their encounter with the military reality of occupation renders this ideological belief problematic. As I have described above, some will experience this as a form of guilt, as a further impetus to improve their behaviour and the conduct of others in order to bring the uncomfortable reality closer to the ideal. Others, however, experience this as anxiety, as an unsettling experience of doubt in the consistency of the Symbolic order itself. This may occur as their initial reaction, especially if they have prior political commitments. It may also be as a consequence of trying and failing to improve the situation through a guilt-response. But, finally, it may also happen through confronting this experience after military service, especially in a framework such as giving testimony to Breaking the Silence. My aim in the rest of this chapter will be to show how consistently the testimony process itself achieves this and to analyse the political consequences.

The testimony process

The analysis so far has concentrated on the early experience of activists in Breaking the Silence. However, since its establishment over one thousand soldiers from all areas of the IDF have testified to the organisation. While these testifiers are usually aware of the message of the organisation, not all of them fully support it. Their motivations for agreeing to give testimony are diverse and complex. Moreover, they are difficult to research because Breaking the Silence goes to great lengths to protect the anonymity of those soldiers who testify (with the exception of the small number, usually existing activists, who give video testimonies). I interviewed fifteen Breaking the Silence activists at length and spoke to several more while observing and participating in their public lectures and tours. However, the very fact that these testifiers were also activists meant that the political component of their motivation to testify was much more strongly pronounced than in the wider population. In order to learn more about this larger group, I spoke with four activists who were responsible for collecting testimony, who between them had interviewed approximately 400 soldiers. I soon discovered that the diversity of experience and views was even wider among the general group of testifiers. The different testimony collectors also had diverging views on how best to conduct interviews, which I will discuss at greater length in the next section.

This diversity notwithstanding, there are certain regularities to the testimony process that can be outlined. The first step is finding a willing participant. Normally, testifiers are not straightforward volunteers who approach the organisation without any prompting. The testimony collectors constantly attempt to recruit new testifiers by soliciting phone numbers at lectures or tours or by asking existing testifiers to suggest the names of friends or acquaintances they know who might be willing. The testimony collector will then call the soldier directly. Eran Efrati, who conducted up to 150 interviews over two years, estimated that roughly nine out of ten people whom he contacted in this way would refuse to give testimony. Approximately half of those who refuse to give testimony will do so almost straightaway on principle when they hear the suggestion, either because they do not like the organisation or they do not feel comfortable sharing the information. The other half refuse either because it proves difficult to build rapport and trust with them or because they do not yet feel prepared to but might in the future.¹⁷

Given the general lack of willingness of soldiers to testify, testifiers' motivations for doing so can seem enigmatic and ambiguous. There is no typical testifier profile, but it is possible to discern some trends and categories. The largest group represented among the testifiers is secular, Ashkenazi, and relatively wealthy, usually from a left-leaning or liberal Zionist background.¹⁸ Testifiers are overwhelmingly male; women testifiers are under-represented even compared with the proportion who served in some capacity in the occupied territories. Particular units are also over-represented, especially the Nahal 50th Battalion because of the origins of Breaking the Silence in this unit. However, practically all groups in Jewish Israeli society are represented among the testifiers, including religious, Mizrahi, and even settler soldiers. The organisation also has testimonies from all major army units.

The personal motivations of the testifiers can be further broken down into groups. Avichai Stollar, the head of the testimonies project, who has interviewed upwards of 150 soldiers, identified five major

¹⁷ Author interview with Eran Efrati.

¹⁸ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

groups to me, based on previous reflection on this question.¹⁹ The first group are those with political motivations, which is a very common reason to testify. These soldiers sympathise with the goals of Breaking the Silence and oppose the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.²⁰ Many of these will be politically active in some capacity already or are looking for some way to become politically active on the left. Indeed, most of the activists I interviewed fell into this category, including Avichai himself.²¹

Just as common, however, is a second group: those with a guilty conscience. Avichai described these soldiers as “people who feel like shit about either things they did or participated in or witnessed; and they do this to get some kind of... you know, like the Catholic ‘forgive me father for I have sinned’ shit”. In other words, a large number of testifiers treat it as some kind of opportunity for confession. Although this group is large, it is unlikely to constitute an overall majority of testifiers.²² The distinction between these first and second groups turns to a large extent on the difference between anxiety and guilt I have identified. Whereas the former group has embraced the experience of anxiety about the fantasy of a moral occupation and a moral army, many retain these beliefs and often feel guilt as a response, placing them in the second group. Together these first two groups constitute the vast bulk of testifiers.

The third group are those that believe in the importance of truth and public information. These are usually people who do not have a problem with what they did, either personally or politically, and therefore do not feel any compunction in talking about it. Occasionally these soldiers are actually proud of what they did and are trying to confound Breaking the Silence by bringing what they consider more positive stories about the occupation. Soldiers with more right-wing politics and even settlers fit into this group. A smaller subset of this group might have a particular episode or issue which concerns them but would remain fundamentally a believer in the morality of the occupation. They approach Breaking the Silence in order to expose what they consider a localised problem to the public.²³ A fourth group are those that testify out of a sense of obligation, usually because they have

¹⁹ The observations that follow are drawn from my interview with Avichai Stollar, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

²¹ Author interviews with Nadav Weiman and Hillel Cohen; fieldnotes, 11th December 2012.

²² Author interview with Ilan Fathi (see also Chayut, 2013: 180–181).

²³ Author interview with Noam Chayut (see also Chayut, 2013: 179).

some kind of personal connection to a member of Breaking the Silence and they do not have any real objections to it. A final fifth group are those whose motivations remain mysterious and who in some cases appear not to have understood what the aims of Breaking the Silence are at all. This group will sometimes tell what they think are impressive war stories or racist jokes about Palestinians.

Having secured the willingness of the testifier, the interviewer will then fix a time and a location. The length of the interview is flexible but usually takes two hours or more. The locations at which the testimony takes place range from private homes to cafes, universities, bus stations, and even military bases.²⁴ Generally, the interviewers I spoke with preferred to conduct the interviews at the soldier's home in order to encourage a more informal atmosphere; but they would be prepared to meet them wherever they wanted. Interestingly, Eran noted that it was very rare for a soldier to be willing to be interviewed at their family home, usually because of the stigma attached to the organisation and a sense of embarrassment: "They understand they are doing something they are not supposed to."²⁵

The interviewer begins the meeting by informing the testifier about Breaking the Silence and its aims, followed by reassurances about anonymity and the legal and journalistic protections under which the testimonies are collected. The interviewer also emphasises that he was interested not just in sensational stories but in the routine practices of service in the occupied territories. All interviews are tape-recorded from beginning to end. All of the interviewers I spoke with started the interviews in a similar way, by asking if the soldier had any particular stories he wanted to share.²⁶ Often, and especially among those who have strong feelings of guilt, testifiers will have prepared one or two of the more remarkable stories from his military service. The initial discussion about such incidents can go on for a while, even up to an hour. Interviewers seemed to interpret the rationale for this opening strategy differently. For some, it was a way to generate talking points and make the soldier more comfortable; for others, the idea was to get this story out of the way, allowing them to direct the testifier towards those things they were less inclined to mention or prepared to discuss.

²⁴ Author interviews with Avichai Stollar and Eran Efrati.

²⁵ Author interview with Eran Efrati.

²⁶ Author interviews Avichai Stollar and Eran Efrati (see also Chayut, 2013: 180).

After this point, the interviewer will then lead the testifier through his service chronologically, beginning with basic training and then through all of their deployments and missions. This structure has two purposes. The first is mnemonic, helping the soldier to recall details and arrange his recollections. The second is more analytic, helping the interviewer to find details and stories of interest. Since Breaking the Silence now has a very large database of testimonies, it may even be possible to use the interview to verify stories they had previously heard or to augment the picture of a particular area or particular time of interest. In general, the preference is for the soldier to formulate his memories as particular stories located in a time and place, since these are more powerful to read than dry analysis or scattered remarks. Occasionally the interviewer will also interject with a question asking for clarification or attempting to solicit particular details.

These procedural aspects of the testimony process change very little from interviewer to interviewer. However, one major area of difference in the practice of taking testimony concerns the role of emotions both in the interview itself and in the content of the testimony. On this question there has been some considerable disagreement within the organisation, which is the topic to which I will now turn.

“Psychological shit”

The head of the testimonies project at Breaking the Silence, Avichai Stollar, described his attitude towards the relationship between the interviewer and the testifier as follows:

“I try to minimise my interference in what he is saying. I would never stop him in the middle of a sentence unless he is talking about something which is completely irrelevant... Even there, unless he got carried away with it then I wouldn’t stop him because the intention is to make it as informal as possible, to make him feel that it’s a conversation and not like an interview. That’s one of the reasons why I never touch the recording device, not to remind him... And it’s also about the feeling that you give him. That you’re not judgemental, no matter how horrible the stories that he’s telling you. It’s not a poker face, because a poker face would give him the feeling he’s being interviewed. Even if I... deep inside do feel

resentment to what he's saying or the way that he's presenting what he's saying... the general feeling in general in *Breaking the Silence* is to make him feel that his story is not just his own personal story, but it's a bigger story. And when he's telling something, it's usually the case that there are a million people, or a hundred people, or five hundred people telling the same story. Sometimes I would even say that 'yeah, it's amazing, you know I did the same thing five years before you'. And when he's telling a joke I would laugh, even if the joke is inappropriate or even a bit racist sometimes. That's the art of interviewing. Making the person who's being interviewed feel comfortable is the most important thing that you can do. But in *Breaking the Silence* it's even more important because you're already touching something that for many Israelis is very sensitive in many, many aspects, both in the personal sense and in the guilt sense. A lot people feel like when they are doing this they are snitching out or... from the complete opposite [point of view], they feel awful about the things that they did. They feel genuinely bad and guilty about the things that they did and then it's also important to give them the feeling you know, that... keep talking, it's all of us. And that reassures people and gives them the confidence and the ability to speak freely, or the willingness to be more accurate."²⁷

These remarks capture the unavoidable role of affect and subjectivity at the heart of the process of giving testimony to *Breaking the Silence*. Avichai starts by stating his intention to minimise his involvement in what the soldier is saying. Yet by the end of this passage, it is clear that producing the desired kind of testimony requires carefully managed interventions in the emotional and psychological situation of the soldier. Even a purely extractive approach to generating testimony which is unconcerned with the soldier himself must nevertheless pass through his subjectivity in order to produce it.

In stating his desire to remain as minimally involved with the soldier as possible, Avichai is articulating the line which is generally held by *Breaking the Silence*. The organisation is not interested in intervening in soldier's lives, either politically or otherwise. Instead, its objective is to record and

²⁷ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

publish as many soldiers' testimonies as possible in order to document its claim that the occupation is immoral. The aim is to change public discourse in Israel, not to change the behaviour and attitude of soldiers. "We are after the information... In a way we don't really care about the interviewee", activist Noam Chayut put it to me, "I shouldn't put it that way but we kind of use them, [like] journalists".²⁸ This attitude partly emerges from the conclusion that the occupation is in itself immoral and that, no matter how hard they try, individual soldiers cannot change this. Yet it is also driven by other concerns, which derive from the organisation's awareness of its history in the tradition of soldiers' testimony in Israel. Breaking the Silence wants to avoid indulging in "shooting and crying" (*yorim yebokhim*) and facilitating a discourse of victimhood among Israeli soldiers. Avichai was the most straightforward about his distaste for this kind of discourse:

"...it re-empowers the feeling of people like my family who want to be moral and live comfortably with the fact that... yeah, you know it's such a horrible reality in which we have to shoot and then cry. You know, in the words of Golda, I will forgive them for killing our children but I will never forgive them for making us to kill their children. Fuck that! That's bullshit. That is bullshit. That's horrible. If you want to understand how to be really moral then you need to understand those that are oppressed... and those who are oppressed are not the soldiers, those that are oppressed are the Palestinians. They don't care about the psychological shit when it comes to the Palestinians. They only care about it when it comes to their own soldiers and they're getting it from all possible directions."²⁹

Avichai's discomfort with soldier's "psychological shit" is a common attitude in Breaking the Silence, although his perspective is probably a more extreme example. Likewise, Noam Chayut – who recorded the video testimonies given to Breaking the Silence – stressed his wish to avoid turning soldiers into victims by allowing them an outlet for their feelings of guilt:

"...we don't want to be these Catholic priests. For example, in the video testimonies... I did not agree to have any kind of victimhood in this project. And there was a soldier from Hebron

²⁸ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

²⁹ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

that, in each and every story... I made a mistake as the interviewer and let him understand that I don't like his victimhood and he went and put it in all the stories in a way that it would be difficult to edit. And some stories didn't go in because he felt that he is a victim, that his comrades [and] friends are victims, [that his] commander is a victim of a system, of a militaristic society.”³⁰

The difficulty is, as the resistance of Noam's testifier shows perfectly, that testimonies depend on experiences such as guilt and victimhood in order to come about in the first place. Moreover, as Avichai's remarks at the beginning of this section show, emotions have an important mnemonic and interlocutory function in extracting precise and important information from soldiers. Not only this, those testimonies which contain an emotional component are also those most likely to have an impact on the reader or viewer. Avichai acknowledged this, with reference to his own personal testimony:

“If you watch the last video testimony that I gave I'm talking about what I did but the deepest thing that comes out of it is, you know, the part where I am saying that I am a sadistic shit. It's the most powerful part of the testimony. More powerful than what I'm telling about how an entire battalion was beating the shit out of a Palestinian. I understand that and it has its place and it's inevitable and I'm completely okay with that... I'm well aware in the political war the importance that emotions have. I'm just saying we shouldn't place our focus on that just because it's somehow convenient and many would say it's almost expected...”³¹

There is, however, an alternative strand of thinking in *Breaking the Silence*, which is less well represented today but which was especially clear during 2008-2010. This was the period when Eran Efrati was one of those responsible for interviewing soldiers. Eran believes in the necessity and importance of the emotional element of the interview. Not only does he recognise that this is inevitable, he also attempts to encourage it. This is partially because he believes that emotions are an effective way to trigger the memory and extract better information. In order to do this, Eran would regularly intervene with questions about how the soldier felt at the time of the events he was

³⁰ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

³¹ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

describing, including by asking about seemingly unrelated matters such as the soldier's relationship with his girlfriend or family. However, Eran's principal motivation for introducing a more emotional element into the interviews was as a means of intervening in the ethical, political, and psychological development of the soldier. Unlike the majority in *Breaking the Silence*, Eran saw it as his responsibility to bring about a transformation in the soldier and if possible to radicalise his political perspective.

In doing so, Eran was deliberately diverging from what he saw as an attitude among others in the organisation that was uninterested in the well-being of the soldier. In his view, refusing to allow the soldier an opportunity to come to terms with what he did was reflective of a wider attitude in the organisation that soldiers do not deserve such redemption. Indeed, his interpretation was that some activists in *Breaking the Silence* – many of whom remain close friends of his – deny this opportunity to testifiers precisely because they also deny it to themselves as a form of “self-punishment” for what they did during their military service. Eran felt that this approach was politically counter-productive, or at the very least was passing up an important political opportunity to recruit new activists:

“I didn’t want to punish them. I wanted them to understand they are one of a million. It’s not them, it’s a system, it’s a society, it’s a country. Also, I wanted them to be active. I hope all through the years with my testimony that all of the guys I took testimony from will be active. I really hoped. It’s an illusion but I think a large number of them became somehow involved in the process.”³²

Eran's approach was therefore to amplify the tendency already latent in *Breaking the Silence* (which Avichai also refers to above) to show the soldier that his actions were part of a larger context which itself is corrupted. In other words, Eran was accelerating the transition from feelings of guilt towards feelings of anxiety. Rather than simply suggesting that the occupation was the problem, however, Eran would also often begin to connect the occupation with wider and deeper questions about the nature of Israeli society. He would talk with the soldiers about the history of the conflict, about

³² Author interview with Eran Efrati.

Zionism, about racial politics and particularly about the role of Mizrahim in Israeli society. This last point was especially important for him as Mizrahi Jew in an organisation dominated by Ashkenazi, often “Anglo”, activists.³³ After a certain point in his own process of radicalisation, he even began encouraging the soldiers he interviewed to refuse to serve in the IDF, which caused controversy in the organisation. He would combine such questions and probing with more emotional questions, asking them about their current feelings about what they did or asking if their families and friends knew whether they were testifying to Breaking the Silence. Eran often stayed in close personal contact with those he interviewed, hoping to encourage their transformation from occupying soldier to anti-occupation activist. He estimates that he is still in contact with 50-60 of them on a regular basis, despite having now left the country.

Eran’s perspective was also derived from another area of contention concerning the testimony process, which is its relationship to the soldier’s experience of trauma and possible psychological damage. Despite the often harrowing details which emerge from testimonies, and the fact that some soldiers do experience some kind of trauma, Breaking the Silence does not train its testifiers in dealing with such issues and still has not developed a clear protocol for this. Certain informal institutional links have been established: Eran used to recommend that his testifiers visit the organisation, “Psycho-Active”, a left-wing Israeli NGO run by psychologists who oppose the occupation and who offer subsidised treatment to activists; more recently, Avichai has begun to attempt to co-ordinate with Physicians for Human Rights and to try to act as a bridge for soldiers to seek treatment. However, these efforts have not matured and it remains a source of concern for Avichai: “I really don’t feel comfortable with the fact that a lot – I don’t know if it’s a lot – that some of our testifiers, you know... [say] ‘goodbye, I’ll carry on with my life’ and he’s basically fucked.”³⁴

Avichai’s main response to this concern is to reduce the emotional element of the interview process to a minimum. Indeed, his view was that Eran’s approach was likely to aggravate psychological

³³ “Anglo” refers to Jewish Israelis with a personal or family history in an Anglophone country, usually the US or UK.

³⁴ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

problems. Yet Eran retains his view that this was unavoidable and that failing to engage with these issues, albeit in an amateur way, was likely to lead to more, not less, harm:

“If you’re opening a conversation with a guy who saw the body of a Palestinian child... and decided to take a picture with it and now you are trying to open this story to use it, the trauma is already there. Now, you’ve got two choices: to try to... get him to a place where he understands what he did but you can be somehow forgiven; or you can just leave him like that, dazed and confused. [...] most people will never take [the] opportunity and go to speak with someone else. You are their shot. They are coming for you, this is it, this is what they are doing with their life. And if you are there enough at that moment realising that, you can take them and make them go through a process. Even if you just start pushing and then let go and see what happens. It’s not like I’m calling every one of my guys and asking ‘Are you still doing veteran service, you motherfucker?’ If someone didn’t do the journey, I let it go [...] It’s dangerous. It’s dangerous to play with someone, with his memory, with his feelings, with his trauma. But it’s more dangerous to open that and then leave. I still believe in that.”³⁵

What is interesting is the way in which Eran clearly associates a political transformation with a process of psychological healing. This is not the same as a process of “shooting and crying”, even though in some cases that may still be what soldiers use the testimony process for. Eran was not trying to reconstitute the soldier as a military subject with a clear conscience and greater esteem for himself and his mission: “I didn’t really want them to feel good about themselves. I wanted them to feel like they are not the problem, they are not the issue.”³⁶ Eran believes that the testimony process can be a beneficial and politically productive experience precisely insofar as it does not seek to marginalise or ignore its irreducibly emotional (and subjective) aspect. He refers explicitly to his own personal political trajectory as an example of this. Eran feels that engaging with his experience through testimony allowed him to become the activist he is today, moving from the heart of the Zionist

³⁵ Author interview.

³⁶ Author interview.

consensus to being a strong supporter of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement outside Israel:

“I think my process is a lot healthier. I think my process helped me continue my life as an activist and understand the occupation is not narrow, it’s very wide. And it helped me realise I need to fight something bigger and I’m a better activist right now because I learned to... I don’t know if forgive myself, it’s not a forgiveness thing... I just learned to live with the idea that it’s not something I did, it’s a situation I was brought into and if you can understand that, then you can be a really good activist. You can say, okay, let’s stop this situation from happening, not just take the story after it happens. Let’s dismantle this project, let’s dismantle this idea. And maybe [others] will not get to this point because they really want their process to be cold, like they feel they deserve.”

What remains to be seen, however, is whether Eran’s experience can be generalised. The next section will analyse in more detail the political consequences of the testimony process.

Melancholy politics

When I interviewed Nadav Weiman, a relatively new activist in *Breaking the Silence*, he showed me a collection of photographs he had taken during his military service. One photograph in particular struck me (see below, figure 3). He had taken it using a long exposure which had allowed him to capture himself sat in two different positions on his sofa: on the right hand side, he sat in civilian clothes reading the newspaper, *Ha’aretz*; on the left hand side, he sat in military uniform holding his rifle and looking at his civilian counter-part. He captioned it: “Me, the soldier, looking with envy at me, the civilian.”



Figure 3: Me, the soldier, looking with envy at me, the civilian [photo courtesy of Nadav Weiman, reproduced with permission]

The long exposure also means that neither of Nadav's two selves appears fully in the picture, but rather as translucent ghosts. In this single photograph, I believe, Nadav has captured the structure of soldier subjectivity. The soldier subject in this photo is neither fully the man in uniform, nor fully the man reading the newspaper (nor, indeed, the man behind the camera). Instead, the subject is the fleeting movement between all of these positions (cf. Fink, 1996: 41–42).

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, my interpretation of this photograph is that it represents the struggle of the soldier-subject to find consistency in the Symbolic order of Israeli militarism. Confronted with the Real of the violent military encounter, the desire of the soldier to uphold the professed values of the Israeli civilian for a moral occupation proves impossible. There is an irreducible gap between the two subject positions, such that the desiring soldier will never fully overlap with the civilian ego-Ideal.³⁷ The soldier-subject is therefore a *split* subject who remains alienated from the Symbolic order of Israeli militarism. Moreover, this Symbolic order remains inconsistent, demanding unachievable and hopelessly contradictory things from the soldier. It seeks to

³⁷ This irreducible gap was first discussed in chapter 1 above, 74–75.

mask this inconsistency by producing fantasies, some of which (such as “purity of arms”) I have discussed in previous chapters. These fantasies incite guilt in the soldier who (inevitably) fails to fulfil the expectations placed upon him by the Symbolic order and who therefore finds the fault within himself. This guilt operates to prevent the much more dangerous experience of anxiety, in which the subject starts to manage to *separate* himself from the “Big Other” and not merely alienate himself in it. Žižek has rendered these important distinctions as follows: “In terms of affects, the difference between alienation and separation equals the difference between *guilt* and *anxiety*: the subject experiences guilt before the Big Other, while anxiety is a sign that the Other itself is lacking, impotent – in short, *guilt masks anxiety*. In psychoanalysis, guilt is therefore a category which ultimately *deceives* – no less than its opposite, innocence” (Žižek, 2000a: 255).

Many Breaking the Silence activists have managed to achieve this *separation through anxiety*. Indeed, both Eran and Avichai described their own personal experience in this respect in strikingly similar ways, drawing on the same distinction between their military and civilian selves. For Avichai, this meant abandoning his soldier self after his discharge by insisting that people no longer use his army nickname, Stollar: “No, no, no, you don’t call me Stollar. My name is Avichai. I buried Stollar in the military base where you get discharged. I told them Stollar does not exist any more.”³⁸ In an even more surprising case, Eran began to effect this separation in dramatic fashion during the period of his military service:

“I understood that I was doing something really, really bad from the beginning. And I had these fantasies that I was protesting against myself, like against the army... After 3-4 years in the army I started going to Bil’in every Friday.³⁹ So, I would leave the army, take the uniform, put it in a bag, have my civilian clothes on me, the bag was on my back, and I was set with

³⁸ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

³⁹ Bil’in is a famous site for weekly protests in the West Bank where local Palestinian villagers demonstrate against their separation from their farmlands by the construction of the separation barrier around the settlement of Mod’in Illit.

guys in Tel Aviv, and we would drive together to Bil'in. And nobody there knew I'm a soldier."⁴⁰

It is necessary to be clearer about the role that testimony plays in this process of separation through anxiety. In a fascinating Masters thesis written at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Efrat Even-Tzur analyses this question precisely from a Lacanian perspective (Even-Tzur, 2011). Based on nine depth interviews with soldiers who testified to *Breaking the Silence*, she draws comparisons between the process of giving testimony and the ethical consequences of psychoanalytic treatment (Lacan, 2007a: 645–670, 2007b). She notes that in many cases soldiers who testified did so in the classic framework of “shooting and crying”, using the testimony as an opportunity for confession. In Lacanian terms, the ethical process these soldiers underwent remained at the level of the Imaginary. Testimony for them meant indulging in a kind of “ego psychology” reminiscent of the American psychoanalytic school Lacan criticised for being principally concerned with restoring the individual to an ordinary way of life without effecting serious change (Lacan, 2007a: 197–268). However, in a few cases, Even-Tzur also notices that some testifiers engage in what Alenka Zupančič has termed an “ethics of the Real” (2006), an ethical process in which the soldier confronts through testimony the way in which his subjectivity has been shaped by his military participation. She observes “the choice that was made by some of the participants to expose themselves in their testimony, standing openly behind the truth it reveals, and presenting their own vulnerability” (Even-Tzur, 2011: 7).

This confrontation with the Real allows the testifier to locate his subjective constitution not primarily in his individual deeds but instead as a response to wider social, political, and military structures. This does not involve absolving the soldier of responsibility or forgiving him. Rather, it involves connecting the soldier's individual responsibility with this larger context and thereby identifying how the soldier as a subject came to be in this order. This is consistent with the Freudian dictum, championed by Lacan, of “Wo es war, soll ich werden” – “Where it was, there I shall become”. In this phrase, “it” refers to the unconscious object which constitutes the fundamental fantasy of the subject and orders his experience of reality (Lacan, 2007a: 334–363, 2007b: 51–86). In the psychoanalytic

⁴⁰ Author interview with Eran Efrati.

process, as Freud conceives it, the aim is to make the analysand consciously assume this unconscious desire so that it no longer exercises the terrifying power it once did. Eran, without even knowing it, articulated precisely such an ambition in the account of his own political radicalisation quoted above: “I just learned to live with the idea that it’s not something I did, *it’s a situation I was brought into*.”⁴¹ In Lacan’s famous phrase, by making this discovery the subject succeeds in “traversing the fantasy”, in coming to terms with the impossible desire which made him who he is. To refer back to Nadav’s photograph, the subjective movement which takes place in such a testimony process is represented by the shift in gaze that the photograph effects. Nadav no longer gazes at himself as a soldier looking at his civilian ego-Ideal: from behind the camera, he now gazes at himself gazing at himself. His gaze is no longer guilty and envious, it is anxious.

In many ways, one could therefore consider this model of giving testimony a potentially positive political tool, one which helps the soldier to escape the confines of a de-politicised and militarised ethics. However, in the remainder of this section I would like to explore several problems with the ethics of giving testimony in *Breaking the Silence* which raise doubts about the reliability and efficacy of the transition from guilt to anxiety through testimony. The first problem is its uneven and incidental occurrence in the actual testimony process. The second issue concerns the tendency of anxiety to relapse into guilt, especially through the mechanism of melancholia. Finally, the third problem involves the confinement of this ethical process to one in which, even if marginally emancipated from the signifying structure, the subject remains constituted by it and moreover does not intervene to change it.

Uneven and incidental occurrence

To address the first point, it should be obvious from my discussion of the differing approaches to the testimony collection process that the personal and political transformation of the soldier is not the primary aim of *Breaking the Silence*. Privately, some activists expressed a hope to me that testimony might still serve such a purpose.⁴² Many also showed a clear awareness that guilt was not a politically

⁴¹ Author interview with Eran Efrati, emphasis added.

⁴² Author interview with Noam Chayut.

useful affect and made efforts not to encourage it when taking testimonies.⁴³ However, the extraction of information remains the principal goal of the testimony process; any other consequences it has for the soldier are simply “by-products”.⁴⁴ In addition, many soldiers are simply not interested in this side of giving testimony. As Avichai remarked: “Some of the testifiers, many of the testifiers, give a testimony and they want you to leave them alone. You know, that’s for their catharsis or whatever. They want to break their silence and get it over with and really leave their military service behind them.”⁴⁵

Eran’s approach therefore represents only a minority of the testimonies conducted, and this proportion will have diminished even further since he left the organisation. Moreover, even when, as in Eran’s interviews, personal and political transformation does assume a more important role in the testimony, this transition from alienation to separation through anxiety is still very difficult and time-consuming to achieve. One sign of this is that many soldiers who testify to Breaking the Silence continue to serve in the IDF, either in reserves or (less commonly) in mandatory service. This was one of the reasons why Eran gradually began to consider his activism in Breaking the Silence a relatively inefficient way to achieve political change:

“I think that was one of my breaking points. When I understood that a lot of the people I’m talking to... seeing them just giving the interview and we’re staying in touch but continue going to the occupied territories, maybe going to be officers and commanders – I think that was the time when I understood that I can’t wait for the Israeli public to understand why it’s a problem. Because we don’t have this time – either the Palestinians don’t have this time, or us as Israelis don’t have this time – and that was the point I understood I need to go and try to pressure Israel from outside, I think.”⁴⁶

The question of whether testifiers continue to do military service is one of the most vexed issues in Breaking the Silence. Privately, many activists have found ways to avoid further military service. The

⁴³ Author interview with Nadav Bigelman.

⁴⁴ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

⁴⁵ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

⁴⁶ Author interview with Eran Efrati.

most usual way for this to take place is so-called “grey refusal”, where soldiers are exempted either from service as a whole or from service in the occupied territories through informal arrangements or deception. However, many activists (especially relatively new members of the organisation) do continue to serve in the occupied territories. During my fieldwork I spoke with three Breaking the Silence activists, who had all received emergency call-ups during Operation Pillar of Defence in November 2012.⁴⁷ Two of the three soldiers had previously attempted to come to informal arrangements to exempt themselves from service in the occupied territories. Although for each of them it was not an easy decision, they had all been deployed to the border with their units. They primarily attributed their decisions to accept the call-up to loyalty to their units and the national mood in support of the operation.

Among the wider population of testifiers, the proportion who continue to do military service is even higher and probably amounts to the majority of those who give testimony.⁴⁸ However, it is difficult to be certain about the precise number because of partial information and because some soldiers may have changed their minds since giving testimony. Breaking the Silence did attempt to gather some statistics on this question based on the testimonies of 625 testifiers (roughly two-thirds of the total at the time of writing).⁴⁹ Of those who gave a definite response, 109 were still serving in reserves and 58 were not. However, there is no information on precisely why those 58 were not serving, which makes it even more difficult to determine whether their non-service was a consequence of refusal, grey or otherwise. It is also not clear what influence, if any, giving testimony to Breaking the Silence has on testifiers’ decision to refuse or continue serving. For some activists, testimony has clearly been an important step in their political radicalisation and decision to refuse to serve. However, for most testifiers the decision to refuse is a product of a much wider set of considerations. The most that can be said with confidence, therefore, is that testifying to Breaking the Silence is fully compatible with continuing to serve in the IDF. This should serve as further confirmation of the point that, whether it

⁴⁷ Author interviews with three anonymous Breaking the Silence activists. During this 8-day operation, 167 Palestinians in Gaza and 4 Israeli civilians were killed. The operation concluded without a large-scale ground invasion by Israeli regular forces.

⁴⁸ Author interviews with Avichai Stollar and Noam Chayut.

⁴⁹ Email communication from Avichai Stollar, 28th March 2013.

is intended to or not, testimony to Breaking the Silence has only an unreliable and incidental tendency to bring about personal or political change within the soldier.

The return to guilt through melancholia

The second problem with the ethics of giving testimony is that the experience of anxiety it gives rise to can still relapse into politically unhelpful forms of guilt. This occurs even in cases where the experience of separation through anxiety, and the consequent radicalisation of the soldier, is at its most intense. To demonstrate this point, I will take the example of Noam Chayut, a long-standing activist in Breaking the Silence who recently published a memoir of his political transformation since his service in the IDF, including his activism with the group. The memoir is entitled *The Girl Who Stole My Holocaust* (*Ganevet HaSho'a Sheli*, in Hebrew), which refers to the encounter from which Noam dates the beginning of his journey from IDF soldier to anti-Zionist activist (Chayut, 2010, 2013).

During his service in the occupied territories, Noam remembers smiling at a group of children playing a game in a village in the West Bank. The aim of his smile was to show “I am sensitive but also masculine and strong” (Chayut, 2013: 58). But the children did not return the smile and one girl in particular looked back at him with a stare of horror. This moment had a profound effect on Noam, who subsequently began to lose his belief in the Zionist and militaristic narrative which had equipped him with the ideological justification for serving in the IDF. Noam describes this narrative as his “Holocaust”, wrapped up as it was in the memory of the extermination of European Jewry and the concomitant belief in the necessity for a state to protect Jews. The look he received from the Palestinian girl undid this narrative:

“I only understood much later what that scrawny girl in light-coloured clothes had taken from me: she took away my belief that there is absolute evil in the world. She took from me the belief that I was avenging my people’s destruction by absolute evil, that I was fighting absolute evil. For that girl, I embodied absolute evil... As soon as I realised the fact that in her eyes I myself was absolute evil, the absolute evil that had governed me until then began to

disintegrate. And ever since I have been without my Holocaust. Ever since, everything in my life has taken on new meaning: the sense of belonging is blurred, pride has gone missing, belief has weakened, regret has grown strong, forgiveness has been born.” (Chayut, 2013: 63)

What Noam is describing here is the clearest and best documented example of the process of separation through anxiety that I have been describing in this chapter. The encounter with the Palestinian girl (retroactively) marks the moment at which Noam traverses the fundamental fantasy of Israeli militarism. The moral justification for his military participation begins to evaporate and the Symbolic order of the ethics of Israeli militarism loses its apparent consistency. This provoked a worrisome series of questions for Noam, who over time loses his belief in the IDF as a moral army and in Zionism. This personal crisis is more than simply moral, however. It is also deeply bound up with questions of identity and belonging, including not only national but gendered identifications (“I am sensitive but also masculine and strong”). Noam’s position as a subject among the signifiers of Israeli militarism becomes unclear: “This process was slow at first, but after a while I felt I was sliding down a slope, losing grip on my sense of self. I lost more and more components of my previous identity, mostly based on what I no longer believed in” (Chayut, 2013: 163).

Through his experience in *Breaking the Silence* and his investigations into the history and landscape of the conflict, Noam gradually reconstructs his worldview. He makes connections between his individual responsibility as a soldier with a wider social picture of racism, colonialism, and militarism. He also comes to understand the profound role which the Holocaust and its commemoration in Israel played in shaping him as a subject, and the way in which – despite its “theft” from him – the empty place where his Holocaust once stood still structures his experience of reality. Yet what is interesting about this process of separation from the militarist and Zionist Big Other is that, in Noam’s experience, guilt has not completely disappeared. Indeed, Noam is remarkable for his brazen insistence that he must still be punished for what he did as a soldier. In explaining why he chooses to remain in Israel and campaign with *Breaking the Silence* rather than leaving the country, Noam writes:

“At this phase of my life, I still owe a heavy debt to Israeli society and to Palestinian society. I was among the brainwashed who committed crimes in the occupied territories, and the quiet struggle over public opinion that Breaking the Silence is conducting is also a kind of penance for me [*kaparat ayonot*].” (Chayut, 2013: 210, cf. 2010: 192)

When translated into the English word “penance” the term *kaparat ayonot* loses some of its potency, since its literal rendering is “atoning for sins”, which refers directly to what religious Jews do on Yom Kippur. During our interview, I asked Noam about what exactly he meant by “atoning for sins”:

“In a different political situation I would mean jail for years. For the violence that I carried out, for the crimes that we carried out. Now, like British soldiers nowadays, like American soldiers nowadays, like strong societies, we don’t pay for our violence [...] I do feel that the only way I can try to pay for what we did, for what I did (let’s be more harsh with myself) is by letting people know what we did, which are crimes, and I really believe people should pay for them and be responsible for them... And there’s nothing else we can do.”⁵⁰

Noam makes clear in this statement that, for him, there is still a strong connection between truth-telling and atoning for sins, bringing the model of testimony much closer to confession. This is despite the fact that Noam fully accepts the criticism that confession, and the use of the testimony process as conscience-clearing, is a problematic feature of what Breaking the Silence does.⁵¹ It is therefore necessary to determine how it is possible for a soldier-subject such as Noam, who has experienced separation through anxiety and traversed his fantasy, to nevertheless return to the experience of guilt.

The answer, I would argue, lies in the phenomenon of melancholia. Freud first defined melancholia in psychoanalytic terms in his essay, “Mourning and Melancholia”. He distinguishes melancholia from mourning on several grounds, the most important being that the loss felt during mourning is a loss of a real object (typically the death of a loved one), whereas the loss felt during melancholia is the loss of an unconscious object (Freud, 2001: 245). This unconscious object lost during melancholia need not

⁵⁰ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

⁵¹ See above, 200-201.

imply the actual loss of a real loved object but the loss of what it was *in* that object that the subject formerly loved (Žižek, 2000b: 659–663). The Lacanian term for this quality *in* something which causes our desire for it is the *objet a*, which is also the object of fantasy. What melancholia describes therefore is a condition in which the subject's fantasy disintegrates, in which a love object fails to excite the response it once used to. For Noam, his fundamental fantasy has been damaged in precisely such a way: the theft of his Holocaust is not a real loss – the Holocaust is of course still there – but rather the loss of what it was *in* the Holocaust that used to motivate him to serve in the IDF.

The other major difference from mourning lies in how the subject responds to the loss of the unconscious object. Freud observed a tendency for melancholics to engage in intensive self-abasement and self-punishment and to consider themselves as worthless:

“In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished” (Freud, 2001: 246)

Freud's explanation is that melancholics displace their libido from the lost object onto the ego itself as a way of refusing this loss:

“An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and displacement of it on to a new one, but something different, for whose coming-about various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance, and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this an object-loss

became transformed into an ego-loss, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticising activity of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification.” (Freud, 2001: 248–249)

As Judith Butler has argued, what Freud develops here is an account of how melancholia produces the effect of self-punishment and hence power over the subject (Butler, 1996: 167–200). As a way of forestalling the loss of the love-object, the subject transforms the relationship he used to have into topographical mutation of the ego in which one part, standing in for the lost object, is criticised and berated by another. This “criticising activity of the ego” is none other than the super-ego, the part of the subject responsible for producing guilt. The reason that this formerly loving relationship mysteriously develops into a wrathful urge to punish is the most difficult to grasp element of Freud’s hypothesis. Freud elsewhere observes the tendency for love to acquire sadistic elements; in the case of melancholia, this seems to happen because the subject feels anger towards the lost object for disappearing:

“If one listens patiently to a melancholic’s many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, some person whom the patient loves or has loved or should love.” (Freud, 2001: 248)

My suggestion is that Noam’s experience of losing his Holocaust can be understood as a melancholic process, which explains the re-emergence of guilt in the ethics of his political activism. I have already indicated that the structure of Noam’s Holocaust theft accords with melancholic loss, in that it is an unconscious rather than actual loss. Other features of his experience also conform with melancholia. The fact that Noam’s memoirs are written to the girl who stole his Holocaust betrays the tendency of the melancholic to reproach the lost object, even though this is usually introjected as self-reproach. Yet the clearest indication is the desire for self-punishment Freud identifies. This is first evident in the 900km hike across Palestine that Noam put himself through immediately after his army service. He undertook this almost completely alone and often without talking to anyone for days on end. His

mother called it a “purification journey”. “Why was I tormenting myself like this?” Noam asked along the way (Chayut, 2013: 111–112). Further indications of this tendency are the schedule and rules that Noam imposed on himself for three months when he returned to Israel after his post-army service travels, which included strict limitations on calorific intake, alcohol consumption, smoking, and even masturbation (Chayut, 2013: 165–167).

Yet it is also clear that this tendency for self-punishment appears to drive his activism. Noam is very clear that he should be tried for war crimes and, failing that, that he should at least pay some kind of price to re-pay the debt he owes to Palestinians. During our interview, he was very open about the emotional importance to him of at least doing something to pay for what he did:

“Every evening that I walk with my dog I collect clothes from the garbage around houses in my neighbourhood. People leave their nice clothes that they don’t want any more and nice handbags. And I collect them and every week I bring them to my mother, which goes every two or three weeks to a village in the West Bank and somebody sells it. And [these are] things that I do in order to feel better and every Israeli should do. But the one thing I should do and can do to really deal with my crimes... [is letting people know what we did]. And, you know, I’m a party pooper in the pride parade of macho-Israelis, that’s I think the price to be paid. And it’s party-poopering: I’m destroying my party as well...”⁵²

Indeed, at certain points Noam also seemed to suggest that his activism was a kind of compulsion:

“You know, it’s not a question. I mean, I cannot not do it. Actually Yehuda [the co-founder of Breaking the Silence] and I asked ourselves this question here in this restaurant just... three or four months ago. We were sitting and talking about something and he came over and we had a conversation: why are we doing [this]? And you know, we just answered ourselves as friends that we have no other choice [...] because we both understand that we have to do it.”⁵³

⁵² Author interview with Noam Chayut.

⁵³ Author interview.

Other Breaking the Silence activists seemed to confirm this picture. The former education director appeared to concur that it was affective investment, and not necessarily political efficacy, that drove Breaking the Silence to continue: “You fail to reach your goals, so you just start documenting. Why? Because the EU funds it. Why? Because that’s the only thing you can do. Why? Because you cannot quit. You have to do something.”⁵⁴

Of course, the fact that activists have strong affective investments in a certain political activity does not necessarily discredit it. Political campaigning which relies on individuals’ sense of guilt or obligation can still be effective. It is in the next chapter that I will evaluate in more detail the successes and failures of Breaking the Silence’s campaigning. However, for my present purposes, the important point to be made is that there is a risk that individuals’ affective commitments might begin to instrumentalise activism, displacing political efficacy with affective reward as the criteria for success (cf. Berlant, 2011a). There are signs that, for Noam at least, this is beginning to take place, since he seems not to believe that what he is doing will lead to serious political change: “You know why it’s *kaparat ayonot* [atoning for sins]? Because it won’t make a difference. Because this place is going to hell anyway... I’ve nothing else to do, so that’s what I’m doing. Can I do more? Maybe. Probably not.”⁵⁵

Lauren Berlant has described “cruel optimism” as “a relation... when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (2011b: 1). Noam’s example seems much more apt to be described as cruel pessimism, despairing as he is about the political outlook in Israel/Palestine.⁵⁶ Yet Berlant’s analysis is still relevant here precisely because of the ambiguity and reversibility inherent in desire. As we have seen, in cases of melancholia desire is re-routed when a part of the ego identifies with the lost object and the super-ego begins to punish and criticise it. In Noam’s case what was formerly an optimistic attachment to Zionism and Israeli militarism translates into a merciless and pessimistic attachment to “atoning for sins”. It may seem inappropriate to employ clinical terms such as

⁵⁴ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

⁵⁵ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

⁵⁶ For a detailed examination of the (gendered) production of political apathy in Israel which draws extensively on Berlant’s work, see Natanel (2013: esp. 147–186).

melancholia to describe this personal and political transformation. However, it should not be forgotten that the concept of melancholia has been of immense interest to political theory. Indeed, if (following Berlant) we are seeking to understand an example of a desire which acts as an obstacle to flourishing, then the phenomenon which Wendy Brown has termed “left melancholy” can provide us with an excellent model for understanding the ethical dimensions of testimony and activism in *Breaking the Silence*.

In her essay “Resisting Left Melancholy”, Brown engages in criticism of the contemporary Left for an attachment to defeat (1999). This attachment takes a melancholic form, according to Brown, because the Left has transformed the lost object of its desire – revolution – into a form of endless self-criticism for failure. Rather than truly engaging with that loss and its consequences through renewed political engagement, she argues, the Left has continued to cling to it indirectly through this melancholic disposition (1999: 23–27). Jodi Dean has recently re-evaluated Brown’s argument, agreeing with Brown that the Left remains addicted to failure but disagreeing that this is because of its refusal to abandon a hopeless orthodoxy (2012: 157–206). Dean reverses this position and claims that it is the Left’s failure fully to pursue its desire for revolution which has generated this melancholia. She accuses the Left of having given up on its desire, in the Lacanian phrase (2012: 169–176).

The most interesting dimension to Dean’s critique, however, is that she then directly attacks the turn to “the drive” as a political strategy on the Lacanian Left (2012: 173–175). Lacan famously distinguished between desire and drive, arguing that whereas desire is aimed at a lacking object, drive is invested in the very gesture and movement towards that object. For Žižek, and other Lacanians, the corollary of “traversing the fantasy” is supplanting impossible desire with drive. The subject realises that the object of its fantasy is inherently unreachable and ceases to be oppressed by the search for impossible consistency in the Symbolic order. However, this desire, being unconscious, cannot simply be abandoned, since that would imply the disintegration of the subject. Instead, the subject must now find a way to come to terms with this desire through the drive; one must learn to “enjoy the symptom”, assuming it consciously and deriving satisfaction from a repeated movement towards the empty place where the object once resided (Žižek, 1991: 130–141; Zupančič, 2006: esp. 238–259; see also

Bosteels, 2011: 72). Drive, in other words, is the only way to safely enjoy one's desire without giving up on it. Dean, however, is not satisfied with this resolution, arguing that it is the Left's very turn to the drive which has given rise to its melancholy:

“For such a Left, enjoyment comes from its withdrawal from responsibility, its sublimation of goals and responsibilities into the branching, fragmented practices of micropolitics, self-care, and issue awareness. Perpetually slighted, harmed, and undone, this Left remains stuck in repetition, unable to break out the circuits of drive in which it is caught, unable because it enjoys them.” (2012: 174–175)

The relevance of these theoretical insights for understanding *Breaking the Silence* is that it shows the limits of the political and ethical transformations that testimony can effect. Even if some activists succeed in “traversing the fantasy” through confrontation with the violent Real of their actions in testimony, there is a danger that the vicissitudes of the drive can then produce melancholia. Noam's desire for penance is only one individual case of this. Eran felt that this was a general feeling in the organisation, even in himself, that was reflected in the way testimonies were conducted:

“I think every one of us has a way of self-punishment... but it's all very different. For [some], it's like: ‘I want you to confront what you did’ because this is what they want from themselves. So they say, ‘I want you to be confronted with what you did, feel bad about it, look in me in the eyes, understand what you did, and then you can go away’. And I feel like I was always trying to... I don't know... it was still a self-punishment, I think, for me but it was more as a... how can I say it? Trying to forgive myself, trying to understand why I sat frozen in all of these situations, start[ing] to comfort myself, stuff like that. And that's why we were so different, every interviewer was so different.”⁵⁷

What Eran has identified very well here is the constant tendency for oscillation between guilt and anxiety in *Breaking the Silence*. Even in cases where separation through anxiety is achieved,

⁵⁷ Author interview with Eran Efrati.

melancholia allows for the return of guilt and self-punishment, impulses which can then colonise and divert activism away from the most politically effective paths.

The blocked path to courage and justice

The third and final problem with the ethics of giving testimony in *Breaking the Silence* follows directly from these diverted impulses, in that they tend to obscure political possibilities and strategies for wider structural change. What desires are being ceded upon in favour of these melancholic drives, to put it in Jodi Dean's language? What opportunities for flourishing are being blocked by this cruel optimism, to phrase it in Berlant's? Or, to use the terminology adopted in this chapter, is there a politics beyond an ethics of guilt and anxiety? To answer these questions, certain remarks by activists indicate an alternative ethical approach, which is not pursued by *Breaking the Silence*.

One aspect of the self-reproaches Noam directs at himself in his memoirs is the tentative accusation of cowardice:

“For I – you must have already understood this from my previous stories – am not especially fond of taking risks. I am not one to rush ahead and get beaten up at a demonstration, not one to march, head held high, off to a military or any other kind of jail. I decided long ago not to violate any law. If the law becomes unbearable, then I will exchange my old dream of a little house in my home village... for a new dream of a little house abroad with the same beloved wife and four imaginary children. Some would say this is cowardice, but as far as I am concerned, it is a simple order of priorities: laws are geographic. Man isn't... And still, perhaps “cowardice” is the concise, precise definition for a life philosophy of this sort?”
(Chayut, 2013: 210–211)

Partly, Noam justifies his aversion to risk-taking in political activism by reference to simple pragmatism:

“I don't go and breathe tear gas in Bil'in. I think it's... I mean I adore these people that do it. I don't do it... Now, seriously, politically speaking it wouldn't make any difference if I would make this night a night in [jail] or have dinner with someone... if all of us, a few millions of

us would go to a checkpoint and say ‘arrest us’, we’d cross [...] the occupation would end tomorrow. But these people around us don’t even understand what the fuck is wrong and I don’t have the guts to be in jail [...] That’s the fact. And I do admit in the book that you can call it whatever you want to call it but that’s the way I act...”⁵⁸

However, Noam also seemed to acknowledge that his level of willingness to risk himself in activism had diminished since he left the army and he acquired his new political identity:

“A nationalist would go and fight for the flag forever and he would die for the flag, as I would do when I was 21. You know, I won’t fight to the end today... I would be happy to say I would but it would be a lie. I wouldn’t... You can call it cowardice. You can call it just being a coward and not fighting for others. And I would agree probably.”⁵⁹

Elsewhere in her analysis of “left melancholy”, Jodi Dean suggests that the guilt that leftists often feel comes from the sense of having given up on their true political desire, substituting it with “criticism and interpretation, small projects and local actions, particular issues and legislative victories, art, technology, procedures, and process” (Dean, 2012: 174). Foolish as demonstrations, marches, and getting arrested may seem to Noam, his remarks nevertheless betray a respect for such actions and a belief that ultimately they would have to form the basis of real political change.

The accusation of cowardice is particularly notable because of what its opposite – courage – suggests about the ethical basis of alternative political activities. The philosopher Alain Badiou has devoted considerable attention to the ethical approach required to achieve emancipatory political change. In his early work, “Theory of the Subject”, he offers a typology of four ethical concepts (2009: 277–332). The first two are extrapolated from Lacan, anxiety and superego, whereas the latter, courage and justice, are Badiou’s own additions (Badiou, 2009: 144–147, 277–303). He codes each of these pairings Ψ (anxiety-superego) and α (courage-justice). My argument is that the ethics of testimony in *Breaking the Silence* remains confined to the Ψ strand and that this is the source of its political

⁵⁸ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

⁵⁹ Author interview.

limitations. I have argued consistently throughout this chapter that the ethics of testimony constantly moves between affects of anxiety on the one hand and guilt produced by the superego on the other.

As I have above, Badiou describes anxiety as occurring when the Symbolic order disintegrates and its inconsistency is exposed to the subject (2009: 291–292). Superego, by contrast, is the conservative impulse to restore a previous order, which takes the form of a terrifying and senseless re-assertion of the law. Badiou argues that anxiety, which is a potentially radical moment where new political possibilities become thinkable, will often be followed by an encounter with the superego because of the unbearable and disorientating extremity of anxiety: “Hence anxiety calls upon the superego. Anxiety is that inevitable side of subjectivisation which, caught in the web of the dead order, makes an appeal to the reinforced sustenance of the law. Here the Freudians will mention the anxious practice of self-punishment” (Badiou, 2009: 292). Badiou’s point is that these two poles of ethical experience are insufficient to produce revolutionary change. Unsupported, anxiety will degenerate into super-ego, guilt, and self-punishment. As Bruno Bosteels puts it:

“Between anxiety and the superego, a subject only oscillates in painful alternation, without the event of true novelty, just as the insufferable experience of formlessness without a law provokes in turn the reinforcement of the law’s excessive form. At best, these two subjective figures thus indicate the point where the existing order of things becomes open to a fatal division, but without allowing a new order to come into being.” (Bosteels, 2011: 89)

Badiou therefore appeals to the concepts of courage and justice as a pathway out of this tendency: courage forces the “dead order” to disappear, even at the risk of losing oneself in this gesture; justice reconstitutes a new order, which exists not as law for the sake of law (as in the superego) but as law tested against the requirements of the cause (2009: 294–296).

Without the addition of these ethical components of courage and justice, *Breaking the Silence* remains contained between anxiety and guilt and therefore limited in its contribution to political change. Occasionally, *Breaking the Silence* does successfully “indicate the point where the existing order of things becomes open to a fatal division”. However, there is little in the corresponding ethics which

encourages a genuine confrontation with this order or a creative moment of political novelty. In fact, the melancholic tendency appears to militate against these possibilities, creating affective investments in modes of self-punishment and criticism which obstruct alternative approaches. This is something which several activists appeared to have realised, especially those who have now left the organisation, who were even more forthright in suggesting that Breaking the Silence was diverting energies towards less effective activities. Micha Kurz, a co-founder of the organisation who now works for a grassroots activist network, remarked:

“[Unless we are] building capacity within communities to overcome their oppression and human rights violations, or just development goals, then we are wasting our time. If we are not doing that, if Breaking the Silence doesn’t find a way to do that, they become irrelevant... they are just putting another bandage or documenting the wound, but it’s not healing anything.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

My argument in this chapter has been that an ethics caught between guilt and anxiety is a facet and product of the political use of testimony in Breaking the Silence. Guilt and anxiety as ethical responses to the realities of serving in Hebron during the Second Intifada produced the original impetus for creating the organisation. Anxiety and guilt also provide major motivating factors for soldiers who have subsequently given testimony to the organisation. Furthermore, despite the often vigorous efforts of activists to keep emotions out of the process, these affects of anxiety and guilt very often unavoidably develop a role in giving testimony. Thanks in particular to testimony collectors such as Eran Efrati, who saw in testimony an opportunity for the personal and political transformation of the testifier, testimony also occasionally offered an opportunity to effect a transition from a situation of *alienation in guilt* to one of *separation through anxiety*. By allowing some testifiers to overcome a tendency towards self-punishment and to discover and accept the inconsistency of the Symbolic order of Israeli militarism, the political effect of radicalisation was achieved through ethical work.

⁶⁰ Author interview with Micha Kurz.

However, this latter scenario is far from a consistent or even usual outcome. To begin with, the instrumental approach towards testimony as a kind of data collection predominates in the organisation, where there is currently little appetite for facilitating personal redemption for the soldiers who testify. Indeed, there is strong evidence that many soldiers do not experience testifying to Breaking the Silence as a moment of significant political transformation, especially since so many of them (including several activists) continue to serve in the IDF. Moreover, even in cases where separation through anxiety and “traversing the fantasy” is achieved, I have also noted the tendency for the transition from guilt to anxiety to reverse. I highlighted the role of melancholia in producing this outcome. Although this melancholic experience does not return the anxious soldier to his former position and opinions, it does have significant consequences for the kind of activism it encourages. A recursive transition from guilt to anxiety and back may create affective investments in modes of politics not best suited to achieving desired outcomes. Specifically, I have argued that the ethics of testimony in Breaking the Silence may foreclose an alternative politics governed by the imperatives of courage and justice. In the next chapter, I will provide a much fuller analysis of how in practice the campaigning activity of Breaking the Silence is self-limiting in this way. For now, it suffices to note how the ethics of testimony creates affective attachments to the deficient approaches I will discuss next.

Before moving on, however, it is also worth glancing back at the way in which this outcome has been constituted by the ethics of Israeli militarism. What is notable about the soldiers who founded Breaking the Silence, and indeed about its activists more generally, is that prior to their involvement with the organisation they tended to be among the most ideologically committed soldiers and citizens. Although they came typically (but not exclusively) from secular and left-wing backgrounds, the fact remains that they were frequently members of major Zionist youth movements, participants in the “year of service” IDF volunteering programme, and even in some cases graduates of *mekhinot*. They were those for whom the idea of a moral army, and concepts such as purity of arms, tended to mean the most. This not only amplified the common sense of guilt at being unable to realise these values in practice. It also made the experience of anxiety all more disorientating (and therefore likely to lead

toward melancholia). In short, it is important to see that the pre-dominance of guilt and anxiety as ethical responses in *Breaking the Silence* are a *product*, and not merely an anomaly, of Israeli militarism. Indeed, insofar as these responses produce the political limitations that I will discuss in the coming chapter, they must also be seen as part of its disciplining effects.

Chapter 5: “Creating a moral conversation”: the public activism of Breaking the Silence

We arrived in the desert near Nitzana at mid-morning, just as this December day was beginning to warm up. I was travelling with a group of Breaking the Silence activists for an educational activity they had planned in the Negev desert. Every year, hundreds of high-school graduates from the kibbutz movement cycle a route around this area, stopping along the way to hear lectures and talks from various Israeli civil society organisations. Alongside other left-wing groups such as Combatants for Peace and Machsom Watch, Breaking the Silence runs a station where the youths can meet and talk with former and serving soldiers who oppose the occupation. The plan was to arrive early, set up the stalls and tents, and then wait for the youths to arrive. There were ten of us present, including two women.

I looked around. The place immediately struck me as an odd location for an educational activity. A sign on the side of the road we had stopped on read, “Danger! Firing zone.” A large tank was parked a few hundred yards away and a couple of soldiers were standing nearby. The only distant building visible on the landscape was the (supposedly secret) nuclear reactor at Dimona. A surveillance balloon floated ominously above it. Everyone referred to it simply as “ha kur” [the reactor]. The team began to assemble the tents and stalls on the left hand side of the road, directly beside the firing zone sign. A couple of minutes after we had set to work, an army jeep pulled up and told us to move to the other side, where the ground was less even. Ayal protested that he had set up camp in the same spot on the left hand side at last year’s event. But the soldiers would not back down, so we wearily began to dismantle things and move them over the road. “Why does everything have to be on the right in this country?!” joked Nadav.

The wind had begun to pick up, which made the task of erecting the tents, stringing up signs, and preventing testimony booklets from blowing away quite a challenge. We stretched out the canopy material and attempted to hoist it onto the stilts. Desperate to appear helpful, I grabbed a corner and tried to assist the process. However, my tent-assembling Hebrew was

not very proficient (I was better with words like “battalion”, “grenade”, and “curfew”) and, compared with soldiers who had plenty of experience putting up tents, it became clear that I was being more of a hindrance than a help. I helped tie up a sign instead. After a struggle, the rudimentary camp was more or less complete.

We sat down to eat the large picnic breakfast which Ayal had brought for us. The activists ate hungrily while he briefed them on the day’s work. Many of those in attendance were relatively new to the organisation and had little experience giving public talks. Ayal, Avner, and Shachar were the most experienced, followed by Nadav and Yoni. Others were there to watch and learn, and perhaps to speak informally with individuals at the sidelines. Neither of the women would be presenting. Ayal stressed that today would be tough: the kids would only be staying for a few minutes each and many would be coming and going throughout proceedings. They would be tired after the long ride and levels of prior knowledge about the occupation would be quite low. Ayal advised them to stick to giving and reading testimonies as much as possible. He warned them not to get into conversations about political solutions to the occupation, repeating the usual line that the goal of Breaking the Silence was simply to highlight the problem. He further made clear that the official line of Breaking the Silence on whether to refuse army service was that this matter was a personal choice. Finally, he added: “we don’t use the word ‘Nakba’ and we don’t use the word ‘Apartheid’.”

- Field notes, Tuesday 11th December 2012, morning

Introduction

This chapter continues my analysis of Breaking the Silence and my investigation of the relationship between the ethics of testimony and the politics of militarism in their work. Whereas in chapter 4 I considered the ethical impact of giving testimony to the organisation on the soldiers who testify, in the present chapter I will consider the educational and campaigning activities that the organisation undertakes. I will show how the oscillation between affects of guilt and anxiety I analysed in the previous chapter continues to manifest itself in the activism of the organisation, imposing severe

limits on its efficacy when it enters the Israeli public sphere. In essence, the process I shall describe is the reduction of a political question to moral terms. Breaking the Silence views this rhetorical strategy as a political expedience, as a worthwhile cost to be paid for access and attention from the Israeli public. Nevertheless, I argue that the moralisation and de-politicisation of their campaign against the occupation is also a tendency inherent in its ethical form, which is testimony.

As I have shown in previous chapters, testimony is a fundamental aspect of the pedagogical edifice of the ethics of Israeli militarism. Israeli militarism relies upon and produces, primarily through testimony, a certain set of ethical responses in order to function. Breaking the Silence represents a misfiring of the ethical impulse to testify, one which even occasionally escapes the bounds of militarism through the experience of anxiety. However, when testimony resumes its function as a moral pedagogical tool in the work of Breaking the Silence, albeit for different political purposes, it risks reproducing the militarist tendencies that initially produced it. In particular, testimony tends to provoke a guilt response, directing attention away from wider political structures and towards the conduct of the individual soldier-subject. This not only allows Israeli militarism to discipline and contain the work of Breaking the Silence: it also allows militarism to make use of it.

I will begin this chapter by directly discussing the political strategy and messaging of Breaking the Silence and the rationale the organisation uses to justify it. I will show how this message constrains the organisation and frequently tempts it into tacit support for militarism. In a second section, I will discuss the tours and public events organised by Breaking the Silence in order to show how this message plays out in practice and to illustrate some of the problematic consequences for the efficacy of its campaigning. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the work of Breaking the Silence at pre-military academies, thereby extending the analysis of chapter 3 as well as providing the clearest and most troubling illustration of the organisation's implication and complicity in patterns of Israeli militarism.

The political strategy of Breaking the Silence

We waited several hours at our camp for the youths to arrive. During this time we sat and talked among ourselves. Nadav mentioned his plan to gather together all of the soldiers from his twelve-man unit and record a conversation with them about their experiences serving in the West Bank, in conscious imitation of Siah Loḥamim. “That would be great”, replied Avner, and others readily agreed. As boredom set in, Nadav began to construct a makeshift catapult out of spare materials from the camp. The atmosphere was quite jocular but masculine, with plenty of coarse language.

During this period we were only approached by a few people. A man arrived on a bicycle who introduced himself as the co-ordinator of the gar’in tsabar project, which brings Jewish volunteers from America to serve in the IDF and live on a kibbutz in co-ordination with the Israeli scouts. He seemed very interested in Breaking the Silence and began asking Ayal a series of questions. Most of all, he wanted to know exactly where and in which units each of the soldiers had served. He pointed to each person in turn to find out, including to me (“the ginger”, as he called me), and seemed disappointed to learn that I had not served. At another point, the two serving soldiers walked up from the tank further down the road and asked for copies of the testimony booklets. They seemed interested.

Several members of the group, mostly relative newcomers, then started a conversation about why Breaking the Silence does not organise demonstrations. They seemed keen to pursue this kind of activism further. In response, Avner and Ayal stressed that they were in favour of demonstrations in the abstract but that the main tool of Breaking the Silence was educating the public rather than organising protests. It was a question of tactics rather than principle, as Avner put it.

Finally, the youths began to arrive, gradually at first and then building up to a steady stream. The leader who had been guiding them on their cycle ride announced the station to those who were stopping. He told them that this station was a joint station with two parts. This took me

somewhat by surprise because I was not aware of another nearby. He then explained that the other half of the station was in fact the tank further down the road, where there were soldiers who would explain possible pathways through military service. On later inspection, it turned out that there was also a hands-on experience with a machine gun and a noticeboard covered with stories from soldiers who had served in different parts of the IDF. To these young kibbutzniks, service in the IDF and testifying to Breaking the Silence were somehow being presented as a seamless whole, as fully compatible with each other.

- Field notes, Tuesday 11th December 2012, afternoon

Breaking the Silence is no longer a small Israeli NGO, though neither is it particularly large. In 2012, it had an operating budget of 3,726,988 NIS (New Israeli Shekels), which equates to roughly £625,000 (Breaking the Silence, 2013a: 3). By way of comparison, in their most recent financial reports, B'Tselem, probably the most renowned human rights observatory, had a budget of 8,966,042 NIS (roughly £1.5 million) (B'Tselem, 2013a: 4); Yesh Din, another human rights organisation working on legal accountability, had a budget of 5,338,403 NIS (roughly £900,000) (Yesh Din, 2014: 4); Gisha, which focuses on freedom of movement in Gaza, operated with 3,694,287 NIS (roughly £620,000) (Gisha, 2014: 3). Breaking the Silence receives donations from, among others, the European Union, the Spanish and Norwegian governments, UNICEF, the Irish Catholic Church, Oxfam, Christian Aid, and the New Israel Fund. It is, in short, a medium-sized but prestigious NGO attracting a lot of confidence from foreign donors in a crowded marketplace of potential grantees.

What grounds this confidence is the ability, and willingness, of Breaking the Silence to engage a much larger section of Israeli civil society than many other NGOs. This derives primarily from the identity of its activists as soldiers, which gives them an instantly higher level of credibility in the eyes of most Israelis. It has been the use of this soldier's voice which has consistently propelled Breaking the Silence into the national consciousness. Avichai Stollar, the head of the testimonies project, divided the enhanced credibility that soldiers have in Israeli society into two aspects, factual and

social.¹ From the point of view of facts, soldiers appear more credible because they were eye-witnesses and participants in the events they describe.² Not only this, as soldiers they are able to offer insights into the logic behind the military occupation. They also have access to information which would be difficult for researchers, especially Palestinian researchers, to obtain. This insight gives soldiers a certain kind of epistemic authority. As Avichai put it, “You cannot say that we are naïve and do not understand the reality because we were the implementers of the reality.”³ Yet even this epistemic authority is not without its blindspots. Eran Efrati, while accepting the power of the soldier’s voice, specifically challenged this claim to privileged insight: “You don’t have to be a soldier to understand what’s going on there. Maybe it’s the opposite way around. When you are a soldier you are very limited [in] what you can see or think for yourself.”⁴ Reading the occupation through a soldier’s eyes is therefore automatically to understand it from a position of power and privilege. It risks granting a false omnipotence to structures of power and in turn tends to allow Palestinians to appear in the frame only insofar as they are victims, bodies, or targets.

The social credibility accorded to soldiers in Israeli society is, if anything, stronger than the claim to epistemic authority. Serving the nation through military participation still holds high symbolic rewards in Israel, especially when it includes service in combat units (Levy, 2007: 11–15). A culture of national sacrifice sanctifies the military contribution of citizens, especially those who risk death, injury, or capture (Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman, 1997; Zerubavel, 2006). The IDF functions as the avatar of the nation and its soldiers are often imagined to speak in some sense on behalf of all citizens (Benziman, 2010). Moreover, a lengthy history of soldiers’ testimony about the ethics of war has generated a heightened receptivity to the voice of the morally sensitive soldier. The figure of the idealised speaking soldier tends to occupy a privileged place in Israeli social hierarchies: his body is identified as male; he is affluent and well-educated; he is of European descent (Sasson-Levy and Levy, 2008; Sasson-Levy, 2002a, 2002b; Weiss, 2002). Testifiers to *Breaking the Silence* tend overwhelmingly to inhabit the privileged position afforded by these social trends: they have usually

¹ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

² Author interview with Dana Golan.

³ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

⁴ Author interview with Eran Efrati.

served in combat units and are usually from relatively wealthy secular Ashkenazi families.⁵ The number of women and Mizrahi activists is disproportionately low.⁶

Breaking the Silence activists are aware of the advantages that their position affords them, as well as its problems. Acknowledging the criticism that Breaking the Silence participates in societal militarism, Avichai responded as follows:

“I do agree in some ways that we are empowering... a discourse in which those who were combat soldiers have more ownership over what’s true and what’s really reality and who should be listened to and who should be heard. But I think in this sense you really need to define your aims. Are you doing it in order to reconstruct Israeli society or are you doing it in order to end a specific well-defined political reality? And we decided that we are doing the second thing. We decided that our aim is to end the military occupation of the Palestinian territories and in this sense what we’re doing is the most effective thing because you can say that we’re riding on the Achilles heel of Israeli society which is [that] the fact that you wore the helmet and carried the gun gives you some kind of a card to the heart of the Israeli mainstream society. And if you’re trying to influence the mainstream [of] Israeli society then you need to find the means to do so. And I would argue that even when it comes to the greater cause, which I support, making a society which is not militarised and is not based on all these concepts, then that’s a process and we cannot continue on the next step until we end the occupation.”⁷

Breaking the Silence has therefore made a very explicit calculation that participating in societal militarism is a worthy price to pay for access and credibility with a wider range of people. This calculation is based on the conviction that the message which Breaking the Silence has crafted is sufficiently effective and disruptive to provoke a serious shift in Israeli public opinion about the occupation, and perhaps even to pose a significant challenge to militarism in the longer term. The question of whether Breaking the Silence helps to reproduce or disrupt Israeli militarism therefore

⁵ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

⁶ Author interviews with Eran Efrati and Gil Hillel.

⁷ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

turns on much more than simply its use of the privileged voice of the soldier and the perpetuation of the attendant class, race, and gender hierarchies that this implies. Any answer to this question must also take the effectiveness of this message and the campaigns used to disseminate it into account. Only then will it be clear whether the other political costs incurred have been worthwhile.

Breaking the Silence has a simple, primary claim to make, which is that the occupation is immoral by nature and that there is no way for it to become moral without ending.⁸ As I have argued arriving at this conclusion in the first place was the outcome of a shift from guilt to anxiety, in which the ethical experience of soldiers as voiced in testimony prompted the realisation that the immorality they perceived was a structural condition and not a product of individual failings. The message which follows from this, which has been refined over several years, is that the only way for the immorality of the occupation to end is for the occupation itself to end.⁹ This moral approach is certainly distinctive among left-wing Israeli NGOs, most of which develop a critique of the occupation based on international law and human rights.

Breaking the Silence uses soldiers' testimony to persuade its audience of its viewpoint, using something like a two-stage process. The first stage is to elicit a moral response from the reader or listener. This requires testimonies which show soldiers describing the moral difficulties which they themselves faced: "what the soldier did, what the soldier saw... something that describes what was going on in a soldier's mind because that's what most touches people".¹⁰ In this, the social position of the soldier as a respectable, moral voice of the nation is particularly helpful. Furthermore, the role of emotions, as explored in the previous chapter, has its most powerful part to play here.¹¹ Occasionally, although less commonly, it is sometimes the lack of moral reflection which stands out when soldiers report instances of violence as if they were unremarkable or justified features of their everyday world (e.g. Breaking the Silence, 2010: 56–57, 72–73).

⁸ Throughout this chapter I will use the terms "immoral" or "immorality" descriptively, rather than normatively, to indicate the view of Breaking the Silence.

⁹ Author interviews with Dana Golan and Avichai Stollar.

¹⁰ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

¹¹ See chapter 4, 198–205.

The second stage is to show that this immoral condition is structural and that individual soldiers cannot change the fundamental pattern of violence that the occupation projects. This is usually achieved through the simple accumulation of evidence of immorality, which is why Breaking the Silence is constantly seeking to expand the number of soldiers who have testified.¹² Another strategy is to show the structural limits imposed on individual soldiers. Very often, testimony will show soldiers struggling to improve the morality of the occupation by changing their behaviour or encouraging others to do so, with the inevitable result that the fundamental problems remain unresolved. In its more sophisticated forms, this has involved editing testimonies in such a way as to reveal these structural dimensions. In the largest collection of testimonies released by Breaking the Silence, published in English as the book *Our Harsh Logic*, the aim is precisely this (Breaking the Silence, 2013b). The material is subdivided into four sections analysing different terms used to describe the purpose of the military regime governing the West Bank: prevention, separation, the fabric of life, and law enforcement.

The focus on morality in the public advocacy of Breaking the Silence is a deliberate, strategic choice. Ayal Kantz, the former educational director of the organisation, explained the rationale behind this decision to me, arguing that it forces arguments away from the usual discussions about plausible political solutions or the presence or lack of a “partner for peace” to a discussion about the fundamental problem of the occupation and its immorality. The idea is to change the discourse surrounding the occupation, moving it away from typical discussions about security and diplomacy: “my job, or Breaking the Silence’s job, is to implement a new discourse, that point of view that we’re not so used to, that point of view we’re not usually talking about [at] Friday [night] dinners: the point of view of testimonies”. This requires constantly diverting from a political discussion, in which everyone has opinions and authority, towards a conversation about the morality of what Israeli soldiers are doing, in which Breaking the Silence is best placed to succeed:

“I’m not an expert in the two-state solution. I cannot contribute anything as Breaking the Silence towards the two-state solution and I would probably lose that discussion.... And also

¹² Author interviews with Dana Golan and Noam Chayut.

we would miss our target... First of all, you would find yourself on the defensive; and second of all, you wouldn't have a lot of tools to defend with. Now, as long you're speaking Breaking the Silence, as long as you're speaking testimony, you're on the offensive side and you have a lot of tools to be on that side."¹³

Avichai Stollar concurred with this assessment of the discursive strategy, emphasising the importance of adding a moral supplement to public discussions about the occupation:

"When it's purely political, your ability to convince people is much more limited... I mean, 'moral', at least for our audiences, is supposed to be a common ground. When you're saying something is immoral that's what we're trying to convince them [of] because we want the discourse to start from there. In this reality within Israel the discourse when it comes to the conflict is highly polarised. It's polarised because – and not only polarised, it's leaning to the right when comes to the general opinion – it's because the discourse completely ignores the implications of the occupation. It's about our security needs, it's about our historical right, it's about the intention of the other side, it's about the fragments of a possible peace agreement, eviction of settlements, right of return. It deals with the things that terrify Israelis – suicide bombing, the existence of a new country West of the Jordan River. But as long as this is the discourse you can never win... [T]he right-wing would always have the upper-hand because it will always have the security card. But we're coming from a point that we believe that at least, again, within our audience, that we believe that the majority of Israelis do accept the... this mantra here that we do have the most moral army in the world. It's not just a PR stunt. It's a genuine belief and a genuine desire of the Israeli public. We want to be moral, we truly do. And we believe that if this is the starting point, or if this could be the starting point, then there is a chance to fundamentally change the discourse regarding it."¹⁴

It is therefore precisely insofar as the ethics of Israeli militarism produces the belief that the IDF is "the most moral army in the world" that Breaking the Silence believe they have the opportunity to

¹³ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

¹⁴ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

change public discourse about the occupation. By arguing that the only way to be a moral army is to cease the occupation, rather than through pedagogical improvements to the conduct of individual soldiers, Breaking the Silence believes that this moral critique can acquire political force. Indeed, it is the strong conviction among activists that this moral message, generic though it might be, is a political statement: “We are political because saying that occupation is immoral is a political statement.”¹⁵ Activists also argue that this sets them apart from other NGOs in Israel, because Breaking the Silence takes a normative stance and calls for the occupation to end, rather than simply documenting human rights abuses: “we are a political organisation because when you are saying that the only way out is by ending the occupation that is political per definition”.¹⁶

Valid though these points are, they overlook the trajectory of the ethical process explored in the previous chapter, which entails the possibility that anxiety can relapse into guilt. By focussing on a message with primarily moral content and by delivering it in the ethical form of testimony, the public campaigning of Breaking the Silence remains exposed to this prospect. Its target remains one of moral improvement achieved through a process of ethical work in listening to testimony. In this sense, it remains isomorphic with the pedagogical tendencies I have explored elsewhere in this thesis, even when it is directed towards an ostensibly political goal. As I will illustrate, it is relatively easy for militarism to strip away this political element, especially when it so inchoate, and to re-instate testimony as a military ethical pedagogical tool.

Indeed, this process is made much easier by the tendency of Breaking the Silence to frame the discussion in purely moral and pedagogical terms, even when wider political issues are pressing. For example, following Operation Protective Edge, the new executive director of Breaking the Silence wrote in the *Guardian* that she was concerned that the values of the IDF she had served in as an air force officer were being undermined:

“I was made commander of a course for air force officers. I taught cadets how to take responsibility for their actions as officers. We studied the lessons of previous air force

¹⁵ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

¹⁶ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

operations. I taught them that the IDF is the most moral army in the world, and that the air force is the most moral corps within the IDF... I believed with all my heart that we were doing what needed to be done. If there were casualties, they were a necessary evil. If there were mistakes, they would be investigated. Things have changed, and now I can no longer have that certainty.” (Novak, 2014b)

The continuities evident here between military ethical pedagogy and political activism also extend to the way in which *Breaking the Silence* distributes its materials. Following the publication in 2009 of a booklet of testimonies concerning violence towards Palestinian children, *Breaking the Silence* set up stalls outside high schools in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem and handed them out to students. The rhetorical point was that, if Palestinian children were old enough to be killed by the IDF, then Israeli children were certainly old enough to read about it. Yet when I discussed the reasoning for targeting this social group with the executive director, an additional motivation was discernible:

“We believe people should know as fast, as soon as possible. And then you give it to them before they join the army. So at first it might shape their idea. And maybe they choose to join the army or not to join the army... so maybe you managed to give them one moment to think about it and maybe it will prevent them from becoming those abuser soldiers at the checkpoints. Of course, for us, as long as the occupation is there it does not make a difference whether you have... The checkpoint is the story, it's not the soldier. So long as there are soldiers standing at checkpoints the problem is not solved. But for us of course we prefer that the soldiers that are standing at checkpoints will be the ones that are not abusing Palestinians and so on... So maybe if I give them time to read that or think about it... maybe I will contribute something [to] changing the reality as well.”¹⁷

These comments illustrate the extremely delicate balance between a political critique couched in moral terms and a straightforward case of military ethical pedagogy. It is possible to see how the constant oscillation between guilt and anxiety produces this ambiguity. Whereas the focus on the behaviour of individuals within the army derives from the affect of guilt, anxiety produces a more thoroughgoing critique of the entire political and military apparatus of the occupation. It is usually

¹⁷ Author interview with Dana Golan.

clear in the minds of Breaking the Silence activists that there is an important difference between these two approaches. Yet, as I will describe, this difference is far from reliably absorbed by the Israeli audience targeted by these campaigns. Indeed, the tendency of anxiety to relapse into guilt I have noted is increased when these discourses approach more closely the ethical forms of pedagogy described earlier in this thesis. The shrewdest of Breaking the Silence activists are usually quite aware of this danger. As Noam Chayut put it to me, “The strength is that it’s a moral organisation, rather than just a political one. And the weakness is that it’s a moral organisation, rather than just a political one.”¹⁸ The hope is that this strategic awareness can prevent the weaknesses from overtaking the strengths; in practice, this outcome seems far from secure.

“Bringing our parents to Hebron”: tours and lectures

The activists split themselves up and began giving individual talks to small groups of youths. I circulated among the talks trying to hear each of them in turn. I started with Avner, who is probably the most polished of the presenters. He began by introducing himself and the organisation, but he wasted no time in getting into details: “My name is Avner, I served in the paratroopers. I am a member of Breaking the Silence, a group of soldiers who talk about the things they did when they served in the territories. Things like straw widows. Do you know what a straw widow is?” A straw widow is a military term for a house occupation, which involves turning a Palestinian home into a temporary military base. They can last for a few days, during which time the family are confined to one room, or for as long as several years, necessitating a full eviction of the family.

As I circulated around the talks, it turned out that straw widows were a very common topic of conversation. Both Shachar and Avner emphasised that they did not feel at all “professional” after conducting a straw widow, but rather embarrassed at what they had done. Shachar remembered the mud his soldiers traipsed into the house during winter and how dirty they had left the house. Nadav told the story of his first straw widow, when he dragged an 11 year old child from his bed; he said the image of the child’s face would stay with him forever. All

¹⁸ Author interview with Noam Chayut.

of the activists worked very hard to emphasise that these stories were not simply individual failings but part of a bigger picture of the reality of military rule. “I couldn’t have done anything more”, Shachar said, stressing that it is impossible to be “nice” all the time, day after day, when serving in the West Bank.

During the post-talk questions, one of the youths asked Avner whether he thought that soldiers should stop going into houses. Avner said that it wasn’t as simple as this, since straw widows were only one part of a system of military rule. Countering the questioner’s impulse to find ways to improve the IDF’s performance, Avner pushed the youths to question the whole logic of military rule, and not just the soldiers.

Both Avner and Shachar also referred to the upcoming elections, remarking that many of the youths would have a vote and could possibly help change the political reality. However, they resisted requests to give recommendations about who to vote for. Shachar instead asked the youths to make a decision “based on knowledge”, even if they disagreed with Breaking the Silence, or even if they were to decide that Israel had “no choice” but to continue the occupation.

- Field notes, Tuesday 11th December 2012, afternoon

Breaking the Silence have been leading tours to Hebron since the organisation was established. In a common refrain, the activists often say that they realised after the success of the first exhibition that it would not be enough to bring Hebron to Tel Aviv: they would also need to bring Tel Aviv to Hebron. In the formulation of one activist, this meant “bringing our parents to Hebron” and showing them what their children had been asked to do in the name of Israeli society.¹⁹ At first the tours were loosely organised.²⁰ A group of activists hired a bus between themselves and walked sporadically around the centre of Hebron, pointing out features of interest and explaining what they had done while

¹⁹ Field notes, 29th October 2012.

²⁰ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

serving there.²¹ They would bring friends, family, journalists, and tourists with them. The tours soon began to generate controversy among the settlers living in the city centre. This often degenerated into disorder when settlers shouted over the tour guide and threw things at the group. As a result of these disturbances, Breaking the Silence faced several struggles with the IDF and the High Court to gain permission to run tours in the city. However, as the years have progressed – and despite continued disruptions and attempts by settlers to block them – Breaking the Silence tours to Hebron have become routine.

The route, timings, and content have been steadily regularised over the years.²² The tours around the city follow a clear path of stations, which is adjusted according to the preference of individual guides and time constraints. After an introductory lecture about the history of Hebron and Breaking the Silence on the coach journey from Jerusalem, the tour first stops in Kiryat Arba, a settlement to the North of Hebron. There the group visits the grave of Baruch Goldstein²³, still honoured by local residents, before moving on to the “H2” area of the city under direct Israeli control.²⁴ Beginning at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs complex, the tour walks down Shuhada Street, formerly the main shopping district in Hebron but now completely closed to Palestinian pedestrians and shopkeepers. Along this main street, the tour makes several stops – at the entrance to the Palestinian Casbah, at the site of the murder of two Jewish settlers, at the settlements of Avraham Avinu, Beit Romano, Beit Hadassah, and Tel Rumeida, at the military base on the site of the old bus station, at the main checkpoint between H1 and H2, and at the permanently closed chicken and gold markets. The tour usually concludes with a talk at a Palestinian grassroots activist centre called “Youth Against Settlements” on the hill above the city.

²¹ Some indication of the nature of these early tours is available in a video produced by the organisation (Breaking the Silence, 2011b).

²² Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

²³ Baruch Goldstein was a religious settler who murdered 29 Palestinians in a massacre at the Ibrahimi Mosque in 1994. He was eventually subdued and killed by surviving worshippers.

²⁴ Under the agreement signed in 1997, security deployments in Hebron were divided between the Palestinian Authority (H1) and Israel (H2). The IDF retains a constant presence in H2 but has largely withdrawn from the rest of the city. Regular incursions into H1 still take place and the whole city remains under Israeli military control.

This itinerary has become completely routine over the years. Rarely does a week go by when there is not a tour running in either Hebrew or English; during most weeks there is more than one. Having several tours on a single day is not uncommon. The tours have therefore in some sense become part of the fabric of the city. Since the area which the tours explore is under constant curfew, the inhabitants can easily recognise them as they progress around the streets. The few remaining Palestinian shopkeepers left in central Hebron are on friendly terms with the activists; street peddlers selling bracelets rely on the tours as a source of income; the settlers observe the tours and frequently approach them to contribute their opinions, usually in a civil but slightly intimidating fashion; soldiers on duty often watch over the tours from their posts, occasionally listening in but usually appearing unmoved; European volunteers from the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) observatory pass on their encouragement.

Although there are frequently violent clashes in Hebron, the tours usually remain unaffected by this. Occasionally, demonstrations in the “H1” zone are audible, punctuated by the boom of sound grenades. Soldiers sometimes warn the tours away from certain areas, citing the threat of stone throwing from the Casbah. One tour I attended received a dose of teargas when the wind carried it back from the checkpoint where it had been fired. But such events are uncommon. For the most part, the violence of the occupation in Hebron is a slow violence which is not immediately obvious. Hints of the coercive regime in action emerge here and there: arrested Palestinians walking with a patrol of soldiers; Palestinian children warned away from forbidden areas; small arguments at checkpoints. Yet the coercion must generally be inferred from the landscape, with its empty streets, shop doors welded shut, barricades, caged windows, and soldiers moving across the rooftops above. The area is bleak, uncanny, and depressing.

Scholars have already remarked on the intersections between war and tourism, the ways in which the consumption of danger and insecurity can attract the traveller’s gaze (Lisle, 2000). Hebron must rank among the most extreme examples of tourism directed at a conflict which is on-going, rather than simply memorialised, and where visitors consume the violence as it unfolds before their eyes. Activism has a curious role to play in this war/tourism dynamic. For foreign visitors, activist political

commitments often feed into the desire to visit this site of conflict (Landy, 2008). One former Breaking the Silence tour guide was quite cynical about their presence on tours for this reason:

“... every day there would be a bunch of 40 Dutch, lefty 19 year old girls, 45 extreme left-wing British guys, 25 year olds, 35 Protestant Priests for Peace. And they’re there and it doesn’t matter what you’re going to say. So they’re left wing, they think Israel should get out the West Bank, they think Israel is a war criminal... blah, blah... they think all the regular lefty things that they think... I felt that the group is not interested in what I had to say... They wanted to go back home and tell their Dutch, British friends that they were in Hebron with Breaking the Silence. It became a brand... I was very disappointed by it.”²⁵

These days, however, the majority of tours are run for Israelis in Hebrew, even though the English tours remain very popular. There has been a very deliberate attempt to target the Israeli audience, in part due to the feeling that tours for foreign visitors are often a case of preaching to the converted.

When Israelis join Breaking the Silence tours the activist-tourist dynamic is less obvious than in the case of foreign visitors, especially because they are less likely to be sympathetic; but it is still possible to discern. In the first place this is because the tours take place alongside the arrival of coach-loads of religious tourists who have come to visit the holy sites. Mostly, however, it is because Hebron is still being *consumed* on Breaking the Silence tours, even when this process remains largely detached from the political economy of leisure and travel. The tours make use of the built environment and the people who live there as tools for advocacy and education. Moreover, since access to the space of Hebron is unequally distributed, in that it is forbidden to Palestinians, the tours participate in a political economy of gaze, circulation, and association which is fully implicated in the colonisation of the West Bank (Weizman, 2007: 111–138; Ophir et al., 2009; Collins, 2012: esp. 79–108). When former soldiers and reservists lead civilians, some of whom may also be reservists or even future soldiers, on tours around Hebron to view the realities of military rule and to assess its morality, it is difficult not to see this as an example of the Israeli occupation watching itself happen. One might

²⁵ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

even say that in this movement of gazes a certain elementary structure of ethical subjectivity is being produced in which a critical faculty of the ego looks back upon itself.

The crucial question is what *kind* of ethical subject this is. Is it driven primarily by anxiety or guilt, by structural political critique or moral self-examination? Breaking the Silence activists remain convinced that it is primarily the former. Indeed, the tours are considered the most powerful educational tool available to the organisation. In the words of the former executive director:

“I know that if I bring 3000 people to Hebron every year, it does something. It’s difficult for me to say what it does, but I know because I hear people talking about the tours in Hebron four years after it took place and... pointing at this point as a turning point in the shaping of their political views or their perceptions of the situation.”²⁶

This hoped-for process of political transformation is understood as affective as well as merely informative. On this point it is worth comparing the tours in Hebron with another tour that Breaking the Silence operates to the South Hebron Hills. Far fewer activists in Breaking the Silence have experience serving as soldiers in this area. Moreover, the area is much larger and more complicated than Hebron. Whereas there are clear signs of division and military rule in Hebron itself, in the South Hebron Hills the military presence is far less concentrated. In this area, the occupation works through legalistic mechanisms, including the confiscation of farmland as “state land”, the use of “closed military zones” and nature reserves to restrict movement, planning regulations, and the *post factum* justification of temporary settlement outposts (Weizman, 2007: 87–110; Gordon, 2008: 116–146). In many ways, this area is a far more appropriate place to explain the violence of the occupation, since it is more typical of wider trends. However, fewer tours go there, simply because it is harder to make as emotive a point about it. Ayal described the relationship between the two tours:

“In some way, the tour in Hebron hits you much more than the tour in South Hebron. It’s much more vivid, and it’s personal – you see the place. But I think for everyone who did the South Hebron tour after they did the Hebron tour, the South Hebron tour was much more

²⁶ Author interview with Dana Golan.

troubling because then you understand the mechanism and you understand that it's not only Hebron, it's not only a certain place – it's a whole mechanism. But at the end of the day, what bothers you are the pictures of Hebron... You need to understand that this testimony is not a single testimony, it's a part of a mechanism, it's part of a bigger thing... but what I believe is that you can talk about the mechanism until tomorrow, what people go home with is that testimony that made them feel 'oh my God' ...”²⁷

What should be clear from this is that the relationship between moral outrage and a political critique of “the mechanism” is complex. Ideally, the trajectory leads from the former to the latter, from guilt to anxiety. However, it is the initial and emotional moral reaction which often leaves a more lasting impression. As Ayal indicates, additional work is needed to ensure that this response is contextualised as a political reaction to a feature of a wider system. The difficulty that *Breaking the Silence* faces is that it is precisely on political grounds that many Israelis are prepared to accept the “moral price” of the occupation. Without any engagement with this side of the question, it is very easy for a supposedly distinct sphere of morality to remain cordoned off from the wider debate. It is also very easy to re-insert the moral content of testimonies back into a militarised ethical process.

On one of the tours of Hebron I observed, which was organised for students of the Hebrew University, these issues of the distinction between morality and politics were raised quite sharply.²⁸ The group was standing underneath a stone archway near the entrance to the Casbah and the Avraham Avinu settlement. Usually the tour remains in the courtyard further from the settlement. However, this time the soldier stationed there had asked us to move under the archway and closer to the settlement. He was concerned about stones being thrown from the Casbah. Shachar, who was leading the tour, commented wryly that the settlers might also throw stones at us if we moved any closer. As we shuffled under the archway, he began taking questions from the group. One student commented that, although the lack of morality of the situation in Hebron might be evident, there was still a political discussion to be had about the Israeli presence there. Shachar agreed that there was an important

²⁷ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

²⁸ The following account is derived from field notes from 14th November 2012.

political discussion to be had but stressed that it was not the role of Breaking the Silence to participate in it. Instead, he said, their place was to encourage a moral conversation.

We walked further along the route of the tour and I tried to catch the attention of Ayal and Yuli, the new executive director, to ask for their thoughts on this exchange. They were deep in conversation. When I finally spoke with Yuli, it emerged they had already been discussing this question between themselves. She asked me why I was interested in the exchange and I mentioned the distinction that Shachar had drawn between morality and politics. It was clear from her expression that she recognised the problem I was getting at. She replied that it was important to be “strategic”. “You need to understand the discourse here”, she told me. We stopped at another station where Shachar discussed the moral difficulties presented by protecting the settler community in Hebron given that it was located in the heart of a Palestinian city. He argued that the moral cost of defending the settlement, which required curfews, street closures, and strict control of Palestinian movement, was the main issue, not the ideology of the settlers. Breaking the Silence does not really have a political argument with the settlers, he said, just as it does not really have a political argument with the army. In his view, the settlers had already done an “accounting of their souls” [*heshbon nefesh*] and were comfortable with the moral costs of being in Hebron. He said that Breaking the Silence wanted to have a moral conversation with the wider majority of Israeli society and to get them to go through the same process of self-examination.

Clearly, however, there are political limits to the use of this ethical process of self-examination, especially when it is an approach that is commonly used as a technique of military ethical pedagogy. These limits were readily apparent at the lectures organised by Breaking the Silence at the Hebrew University itself, where students from settlements in the West Bank frequently attend.²⁹ At one lecture I observed, a settler directly challenged Ayal to be more explicit about his political aims.³⁰ The settler distinguished very clearly between two levels of activity – one of which was aimed at improving the conduct of the IDF, the other of which was aimed at ending the occupation. He said that he could

²⁹ Field notes, 8th January 2013.

³⁰ Field notes, 5th December 2012.

agree to the former but not to the latter. Furthermore, he claimed it was fundamentally dishonest to argue that withdrawing from the occupied territories was a moral issue when it has fundamentally political dimensions. It is indeed a common criticism from the Right that Breaking the Silence hide their politics behind a moral discussion.

Another lecture at the university was presented by Dana Golan, the outgoing executive director. The right wing organisation *Im Tirzu*³¹ has a number of activists among the student body who regularly attend the lectures and events organised by Breaking the Silence in order to argue with the lecturers. The *Im Tirzu* activists left leaflets on every chair in the lecture room describing Breaking the Silence as liars who try to delegitimise Israel. Dana introduced the organisation and described her own experience of conducting a house search in Hebron. As she opened for questions, she asked if anyone else had served in Hebron; two of the *Im Tirzu* activists raised their hands. They argued continuously with her throughout the questions, trying to coax her into declaring her political preferences. Dana refused and continuously tried to stick to what she had described in her opening remarks as “creating a moral conversation” [*le’orer diun musari*] about the occupation. After several minutes of arguing, she conceded that if the *Im Tirzu* activists did not see a moral problem in the occupation, then she could have no further argument with them.

I had seen one of the *Im Tirzu* activists before, while observing a Breaking the Silence information booth on campus. *Im Tirzu* had established their own directly next door.³² I introduced myself to him and asked for his opinion on the work of Breaking the Silence. He said that they didn’t tell the whole picture, only a part of it; he effectively reprised the “rotten apple” thesis that incidents of violence are attributable to individual failings, not structural problems. What was most interesting about his response, however, was that he used a testimony of his own to make his point. He told me about his time during the army, when he had been an officer in the armoured corps. During one arrest operation he told his soldiers that they were only supposed to arrest and not to do anything else. However, one of his soldiers put plastic handcuffs very tightly and painfully around the wrists of the Palestinian in

³¹ *Im Tirzu* is a right-wing organisation which calls for a “second Zionist revolution”, aimed mainly at defending and promoting Israel’s name and Jewish character both at home and abroad.

³² Field notes, 28th November 2012.

order to cause him discomfort. The activist was proud to tell me that he reported the incident and that the soldier spent twenty days in jail and was denied leave because of it. He said that if an army is imposing an occupation there will always be moments of transgression, just as in any large organisation there will always be problems and individuals who do wrong. But he said Breaking the Silence elevate these inevitable occurrences to the status of the norm, which was not a fair picture.

Despite these interventions and questions, there was no doubting that each of these events went well from the point of view of Breaking the Silence. They were well attended and generated a lot of interest from the audience. Indeed, for Ayal, a sign that the work that Breaking the Silence does is effective is that audiences exhibit at least some emotional reaction:

“After every lecture that you go to, you feel like ‘wow, that’s important’ because the people I met, the majority of them, even if it was hard for them to accept me, they more or less realise that there is something wrong and many times you get very, very good reactions... Even if the majority were irritated by you, it touches them. You feel that you touched the people. You feel that we really want to be different. The problem is people don’t know about the situation and people don’t know what to do... when I’m giving a lecture I’m much more concerned [if] people tell me, ‘ah, okay, so what?’ but it never happens. It’s either people are... very irritated, some people are... very shocked, but it touches them.”³³

It is also possible that these signals are misleading, however. As Lauren Berlant has written of ethics in the service of politics:

“Self-transforming compassionate recognition and its cognate forms of solidarity *are* necessary for making political movements thrive contentiously against all sorts of privilege, but they have also provided a means for making minor structural adjustments seem like major events, because the theatre of compassion is emotionally intense.” (Berlant, 2011b: 182)

In Berlant’s view, attention to the affective rewards of ethical activity can reveal its political shortcomings: activism which *feels* worthy and important does not necessarily translate into effective

³³ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

political change. Indeed, it might actually distract from it in favour of the pursuit of minor, cosmetic, or phantasmic improvements. For several of the critics of Breaking the Silence I described above, working *within* the military to make moral improvements is a more worthy approach than public critique of the occupation as a whole. Yet Breaking the Silence activists themselves are also susceptible to these temptations. For Ayal, lectures which “touch” people are a positive sign; for Dana, reducing the number of “abuser soldiers” at checkpoints still remained a worthwhile goal. For all the professions of the importance of understanding the occupation as a mechanism which is structurally and irredeemably violent and immoral, at a certain point the “cruel optimism” of Breaking the Silence activism begins to converge with more conventional forms of the ethics of Israeli militarism. This convergence of ethical responses becomes more palpable the closer one gets to the military apparatus itself, as I will show next.

We left the site in the late afternoon and headed back to Beer Sheva, from where we were travelling our separate ways. Ayal invited me to join them for the debriefing at a local Indian restaurant, and I gladly accepted. The general feeling was that the day had gone very well. Something like 600 youths had passed through the station, Ayal estimated, though I thought this number rather optimistic. Yoni remarked that high-school kids were much easier to talk to than students or adults, who often prove difficult to persuade.

Ayal invited the activists to evaluate their performances and began with himself. The most difficult part of the day for him was an exchange with a youth who had asked him to talk about possible political solutions to the occupation. This, as Ayal had indicated earlier, is a very common but difficult question. This is principally because Breaking the Silence has no real answer to it – only ways to avoid it. The youth had continued to ask “what do you propose?” [ma 'ata matsi'a] over and over again; and Ayal had lamented that he had allowed himself to get stuck in this “loop”, leaving not enough time to read testimonies.

Others remarked that this was indeed the most common and difficult question. Shachar estimated that 90% of the questions he had received were either “what is the solution?” or “should I or other soldiers refuse to do army service?” Many of the activists seemed dissatisfied with the answers Breaking the Silence gives to this question and much of the conversation revolved around effective strategies for drawing discussion away from “solutions” and towards testimonies. Ayal also tried to argue that arguing that the occupation has to end is a concrete enough proposal to serve as a solution.

Avner remarked that, however satisfied people were with that as a solution, the main contribution that Breaking the Silence could make was to get people to talk about “the occupation” in the first place. It was important, he thought, “not to be afraid of” this term and to try and let it enter public consciousness. Yoni remarked that he often likes to begin by talking about “military control” [shliṭa tsva’it] and gradually work his way towards the term “occupation” [kibush].

The group then turned to me, and asked for my impressions of the day. Not wanting to sound too downcast, I remarked that I was struck by how little variation there was in the content of both the lectures and the audience questions. I had been attending Breaking the Silence events for some time by this point, so it is true that very little sounded new to me; but, particularly on that day, I had seen several talks arrive precisely at the “loop” Ayal described. Even among what could be described as one of the most sympathetic audiences possible for Breaking the Silence, the question of “the solution” and political action remained unanswered. Instead, following the talks, the youths had picked up their bikes, cycled down the road, and gone to see the tank.

- Field notes, Tuesday 11th December 2012, evening

“Bringing our PTSD into the *mekhina*”: Breaking the Silence at pre-military academies

We sat in a small circle on the patch of grass in front of the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, an area which is forbidden to Muslims, who must enter the complex from the rear. Avner was

about to introduce his tour of Hebron to the students of Ein Prat pre-military academy, a mixed academy of religious and secular students located in the West Bank. Like many pre-military academies, the students of Ein Prat visit Hebron every year. The night before they had stayed with settlers in the heart of Hebron; this afternoon they were going to meet Breaking the Silence and hear an alternative perspective.

Avner began in dramatic fashion. Without introducing himself, he read directly from the first testimony booklet Breaking the Silence produced. One student was not comfortable with this and attempted to disrupt the reading: "Excuse me? Who are you?" Avner was not deterred. He finished reading from the booklet and told them who he was. He explained that he grew up in a religious family and that he attended yeshiva when he was young. He told them of his relations living in Kfar Adumim in the West Bank, where the pre-military academy was located. He said that he did a year of volunteering before joining the paratroopers and that he had always tried to be a moral and professional soldier. Then he told the story of his first straw widow operation, and how – despite the disruption it had caused the family living in the house – it had only been a practice run. He said that the biggest question the occupation raises is a moral question. He was careful to emphasise that he understood the settlers and the religious significance of Hebron; but he also referred to the importance of keeping mitsvot [religious duties] and observing "moral limits".

In the typical fashion of Breaking the Silence, Avner was attempting to hold a moral conversation with the students about the occupation. The reaction was mixed. Some students raised the issue of the foreign funding that Breaking the Silence receives and criticised the organisation for giving Israel a bad name abroad. Others seemed more receptive but were looking for ideas on how to improve things. As usual, Avner demurred from offering political solutions. Likewise, he stated emphatically that Breaking the Silence was not interested in making the IDF more moral in the situation it was in, but rather in changing an immoral situation.

The students were intelligent and quite knowledgeable. When Avner raised the topic of the “neighbour procedure” (under which the IDF uses Palestinians as human shields when entering suspicious houses), one of them countered with the observation that the Supreme Court had made this practice illegal. Avner responded by saying that he himself had used the “neighbour procedure” when he was a soldier in 2006, one year after it was made illegal. At the time, he had no idea that it was a forbidden practice, he said. The students were quite shocked by this revelation and pressed him for more details.

What stuck in my mind most from this introductory talk, however, was not the content of the discussion but what was taking place in the background. At a certain moment, Avner remarked on the fact that the area we were sat in was closed off to Muslims. He said that the Palestinian children currently playing on it were liable to be removed at any moment. The discussion then continued and moved on to other issues. But sure enough, as Avner predicted, two soldiers soon walked over to the children, who were no older than 10, and shouted at them, ordering them to leave. The children did not listen and continued to play. One of the soldiers then marched towards them and pushed one of the boys, before grabbing him and dragging him out of the area. I had been coming to Hebron for months by this point but I had never seen such direct violence against children. The students from Ein Prat, however, barely turned their heads. They were too interested in what Avner had to say.

Breaking the Silence has been active at pre-military academies since at least 2009.³⁴ The education director at that time, Ilan Fathi, approached them as part of an attempt to reach mainstream Israeli society, rather than simply the growing crowd of foreign media interested in the organisation. His personal motivations for doing so were a mixture of sympathy for the future soldiers and a hope that he might persuade them to refuse army service.

³⁴ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

“... *mekhinot* are usually the salt of the earth. Very good kids, well educated, good families, volunteering. And they would go to the best combat units in the IDF, which means they’re going to see the hideous things and do the worst things and not have any chance to take the easy way out. I don’t know if the original idea was that I feel bad for them, that someone should tell them what they’re going to do[...] I don’t know what was stronger: the feeling bad for them thing, or the political activism of telling people before they recruit what they’re going to do, hoping their going to refuse to serve the IDF.”

Officially, Breaking the Silence never calls on soldiers to refuse to serve. Privately, a number of activists hope for this outcome without being able to say it. The most common answer I received when I asked for the justification for speaking with *mekhinot* was that they are an effective way to reach students who have ambitions to enter leadership roles in society, either in education, social work, or politics. The fact of their impending army service was downplayed as coincidental.³⁵

Getting access to the *mekhinot* was very difficult in the first instance. Only a few academies allowed them to come, and then only in tightly controlled circumstances. Ilan recognised that this limited exposure to Breaking the Silence was quite ineffective, and perhaps even harmful:

“One of us would go talk for an hour and a half and go and that’s it. Without us controlling the discussion afterwards, without making sure that it’s being held within a context. And you have no idea what’s the discourse around your talk. In the religious *mekhinot*, in the beginning, we would come after the teachers in the *mekhina* for 45 minutes would tell them, don’t take anything they say for granted, they are a bunch of liars, they are a bunch of traitors, they’re ruining their country... And it would be easier for me to talk to those kids... because there was a certain context, because they expect something, because they are trying to understand this within a certain frame: rotten apples in the military, traitors. They are trying to understand somehow. But in *mekhinat* Rabin these guys were shocked, really really shocked. I mean, we brought our PTSD into the *mekhina*, put it there and left.”

³⁵ Author interviews with Ayal Kantz and Dana Golan.

In fact, for this reason, it was initially much harder for Breaking the Silence to get access to left-leaning academies. The more right-wing academies were confident in their ability to portray the organisation as unreliable and unpatriotic, whereas the left-wing academies feared that their discourse would be subversive once it was accepted as plausible.³⁶ This trend was only reversed when Rabin academy, one of the earliest academies to invite Breaking the Silence to speak, held its widely publicised and controversial event in which veterans from Operation Cast Lead spoke about their experiences.³⁷ After this point, students from *mekhinot* across Israel began to ask for Breaking the Silence to visit. This upsurge in interest in the organisation took place at a time when opinion around it was polarising, especially as a result of the release of its testimonies about Operation Cast Lead and the publication of the Goldstone Report, which drew on them as evidence. Religious academies gradually stopped inviting the organisation, to the extent that it is almost unheard of for Breaking the Silence to visit them today. The result of all these developments has been that Breaking the Silence have now become a regular fixture at secular and mixed pre-military academies, having some form of interaction with almost all of them each year.

This is not to say that their presence in pre-military academies remains uncontroversial among the staff of *mekhinot*. Erez Eshel, the founder of Ein Prat academy and a senior figure in the leadership of the *mekhinot*, has tried very hard to prevent them visiting. Ayal, the education director during the period of my fieldwork, claimed to have received abusive phone calls from Eshel about their work in academies. He also said that some academy staff refuse to allow Breaking the Silence to visit, citing heavy pressure from Eshel as their reason.³⁸ For the most part, however, the main impact of this pressure has been to constrain rather than prevent the work of Breaking the Silence:

“I think what’s hard is not to get us in, it’s to get us in the way we want... what started happening this year – very, very much from the managers – is to limit our meetings, so...

³⁶ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

³⁷ I analysed this event in detail in chapter 3, 166-170.

³⁸ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

what we're trying to do is a tour but not a meeting before, and not a five-hour tour but a two-and-a-half-hour tour.”³⁹

The consequence of this pressure has been that, although Breaking the Silence remains highly active in pre-military academies, they do so decreasingly on their own terms.

The first lecture by Breaking the Silence that I witnessed at a pre-military academy took place at Telem academy in Jaffa, a mixed academy associated with the Reform movement.⁴⁰ It was 8:30 am and most of the students had just woken up. Many of them sat with bowls of cereal in the small lecture room while the talk took place. Nadav, the lecturer on that day, began by emphasising very clearly that Breaking the Silence was not interested in helping the students be better soldiers but rather in talking with them about the occupation. He gave several testimonies from his own experience, including a straw widow operation and a house mapping exercise.⁴¹ In each case he stressed how he had made an effort to be polite and to clean up after entering a house but that it still felt wrong. “We gave candies to the children and then arrested their dads”, he said. He then played the students a video from Hawara checkpoint. This video is commonly used by Breaking the Silence at its educational events (see Breaking the Silence, 2011a). It depicts the daily drudgery of passing through the checkpoint, showing long queues of Palestinians waiting at the ramshackle barriers while soldiers shout at them to maintain order. On several occasions in the video we witness violence from soldiers towards civilians. At one point, a man is beaten and detained in front of his wife and small children.

The most astonishing thing about this video, however, is not the content but its source: it was filmed by the IDF Education Corps. The purpose of the video appears to be to document the problems that soldiers might face when on duty at a checkpoint. It features several interviews with the soldiers who acted violently, in which they discuss their difficulties. One soldier who punched a Palestinian even acknowledges that what he did was wrong and would be punished if discovered by his superiors.

Although there is no way of knowing how this video was in fact used for educational purposes, such

³⁹ Author interview with Ayal Kantz.

⁴⁰ The following description is from my field notes from 29th November 2012.

⁴¹ “House mapping” refers to an operation in which the IDF enters a civilian home, usually at random during the night, and logs the identity of each of the inhabitants. The intelligence gathered from these operations is rarely used and they are more commonly aimed at “demonstrating the presence” of the army.

an approach seems commensurate with the pedagogical strategies discussed in chapter 2. Even if the material was not used, it gives an indication of what was being sought. Breaking the Silence is therefore making use of a testimonial video first designed to improve the ethical performance of soldiers at checkpoints in order to make the political point that such improvements are meaningless without an end to the occupation. The ethical form of this claim seems to run at cross-purposes to its content.

This tension between medium and message, between guilt and anxiety, was exposed very clearly in the ensuing discussion. The teacher responsible for the session concluded by telling the students not to be discouraged by the video they had seen. He recounted his own experience of being a commander at Hawara checkpoint, saying that with good soldiers and officers it was possible to avoid problems such as those in the video. He argued that the video, in spite or perhaps because of its shocking nature, should in fact encourage the students to seek out positions in the army which were less socially respected (compared with elite combat units) but which made all the more difference in the field. He said that he wanted to encourage the students to join precisely those units doing difficult work at checkpoints, to become commanders, and to act as leaders who took the initiative in challenging situations. He also conceded that it was possible to make a difference outside the army, such as by joining Breaking the Silence. In one short speech, therefore, Guy managed to turn a presentation aimed at outlining a political critique of the occupation into an opportunity to encourage the students to engage in ethical self-cultivation through military service.

It is this pattern – whereby a political critique, however carefully framed, loses its potency through its reliance on the ethical form of testimony and its contextualisation in a programme of ethical self-cultivation – that I observed repeatedly in my conversations and exchanges with staff and students at pre-military academies. Most academies accept that there is an element of truth to what Breaking the Silence say but do not like that the organisation does not want to work with the IDF in order to improve the morality of the occupation. Dani Zamir, the head of Rabin Academy, criticised Breaking the Silence for engaging in “confession” [*yidui*] rather than in a constructive effort to change the IDF for the better:

“when they come here to give a lecture at the *mekhina*, I say to the students that, for me, they are not doing the right thing. The right thing is: the moment something happens, you have to speak. Not two days after. Not to be a civilian for ten years and then say: ‘well, when I was a soldier I was doing this and this and this...’ It’s okay but it’s a little cowardly.”⁴²

Zamir’s remarks are interesting because they echo Foucault’s critique of confession. Zamir prefers the model of *parrhesia*, risky truth-telling aimed at moral improvement. Of course, Breaking the Silence would reject the idea that their activity is primarily confessional. In many ways, they too aim at a kind of public *parrhesia* aimed at civil society. Indeed, several scholars have analysed the organisation sympathetically as a clear example of political *parrhesia* (Morag, 2013: 180–210; Shavit and Katriel, 2011, 2013). The problem is that this is all too easily subsumed in the pedagogical aims of pre-military academies, which restrict the use of *parrhesia* to a technique of moral improvement in a culture of military asceticism.

David Nachman, the director of Ein Prat academy, adopts a similar approach to Breaking the Silence. He argues that, even though he disagrees vehemently with the organisation, it is important to hear their views because “every opinion has truth inside” and it is important for students to know how to respond to their arguments. Nachman believes that Breaking the Silence reveal the occasional moral difficulties that soldiers face and thereby show the importance of ethical activity:

“I say every time after they come here what the points of truth they have to say are but also when and where we don’t agree with them and their way and why – and deeply... The important thing [that Breaking the Silence show] is that sometimes IDF soldiers do not act as we expect a Jewish soldier to act. As I said [earlier in the conversation], a Jewish soldier must be sensitive[...] The problem with Breaking the Silence – and it’s a very, very, very big problem – is that some stories are not so true and, because of their agenda, they are not bringing the facts as they are[...] I think the army itself deals with most problems in a very,

⁴² Author interview with Dani Zamir.

very good way. [Breaking the Silence] use terms like ‘crimes against humanity’⁴³. I hate this kind of thing. It’s not right. I say this as an IDF officer for 25 years. It’s not right. I know what it’s like in the combat units and I see it and I know the problems. But I know the personalities of the officers in the IDF and I don’t think there is any other army in the world that, in situations like we are, acts so sensitively and so... it’s purity of arms, really... The way I want to see the IDF is just the way Breaking the Silence wants to see the IDF... Most of the members of Breaking the Silence were members of combat units, so they have to understand the complexity. I have a lot of examples of how sometimes the situation creates things that when you are looking at it from outside or you look at it from a sterile room you say ‘how could he do it?’ or ‘how could he shout at the Arab?’ But when you are under stress and the situation is not simple, things happen and it’s not good. But it’s not ‘crimes against humanity’ or something like this.’⁴⁴

By arguing that he shares Breaking the Silence’s view of how the IDF should be, David Nachman shows how easily a critique which is expressed in moral terms through testimony can lose its political content. In this framing, Nachman and Breaking the Silence share a common goal for a more moral IDF; they simply disagree about how to achieve it. Moreover, when properly contextualised, Nachman believes that Breaking the Silence can assist him in achieving this goal by showing certain “points of truth” through testimony.

At Nachshon academy, I spoke with another teacher who contextualised the lecture by Breaking the Silence in the same way:

“... every year we meet Breaking the Silence, for a talk with the kids... and I remember one year someone came who was in the Naḥal and he talked about... I mean, horrendous things that happened in Hebron when he was there as a soldier... And I gave him a lift in the car to a bus stop in the evening, it was quite late. So we had a chance for a chat. And whilst chatting I remembered, I realised that he was in the Naḥal in a certain company, the company he was

⁴³ In fact, Breaking the Silence deliberately eschews the use of legalistic language in favour of a discourse of morality. In months of observing the organisation, I never heard an activist use this phrase in public.

⁴⁴ Author interview with David Nachman.

talking about, where the company commander was someone I knew, who had worked in this *mekhina* in Nachshon in the past. A really excellent guy and I said to him, you know, ‘wait a second do you know, do you know Kuti?’ – that’s his name. And he said, ‘yeah of course, Kuti is amazing... he was an amazing officer, an amazing company commander’. And I said to him, ‘wait a second, you know, are you trying to say that the things you just told us about in the lesson happened in Kuti’s company?’ And he said, ‘no, no, these things would never happen in Kuti’s company’. And I remember the day after speaking to my students and telling them this, telling them this story. And why was it so important for me to tell this to my kids? And what I would say is that I’m not sure about, you know, what exactly happened in the stories that he was telling about atrocities that had happened in Hebron. But, first of all, in the lesson with the kids he didn’t even mention the fact that when the company commander was doing a good job... these things didn’t happen. And that is such an important thing to pass on to the kids. You know, the commanders and officers have such an important job in dictating the values and the behaviour of the soldiers and the atmosphere and the way they do the missions and so on.”⁴⁵

The final example of this attitude in pre-military academies comes from the director of the Jerusalemite Academy. She explicitly referred to the fact that Ayal, who commonly lectures for Breaking the Silence in *mekhinot*, still serves in the IDF as important evidence that it remains important to work inside the army to improve its conduct:

“I know he serves in the army and does reserves. It’s very, very important that he comes and says ‘this is very bad but I’m part of it’... and the moment you are part of it you can first of all understand how you can be part of it and still be critical and the other thing is to know how you can make changes from inside. And I really think that people who choose not to go to the

⁴⁵ Author interview with Daniel Berkeley.

army or do reserves, I can say that I have many difficulties in having a conversation with them because they don't do the first obligation of being a part."⁴⁶

In the view of Ilan, the former educational director of Breaking the Silence, the growing presence in the organisation of soldiers who still perform reserve service is a crucial factor in undermining the political message of the campaign:

"When you stand in front of a group of high school kids and at the end of every talk they ask the same question, 'do you serve or do you refuse?' and you say, 'I serve', that's it. The message is completely blurred in that second. And it doesn't matter if he makes omelettes in the military: he serves. His message is lost."⁴⁷

It also allows for beliefs such as those expressed by pre-military academy staff above to focus attention on moral improvement within the IDF, an aim which is fully in keeping with the pattern of militarism at *mekhinot*. As Ilan argued:

"we went too far... We had to stop at a certain point and check... the outcome. And we were framed. We were seen as the worm in the apple. We were seen as what should be isolated from the general public. 'Look, these guys went wrong. They weren't ethical enough. They were rotten apples. Let's cut the rotten piece out and you guys will be the great shiny apple, you will serve there, you will have your values, you will be '*erkiyim* [ethical]. You will stand in the checkpoint, be polite, know a few words in Arabic, blah, blah, blah...' And we didn't know where to stop. We didn't know or we didn't have the guts to stop and find new ways to deliver our message. We just continued. And now Breaking the Silence talks to pretty much all the *mekhinot* in Israel, in the West Bank as well by the way. And Breaking the Silence is being framed again and again as: look, you came to the *mekhina*, this is what you shouldn't

⁴⁶ Author interview with Yael Domb.

⁴⁷ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

become, be aware. And I think this is terrible... This is not what we started Breaking the Silence for.”⁴⁸

Conclusion: silence as a political problematique

Breaking the Silence was founded on the belief that Israeli society does not talk about the occupation and that, by talking about the occupation, Israeli society could be encouraged to end it. This is based on a strongly liberal and democratic assumption about the way in which public discourse brings about political change, which holds that the free exchange of ideas will produce a consensus reflecting the best way forward. Such is the strength of its conviction in the power of soldiers’ testimonies to reveal the immorality of the occupation, Breaking the Silence is prepared to present them to whomever will listen, often without regard to their ulterior motives. As Avichai Stollar explained to me:

“We believe in discourse. Basically, the reason that we don’t say a lot more than just giving out our materials is because we believe, you know, that the sun is the best steriliser, that... having those testimonies out there, no matter how they’re being used, just... their sheer existence in the political, in the social sphere, has immense importance by itself.”⁴⁹

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to show the limitations of this view of political activism in a situation of societal militarism. Specifically, I have illustrated the ways in which a critique couched in moral terms can be easily stripped of its political content and turned into a feature of ethical pedagogy in support of militarism. In the terms I developed in the previous chapter, I have shown how the transition from guilt to anxiety which Breaking the Silence seeks to effect is often unsuccessful. Moreover, I have shown how this failed transition can be captured and exploited by a militarist apparatus. This challenges the view that the political benefits gained from this kind of activism outweigh the costs of participating in the militarist discourse of soldiers’ testimony which is steeped in masculinism and the perpetuation of social and racial hierarchies in Israeli society. It is therefore apt to reconsider the fundamental assumptions implicit in the Breaking the Silence project. Specifically, it seems important to ask, firstly, whether in fact Israeli society is quite as “silent” as the

⁴⁸ Author interview.

⁴⁹ Author interview with Avichai Stollar.

organisation maintains and, secondly, whether “breaking” that silence by participating in public discourse in Israel is really the most effective kind of activism.

In his celebrated history of European sexuality, Foucault describes the “incitement to discourse” brought about by the discursive regimes constructed around sexuality (1998a: 1–50). He attacks the myth of the “repressive hypothesis” as a chimera, arguing instead that it was obsessive, perverse speech and not silence which characterised the nineteenth-century attitude to sexuality. He maintains that it is this image of “silencing” which maintains the illusory hope in emancipation through sexual freedom and free speech about sex. When one successfully claims to be breaking a silence, the object of one’s discourse acquires a privileged status. What all these discourses on sexuality share therefore – whether they belong to Victorian sexologists or the sexual liberation movement – is a belief that sexuality speaks a privileged truth about the subject who participates in it.

It should not be too difficult to imagine how, in a militarist society such as Israel, military participation could also become the object of such a “regime of truth”. Foucault himself gives a clear analysis of the importance of discourse about war for modern regimes of power in his *Society Must be Defended* lectures (2004: 41–62, 239–263). Indeed, throughout this thesis, I have been documenting a wide range of practices of speech and testimony associated with military service in Israel. What this evidence suggests is not that Israeli society is silent about the occupation but rather that it speaks about it in code, its details parsed through very careful practices of testimony and self-examination. I have argued that these practices are an important feature of militarism, in that they produce an ethical subject for whom performance in warfare becomes a crucial test of the self. Despite its critical perspective, *Breaking the Silence* does not depart significantly from these trends. If anything, it contributes to them by invoking the idea of societal silence and thus privileging discourse about war as a measure of the moral character of the Israeli public.

Yet it would be fair to ask what the alternative to discourse about war could possibly be if the aim of a political organisation is to end the occupation. Even if the silence being broken is a partial illusion, it is harder to imagine a political strategy that would reject speech altogether. This is because, as Berlant

has argued, the contemporary “desire for the political” has increasingly taken on a form in which an auditory public relies on speech and sound for the affective rewards of political participation, often at the expense of more thoroughgoing process of contestation and struggle: “... the social circulation of *noise*, of affective binding, converts the world to a space of moral action that seems juxtapolitical – proximate to, without being compromised by, the instrumentalities of power that govern social life” (Berlant, 2011b: 224). This emphasis on speech generates the impression that “there is already a better sensorial world that exists right here, right now, more intimate and secure and just as real” (2011b: 224).

Indeed, in Ilan’s view, *Breaking the Silence* increasingly works to facilitate this feeling of intimacy and experience of a better world, rather than directing attention towards genuine political change. Referring to the organisation’s work with youth movements, high schools and *mekhinot*, he reflected:

“We created a situation where those groups in the society think that they are actually talking about [the occupation]. They think that they are really discussing it. But they are as wrong as they can be. They are having a nice comfortable discourse around it. They are not touching the real issue. They are talking about how to make it nicer... You can say very hard things. But within the right political frame of discourse, those things will be conveyed as very soft messages.”⁵⁰

For Berlant this very emphasis on speech can be a form of “cruel optimism”, in which relations of affective attachment formed through spoken exchange can obstruct a more radical political opening. She includes testimony as an ethical form in this:

“There are vigils; there is witnessing, testimony, and yelling. But there is not yet a consensual rubric that would shape these matters into an event. The affective structure of the situation is therefore anxious and the political emotions attached to it veer wildly from recognition of the enigma that is clearly there toward explanations that *make sense*, the kind of satisfying sense that enables enduring.” (Berlant, 2011b: 225)

⁵⁰ Author interview with Ilan Fathi.

It is notable that Berlant speaks of the affect of anxiety in this passage. As I have emphasised, it is in the production of such anxiety that *Breaking the Silence* comes closest to achieving its political goals. Yet, by filling the gap opened up by such anxiety with more speech and moral discourse, the organisation undoes its own work, producing a listening public which is more content to focus on moral improvement than political change. Berlant argues that, in these conditions, silent protest may offer a more effective paradigm for political activism. She sees promise in the moment when “people enter the public sphere in order to withhold from it the very material—speech oriented toward opinion—that animates its world-making and world-building effectivity” (Berlant, 2009). Indeed, the radical feminist anti-occupation movement “Women in Black” has pursued just such a strategy in Israel for many years. In the regime of militaristic “incitement to the discourse” that I have been describing, it may well be that a performative refusal to speak, rather than breaking the silence, would serve as a more radical gesture.

Conclusion: testimony, ethics, and militarism

In this thesis, I have traced the intersections between ethics and militarism in Israel in a variety of settings. The first three chapters examined ethical practices within and closely related to the institutional structure of the IDF, analysing the formulation of doctrine and the practice of pedagogy. I devoted the last two chapters to an in-depth study of the ethical activity of *Breaking the Silence*, examining forms of ethics which operate largely outside the formal military structure and frequently in self-conscious opposition to it. In this conclusion, I would like to draw together the different sections of the thesis in order to underscore that the phenomena they examine are not merely contiguous parts of a whole, but also thoroughly interpenetrated and mutually supporting elements. I will do this firstly by highlighting the importance of testimony as a thread running throughout the thesis and, secondly, by identifying some common features of the soldier-subjectivity I have been analysing. I will then draw out the implications of these connections for how we should understand Israeli militarism, militarism in general, and the ethics of war respectively.

Testimony

In this thesis testimony has consistently emerged as central to the production of the ethics of Israeli militarism. A wide range of practices were analysed under this rubric, from confession, to self-examination, to *parrhesia*. What each of these practices share, however, is the placement of the subject, truth, and his experience into a relationship through speech. In some cases, this involves the soldier-subject speaking the truth of his own experience, where he becomes an object of a knowledge transformed into power through that disclosure (confession). At other moments, the soldier speaks of his experience in order to compare it with a truth which is externally given, often from a source of pedagogical authority (self-examination). Alternatively, disclosing one's own experience can become a means of conferring the truth on another subject in order to bring about a transformation, either pedagogical or political, in them or in oneself (*parrhesia*). Of course, similar practices may often be deployed with very different ends in mind. The crucial analytic move I have attempted to make, however, is to place these practices on a continuum and to examine the ways in which each of them participate in the ethics of Israeli militarism by producing a subject.

I observed the subtle transformations in the text of the ethical code which enabled an expansion of the role of testimony. As soon as the document changed from the future-imperative description of Asa Kasher's "practical ideal" into a redrafted statement of moral and educational aspiration, testimony became the means by which that irreducible gap between Symbolic ideal and actual behaviour could be registered in speech and made to have a deeper effect on the soldier as an ethical subject.¹ I also described how this was mobilised in ethical pedagogy in the IDF: testimony became the moment for an ascetic process of self-examination and self-cultivation, a technique for absorbing the values of the "Spirit of the IDF" in pursuit of "keeping a human image". These techniques are echoed, and if anything amplified, in pedagogy at pre-military academies, which not only infuse their military ethics classes with the use of testimony as a tool of self-examination and pedagogical *parrhesia*, but also provide a number of forums in which the production of testimony is a self-conscious goal.

The practice of testimony as political *parrhesia* is most conspicuous in the work of Breaking the Silence; but its genealogy shares important features with the way testimony appears in Israeli military ethical pedagogy. They both build on a cultural and literary tradition of soldier's testimony; they both emerged as responses to intensifying counterinsurgency; they both oppose themselves to "silence", either in the public sphere or within military units²; above all, they are both manifestations of a form of militarism in which the conduct of the individual soldier has become an important object of scrutiny and discourse. Moreover, when the testimonies produced by Breaking the Silence become material for the pedagogical institutions of Israeli military ethics, its disruptive potential is often neutralised and becomes part of the very fabric of that which they seek to resist.

Understood from this perspective, institutions and individuals which appear at first glance to be operating in fierce opposition to each other are also working, often unwittingly, to produce different features of the same underlying structure. The very fact that the IDF is itself involved in eliciting testimonies from its soldiers about the most violent and troubling features of the occupation confounds the impression one receives from the publicity war being waged over its conduct. The IDF

¹ See chapter 1, 74-75.

² See chapter 2, 127-128, and chapter 4, 182-186.

may prefer to speak about harassment at checkpoints in closed settings through discussion groups and drama workshops; Breaking the Silence may prefer to expose this information to the world. But it is possible for *both* these practices to draw on and reinforce militarism, particularly when neither of them emphasise legal accountability or clear political objectives. In fact, viewed more closely, this is not a battle between silence and truth but a struggle between competing forms of militaristic truth-telling, in which practices of testimony developed in one context are being continually re-implanted elsewhere (cf. Foucault, 2008a: 215).

The soldier-subject under the signifiers of Israeli militarism

It is now apt to recapitulate the features of the soldier-subjectivity which I have argued is produced in testimony and the broader ethics of Israeli militarism. My account of subject formation in this thesis has been heavily influenced by Foucault's work on ethical *autopoiesis*. In particular, I have drawn attention to the ways in which testimony in its various guises can contribute to an ascetic practice of self-cultivation, in which the Israeli soldier seeks to master himself through techniques such as self-examination and mental preparation. However, I have also made clear that these practices sustain an apparatus of militarist governmentality. I analysed how this ethical work complemented the governmental requirements of counterinsurgency, showing how decentralised decision-making and the intimacy of the encounter between the IDF and the Palestinian civilian population accentuated the role for ethics. I have also shown how this emphasis on ethics has been strengthened by a neoliberal rationality emphasising individual freedom and responsibility cultivated through interactions with private moral communities. IDF soldiers are increasingly encouraged to become "entrepreneurs of the self" who strive to improve themselves in contact with Jewish educational charities and informal education programmes such as pre-military academies.

However, for important reasons I have not confined myself to a Foucauldian approach. In addition, I have developed an account of militarist subject formation which takes psychoanalytic claims about the place of the subject in a signifying structure seriously. In the first instance, this allowed me to augment my account of military ethical pedagogy within the IDF. It helped to divulge the crucial role that ideological dis-identification plays in facilitating participation in violence, especially through the

cultivation of a soldier's "human image". It also revealed the importance of the super-egoic dimensions of military asceticism much more clearly, particularly the role of the impossible pursuit of the value of "purity of arms" in masking the political contradictions of maintaining a moral occupation. A psychoanalytic account also provided an analysis of the ways in which the ethics of Israeli militarism is present in the work of *Breaking the Silence*. In particular, it allowed for an understanding of how the affects of guilt and anxiety were produced in testimony and how these came to constrain the possibility of effective political activism.

I have shown the various ideological operations through which the ethics of Israeli militarism attempts to conceal the fundamentally inconsistent nature of its Symbolic order. This inconsistency is both structural and constitutive. Israeli militarism cultivates impossible beliefs about the political reality in Israel/Palestine, most notably the idea of the IDF as a moral army which can enforce an "enlightened occupation". Yet it also offers fantasies to the soldier-subject to mask these inconsistencies: the culpable bystander; the empathetic checkpoint; the impossible pursuit of "purity of arms"; the struggle to preserve the soldier's "human image". These beliefs and fantasies, facile though they may seem, do not simply appear: they must be produced through ethical work. The culture of military asceticism produces them, imbuing them with meaning through repeated exercises. Purity of arms comes to stand for something significant when it is recounted in testimony, turning trivial acts such as the abjuration of a watermelon or the cleaning of a house into seemingly consequential ethical moments.³ Likewise, the idea of showing empathy to Palestinians passing through a checkpoint seems like a meaningful concept when it is practised through drama workshops in a group of one's peers and supervised by a civilian woman.

Occasionally subtle as these ideological mechanisms are, however, it is impossible to avoid encounters with the underlying violence of Israel's occupation: "what is not symbolised returns in the Real" (Chiesa, 2007: 109, n. 19). In this sense, the emergence of *Breaking the Silence* should be understood quite literally as the return-of-the-repressed of the ethics of Israeli militarism. This means not only that this violence is revealed where formally it was hidden, but also that testimony of it

³ See chapter 3, 154-156; 169-170.

emerges from the place of the soldier-subject under the signifiers of Israeli militarism. In other words, this testimony comes from a subject position in which the non-coincidence of the Symbolic and the Real stands out all too clearly – hence the production of affects of guilt and anxiety. To restate the difference between these two affects: guilt emerges when the soldier-subject blames himself for the failure of the Symbolic order to coincide with reality, whereas anxiety is the experience of realising that the Symbolic order itself is inconsistent and lacking.

In chapter four, I argued in detail that insofar as the ethical response promoted by *Breaking the Silence* is guilt, it remains fully complicit in the patterns of militarism generated by ethical pedagogy in the IDF. Moreover, I suggested that, although the shift to anxiety offered a more promising ethical response, a tendency existed for anxiety to relapse into guilt, thereby obscuring other political openings. In addition, I argued that these limiting responses were conditioned by the prior involvement of the soldier-subject in the ethics of Israeli militarism. The inculcation of its values made it all the more difficult for the soldiers who testified to *Breaking the Silence* to escape the patterns of guilt upon which such an ethics depends. Furthermore, the ideological strength of this signifying structure made the experience of anxiety all the more overwhelming and unstable, prompting a tendency to return to guilt through melancholia. In chapter five, I analysed how this tendency to return to guilt was also manifested in the public education and campaigning activities of *Breaking the Silence*. I noted how much of its activism remained implicitly premised on the importance of moral improvement within the military, how many of the audiences reached by the organisation tended to treat their work primarily as evidence for the need for such moral improvement, and how pre-military academies manipulate their message to reinforce their pedagogical objectives.

These tendencies should all underscore the extent to which *Breaking the Silence* remains caught, often despite its activists' best and shrewdest intentions, in the ethics of Israeli militarism. They demonstrate that ethical pedagogy in the IDF and soldiers' testimony in civil society not only cross-pollinate each other but also arise from and participate in an underlying structure of subjectivity which privileges a depoliticised ethics working in support of militarism. Compelling as Foucault's taxonomy of ethical subject formation is, this is an insight which one needs psychoanalysis in order to reach.

The practices and techniques of ethical work often look eerily similar; occasionally the mutual borrowings are striking; but only attention to ideology and the place of the soldier-subject in its signifying order indicates how deeply this mutual implication occurs.

Negotiating ambiguity: militarism in Israel

In the introduction I identified various trends in the literature on the military and militarism in Israel. Specifically, I noted two phases in its explanation for the persistence of militarism in Israel: hegemonic and post-hegemonic.⁴ In the hegemonic phase, scholars noted the strong connection between a social hierarchy in which the Ashkenazi secular elite remained at the top and a pattern of military participation in which the social and cultural rewards of military service accrued mostly to this elite group. As social, political, and demographic change occurred from the 1970s to 1990s, the strength of this hegemonic arrangement deteriorated. Initially, these changes encouraged some scholars to be optimistic about a future decline in militarism. However, the persistence of military violence and the failure of diplomatic initiatives after 2000 put paid to this optimism. Scholars therefore began to offer what I termed post-hegemonic explanations for the persistence of militarism which emphasised trends towards professionalisation and marketisation, growing religiosity, and the management of combat motivation through casualty aversion and remote occupation. While some scholars have identified these trends as possible sources of tension (Cohen, 2008), I want to suggest that ethics has been a crucial means for negotiating the difficulties and ambiguities that these changes have produced, allowing tensions to be expressed and yet held together in a shared framework.

Firstly, I have identified ethics as a crucial component of the organisational changes accompanying professionalisation and marketisation. I identified both of these shifts with neoliberalism, but in doing so I stressed not only its sociological or economic consequences but also the changes it produced in governmental technologies and rationalities. Ethics has been a central part of the project to make the IDF “smarter”, more professional, and attractive to recruits. In particular, this has involved greater concern with the production and management of soldiers’ individual freedom as a supplement to

⁴ See above, 19-22.

traditional hierarchical and collective modes of military mobilisation. Through an analysis of the emergence of the ethical code, the development of courses for officer and soldiers on “Identity and Purpose”, and the growing role of semi-autonomous pre-military academies, I have shown how these attempts have manifested themselves.

Yet I have also pointed out some of the attendant contradictions. In particular, the return of an emphasis on the IDF as a national “People’s Army” has been thoroughly opposed to the perceived trend towards professionalisation. However, even this countervailing project seems inflected with neoliberalism, sharing many of the basic features of its governmental agenda. Rather than representing a return of the collectivist project of the hegemonic era, this new “Jewish People’s Army” (as Libel, 2013, has called it) is focussed on capturing the allegiance of the soldier by providing him with a project for cultivating personal identity and values. It emphasises the development of moral and even religious character, making ever-greater demands on the individual soldier (such as “love of homeland”) even as he is “freed” to make such decisions himself. Indeed, what emerges most clearly of all from these struggles over the professional or popular nature of the IDF is that ethics has been the crucial, and shared, terrain on which they have been fought.

These observations are also applicable regarding the role of religion. I have explored several instances in which religion and ethics have coincided in practices of militarism in this thesis, specifically: the inclusion of “Jewish values” in the redrafted IDF ethical code; the religious emphasis of the *Yi’ud veYihud* educational programme; and ethical practices at mixed and religious pre-military academies. In each case, my argument has been that the incorporation of these religious discourses, practices, and personnel into militarism cannot be separated from a wider emphasis on ethics. As anthropologists of ethics have found, it is very often pious practices which present the clearest and most elaborate examples of programmes of ethical conduct (Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind, 2006; Faubion, 2012a; Laidlaw, 2013). Undoubtedly, the values of these religious modes of ethics often conflict with more widely held or secular points of view. However, the underlying shift towards ethics as a mode of military governance suggests that a growing role for religion most likely complements rather than contradicts these wider developments, indicating that they should serve as important context for

understanding the increasing prominence of religion in Israeli militarism (cf. Cohen, 2008: 107–135; Rosman-Stollman, 2014).

I also argue that ethics has a strong bearing on attempts to manage combat motivation in the IDF. Levy has primarily concentrated on the creation of a “death hierarchy” to explain how the IDF has maintained combat motivation by managing the risk and fatigue to which soldiers are exposed. Taking Gaza as an example, Levy has shown that successive Israeli assaults have grown progressively more deadly for Palestinians as the IDF has become less directly involved in the governing of the Strip (Levy, 2012: 147–180). He argues that, because of the likely level of civilian casualties, seeking “political legitimacy” is now therefore the key constraint in enabling the IDF to deploy force. This is undeniably true. Yet what should also not be overlooked is that the IDF’s emphasis on military ethics has simultaneously increased over this period, suggesting that this has also been an important element of the legitimating framework for the use of force. Indeed, this trend reinforces a central contention of this thesis: that the role of military ethics in Israel has primarily been the ideological facilitation of violence. Importantly, however, this thesis has also shown that the legitimacy provided by military ethics is far more subtle than an all-encompassing justification of every act of violence. In fact, its power lies precisely in the fact that it is able to tolerate a high level of moral ambiguity while working to restore soldiers’ pride in the violence in which they participate. This suggests that the constraints of “legitimacy” on Israeli militarism which Levy identifies, while significant, may not be as great as previously imagined.

Understanding militarism

This thesis also has implications for how we should understand militarism more generally. In particular I have strongly emphasised the connections between militarism and subject formation. In the first instance, this has involved augmenting our understanding of militarism as a form of governmentality. Thus far, Foucauldian studies of war and the military in liberal contexts have tended to emphasise the importance of disciplinary power and biopower ahead of practices of ethical self-cultivation. In this framework, soldiers have generally been understood to be governed either as bodies or as part of a population. To this framework, I have suggested, we should add consideration of

the role of ethical techniques of the self in cementing these other aspects of militarist governmentality. This approach emphasises that soldiers are not simply passive receptors of orders or pawns of military power but also subjects who are encouraged to conduct themselves in accordance with military objectives: soldier-subjects who do not simply implement doctrine but also intuit and decide, who consistently demand more from themselves, and who engage in a reflective effort to be a better person, and even a better religious subject.⁵

In this respect this thesis also makes a contribution to feminist perspectives on militarism. It shows that military masculinities are not only discursive disseminations or bodily performances but also the product of subjective ethical practice. Building on Sasson-Levy's analysis (2008) of gendered militarist identities, for example, I have suggested that the dynamic between "thrill" and "self-control" constitutive of military masculinities can also be expressed through ascetic ethical work. This gendering process is not merely imposed externally by the bodily discipline of military training but is also generated from techniques of subjectivation which soldiers practice *on themselves*. Furthermore, the military masculinity produced by the ethics of Israeli militarism is not a straightforward pursuit of machismo. Particularly insofar as Israeli military ethics is attuned to the requirements of counterinsurgency, it demands deliberate tempering and disciplining of one's masculinity, incorporating a disposition which is often explicitly identified as more feminine.⁶ Indeed, although a limitation of this research is the lack of evidence generated regarding the implications of ethics for militarism among women, whose participation in the IDF is increasing but also challenged by the requirements of growing religiosity, a fruitful line of further inquiry would be to investigate how the changes I have documented might be affecting their experience of military participation.

For all this emphasis on the more self-conscious dimensions of this mode of military power, however, I have also sought to show that subject formation in militarism can also be considered an *unconscious* ideological process. The most commonly used definitions of militarism in sociology and international relations tend to eschew the interpretation of militarism as an ideology. However, this reticence

⁵ See for example chapter 2, 113-114, and chapter 3, 144-145.

⁶ See for example chapter 2, 124, and chapter 3, 153, 174.

mostly relates an outmoded conceptualisation of militarist ideology as a set of beliefs glorifying war and military ways. The understanding of ideology I have sought to deploy in this thesis is indebted to Žižek and the psychoanalytic tradition, stressing the importance of unconscious enjoyment (or *jouissance*) for analysing the behaviour of soldier-subjects. This may seem a paradoxical position, since I have just emphasised the extent to which the ethics of Israeli militarism encourages reflective practices of self-cultivation. As I have stressed, this ethical work is self-directed, and therefore seems to represent the antithesis of unconscious automatism. The apparent paradox disappears, however, when we consider that these practices are focussed on the strengthening of the ego. The task of this ethical work is *self*-mastery, not full autonomy from the signifiers of Israeli militarism. Indeed, it is important to be clear that even the most self-conscious and reflective practices of the ethics of Israeli militarism also leave a deeper subjective trace which precisely strengthens the hold of ideology.

One need only recall the importance of “keeping a human image” in order to grasp this. Ethical pedagogy helps soldiers to consciously dis-identify with the violence of militarism by cultivating a better image of themselves. Yet at the same time this only serves to make their participation in that violence all the easier. This pattern conforms perfectly to Žižek’s understanding of unconscious ideological fantasy:

“What they overlook, what they misrecognise, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion that is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy*.” (Žižek, 2008b: 30)

I have also stressed the extent to which ideological fantasies are crucial in masking the inconsistency of the Symbolic order of Israeli militarism with the realities of military violence. I explained, for example, how the value of “purity of arms” produces a phantasmic object for the soldier to enjoy – a satisfying ascetic pursuit of self-improvement, in which one could always potentially be more pure.

This moral object focuses attention on the conduct of the individual soldier, making the improvement of his behaviour the key to concealing the (ultimately irreducible) gap between the professed norms of Israeli military ethics and the brute facts of occupation. This fantasy diverts attention from any political attempt to dissipate this violence and obfuscates the realisation that this gap is not simply personal or incidental but structural and constitutive.

The strength of such obfuscations is manifested nowhere more clearly than in the constraints it imposes on the work of *Breaking the Silence*, where it pushes the soldiers' ethical response towards the affect of guilt and limits the horizon of ethical possibility to the inherently unstable and politically unreliable experience of anxiety. Indeed, the example of *Breaking the Silence* is especially helpful in revealing the importance of understanding militarism as ideology. A sensitivity to the vicissitudes of ideology shows that the experience of militarism is not always a voluntarist enthusiasm for war. Instead, it reveals that very often the most powerful effects of militarism are also its most ambiguous. Militarism persists in the unconscious traces it leaves even in the minds of those who try to turn against it. It distorts their political diagnosis of the situation with its affective legacies and finds ways to absorb and appropriate the activities and behaviours with which they intend to undermine it.

Towards an anti-militarist ethics

Finally, this thesis has also been concerned with showing the conditions under which ethics can become a militarist practice. The key process which allows this to happen is subject formation: simply put, both ethics and militarism make and remake subjects, and this allows them to encourage one another. Often ethical activities which are undertaken with critical, even political, intent can in fact reinforce this dynamic. This has clear implications for thinking about how ethics might be deployed as part of an anti-militarist strategy, and what use it can have as part of a critical intervention in contexts such as Israel/Palestine.

This thesis has shown the shortcomings of certain ethical approaches to the constraint of violence. Most obviously, it has revealed the limitations of some existing approaches to military ethics based on Just War Theory. Although Just War Theory has already been criticised from within for functioning

as an ideology, the suggested response has often simply been the cultivation of more “reflective” soldiers (Challans, 2007; see also Moseley, 2008). As I have shown, this response is also inadequate. In the Israeli case, it is precisely the cultivation of reflective soldiers which produces this ideology. The more fundamental problem lies in Just War Theory’s attempt to bracket *jus in bello* from *jus ad bellum*, to insulate military ethics from politics when they are fundamentally bound together. Militarism is not simply about the bellicosity of a state’s foreign policy: it is also a subjective disposition, in which war and military formations are made to seem appropriate and desirable. Military ethics can just as easily produce this disposition as undermine it. The proper task of an anti-militarist ethics would be to uncover and critique these fundamentally political processes.

Some alternative ethical approaches have begun to do this, but here caution is also advisable. One common avenue of critique has been that the development of military technology has removed the “human” element of warfare, making ethical processes programmatic and even robotic (Coker, 2013; Schwarz, 2013: 185–208). While perspectives which have sought to recover the on-going human dimension of remote warfare are welcome (Holmqvist, 2013), this thesis suggests that we cannot be too sanguine or uncritical about any straightforward return to the human either, especially when it is soldiers’ human image that military ethics seeks to cultivate. Once again, there is a politics to this process which cannot be overlooked. As feminist and post-colonial perspectives reveal, a discourse of “just” or “humane” warfare is often complicit in the production of military masculinities and civilisational hierarchies (Elshtain, 1995; Owens, 2010; Kinsella, 2011). In this thesis, I have shown that such ethical discourses work to strengthen the fabric of Israeli militarism through the production of ethical subjects.

Indeed, what has consistently emerged in this study is that it is political questions which can most often be obscured by military ethics. The colonial origins of counterinsurgency, the fundamentally settler-colonial and racist structures underpinning the Israeli occupation, the patriarchal nature of the military, the fundamental militarism of Israeli society – all of these are regularly effaced in the examples discussed in this thesis. This is true even when ethics becomes a terrain of contestation, as the experience of *Breaking the Silence* shows. When the political field is so circumscribed, even a

Foucauldian recourse to *parrhesia* or a Lacanian ethics of anxiety do not seem sufficient on their own. What is more, they often seem effective in strengthening the edifice of militarism, which deploys its own ethical techniques to capture and discipline this criticism.

What I have primarily insisted on above, then, is the importance of restoring politics to the ethics of war and violence in order to rescue it from such a militarist re-appropriation. An ethics which seeks merely to restrain the excesses of military violence, or which seeks merely to develop procedures, standards, or dispositions which are averse to those excesses, cannot alter the political realities which make militarism possible. At a certain point, these realities must be confronted and resisted on their own terms. While this alternative unquestionably entails tremendous difficulties and risks, my final conclusion is that this is the only way that ethics can reliably break with militarism.

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List of interviews

Name	Role	Date	Location
Anonymous	Founding member of Breaking the Silence	29th January 2013	Jerusalem
Idan Barir	Testifier to Breaking the Silence	12th December 2012	Tel Aviv
Yishai Beer	Major General (reserves) in the IDF; former Judge Advocate General; member of committee to redraft IDF ethical code; teacher of ethics in the IDF	15th March 2013	Jerusalem
Yochanan Ben-Ya'akov	Education Ministry official responsible for pre-military academies	30th April 2013	Jerusalem
Daniel Berkeley	Teacher at Nachshon Academy	11th March 2013	Sde Yoav
Nadav Bigelman	Activist in Breaking the Silence	25th November 2012	Jerusalem
Ya'akov Castel	Former education director of the IDF; member of committee to redraft IDF ethical code; convenor of <i>Maḥzabim</i> and <i>Lev Aharon</i> programmes	13th March 2013	Jerusalem
Noam Chayut	Activist in Breaking the Silence	7th February 2013	Haifa
Michael Cohen	Teacher at Keshet Yehuda Pre-Military Academy	23rd April 2013	Keshet
Hillel Cohen	Activist in Breaking the Silence	15th January 2013	Beer Sheva
Yael Domba	Head of Jerusalemite Pre-Military Academy	21st November 2012	Jerusalem
Atar Dagan	Colonel in the IDF	3 rd May 2013	Telephone conversation
Eran Efrati	Former activist and testimony collector in Breaking the Silence	25th February 2013	Jerusalem
Ilan Fathi	Former education director of Breaking the Silence	4th December 2012	Beer Sheva
Michal Feuras	Convenor of soldiers' drama workshops at <i>Beit Morasha</i>	7th March 2013, 9th April 2013	Tel Aviv
Dana Golan	Former executive director of Breaking the Silence	10th December 2012	Tel Aviv
Ben Tzion Gruber	Colonel in the IDF; teacher of ethics in the IDF	1st May 2013	Tel Aviv
Moshe Halbertal	Professor of Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; member of committee to redraft IDF ethical code; teacher of ethics in the IDF	7th April 2013	Jerusalem

Ilana Hammerman	Editor of two anthologies of soldiers' testimonies	5th May 2013	Jerusalem
Amos Harel	Defence Correspondent, Ha'aretz	1st May 2013	Tel Aviv
Shai Herskowitz	Convenor of Identity and Purpose Programme at <i>Beit Morasha</i>	7th May 2013	Latrun
Gil Hillel	Activist in Breaking the Silence	15th March 2013	Tel Aviv
Guy Immerman	Teacher at Telem Pre-Military Academy	7th March 2013	Tel Aviv
Ayal Kantz	Former education director at Breaking the Silence	1st May 2013	Tel Aviv
Asa Kasher	Professor of Philosophy at Tel Aviv University; principal author of IDF ethical code; teacher of ethics in the IDF	28th April 2013	Ramat Gan
Micha Kurz	Former (founding) member of Breaking the Silence	14th January 2013	Jerusalem
Reuven Mass	Teacher at Karmeit Hayil Pre-Military Academy	22nd April 2013	Beit Rimon
Avi Mograbi	Director; member of Breaking the Silence board of trustees	1st April 2013	Tel Aviv
David Nachman	Director of Ein Prat Pre-Military Academy	28th January 2013	Kfar Adumim
Avi Sagi	Professor of Philosophy at Bar Ilan University; member of committee to redraft IDF ethical code; teacher of ethics in the IDF	3rd April 2013	Jerusalem
Micha Shalvi	Teacher at several pre-military academies	18th April 2013 5 th May 2013	Jerusalem; telephone conversation
Ohad Shamama	Teacher at Lakhish Pre-Military Academy	20th January 2013	Beit Guvrin
Itamar Shapira	Former activist in Breaking the Silence	21st January 2013	Jerusalem
Daniel Statman	Professor of Philosophy at Haifa University; member of committee to redraft IDF ethical code; teacher of ethics in the IDF	28th February 2013	Jerusalem
Avichai Stollar	Head of testimonies project at Breaking the Silence	13th March 2013	Jerusalem
Roni Sulimani	Former education director of IDF	4th April 2013	Latrun
Shachar Tzemach	Activist in Breaking the Silence	3rd March 2013	Beer Sheva
Nadav Weiman	Activist in Breaking the Silence	5th December 2012	Tel Aviv
Shuki Yoshav	Former member of Soldiers Against Silence	28th November 2012	Jerusalem
Dani Zamir	Director of Rabin Pre-Military Academy; Chair of the Joint Council of Pre-Military Academies	30th November 2012	Tiv'on

Appendix A: “The Spirit of the IDF”, first version, 1994

Preface¹

1. The Spirit of the IDF is the moral and normative identity card of the IDF as an organisation, which stands as the foundation for all actions carried out by all men and women soldiers in the framework of the IDF.
2. The Spirit of the IDF includes eleven IDF values, presenting the essence of each one of them, and detailing its definition and parameters. The Spirit of the IDF also contains basic principles that express these values.
3. The Spirit of the IDF draws its values and basic principles from three traditions:
 - a. The traditions of the Jewish people throughout the generations.
 - b. The traditions of the State of Israel, as expressed in its democratic principles, its laws and its institutions.
 - c. The traditions of the IDF and its battle heritage as the defence forces of Israel.
4. The Spirit of the IDF is the code of ethics according to which all the IDF’s soldiers, officers, units and forces will comport themselves, and it will serve in molding their patterns of action. They will educate and critique themselves and their fellows in accordance with the Spirit of the IDF.
5. The complex nature of military activity in general, and of combat in particular, is liable to produce conflicts among the values and basic principles of the Spirit of the IDF, and to raise problems in judgement and decision-making regarding the balance required among them in practice. The obligation to execute the mission and to win in the war will be the compass in every effort to arrive at a proper balance within the system of values and basic principles of the Spirit of the IDF. The effort to attain the proper balance in light of this compass will permit the preservation of the IDF as a principled and high-quality organisation, which properly executes all its obligations and missions.

The Values

Pursuit of the Mission

The soldier will fight and otherwise act with the utmost bravery, notwithstanding any and all dangers and obstacles in his path. He will move forward and be tenacious and brave in the pursuit of his mission, persistently and intelligently, and will not flinch from risking his life.

The pursuit of the mission of IDF soldiers means their ability and readiness to fight bravely, even in the face of danger and in the most arduous of situations, carrying on and pushing ahead to reach their objective, in accordance with the circumstances, fully and efficiently, with thoughtfulness and without haste, despite any difficulty, pressure or suffering, or even danger to their lives.

¹ Translation adapted with modifications from Hauser (1997: 64–72) and Kasher (1996: 230–237).

Responsibility

The soldier will see himself as an active partner in the security of the country and its citizens, carrying out his duties decisively and quickly within the bounds of his authority.

The responsibility of IDF soldiers means their effective partnership and readiness to fully utilise their maximum ability to defend the country and its sovereignty and the life and safety of its citizens, within the bounds of their authority. They will demonstrate complete and rapid implementation of their functions, with continual involvement, initiative and perseverance, and with absolute readiness to take part in every endeavour.

Integrity

The soldier will aspire, in all his actions, to fulfill his orders in the proper fashion, with the highest professional standard, from meticulous and painstaking preparations for the mission up through accurate, honest, complete and exact reporting of its results.

The integrity of IDF troops means that they carry out all military operations to the fullest possible extent, on the basis of their expertise, with a belief and awareness that they are acting in the proper professional manner, with unflagging eagerness to be scrupulous in planning, implementation and accurate reporting, exhaustively and meticulously, bravely, frankly and fairly.

Personal Example

The soldier will behave according to what is expected of him, and will act in the way that he himself demands of others, with sympathy and intelligence, aware of his ability and responsibility to be a shining beacon for all those around him.

The personal example of IDF soldiers means acting according to the highest standard in whatever is demanded of them, from them and by them, with genuine and unshakable readiness to serve as an example to all those around them, in their actions and their behaviour; to produce, perpetuate and expand mutual understanding and joint responsibility for implementation of assignments and attainment of objectives in the proper manner, in all areas of military endeavour.

Human Life

The soldier will do his utmost to preserve human life, with an awareness of its supreme importance, and will endanger himself and his colleagues only to the extent necessary for implementation of the mission.

The sanctity of life in the eyes of IDF troops will be manifest in all of their actions, in thoughtful and precise planning, in astute and safely conducted exercises and in proper implementation, in

accordance with the mission, with the appropriate level of risk and caution, and with continual effort to restrict the loss of human life to the extent required by the mission.

Purity of Arms

The soldier will use his weapon and his power to vanquish the enemy only to the degree required, and will exercise self-restraint in order to prevent unnecessary harm to human life, body, honour and property.

Purity of arms among IDF troops means the restrained use they make of their weapons and their power in the implementation of missions, only to the extent necessary for their attainment, without unnecessary harm to human life, body, honour and property, whether to troops or civilians (especially the defenceless), during war and security operations as well as during times of peace and tranquillity.

Professionalism

The soldier will aspire to be aware of and understand the expertise involved in his military role, and will be competent in all skills connected with the performance of his duties.

The professionalism of IDF soldiers means their ability to carry out their military function properly, with an effort to attain excellence and continual upgrading of their accomplishments and those of their units, through broadening of knowledge and sharpening of skills, taking into account the cumulative lessons of experience and research, while continually broadening and deepening their military know-how.

Discipline

The soldier will strive towards complete and successful implementation of all that is demanded of him according to his orders and their spirit, in the framework of the law.

The discipline of IDF troops means their readiness to act with all their faculties to carry out what is demanded of them, fully and successfully, according to their understanding of the orders and in keeping with their spirit, with the continual aspiration to understand and internalise, while taking care to give lawful orders and repudiate those that are manifestly illegal.

Loyalty

The soldier will act with utter devotion to the defence of the State of Israel and all its citizens, in accordance with IDF orders, within the framework of the laws of the state and the principles of democracy.

The loyalty of IDF soldiers lies in their devotion, in all their deeds, to their homeland the State of Israel, to all its citizens, and to its army, and in their continual readiness to fight, to devote all their strength, and even to sacrifice their lives in defence of the lives of its residents and their well-being, and in defence of the sovereign State of Israel, in accordance with the values of the IDF and its orders, and while upholding the laws of the state and its democratic principles.

Representation

The soldier will see himself always as the representative and agent of the IDF, acting only within the bounds of his authority and orders.

Representation of IDF soldiers means the awareness, manifest in all of their actions, that the military power in their hands and the right to use it are given to them only by virtue of their belonging to the IDF, in their capacity as responsible agents carrying out their functions in its service, within its authorities, according to orders and decisions made by the IDF, the army of the State of Israel, acting according to its laws, and subject to the authority of its government.

Camaraderie

The soldier will always come to the aid of his comrades when they are in need or dependent upon him, notwithstanding any danger or difficulty, even to the point of self-sacrifice.

The camaraderie of IDF soldiers means *esprit de corps*, everlasting devotion to one another, readiness to extend deserved help, even to endanger their lives for their comrades in arms. They will act to preserve and bolster the cohesiveness of their unit, with full cooperation among different units, maintaining uniformity of aims throughout the IDF.

Guiding Principles

A. Values

1. The soldier, in all of his actions and deeds, will incorporate the basic values of the IDF: pursuit of the mission, responsibility, integrity, personal example, human life, purity of arms, professionalism, discipline, loyalty, representation and camaraderie, in accordance with their definition and with the circumstances encountered.
2. The soldier will take into account, in all his activities during his military service, that he bears responsibility not only for the results of his actions and omissions, but also for the patterns of behaviour that he helps to produce, through his orders or his personal example, explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally.

B. In Military Service

3. The soldier will see himself, in all his various actions, as bearing full and pivotal responsibility for the lives of the troops and all others who are dependent on his actions and decisions.
4. The soldier will be prepared to endanger his life when encountering the enemy, and to save human life (to the extent necessary), but will do everything possible to preserve his life and that of his comrades in any other military activity.
5. The soldier will take into account, in all relevant contexts, not only proper concern for human life, but also the influence his actions have on the spiritual and physical integrity of the individual, and on his honour.
6. The soldier will endeavour to utilise all of his faculties to the maximum degree possible, in line with the demands made of him and with the preference given by the IDF to combat and command roles.
7. The soldier, in all his deeds, will scrupulously protect the honour of the country, its institutions, sites and symbols, including the IDF's honour and symbols.
8. The soldier will show particular reverence for his fallen comrades. He will act respectfully at cemeteries, memorial displays and remembrance ceremonies, and will treat the bereaved families with deference.
9. The soldier will preserve the IDF tradition of honouring disabled and wounded IDF veterans.
10. The soldier will preserve the IDF tradition of learning IDF battle lore and of helping to boost the spirit of his unit.
11. The soldier will not express his personal opinions on issues beyond his area of responsibility, authority and professional skill, and certainly not his personal opinions on political, social or ideological topics subject to public debate.
12. The soldier will use his power and his military, command or professional status only for the good of the IDF, never using them illegitimately in order to advance a personal interest or any other objective that is beyond the boundaries of his authority and responsibility, whether by the letter or spirit of the law, within or without the IDF.
13. The soldier will see himself as responsible for the results of actions taken under his orders, and will stand behind anyone acting in line with them or in an otherwise proper fashion. The soldier will see himself as responsible for behavioural patterns that he has instilled.
14. The soldier will stand by his unit and its commanders in every effort necessary to fulfill the unit's missions, and in building, developing and utilising military force. The soldier will obey his superiors as required by law and will respect his superiors, colleagues and subordinates.
15. The soldier will not conceal any infraction or mishap and will dismiss any suggestion to be a partner in such enterprise. In the face of an infraction or mishap, the soldier will act intelligently and do whatever is needed to remedy the misdeed.

16. The soldier participating in a discussion or argument connected with IDF activity, before, during or after implementation, will take a stand and express his opinion in line with his knowledge and professional belief, honestly, bravely and fairly.
17. The soldier will use the force at his disposal towards another person only in a fair, restrained, intelligent and professional fashion, showing the proper respect for the privacy of the body and life of the other.
18. The soldier will see his appearance in IDF uniform as a symbol of his loyalty to the principles and basic guidelines of the IDF.

C. Encountering the Enemy

19. In every encounter with the enemy, the soldier will use the force at his disposal bravely and wisely, while demonstrating tenacity, and with on-going readiness to fulfill all his duties, notwithstanding danger to his life or any other obstacle.
20. The soldier will be prepared to do whatever is necessary, even risk his life, in order to rush to the aid of his comrades and not to abandon wounded troops on the battlefield.
21. The soldier will act, in every encounter with the enemy, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the laws of war, preserving the purity of arms and ethics of warfare.
22. The soldier will treat enemy soldiers and civilians, in areas controlled by the IDF, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the laws of war, and only within the bounds of his duties.
23. The soldier will act fairly, restrained to the extent necessary, wisely and professionally, within the bounds of his duties, in every contact with civilians residing or otherwise present in areas controlled by the IDF, whether during combat or thereafter. The soldier will respect, as much as possible, the beliefs, values, and holy and historical sites of these civilians, according to the principles and basic guidelines of the IDF, and to military necessity under the given circumstances.
24. The soldier will fight and strive up to the limit of his endurance, even when his life is threatened, in order to avoid surrendering to the enemy; on the contrary, the enemy must be overcome. The soldier will not surrender to the enemy as long as he has a chance to carry out his mission. Even barring this circumstance, the soldier will not surrender as long as he is in communication with his commander or is able to evacuate.
25. The soldier who, despite everything, falls captive, will act in accordance with IDF directives, responsibly, thoughtfully and honourably.

D. With Regard to Civilian Bodies

26. The soldier will give preference to the aims of the IDF, in keeping with its directives, orders, principles and basic guidelines, over the advancement of any civilian organisation, in any case of conflict between the aims of the IDF and those of the organisation.

27. The soldier will conduct all official contacts with civilian bodies in a professional manner and without impairing the principles, basic guidelines and honour of the IDF.
28. The soldier may be connected with a commercial or civilian body only in accordance with existing orders and practices, in their letter and spirit, and within the bounds of his duties.
29. The soldier will refuse personal favours derived from his role, rank, status or actions. The soldier will not request and will not agree to receive favours of any kind from any source, within or without the IDF, directly or indirectly, whether for himself or for someone else, except in line with existing orders and practices.
30. The soldier will take care, in any public appearance (especially in the media), to secure prior approval, to express absolute and unflinching loyalty to the principles and basic guidelines of the IDF, to represent the policies and decisions of the IDF, and to contribute to the public's faith in the IDF.
31. The soldier will be certain that his behaviour in private circumstances cannot be interpreted as detrimental to the IDF's principles and basic guidelines, nor harmful to the public's faith in the IDF, nor contributing to the creation of behavioural patterns liable to impair the realisation of the IDF's principles and basic guidelines.

E. In Reserves and Retirement

32. The soldier will act, during his reserve duty, according to the same IDF principles and basic guidelines that apply to the soldier in regular service.
33. The discharged soldier may use privileged or sensitive information coming into his possession during his military service only with appropriate permission to use this information for commercial, media or other purpose outside the framework of IDF service, to advance a personal or other aim.
34. The discharged soldier will make use of his military status, including his reserve or retirement rank, or will give others permission to do so, after finishing his tour of active duty, only in civilian contexts in which there is no harm to the IDF's principles, basic guidelines, honour or trust placed in it by the public.

Appendix B: “The Spirit of the IDF”, updated version, 2001

Preface¹

The Israel Defence Forces are the State of Israel’s military force. The IDF is subordinate to the directions of the democratic civilian authorities and the laws of the state. The goal of the IDF is to protect the existence of the State of Israel and her independence, and to thwart all enemy efforts to disrupt the normal way of life in Israel. IDF soldiers are obligated to fight, to dedicate all their strength and even sacrifice their lives in order to protect the State of Israel, her citizens and residents. IDF soldiers will operate according to the IDF values and orders, while adhering to the laws of the state and norms of human dignity, and honouring the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

“The Spirit of the IDF” – Definition and Origins

The Spirit of the IDF is the identity card of the IDF values, which it is appropriate that should stand as the foundation of all of the activities of every IDF soldier, on regular or reserve duty. The Spirit of the IDF and the guidelines of operation resulting from it are the ethical code of the IDF. The Spirit of the IDF will be applied by the IDF, its soldiers, its officers, its units and corps to shape their mode of action. They will behave, educate and evaluate themselves and others according to the Spirit of the IDF.

The Spirit of the IDF draws on four sources:

- The tradition of the IDF and its military heritage as the Israel Defence Forces.
- The tradition of the State of Israel, its democratic principles, laws and institutions.
- The tradition of the Jewish People throughout their history.
- Universal moral values based on the value and dignity of human life.

Fundamental Values

Defence of the State, its Citizens and its Residents – The IDF’s goal is to defend the existence of the State of Israel, its independence and the security of the citizens and residents of the state.

Love of Homeland and Loyalty to the State – At the core of service in the IDF stand the love of the homeland and the commitment and devotion to the State of Israel – a democratic state that serves as a national home for the Jewish People – to its citizens and to its residents.

Human Dignity – The IDF and its soldiers are obligated to protect human dignity. Every human being is of value regardless of his or her origin, religion, nationality, gender, status or position.

¹ Translated adapted with modifications from: http://www.aka.idf.il/SIP_STORAGE/FILES/4/47634.pdf [accessed 16th June 2015].

Values

Pursuit of the Mission and Drive to Victory – IDF servicemen and women will fight and conduct themselves with courage in the face of all dangers and obstacles. They will persevere in their missions resolutely and thoughtfully even to the point of endangering their lives.

Responsibility – The IDF serviceman or woman will see themselves as active participants in the defence of the state, its citizens and residents. They will carry out their duties at all times with initiative, involvement, and diligence with common sense and within the framework of their authority, while prepared to bear responsibility for their conduct.

Honesty – The IDF servicemen and women shall present things objectively, completely, and precisely, in planning, performing, and reporting. They will act in such a manner that their peers and commanders can rely upon them in performing their tasks.

Personal Example – The IDF servicemen and women will comport themselves as required of them, and will demand of themselves as they demand of others, out of recognition of their ability and responsibility within the military and without to serve as a deserving role model.

Human Life – The IDF servicemen and women will act in a judicious and safe manner in all they do, out of recognition of the supreme value of human life. During combat they will endanger themselves and their comrades only to the extent required to carry out their mission.

Purity of Arms – The IDF servicemen and women will use their weapons and force only for the purpose of their mission, only to the necessary extent and will maintain his human image even during combat. IDF soldiers will not use their weapons and force to harm human beings who are not combatants or prisoners of war, and will do all in their power to avoid causing harm to their lives, bodies, dignity and property.

Professionalism – The IDF servicemen and women will acquire the professional knowledge and skills required to perform their tasks, and will implement them while striving continuously to perfect their personal and collective achievements.

Discipline – The IDF servicemen and women will strive to the best of their ability to fully and successfully complete all that is required of them according to orders and their spirit. IDF soldiers will be meticulous in giving only lawful orders, and shall refrain from obeying manifestly illegal orders.

Camaraderie – The IDF servicemen and women will act out of fraternity and devotion to their comrades, and will always go to their assistance when they need their help or depend on them, despite any danger or difficulty, even to the point of risking their lives.

Representation – The IDF soldiers view their service in the IDF as a mission. They will be ready to give their all in order to defend the state, its citizens and residents. This is due to the fact that they are representatives of the IDF who act on the basis and in the framework of the authority given to them in accordance with IDF orders.