

Between Militarism and Pacifism: Conscientious Objection and Draft Resistance in Israel

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Introduction

The outbreak of the Palestinian *Intifada* in 2000 prompted many Israelis to object to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories by refusing their reserve call-up or by resisting the draft. They have established and were active in four social movements (*Yesh Gvul*, *Courage to Refuse*, *New Profile* and *Shministim*) which supported conscientious objectors and draft resisters as well as argued against Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. By analysing a total of 87 in-depth interviews with members of the four movements, this study attempts to answer the following question: ‘What are the critical discourses voiced by Israeli conscientious objectors and draft resisters, and how can their emergence on the Israeli public sphere be explained?’

The analysis of these interviews demonstrated that in their appeal to Israeli public members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* utilized symbolic meanings and codes derived from dominant militarist and nationalist discourses. In contrast, draft-resisters, members of *New Profile* and *Shministim*, refusing to manipulate nationalistic and militaristic codes, voices a much more radical and comprehensive critique of the state’s war making plans. Invoking feminist, anti-militarist and pacifist ideologies, they openly challenge and criticize dominant militarist and Zionist discourses. While the majority of members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* choose selective refusal, negotiating conditions of their reserve duty, anti-militarist, pacifist, and feminist ideological stance of members of *New Profile* and *Shministim* leads them to absolutist refusal.

How can these differences in the movements’ discourses be explained? I contend that the two different critical discourses and patterns of refusal can be understood in the context of recent socio-economic, political and cultural

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changes within Israeli society. In recent decades Israel has undergone a process of cultural and structural demilitarization which has resulted in a diminishment of the prestige and importance of military service in civilian life. Simultaneously, the dominant Zionist discourse, which considers Israel as a Jewish state, has been challenged by a post-Zionist critique. Post-Zionism, criticizing the discriminatory nature of the state defined in nationalistic terms, provides a vision of a more civil and liberal Israel. Both demilitarization and post-Zionist critique have particularly affected the Israeli middle and upper classes: that is the urban, secular and mostly Ashkenazi stratum of Israeli society – the very stratum to which Israeli conscientious objectors and draft-resisters belong.² Their critical discourses, therefore, can be seen as an integral part of the socio-political and cultural changes that have emerged in Israel in the past decades.

The first half of this paper begins with the brief introduction of the movements under study. It then moves to the discussion of the socio-political and cultural changes in Israeli society mentioned above. They provide a background for understanding the movements' discourses presented in the second half of the paper.

The Movements

Yesh Gvul was founded during the first Lebanon War (1982–1985). It became the first social movement in Israel which supported willing to refuse combat soldiers and officers. With the onset of the first Palestinian *Intifada* (1987–1991) the movement resumed its activities and began to counsel soldiers and officers who refused to serve in the Occupied Territories backing them morally and financially. It was also active during the second Palestinian *Intifada*, but was less visible on the Israeli public sphere due to appearance of new organizations which offered their support to conscientious objectors and draft resisters.

The outbreak of the second Palestinian *Intifada* in October 2000 opened a new chapter in the history of conscientious objection in Israel, marked by the proliferation of movements supporting the refusal. Alongside *Yesh Gvul*, three other organizations began to advocate refusal to serve in the Occupied Territories and to support those willing to refuse their military duty: *Courage to Refuse*, *Shministim* and *New Profile*. There is however a significant difference between these organizations both in their socio-demographic characteristics and their ideological orientations. While *Courage to Refuse*, similarly to *Yesh Gvul* was comprised of reserve combat soldiers and officers and advocated selective refusal to serve in the Occupied Territories, *Shministim* and *New Profile* were mainly

² The absolute majority of the interviewed for this study conscientious objectors and draft resisters come from major cities (Tel Aviv or Jerusalem), secular, middle class families. Similar picture with regard to refusers' socio-demographic profile emerges from the studies of Israeli scholars on conscientious objectors to the first Lebanon War (Helman 1999a, 2003) and first *Intifada* (Linn 1995, 1996).

comprised of high-school students (or those who just finished high-school) and supported absolutist refusal. Moreover, due to the fact that combat service in Israel is almost exclusively comprised of male reservists, almost all members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* are male. In contrast, both *Shministim* and *New Profile* are mixed movements comprised of female and male activists. The differences between the movements are summarized in Table 1.³

| Movement | Average Age | Birth Cohort | Membership | Type of Refusal |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Yesh Gvul | 46 | 60's | male combat soldiers and officers | selective |
| Courage to Refuse | 28.8 | 70's | male combat soldiers and officers | selective |
| New Profile | 21 | 80's | majority are female activists | any type of refusal |
| Shministim | 19.4 | 80's | female and male high-school students | any type of refusal |

Table 1

From Militarism to Demilitarisation

In his classic article titled ‘Militarism in Israeli society’, Kimmerling (1993) argued “whether we like it or not – our society is militarist par excellence. Militarism is a central organizational principle around which Israeli society revolves, works, determines its boundaries, its identity, and the accepted rules of the game.”⁴ (p.124). This militarisation is expressed in the profound influence of military matters on the political, economic, judicial and educational spheres of Israeli society. In the political sphere, militarisation is evident from the centrality of security matters in decision-making processes and the importance of military experience for political careers (Ben-Eliezer 1997). Furthermore, the Israeli political map is structured according to political actors’ solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: left-leaning parties traditionally support a ‘two-state solution’ to the conflict and the withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, while right-wing parties advocate an idea of “Greater Israel” which implies continuation of the Occupation and of the settlement enterprise. In the economic sphere, militarisation is expressed in the allocation of a large proportion of the budget to military needs. Israeli education, particularly schooling, is oriented toward the perpetuation of the military ethos through memorial ceremonies and preparation of youth for the military service which is part of their curriculum

³ The calculations of ‘average age’ and ‘birth cohorts’ presented in the Table 1 are based on the interviews with the members of the movements.

⁴ The article was originally published in Hebrew, my translation was informed by the translation of the same quotation found in Feige (1998:87).

(Levi et al. 2007). Another indicator of the militarisation of the society is the convertibility of military virtues into the advantages in civilian life (Levy 2004). In Israel, ex-officers with prominent military careers are “parachuted” not only into positions of power in political sphere, but into all others spheres. Retired high-ranking officers, argues Kalev (2006), “become directors of banks and high-tech firms, senior-level managers of business and industrial projects, principals of schools and the heads of educational institutions.”(p.268)

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the militarisation of the Israeli society is its cultural expression. Having analysed the cultural and cognitive dimensions of militarisation of Israeli society, Kimmerling (1993, 2001) conceptualizes the Israeli order as ‘civil militarism’. The difference between civil militarism and other forms of militarism is that the former implies internalization of conflict and war preparation by ‘most statesmen, politicians and the general public as a self-evident reality whose imperatives transcend partisan or social allegiances’ (Kimmerling 2001: 215). The social significance attributed to military service, the prioritization of security matters over any other political or economic considerations, the cognitive orientation toward constant war preparation is what Kimmerling (2001) coins ‘militarism of the mind’ (ibid). Military service, which delineates the boundaries of the political community, is identified ‘as the ultimate token of political obligation as well as the highest contribution to the achievement of collective goals (Helman 1999a:393). It is perceived as an expression of loyalty to the state and as such it defines the hierarchy of belonging to the state, determining ‘who is a “patriot” and to what extent’ (Sason-Levy 2002:360).

Exploring cultural dimensions of militarisation, several phenomenological studies have investigated how war and military service construct the life-world of Israelis. Helman’s study (1999b) based on interviews with conscientious objectors of the Lebanon War shows that military service is identified by her interviewees with Israeliness. They overwhelmingly state “Israelis are only those that went through the army” (Helman 1999b:201). It is perceived as an entry ticket to the public sphere which grants right to equal participation and legitimizes critical opinions of state policies (ibid). Another study, based on interviews conducted with Israeli men who took part in the Yom Kippur war, demonstrates the pattern of normalization and integration of the war into the personal biographies of the war veterans (Lomsky-Feder 1995). In their narratives war appears as an inevitable and natural part of the life of Israeli society (ibid).

Crisis of Civil Militarism

Despite this high level of militarisation, compared to other democratic countries, in the past two decades Israel has experienced a shift in military-society relations expressed in the diminishing influence of the army. The institutional and cultural changes which Israel has underwent in recent decades translated

into a legitimization crisis experienced by Israeli army as well as a motivation crisis among conscripts and reservists. In other words, the Israeli army seems to be gradually losing its legitimization and prestige among Israelis. As a consequence the motivation of conscripts to complete their military service is falling, in particular of those belonging to traditional elites of Israeli society.

This gradual demilitarisation is an outcome of several inter-related processes. Firstly, the hegemonic status of ‘the security ethos’ has diminished. The old collectivistic ethos of heroism and self-sacrifice for the common good has been replaced by more individualistic, democratic and civil values. (Peri 2001a) The latter led to the re-conceptualization of the social role model: the role model of contemporary Israeli youth is not a combat officer of the elite unit, but rather a ‘high tech entrepreneur, lawyer or media celebrity’ (Peri 2001a:109). Secondly, in the past two decades the IDF has been losing its social prestige due to perceived failure to ‘deliver the goods’ (Peri 2001 a). Since the Lebanon War (1982–1985), during the first *Intifada* (1987–1993) and in mid nineties during the occupation of the Lebanese territory, the army was repeatedly criticized for the way it handled these campaigns. Their very legitimacy was challenged by peace movements and conscientious objectors. Thirdly, in recent years the influence of the military on civilian institutions diminished while civilian control over the military increased. This process is expressed in the greater intervention of both judicial system and social organizations into the military affairs.⁵ (Ben-Eliezer 1997, Levy 2004, Levy et al. 2007, Peri 2001a, Shtern 1998)

In addition, the IDF itself, as a result of a surplus of manpower in the past two decades, has undergone structural changes.⁶ A sharp increase in the number of potential conscripts led the IDF to reconsider its recruitment policy and the length of the service. The recruitment policy became more flexible allowing a larger proportion of conscripts to be exempt from service; the length of combat reserve service was also shortened.⁷ (ibid) The sharp rise in exemptions given on a basis of psychological unsuitability during the service – from 3% in 1992 to 10.1% in 2004 – is just one of the indications of the changing approach

⁵ The greater control of the civilian sphere over military is expressed in greater involvement of the parents of conscripts in the conditions of their service, as well as greater accountability of the military to parent’s lobby groups (Levy et.al. 2007, Levy 2004, Peri 2001a). During the 1990s there was also an increase in criticism of the military in the Israeli media (Peri, 2001a, 2001b).

⁶ Between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s there was a rise of more than 25% in the population of individuals between the age of 18–21, and an almost 59% rise in the number of potential reservists due to the large emigration wave from the former Soviet Union. (Peri 2001a:122)

⁷ IDF expressed greater flexibility in exempting conscripts with a low physiological profile (‘21 profile’), and in discharging soldiers during the service who were categorized as unsuitable for military service. As a result approximately 25% of men eligible for service are not conscripted and approximately 20% are discharged before completion of the service due to ‘unsuitability’ (Peri 2001a:125). Nevo & Shor (2002a) estimate that in 2010 only 50% of all those eligible for service will complete the full term of duty (p.14–15).

of the army (Yushua 2005). One of the high-ranking officers from the IDF human resources unit, commenting on the trend, argued ‘it is highly unlikely that one in 10 Israelis suffers from such a serious psychological problem that she has to be exempt from the army on this basis. The psychological health of Israeli youth could not have deteriorated to such an extent’ (ibid). This trend, however, is not only an outcome of the army’s flexibility toward unwilling conscripts, but is also a reflection of underlying cultural change. Although the army’s human resources department described it as a ‘Loss of values in Israeli society’, arguing that ‘what once was seen as a shame, now became a norm’ (ibid), the trend seems to be rather an indication of diminishing importance of the military service for civilian life in contemporary Israel.

The ‘erosion of the hegemonic military ethos’ (Levy et. al. 2007) is discussed in the Israeli press and among Israeli scholars as a ‘motivation crisis’ among potential conscripts and reservists (p.28).⁸ While in comparative perspective the motivation of Israeli youth to serve in the military seems to be quite high⁹, in the past two decades there has been a gradual decrease in motivation to serve in combat units, to volunteer for command courses and to continue military service after completion of compulsory duty (Levy 2004, Levy et. al. 2007; Peri 2001). Simultaneously, there has been an increase in the number conscripts asking to be placed in rear roles and applying for exemptions for mental health reasons before and during the military service (ibid). The rise in evasion of reserve call-up is just one of the symptoms of the motivation crisis. Recently, the evasion became so widespread that the whole concept of a ‘people’s army’ which implies universal conscription and equally distributed burden of reserve service became irrelevant.

The inequality in distribution of the burden of reserve service is evident from the following data: in 2000, only 12% of men out of all Jewish men between the ages of 21–45 served more than four days in reserve and only

⁸ See Cohen (1997), Cohen & Bagno (2001:138–142), Levy (2004), Levy et al (2007), Nevo & Shor (2002a:14–15), Nevo & Shor (2002b), Peri (2001), Shtern (1998)

⁹ In 1994 a survey conducted by IDF showed that 50% of respondents replied that they would volunteer to a full three years of service even if it would be voluntary, and 44% said that they would volunteer for a shorter period (Peri 2001:126). The data published by the Israel Democracy Institute shows that 84% of the respondents said that they ‘desire/strongly desire’ to conscript for military service (Nevo & Shor 2002:15). This data, however, should not be taken at face value as the same authors contend that only 55–60% of all eligible to serve in the military finish their full three years of service (Nevo & Shor 2002:14, Peri 2001:126). The discrepancy between the data show high levels of motivation of the Israeli youth to serve in the army and the actual number of individuals completing their compulsory military service can be explained by two factors. Firstly, the sample of the survey exploring motivation to serve may be non-representative of the entire population of eligible individuals for service. Secondly, the data about motivation to serve implies that respondents were surveyed before their conscription. It is possible that after they have been conscripted some of the respondents may have changed their opinion, and perhaps did not complete their service for various reasons.

4% served more than 26 days in a year (Nevo & Shor 2002b:12). Those who regularly answer a reserve call-up (80000 reservists) constitute just 1% of the Israeli population!¹⁰ Muslims are excluded from military service, Orthodox Jews, religious women, married women, mothers (or pregnant women) are given exemption, while of those eligible for conscription only 55–60% complete their compulsory term of duty (Nevo & Shor 2002a:14, Peri 2001:126).

The motivation crisis, however, is not equally spread among the Israeli population. It is rather a motivation crisis among the secular Ashkenazi elite (Levi 2004, Levi et. al. 2007, Peri 2001). The latter was always regarded as the social ‘backbone’ of the military. Members of the kibbutzs and the urban middle class youth traditionally filled the ranks of elite units and moved up the military hierarchy to become officers. This was also a stratum of Israeli society which benefited from militarism the most. The process is rooted in the diminishing value of military virtues in the civilian sphere. The erosion of the social value of military service caused by economic, cultural and political changes has affected the motivation of those who had previously benefited from militarism the most. Non-consensual, controversial wars damaging the army’s prestige distanced the secular Ashkenazi stratum of Israeli society from the military. Globalization and transition to a market economy led to the devaluation of military experience in the civilian job market, while the liberalization in the political sphere has broken the direct link between military virtues and civil rights. (Levy 2004) In short, from the perspective of the elite stratum of Israeli society investment in the accumulation of military virtues in contemporary Israel has ceased to be worthwhile. As Levy et. al. (2007) put it ‘the state demanded a higher payment for reduced returns.’ (p.13)

The motivation crisis among the secular-educated-Ashkenazi stratum of the society was conceptualized by Levy et. al. (2007) as ‘a retreat from “obligatory militarism”, which sees compulsory military service as an unconditional contribution to the state, and the adoption of “contractual militarism”, that is making service conditional on its meeting individual ambitions and interests.’ (p.128) The newly emerged form of militarism, according to the authors, embodies a shift in relations between secular middle – class youth to the army where bargaining plays a central role. Despite the remaining formal obligation, the value of military service is measured against its utility in the civil and economic spheres. Rather than being based on a collectivistic ethos, contemporary youth’s motivation to serve is increasingly dependent on the convertibility of the prospective military experience into the advantages in civilian life. This type of relationship between the social elite and the army indicates for the authors a transition from republican citizenship to citizenship defined in more liberal terms. (Levi et.al. 2007)

¹⁰ The data is taken from the report of Channel 2 News (Israel) shown on 20/04/07, by reporter Nam Amit can be found at: <http://www.keshetv.com/VideoPage.aspx?MediaID=15664> (last viewed on 28/04/2007)

The importance of Levi's et al (2007) conceptualization of the changes in militarization patterns for understanding of the conscientious objection movements is twofold. Firstly, it is important because conscientious objectors traditionally come from the very stratum of Israeli society which, according to Levi et al (2007), is at the core of the changes discussed above. Secondly, the claims of conscientious objectors have always been an amalgam of republican and liberal discourses. The puzzle of conscientious objectors in Israel lays in the fact that anti-war and anti-occupation protest (before the recent *Intifada*) was led by combat reserve soldiers and officers – the backbone of the Israeli military – who used military rhetoric to legitimize their anti-war claims in the public domain. The appearance of a new type of conscientious objection movement such as *Shministim* and *New Profile* along side *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* makes for an interesting case for interpretation within the debates on demilitarisation of the Israeli society.

Members of all four movements come from a similar social background (i.e. they belong to the urban, secular middle and upper classes). The difference between reservists and younger refusers, however, is in their relation to the army. Members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* represent a symbolic core of Israeli society – those 4%-12% of all Israeli Jewish men eligible for reserve service who actually complete their reserve duty. They, therefore, can be seen as bearers of the militaristic ethos. Their discourse, as we shall see further, is derived from the Israeli militaristic culture which stresses contribution and loyalty. Their refusal is selective and conditioned upon the nature of a particular military campaign. They do not reject military service as such, but object to an 'unjust war'.

In contrast, members of *Shministim* and *New Profile* represent those 40–45% of Israelis who do not complete their compulsory military service. Socially speaking, in contrast to reservists, they represent a very widespread trend within Israeli society. Despite that, they are politically marginalized since their avoidance of military service is ideologically motivated and used as a tool in political protest. In other words, these younger refusers constitute a politically radical segment of a mainstream phenomenon. Their anti-militarist, post-nationalist and feminist discourse, marginalising them within the Israeli political map, turns them into a political vanguard. In order to clarify this point further, in the next section I consider the recent changes in the ideological orientations and identities of Israelis.

From Zionist to Post-Zionist Discourse

In order to understand the movement's discourses one has to place them within the Israeli political culture. There are different ways of approaching this question. I, however, wish to focus on the role of Zionist ideology in structuring Israeli political map. Its importance within the Israeli political culture cannot

be over-estimated. Zionist ideology determines Israel's national aspirations and policies; it encompasses national myths and ethos; it constitutes personal identities. Last, but not least, it defines frontiers of national consensus, thereby demarcating legitimate and illegitimate political discourses and strategies, and turning political actors into outsiders.

Zionism in Structuring Israeli Political Culture and National Identities

Israeli political culture is characterised by the widespread consensus among Jewish Israeli citizens of Israel based on a set of shared beliefs. One of them is a belief in the necessity of a strong military for the survival of the state. Another is the belief in the Jewish – Zionist character of the state. Although this claim is often challenged by radical leftist groups and leftist oriented academics it nevertheless remains the official definition of the state of Israel supported by the wide consensus of the Jewish Israeli citizens of Israel. Analyzing the historical roots and contemporary implications of Zionist ideology on the Israeli state, Kimmerling (1999) described the Israeli social order as Zionist hegemony. Zionist hegemony, argued Kimmerling, is “expressed in the taken for grantedness of the equivalence between Jewish religion and nation” (p.340) The phenomenon results from the aspirations of the Zionist movement (the generator of modern Jewish nationalism), firstly, to legitimize the idea of the establishment of the Jewish state in ‘The Land of Israel’ (Zion), and secondly, to unite all Jews in the achievement of this goal. As there was no other viable source that could legitimize Zionist aspirations for an independent Jewish state, as well as to define boundaries of the collective and consolidate a national consciousness, Judaism was reinterpreted in secular terms and has since served as a source for national self-identification.

The close linkage between Zionism and military service is apparent from a close look at the Israeli political map. Any (Jewish) political party or movement which publicly disassociates itself from the Zionist ideology or doubts the necessity of the military service automatically excludes itself from the consensus. Exclusion from the consensus results in an inability to draw wide public support. The outrage directed at any Jewish criticism of Zionism is rooted in close association between Jewish and Zionist identity. Those who criticize, or worst of all denounce the Zionist enterprise are perceived by the Israeli public as traitors who betray both their nation and their own Jewish identity. Criticism of Israeli politics is frequently equated with negation of one's Jewish identity, while leftist critics of Zionist enterprise are often called ‘self-hating Jews’ (Finlay 2005). In the same context anti-Zionism is often associated with anti-Semitism (Shapira 2006).

The political strategy of the Israel's largest peace movement – ‘*Peace Now*’ exemplifies the power of Zionist consensus. *Peace Now* is regarded and conceives itself as central to the peace movement in Israel because of its ability to mobilize the public for a political protest. The movement has always avoided

being associated with non-Zionist or anti-Zionist peace movements by avoiding or carefully managing joint demonstrations with radical leftist movements. Moreover, despite criticizing both the conduct of the Lebanon War (1982–1985) and the recent *Intifada*, leaders of the movement have never publicly supported the refusal movement.¹¹ This strategy was aimed at preserving *Peace Now*'s public image as a consensual, mainstream leftist movement in order to retain its broad public support.

However, despite wide consensus regarding the Jewish – Zionist character of the state and core values associated with Jewish Israeli identity, Israeli public opinion and identities are far from being monolithic. It is argued that from the beginning of the 1980's Israel underwent socio-political, economic, and cultural changes which led to an emergence of an alternative post-Zionist discourse and identities (Ben-Porat 2006, Don-Yehiya 1998, Eisen 1998, Harris 2005, Kelman 1998, Ram 1999, 2000, Seliktar 2005, Smootha 1997, Shafir & Peled 1998).¹²

Post- Zionist Alternative

In recent decades, so-called 'Zionist hegemony,' usually understood as national ideology based on viewing Israel as a Jewish state, has been challenged by Post-Zionist discourse (Ben-Porat 2006, Don-Yehiya 1998, Eisen 1998, Harris 2005, Ram 1998, 1999, 2000, Seliktar 2005, Smootha 1997, Shafir & Peled 1998). Post-Zionist discourse, stressing the discriminatory nature of the state defined in nationalist terms, proposes a liberal, post-nationalist approach to citizenship which would include all citizens of Israel on equal terms. It also challenges the ultimate right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, thereby affirming national aspirations of Palestinians and their respective right to self-determination in Palestine. The appearance of the new ideological orientation on the Israeli political map happened simultaneously with the process of demilitarization. Both processes were rooted in the liberalization and democratization of Israeli society in the past two decades. They have both affected the same stratum of the Israeli society – middle class secular Ashkenazi origin Israelis who are generally characterized by a leftist orientation and who overwhelmingly fill the ranks of peace movements. They are as a consequence the most likely articulators of the post-Zionist critique.

¹¹ From the interview with the leadership of the *Courage to Refuse* who sought support and alliance with *Peace Now*, but have never publicly been backed by the movement.

¹² Simultaneously with the appearance of the post-Zionist discourse, the ethno-nationalistic version of traditional Zionist emerged on the Israeli political sphere. New-Zionism mostly adopted by religious Zionists (Jewish settlers) reasserts traditional Zionist vision of Israel as a Jewish state. Religious Zionists utilize this discourse as an ideological foundation for the expansion of the Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. (Ram 1999, 2000, Seliktar 2005, Smootha 1997, Shafir & Peled 1998)

Post-Zionism, as a critical discourse, was initially articulated by academics, particularly by historians and sociologists.¹³ Scholars belonging to the post-Zionist camp have challenged the dominant view of the past Israeli state, dispelling historical myths and deconstructing collective memories. The group of academics which for the first time challenged the hegemonic Zionist narrative of the foundation of Israel became known as ‘new historians’. New historians, among them Benni Morris, and Ilan Pappé, famously subverted the official version of events that led to the establishment of Israel and the Palestinian refugee problem. Exposing previously unknown facts about Israeli military power during the Israeli-Arab wars, they have challenged a ‘David and Goliath’ ethos. They have also undermined Israel’s self-portrayal as a peace pursuing state showing its uncompromising position during the peace talks. Critical sociologists, for their part, have problematised the definition of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, demonstrating in their works how the state systematically discriminates against its non-Jewish citizens. Demystifying Israel’s self-portrayal as a ‘melting pot’, they have also shown how a hegemonic Zionist narrative imposed by Ashkenazi elites stratified Israeli citizenship disadvantaging Sephardic Jews and women in various spheres of social life. Their answer to the inequality and discrimination present in the Jewish state was its ‘civilization’ and transformation into the multicultural state of all its citizens. Overall, post-Zionist academic discourse not merely exposed unknown facts and criticized the Zionist enterprise showing its effects on Israeli and Palestinian society, but more importantly it has re-conceptualized Israel’s past and present. The post-colonial theories applied to the Zionist movement have challenged the very core of Zionist ideology, which considered Palestine as Jewish homeland, thereby re-conceptualizing the relationship between newcomers and the local population. (Pappé 1997, Shafir 1996, Waxman 1997)

Alongside the academic post-Zionist critique, a less academic version of the discourse has been adopted by progressive sectors of Israeli society. The emergence of the post-Zionist discourse and identities among the Israeli middle and upper classes was an outcome of several processes which Israeli society has undergone since the 1980s. Economic liberalization coupled with the effects of globalization made the conflict settlement a priority for the business elite. Apart from increasing economic prosperity of the Israelis, these processes have led to cultural change expressed in the rise of a consumption culture. Shafir and Peled (1998) coined these changes a ‘bourgeois revolution’ arguing that they led to the emergence of a business community alongside a pleiad of politicians, journalists and academics interested in a more liberal and civic Israel. The *Intifada* (1987–1993) which followed these transformations has once again demonstrated the high economic and moral cost of the unsettled conflict

¹³ For the full review of the arguments of ‘new historians’ and critical sociologists see Pappé (1997), Waxman (1997) and Shafir (1996).

with the Palestinians. The beginning of the Oslo peace process (1993–2000), prompted by the *Intifada*, promised a settlement of the conflict which would in its turn bring normalization of Israeli–Arab relations and wider acceptance of Israel in the region. The Oslo accords not only increased international investments in the Israeli economy, resulting in an economic boom, but more importantly they produced a vision of Israeli society as a society freed from conflict and war.

A viable solution to an intractable conflict created conditions for a shift from collectivistic orientations idealizing unity, contribution and loyalty to a more individualistic societal orientation stressing individual rights. More importantly, liberalization, globalization and peace processes undermined nationalistic and territorialized aspects of Israeli identity. Ethnic nationalism which linked Israeli identity to a particular territory was challenged by newly emerged post-national, de-territorialized identities (Ben – Porat 2006, Newman, 1999, Ram 1999). Another way of characterizing post-Zionist discourse is through comparing post-Zionist conceptions of citizenship with a traditional Zionist version. Whereas within the Zionist nation building project citizenship was interpreted within ethno-nationalist and republican discourses, post-Zionism reinterprets citizenship in more civic and universalistic terms (Shafir & Peled 1998). On a practical level this trend has expressed itself in the diminishing cultural importance of military service which has been previously seen as an epitome of good citizenship.

It is my contention that the critical discourse articulated by members of *Shministim* and *New Profile* reflects precisely this trend within the Israeli society. Unlike members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* whose discourse resonates with the consensus due to its appeal to the nationalist and militarist codes, the younger refusers' rhetoric is derived from the post-Zionist discourse. Their narratives expose liberal rather than republican or ethno-nationalist approach to citizenship. They define citizen duty in civic rather than militaristic terms. As we shall see further, their criticism of the Israeli militaristic culture and Jewish character of the state mirrors similar critique voiced by post-Zionist academics.

The Movements' Discourses

Contractual Militarism: *Courage to Refuse* and *Yesh Gvul*¹⁴

The main difference between members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* and members of *New Profile* and *Shministim* is that while a majority of reservists viewed themselves as mainstream and wanted to appeal to the consensus,

¹⁴ The term 'contractual militarism' was coined by Levi *et al* (2007)

high-schoolers rather considered themselves as radical activists. Several studies on conscientious objectors of the Lebanon War indicate that the socio-demographic profile and rhetoric of conscientious objectors were quite similar to the consensual peace camp in general (Helman 2001, 2003). Conscientious objectors, members of *Yesh Gvul* belonged to the same social stratum – educated, middle-class, secular Ashkenazi males – as the leadership of the largest consensual peace movement in Israel – *Peace Now*. Unsurprisingly, both used the ‘fighter’ mobilization frame and security discourse to legitimize their claims on the public sphere (ibid). The only difference between the two movements was the attitude to refusal. Whereas *Peace Now*, having criticized the Lebanon War, avoided calling upon soldiers to refuse to fight it, *Yesh Gvul* openly challenged the unconditional status of military duty. As Helman (1999c) put it, conscientious objectors of the Lebanon War, challenging state monopoly over security discourse, demanded “to allow each individual the leeway to decide where, when and under what circumstances he will fulfill his military duties.” (p.60)

Courage to Refuse self-reportedly has a similar socio-demographic profile of mostly- Ashkenazi, middle-class educated males – and a similar ideological message. The commonality between *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* discourses can be clearly seen from their public letters. Both movements in their appeal to the Israeli public have manipulated the hegemonic codes derived from Israeli militaristic culture. Both movements have used images of the fighter and have emphasized their loyalty to the state, stressing their past war experience and willingness to take up arms in defense of the state.

One may wonder why the founders of *Courage to Refuse* have established a separate movement rather than joining *Yesh Gvul*. Leaders and founders of the movement argued that at the time when they were considering refusal (beginning of the second *Intifada*) *Yesh Gvul* was not in the public eye so some of them did not know about the movement. Others argued that due to the age of the *Yesh Gvul* members (most of whom refused during the Lebanon War and first *Intifada*) and association with the radical left *Yesh Gvul* cannot anymore appeal to the mainstream. *Courage to Refuse* wanted to capitalize on their members’ combat experience and the fact that they had all served in the Occupied Territories, many during the recent *Intifada*. This, they believed, would enable them to persuade the Israeli public about injustices that happen in the Occupied Territories and in their righteousness in refusing to serve there. Members of *Courage to Refuse* (at least at the time) viewed themselves as belonging to the political mainstream; they wanted to appeal to the mainstream and sought political alliance with mainstream leftist movements and parties. This can clearly be seen from the following extract from an interview with one of the members of the movement:

We are the IDF! We’re the children of the mainstream who are breaking their consensus. It is not out of fear, it’s not because we are spoiled, it’s because we have caused a terrible injustice to an entire people. We’re breaking the

rules because we have no other choice. We have an obligation to refuse. It's an historical role we must play.” (Yaniv Izkovich as quoted in Chacham (2003:62)

As the above quote demonstrates, the majority of the *Courage to Refuse* members (at least in the beginning of their political activism) identified themselves with the IDF and emphasized their belonging to the mainstream, viewing refusal as a last resort.

Loyalty to the IDF

The analysis of the interviews shows that similarly to the conscientious objectors of the Lebanon War, members of *Courage to Refuse* view military service as an important citizen duty. Conscientious objectors of the Lebanon War interviewed by Helman (1999d) identified military service as a paramount citizen obligation which determines one's contribution and belonging to society. Military service was viewed by them as “the ultimate criterion of membership and participation in the socio-political community” (Helman 1999:54). Similar discourses emerge from the interviews with the members of the *Courage to Refuse*.

Yuval, a member of *Courage to Refuse*, intelligence officer and political activist in various leftist organizations explains why after declaring his refusal he continued serving in reserve:

“Yuval T.: I have continued to serve and I still do that.

Interviewer: Why?

Yuval T.: I think a lot about society, to be part of the society, to be very careful... I do not want to exclude myself from the society.

Interviewer: Do you think refusal would exclude you from the society?

Yuval T.: I think refusal excludes me from the society in certain sense. I want to influence society with my views, I do not want to be out of touch with society, I do not want to exclude myself. I want to live here.”

In Yuval's narrative military service is viewed as a practice which continually re-establishes his social belonging and legitimizes his critical voice. In order to be an equal member, to participate and to influence public opinion, one has to perform his military duty. The termination of this practice leads to the abolition of social contact and excludes one from society.

As opposed to the younger generation of refusers, refusal of the reservists was distinctively selective: they opposed the Occupation, but not the existence of the army or conscription as such. A majority of the interviewees argued that military service is important considering the geo-political circumstances of Israel. Ori's statement is representative of this dominant voice among refusers belonging to the older generation:

“I still believe that the army is important for the state and for people who live here. I think that strong navy and air force are important because Israel is still under threat, and it needs deterrence.” (Ori R.)

Since military service is constitutive for the social identity of Israeli males (Helman 1999a) it was not surprising that some refusers identified themselves in terms of their military career stating “I am a pilot”, “I am an officer” or “I am a commander”. The trend was particularly prominent among those who were high-ranking officers. They often saw their refusal as an outcome of their identity as a military commander. These interviewees argued that the position of an officer and values associated with it impose on them the responsibility for other people. Their public refusal therefore was seen as a means to both persuade their fellow soldiers that they do not avoid military service out of egotism but rather act out of genuine care for them and the future of the army. The following quotations represent these voices among reservists:

“Interviewer: Why did you sign the letter if you could just avoid service by going abroad?”

Yaniv I.: I think because of the fact that we were officers, we felt the responsibility. We were commanders. I think if you are commander of twenty people it gives you a responsibility, you can’t just leave them. It’s not right. You have to do something that will show that it’s not about you doing this because you don’t want your hands to get dirty, but you want whole the situation to stop that they don’t have to go either.” (Yaniv I.)

“Military service is very important for me. That is why I have refused...I have identified myself with all the values IDF represents; even nowadays I do. Honestly! You know, it is often said that IDF is one of the most moral armies in the world, it stresses moral values. In my opinion it is true nowadays as well. That is what you learn in officers’ course. I believe that in its core Israeli army is the most moral in the world. But the problem is that in the Occupied Territories it collapses, it doesn’t work. This understanding led me to refusal. I believed in these values so much, the values I have learned in the army, that I just could not see them collapsing.” (Itai S.)

In the above quotation refusal is presented as an act of concern for fellow soldiers and the moral character of the army. As opposed to the younger generation of refusers who view their refusal as an act of protest not only against the Occupation, but also against the militarization of society in general, members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* confine their criticism of the Israeli army to the occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Their refusal is both selective and conditional: their willingness to serve depends on the nature of the duty they are asked to perform.

Zionism

Courage to Refuse went even further than *Yesh Gvul* in proving its loyalty to the state. The movement constantly emphasized its adherence to Zionist values. The first line of the famous *Combatants letter* issued by the movement states: “We, reserve combat officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, who were raised upon the principles of Zionism, sacrifice and giving to the people of Israel and to the State of Israel.” From the interviews it became apparent that although not all the members of the movement identified with Zionist and militarist aspects of *Courage to Refuse*’s public image, its leadership did. The founders and leaders of the movement strongly felt that these cultural codes resonate with the Israeli mainstream public. In its demonstrations the movement often used the slogan “Zionism 2002 is Refusal”. The founders of the movement also felt that a Zionist identity legitimized their protest against the state. The following reflective account of one of the founders of the movement demonstrates this point:

In January 2002, when I came to the first refusers’ meeting, it was as if I looked in the mirror and saw reflections of myself. Socially speaking we came from the same place. We were good middle class kinds. Maybe I can allow myself to rebel because I take it for granted that I live comfortably. Perhaps the ability to rebel is related to one’s proximity to Zionism. Those who didn’t grow up with the assumption that their parents and grandparents were full partners in the Zionist project must find it harder to contradict the state. (Asaf Oron in as quoted in Chacham (2003:30))

When the movement rapidly expanded during the first year of its existence some of its new members disagreed with Zionist and militarist aspects of the *Courage to Refuse* image. Other members even though they did not identify with these aspects, pragmatically agreed with the leadership that the hegemonic codes which signify the movement’s belonging to the mainstream increase its chances of influencing the Israeli public. Daniel’s narrative reflects these pragmatic voices within the movement:

“I’m not really a Zionist, I feel more Israeli than Zionist. Nevertheless, I have no problem to demonstrate with the slogan “Zionism is Refusal”. I do not advance this standpoint, but I believe that change comes from within the consensus; when it is driven by the people from inside of the system. This is the strength of the movement.” (Daniel S.)

In the above quotation Zionism is seen an ideology at the core of the social consensus. Whether the members of the movement identified with this ideology or not, the majority pragmatically agreed that it will increase public appeal of the movement and thereby its chances to bring about social change.

Negotiating Conditions

Despite the two decades gap in the time of the refusal of the members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse*, the members of these movements articulate a similar discourse with respect to military duty. Their willingness to serve is conditioned by the nature of the duty they are asked to perform. The case of Eli, a veteran member of *Yesh Gvul* is particularly interesting as it is paradigmatic for the discourse articulated by reservists. Eli was one of the signers of the first *Shministim* letter published in 1978. He later joined *Yesh Gvul*. Having refused, he was imprisoned several times during his compulsory service and reserve service. Despite his objection to the Lebanon War and the occupation of the Palestinian Territories he continued to serve in reserve. He argues that since he is not a pacifist his protest is directed at unjust wars, but not against military service as such:

“Eli G.: I went to the most reserve duties.

Interviewer: Why did you go?

Eli G.: For two reasons: I am not a pacifist, I am not avoiding my duty to protect the country, I am avoiding the Occupation. So if, lets say, I have to go to Bait-Shen to protect the border I don't have problem with this. I make distinction between what is inside the Green Line and outside of it.”

A similar discourse of conditional military service emerges from the narratives of the members of *Courage to Refuse*. With the exception of several members, the majority argued that they will continue to serve in the IDF as long as the tour of duty is not in the Occupied Territories. They stressed that due to the security threat from neighbouring countries Israel needs a strong army and therefore they see military service as an important citizen duty. Rami's defense of his decision to continue his reserve service exemplifies this line of argument among refusers belonging to the older generation:

“Interviewer: So are you serving in reserve?

Rami K.: Yes. My principle position is that I am not against the IDF. I am for IDF as long as it is *defence* forces. I am not prepared to be a part of the Occupation; I am not prepared to cross Green Line or to carry out missions which serve the Occupation.

Interviewer: What about serving the Occupation within the Green Line?

Rami K.: There is a point in this statement, but I put my line here. There is a difference between going to the Territories yourself and preparing against the war with Syria (what I am doing now). I think, war with Syria can happen and not because of Israel. Israel needs defence forces for that case. I am ready to argue with the radical left about this point.”

As opposed to the younger generation of refusers, the majority of the members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* restrict their protest to objection to

the Occupation. Their objection is expressed in refusal to serve in the Occupied Territories or to specific missions they are asked to perform. Similarly to Rami, the majority of the members of *Courage to Refuse*, answering my question whether they will continue to serve in reserve, argued that it depends on the nature and location of their service.

New Radicalism: *New Profile* and *Shministim*

A refuser of the Lebanon War, a member of *Yesh Gvul*, stressed the difference between his generation of refusers and younger refusers of the second Palestinian *Intifada*:

(a) new non-conformist generation in the Israeli left has emerged. The problem with my generation is that there is a very strong conformism in the society. New generation of refusers from *Shministim* and *New Profile*, is much more non-conformist generation; it asks these questions in much younger age. (Eli G.)

The ‘non-conformism’ of the members of *New Profile* and *Shministim* is expressed in their refusal to manipulate the symbolic meanings belonging to nationalist and militarist discourses. Unlike *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse*, signatories of the *Shministim* letters which criticized the Israeli policy on the Occupied Territories, did not attempt to justify their criticism in the eyes of the mainstream by emphasizing their patriotism, loyalty and contribution. Their criticism of the Israeli army was much more radical and uncompromising. In their letter published in August 2001, *Shministim* accused Israel’s government of committing crimes, conducting racist policy and breaching human rights:

“To: Prime Minister Ariel Sharon,

We, the undersigned, youths who grew up and were brought up in Israel, are about to be called to serve in the IDF. We protest before you against the *aggressive and racist policy* pursued by the Israeli government’s and its army, and to inform you that we do not intend to take part in the execution of this policy.

We strongly resist *Israel’s pounding of human rights*. Land expropriation, arrests, executions without a trial, house demolition, closure, torture, and the prevention of health care are only some of *the crimes the state of Israel carries out*, in blunt violation of international conventions it has ratified.

These actions are not only illegitimate; they do not even achieve their stated goal increasing the citizens’ personal safety. Such safety will be achieved only through a just peace agreement between the Israeli government and the Palestinian people.

Therefore we will obey our conscience and refuse to take part in *acts of oppression against the Palestinian people, acts that should properly be called terrorist actions*. We call upon persons our age, conscripts, soldiers in the standing army, and reserve service soldiers to do the same.” [my Italics]

Shministim was the first generation of refusers in the history of Israel who dared to compare the actions of the Israeli government to terrorist acts. The radicalism of their critical voice does not resemble the apologetic tone of letters published by *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse*. Moreover, the public letter published by the second group of *Shministim* in March 2005, in addition to similar criticism of Israel’s policies in the Occupied Territories, had a prominent social agenda. This was another innovation in the refusers’ ‘repertoire of contention’ which, appealing to the ‘security discourse’, went as far as stating that the Occupation harms the security of Israel. *Shministim* in their critique have linked the maintenance of the Occupation to the deterioration of the economic situation and social welfare:

“The Occupation has corrupted Israel, turning it into a militaristic, racist, chauvinistic and violent society. Israel is wasting its resources on the perpetuation of the occupation and repression in the territories, while hundreds of thousands of Israelis live in shameful poverty. In recent years Israeli citizens have experienced a deterioration of all public services. Education, medicine, welfare, pensions, everything to do with the well being of the citizenry has been neglected and sacrificed for the continued existence of settlements which the majority of the population wishes to be evacuated.

We cannot stand idly facing this situation, which amounts to a “targeted liquidation” of the principle of equality. We wish to live in a society which pursues justice, upholding equal rights to every single citizen. The Occupation and repression policy is an obstacle to the realization of this vision, therefore we shall refuse to take part in it. We wish to contribute to society in an alternative way, which does not involve harming other human beings.”

The depth and the radicalism of the criticism reflected in the above *Shministim* letter are typical of the narratives of the young draft resisters. Their narratives expose comprehensive criticism of Israel’s policies in the Occupied Territories and are often based on the pacifist, anti-militarist and feminist ideology. In the narratives of some refusers these ideologies overlapped, in other cases particular ideological discourse was more dominant. In the next three sections I will present these ideological arguments in turn.

Pacifism and Anti-Militarism

As opposed to reservists, most of the younger refusers are absolutist refusers.¹⁵ Absolute refusal was usually an outcome of the refusers' pacifist and anti-militarist stance, a stance which characterizes narratives of many high-school refusers. Pacifist and anti-militarist ideology provided a wider framework for critical analysis of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. While members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* view Israel as a 'special case', as a country under existential threat whose 'security needs' have to be met, but just not through the occupation of Palestinian Territories, the security discourse is visibly absent from the narratives of the draft-resisters belonging to *Shministim* and *New Profile*. Their discourse is characterized by the wider contextual framework where Israel's occupation is viewed as just one of the many cases of similar occupations around the world. Maayan's criticism of Israeli militaristic culture is an example of such analysis:

"I want to deconstruct the army tomorrow; I do honestly would get rid of all the armies tomorrow, even today, why to wait till tomorrow? I believe that law that permits militarism, the law that approves and gives national value to all the violence is law responsible for all the victims of the violence. Whether it is to develop nuclear weapons, to bomb civilian areas, to crush human rights in occupied Iraq, in occupied Afghanistan, during Vietnam war, during Lebanon war or in the Occupied Territories; whether these are militant rules in Japan during second world war, or militias in Sudan that murder anyone and everyone. For me, military institution does not square well with the idea of peace."(Maayan P.)

Maayan's narrative is a clear example of anti-militarist discourse. She opposes not only the occupation of the Palestinian Territories, but the existence of the military institution as such. She places the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among other similar, in her view, cases of occupation and compares Israeli militarism to other countries ruled by military elites. A discussion of the validity of Maayan's analysis is beyond scope and purpose of this study. What is important to note here is that the anti-militarist critique voiced by the younger generation of refusers is an important discursive innovation in the Israeli public sphere. Although pacifist and anti-militarist voices existed from the very inception of Israel, they were marginal and invisible for the mainstream public. Anti-militarist critique is still a marginal phenomenon in Israeli society, but with the appearance of *Shministim* and *New Profile* the margins have become much wider and more visible in the public sphere.

¹⁵ All interviewed members of *Shministim* and *New Profile* who have already refused were absolutist refusers. Absolute majority of the refusers who have not yet had a chance to refuse in practice due to their age argued that they will refuse to serve in the army altogether.

Post-Nationalism and Anti-Zionism

Neither post-nationalism nor anti-Zionism was declared as part of an official ideological position of *Shministim* and *New Profile*. However, the ideological stance of their members is evident from the curious fact that the members of these movements were refusing to take part in *Courage to Refuse* demonstrations. The younger refusers argued that they could not join in as they did not identify with the Israeli flag used by *Courage to Refuse* in all its demonstrations. While for *Courage to Refuse* the Israeli flag served as a means to show their belonging to the mainstream of Israeli society; for the younger generation it represented the Zionist movement and the ideology which they heavily criticize and blame for the perpetuation of the occupation of Palestinian Territories. Omri's narrative is a good example of how these two discourses were employed as a criticism of Jewish nationalism and Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories:

“My refusal goes beyond the occupation, it just horrible symptom, racism and militarism didn't stop there it is much deeper in our society. I think that country by definition is a tool for people, it supposed to serve the people, it cannot ask from people to give their life or life of other people for the existence of the state. The purpose of the state is to serve the people and I will not die not for this and not for any other country because I think the existence of the people is more important than existence if the country, Jewish country or any other...

I don't believe in any kind of nationalism, Zionism specifically very racist and imperialist type of nationalism, it was nationalism of people not living here but of people who lived in Europe, it had mutual cultural background who decided to have a country in another part of the world which wasn't Europe, it wasn't populated by white people so it was ok to take their land, it could be Uganda or Africa, ideology didn't matter because these were not white civilized people that were taken land from. The very core of Zionist ideology is very racist, superior saying that certain people because of their race can have right to the land which other people cannot. It is racist, colonialist and imperialistic. (Omri E.)

The anti-Zionist, post-nationalist views reflected in Omri's narratives to a large extent resemble post-Zionist academic discourse. Political Zionism which led to the foundation of the state and since then has served as its national ideology is viewed by Omri as a racist and imperialist ideology. It is seen as another example of Western imperialism. In his narrative patriotism is replaced by radical humanism; the value of the nation-state is nullified by the value of human life. As opposed to members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse*, who emphasized loyalty and making a contribution to the state, members of *Shministim* and *New Profile* view the state as a tool that is meant to serve its citizens. No state can demand its citizens to sacrifice their life in its name.

The existence of people, argues Omri ‘is more important than existence of a country’. The Jewish state is not an exception.

Feminism

Although a feminist perspective can be employed to justify conscription of women, radical feminist scholars overwhelmingly oppose militarization criticizing it for exploiting and disadvantaging women (Sason-Levy 2002). Militarism (which often goes hand in hand with nationalism), argue feminists, is based on patriarchal and masculine values (Nagel 1998). Women are, therefore, systematically discriminated within military institutions; and, harassed and disadvantaged in militarized societies (Eclou 1988, 2000).

Many of young draft-resisters, particularly the members of *New Profile* (which is feminist movement), base their ideological objection to military service on feminist ideology. For these refusers, feminist perspectives serve as an analytical framework allowing effective criticism of the military and militarization. Idan, a member of *New Profile*, in her criticism of the Israeli ‘security discourse’ based on her feminist stance represents this line of argument among feminist oriented refusers:

“There is a tendency to see the army as an existential necessity, something without which we can’t live, something that can’t be touched in any way or reduced. And this is because the army protects you. I think this view neglects many social and economic problems, problems of violence and harassment. There is no army which deals with these problems, and I am sure that these problems are not less important in anyway. The issue of women being killed by her husband is not less important issue than military issues. In my opinion, the argument that we shouldn’t touch army as it deals with issues of life and death is hypocritical. There are many issues which we regard as less important because of our upbringing... When we talk about terror as an existential threat, we don’t regard domestic violence against women as existential threat against particular social stratum. Why this is not a topic for discussion in the committee for internal affairs? It is also an issue of life and death, but the social discourse regards it as less important.” (Idan H.)

In her narrative Idan challenges the ‘security discourse’ which places issues concerning national security on top of the public agenda. Raising questions about the place of women in a militarized society, she criticizes the ‘military consciousnesses’ of Israeli society which prioritises issues of national importance according to their contribution to national security. In such a society, argues Idan, women’s welfare is on the bottom of the public agenda. Subverting taken-for-granted hierarchies, she frames issues of domestic violence as an issue of prime national importance.

Feminist ideology, which featured in a majority of the narratives of the female interviewees, was often responsible for their absolutist refusal. The gendered structure of the army makes selective refusal irrelevant for women. An overwhelming majority of the female conscripts serve in the rear roles and are unlikely to be sent to the Occupied Territories. As a consequence, unlike male conscripts, their opposition to the service in the Occupied Territories cannot be actualized in refusal to serve there. Radicalizing the means of the protest, female refusers argued that they see any role within the military as assisting to perpetuate the Occupation. Female refusers frequently employed a feminist perspective to criticize the gender division of labor within the IDF. Invoking a stereotype of a female conscript who serves coffee to a high-ranking officer, they often stated “I don’t want to serve coffee to a commander who sends helicopters to Gaza”.

Citizen Duty in Civil Terms

Israeli public discourse and education stresses the importance of loyalty and making a contribution to society while military duty is seen as a paramount citizen obligation. Members of Yesh Gvul and Courage to Refuse consistently emphasized their military ranks and combat experience as an evidence of their loyalty and contribution to the nation. As opposed to reservists, high-schoolers overwhelmingly reject viewing military service as a positive contribution to the society. They do not negotiate conditions of military service. They rebel against the military culture which views military duty as an ultimate contribution to society. Younger refusers define ‘contribution to society’ in civil terms. The following quotations exemplify their approach to what is to be considered ‘a contribution to society’:

I see the fact that young people are asked to serve their country for two years as a good thing. Only, I don’t see military service as a contribution. I don’t think that what army does serves society, it destroys, it damages society. The fact that I didn’t want to serve in the army doesn’t mean that I do not want to contribute to the society. In opposite, I do want, just in different way: for instance, through helping children from underprivileged background. That is what interests me. (Noa L.)

By refusing to serve in the military I am showing to others the alternative of how to contribute to the society, and not through military service; not in way which oppresses human rights, but in way which helps people to fulfill their rights and to make the state to respect human rights.(Ala Y.)

In my opinion, civic contribution to the society, like involvement in civic associations, is much more important and significant...My contribution is expressed in my involvement in the community that sees itself as a part of civil society, we care, we influence and change things...” (Danya V.)

The members of *Shministim* and *New Profile*, as the above quotations demonstrate, interpret civil duty and social responsibility in civic terms. Militaristic thinking characterizing society at war is visibly absent from their narratives. Moreover, military service is viewed as corrupting society's moral image, as harming its security and economy. These draft-resisters stress the importance of volunteering in civic organization which they see as equal or even more important contribution to the society than military service. For them, their involvement in the community and civil associations demonstrates their loyalty to their country.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that Israeli refusers articulate two distinct critical discourses. Reservists, members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* appealing to mainstream opinion, utilise militarist and nationalist codes derived from the hegemonic discourse. The members of both movements stress their loyalty and contribution to the state. They consider their military experience, the participation in Israeli wars and military ranks as an indication of their patriotism which legitimises their critical voice. Their refusal is selective and conditional. The majority of reservists do not reject military service altogether, rather, arguing that their readiness to perform military duty depends on its nature and location. In contrast, the younger generation of refusers' criticism of the state is much more radical and comprehensive. In contrast, high-schoolers, members of *New Profile* and *Shministim* view any military position within the army as directly or indirectly perpetuating the Occupation. Their absolutist refusal is rooted in pacifist, anti-militarist and feminist views. Employing these ideologies to criticise Israeli militaristic culture, these young refusers define citizen duty in civic terms.

The discourses articulated by Israeli refusers reflect recent social-political and cultural changes within Israeli society. The difference in discourses uncovered in the analysis grasps the very dynamic of these changes. The grammar of these discourses, being rooted in Israeli political culture, reflects both the existence of the social consensus and the alternative discourses which challenge its historical and moral legitimacy. Militarist identities and the rhetoric of the reservists who opt for selective refusal, being rooted in Israeli militarist culture, indicates that consensual nationalistic and militarist codes are still playing a legitimising role in the appeal to the mainstream public. The appearance of the radical anti-militarist and feminist critique, voiced by draft-resisters, is a reflection of the gradual cultural change within the Israeli society. These voices are still politically marginal and perceived as such by the majority of the Israeli public. They, however, represent a larger trend within the mainstream which strives for a more civic and liberal Israel, an Israel, where military duty is not an ultimate, but just one of the ways to contribute to the society.

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