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## **The Deconstruction of the Israeli Militarism: From Its Historic Foundation to Contemporary Attempts of Demilitarising Israeli Society**

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Master in International Studies,

Supervisor:

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ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon

30 October 2022

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SOCIOLOGIA  
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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History Department

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## **ABSTRACT**

Military violence is a daily reality faced in many countries around the world. The level of extreme brutality, the subsequent tolerance and disregard for its victims are some of the many symptoms of a highly militarized society.

Israeli society sees the integration and performance of the military service as an honour and the fulfilment of their civilian and, at times, religious duty. The core of the Israeli militarization is rooted in the inability of questioning the actions of the military without the person being ostracized within their own community. The profound assimilation of a public secret, known by everyone but never spoken, is the reason the military is able to infiltrate societies, acquiring a powerful influence that cannot be contested.

This dissertation enters the discussion of the level of militarization in Israeli society, its impact in the rest of the citizens' daily life and foreign policies, combining it with the analysis of the growth of anti-occupation organizations, and looking for a demilitarized Israel and Palestine. It uses academic literature, reports by human rights organization, international organizations, historians and journalists, and personal accounts from two Israeli anti-occupation organizations to shed light in the possibility of the military reducing its influence in Israeli society in order to achieve a peaceful resolution.

**Keywords:** militarism; demilitarization; anti-occupation activism; digital militarism; Israel; Palestine

## RESUMO

Violência militar é uma realidade cotidiana em muitos países no mundo. O nível de extrema brutalidade, a subsequente tolerância e desprezo das vítimas são alguns dos vários sintomas de uma sociedade altamente militarizada.

A sociedade israelita visualiza a integração e desempenho do serviço militar como uma honra e o cumprimento do dever civil e, por vezes, religioso. O núcleo da militarização israelita está enraizado na incapacidade de questionar as ações do exército sem que a pessoa seja ostracizada dentro da sua própria comunidade. A profunda assimilação do segredo público, conhecido por todos mas nunca falado, é a razão pela qual o exército é capaz de infiltrar sociedades, adquirindo uma poderosa influência que não pode ser contestada.

Esta dissertação integra a discussão do nível de militarização na sociedade israelita, o seu impacto no resto da vida dos cidadãos e das políticas externas, unindo com a análise com o crescimento de organizações anti-ocupação, e a visão de um Israel e Palestina desmilitarizados. Utiliza literatura académica, documentos de organizações de direitos humanos, organizações internacionais, historiadores e jornalistas, e testemunhos pessoais de duas organizações anti-ocupação israelitas para esclarecer a possibilidade do exército reduzir a sua influência na sociedade israelita de modo a poder atingir uma resolução pacífica.

Palavras-chave: militarismo; desmilitarização; ativismo anti-ocupação; militarismo digital; Israel; Palestina

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## **GLOSSARY TERMS**

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

IDF – Israeli Defence Forces

IHL – International Humanitarian Law

IR – International Relations

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MK – Members of the Knesset

PA – Palestinian Authority

PLO – Palestinian Liberation Organization

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN – United Nations

UNHRC – United Nations Human Rights Committee

## INTRODUCTION

The establishment of a Jewish State has been blossoming as a fulfilment to the biblical promise of Moses<sup>1</sup>, relying as well on God's promise<sup>2</sup> to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the Land of Israel<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, "Jews regarded themselves as being in exile, and they longed and prayed for a return to their homeland" (Eisen, 2011, p. 168). However, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish communities "rejected the notion that they could accommodate themselves to European society, and they believed that Jews should return to the land of Israel, then called Palestine, to re-establish a Jewish state" (Eisen, 2011, p. 142). Thus, it is the collective desire in favour of the return of the Jews to their homeland and the reestablishment of a Jewish State based on the long Jewish connection and attachment to the land that created the Zionism<sup>4</sup> movement.

Zionism is fragmented into several areas, each with its importance in establishing the Israeli society's mentality. Political Zionism refers to the "primacy to political-diplomatic efforts to attain international recognition and sanction for the establishment of a state for Jews" (Shimoni, 1995, p. 88). Although Zionism was, in its majority, a secular movement, religious Zionism established a religious connection between the messianic eras<sup>5</sup> and the political objectives. The radicalization of the initial concept of religious Zionism led to the support of "aggressive settlement activity (...) in the territories captured by Israel in the Six-Day War and encouraged a hostile attitude towards Palestinians, Arabs, and non-Jews in general" (Eisen, 2011, p. 149).

Socialist labour Zionism was essentially a historic "socio-economic analysis of the Jewish condition that looked at anti-Semitism through a class prism" (Shimoni, 1995, p. 172). It settled the creation of the state on the efforts of the Jewish proletariat class, advocating for a socialist society that would minimize the class struggle. Finally, territorialism Zionism referred to the establishment of an "independent, autonomous

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<sup>1</sup> Moses promises the people of Israel that, even though they might get scattered throughout the world, God will return them from captivity and gather them in the land of their ancestors, making them more prosperous and numerous (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).

<sup>2</sup> "In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

<sup>3</sup> The Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*, in Hebrew) refers to the territory of ancient Kingdom of Israel and the time period where the Jewish national and religious identity had been forged (*Jewish Claim to the Land of Israel*, Jewish Virtual Library).

<sup>4</sup> The term was created in 1890 based on the word 'Zion' referring to a hill near Jerusalem (Alroey, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Two major messianic eras: first, the final redemption with a catastrophic end, followed by a miraculous and utopian society and, second, the restorative messianic view "characterized by the restoration of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem" (Eisen, 2011, p. 146).

entity other than the Land of Israel” (Alroey, 2011, p. 1). The essence of their goal was not the establishment in “the Holy Land, but a land for our own” (Alroey, 2011, p. 1). In fact, some members of the Zionist movement, including Theodor Herzl, didn’t consider the establishment in Palestine “a requirement for the realization of its aspirations” (Alroey, 2011, p. 5), considering diplomacy should precede forced settlement<sup>6</sup>.

In current times, Israel has become one of the highly militarized countries in the world, with their security agencies being traced to the period of the Yishuv community<sup>7</sup>. The establishment of an Israeli State has not been peaceful as Israel has been involved in several wars with its neighbouring countries: the Suez Crisis in 1956<sup>8</sup>, the Six-Day War in 1967<sup>9</sup>, the War of Attrition<sup>10</sup> of 1967-1970, Yom Kippur War<sup>11</sup> of 1973, and the 1982 Lebanon War<sup>12</sup>. Israel also engaged in military offensive operations against Palestinian and Lebanese non-state armed factions, such as Hamas<sup>13</sup> and Hezbollah<sup>14</sup>. Throughout the decades, successful armistice agreements have been achieved with Egypt, in 1979, and with Jordan, in 1994. Mutual understandings and occasional ceasefires were reached, but even those were disrupted by frequent violence.

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<sup>6</sup> “Should the Powers declare themselves willing to admit our sovereignty over a neutral piece of land, then the Society will enter into negotiations for the possession of this land. (...) experiments in colonization have been made, though on the mistaken principle of a gradual infiltration of Jews. An infiltration is bound to end badly. It continues till the inevitable moment when the native population feels itself threatened (...) Immigration is consequently futile unless we have the sovereign right to continue such immigration” (Herzel, 1989, p. 13).

<sup>7</sup> It is the Jewish community in Palestine during the United Kingdom’s rule. It had pre-independence security institutions, such as Haganah (later the core of the IDF), Palmach, Etzel and Lehi. (*British Palestine Mandate: The Jewish Community under the Mandate (1922-1948)*, Jewish Virtual Library).

<sup>8</sup> Also known as the Second Arab-Israeli War, it represented the invasion of Egypt by Israel in 1956 as a response to the nationalization of the Suez exploration. It resulted in the Israeli occupation of Sinai Peninsula (Mayer, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Also known as the Third Arab-Israeli War, the closure of the Strait of Tiran to Israeli vessels triggered an Israeli military response. It resulted in Israeli victory with the occupation of the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Bowen, 2017 June 15).

<sup>10</sup> After the diplomatic failure of the Six-Day War, the 1967 Arab League summit issued the Khartoum Resolution of 1 September 1967, known as the Three No’s: “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it” (The Khartoum Resolution).

<sup>11</sup> Also known as Ramadan War and the Fourth Arab-Israeli War, it was against the coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria. It ended with the 1978 Camp David Accords with Israel returning the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt (Rabinovich, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> From 6 June 1982 to 5 June 1985, it was triggered by the southern invasion of Lebanon by Israeli forces (Freilich, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Hamas (acronym for *Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-’Islāmiyyah*, Islamic Resistance Movement), founded in 1987, is a militant, nationalist and Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist organization, known as a branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In 2007, it became de facto governing authority of the Gaza Strip and currently holds the majority of the parliament of the Palestinian National Authority (Taraki, 1989 January-February).

<sup>14</sup> Hezbollah (also written as Hizbullah), founded in 1985, is a Lebanese Shia Islamist militant group and political party. Its political wing is the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc and its paramilitary wing is the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon and the Lebanese Resistance Brigades (Levitt, 2013).

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Based on this context, this dissertation will explore the depths of the militarism in Israel, focusing on the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and the security network, and the demilitarization movements within Israel and a demilitarized Palestine. My interest in conducting a profound and thorough investigation on this topic rose from the interest in the Middle East and North Africa region, rooted in my own heritage and passion for the culture and history of the place.

The investigation was conducted to explore the rooted nationalism and militarism in Israeli society and how it affected the national and foreign policies. It focused on the idea of militarism as an ideology and ethics within the IDF. Within the militarism framework, it aimed to understand and highlight in particular the importance of the digital communications within militarism. It was also conducted on the investigation of Israeli anti-occupation activism and demilitarization movements, highlighting the organizations Breaking The Silence and New Profile, and how their work is framed inside a extremely militarized society. At last, a brief exploration of the potential of a demilitarized Palestine and its significance for a peaceful resolution.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In International Relations (IR), militarism is “understood as the social and international relations of the preparation of, and conduct of, organized political violence” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 3), thus it is a crucial characteristic of world politics. In recent decades, the search for these characteristics has been redirected at the Global South due to military coups and military authoritarian regimes.

With the end of the Cold War, the 1990s symbolized a decline in global military spending, inter-state armed conflicts and of military and authoritarian regimes, giving way to a period defined “by democratization, economic liberalization, globalization, global governance and peace” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 6). Hence, the concept of militarism hasn’t received sufficient attention within the contemporary debates in IR, “despite the ongoing social, political and economic reach of military institutions” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 3).

The establishment of the United Nations (UN) and de-legitimization of wars of aggression have redirected concerns to the securitization of societies. It became observant for the excessive influence of military institutions and ideologies in domestic and international politics, “with the practice and legitimization of exceptional ‘security’

measures, regardless of whether these be the work of the military, or instead of intelligence services, domestic law enforcement agencies, the media, or any number of state, private sector and international ‘securitizing actors’” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 10).

According to Stravrianakis & Selby (2012), there are five theoretical perspectives on the concept of militarism: first, ideological militarism, in which the glorification of war has ranked “military institutions and ways above the ways of civilian life, carrying military mentality and modes of acting and decision into the civilian sphere” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 12); second, behavioural militarism, where there is an “inclination to rely on military means of coercion for the handling of conflicts” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 12); third, military build-ups, where there is an increase “in weapons production and imports, military personnel and military expenditure” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 12); fourth, institutional militarism, centred on the relations between the military and political institutions “where the former are deemed to exert excessive influence over the latter” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 13); and, fifth, sociological militarism, in which the “military relations influence social relations as a whole” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 14).

The post-positivist revolution in IR has assumed the liberalization and democratization in the second half of the twentieth century have challenged the militarist ideologies. It centred on the idea that democratic states cannot afford to go to war with each other since “democracy, trade and high economic development are systematically correlated with a decline in the incidence and severity of warfare” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 6). However, “liberalism is neither incompatible with militarism, nor quite as hegemonic” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 6) since history has shown otherwise<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there have been countries and regions which have experienced a progressive demilitarization.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

Based on this academic field and with emphasis on the necessity to study both militarization and demilitarization, the main research question of this dissertation is: in such militarized country, whose own military has been the source of violence and

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<sup>15</sup> “The leading liberal propensity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Great Britain and the United States respectively, fought more wars during these periods than any others” (Stravrianakis & Selby, 2012, p. 6).

accused of human rights violations, can the IDF reduce its militarized force on behalf of achieving the end of the occupation and the beginning of a peaceful resolution?

The dissertation seeks to answer this research question through the analysis and interpretation of academic texts and literary books, semi-structured online interviews with two Israeli activist organizations, Breaking The Silence and New Profile, as well as reports and documents written by the mentioned organizations. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic didn't allow a field research, originally included in the methodology. The limitation to academic texts, studies and reports allowed for a mostly academic view of the conflict, lacking the human connection and the authors' own integration in the reality discussed throughout the dissertation. Nevertheless, my personal perception of the information gathered and the personal accounts of members of the two Israeli organizations are present throughout the dissertation.

It is of utmost importance to highlight that this dissertation doesn't seek to find a definitive answer. The Israeli-Palestinian hostilities is an ongoing crisis that has endured multiple changes throughout the decades, with constant change in governments, leaders and policies, and, until its resolution, it is impossible to provide a definitive answer to the proposed research question.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis has been lasting as long as the establishment of the State of Israel and, despite the occasional approaches to negotiations for a peaceful agreement, it hasn't show signs of resolution in the near future. The crisis itself provides an segregated environment, in which Palestinians have to live with their human rights being violated daily, and nationalism and militarism has been deeply rooted in Israeli society. The securitization of every single aspect of life has conditioned Israelis to believe their security is constantly being threatened and, thus, their perpetual need to ensure national protection. The citizens of Israel and Palestine have lived in these conditions for eighty years and the Israeli anti-occupation organizations have fought for decades to appeal to the government and the IDF to end the military occupation. Therefore, it is necessary to understand if the IDF has shown signs of willingness in ending the occupation.

## **PART I: MILITARISM IN ISRAEL**

What is currently happening in Israel and Palestine can be interpreted as a direct reflection of the long-term perception of constant threat and violence coming from the collective memories of the Jewish community's suffering and persecution. It resulted in generational trauma and an overwhelming dedication regarding one's security, both domestic and foreign, affecting all areas of Israeli and Palestinian lives.

This culminates into the concept of "continuous existential threat" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 15). It is demonstrated as a continuation of the trauma of their ancestors, felt by Israelis through the hostilities between Israel and the Arab countries and Palestinians, translating in domestic and foreign threats, whether one considers them real or imagined, to the existence of the Israeli state<sup>16</sup>. The security issues are considered one of the most, if not the most, pressing issue in Israeli society. The rapid and constant growth of the Israeli security sector, in particular the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the private sector, translated in the evolution of the military industry with advanced technology and weaponry systems.

### **CHAPTER I: ISRAELI DEFENCE FORCES**

The military is already part of the Jewish-Israeli identity by the time of the establishment of the State of Israel but it is after the first Israeli-Arab War (1947-1949) the Israeli leaders decided all Israeli citizens, regardless of their gender, should be drafted to the IDF at the age of 18. Since then, Israel has created an impressive reserve military force composed by men and women who have completed their mandatory military training and can still be mobilized for national emergencies.

The IDF's goal is consistency in "a single code of conduct that spans its entire military and that is subject to fairly uniform interpretations" (Schulzke, 2019, p. 163). Its original objective was the defense of the borders of the new established state and the protection of Israeli citizens from Arab-driven attacks. It is the awareness of a possible second war with the Arab countries that led, in the 1950s, Israel to adopt an offensive-defensive strategy which consisted in the periodical launch of strikes against "imminent threats to the state's security" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 4).

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<sup>16</sup> The security existential threat can be due to various factors: "first, the particular circumstances in which the state was established; second, the history of the state (and sometimes also the pre-state community) before and/or after independence; third, the state's contested legitimacy in the eyes of domestic actors, foreign actors, or both; and fourth, extraordinarily high levels of hostility towards the state demonstrated by some or all these actors" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 19).

It is necessary to understand that the IDF didn't only influence military settings; they were entrusted with general society, such as settlements and education. In the early years, thousands of hundreds of new migrants fled or migrated to Israel, much of it due to the historical, cultural and religious sense of the Promised Land<sup>17</sup>. Thus, "the IDF played a pivotal role in Israel's process of state formation and development" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 5), emphasising the power to influence civilian life, making the boundary between the civilian and security spheres barely existent.

The Israeli national security has marginalized civilian leaders on behalf of placing former and acting soldiers in traditionally civilian roles, thus seeing "an increasing number of (...) "professional" military personnel (...) became intimately involved in policy and decision making" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 36), creating a tradition "perceived as natural and legitimate (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 36). Its involvement has resulted in a more war-oriented behaviour towards Israel's neighbours and a further involvement in politics, particularly after the First Israeli-Arab War when Shabak<sup>18</sup> and Mossad<sup>19</sup> were created. The following armistices, established through the assistance of the IDF, enhanced the perception for "its political and security elites that the new state would continue to rely" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 37). After the War 1967, the nomination of IDF's Chief of Staff for ministries positions<sup>20</sup>, a post previously held by civilian politicians, turned into a wave of tradition based on the perception "that former security officials are the best qualified individuals to deal with Israel's complex geo-strategic challenges" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 37).

It is clear the security sector thrives in hostile situations and "push the Arab states and Israel toward a war" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 38) in order to further legitimate the association with the civilian sphere. It is the combination of several factors, such as political, military and economic isolation that allowed Israel to thrive in self-reliance, expanding the country's autonomy in the security sector.

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<sup>17</sup> It is the land promised to Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 15:18).

<sup>18</sup> The Israel Security Agency, known as Shabak or Shin Bet, was established on 30 June 1948 after the dissolution of Haganah and it is responsible for safeguarding state security, aid military administration, counter terrorism and political subversion (*About, Shabak*).

<sup>19</sup> The Institute for Intelligence and Special Operation, known as Mossad, was established on 13 December 1949 and it is responsible for the collection of intelligence, develop intelligence relations with other countries, assistance in peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, and involvement in special operations, such as the pursuit of Nazi criminals (*About, Mossad*).

<sup>20</sup> The first nomination of an IDF Chief of Staff for a ministry position was Moshe Dayan (1915-1981) for Minister of Defense, from 1967 to 1974. In 1978, for the first time in Israel's history, a former Chief of Staff was appointed Prime Minister with the nomination of Yitzhak Rabin who soon nominated Shimon Peres (1923-2016) as Minister of Defense.



The distance between the security sector and the political sector was preferred by certain politicians, such as left-right winged parties' members and moderate politicians, due to the IDF's tendency to cross lines, such as the initiatives to combat in the Sinai, the execution to reach the Suez Canal or the occupation of the Syrian Golan "without the knowledge of most Israeli ministers" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 39). Nevertheless, the IDF and the security network continue to thrive in the dominance they so fiercely cultivated.

The IDF's involvement with Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weizman<sup>21</sup>, then Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs respectively, with Egypt allowed the two countries to reach the Camp David Accords<sup>22</sup>, in 1978. During the First Intifada<sup>23</sup>, in December 1987, the IDF and the government agreed on strategies to demolish the Palestinian Uprising, which only resulted in losses on both sides. During the Second Intifada<sup>24</sup>, in October 2000, despite the Oslo Accords<sup>25</sup>, the IDF played a crucial role in the escalation of the conflict, resulting in human losses as well as the establishment "of the Separation Barrier<sup>26</sup> that Israel built in the West Bank" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 42). In the 1990s, the peace negotiations with Jordan and Syria as well as contacts with the Palestinian Authority (PA) after the Oslo Accords counted with the participation of acting generals of the IDF.

Regardless of the existence of an Israeli National Security Council<sup>27</sup>, the agency didn't become a major player in the decision-making process, as "the IDF, (...)

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<sup>21</sup> Ezer Weizman (1924-2005) was the 7<sup>th</sup> President of Israel from 1993 to 2000, serving as Minister of Defence from 1977 to 1980 (Orme Jr & Myre, 2005 April 25).

<sup>22</sup> The Camp David Accords were established between President Anwar Sadat and Prime Minister Menachem Begin, in 1978, establishing peace between Egypt and Israel. Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, in 1978 and 1979 that established a peace between Egypt and Israel (MFA, *Peace Process Guide to the Camp David Accords*).

<sup>23</sup> The First Intifada started at 8 December 1987 and ended on 13 September 1993. It ended in the suppression of the Palestinian uprising with the Madrid Conference of 1991, followed by the Oslo I Accord, which resulted in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and with the recognition of Israeli by the Palestine Liberation Organization (Peters & Newman, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> The Second Intifada started at 28 September 2000 and it ended in 8 February 2005. It was triggered by the failure of the Camp David Summit 2000, meant to reach a final agreement on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process (Peters & Newman, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> The Oslo Accords consist in Oslo Accord I, known as Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed in 1993, and Oslo Accord II, known as Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, signed in 1995, between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat (Fleischmann, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> The barrier was created without Palestinian civilian consultation, which is a violation of the Geneva Convention, complicating Israeli's position in the international community, particularly the International Court of Justice (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 42).

<sup>27</sup> Established in 1999 with the purpose to consult and advice in security issues without the involvement of the security agencies (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 44).

the Shabak and the Mossad, have retained their primacy as consultants to the government in general and the prime minister” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 44). Having in consideration the IDF has been gathering power and dominance over these matters, it does seem unlikely any other institution will ever either hold a higher power than the IDF does now or share its dominance. The intense involvement of the security network on every matter, relating it to security issues, has classified them as indispensable and increases their legitimacy.

## CHAPTER II: SECURITY NETWORK

The IDF is solemnly a part, although the most crucial, of the security network. The existence of the security network is based on acting and former security personnel and their partners in the civilian spheres of Israeli society, interconnected by shared common Zionist values, interests and perceptions. Despite their disagreements on how to promote it, they define security as the major concern and the ultimate goal. Therefore, “considerations about security become a major determinant of policies and decisions in many spheres of collective life; society members view security as a central issue in societal life with all its implications, and, security forces have major determinative power in the society” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 69).

Many soldiers “continue working with former military comrades when they go into civilian employment, thereby sustaining affiliations and unit subcultures” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 160) and expanding their social network. The politicization of the high ranked members of the IDF reveals “the general lack of separation between the political and military spheres in Israel and the dominating role of the IDF in deciding the state’s national security policy” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 66). Furthermore, IDF acquires an undeniable authority where their knowledge and experience in the security sector is a valuable skill, deeming those who do not possess it cannot possibly understand it. It is combined with a fierce loyalty within the security sector; often seen protecting the members in need of help, even from unlawful actions, seeming “forever hesitant to dismiss one of its own” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 71) and those who criticize it are often silenced.

The civilian sphere in Israel has been profoundly affected by the security network, deeply so, until 2012, a total of 54 security officials have served as Knesset members, 39 as government ministers, 6 as Prime Ministers and 3 as President (Barak & Tsur, 2012, p. 488-489). Although, there is a civil society whose purpose is to “operate in the public sphere and whose members attempt to change, or express their support for, the government’s policy in specific areas, but without challenging Israel’s democratic regime” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 56), referring to the Israeli press and overall media, and educational system.

The security network cultivated a stronghold on the Israeli media, seeing a growth in members of security officials, followed by a military censorship policy<sup>28</sup>. Accordingly, the IDF teaches journalists how to self-restraint in order to maintain a particular connection with the security sector in exchange for a continuous flow of information, thus increasing the dependence of the Israeli media on the security sector. It is a monopoly “when it comes to national security, the sources of information are few and access to them is controlled” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 59). The IDF goes further into applying pressure, including harassment, on journalists who attempt to publish any material that the IDF might find harmful, which means “writers who operate outside the purview of Israeli’s security network are strongly encourage to play by the rules or not play at all” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 59).

In the educational system, there has been a gradual infiltration of former Israel officials, consisting in the positioning of active army officers in several high schools in order for them to advise and oversee students who were nearing their time to serve the mandatory military service. Furthermore, it resulted in “the appointment of a Shabak official as a deputy to the head of the Arab education in Israel’s Ministry of Education, a position that enables this official to be involved in, and even to veto, the appointment of Arab Palestinian principals and teachers” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 61).

Regardless of its interconnectivity, the security sector maintained autonomous from civilian politicians until 1978 when, for the first time in Israel’s history, Yitzhak Rabin, a former Chief of Staff of the IDF, was appointed Prime Minister. In consequence, “Rabin soon promoted several of his former comrades to senior positions in his government, and in the security sector” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 40), including Shimon Peres<sup>29</sup>, who was nominated to the Ministry of Defence.

### **SECURITIZATION IN ISRAEL**

The reality is that the “military service is such a focal point in Israel that for one who does not perform well or honourably in the IDF it is almost impossible to succeed in the civilian sector” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 160). Therefore, the interference of the military in civilian society has led to the securitization of Israel. The dismissal of

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<sup>28</sup> Imposed by the Israeli Military Censor, an IDF unit, it seeks to watch over the publications of any and every informational of military network and national security. It has the authorization to suppress any information deemed compromising from ever going public (Matar, 2022 June 28).

<sup>29</sup> Shimon Peres (1923-2016) was Minister of Defence and Foreign Affairs and served as Prime Minister in two different times: the first from 1984 to 1986, and the second from 1995 to 1996 after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

civilian leaders in favour of the appointment of security officers has become a reoccurring situation, and it can lead to political crisis and international incidents.

One of the most notorious cases would be the resignation of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Sharett<sup>30</sup>, in 1956, when the IDF “planned and prepared to launch a pre-emptive war against Egypt” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 77) which heightened the tension within Israel’s main political party, Mapai<sup>31</sup>, between the moderate and the activist faction. The activist faction was led by Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, David Ben-Gurion<sup>32</sup>, while the moderate faction was led by Moshe Sharett. Sharett believed the IDF’s plan to be an action mostly motivated by the institution’s desire to initiate a war, rather than concerns over national defence. He emphasised “the desire for a preventive war which is obsessing the IDF’s elite to the point they are using every possible pretext to launch an explosive act which will set off the powder keg” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 78). Despite Sharett having initiated talks with Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdul Nasser, the IDF executed its plan, which led to Sharett’s resignation.

In 2011, the leaders of the religious Zionism movement conducted a fierce campaign against the appointment of a favoured candidate, backed by the former director, for considering him “hostile to them and to the settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 85), naming Yoram Cohen instead. Then Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu<sup>33</sup>, conceded and nominated him as the new director of the Shabak.

In the period of 1999 and 2004, the Israeli defense budget “exceeded the budget officially approved by the government by 15 percent” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 87). Any intentions to reduce or cut the defense budget’s allocations are met with resistance and accusations of inefficiency and of destruction of the security sector. In 2005, after decades of Israel refusing to develop an anti-ballistic defence system, the construction of the Iron Dome project was “the brainchild of members of Israel’s

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<sup>30</sup> Moshe Sharett (1894-1965) was Israel’s second Prime Minister, serving between Ben-Gurion, from 1954 and 1955. He was also Israel’s first Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving from 1948 to 1956 (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Mapai (acronym for *Mifletet Poalei Eretz Yisrael*, translated to Worker’s party of the Land of Israel) was a democratic socialist political party and the dominant force in the Israeli political system until it merged, in 1968, into Israeli Labour Party (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) was one of Israel’s founders and served as its first Prime Minister, from 1955 to 1963 (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu (1946-) served as Prime Minister of Israel for two periods, from 1996 to 1999, and then again from 2009 to 2021. Netanyahu served in the IDF’s elite unit, *Sayeret Matkal*, and later joined the IDF reserves (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

security network, and was moreover initially developed without government's approval" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 91). The Iron Dome eventually officially developed under Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert<sup>34</sup>, in 2006.

Another aspect of Israeli's securitization of non-military issues is that civilian issues are often seen or transformed into security challenges, regardless of their connection with security, such as "anti-drug campaigns that portrayed pot smokers as collaborators with Hezbollah; efforts to integrate more ultra-religious Jews into the Israeli economy by recruiting them to the IDF; calls made by Israelis MKs and former security officials to quickly exploit the large reserves of natural gas discovered off the shores of Israel lest they fall into the hands of Israel's enemies, Iran and Hezbollah" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 96). It goes further into transforming forest fires into a matter of national security, in which "official statements and media reports concerning the fire immediately (...) insinuated, that (...) was an act of terror" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 97), enhancing the status of the civilian politicians as security experts.

In addressing civilian issues by securitizing them, security officials can often use terminology similar or equal for when dealing with actual security threats and transfer a lot of the civilian issues towards the security side. By doing so, they prevent hard questions from being asked about their performance. Therefore, the "securitization of a civilian sphere (...) opened the door for an even accentuated role of Israel's security sector and (...) for members of the security network, in decisions of war and peace" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 100).

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<sup>34</sup> Ehud Olmert (1945-) was the 12<sup>th</sup> Israeli Prime Minister from 2006 to 2009 (Olmert, 2022).

### **CHAPTER III: ISRAEL'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICIES**

It is not only the civilian society that is securitized; any topic or issue that fits under the sphere of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) “was immediately passed to the security sector” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 102) and, more often than not, sensitive information was not shared with the MFA. It indicates a power struggle from the security sector, especially the IDF, in which “meeting with military personnel have a fixed scenario. The military representatives present three options: the first could be very effective, but bears many risks and has a low chance to succeed; the second might succeed and bears no danger, but is of marginal effectiveness; and the third, which was the one they preferred from the start. It got to the point where I would just say to them – “start from the third option”” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 103).

It gave an unparalleled role in setting Israel's foreign policy, with clear lack of directives separating it from the civilian sector and the failed attempts to desecuritize policies only led to “the recognition of members of the security network as specialists in the area of national security” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 104). Despite the wide variety of cases that can be demonstrated to showcase the power the security sector has over the foreign sphere, only two will be presented: the Israeli policy regarding the Palestinian Territories and the one regarding Lebanon.

#### **ISRAELI POLICY REGARDING THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

The major political question that Israel has been confronted since its establishment is about the Palestinian territories, which, since 1967, refers to the West Bank – East Jerusalem included -, previously under Jordan rule – and the Gaza Strip, previously under Egyptian rule. Israel controlled the latter until 2005 when withdrew from the area under the Disengagement Plan<sup>35</sup>, implemented by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. According to the MFA, “the purpose of the plan was to improve Israel's security and international status in the absence of peace negotiations with the Palestinians” (Under-Secretary-General Tells Security Council, 2005).

According to Al-Jazeera, in May 2021, since 1967, Israel has built, at least, 250 settlements, being 130 of them government approved while the remaining 120 are unofficial, housing around 500,000 Israelis in the West Bank and 200,000 in East Jerusalem. There is an estimate of as much as 750,000 settlers are living in illegal

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<sup>35</sup> Elaborated by Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, the unilateral Disengagement Plan meant to withdraw Israeli control over the Gaza Strip and North Samaria (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 105).

settlements (Haddad, 2021 May 19). Although the settlements were part of the Zionist project since the beginning, there was hesitancy. On the one hand, the 13<sup>th</sup> government of national unity<sup>36</sup>, established in 1967, didn't want to concede the Palestinian territories in return for peace with the Arabs as done before "with regard to the Sinai (...) and the Golan" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 106). On the other hand, Israeli leaders didn't consider to officially annexing the Palestinian territories.

The hesitation is rooted from the disagreements within the government itself. Some members believed Israel should keep the territories occupied claiming its importance for national security while others stated that, by incorporating the then Arab-occupied territories, it would lead "to the destruction of the Jewish State" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 106). Other members were indecisive, such as Prime Minister Eshkol<sup>37</sup> who, although played an active role later, initially wasn't sure if Israel could control the areas without feeling the need to control the Palestinians.

Domestically, an ambiguous policy can ease the tensions within the government and it can be supported by all spectrums of the political system. On the external level, it can avoid or alleviate international pressure; a lesson previously learned in Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. Another factor is the United States' unwillingness to propose, agree or act in order to reach an attainable solution. Nevertheless, it provided an opening for those supporters of the total Israeli control of the occupied territories, whether motivated by religious or political values, to promote their individual and collective interests.

According to Sheffer & Barak (2013), the security network's role was essential for the securitization of the Palestinian issues in order to respond to the existential threat. The 1967 War might have been over but the Arab neighbouring countries continued to represent a threat to Israel, thus increasing the belief that the occupation of the Palestinian territories could prevent the destruction of the state. In its essence, "by securitizing the Palestinian Territories, the government (...) ensured that its own discussion and decisions (...) would remain a state secret" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 109).

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<sup>36</sup> A national unity government is a coalition government consisting on some, most or all parties to form government, usually during a time of war or national emergency.

<sup>37</sup> Levi Eshkol (1895-1969) served as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Prime Minister of Israel from 1963 until his death in 1969, and as Minister of Defense (Avner, 2010).



However, the indecisiveness and hesitancy doesn't mean the future of the territories was left at chance. Yigal Allon<sup>38</sup> and Moshe Dayan alongside with the security network were able to change Israel's policy regarding the Palestinians "from one characterized by hesitancy to an activist policy" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 107).

The Allon Plan proposed a form of settlement and eventual annexation of specific areas in the Occupied Territories<sup>39</sup> with a return of other areas to Jordan. It consisted in the Israeli annexation of the Western side of the Jordan Valley as well as the Western side of the Dead Sea. The areas which would be ceded to Jordan would be a part of the West Bank as well as areas from Bethlehem to Hebron, which would enable Israel to flank the West Bank from all sides, in some sort of containment. Ultimately, two roads, one Jordan and one Israeli, linked the territories of each country, creating a sort of "future Israeli-Jordanian governance condominium" (OHCHR, 2021 July 9). For Allon, the plan would assure a peace for the Israeli-Arab conflict by seizing all continued hostilities and preventing future wars as well as giving Israel a sense of security. It would allow a continuity of the Jewish majority, based on the Zionist principles, and provided the Palestinians the opportunity to live without subjugation of the Israeli state, allowing them to establish political relations with whoever they wished (Center For Israel Education, 2019 July 2).

The Dayan Plan proposed Israel's indefinite *de facto* control over all the Palestinian Territories until the possibility of a future *de jure* declaration (OHCHR, 2021 July 9). It would incorporate an economic integration so deeply linked that it would make the separation of the territories from Israel more difficult as time went by. It would allow an Open Bridges Policy which authorized the free movement of Palestinians as well as movement of goods to and from Jordan and other neighbouring countries through Jordan (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 1969 August 21).

Despite the contrasts between each other, both plans ended up being utilized in the formation of the Israeli settlements, each on its own specific area.

The securitization of the Palestinian territories offered multiple opportunities for the security network to promote their own interests and agendas, regardless of it being in accordance to governmental approval or not. Furthermore, over the decades,

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<sup>38</sup> Yigal Allon (1918-1980) was an Israeli politician and served as a commander of the Palmach and general in the IDF. He served several ministerial roles and was the acting Prime Minister for less than a month in 1969 (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> The territories occupied after the 1967 War refers to the Golan Heights (later returned to Syria), the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Sinai desert (later returned to Egypt).

Israel's policy has aggravated with some governments intensifying the settlements and others ignoring the issue, allowing the security network to continue to exert dominance in the policymaking decisions.

In 1987, Yitzhak Rabin<sup>40</sup>, then Minister of Defense, believed “the [First] Intifada would be a passing phase” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 113), ignored the advices of civil society actors and specialists, who warned the Intifada to be “an authentic Palestinian uprising” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 113) and that military force would only increase the tension. Rabin allowed the IDF to use force to suppress the uprising but later realized that it could not be dealt through military ways.

From 1993-1995, an international effort was made to reach a first stage of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, promoting mutual recognition and a path for the two-state solution. Yitzhak Rabin, as Prime Minister and Defense Minister, sat at the table with Yasser Arafat<sup>41</sup>, leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). These negotiations represented an “historic compromise between the Jewish and the Palestinian national liberation movements” (Shlaim, 2018 September 13). Although the accord was a conduct to Palestinian self-determination, Israel exploited it “to repackage the occupation” (Shlaim, 2018 September 13) and resecuritized the Palestinian issue once more. The negotiations were unsuccessful with the Oslo Accords being viewed as an extension of Israeli policy, for “all the difficult questions: security, Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, borders (...) all of them were taken out [of the Oslo negotiations]” (Al-Jazeera, 2013).

Ultimately, the Oslo Accords were a step in the right direction “but it was killed when the rightwing Likud party returned to power under Netanyahu” (Shlaim, 2018 September 13). The Oslo Accords were abandoned after the failure in the talks with Netanyahu, in 2014, after the Israeli Prime Minister deemed it “incompatible with Israeli security and with the historic right of the Jewish people to the whole land of Israel” (Shlaim, 2018 September 13) and “a surrender to terrorists and a national humiliation” (Shlaim, 2018 September 13). Under his rule, Netanyahu undermined the entire spirit of the Oslo Accords, and all his claims of a peace process “gave Israel just

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<sup>40</sup> Yitzhak Rabin (1922-1995) was an Israeli general and politician. He appointed IDF's Chief of Staff in 1964 and served as the 5<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Israel twice, from 1974 to 1977 and then from 1992 until his assassination in 1995 (Makovsky, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Mohammed Abdel Rahman Abdel Raouf al-Qudwa al-Husseini (1929-2004), commonly known as Yassar Arafat, was a Palestinian leader for the PLO from 1969 to 2004 and it was the President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) from 1994 to 2000 (Makovsky, 1995).

the cover it needed to pursue the aggressive colonial project on the West Bank” (Shlaim, 2018 September 13). It enhanced the determination “to create a nation-state of Jews, rather than a Jewish democratic state” (Shlaim, 2018 September 13).

After the failure of the Camp David Summit<sup>42</sup>, in 2000, between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak<sup>43</sup>, then Israeli Prime Minister, the escalation of tensions between Israelis and Palestinians led to the Second Intifada when the IDF used its military force to suppress the uprising, disregarding the government’s policy for moderation, for considering the conflict “the continuation of Israel’s War of Independence” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 114).

The interconnected assistance between the IDF and Israeli settlers increased as they both considered the right to defend and strengthened their positions in the Occupied Territories. Israel often argues that Palestinians “insisted on all or nothing and ended up with nothing” (Shlaim, 1994, p. 26). It is argued that Palestinians are too slow in their decisions as, by the time they agreed on the principle of partition and the two-state solution, in 1988, “Israel, under a Likud government, rejected the idea, laying claim to the whole of the biblical Land of Israel, including “Judea and Samaria”<sup>44</sup>” (Shlaim, 1994, p. 26)

#### **ISRAELI POLICY REGARDING LEBANON (1975-2000)**

The securitization of the Lebanon issue led into a military endeavour that went from 1975 to 2000. In its essence, the operation intended “to destroy the PLO’s military and political infrastructure, to strike a serious blow against Syria, and to install a Christian regime that would sign a peace treaty with Israel” (Schulze, 1998, p. 215). However, the achievements of its objectives fell short and Israel ended engaged in the Lebanese civil war.

The signature of the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Israel and Lebanon allowed a neglect of Lebanon as a concern worthy issue due to the relations being managed through Israeli-Lebanese Mixed Armistice Commission<sup>45</sup>. In the late 1960s

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<sup>42</sup> The objective of Camp David Summit was to take a step further in the peace process but it was met by short advances, ending without an established agreement (Fleischmann, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Ehud Barak (1942-) is an Israeli general and politician, serving as the 10<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Israel from 1999 to 2001. He held positions as the Defense Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Biblical names for the modern West Bank.

<sup>45</sup> To resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United Nations established the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) which created four individual Mixed Armistice Commissions featuring Israel with Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 116).

and early 1970s, the relations deteriorated after Palestinian factions carried out attacks against Israel from Lebanese territory. The continuous attacks and accusations increased after the signature of the Cairo Agreement of 1969, which “concerned the toleration and regulation of the presence of Palestinian guerrillas (...) and their activities” (Christie K, 2021 May 14) by Lebanese authorities, followed by the expulsion of PLO fighters from Jordan following Black September<sup>46</sup>.

In 1975, in the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, Israel implemented the “‘Good Fence’ policy” (Nachman, 2012 June 18) as an effort to neutralize the Lebanese border and, “in the glory days of its ties with the Christians and the villages in South Lebanon, Israel had hoped to use the fence as a means toward co-existence” (Nachman, 2012 June 18), consolidating the control of the region named South Lebanon Area<sup>47</sup>. Israel’s invasion in 1982 was directed against Syria, who had replaced Egypt after the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in 1978 as “Israel’s most implacable enemy” (Freilich, 2012, p. 43) and the PLO. The once peaceful border was being challenged by the growing powers in Lebanon, thus its preservation “constituted a fundamental strategic objective for Israel” (Freilich, 2012, p. 43) and “with the goal of removing the Palestinian armed factions and (...) the Syrian Army” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 118).

In 2000, then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, sought to achieve peace with Syrian but after the failure of a peace agreement and “with the outbreak of the Second Intifada (...), Israel found that it could not effectively wage two wars at the same time, diplomatically or militarily, and chose to give priority to the Palestinian front” (Freilich, 2012, p. 45), deciding to unilaterally withdraw from Lebanon. The withdrawal didn’t bring absolute peace, for occasional shellings, abductions, assassination attempts and low-level attacks continued on both sides of the border. However, it is with the abduction and murder of Israeli soldiers in 2005 that “both Israel’s public and decision makers were increasingly becoming convinced that even a complete Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory, albeit a unilateral one, had only diminished its security” (Freilich, 2012, p. 46).

From the 1970s, there was an increased in the Israeli territorial nationalism and religious nationalism which led to a higher drive for “the expulsion of the entire non-

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<sup>46</sup> Also known as Jordanian Civil War, Black September was a conflict between Jordan and the PLO fighters from 1970 to 1971, resulting in the expulsion of the PLO from Jordanian soil. Simultaneously, an Syrian invasion in Jordan was repelled and in the creation of the Palestinian organization, Black September (Shlaim, 2008, pp. 290-404).

<sup>47</sup> Commonly known by its Hebrew acronym, ADAL.

Jewish population of the territories either immediately or as a result of a deliberate program” (Kimmerling, 1993, p. 217-218). It enhanced the ideological-political sphere, not using national security as the sole justification for war.

For Freilich (2012), the unique aspect of Israel’s policy in Lebanon is its nature. Often argued as a reactive nature, in the Lebanon case, “although major environmental changes served as the background for the policy changes made, Israel’s decision makers took the initiative (...) in the attempt to pro actively shape the environment” (Freilich, 2012, p. 46). It shifted Israel’s claims in defining each war “as a ‘war of no choice’” (Kimmerling, 1993, p. 218). Instead, under his rule, Menachem Begin<sup>48</sup> claimed “a war can be waded ‘by choice’” (Kimmerling, 1993, p. 218) and “deployed the military to attain patently political objectives” (Kimmerling, 1993, p. 218).

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<sup>48</sup> Menachem Begin (1913-1992) was Russian-Israeli politician, founder of Likud and appointed 6<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, from 1977 to 1983. Before the establishment of the State of Israel, Begin was the leader of the paramilitary organization Haganah (Avner, 2010).

#### **CHAPTER IV: “THE MOST MORAL ARMY IN THE WORLD”<sup>49</sup>**

The last three chapters highlighted how the level of militarization in Israeli society is directly connected to the importance and influence the IDF has in the security network. Nevertheless, that level of militarization has been achieved due to its roots in ethical and moral values. The use of militarization as a form of ethical and moral enforcement from a state or organization is not a recent phenomenon, nor rare. In fact, ethics and morality has become part of the military propaganda and war justification. Whether it be in Gadhafi’s Libya, in 2011, or in Hussein’s Iraq, in 2003, the justification of the heavy international involvement settled on “moral and humanitarian imperatives” (Lodico, 2001, p. 1028) but, more often than not, the missions are complex as the UN seeks to balance its enforcement for peace and the states’ interests.

These justifications settle in an idea of a moral battle between the good and the evil, a humanitarian-positive army and an evil barbaric one. Most recent military interventions are justified as a defence of humanity against those who threaten it, using the humanitarian principles to legitimate military violence. On the other hand, there have been conflicts which humanitarian intervention should have been used and it wasn’t, such in Rwanda, or wasn’t coordinated, such in Yugoslavia, in the 1990s. According to then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, “member states were reluctant to place soldiers in harm’s way because there were no perceived vital interests at stake” (Lodico, 2001, p. 1028).

In Israeli militarism, ethics has obtained an importance capability of imposing “doubt on the efficacy of political challenges which seek to mobilise a purely moral critique of Israel’s military engagements” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 2-3), becoming part of the IDF’s program machine, making violence easier rather than to restrain it.

#### **MILITARISM AS IDEOLOGY: ‘KEEPING A HUMAN IMAGE’**

The truth inherit to any civilization, culture, religion or time period is that, regardless which beliefs are true or false, what matters is how strong belief allure individuals to participate in society. They often capture the individual’s desire which “cannot be explained purely with reference to the conscious thoughts of the actors involved. Instead, it highlights the importance of unconscious desires and drives in accounting for ideology” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 33).

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<sup>49</sup> A title referencing the statement by Israeli Defence Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, in 2018 (Barak, 2018).

Israeli militarism is a form of ideology in which the individual desires war or military intervention, allowing ethics to play an essential role. Thus, “certain key values and discourses associated with war-fighting and military activity are presented as the expression of the soldier’s desire” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 35-36), making soldiers embody them. Then, ethics covers the inconsistencies of the produced fantasy when confronted with certain aspects of reality, such as the violence of the occupation, becoming unconscious and difficult to dislodge.

The Israeli concept of conserving soldiers as human beings comes from Spirit of the IDF<sup>50</sup>, in which the “ethical code, and the guidelines and operation resulting from it, shape the mode of action applied by all IDF soldiers and units, both in peace and at war” (*Ruah Tzahal - IDF Code of Ethics*, n.d.). Exposed in the beginning of the military service and required to be carried at all times, the Israeli Code of Ethics’ objective is the protection of the soldiers from the moral consequences of the military service. The goal is not the creation of a war machine or blindly obedient soldiers who do not question their orders but the preservation of a pre-existing humanity while “being able to relieve soldiers of the burden of using their own judgment” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 6). The idea of “keeping a human image” (Eastwood, 2017) is not meant an endless justification of every action but the confrontation with the reality of violence.

The ethical pedagogy implemented by the IDF is not systematic or centralized, “not at all integrated into disciplinary or accountability mechanism which might translate greater awareness of ethical issues into changes in military conduct” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 80). It means that some cultural, religious and even operational aspects of the teaching can differ, depending on the instructor. It rarely leads to investigations or legal accountabilities, which reinforces the idea that the Israeli ethical education is made purposely to protect the soldiers and not to apply accountability.

In 2004, there was a reform in the pedagogical doctrine, initiated by Moshe Ya’alon<sup>51</sup>, then Chief of Staff, who promoted the concept of *Yi’ud Ve Yihud*<sup>52</sup>. It sought to restore the Jewish-Israeli identity, “returning the IDF to its militia-like roots but combining it with a new ethno-religious emphasis” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 83) to

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<sup>50</sup> *Ruah Tzahal*, in Hebrew. It is the IDF code of ethics, designed to be the creed of Israeli military. It was first published in December 1994 and edited in 2001 (*Ruah Tzahal – IDF Code of Ethics*, Jewish Virtual Library).

<sup>51</sup> Moshe Ya’alon (1950-) is an Israeli politician and former Chief of Staff for the IDF. Ya’alon served as Minister of Defence under Benjamin Netanyahu from 2013 until 2016. From 2019 to 2021, he was in the Knesset until he retired from politics in 2021 (Sheffer & Barak, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> *Identiy and Purpose*, in Hebrew.

revive combat motivation, illustrating the connection between values and identity. In fact, “these activities distract from violence not in the sense that they ignore it, but in that they turn the ethical encounter with violence into an opportunity to stage a variety of militarist fantasies, many of which also encompass a range of gendered, racial, religious, and ethno-national identifications” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 113).

The advantage of the IDF’s code of ethics is that soldiers do not have to face philosophical dilemmas regarding ethical questions, thus rejecting the idea the soldier having a direct role in their moral development. Instead, it “sets the foundations for soldiers receiving rules from superior officers who are in a position to solve the dilemma and issue directives” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 167). In theory, it frees soldiers “from the burdens of moral thinking” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 167). However, it can be dangerous if it serves as an encouragement “to uncritically follow orders without reflecting on whether they are truly moral” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 167). Therefore, the military ethics education taught in the pre-military academies tries to counteract this statement.

### **PRE-MILITARY ACADEMIES**

The IDF’s powerful position has enabled them “to shape civilians’ threat perception” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 170) and “the result is a narrative of threats reiterated by conservative politicians, threats that Israeli civilians are socialized into long before they enter the military service” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 170). Therefore, the pre-military academies<sup>53</sup> have a key concept to prepare the individual to do not only a “meaningful military service but to train leaders for civil society after the army” (The Joint Council of Pre-Military Academies, n.d.). It is widely believed the best way for an individual’s effective military service is through ethical self-cultivation where the “military service is the means to cultivate the soldier as an ethical subject” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 123). In these programs, the academies offer a deeper insight to the military service with some academies focusing on the intensive physical training while others focus on the orientation and navigating skills and others focus on leadership skills.

Furthermore, they value a sense of identity which serves as an ideological foundation for their military participation. In the religious academies, parts of the

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<sup>53</sup> Pre-Military Leadership Academies, also known as Mekhinot, are either private or public, religious or secular academies intended to help young Israelis to prepare for their military service as well as develop leadership skills for a community service in different aspects of civil society after the military (The Joint Council of Pre-Military Academies).



programs are conducted towards a religious and national identity, promoting the Jewish-Israeli identity, alongside with a Zionist aspect, implemented to view the military service as part of a religious duty. In this way, the “military service is presented an expression of faith, as an opportunity for drawing and acting on one’s religious values” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 124), with the goal of making them a better soldier. It raises the idea that a meaningful service in the military contributes to the self-improvement of the soldiers as human beings, thus keeping a human image.

### **THE VALUES OF PURITY**

The term ‘purity’ is introduced in the IDF code of conduct and in religious academies, although in different interpretations. The concept of purity is connected with King David’s military victory and how David attributes his victory to “‘the cleanliness of my hands’ and ‘according to my righteousness’ in the eyes of God” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 151). Thus, these academies consider that the soldiers are “‘cleaner, purer, and more precise’ in order to maintain their motivation and the belief that they are doing ‘the work of God’” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 151). The purity of arms relates to the behaviour of the soldier as a whole. However, such interpretation allows the generalization of the value and makes it applicable to the self-cultivation culture in the pre-military academies. For some, the value means the requirement for the soldier “to aspire at all times to be moral” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 129).

Personal testimonies are particularly important in the spread of awareness within and outside the IDF’s concrete walls. Those testimonies are often known through Israeli human rights organizations, such as B’Tselem and Breaking The Silence, whose work focus on the gathering of documents, reports, visual and verbal testimonial accounts of the violence perpetuated by the IDF. However, due to these organizations’ reputation for criticising the Israeli authorities, the students are often sceptical about the accounts of bribery and others acts of the same severity and of exploitation and violence.

The military academies offer discussion of values and rules described in the IDF’s code of ethics, allowing the inquiring of hypothetical scenarios “to give them the opportunity to clear up any ambiguities” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 163). Through pedagogical work the students can abandon the defensive attitude and “replace it with a desire to prevent them [violent behaviours] during their own military service” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 130). The reality is the root of the problem in these testimonies is often ignored in

favour of creating an environment in which students can allow the ethical self-cultivation to be a better soldier.

Another meaning of “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” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 133), which means that this value also covers the purity of intent. Turning it into a moral component, allows the disappearance of “the structural violence of the Israeli occupation (...) into the background of a constant struggle for the self-cultivation of the soldier” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 133).

In theory, this value states that a soldier can only use their weapon and authority for the purpose of the military mission and never for personal purpose. However, it gives the soldier “an additional benefit which is ‘surplus’ to the mission” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 134) in which the “military activity, pursued for its own sake produces enjoyment and supersedes the purely instrumental uses of deploying force” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 134).

### **DUALITY OF ETHICS**

The introduction of Israeli checkpoints and settlements throughout all Israeli and Palestinian lands laid “outside the scope of the IDF’s conventional war fighting expertise” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 156). The change “from conventional fighting to counterinsurgency has brought soldiers into greater contact with civilians, politicized the military, and given (...) more freedom of action” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 156), forcing soldiers to act in different roles than the ones initially trained for.

The religious root of the military duty enabled justifications in which Palestinians, “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” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 146). It has been rooted in the IDF’s thinking the idea that “every war is an existential crisis that must be won at all costs” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 154). It creates “a perpetual state of desperation to win, and the prominence of this belief in the IDF’s doctrine further suggests this is the primary motive for Israel’s controversial strategies” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 171).

The perceived existential crisis has influenced the IDF doctrine and its strategic planning to justify violent actions, including “morally questionable practices, such as targets killings, preemptive attacks, lethal violence” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 171), which were deliberately adopted by those “who (...) are responsible for solving ethical

dilemmas so their subordinates do not have to” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 171). The endorsement of the willingness to suspend moral roles in emergency situations “and the decision to enshrine this reasoning in the IDF’s code of ethics authorizes soldiers to go beyond the limits of their ethical rules” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 171), sacrificing humanitarian concerns in favour of national interest.

Therefore, IDF’s code of ethics offers “explicit rules meant to guide soldiers so effectively that they do not have to make independent ethical decisions” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 171). But it enters in conflict when soldiers “resolve conflicts between rules or ambiguities in them by acting in Israel’s interest, and the rules may be overridden by the IDF’s overall imperative of protecting the country against perceived existential threats” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 172).

Nevertheless, soldiers are allowed to question the lawfulness of an order and the IDF’s code of ethics “addresses how to formulate legal orders, how to judge the legality of an order that is received, and how to respond to illegal orders” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 163). Essentially, soldiers are obliged, under Israeli law<sup>54</sup>, to follow all orders while being required to refuse those they consider manifestly unlawful<sup>55</sup> (Customary IHL – 154. Obedience to Superior Orders. ICRC Database, n.d.).

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<sup>54</sup> The differentiation is called ‘Black Flag doctrine’ is rooted in the Kafr Qasim massacre, on 29 October 1956, when the Magav (Israeli Border Police) killed 48-49 Arab civilians when they returned from work during curfew that had been imposed that same day to which they were unaware of. The judge of the trial stated that “the hallmark of manifest illegality is that it must wave like a black flag over the given order, a warning that says: “forbidden!”. Not formal illegality, obscure or partially obscure, not illegality that can be discerned only by legal scholars, is important here, but rather, the clear and obvious violation of law... Illegality that pierces the eyes and revolts the heart, if the eye is not blind and the heart is not impenetrable or corrupt – this is the measure of manifest illegality needed to override the soldier’s duty to obey and to impose on him criminal liability for his action” (Blisky, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> Israeli law makes a differentiation between unlawful order, referring to an action against legality, and a manifestly unlawful order, referring to the protection of persons (Blisky, 2004).

## CHAPTER V: DIGITAL MILITARISM

The creation of the digital communication platforms has aided Israel in expanding and deepening their militarism through the practices employed by their users by converting them into “militarized tools in the hands of state and non-state actors, both in the field of military operations and in civilian frameworks” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 6). Over the years, “the use of digital media for information warfare and more direct modes of computer-based combat such as hacking attacks on computer infrastructures and databases” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 11) created the atmosphere for cyber war.

Digital testimonials have been recognized as a “political potential of social networking and mobile digital technologies as instruments of grassroots mobilizing, citizen empowerment, and democratic politics in the Middle East” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. xi), but its usage under hands of authoritarian regimes has been a warning issue. The militarization of digital platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, has been integrating military operations across the globe, employing them “as tools of surveillance and counter-insurgency, and as archives of perpetrator violence” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 6). Contemporary warfare, conflicts and crisis have been exposed in digital communications platforms as the unavoidable presence of smartphones, computers and cameras on the battlefield with real-time updates and violent footage evidence are shared by both the victims and perpetrators. It creates the vulgarization of violence by mitigating its act and, by consequence, its impact.

The most concerned aspect in Israeli digital militarism is the interplay between violence and the absence of violence seen through the publication of photos and videos, “casting soldiers as beautiful and often erotic subjects” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 13) while articulating a set of common goals, such as “killing in the name of national security, eradicating enemies and returning unharmed” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 13) as they defend their country against a common, dangerous enemy.

Kuntsman & Stein (2015) introduce a concept of temporality presented by the division of ‘The Now’, represented by the visual archives, filled with digital publications in social media, and the ‘Yet To Come’, represented as “scenes of collective waiting for an impending ground invasion, a field of suspended time in which military engagement exists in the modality of an imprecise but certain future” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 13). There is evident interconnection between “violence and not-violence, (...) killing and eroticism, war and self-branding, security emergencies

and everyday moments” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 14) which emerge from the contrast of Israeli militarism in the present time and its long history: “between the *not yet (war)* and the *always (war)*” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 14). It promotes a military occupation simultaneously present and absent, hidden and visible as “the future war has always already been foretold and secured, its violence obviated through inevitability” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 13).

Therefore, the core of digital militarism lies in the “tension between virality and obfuscation, exposure and concealment, the spectacular visibility of Israel’s repressive military rule and the increasing Israeli refusal to acknowledge it as such” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 14). It establishes the idea of a public secret where “a secret that is known to the public but which the public chooses to keep from itself” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 15), setting oppositions of “something that is known but concealed, understood but protected” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 43). Ultimately, it allows complicity with violence.

The Israeli public secret can be traced to the foundation of the Zionist movement and its settlements, recalling “the collective Israeli refusal to contend with histories of Palestinian expulsion at Israeli hands” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 15). Thus, the Israeli public secret is viewed as “a form of social contract that works to contain the effects of Israeli state violence on the civilian everyday” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 15).

### **THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AS THE OTHER BATTLEFIELD**

Digital militarism began in 2000 when a group of Israeli youth hackers decided to hack the websites of Hamas and Hezbollah with the intent of “replacing existing content with Israeli national symbols or slogans, political taunts, and occasional pornography” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 24). The attacks triggered a response from the Palestinians hackers who targeted important institutional Israeli websites, such as the Israeli Parliament, the IDF and others. Since then, hacking attacks from either side on databases websites, institutions, and platforms as well as personal attacks on supporters and leaders have continued.

In 2006, the war between Israel and Hezbollah represented “the first instance in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict in which virtual and real battle spaces were actively conjoined” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 25), with citizens using Google Earth to identify areas on the other side and using TV channels, radio and websites as each

side engaged in the spread of their own propaganda. The usage of the Internet as a form of cyber warfare opened a new set of concerns and security breaches as well as a new set of targets, weapons and, consequently, damage that required strategic planning of the cyberspace and cyber security. Indeed, “this process transformed the terms of Israeli militarism and created new relations between civilians and soldiers, between home and battlefield, between acts of wit and acts of violence” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 26).

The 2008-2009 Gaza War, known as Operation Cast Lead<sup>56</sup>, had the objective to end the Hamas’ rockets fired at southern Israel which were triggered by an Israeli violation of the latest ceasefire. The war prompted the Israeli online communities to employ militarization in its plenitude from all political and ideological beliefs. Palestinian communications infrastructures were heavily targeted by the Israeli military, as they converted “civilian sites into legitimate military targets “whose destruction would have been otherwise in contravention of the law”” (Stein, 2021, p. 38). It marked the first official military use of social media after “the Israeli military was said to have lost the information battle due to numerous technological missteps” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 27). It led to the launch of an official YouTube channel whose purpose was to publish military operational footage and video blogs from IDF’s spokesperson to provide visual justification for the ongoing operations, accompanied by notes and circled targets.

The assault on the Freedom Flotilla<sup>57</sup>, in 2010, generated mass mobilization throughout the digital world as the Israeli seizure of the ship resulted in numerous casualties and nine deaths, becoming viral on social media. Despite the efforts to appease public opinion through constant justifications, it was considered a “colossal public relations failure” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 29). The episode emphasized Israel’s inability to utilize social media effectively in their favour in the early stages and articulated the need to “distil the complex messages in a more accessible way, and send links to legal sources” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 32).

Subsequently, Israel boosted its hacking skills and anti-hacking defences, expanded the surveillance and invested in the growth of international bloggers’ support

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<sup>56</sup> Operation Lead Cast (*Mivtza Oferet Yetzuka*, in Hebrew) is the name given to the Israeli launched operation in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009. Its name is rooted in a traditional children’s games during Hanukkah (Gavriely-Nuri, 2015, pp. 42-43).

<sup>57</sup> The Gaza Freedom Flotilla was a naval convoy carrying humanitarian aid and construction materials in order to break the naval blockade imposed by Israel on the region. It was a coalition between the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (Black & Siddique, 2020 October 15).

in favour of the state. It allowed the Israeli government and military to inhabit the social media platforms as everyday users, “transforming the traditionally formalized and hierarchical language of state talk and press releases into the popular terms required by Twitter and Facebook” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 33). The investment compensated with Operation Pillar of Defence<sup>58</sup>, in 2012, as Israeli soldiers and official military spokespersons updated their social media, employing their respective political and military propaganda in digital platforms. It was called, by the global media, as Israel’s “first social media war” (Peled, 2012 December 6).

On the Israeli side, the digital updates were an institutionalized documentation of the events while, on the Palestinian side, it was an amateur documentation of the violent devastation, often their “personal technologies transformed the civilian into a combatant, able to be killed with impunity” (Stein, 2021, p. 39). Digital militarism evolved to the point the Israeli official military account began to announce operations, updating their status and promoting them. The most recent example was during the 2021 Israeli-Palestine crisis<sup>59</sup> where Israel announced through Twitter a declaration of several attacks in the Gaza Strip.

The state’s investment was accompanied by the civilian sphere, as “while Hamas and the IDF traded public relations quips, digital pro-Israeli groups were using social media platforms to share patriotic testimonials, to voice hatred towards anti-war “traitors”, to track sites of wartime devastation within Israeli territory, and to employ hashtags to catalyze solidarity (#PrayForIsrael)” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, pp. 33-34) and publication of “handwritten Hebrew signs (“Stop the rockets”); amateur photographs from the bomb shelter; selfies with personal testimonials” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 34). The ultimate goal was the dominance of digital platforms by using them for patriotic and nationalist goals.

It created a concept of first time narratives in which “the storyline installed the fiction of temporal novelty, collapsing history into an all-consuming present, a story contingent on perpetual forgetting of the past” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 38). The state and military are considered individual and its operations are personal projects,

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<sup>58</sup> Operation Pillar of Defence was launched on 14 November 2012 consisted of aerial assault on the Gaza Strip as a responsive attack for the Hamas’ rockets attacks, and thus reducing the rockets in Hamas’ possession (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> The 2021 Israeli-Palestine crisis started in 6 May and ended on 21 May. It was triggered by IDF riot and Palestinian protests over the last days of the Ramadan. On 10 May, Hamas’ demand for the removal of Israeli forces from Al-Aqsa mosque. Shortly after the deadline, Hamas fired more than 150 rockets from Gaza into Israel. In response, Israel launched air strikes against the Gaza Strip (Kingsley, 2021 May 15).

acting as a public secret with consensual unspoken agreement of not acknowledging the violence of the occupation. Thus, it “masked state violence through the patina of the private, while “first times” obscured its working through historical amnesia” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 38).

### **THE SUSPICIOUS SCANDALOUS NOT-SO-SCANDALOUS EVIDENCES**

For the Israeli military, the fluidity provided by the digital militarism offers an operational advantage but it proves to also be a liability to the state as “private cameras and cellphones of soldiers moved in and out of operational contexts in ways that military officials could not fully control” (Stein, 2021, p. 20). Young Israeli soldiers’ digital presence allowed them to post content of “their war, their fun, their observations of what they find picturesque, their atrocities” (Stein, 2021, p. 18), often triggering a viral scandal due to its plain and visual violent content with suggestive and degrading comments towards the Palestinians in a playful tone.

These visual contents are the norm, as “there is no IDF soldier in a combat unit that does not have at least one photograph with cuffed detainees, blindfolds on their eyes” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 42) and some confess to have worse photos, claiming the mistake is to “put them on the Internet” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 39). According to testimonials given to *Breaking The Silence*, the publications are a representation of the Israeli soldiers’ daily life as “for these soldiers serving in the occupied territories, this is what they see 24/7: handcuffed and blindfolded Palestinians” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 39). Visual content of “everyday street scenes in urban Hebron, building exteriors, the details of private Palestinians homes” (Stein, 2021, p. 27) often decorate the Israeli soldiers’ cameras and displayed “their wanton brutality (...) from smiling snapshots of the platoon to (...) images of dead Palestinian bodies” (Stein, 2021, p. 30).

It illustrates the mentality of the public secret regarding violence perpetuated by the Israeli occupation: it is seen “as both Israeli common knowledge and Israel’s dirty secret” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 60). The left-wing groups criticize the individual’s character, casting them as the dark side of the military occupation that “endangered Israel’s international reputation and public efforts” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 44). Nevertheless, the scandals didn’t precipitate a national conversation about the violence perpetuated by the IDF in the name of Israel’s occupation. Instead, the discussion is redirected to the “information security in the digital age, on social media



best practices, on the lures of the Internet for those in the armed forces” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 43).

For the Palestinians, the brutality of the images serve as evidence of “another incident of military violence with legal impunity” (Stein, 2021, p. 3). It is a further “example of the day to day life of the Palestinian people under occupation. It indicates that occupation is a cause of suffering and humiliation for the Palestinians people every day and it is an indicator [of the ways] that occupation also corrupts the Israelis” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 44).

Ultimately, the Israeli state has been admitting what they cannot deny. The viral cases make it impossible for Israel to deny the existence of the violence, but they can distance themselves from the negative interpretations by isolating them as incidents and anomalies in the IDF rather than a standard behaviour. The IDF presents itself “as a military with a conscience, which in turn contributes to the impression that any misconduct is accidental and contrary to the IDF’s goals” (Schulzke, 2019, p. 158). In its essence, Israel’s perceived social contract with the public has resulted “in poor enforcement of existing bans and a slow pace of new regulations” (Stein, 2021, p. 44) that might prevent future viral cases.

Furthermore, the visual material can be equally considered suspicious. The rooted suspicion by considering the content as potentially digitally manipulated, staged or taken out of context is seen as a form of patriotism. It can be used as a political tool by destabilizing Palestinian indigenous claims of “history, land, humanity, etc.” (Stein, 2021, p. 74) and displayed as inauthentic or fabricated. It becomes “crucial in enabling the violence of colonialism” (Stein, 2021, p. 74). In this case, suspicion is seen “as an attempt to recalibrate the terms of the longstanding colonial project” (Stein, 2021, p. 74). Accusations are justified as “irrefutable evidence of the deceitful and corrupt nature” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 56) of Palestinians as Israel casts “doubts on both the veracity of the footage and the body of the alleged victim, alleging that both were manipulated to frame the Jewish state” (Stein, 2021, p. 98) and, thus threatening Israel’s public image.

Ultimately, it is the Palestinian identity that is being questioned. Israel’s accusations are rooted in nationalism which makes “little room for Palestinians’ political and humanitarian” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 68) matters. Hence, “digital suspicion cleansed not only the Israeli army of its wartime responsibility, but also the military occupation of its occupier” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 70) as “Israelis were

being taught to read the visual field of state violence as a locus of probable, rather than merely possible, fraudulence” (Stein, 2021, p. 96).

### **THE NORMALIZATION OF DIGITAL MILITARISM**

Digital militarism doesn't consist solemnly in the normalization of the defence of one's country or one's belief against another's. It consists on the suspicion over content by one's adversary, on the publication, sharing and promotion of the vulgarization of state violence. It is the routine of documenting daily life, regardless of how disrespectful and invasive. Simultaneously, it is the capture of visual content and its exhibition “flourished, both in the stance of perpetrator and activist” (Stein, 2021, p. 44).

In 2014, “Israel killed more Palestinian civilians (...) than in any other year since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaze Strip began in 1967” (Zonszein, 27 March 2015). This was due to the kidnapping and killing of Israeli teen settlers in the West Bank, which prompted the launch of Operation Protective Edge, a seven-week-long conflict with violent responses from both the IDF and Hamas. Despite the devastating Israeli bombings, the Palestinian reality was obfuscated by the Israeli one. The brutal murder of the Israeli teenagers raised rage, indignation and a need for revenge, as “some Jewish Israeli extremists mobs roamed Israel's streets hunting Palestinian victims, others turned to Facebook to call for vengeance: “The People of Israel Demand Revenge” (...) (#IsraelDemandsRevenge) (...) “Death to the Arabs”, “Death to every terrorist”” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, pp. 92-93). A line had been crossed and the violence exploded, aided by digital militarism through “the patriotic mobilization, the military propaganda efforts, the racists tweets and posts, the beautified soldier selfies, the joyful celebration of Palestinians deaths, the discourse of digital suspicion” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 95).

Before, the displays of solidarity consisted in a distant approach in standing by the aggressor. In 2014, the citizens stood as the violent aggressor, as “they acted as aggressive agents in their own right by collectively demanding violent retribution” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 95). It provided for a shift in time: what had been once an action in a time less certain raised to a call for unequivocal violence in an immediate present and future, going “from killing in an ambiguous time to blunt calls for deadly futures” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, pp. 95-96).

## **PART II: DEMILITARIZATION IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE**

The level of militarization of Israeli society hasn't been able to silence all the voices advocating for the end of the occupation and the demands for a demilitarized society. The grassroots activism increased in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the generational change as young people born in Israel reached the political age. Having never experienced the collective traumas older Jewish people suffered, "such as the Holocaust or the prolonged and bloody struggle for national independence" (Hermann, 2014, p. 53), their sense of security and self-reliance was stronger than those "who had experienced life-threatening personal and national crises" (Hermann, 2014, p. 53). In 1968, the noncompliance and alternative political paths manifested through Letters From Seniors sent to then Prime Minister, Golda Meir<sup>60</sup>, questioning the "authentic desire of the Israeli government to make peace with the Arabs, (...) that made them question the rationale for their impending military service" (Hermann, 2014, p. 53-54).

Israeli society has the duality of perceiving itself simultaneously as a victim and a warrior fighting its enemies while sharing a collective denial for Palestinians issues. However, the liberal Zionist left-wing "frame[s] their critique within the boundaries of explicit loyalty to Israeli society and allegiance to Zionism" (Weiss, 2019, p. 173). Their presence is crucial due to Israeli authorities' dependency on its citizens to survive and claim that holding the government accountable for their policies is a key element for producing change.

In current days, all Israeli anti-occupation groups recognize the Palestinians' rights to self-determination "as the point of departure for negotiations, not its result" (Hermann, 2014, p. 66) as most groups prefer "the establishment of an independent Palestinian state side by side with Israel" (Hermann, 2014, p. 66).

Despite the common objective in "actively challenging Israeli government policy, the Israeli state narrative and actions towards the Palestinians" (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 11), these groups differ of each other, whether on the problems they focus to the solutions they propose. In fact, "some commit their time and energy in pursuit of an end to the 'conflict' and 'peace' between Israel and Palestinians; others reveal the violations of Palestinian human rights at the hands of the Israeli authorities, in order to encourage an end of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and the blockade

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<sup>60</sup> Golda Meir (1898-1978) was an Israeli politician and teacher who served as Israel's 4<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, making her the first woman to ever be head of government in Israel. Meir also served as Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of Foreign Affairs (Avner, 2010).

of the Gaza Strip; still others acknowledge their history as a colonizing population, dedicating their efforts to supporting the struggle of the Palestinian people” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 11).

## CHAPTER I: THE ISRAELI ANTI-OCCUPATION ACTIVISM

This second part of the dissertation will follow the division presented by Fleischmann (2021) and divide the Israeli anti-occupation activism into three categories: liberal Zionist, radical and human rights.

The Liberal Zionists groups have adopted a liberal approach to Zionism as they “acknowledge and support the Jewish nature of the State of Israel and based their criticism of the occupation on the harm it causes, first and foremost to Israel’s moral essence and to Israeli interests and international image” (Hermann, 2014, p. 67). They view the end of the military occupation as necessary to achieve peace but reject the idea to “abolish the Law of Return<sup>61</sup> or to make it universal” (Hermann, 2014, p. 68). Created as an opposite response to the settler movement, Gush Emunim<sup>62</sup>, their approach is non-confrontational, adopting a method of mobilizing the Israeli audience and seeking to directly influence the government.

The Radical groups align their narrative with the Palestinian narrative by acknowledging “their position and history as colonizers, (...) that Israel conducted an ethnic cleansing on the Palestinians between 1947 and 1949, has colonized the West Bank since 1967 and has engaged in an ‘ongoing forced displacement’ of the Palestinians” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 14-15). They focus on “equality and justice, rather than peace” (Fleischmann, 2021, p.14). The radical organizations are from a diverse variety of political spectrums: those who are anarchists, anti-Zionists, those who support the two-state solution and those who do not seek a political solution at all. The term radical refers to their collective of ideas that can be “unacceptable, taboo or even illegal” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 15) within Israeli society.

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<sup>61</sup>Also known as ‘Right of Aliyah’. It started to be implemented in the 1880s where immigration to Palestine was known as ‘ingathering of the exile’ or ‘returning to the promised land’. It was passed by the Knesset on 5 July 1950, granting every Jew in the world the right to settle in Israel, thus making Aliyah a state policy under the Law of Return (*Israel’s Law of Return*, Jewish Virtual Library).

<sup>62</sup> Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) was an Israeli Orthodox Jewish movement. Although it no longer exists as an official movement, it has left enough influence to continue to impact in Israeli politics and society. Its purpose was to establish Jewish settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and the Golan Heights “on the basis of the religious-nationalist beliefs of a Great Land of Israel” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 14).

The Human Rights organizations focus on the protection of the rights of the Palestinian people<sup>63</sup>. The objective is holding the Israeli government accountable by raising awareness and documenting Palestinians' lives and discrimination. Their objective doesn't concern with historical aspects nor seek to promote any political solution.

The outbreak of the Second Intifada has fragmented Israeli society further, thus it is inaccurate to refer to the Israeli activists as an 'Israeli peace movement' as they have "either rejected support for a peace process over action on the ground or focused on human rights violations rather than on a political agreement" (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 16). It is more accurate to adopt the term Israel anti-occupation activism as all groups have one common objective: end the Israeli occupation. Even then, the term occupation may differ from one group to another. The liberal Zionists and human rights organizations usually refer to the areas occupied by Israel after the 1967 War, focusing on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The radical groups often refer to the own foundation of the State of Israel, in 1948, incorporating historical Palestine.

Therefore, the different approaches, beliefs and solutions make it difficult to have one cohesive voice. Nevertheless, in the late 1980s, most of the existing organizations at the time united forces to persuade the Israeli government into going to negotiations with the Palestinian side which, until then, "were expected to wait patiently for Israel and the Arab states" (Hermann, 2014, p. 65) to reach an agreement. The pressure succeeded in the early 1990s but the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin together with the failure of the Camp David Summit and the outbreak of the Second Intifada has impacted severely the Israeli anti-occupation movement.

### **RE-FRAMING ISRAEL ANTI-OCCUPATION ACTIVISM**

Israeli activists "experience challenging entanglements, contradictions, and dilemmas" (Weiss, 2019, p. 173) as the military and nationalist values inherent in Israeli society since its beginning increases "the difficulty, both strategic and emotional, of publicly going against an organization they once revered and in which they served" (Weiss, 2019, p. 174).

Initially, the liberal Zionist groups advocated the idea that the occupied territories after the 1967 War "should be conceded to Israel's Arab neighbours in

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<sup>63</sup> Defend the rights of freedom of movement, self-determination, access to food and water, right to liberation, right to education and individual and collective safety, among others (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 15).

exchange for peace agreements to ensure the peace and security to Israel” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 26). Peace Now<sup>64</sup>, the largest organization of the liberal Zionist group, and their Settlement Watch Project<sup>65</sup> reinforces the idea that the Israeli settlements in Palestinian occupied territories are “the main obstacle for peace” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 31). The outbreak of the Second Intifada brought lack of empathy for Palestinians, forcing the acceptance of certain government’s rhetoric. Thus, “by ridding itself of its pro-Palestinian image” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 28), the organization can “strategically frame itself and the messages it portrayed in ways that would resonate with the Israeli public” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 29).

Within the anti-occupation activism, there is the belief that if Israel continues to control the West Bank, “we are going to lose our identity either as a Jewish State or as a democratic state” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 29-30). While Liberal Zionist activists believe in the establishment of Israel as a fully democratic Jewish State, “the non-Zionist groups denounce this formula as hypocritical and demand that Israel be turned into “a state of all its citizens”, rather than a Jewish state” (Hermann, 2014, p. 68). Radical groups consider Israel cannot be simultaneously Jewish and democratic “because a ‘Jewish’ state – as opposed to state whose culture is Jewish or is ‘a national homeland’ for Jews – will always be a racist, discriminatory state” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 30). Recent approved laws confirm those statements: in 2018, a law<sup>66</sup> declared that, in Israel, only Jewish people had the right to self-determination; Arabic was removed as a co-national language; declared Israel as “the national home for all Jewish people” (The Knesset, 2018); and established “Jewish settlement as a national interest and [the state] will take steps to encourage, advance, and implement this interest” (The Knesset, 2018).

Radical groups do not accept the government’s rhetoric and acknowledge the need for the recognition of indigenous Palestinian population self-determination and the right of return for Palestinian refugees to “their original places of residence within

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<sup>64</sup> Peace Now is an Israeli non-governmental organization and activist group that advocates for two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was founded in 1978 after the visit of President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, resulting in a soldiers and officers’ open letter known as The Office’s Letter calling for peace (*Who We Are*, Peace Now).

<sup>65</sup> The Settlement Watch project monitors the construction of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It protests against its illegality and it has successfully achieved the evacuation and dismantlement of some settlements (Fleischmann, 2021, pp. 31-32).

<sup>66</sup> Commonly known as Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People, Nation-State or Nationality Bill. It defines the nature of Israel as a nation just for Jewish people, excluding the Palestinian citizens of Israeli – also defined as Palestinians of ‘48, their culture and their language (The Knesset, 2018 July 19).

Israel” (Hermann, 2014, p. 66). A well-known radical group is Ta’ayush<sup>67</sup>, who has a pacifist agenda opposing violence from both sides, employing disobedience to the law they consider illegal and illegitimate. Another group is Zochrot<sup>68</sup>, defending the right for Palestinians to return as a key to decolonization and a sustainable solution for the conflict. Tarabut Hithabrut<sup>69</sup> is an Arab-Jewish political movement seeking “to empower those oppressed communities to ‘free themselves’” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 35) and Combatants For Peace<sup>70</sup> condemns the suffering of the Palestinians while allowing the Israeli participants to maintain a Zionist look by conducting dialogue<sup>71</sup>. There are still those radical groups who openly challenge the Israeli army, such as Anarchists Against The Wall<sup>72</sup>, whose purpose is direct confrontation with the IDF in settlement constructions “coordinated through villages’ local popular committees (...) essentially Palestinian” (Hermann, 2014, p. 215).

Most of the radical groups criticize liberal Zionist and human rights organizations for their complacency, refusal or dismissal. They accused them “of actually serving only Israeli interests and of having no real interest in a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and considered their expressions of sympathy with Palestinian suffering as lacking in sincerity” (Hermann, 2014, p. 68-69). The reality of criticizing the military violence with a moderate Zionist creed by the liberal Zionist organization has led to “a more fruitful dialogue with the mainstream and ensured greater success” (Hermann, 2014, p. 68) but, at the same time, it has become a liability in the formation of “solid alliances with Israeli non-Zionist organizations” (Hermann, 2014, p. 68).

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<sup>67</sup> Ta’ayush (Arabic word for “*living together*”) is a joint grassroots movement of Jews and Arabs whose purpose is to call out the discrimination and segregation by promoting an Arab-Jewish partnership through non-violent actions of solidarity (*About Ta’ayush*, Ta’ayush).

<sup>68</sup> Zochrot (Hebrew word for “*remember*”) is an Israeli organization, founded in 2002, whose purpose was recognizing the Palestinian Nakba, support Palestinian refugees and their right to return after the Palestinian expulsion in 1948 (*Who, Why and How*, Zochrot).

<sup>69</sup> Tarabut Hithabrut was created by former members of Ta’ayush group who, although felt the principles and goals of the former group were crucial, they felt the need to mobilize to a wider audience and transform the cause into a political movement (*About Us*, Tarabut).

<sup>70</sup> Combatants For Peace is a non-profit, moderate radical group created by former Israeli soldiers and Palestinians combatants with the purpose of initiating dialogue between both sides and reach a common understanding for a two-state solution (*About*, Combatants For Peace).

<sup>71</sup> The organization assembles meetings through their ‘Encounter Program’ to provide an opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to hear and learn from the other side by each sharing their own stories, engage in a format of Q&A and open discussion (Combatants For Peace, 2020 April 20).

<sup>72</sup> Anarchists Against The Wall (*Anarchistim Neqed haGader*, in Hebrew) was founded in 2003 with the purpose of serving as a direct action group against the Israeli army (Gordon, 2011 April 1).

## CHAPTER II: CHALLENGING ISRAELI CONSENSUS: BREAKING THE SILENCE AND NEW PROFILE

**“NOTHING STRENGTHENS AUTHORITY SO MUCH AS SILENCE.”<sup>73</sup>**

Established in 2004, Breaking The Silence<sup>74</sup> is a veteran-based organization whose objective is to document testimonials from serving and discharged soldiers of the IDF about the military violence in the occupied territories. In their own words, “the main goal (...) is to expose the true reality in the territories and as a consequence to promote a public debate on the moral price paid by the Israeli society as a whole” (Hebron booklet, March 2004, English version, cover page).

Their mission is to collect verbal and visual testimonies about the daily reality of the Israeli occupation “seen from the standpoint of the soldiers assigned to uphold it” (Katriel & Shavit, 2011, p. 78). For that, either anonymously or identified, soldiers tape “into their personal memories in offering authentication to public critiques of the occupation regime and attesting to the price soldiers were paying in terms of their own moral footing and emotional well-being” (Katriel & Shavit, 2011, p. 78).

As mentioned previously, in the early 2000s, the “soldiers had cameras in their vest pockets” (Stein, 2011, p. 24) as documentation of people’s daily lives started to infiltrate the younger generations in the IDF. According to Yehuda Shaul, former combat soldier and one of Breaking The Silence founders, “they were just shooting their life” (Stein, 2011, p. 24). Despite the regulations placed at the time regarding the official photographers, the IDF “had less control over their unofficial ones” (Stein, 2021, p. 24).

The Israeli military tried to enforce a ban over personal recording devices in the occupied territories, stipulating “that no soldiers were permitted to enter Gaza with their mobiles phones or digital cameras, with violators promised stiff penalties” (Stein, 2021, p. 37). The justification was the security of information, but the “enforcement proved both difficult and uneven” (Stein, 2021, p. 37). As Breaking The Silence would document, “soldiers carrying their personal cellphones into the operation had produced another informational photographic record of military atrocity” (Stein, 2021, p. 38) but, despite the empathised importance of the official images, “none of the data collected during these home invasions, neither textual nor photographic, would be archived or

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<sup>73</sup> Quotation from Leonardo da Vinci.

<sup>74</sup> *Shovrim Shtika*, in Hebrew.



processed” (Stein, 2021, p. 41). This failure demonstrated the military had broken “both the promise that such operations were driven by security necessity and that cameras were indispensable tools in the process” (Stein, 2021, p. 42). For these soldiers, “the personal cameras (...) were highly flexible political technologies, at once instruments of repressive occupation and tools of radicalization” (Stein, 2021, p. 19).

From 22-28 May 2021, Breaking The Silence organized their first exhibition in Portugal, featuring several dozens of photographs taken by soldiers in the Occupied Territories since 2000 and visual and written testimonials. I had the opportunity to experience it firsthand on 19 May 2021, a few days earlier than the official opening, thanks to the Professor Doctor Giulia Daniele, and offered a guided tour by Ori Givati, the current Advocacy Director for Breaking The Silence. It has allowed a close proximity to the core objective of these projects. The harsh honesty captured in the photos and blunt language of the testimonies made it difficult to see and listen to them to the point that viewers might wonder how such society has fallen into a pattern of perpetual violence against another. The exhibitions are one of the strongest, if not the strongest, areas of their work, triggering simultaneous sentiments of heartbreak and encouragement. The latter is due to the volunteers and organizers who dedicate their time and effort to expose the testimonies and photos to Israel and the entire world to see, and to the soldiers who find the courage to speak up about their experiences. The multiple overwhelming and overlapping negative and positive sentiments the visitor feels when experiencing the exhibition is a strong indication of how the organization has extraordinarily executed their work.

According to Ori Givati, during an interview I conducted with him by zoom in August 2022, the reason behind the need to form the organization came from how “these groups of soldiers were serving in the middle of all this violence when they came back to their families for the weekends, to meet their friends, they discovered their families and friends don’t really understand what is going on in Hebron.” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). The 2004 exhibition, the first of its kind by the organization, exposed “soldiers’ videotaped testimonies, personal memories orally shared by the organizers as they guided visitors (...) and military vignettes exchanged by viewers” (Katriel & Shavit, 2011, p. 77) through “photos of different mission they took part in and patrols, checkpoints, home evasions, so forth” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). The understanding that the military violence extended beyond Hebron

prompted the organizers to officially create the organization, continuing their work until current times.

Essentially, the testimonials given to the organization serve not only as verbal and visual testimonies of the violence of the occupation but serve as well as topics to be discussed and analysed. It means more than just simply providing a personal account; it is about the reality of a several decades long military occupation “and how it looks like to invade families’ homes and what it means to stand in the checkpoint for 8 hours, what it means to participate or witness settler violence and so forth” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022).

Certainly, the exposure of military violence didn’t sit well with the IDF that launched a military interrogation leading to “confiscation of the video testimonies and demands to provide the names of the anonymous interviewees” (Stein, 2021, p. 31). The exposure of visual content of the military occupation echoed Israel’s public secret shocked the participants and visitors and it marked an important moment in Israeli anti-occupation activism. The emphasis on the anonymity of the images and some testimonials served to prevent military retribution as well as to remind the public these photos could have been taken by any soldier or reservist: “These photographers were military everymen” (Stein, 2021, p. 30). The military strategy changed and it embraced the organization’s role in exposing what they considered rare bad conduct. Although many soldiers decide to speak up after they finished their service, *Breaking The Silence* insists there isn’t any punishment within the IDF for those who speak up, stating “they [the IDF] are not too happy about soldiers talking to us but it is not illegal and there isn’t consequences” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022).

When asked about the impact of their work, Givati gave a few examples of people who came to the exhibitions and were inspired to share their stories but the measurement of their work is difficult to calculate as their ultimate goal, the end of the occupation, has to be done in a gradual pace. Nevertheless, for the organization, if in each of their meetings, exhibitions, tours and lectures, having “one more person against the occupation (...) is an important impact and an important achievement” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022).

The pressure of the military didn’t stop *Breaking The Silence* from continuing their work. Through public talks, press interviews, videotaped testimonies and meetings, *Breaking the Silence* continued to disseminate soldiers’ personal testimonials, not as a form of provoking the end of the military occupation, but as a form to promote

“public debate and thereby (...) demand social accountability” (Katriel & Shavit, 2011, p. 80). There has been a joined collaboration between Breaking The Silence and other activist groups, such as B’Tselem and others, to fight against the normalization of “ongoing violations of human rights associated with such routine domination practices as street patrols, curfews, house searches, and checkpoints control” (Katriel & Shavit, 2011, p. 78).

The organization prides itself to have a “rigorous verification process that each and every one of our testimonies undergoes prior to publication” (Breaking The Silence, n.d.) helping in the identification and discard of false testimonies. To the activists, these accusations serve to intimidate and silence the anti-occupation groups and individuals “in an attempt to smear the names of soldiers who chose to break the silence through testifying” (Breaking The Silence, n.d.).

One particular thing about the testimonials gathered by Breaking The Silence and its exhibitions is its use as a continuously relived past, “making soldiers’ experience as ‘unfinished business’ rather than as a past that they and their audiences can leave behind” (Katriel & Shavit, 2011, p. 80-81). Thus, “past events bleed into their present lives [which] turns them into a community of memory sharing a moral commitment to effect change” (Katriel & Shavit, 2011, p. 81). If one truly pays attention, through their photos, it feels like there is a constant struggle between duty and morality. When questioned about it, Givati explained that “as soldiers and throughout our upbringing as Israeli citizens and our entire society, the things we are doing with our military are for security reasons. In order to protect Israel, we need to do the occupation, among other things” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). Their objective is to fight against the idea that the military are being violent for national security: “Their [the IDF’s] main intention, their main goal, is not protection of Israel but the maintenance and entrenchment of the occupation itself. The security of the occupation. There are many ways to keep a country safe” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022)

Regarding the topic of demilitarization, Breaking The Silence refuses to support or oppose the idea: “We definitely believe that Israeli, like any other country in the world, has the right to defend itself” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). But they clearly reject the Israeli government and military’s justifications for the occupation. For them, “invading innocent families’ homes in the middle of the night (...) or settler violence (...) or the home demolition are not for the safety of Israel” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022).

Israeli society is harsh for those who decide to publicly criticize the IDF and “there is fear to be associated with groups who critique the occupation, in any way. Some people are afraid it will affect their future career and family relationship and friends relationships, so most prefer to stay anonymous” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). However, Givati explained a large number of people have preferred to be completely open: “They speak it about with their friends, in the interviews without their face covered” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). Ultimately, the identification of the soldiers is irrelevant for *Breaking The Silence* as their message is focused on the problem, which is the military occupation, and not specific people or missions. Givati also stated that “it is also less important for us to publish a name because, when you publish a name, it becomes very specific but most of our testimonies don’t talk about specific incidents, they talk about general missions” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022).

Givati stated the irrelevance of IDF being considered the most moral army in the world “because when you occupy millions of people with your military, it doesn’t matter which military you are, (...) if you’re doing it with the best intentions, with the worst intentions” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). Therefore, for *Breaking The Silence* “the occupation is morally indefensible and that there isn’t any way we can continue doing it in a legitimate or any other way. It must end. (...) We believe the point of view of the soldiers is a crucial point of view” (O. Givati, personal communication, 17 August 2022). However, the tendency is for the Israeli society to become “less democratic (...) and less open to criticism, especially about the occupation. What we are seeing today is more violence, more home evasions, more home demolition, more digital surveillance” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022).

When questioned about the main research question of this dissertation, namely the possibility of the IDF, in its current state, being willing to reduce the violence and its militarization in Israel on behalf of achieving peace, the answer was sceptical since “the military is the executive force of the occupation and they are told to control millions of people with military force” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). Due to the long period of occupation, Givati doesn’t believe the IDF can be the force behind the end of the occupation: “I think the way it can change is from the public, from the organizations” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022). For Ori, the progress in Israeli society and the end of the occupation should be an effort coming

from the public and “definitely not from the military” (O. Givati, author’s interview, 17 August 2022).

**‘TO DEMILITARIZE THE COUNTRY MEANS TO MAKE A PROFOUND DECISION’<sup>75</sup>**

Established in 1998, New Profile<sup>76</sup> is a feminist organization whose agenda focuses completely on the military and its role in the citizens’ lives. Their main work deals with the counselling network, which “consults people and help people get out of the army” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022), as well as “workshops about demilitarization and other subjects, social media and articles about (...) the subject of demilitarization: how it affects society, women, people of colour, the environment, animals, etc.” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022).

The organization provides young Israelis a safe space to discuss about conscription, offering them an alternative. In the past decade, New Profile has “organized youth groups in different cities of Israel, (...) work with teenagers who are still in school, encouraging them to think about militarization, feminism, the purpose and activity” (Cockburn, 2012, p. 66) of the IDF. They also run “summer camps for young people, with activities and workshops designed to put across a radical critique of society and militarization, economy and ecology” (Cockburn, 2012, p. 66). It has a portable exhibition showing the symbols of militarism in the citizens’ everyday life and it is presented at “schools, youth groups, galleries and pre-military academies” (*New Profile*, 10 April 2019).

In their counselling network, the organization can offer assistance to those who do not want to serve in the IDF and it offers them an alternative and support “through the legal process of acquiring the status of conscientious objection or release on grounds of being mentally unfit” (*New Profile*, 10 April 2019), including those in prison. Or, a volunteer for New Profile, in an interview I conducted in September 2022, highlights how the counselling network goes beyond providing information for those politically refusing to join the army: “We help whoever wants to get out of the army, and it doesn’t matter why. (...) They [might] want to leave to help their families, or they have been

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<sup>75</sup> Quote from Oscar Arias. Full quote: “To demilitarize the country means to make a profound decision. It is not enough to change the name of the armed forces. It is necessary to change the minds of those people who only yesterday wore a military uniform”.

<sup>76</sup> *Profil Hadash*, in Hebrew. The origin of its name is based on the medical profile the army provides every high school graduate when they enter the army. “This profile serves to determine the placement of each soldier in either a combat or non-combat unit and also identifies those unfit for military service” (*New Profile*, 2019 April 10).

abused in the army. (...) A part of the network is given to support these people, which sometimes it is not only the bureaucracy, but also moral and mental support” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022).

The reason behind the refusal to serve in the army can be varied. Or explains “people refuse to go for ethnical racism, (...) if you’re a woman, if you come from different neighbourhoods, or have a problem with the masculinity, people whose mental situation doesn’t correlate with the violence and control” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022). In particular, Or highlights the importance of those who outspokenly refuse in the name of being against the occupation and their courage in voicing their concerns and shedding light into the issue: “It is important because we don’t hear about it everywhere. It is being silenced, lied about, and it is important to put the voice out” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022).

For Israeli citizens to call for conscientious objection is near impossible since “because of the law, we cannot openly say we call for refusing to join the army but we do support the people who refuse” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022).

Until the early 2010s, it was possible to receive exemption on psychological grounds, known as Profile 21, and the process “could be achieved by anyone by just asking for a psychiatric evaluation in the army pre-enlisting medical tests and leaving the impression of an unstable personality” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 157). However, “in Israel, where a person is measured by his army history, rank and profile, having health Profile 21 would cause difficulties in finding a job, applying to university, getting loans and would adversely affect your public image in general” (58 2013, p. 171). Therefore, unless the person can explain and apologize for the health condition preventing them from being drafted, they are “somewhat cast out from normal Israeli society” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 158).

New Profile has dedicated efforts to decrease the stigma surrounding Profile 21, directing their efforts to the legal field and sharing awareness within society. Petitions in favour of laws against discrimination in the workplace have managed to declare illegal the information requests about the citizens’ military service and profile, alongside with “a similar process regarding university admission and other issues” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 158). This issue has brought “discussion on the role of the army and the politicians’ use of the army and of military life as a political tool and not only for ensuring the so-called ‘security’ of the people” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 159).

In the meanwhile, New Profile has spoken “freely about the falling draft rates every year and the growing numbers of people who choose Profile 21” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 158), exposing cases of “people who have never served in the army or have chosen to leave it make it into jobs and universities” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 158). According to the activists, speaking up openly about these issues has allowed them to break “the fear in society (...) and more people have received exemption from the draft for psychological reasons” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 158). As a form to fight the increasing number, the military has implemented a system in which a citizen can only get exemption based on psychological grounds if they are taking psychiatric medication. Additionally, a new status of special health soldiers was created for those “who are allowed to take only specific roles, most of them civilian jobs” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 158).

In 2020, new reports have shown that “nearly half of Israeli youth do not start or finish their military service” (Ahronheim, 2020 January 19). In the report, 15% of Israelis do not complete their military service, 32.9% Israelis do not enlist at all and 44.3% of women have been exempted from their military. Medical exemptions for mental health as well as based on religious grounds have increased, resulting in, “of the 4,500 who received exemptions, 44.7% were haredim<sup>77</sup>, 46.6% secular and another 8.7% are religious Zionist” (Ahronheim, 2020 January 19). Another data showed a rise of Muslim Arabs drafted in IDF with “606 Muslim Arabs drafted to the IDF in 2020” (Ram, 2021 July 18).

In many sectors of Israeli life, the military service is considered as criteria “for being an Israeli and being fully equal in every part of life” (Çinar & Üsterci, 2013, p. 159), which discriminates or entirely excludes groups such as the feminist movement, the homosexual rights movement and the Arab groups. The organization believes that if a woman wants equal rights, women must not disconnect from the political context, even “if the political context is the ongoing war that has given right to militarism in our society” (Daniele, 2018, p. 65). Ultimately, their reasoning is that “militarism will never allow equal rights for women” (Daniele, 2018, p. 65).

New Profile’s objective is the re-evaluation of Israeli history and state goals, as well as focusing on the controlling and oppressive relationships originated from the dominant male Zionist discourse. According to Or, the “army is based on men control

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<sup>77</sup> Ultra-Orthodox Jews.

and violence. Making men getting to much power, and learning from age of zero they need to be warriors and have to fight creates more violence and it creates a more chauvinist way of looking at life” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022). In Israel, women and their nature are seen as a weakness, and the society leans towards “a more masculine, violent perception” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022). Or recalls the “countless women being murdered by their husbands, brothers, fathers and cousins with weapons (...) Less army and less weapons means less death of women” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022), regardless of their ethnicity and nationality.

New Profile’s main subject in their agenda is the defense of a demilitarized Israel, stating “there is a direct link between militarism and patriarchy and only the demilitarization of Israeli society will foster values of tolerance and democracy” (Fleischmann, 2021, pp. 46-47). To the organization, “Israel has been controlled by militaristically minded men for too long to enable the emergence of a proper civil society in which women and people who do not share the militaristic ethos or experience can make their voices heard” (Hermann, 2014, p. 171).

When questioned about the demilitarization, Or explained the definition might change depending on the person. In Israeli society, the army is in every aspect of life and militarization means “living under the constant concept of the army being around (...) It is not only soldiers; it is the military’s constant presence in your everyday life” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022). Therefore, the organization’s objective is to not to eliminate the army in its entirety but reduce its presence in civilian daily life, erasing its influence and impact in every area of Israeli civilian society.

New Profile believes “the state creates a situation where it’s legitimate to give high school students false information about service” (Hermann, 2014, p. 171) and that the militaristic culture in Israel has shadowed all sides of the political and social spectrum. Until effective change is implemented in regards to the militaristic thinking of Israeli society, “it will be impossible to progress in the direction of resolving the conflict and strengthening real democracy” (Hermann, 2014, p. 171). Ultimately, “peace cannot be achieved until Israeli society undergoes a deep cognitive transformation – becomes civilian” (Hermann, 2014, p. 171).

At its beginning, the organization’s agenda contrasted profoundly with the Israeli public’s positive perspective of the military service, despite the “slow erosion in the enormous prestige of the IDF” (Hermann, 2014, p. 172). After Rabin’s



assassination, the anti-occupation movement tried to “adapt itself ideologically and operationally to the new realities” (Hermann, 2014, p. 173) but the presence of a hostile government to the Palestinian issue affected the efforts. Ideally, New Profile served as a mirror, aiding in the introspection from a feminist perspective, identifying “militarism as the root of all evil, as something that underlies the motives or considerations that give birth to Israel’s problematic policy” (Hermann, 2014, p. 173).

As previously discussed, one of the main reasons the IDF has a strong power over Israeli life is due to the continuous security threat concept, leaving a great fear for national security. Or understands people can be scared as “the Israeli government succeeded in creating such indoctrination to make people believe that all Arabs hate us and everyone is trying to kill Jewish people around the world” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022). Yet, Or doesn’t agree with the idea that a demilitarized Israel would signify a debilitating security, justifying that the wars Israel has been involved with the Arab countries were “created by the fact that the army exists in the way that it exists. We have countries that don’t have any problem with Israel and Jews; they have a problem with the occupation” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022). Therefore, to Or, “finishing the occupation will change the situation towards peace. Violence always creates violence. History shows that the one in power will have to be the one starting the change ‘cause we’re the ones creating so much suffering” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022).

When questioned about the main research question of this dissertation regarding the possibility of the IDF, in its current state, being willing to reduce the violence and its militarization in Israel on behalf of achieving peace, Or was clear in the response: “The army should not have the power to do it. (...) I do think power should go to the people. I think people should create civilian answers for different things in society, so that we, as society, can do the process of demilitarization and stop the occupation” (Or, author’s interview, 23 September 2022).

### **CHALLENGING THE IDF**

These anti-occupation organizations challenge the status quo of the Israeli mainstream politics and the IDF in different levels, even though a large percentage of the members of the various anti-occupation groups have served in the IDF and many continue to serve in the reserve units. Most of them see their participation in the military

as justification “for their claim to the right to take an active part in the national debate over security matters” (Hermann, 2014, p. 66).

The fragmentation of Israeli activism increases the difficulty in challenging the IDF, particularly for the radical groups who outspokenly reject what the IDF represents. Israel’s mandatory national and compulsory reserve law obliges those leaving high school to fulfil their military service and reserve duty for a period of time, thus its refusal through conscientious objection, either total or partial, provides a strong message to send to the government and Israeli public. Within international law, both the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>78</sup> and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>79</sup> declare the right to freedom of religion, conscience and thought<sup>80</sup>. However, the Israeli Supreme Court, in 2002, established that there cannot be selective conscientious objection, only being recognized general objection to military service.

Liberal Zionists activists often refuse to serve solemnly in the occupied territories, although not always, as it grants them credibility and legitimacy as individuals with “the necessary security credentials and patriotism to be able to criticize government policies” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 46). Meanwhile, radical activists often choose a total refusal, such as Combatants For Peace who expressively expect a total rejection of the military service in those regions.

In the early 1980s, Yesh Gvul<sup>81</sup> organized the first campaign advocating for selective conscientious objection, relating it “to the Lebanon War and then to the military service in the Occupied Territories” (Hermann, 2014, pp. 66-67). In 2002,

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<sup>78</sup> “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance” (UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 18, 1948 December 10,).

<sup>79</sup> “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching” (UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, art. 18, 1966 December 16).

<sup>80</sup> In 30 July 1993, an explicit clarification was made in which, although the treaties involved do not explicitly refer to the right of conscientious objection, it is believed “such a right can be derived from article 18, inasmuch as the obligation to use lethal force may seriously conflict with the freedom of conscience and the right to manifest one's religion or belief” (UNHRC, *CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion, 1993 July 30)*).

<sup>81</sup> Yesh Gvul (*There Is A Limit*, in Hebrew) was founded in 1982 as a political movement whose purpose was to support those who refused to serve in the IDF and conscientious objectors (*About Yesh Gvul*, Yesh Gvul).

Courage to Refuse<sup>82</sup> issued a Combatants' Letter<sup>83</sup> declaring their commitment in not to “continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate” (*Courage To Refuse – Combatants Letter*, 2002) Palestinians. At the same time, it reinforced their commitment to “continue serving the Israel Defense Force in any mission that serves Israel’s defense” (*Courage To Refuse – Combatants Letter*, 2002). However, the members of Courage To Refuse, “who expressed their patriotism and strong adherence to Zionism” (Hermann, 2014, p. 208), were easier “accepted by the general public than the individual refuseniks, whose criticism of Israel and often of the Zionist project” (Hermann, 2014, p. 208) was more aggressive and blunt, such as Yesh Gvul and New Profile.

Non-Zionist anti-occupation activists often “view the IDF as just another tool for the suppression of the Palestinians and for promoting the colonialist aims of the Zionist project” (Hermann, 2014, p. 68). In contrast, most Zionist anti-occupation activists don’t advocate “unconditional conscientious objection or fosters a pacifist creed” (Hermann, 2014, p. 68). Despite the often fluctuation of support of the IDF from the Israeli public, “as an institution it is still regarded as one of the most important in Israeli society” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 46). Ultimately, “challenging the IDF, through refusal to serve, criticizing its actions and direct confrontation, is considered unpatriotic in Israeli society” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 47).

However, the rejection of pacifism or of a military solution for the conflict can be traced to the collective trauma: “I wish I could tell you that they [the Holocaust survivors] were liberated from Theresienstadt by peace demonstrators carrying placards

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<sup>82</sup> Courage To Refuse (*Ometz LeSarev*, in Hebrew) was founded in 2002 by reserve soldiers who refuse to serve further than the 1967 borders (Fleischmann, 2021).

<sup>83</sup> “We, reserve combat officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, who were raised upon the principles of Zionism, self-sacrifice and giving to the people of Israel and to the State of Israel, who have always served in the front lines, and who were the first to carry out any mission in order to protect the State of Israel and strengthen it. We, combat officers and soldiers who have served the State of Israel for long weeks every year, in spite of the dear cost to our personal lives, have been on reserve duty in the Occupied Territories, and were issued commands and directives that had nothing to do with the security of our country, and that had the sole purpose of perpetuating our control over the Palestinian people. We, whose eyes have seen the bloody toll this Occupation exacts from both sides, We, who sensed how the commands issued to us in the Occupied Territories destroy all the values that we were raised upon, We, who understand now that the price of Occupation is the loss of IDF’s human character and the corruption of the entire Israeli society, We, who know that the Territories are not a part of Israel, and that all settlements are bound to be evacuated, We hereby declare that we shall not continue to fight this War of the Settlements. We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people. We hereby declare that we shall continue serving the Israel Defense Force in any mission that serves Israel’s defense. The missions of occupation and oppression do not serve this purpose – and we shall take no part in them” (*Courage To Refuse – Combatants Letters*, 2002).

saying "make love not war". But in fact they were set free not by pacifist idealists but by combat soldiers wearing helmets and carrying machine guns. We Israeli peace activists never forget this fact, even as we struggle against our country's attitude towards the Palestinians, even while we work for a liveable, peaceful compromise between Israel and Palestine" (Oz, 2005 August 28).

Liberal Zionist and radical activists "acknowledge the importance of a strong Israeli army for defense purposes" (Hermann, 2014, p. 68). Even organizations who call for either selective conscientious objection have "never denied or challenged Israel's basic need for a strong armed forces" (Hermann, 2014, p. 68).

### CHAPTER III: THE DEMILITARIZATION OF PALESTINE

Unlike the demand for a demilitarized Israel, which comes from within Israeli society, the demilitarization of Palestine has been an Israeli demand since 1993<sup>84</sup>, in which for Palestine to become independent, it needs to become a demilitarized state. It is a crucial point in the peace process for a two-state solution, increasing “the possibility of maintaining Israeli security while transforming Palestine into a source of stability in the Middle East” (Wessel, 2005, p. 294).

In its essence, Palestine would be “fully demilitarized with no military forces, (...) only with police and internal security forces of limited scope and armaments” (Wessel, 2005, p. 261). Israel demands a unified airspace and the assurance that only Israeli armed forces “shall be established or operate in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip” (Wessel, 2005, p. 261), thus prohibiting the formation of alliances with foreign powers. Israel’s concerns lie in the root of its security, which would “be better maintained if a new Arab state of Palestine were effectively demilitarized” (Beres, 2019, p. 195).

The core of international law states “a treaty is void if, at the time of its conclusion, it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law” (Vienna Convention, 1969, Art. 53), which, in this case, would be “the right of sovereign states to maintain military forces essential to their “self-defense”” (Beres, 2019, p. 197). The *jus cogens* norms do not allow the prohibition of states forging foreign alliances with any country as its prohibition constitutes a violation of the right to individual and collective self-defense under the United Nations Charter, in Art. 51<sup>85</sup>. Although Palestine has expressed their preference in “calling for a UN or other international/multinational third-part presence rather than an Arab coalition” (Wessel, 2005, p. 285), Israel has rejected the blue-helmets due to the threat to a Greater Israel<sup>86</sup>. Regardless, according to international law, if the government of a new Palestinian state

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<sup>84</sup> The 1993 Declaration of Principles, also known as the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements or as Oslo I Accord, served as basis for the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (*Agreement – Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (a.k.a. “Oslo Accord”)*, 2019 March 11).

<sup>85</sup> “Nothing in the present Charter shall impart the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security”.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Greater Israel’ is an expression with biblical and political meaning that has changed over time. It is also known as the Zionist Plan for the Middle East as it consists on the establishment of a Jewish State “from the Brook of Egypt to the Euphrates” (Tandon, 2021).

wished to invite foreign armies to its territory, it could do so without violating international law.

In addition, Israeli pressure in imposing demilitarization onto Palestine could be seen as a violation of international law, as the occupying power cannot impose legal rules on the occupied population against their will. Palestine can “claim duress in the formation of the treaty due to Israel’s previous use of force” (Wessel, 2005, p. 266), emphasized in the 1969 Vienna Convention, Art. 52<sup>87</sup>. In fact, the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories constitute a war crime by definition of Art. 8(2)(b)(viii)<sup>88</sup> of the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Court and Art. 49<sup>89</sup> of the IV Geneva Convention. Additionally, the imposition of demilitarization on an occupied population is prohibited under the IV Hague Convention, Art. 43<sup>90</sup>, and under IV Geneva Convention, Art. 64<sup>91</sup>.

Furthermore, any treaty or agreement of demilitarization between Israel and the PA can be considered null since the “Palestinian state, as an autonomous entity after statehood is bestowed, would not be bound by any pre-independence agreement by the PA” (Wessel, 2005, p. 267) since treaties can only bind states and “an agreement between the PA and any other actor would have no real authority” (Wessel, 2005, p. 267).

A badly executed or negotiated demilitarization for Palestine could result in “a return to more openly expressed Palestinian denials of Israel’s core legitimacy, including within its established “green line” borders” (Beres, 2019, p. 193). Therefore,

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<sup>87</sup> “A treaty is void if its conclusion has been procured by the threat or use of force in violation of the principles of international law embodied in the Charter of the United Nations”.

<sup>88</sup> “The transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory”.

<sup>89</sup> “Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive”.

<sup>90</sup> “The authority of the legitimate power having in fact passed into the hands of the occupants, the latter shall take all the measures in his power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country”.

<sup>91</sup> “The penal laws of the occupied territory shall remain in force, with exception that they may be repealed or suspended by the Occupying Power in cases where they constitute a threat to its security or an obstacle to the application of the present Convention. Subject to the latter consideration and to the necessity for ensuring the effective administration of justice, the tribunals of the occupied territory shall continue to function in respect of all offences covered by the said laws. The Occupying Power may, however, subject the population of the occupied territory to provisions which are essential to enable the Occupying Power to fulfil its obligations under the present Convention, to maintain the orderly government of the territory, and to ensure the security of the Occupying Power, of the members and property of the occupying forces or administration, and likewise the establishments and lines of communication used by them”.

Palestine is “within its right to abrogate any agreement that had previously compelled its own demilitarization” (Beres, 2019, p. 197) as it is hard for Palestinians to accept any kind of limited statehood, “particularly one lacking even the minimal sovereign right of national self-defense” (Beres, 2019, p. 204). Nevertheless, Palestinians believe the process should be voluntary and not implied by Israel as an exchange coin. To them, “demilitarization imposed by Israel would imply that Palestinians were being punished for their use of violence to resist Israeli occupation” (Wessel, 2005, p. 277).

Ultimately, peace between Israel and Palestine should not rest solemnly on the shoulders of a Palestinian demilitarization, thus it is crucial to continue to push for a more meaningful long-lasting political peace settlement.

## CONCLUSION

By analyzing the militarism and the demilitarization movement in Israel as well as the Israeli proposed solution for the hostilities based on the demilitarization of Palestine, this dissertation has shown how much Israeli society has been shaped by the domineering militarist culture while simultaneously shown the significance of anti-occupation activism in a highly militarized society.

The goal of this dissertation was to seek a more comprehensive understanding on the role of the Israeli military in its society and the role of the anti-occupation organizations in their pursuit for a peaceful resolution. From my perspective, I do believe no conflict can be resolved if neither side is heard nor understood, thus the insistence in pursuing an understanding of the IDF's influence in Israeli society.

The historical path of the Jewish people is one of persecution and exile, prompting waves of refugees throughout history and the formation of the Jewish diaspora. These events have emotionally impacted each generation that have developed a trauma response of their self-defense and survival. This research has shown it runs deeper than that. The introduced concept of “continuous existential threat” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 15), a condition developed by the generational suffering Jewish people who have been enduring through the centuries, provided an explanation for the development of a defensive self-image and a strong sense of victimhood. The exclusion of someone else's suffering from Israeli consciousness and its lack of empathy is justified “as coping mechanism for continuing with [Jewish] everyday life” (Fleischmann, 2021, p. 38).

Therefore, the creation of the Israeli state had a deep root in security issues and its integration in the state's democracy, giving it an equal importance to the liberty of people's rights and the establishment of a Jewish dominance in the territory.

In the beginning of this research, I knew little of Israel's military, expecting their power and influence not to be as extensive and as wide as it actually is. The research provided a clear insight to the beginning of the formation of Israeli society since the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948. Since its establishment was rooted in military action, it would come of no surprise the military has continued to hold significance in the society. However, instead of a more contained role, it became clear the IDF is not solemnly directed at military purposes, but at the entirety of Israel's daily civilian sectors and dominating each area of the citizens' lives.



In this research, it became clear the most impressive part of the IDF is the career and non-commissioned officers who were recruited from its conscripts, being, thus, considered as “the “core” of Israel’s security network” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 4). The IDF’s engagement in civilian tasks gave the institution “the senior position in politics, economy, society and public culture of the new state” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 5).

Throughout my study, it became unsure if there was any political opposition to IDF’s intrusion in the civilian sectors but politicians such as Moshe Sharett have adopted a critical position of the security network. According to Ben-Gurion, “if it were not for Sharett’s rejection of the military logic and intention to launch a pre-emptive war, most ministers in the government would have supported his position in favour of it” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 78). At his resignation, Sharett stated that, through his resignation, there would be a deprivation of “the belief that there was someone in the government who would not desert the cause of peace under any circumstances” (Sheffer & Barak, 2013, p. 80).

When the research uncovered the existence of pre-military academies, it became clear the collective effort of the Israeli government and the IDF in ensuring a stronger indoctrination of the military service and its duty in Israeli life. At first, it is thought the military service would be seen as an additional element to the citizens’ lives; however, the military service is seen as the moulding frame in which the experience in warfare becomes the most essential path for the construction of an ethical person. It is through the analysis and interpretation of other people’s experience and the exercise of “ethical decision-making, the practice of self-examination through the reflection of past deeds, and the use of such narratives for the ideological legitimization of structural violence” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 152) that allows students from the pre-military academies to supposedly become more ethical soldiers. It is highly connected with the Israeli-Jewish identity, promoting the Zionist ideology, to view the military service as not only a national necessity but a religious duty as well.

This dissertation has shown militarism should be understood as playing an essential role in maintaining social structures. Therefore, the aim of the IDF’s ethics teaching is not to protect civilians or engage in a culture of soldier accountability. Rather, it is focused on the humanization of the soldier and its disassociation with their military actions, thus keeping the aphorism in the Spirit of the IDF in mind: *lishmor’al*

tselem ha'enosh<sup>92</sup>. Despite being called the most moral army in the world, in clear reference to the statement proclaimed by Israeli Defence Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, in 2018, the morality and ethics in the IDF are fundamentally rooted in the dominance of the Israeli-Jewish identity in the territory. The junction of a military doctrine with an Israeli-Jewish identity masks the military violence as an ethical necessity, entrenched in the religious righteousness.

Another central topic of this dissertation was the approach at how digital communications were a crucial tool for the expansion of militarism. I was expected to find a newer approach, largely used in the 2010s, triggered by the Arab Spring and still highly underdeveloped. Instead, the research has shown that it was during the Second Intifada, the Israeli military realized the importance of the digital communications in the dissemination of militarization. The mistakes taken in the early years only solidified “the need to take social networking more seriously, as both the tool of information dissemination and an arena of counter-insurgency” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 32). It established a division in which, before the mid-2000s, the Israeli political agenda was dominated by the Arab-Israeli issues but, from the mid-2000s, the Israeli politics and society lost interest in a successful peace process, turning the period 2008-2014 where digital militarism became the centre of Israeli society.

More recently, the scandalous images on the Internet of brutally harmed Palestinians and the accusations of misconduct by the IDF, such as the beating and killing of Palestinians in protests or the murder of Al-Jazeera journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, in May 2022, have caused some outrage from the anti-occupation organizations and international community. Yet it seems the Israeli government continues to overlook the root of the problem present in these actions. Throughout this research, the concept of public secret is what can best describe the selective blindness the Israeli government and its citizens have regarding the violent actions of the IDF. Whether it is employed by soldiers or by civilians, Israel has been able to take advantages of the digital communications in order to execute a more effective warfare, both in the real battlefield and the digital one, and it has the tendency to defend their soldiers, regardless of their behaviour while simultaneously demarking itself from scandalous behaviour.

In this dissertation, it became clear that, as much as militarized Israeli society might be, the voices of anti-occupation activists echo against the status quo within

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<sup>92</sup> *Keep a human image*, in Hebrew.

Israeli society. At first, I was unaware of the wide variety of Israeli anti-occupation organizations as well as their diverse approaches and ranges. Furthermore, the personal experience of seeing the exhibition from *Breaking The Silence* allowed a deeper and intimate perspective of the entire work of the anti-occupation organizations as well as about the occupation itself. Throughout the research and interviews done for this dissertation, I have realized the high personal risks each of these activists dare to face, even by just voicing their criticism.

As seen, *Breaking The Silence* has achieved immensely in nearly two decades of exposure of soldier's testimonies. It is through the efforts and dedication of the activists that IDF's actions are further disclosed to the public while simultaneously unravels the protective veil concealing the soldiers' experience from being shared. The guarantee of anonymity is a safeguard for those fearing ostracism from their own communities, including family and friends. The exposure of visual content, such as photos taken by the soldiers themselves, contributes to a more vivid, realistic non-individualist critique to what soldiers are asked to do daily.

*New Profile* has equally impacted Israeli society, although less globally known. With its workshops throughout the country, the organization has been able to reach a growing number of people and teach about the damaging effects of militarization as well as the benefits in a demilitarization of the State of Israel. Their most important work is the counselling network, allowing them to provide information about the possibilities and criteria in either refusing to serve the army or, in case of current soldiers, get out of the army.

At last, the proposed demilitarization of Palestine is one of the most pressed conditions by the Israeli government for a future peaceful negotiation, therefore it was approached, although briefly, in this dissertation. The proposition creates a paradox, heavily contrasting between the Israeli demand for the demilitarization of a state that is not internationally recognized and the defense of their own heavy militarized state. Furthermore, the proposition profoundly ignores the right to self-defense, denying Palestine "the right to collective security in the form of a third or multilateral party which can protect Palestine from external threats by Israel or its Arab neighbours" (Wessel, 2005, p. 264-265).

The importance of this dissertation for academic literature and, specifically, for the field in which it integrates can be explained by the necessity to understand all and

each of the topics addressed in the dissertation as a whole for the possible achievement of a peaceful resolution. This dissertation highlighted not only the militarized side of Israel but as well the side against occupation and in favour of some kind of demilitarization.

The academic literature has presented, and rightfully so, the occupation as a direct problem of the Palestinians. However, this dissertation did not put the occupation through the eyes of their most immediate victims, the Palestinians, but has analysed it through the eyes of those who might benefit and indirectly suffer from it, the Israelis. Whilst many Israelis do not recognize the occupation as such, other Israeli citizens recognize that the occupation and the militarization of Israeli society have negatively affected their lives. In a hostility as long and complex as is the Israeli-Palestinian one, this dissertation exposes the two sides of an Israeli society, often not studied together, and reaches an answer for the core issue, which happens to be the research question of this dissertation: in this highly militarized country, whose own military has been the source of violence and accused of human rights, can the Israeli military reduce its militarization on behalf of achieving the end of the occupation and the beginning of a peaceful resolution?

Although this is an ongoing hostility, which means it is impossible to foresee relevant changes in Israeli politics and society in the near future, this dissertation has concluded that it is not guarantee the IDF will ever change its methods and actions to accommodate the achievement of a mutual peace agreement, much less to end the occupation and minimize the militarization of Israeli society.

The power and influence acquired by the IDF since the establishment of the State of Israel has surpassed the point of return by itself. As been proved in this dissertation, the voices of those who believe in an alternative path of mainstream politics in the Israeli government are ignored and silenced, and the politicians fired or forced to resign. The people in positions of power in each sector of Israeli society either enjoy the benefits brought by being in favour with the military or have been replaced by those who do. The security network has progressed from a handful of people within the military to the entirety of Israeli society as it has grown more influential.

Both organizations studied and approached in this dissertation have concluded the end of the occupation has to be initiated and consummated by the Israeli people. However, due to the high level of militarization of Israeli society, a large percentage of people don't perceive the occupation as such. Instead, they perceive it as the defense of

Israel against domestic security threats as they progressively embrace “a politics of militant patriotism” (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 10).

According to Peled (2012), Israeli political culture experienced three discourses of citizenship which changed Israeli militarism. First, the republican citizenship, dominating from 1948 until 1977, emerged from the Labour Zionism on which the State of Israel was founded. Israel “adopted a new colonial strategy: the establishment, on nationally owned land, of a separate Jewish economic sector based on ethnically segregated land and labour markets” (Peled, 2012, p. 79). During this period, the morality of the military action aligned with the socio-political goals, while “hesitantly questioning some of the means used for achieving those goals” (Peled, 2012, p. 90).

Second, the change in the global economy led to the adoption of a liberal citizenship, dominating from 1977 until 2000. The business class considered that “settling the conflict with the Arabs, including the Palestinians, (...) both an economic and political necessity” (Peled, 2012, p. 82). The entrance in a war with Lebanon showed that there were still forces in Israel who supported the continuation of the military violence. During this period, there was an increase in the questioning of “the use of military force to achieve political ends (...) as well as (...) the state’s political ends themselves” (Peled, 2012, p. 90).

The failure of the Oslo peace process showed the Israeli “political atmosphere was no longer one of peacemaking, but rather of war” (Peled, 2012, p. 85). The change to an ethno-national citizenship, dominating since 2000, deepened the militarism into Israeli society until it became “an equal partner in the policy process and (...) sometimes even more powerful” (Peled, 2012, p. 86). During this period, in mainstream politics and general society, there is barely questioning “of either the end or the means of military actions, to the point of total dehumanization of the enemy” (Peled, 2012, p. 90).

The militarization and the normalization of the occupation have been seeded into the Israeli society and further aggravated by the persistence of the conflict for nearly 80 years. In order for the IDF to be able to achieve the end of the occupation and the beginning of a peaceful resolution, it would have to change its foundations and eliminate most of the influence it has on any civilian sector. In its turn, the Israeli people would have to reject the militarized social, economic, political and educational structure that has been part of their lives since 1948.

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