Part 1 Backgrounds

Chapter 1
Positioning the research within the historical, social and political context

This study is an investigation of young Israeli men and their experiences gained as soldiers in the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) while serving in the ‘Occupied Palestinian Territories’ (OPT) as combatants. The research is focused on the moral orientation of these soldiers in the context of their everyday lives as conscripts in this particular setting. The study is based on fieldwork conducted between 2005 and 2007 in Israel, mainly by means of in-depth interviews. We could call this research an investigation of micro-ethics, to apply a term M. Ignatieff (2001) used to indicate the need for research on moral issues in the military at the level of the soldiers and young commanders themselves. When I initiated this research, my main goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the moralities – the moral behaviour and self-positioning – of young Israeli soldiers, of their way of thinking about the world around them and about the people they were confronted with. I tried to understand how the physical and emotional factors that Israeli soldiers had to face while serving in the OPT influenced their moral behaviour, their self-conception and their decision-making. During the course of the research more and more questions concerning the daily challenge faced by Israeli soldiers of how to deal with Palestinian civilians begged for a better explanation. In view of the often abusive and harassing behaviour displayed in such settings, the question arose of how these young people could resort to acting in such ways? This type of behaviour is often simply dismissed as ‘unacceptable’ and ‘immoral’ without making the effort to look any deeper. In my opinion, however, this is not enough as it lacks any explanatory power. In order to make real sense of the behaviour that Israeli soldiers display when dealing with Palestinian civilians, we need to reach a deeper understanding of the multi-level processes that are at play here.

This research, then, necessarily focuses on the perpetrators and not the victims, on the strong party and not on the weak one. I am aware that the term ‘perpetrator’ is quite ambiguous, tending, as it does, to criminalize actions even when they are legitimate under national law. Here, however, I use the term first and foremost as an analytical concept putting emphasis on the acts of violence (both legal and illegal) performed by soldiers in the specific context of occupation described. As the Israeli soldiers are, in the interactive settings described here, the dominant
‘actors’ or ‘agents’ of different kinds of violence directed at Palestinian civilians, who are ‘on the receiving end’ of their actions, they are designated as ‘perpetrators’.

The motivation for doing this particular research is related to several observations made during previous studies of Israeli society. The first of these is the steady increase of reports of the abuse of Palestinian citizens by Israeli soldiers. These reports come from the media, human rights organizations and sometimes even from the soldiers themselves.\(^1\) Secondly, and in contrast to the first observation, Israel, perceiving itself as being faced with the constant threat of war and terrorism, portrays its military as morally upright, with its own code of ethics and rules of behaviour both of which are inculcated during standard military training. In the face of the above mentioned reports, the Israeli state and Israeli military do not seem to be able to provide adequate explanations and resort to the well-known strategies of denial and justification (see Cohen 2001) to explain away the misbehaviour of Israeli soldiers. The soldiers reported to have acted aggressively are portrayed as ‘rotten apples’ and are then dealt with as exceptions to the rule. The final observation that demands more investigation is that Israeli soldiers themselves seem to have ‘neutralized’ their experiences, and generally do not perceive their own behaviour, often violent or humiliating, as problematic. However, from some of the stories told by ex-combatants, you get the impression that, looking back in retrospect, some part of the soldiers does not understand how they could behave in such a way during the time they were doing service. Although this phenomenon is certainly not unique to the Israeli case, there has been very little research done on the processes that lead to this type of behaviour and on the feelings that soldiers have afterwards.

It, thus, seems essential to ask critical questions about what socio-cultural and psychological processes are at play when Israeli soldiers behave in a violent, indifferent or disrespectful manner towards Palestinians and how these processes influence the way the soldiers perceive of this situation themselves. As I mentioned before, I think it is essential to look further than the simple perception that such soldiers are just immoral exceptions. We should look deeper into these processes on several different levels in order to find out how such behaviour comes into being on a larger, structural scale, taking into account the kind of conflict conditions within which these soldiers serve.

**Research question**

The research project of which this dissertation is the outcome set out to answer the following main question:

\(^1\) See, for example, www.btselem.org and www.breakingthesilence.org.il
How do soldiers engaged in a-symmetrical conflict deal with moral issues emerging from confrontations with diverse and externally unrecognizable opponents – civilians, suspected terrorists or unorganized combat groups?

This question was elaborated in the form of four more specific questions:

1. What moral reasonings were constructed and applied by Israeli soldiers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories during the Second Intifada?
2. How do Israeli soldiers construct their moral reasonings? Which cultural repertoires do they resort to in order to construct and evaluate their moral reasonings?
3. What cognitive and behavioural strategies do they use?
4. How do these moral reasonings influence the actual behaviour of soldiers?

Early in the fieldwork, certain central concepts and attitudes started to emerge, demanding a closer look. These concepts along with others which were filtered out from the material during the analysis form the core of this work and structure its argument.

1.1 Introducing the historical, social and political setting

When an anthropologist wants to investigate a specific group, its motivations and its behaviour, one of the first things that need to be done is to gather knowledge about the position this group has within its society and about the main characteristics this society has. In short, it is important to understand the social and historical context in which these Israeli soldiers (whose morality I try to understand) were brought up and to identify what social and cultural baggage they take with them when they arrive in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to perform their compulsory military service. It is also necessary to provide some background about the mostly conflictive and often violent relationship between Israel and its neighbours.

I will, however, start in nineteenth-century Europe, where Zionism appeared both as an intellectual and as a practical reaction to the harsh situation the European Jews found themselves in. This broad historical perspective is important because it gives us the background for the present-day conflict that Israeli soldiers are involved in. Furthermore, it gives us an insight into important issues within Israeli society today as well as introducing us to the idea of the ‘New Jew’, who could be perceived as the predecessor of the modern Israeli soldier. After this historical grounding I will then continue by discussing other important issues, such as Israel’s militarized character and the role of collective memory as well as the conflicts Israel has played a part in. I conclude the section with a discussion of the key concepts I intend to use in this study.
Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel

Appearing towards the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, Zionism was defined as an ideology of Jewish nationalism based on the premise that the Jews were a people or nation like any other and as a people should come together in a single homeland in order to realize self-determination. This was in accordance with the nationalist fervour generally present in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. In Eastern Europe, where the discrimination against and repression of the Jews was harshest, an emerging cultural and religiously-inspired Zionism became popular. It looked for a practical solution to the increasingly difficult situation of the Jews, notably that being experienced in Tsarist Russia after the pogroms of the late nineteenth century. A deep connection with the land (in particular, that of Israel) was emphasized and working the land became the ideal of Zionism’s followers, being seen as redeeming and as constitutive of a new, free Jewish identity. The adherents of this ideology came from Jewish upbringings and mostly looked for an enlightened, secular way to continue and reconstitute Jewish life (Avishai 2002). In the late 1860s this led to a modest movement of Jews who settled in Turkish Palestine.

The Zionism that the Austrian-Jewish journalist and writer Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) stood for was, however, of a different kind; it was what is known as political Zionism. Herzl and his supporters came from a bourgeois Central European background and were at first more concerned with the idea of Zionism than with actual practical solutions on the ground. With Herzl, who did not see any other possible solution after the Dreyfus affair in France, at its head, the idea of a homeland for the Jews outside of Europe became central to the Zionist movement. The idea was to build a Jewish nation outside of Europe, a nation that would, however, be European in its culture; this would preferably happen with the support of a European partner. This new country would be built following the example of the new European nation-states, but would be geographically outside of it, in a place that would entitle Jews to their freedom and autonomy. At the 8th Zionist congress in 1907, a few years after Herzl’s death, it was decided to combine both political and cultural Zionism to pursue the goal of a Jewish state; cultural Zionism in particular, however, with its emphasis on settlement would prove very important (Avishai 2002: 67).

In the early days of Zionism, Europe was in the midst of the formation of its modern nation-states. This process emerged in Europe with the ideas of self-determination that appeared after the Age of Enlightenment, notably in the phase of Romanticism (see, for example, Herder 1968), which influenced many political and nation-building processes. Nation-states as we know them today were actively created in that era and their inhabitants received the status of national

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2 Since at least the first century AD, called ‘Eretz Yisrael’ (i.e. the Land of Israel) in Jewish thought.
citizens. In his book *Imagined Communities*, B. Anderson shows that with the creation of the modern nation-states, a development which was to a great extent supported by the lexicographical revolution that also occurred during that time, groups of citizens claimed the right to an autonomous place within the brotherhood of equals (Anderson 1991).

The European Jews, however, formed a problem in this respect, as they were never really seen as part of any national-territorial collective within European society. During the period of state-formation, Jews were often forced to drop their ‘backward’ traditions to become national citizens or were excluded from the nation-state. Jews were expected to become less ‘out of the ordinary’, to drop their religious customs and to adjust themselves to the modern European life around them. This resulted in many West-European Jews becoming full citizens, leaving their traditional Jewish lives behind. These Jews were known as ‘assimilationists’. In reaction to this, a movement emerged that was very critical of this assimilation. This movement wanted to restore a Jewish national independence following the very example of the ideals of self-determination of the post-Enlightenment movement. As mentioned before, in the late nineteenth century Jews in Eastern Europe suffered greatly from the pogroms sweeping the land; these Jews felt an acute need to establish a safe haven for their people. These people can be seen as representing the first voices of Zionism (Wistrich 1995).

At first Palestine was not the only homeland that was suggested; there was even talk of Uganda and Argentina being places where Jews could settle outside of Europe. But very quickly Palestine obtained an increasingly prominent place in Zionist ideology as the historical homeland of the Jews. This idea materialized under the influence of the symbolic relationship emphasized by Herzl between Jewish nationalism and Zionism, although, right until the end, Herzl himself remained open to other options apart from Palestine. It was only after his death that (during the 7th Zionist Congress) these other options were abandoned: ‘no substitute land for Eretz Yisrael was entertained at any congress’ (Avishai 2002: 67).

The first wave of Jewish immigrants, (*aliya* literally meaning ‘ascent’) arrived in Palestine in 1882. They were pioneers in the same sense as the pioneers who settled North America, looking, as they were, for land to farm on. They were not particularly looking for a Jewish homeland. The second wave of immigrants, which had much more influence on the construction of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century and came from Eastern Europe (Russia in particular). Their timing was good as their arrival came simultaneously with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire which had been the ruling power in the region up until that time. This was replaced by a modern Turkish political system (Pappe 2006).
These first waves of Jewish immigrants who came to the region were not, however, the first Jews to live in the land of Palestine. For many generations a Jewish community had been living there (mostly in the cities) and had led a traditional, religious life. Members of this community generally did not agree with the creation of a Jewish state, much like some orthodox Jews today, as non-nationalist Judaism prescribes that one should wait for the coming of the Messiah and not take matters into one’s own hands. These resident Jews also did not agree with the secular way of life of the new immigrants from Europe. Even so, the Zionists tried to incorporate this community into their efforts to gain as much influence as they possibly could.

The other inhabitants of Palestine were Muslims, Christians and Bedouins. These were mostly rural people, living off their lands. At first the growing phenomenon of Jewish immigration did not cause them too much worry; however, when more and more of their lands were sold to these immigrants, who then built settlements on them, their apprehension grew. During the same period many illegal immigrants from the countries surrounding Palestine came into the country looking for work.

After the First World War, the effects of Jewish immigration became increasingly visible and the local Palestinian population became more and more distressed. In 1917 the Zionist movement moved a big step closer to its goal, however, when the British, who had by then colonized the region, signed the Balfour Declaration in which they gave their support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine (Avishai 2002; Gorny 1987).

Without getting into too much detail about the processes of Jewish immigration, here it is enough to mention how the immigration of Jews to Palestine increased. While the British were worried about conflict with the local population and would later implement laws against immigration, in the 1920s there was already a Jewish political elite in Palestine consisting of immigrants from the second aliya from Eastern Europe. This elite was determined to create a Jewish society and it wanted to ‘be an integral part of Western culture and looked for ways of eliminating any Middle Eastern or Arab characteristics in their society’ (Pappe 2006: 88). This ideal, as will be demonstrated shortly, is important to understand as it already gives us a glimpse of the attitude of the Zionists towards ‘the other’, be that Palestinians or Jews from the Arab world.

The story of the immigrants from the second aliya is important as their generation gave form to the nation: they were the central makers of Israel’s history and its myths. They were the ones that came with the revolutionary, secular ideology that created the national independence of the Jewish settlers. This aliya ‘was also the source of Zionist national leadership’ (Gorny 1987: 13) and was the source of important figures such as David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett and Levi
Eshkol. The immigrants settled themselves mostly in kibbutzim and moshavim, which were agricultural settlements, and to a lesser extent in cities. The agricultural aspect of the pioneers’ life was very important; they came to work the land with their own hands and this emphasized their closeness to nature. Here the image of the strong, healthy and tanned ‘New Jew’ appears; the image of the Jew who was going to make ‘the desert bloom’. This notion of an ideal person who could be constructed will be discussed shortly.

During World War II Palestine braced itself for attacks from Nazi Germany when General Rommel’s armies arrived in the region. In the meantime, the Zionists continued their quest to increase the immigration of Jews to Palestine, now connecting this to the horrific events taking place in Central Europe which were leaving many Jews desperate for a place to flee to. In 1947 the British handed control of Palestine over to the UN. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing war would change society in Palestine forever.

Establishing a state

The events that occurred around the establishment of the state of Israel are very controversial and historians do not agree on them. Within Israel, most historians work for the state; they have written the official history as the state sees it for many years.

Since the 1980s, particularly after the Lebanon War and during the period when many archives were opened for historians to investigate, a few so called ‘New Historians’ have appeared, amongst them, for example, Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappe, whose contributions to the historical debates are perceived by some to be highly controversial. F. Abdel-Nour, a political scientist working on Middle East politics, states that these historians focused more and more on ‘the nature of Israeli responsibility’, ‘partly because Israelis have been the primary beneficiaries of the Palestinian exodus, and partly because Israeli archives of the 1948 period have begun to open while Arab state archives remain largely closed’ (2004: 340). These scholars were dissatisfied with history as written and dictated by the Zionist elite which strongly influenced what is now known as ‘the’ history of the Israeli state. They set out to write about the events surrounding the establishment of Israel in different, critical terms and included the history of the Palestinians and especially their suffering at the hands of the Zionist nationalist movement, events that had not been written about by Israeli historians before (see, for example, Rogan and Shlaim 2001 and Morris 2004). It is important to note, however, that many of these ‘New Historians’ also disagree with each other, especially on the issue of responsibility for historical episodes that have now been uncovered (see, for example, Abdel-Nour 2004). Nevertheless,

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3 State archives in Israel open thirty years after the events, thus the archives of the state and military for the period concerning the establishment of the state were opened in the late 1970s.
here I use the work of several such scholars as I believe one should widen the debate and take a critical look at all the evidence to do with the history of Israel and Palestine, especially that surrounding the establishment of the state and the war ensuing it.

The UN decided in 1947 that British Palestine was to be divided between the Jewish population and the Palestinians. Very soon after this decision was made, the conflict became aggravated; there were skirmishes everywhere in the country. In May 1948 D. Ben-Gurion declared the state of Israel. Immediately afterwards, the War of Independence or the Palestine War (Rogan and Shlaim 2001) broke out, with Arab armies from neighbouring countries invading the country and battling with Israeli troops. In terms of the official Zionist history this was a war of few (the Jews) against many (the Arabs) in which the Jews fought ferociously and won heroically. Khalidi, however, states that the Arab armies and the local Palestinian forces were far from organized in their attacks; they only operated on a very local level. The troops on the Jewish side, on the other hand, did work on a national basis and their efforts were centralized (2001). Shlaim (2001) supports this view and emphasizes the inability of the Arab forces to coordinate their moves as the main reason for their defeat. During the war, which was eventually won by the Jewish troops, all sides directed their efforts to occupy as many strategic points as possible. The Arab states involved in this war were Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt and even Iraq. In 1949 armistice lines were decided upon under the supervision of the UN. These lines would hold until 1967 for Egypt, Syria and Jordan and until 1978 in the case of Lebanon.

Right up until today there are debates between historians about what exactly happened to the local population during and after this time of conflict. Within Zionism it has become clear over the years that there were thoughts (but no clear-cut decisions) to transfer the local population elsewhere in order to establish a state with a Jewish majority (Avishai 2002). Some have even claimed that in 1948 the Arab locals were called upon by Arab leaders from neighbouring countries to leave their houses and villages while the war was raging; this claim is, however, strongly refuted by others. It is, though, safe to say that most Palestinians did not leave their homes voluntary but were urged or compelled to move out by fear of attacks from Jewish forces: ‘compounded by expulsions, atrocities, and rumours of atrocities - and by the crucial Israeli Cabinet decisions in June 1948 to bar a refugee return’ (Morris 2001: 38). Due to this expulsion, most of the Palestinian villages that existed prior to 1948 have vanished from the landscape of today’s Israel. The inhabitants of these villages were exiled to places elsewhere in the country or, more often, to surrounding countries and to what we know today as the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
**Processes of Orientalization and the birth of the New Jew**

Within Zionist thought there was a clear and frequent use of dichotomies such as East and West, Jewish and not Jewish, Arab and Jew. I believe the use of these dichotomies needs to be discussed here as it influences the way the Zionists historically viewed the Palestinians from the early days of Jewish immigration to Palestine onwards. Furthermore, these dichotomies are important in order to understand current ethnic divides within Israeli Jewish society. While Israel is said to be, by many observers, a ‘post-Zionist’ society (e.g. Silberstein 1999), old ideas linger on and the basis of the state as a Jewish homeland is not refuted. This implies the relevance of traditional ideas about opponents and enemies and, in general, ideas about the other. The ‘other’ has been prominent in Zionist thought in confirming its own (desire for) Western-ness and in order to emphasize its modern, secular and nationalist agenda. For this research, then, it is important to understand the processes of what might be called ‘Orientalization’ in order to comprehend the background of present-day Israeli soldiers and their views of ‘the other’, foremost Palestinians.

In her work on the effects of Zionism on Sephardic Jews from Arab and Moslem countries, E. Shohat, for instance, argues that one should not only look at the way Palestinians were viewed but that one should also investigate the way Sephardic or Oriental Jews were incorporated into Israeli society and state-building after 1948, since Zionism was from its inception a European movement (1988). As we shall see later on, her ideas cast a different light on the understanding of modern Israeli society.

Looking at the period of state-formation, A. Khazzoum, an American sociologist with an Iraqi Jewish background, shows that while partly assimilating to Western European life, there was a certain development in the way the Western Jews looked at other unassimilated Jews, especially those in Eastern Europe. Having been seen as backward themselves by Western Christians, these Western Jews saw the Eastern Jews as unenlightened, backward and unhealthy beings living in filthy dark ghettos (2003). Khazzoum (1998, 2003) calls this a case of ‘Orientalization’ in the way E. W. Said coined the term in his book *Orientalism* (1978). In this much debated work, Said presents his contention ‘that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness. … As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge’ (1978: 204). G. Baumann and A. Gingrich (2006) have also used the concept of Orientalization as one of their grammars of identity/alterity. They use these grammars

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4 There are several different labels for Jews originating in the Arab world, all of which have different political implications. The word ‘Sephardic’ points to their connection with Spain, where many Jews fled from at the time of the Inquisition in the fifteenth century. Other terms are ‘Oriental Jews’ or ‘Mizrahiim’, emphasizing their origins in the East. Recently some scholars emphasizing their Arab roots and culture have been using the term ‘Arab Jews’.
to explain the processes of ‘selfing’ and ‘othering’ that take place between groups of people, indicating that these grammars go beyond the simple binaries of good vs. bad, much like Khazzoum used it in the specific case of Eastern and Western Jews.

Khazzoum then uses Said’s concept, which is strongly criticized by some for giving an oversimplified view of how the West looked at the East (see, for example, Lewis 1982; Irwin 2006; Warraq 2007), to draw attention to the relationship between Western and Eastern Jews and traces this process of ‘Orientalization’ through Northern Africa to modern Israel where Jews of Arab descent and Palestinians are, respectively, ‘Orientalized’ (1998, 2003). These processes of ‘Orientalization’ refer to (sub)conscious processes of labelling based on perceived civilization differences or notions of relative ‘modernity’ and ‘backwardness’ and involve notions of ‘us’ against ‘them’, emphasizing differences and downplaying similarities. Furthermore, the ‘other’ is often portrayed as the antithesis of the ‘us’ and is the personification of what one does not want to be and what one is disgusted or frightened by. Such processes distance one group from the other through dismissal by the dominant group of the weaker of the two as different, not worthy and even filthy (see Khazzoum 1998). The self or in-group then compares positively against these generalizations which are often, as Khazzoum shows, directed against groups of people that have more in common with the in-group than it would like to admit.

In Shohat’s important work (1988, 1999) on Arab Jews, a term she uses to emphasize the deep relation of these Jews with the Arab cultures they came from, she harshly criticizes the Zionist idea of one ‘Jewish history’, a European history, alien to the immigrants coming from places such as Iraq, Yemen and Morocco. In this way the history of the Arab Jews was excluded from this general ‘Jewish, Israeli history’. The effects of the ‘Orientalization’ of these Jews by the Zionist, European Jews are still noticeable today in modern Israel. However, the main point Shohat makes is that the Zionist enterprise made a great, aggressive effort to rid these Jews (who it saw as backward and dangerously ‘Arab-like’) of these characteristics by forcing them to take on a new kind of European way of life that included a European way of practising religion and a European style of public behaviour and looks (see Shohat 1988, 1999).

At this point it is important to explain the emphasis I put on the appearance of Zionism in Europe and its ideas about the ‘other’, be they Muslim, Arab, Palestinian or other (Arab) Jews. I see this labelling and culturally setting apart of ‘others’ as historical process and as real and important in its consequences. The processes of Orientalization of Eastern-European Jews, mentioned above, and later of Jews from Arab countries as discussed in the work of Khazzoum and Shohat are crucial if we want to understand the idea of the ‘New Jew’ which was created by

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5 I will come back shortly to more contemporary ideas about the Palestinian ‘other’ in Israeli society.
the Zionist immigrants of the second wave of immigration to Palestine. As Almog notes, immigrants from this wave were the first to be educated and socialized within the Yishuv, or the pre-state of Israel Jewish society in British Palestine (2000). They created the image of an ideal new person, an ideal man who was strong, tall and healthy. He was, furthermore, emancipated, independent and worked the land; soon after he would become a heroic fighter. This was an ideal man who emerged out of the ghettoized and downtrodden Jewish populations of, notably, Eastern Europe and who personalized an opposite image of Jews, in the form of the Zionist ideals of a new people in a new land. The Zionists rejected full assimilation with the host societies that European Jews lived in but used the negative image of the unassimilated inhabitants of the Eastern European ghetto in creating this new ideal man who was the total opposite of the ‘ghetto-Jew’.

Paradoxically, the assimilated Theodor Herzl (see above) played an important role in the creation of the ‘New Jew’. As the founding father of modern political Zionism, he was disgusted with ghetto-life. However, what he called the ghetto was the fully assimilated, materialistic, anti-social, bourgeois Jewish life in the West and not so much the Eastern European ghetto. He believed that these emancipated Western Jews still had ghetto characteristics and therefore ‘remained a foreign body among the nations’ (Wistrich 1995: 13). The ghetto was thus a strong negative symbol for images of certain groups of Jews, both in the East and in the West.

Herzl’s ideal was ‘to create a new type of Jew, free from any taint of egoistic materialism’ (Wistrich 1995: 15). R. Wistrich shows that under the influence of the vitalist philosophy of Nietzsche, Herzl’s Zionism meant the forging of ‘a noble ideal of a new Jew, a man living by the myth of chivalry, who will be the anti-thesis of the old ghetto culture’ (ibid.). Nietzsche’s ‘superman’ ideology was further transformed by Jewish nationalists into ideas about the ‘New Jew’ or the ‘New Hebrew’ (Ohana 1995). D. Ohana quotes Jewish publicist Reuben Brainin’s comment in respect to this: ‘The future generation shall not be small and weak, beaten and sickly as is this dwarfish generation, rather shall a strong and mighty generation arise, a generation of giants, a generation which shall inculcate new physical strengths and new mental capacities which we never imagined, a generation of the “Superman”’ (1995: 39).

It is important to point out that the discourse of the ‘New Jew’ is almost exclusively masculine. All the characteristics that belong to this ideal person such as strength and large stature are associated with men. This also becomes clear when one looks at the adversary of this image: the ghetto or later the Diaspora Jew. The characteristics of this stereotype were feminine, he was soft and of small stature. These were the same characteristics anti-Semites had given to Jews over the years; in Zionism there is a clear effort to do away with this stereotype. In Shohat’s
words, ‘the mythological Sabra [the New Jew] posited in genderized language as the masculine rescuer of the passive Diaspora Jew, simultaneously signified the destruction of Diaspora Jewish entity’ (1990: 253). D. Boyarin asserts that ‘Zionism was considered by many to be as much a cure for the disease of Jewish gendering as a solution to economic and political problems of the Jewish people’ (1997: 277). This masculine ideal was not developed in a vacuum or solely as a response to the negative stereotype of the Jews. It used the blond and muscular ideal taken from the classic Greek male images, images which were also used to create the European ‘Aryan’ image.

The story of the women of this period has almost never been told. Although ideas exist about their supposedly equal status within the community, D. Bernstein, for example, shows this equality was fought for by some women but was never accomplished (1992). Women were expected to work like men, besides being housewives, but men continued to dominate the higher paying jobs and the political realm, amongst other arenas.6

Placing the collective above the individual

Another important aspect of Zionist thought that was significant in the formation of the ideal ‘New Jew’ was the notion of placing the collective above the individual. This idea was developed within the redeeming ideology of the national agrarian development of the homeland (Israel) and was yet another aspect this idealized person had to make his own. He or she was to put him/herself behind the screen of the collective. This idea becomes clear when we look at the way the pioneers and the next generations were willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the collective. Such a ‘heroic discourse’ is, then, very dependent on this aspect of Zionist thought which was influenced by the socialist ideology within which the community was thought to be essential.

The idea of putting the collective above the individual was also part of Israel’s first Prime Minister’s (D. Ben-Gurion’s) concept of citizenship. As N. Yanai shows, following this line of thought, civil rights were connected to civil obligations. He describes Ben-Gurion’s thoughts as saying ‘every effort should be made to avoid causing injury to individuals in the course of the nation’s struggle for its future; however, the overriding consideration was to do justice to the Jewish people as a deprived nation – in sum, the supremacy of the collective interest’ (Yanai 1996: 130). The idea of self-sacrifice for the collective goals of the nation becomes obvious here.

Furthermore, Ben-Gurion used the ‘pioneering’ ideal for describing the ideal citizen. This pioneer, he said, ‘does not bear any special rights, but voluntarily undertakes special obligations’

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6 There were women trying to redress the balance, see, for example, Berg 2001.
The citizen’s duty is, thus, to strive to be a person who will sacrifice and who will readily follow any obligation put on him by the government. This ideal of the ‘New Jew’, as I shall explain shortly, is central to understanding the creation of the image of combat soldiers within present-day Israel. The soldiers within this research should, then, be understood in the light of this idealized figure, a figure that has been created by the use of ideology, myth and ritual.

The New Soldier

If the immigrants of the second *aliya* were the founders of the myth of the ‘New Jew’, the Sabra was the incarnation of this myth. This was the native-born child of the European-born settlers in the Land of Israel. *Sabras*, seen as the ultimate ‘New Hebrews’, were idealized by the older generation as well as by newer immigrants. They were seen as the ‘hope for Jewish salvation and universal values’ and, according to Shohat, begot the ‘status of a kind of moral aristocracy’ (Shohat 1990: 253). The name *Sabra* stems from the prickly cactus-fruit that can be found all over Israel. The story goes that these Israeli-born youths were also prickly on the outside and sweet on the inside. They were seen as the children of the future.

These children were, furthermore, seen as the ideal Jewish soldiers, those who would protect their new homeland with their lives. As touched upon before, with Jewish immigration increasing, tensions between the new immigrants and the local Arab population ran high. In light of this mounting tension between the Arab population and the Jewish settlers, the latter decided to assemble a defence force. This initiative was linked to the Zionist ideal of the strong ‘New Jew’ and the ideal of fighting for one’s existence, in contrast to the suffering of injury and passive martyrdom of European Jewry. Y. Goldstein shows how it was especially the socialist-Marxist part of the Zionist movement that brought this element of armed defence into Zionist thought (1999).

The first ‘fighting heroes’ were the men of the Bar-Giora movement; they were named after one of the leaders of the Jewish revolt against the Romans in the first century. A few years later another group was created which was called Hashomer (the guardsman). Immigrants from the second *aliya* created both of these movements. The Hashomer pioneers ‘saw as their main task the defence of Jewish settlements and to this end made up … teams of guards who contracted with the farmers in a particular village to defend it against theft and violence’ (Near 1987: 12). The Bar-Giora group had as its goal ‘to protect the national enterprise in Eretz Israel’ (Goldstein 1999: 174). They both wanted to show that Jews could and would defend themselves.
In 1920 the Haganah, a Jewish Defence Force, was created. This would become the forerunner of the Israeli Defence Forces as we know them today.

The deeds of these men in defence of the Jewish settlements were seen as extremely heroic by their own society. The ‘New Jew’ who, as discussed earlier, was to be strong and healthy, who would work the land with his own hands and who would create his own national independence now also became a fighter. Besides agricultural tools, he now also held a weapon. The figure of the ‘New Jew’ thus gained an additional mythical layer: that of the heroic fighter.

An important group central to the creation of the fighting hero’s myth were the fighters of the Palmach, or Palmachniks. This elite unit was created in 1941 and most of its members were Israeli-born Sabras. The rest of the Jewish community in Palestine idealized these young people and many poems and books have been written about their lives. A few themes always show up: the forelock (blorit) dancing in the wind, the suntanned face, the tall and strong posture and the straightforwardness that was seen as a very specific trait of the young Sabras. Furthermore, the love of the country, its nature and the land was very important in the idealization of the Sabra-Palmachnik.

In his study of written material produced by this generation, O. Almog shows that motivation to protect the homeland was very high and that sacrifice for the land was an important ideal for these young people. Palmachniks would write to their girlfriends and families explaining that even though it was hard to be far away from their loved ones, they were doing the only good thing that was possible: defending the homeland and fighting for independence (Almog 2000).

Israel: a militarized society

Having explored Zionist thought and its creation of the ‘New Jew’ and the heroic soldier through processes of ‘Orientalization’ and myth-making, it is now time to take a more contemporary look at the Israeli context, especially at the ways the military is incorporated into Israeli society today. When thinking about a ‘militarized state’, one might think of an intimidating military power that spreads fear in the streets of a country. However, the opposite is the case in Israel, where the sheer comfort and familiarity of its society with the military presence characterizes its militarism.

To this day, Israel practises compulsory conscription; men are called up for three years, women for eighteen months. All Palestinians living within Israel except for the Druze community are exempted from this conscription. A small minority of Bedouins volunteer into the IDF, often as trackers. Jewish Orthodox men who are students at a Yeshiva (religious school) are exempted.
under the Tal law, which is very controversial in Israel; Orthodox women are also exempted from military service.

We can, then, safely say that Israel is home to a militarized society in the sense of soldiers and army commanders being omnipresent and strongly influential in the public sphere, within which an idealization of the fighting soldier is still evident. Furthermore, this military presence and these ways of thinking are accepted and ‘naturalized’ because they are seen as necessary and inevitable in conditions of structural insecurity. The military, its material (i.e. military vehicles, army bases and symbols) and human representatives as well as its influence in the political and economic realm, can be found everywhere in Israeli society. B. Kimmerling called the kind of militarism present in Israel a cognitive militarism (1993). By this he meant ‘modes of thought and action in which security considerations are pre- eminent’ (Ben-Ari and Lomsky-Feder 1999: 6). In the way people look at the world in such a society and in their way of thinking, things military are normalized and become an accepted part of life.

Military service for Jewish Israelis was for a long time perceived as an almost natural ‘rite de passage’ by Israelis, a phase during which one gave to the nation in order to get back its services and protection. This attitude to military service as something marking the transition to adulthood is also found in academic literature (e.g. Lieblich and Perlow 1988; Dar and Kimhi 2001). The republican model of committing oneself to the state in the form of military service still has strong societal support, although cracks in the loyalty of the citizens towards the state in relation to this are becoming more and more visible. The Ashkenazi secular middle class in particular,7 who used to form the core of the military, is drawing away as the benefits it can get through serving dwindle. Other peripheral groups, however, such as new immigrants and Oriental Jews are taking its place (see Levy 2003, 2006). These groups can still obtain social mobility through their service in the combat unit previously manned by the Ashkenazi elite and through their service hope to ‘portray themselves as the new, true patriots’ (Levy and Mizrahi 2008: 38).

The cracks in the loyalty towards the military become especially visible when one looks at the phenomenon of ‘grey refusal’, which Levy and Mizrahi characterized as one of a few possible ‘quasi-exit strategies of alternative politics’ (2008). They define ‘grey refusal’ is an implicit refusal, usually achieved through informal arrangements with commanders when it comes to sensitive operations soldiers prefer not to engage in. However, the term is often used in a broader sense to include all instances of refusal to serve that are not explicitly conscientious, such as medical exemptions that are really politically or economically motivated (e.g. Sandler 2003). While explicit

7 Ashkenazi Jews are mostly Jews from European countries, or descendants of them, as opposed to the Sephardic or Oriental Jews coming from the East.
conscientious objection is quite rare and demands a high personal price, grey refusal is more widespread in Israel. It is, however, not quantifiable as we cannot say with certainty what ‘real’ motivations lie behind not serving. Nevertheless, the fact that more and more young people opt out of service in order to pursue other avenues in life is an indicator of the dwindling loyalty, although still modest, to the military.

Despite these cracks, the military is still extremely important for Israeli society. As S. Helman’s writes, the ‘sustained participation of Israeli-Jewish males in the military rests upon its construction in terms of a community … belonging to this community of warriors is experienced in terms of embeddedness in society, as a criterion of normality and as an entitlement that legitimizes participation in the associations of civil society’ (1997: 306). With this she emphasizes the dominance men have within the Israeli military and the way the Israeli state is able to create an image of the IDF as a natural phase in a young man’s life. These issues are central if we want to understand Israeli militarism.

When meeting new people, for example, young people often use military service as one of their central points of reference. Where has this person served (in what unit or battalion), with whom, and what rank did they have? This information helps Israeli youth to categorize a new person they meet, just as information about family, occupation and place of residence does in a non-militarized society.

Some elements of militarism in Israel are obvious and are easy to see or notice. There are, however, many characteristics of the Israeli militarized society that are political and thus not visible at first sight. Military service and rank during one’s conscription, especially as professional military personnel, has a great influence on occupational possibilities in civilian life. Men benefit from this fact almost exclusively; ‘one of the results of this marginality of Jewish-Israeli women in the most important Israeli cultural and power institution – the military – is not only the reinforcement of women’s marginality in society but also their exclusion from the most important societal discourse, that of “national security”’ (Kimmerling 1993: 216–17). Thus women are excluded from important positions within the military and they take this marginality into civil society where work possibilities are linked to one’s military career (see also Izraeli 2004 and Herzog 1998).

Collective memory and myth

From an early age, Israeli children are familiarized with things military and with concepts such as security and war. The educational system in Israel is full of references to the military. It is not uncommon, for example, to see young children, four or five years old, going on school trips to
military museums where warplanes and tanks are on display. Furthermore, soldiers, usually women, come to schools to teach as part of their national service. On national holidays, children make drawings and packages at school to send to the soldiers out at the front to demonstrate their support. The presence of the military and the concept of being a soldier are, then, normalized cognitively from a very early age.

This process of the ‘normalization’ of the presence of military often takes place in the form of rituals and ceremonies, for example during the celebration of national, Jewish holidays in which collective memories are constructed (see Furman 1999; Ben-Amos and Bet-El 1999). The educational framework in Israel, in M. Furman’s eyes, ‘display[s] two parallel, even contradictory trends: a collectivist orientation that prepares the child for future military roles, and an individualistic thrust that seeks to prepare the child for civilian life’ (1999: 142). This first trend is very important here. It points to a conscious effort by the Israeli state to construct myths and stories of collective identification within its educational system in order to ensure the continuing existence of loyal citizens who are willing to serve the state. In these myths and stories, furthermore, the Israeli self is portrayed as a victim who needs to protect him/herself and never as an aggressor.

In her work on such efforts taking the form of ceremonies at kindergartens and schools, Furman shows how during the festivities of Hanukah, during which the defeat of the Hellenistic rulers in Judea by the Maccabees who refused to submit to them is celebrated, and the ceremonies on Independence Day and Memorial Day, collective Jewish memory and unity is evoked (1999). On other national holidays such as Purim, also, the well-known theme of ‘few against many’ is referred to in order to celebrate the victory of a small number of Jews who did not want to obey foreign rulers, in this case the Persians.

In order to achieve such adherence to one shared memory, the state of Israel makes use of myths not only during holidays and memorials but also during military rituals. These could be seen as ‘rites de passage’, after the famous work of van Gennep (1960). A notable example of such a ritual is the one where paratroopers get their burgundy red berets on Mount Masada.

This ceremony, which was abandoned several years ago now, was very central to the identity of the paratroopers who are seen as part of the military elite by Israeli society. It was carefully orchestrated in the specific spatial setting that made it possible to connect these young soldiers to the Jews who once fought to the death on the Masada rock. This tale of the Masada tells of the heroic last stand of a group of Jews (Zealots) on the Masada hilltop near the Dead Sea some 2,000 years ago (in 73 AD). These Jews, the story goes, fought against the Roman army that was taking over Palestine as ‘few against many’. When they realized that they did not have a
chance of holding on to their position, they committed communal suicide on the hilltop; they preferred taking their own lives to living as slaves under the Romans.

As has been shown by several scholars in recent years, this story was a construction achieved through the embellishment of certain facts and the erasure of others from the history. Historian N. Ben-Yehuda, in particular, opposes the way Shm aria Guttman, a leader in the early twentieth-century Zionist youth movement, and Yigael Yadin, a chief of staff in the IDF turned archaeologist, created this myth. Ben-Yehuda (1995) claims, through comparison with information from the only contemporary record of this episode, the writings of Flavius Josephus, that the Zionist version distorts many of the historical facts. He asserts that, while the Masada occupants, the ‘heroic Zealots’, refused to submit to the Romans, they also turned out to be thieves and thugs who had previously raided the nearby settlement of Ein Gedi, murdering its inhabitants. Whatever the strength of this argument – and caution is needed with the interpretation of the ‘evidence’ of the pro-Roman Flavius Josephus – it suffices to show that the facts are more controversial than the mythological tale that Guttman and Yadin, ignoring much relevant information, managed to create and that would become central in the education of Jewish youth during and after the Yishuv period.

The theme of heroism is very central in this story, but it is strongly exaggerated. What is most interesting here is the way that Masada and its surroundings, together with the heroic story of the Zealots, were used for the purposes of ‘cultural management’. Thousands of Israeli youths were to be formed into brave, strong soldiers who would be ready to do the same as the Zealots did two thousand years before, as Trumpeldor did in 1920,8 and as the Warsaw Ghetto fighters did during World War II: fight to the end. Individuals and youth organizations organized difficult hikes to Masada through the desert. These hikes, together with the difficult climb to the top of the rock, stood for endurance, deep connection to the land, and (again) the new and strong Hebrew that we discussed before.

A direct relation is, then, made by these ‘producers of history’ between former, sometimes even ancient, wars and conflicts and the soldiers of modern Israel. As Furman phrases it when she speaks about the use of collective memory in education, ‘the warrior, as he is presented in the collective narrative of the nursery, kindergarten, or school is divorced from any ethnic, class, ideological and other divisive lines. At the same time, the messages are transmitted in terms of thematic continuity, as differentiated from chronological continuity. The linking thread of this continuity is war’ (1999: 162). The theme of ‘few against many’ and to fight to the

8 Joseph Trumpeldor was the leader of a group of pioneers who fought Arab attacks on their settlement, Tel Hai. When Trumpeldor died in battle, he whispered, or so the story goes: ‘It’s good to die for our country’, a phrase that was then frequently put into use by the Israeli state and military in its ceremonies.
end appear to this day in ceremonies and memorials to remind Israel’s youth of their past and their responsibilities for their, and the state’s, future.

In the production of a shared collective memory, the issue of death is a central one. D. Handelman and L. Shamgar-Handelman write that ‘the placement and commemoration of national death have been central to the moulding of holistic collective memory and identity in numerous states of the modern era’ (1997: 86). However, it is particularly strong in Israel as we can see from the example of Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. Every year on Memorial Day (to remember the fallen soldiers) a state-ceremony takes place on this mount to commemorate those who gave their lives for the existence of the state. Besides being a military cemetery, there is also a special place where Herzl himself is interred alongside other Zionist leaders. These characteristics, together with a burial plot for the ‘Greats of the Nation’, ‘produced the national cemetery as a coherent memorial space permeated with Zionist meaning’ (Azaryahu 1996: 47). In Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman’s words: ‘our sense of death is that it transforms presence into absence’ (1997: 87). Through what they call ‘memorialism’, this absence is redefined into presence. Through ceremonies and other cultural practises, death begets a new meaning, often in a nationalist sense.

Ideas about the Palestinian ‘Other’

Earlier, the processes of Orientalization of Eastern Jews were discussed. However, now in the context of contemporary Israel as a militarized society, I would like to come back to such processes of ‘othering’ and Orientalization vis-à-vis the Palestinian or Arab ‘other’. While the Orientalization of Eastern or Oriental Jews (but also discrimination against black Jews from Ethiopia or Jews from the former Soviet Union) is still very much alive within present-day Israeli society, there is a ‘significant other’ (Triandafyllidou 1998) unifying those different groups. Opposed to the idealized, solidified militarized collective of Jewish Israel stands this other; this is unmistakably ‘the Palestinian’ or, more commonly, ‘the Arab’. In the construction of a new national Jewish identity in Israel, which needed to be solidified and strong, the construction of a clearly defined ‘other’ was necessary because no boundary consolidation is really possible without someone standing outside of these boundaries.

D. Bar-Tal calls this a process of de-legitimization; ‘the majority of Israeli Jews believe the ultimate objective of Palestinians is the annihilation of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian state’ (1990: 70) thus de-legitimizing them as ‘others’. R. Marton has furthermore emphasized the prevalence of processes of ‘splitting’ within Israeli society which reduce the Israeli worldview to something ‘sharply divided into us Israelis – right and just – and them
Palestinian – wrong and evil’ (2008: 3). Through such processes the Israeli self is, furthermore, seen as an ultimate victim (ibid.), something we could already see when collective memory and myths were discussed before.

This otherness of ‘the Arab’ or Palestinian is enforced through the strong emphasis Israeli society puts on Western culture as the ‘proper’ Israeli culture, largely dismissing oriental or Arab Jewish culture as well as Palestinian culture as ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 2002 [1966]; see also Shohat 1999). Education within Israel does not deal with Palestinian culture in depth and if it does ‘the defining characteristic is stereotypical and … negative images … are attributed to them [Palestinians]’ (Lomksy-Feder and Ben-Ari 2007: 7).

Furthermore, Israel is a segregated society; Jews and Palestinians (Israeli citizens) rarely live in the same city let alone in the same neighbourhood. Most Palestinians with Israeli citizenship live either in the ‘triangle’ in Northern Israel or in one of the Palestinian communities spread across the country. Only a few ‘mixed’ cities exist in Israel, and these are usually internally segregated, dividing Palestinian and Jewish communities.

In addition, a negative prejudice exists against the Muslim world as a whole within Israel. A clear emphasis is put on its development into a Western, modern state and on it being ‘the only democracy in the Middle East’. As such, a very clear distinction is drawn between Israeli society and the Arab Muslim world around it, a distinction which Israeli soldiers take with them into the OPT. A survey from 1980 ‘indicated a stereotypical tendency among Israeli youngsters to view all Arabs, anywhere within the state of Israel and beyond, as a menacing and ill-intentioned collective’ (Rabinowitz 2001: 65). Bar-Tal also indicates that ‘the Israeli Jews, from the beginning of their encounters with Palestinians, viewed them as primitive, bandits, cruel mobs, and failed to recognize their national identity’ (1990: 71). Although the survey D. Rabinowitz mentions, which triggered the appearance of the coexistence field in Israel (projects promoting coexistence between Israeli Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel), took place almost thirty years ago and despite the fact that Bar-Tal’s work is fairly old as well, I believe this outcome is still, at least in part, valid for views about Palestinians today, especially during the years of both Intifadas (see also Lomksy-Feder and Ben-Ari 2007: 7).

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict from 1967 on
Let us now take a more thorough look at the conflictive relationship between Israel and the Palestinians since 1967, the year in which Israel achieved victory during the Six Day War. After this victory, large chunks of foreign land were occupied by Israel: the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank from Jordan (which had controlled it between 1948 and 1967) and the Gaza strip
and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. In Israeli history, the (re)capture of Jerusalem is, in particular, monumentally important. Although voices calling for the return of these areas were heard straight away, the majority of the decision-makers were overwhelmed by the emotions of victory and, reinforced in their convictions by the Arab triple ‘no’, Israel held on to the territories. Over the years the Golan Heights, where no local inhabitants were left except for the Druze community, were de facto annexed by Israel and Jewish settlements were built there. Today the majority of the Israeli public does not perceive this area as a ‘real’ occupied territory. The Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egyptian control between 1979 and 1982 following a peace-agreement.

The West Bank and the Gaza strip were a whole different matter, however. Palestinians populated those areas, most of them displaced after the Independence war of 1948 and the foundation of the State of Israel, as discussed earlier. Today, some 4 million Palestinians live divided between these two territories (2.5 million in the West bank, 1.5 million in the Gaza strip). Up until the Oslo agreements of 1993, the Palestinians living within these territories lived under Israeli civil administration. This occupation of the territories by Israel resulted, as will be discussed shortly, in two massive uprisings by the Palestinians, the first in 1987 and the second in 2000.

In October 1973, Egyptian and Syrian troops surprised Israel with a major attack and the ‘Yom Kippur War’, named after the Jewish holiday, broke out, thus ending the years of euphoria in Israel about the victory of 1967. The casualty rate on the Israeli side was very high and the Israeli population went into shock, having felt secure about the military power of its state after 1967 and now realizing that ‘this sense of security was an illusion’ (Azaryahu 1999: 107). The Israeli government had to endure a lot of criticism after the war ended concerning the way the first days of the war were conducted and in 1974 the government of Prime Minister Golda Meir resigned. The defeat of Israel in this war also marked the start of an increasingly critical look at the military and its operations by the citizens of the state. While still supportive of the military, cracks in the idealized view of the defence forces started to become visible. The Israeli public did not accept the strength and invincibility of its military as something self-evident anymore and discussions about how and why certain wars were fought started to be conducted.

In June 1982, Israel invaded Southern Lebanon, led by Ariel Sharon, in an operation called ‘Operation Peace for Galilee’; this would later become known as the ‘Lebanon War’.

9 At the Arab summit conference in Khartoum, Sudan, in 1967, the following policy was adopted: ‘no negotiation, no peace, no recognition’.
10 The term ‘Palestinian’ used to identify a certain people and to describe a feeling of sharing a common past and future has only been used widely since 1967 when the national identity of the Palestinians became more and more of an issue.
Official reasons given for this invasion concerned the activities of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) directed against Israeli targets and came as a response to an assassination attempt against an Israeli ambassador. However, as military historian M. van Creveld wrote: ‘Israel’s excuse for launching “Operation Peace for Galilee” … proved paper thin’ (1998: 289).

This war led to the presence of Israeli forces in Lebanon for several years. After the end of the war proper, in May 1983, Israel retreated to a security buffer zone of some 40 kilometres in which it stayed up to 2000. In 1982 a brutal attack by Phalangist troops on the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila took place, leaving an estimated 700–3500 people dead while Israeli forces looked on.11 Later Ariel Sharon had to resign as Minister of Defence after an Israeli investigation committee found him responsible for failing to prevent the massacre.

During the war more and more Israelis, amongst them many soldiers now in civilian clothes, began to demonstrate against the unjust use of force by the IDF. The organization Peace Now in particular gained momentum during these events. This marked the start of doubts about the morality of the activities of the IDF who were perceived to be carrying out offensive attacks instead of solely defensive moves as stated by the military. During these years, the process of loss of trust in the IDF and the undermining of its almost mythical stature that was taking place within Israeli society and which had started after the Yom Kippur War was accelerated.

The last, but still important, conflict Israel was involved in before the current, post-2000 Intifada (which can be seen as its direct predecessor) was the first Intifada, which broke out in December 1987 and which lasted until 1993. The word Intifada means ‘uprising’ in Arabic and this Palestinian struggle did indeed begin as a fairly spontaneous uprising against the Israeli occupation which had existed for twenty years at that time (van Creveld 1998). In the years after the 1967 occupation, and especially during the late 1970s, more and more Jewish settlements were built in the OPT and roadblocks were increasingly erected, making movement through the territories difficult. In fact almost all facets of Palestinian life were (and still are) controlled by the mechanisms of the Israeli state which N. Gordon (2008) describes as an infrastructure of control.

The demonstrations of 1987 were sparked by a traffic accident in the Gaza Strip in which four Palestinians were killed. Unlike previous demonstrations, however, these did not die down instead growing more and more severe in the days that followed (van Creveld 1998). In the beginning this Intifada was very decentralized and actions happened spontaneously on every street, together with more general civil disobedience in the form of boycotts and underground activities. Only in 1989 did the PLO manage to centralize the activities of the uprising (Andoni 2001). The Israeli Defence Forces did not know how to deal with these civilian outbursts of

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11 For this figure and other information, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabra_and_Shatila_massacre, as accessed on 31-03-2008.
violence, especially during the early days. Rules about the behaviour of soldiers towards the
Palestinian rioters were made and changed over and over again leaving the soldiers with a deep
sense of uncertainty. From the beginning of that uprising up until today, however, the IDF has
gained much experience in dealing with a civilian populations amongst whom rioters and
instigators of unrest hide.

The Al-Aqsa Intifada
In the year 2000 after a provocative visit on 28 September to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by
Ariel Sharon, then opposition leader of the Likud party, the second uprising in the Palestinian
territories broke out. This visit was, however, just the spark for an uprising that had been in the
offing for a long time and one ‘should look beyond the sparks to the deeper factors that
determined the sudden transition from a seemingly routinized system of control to widespread
violence involving young men and women ready to give their lives for the sake of ending the
status quo’ (Hammami and Tamari 2001: 5).

The second Intifada or as the Palestinians termed it ‘Al-Aqsa Intifada’ was, then, seen as a
strong sign marking the feelings of frustration and anger within the Palestinian society of the
OPT combined with a feeling of disillusion about the Oslo agreements of 1993, which in this
group’s eyes did not bring about the changes it had promised (Pressman 2003). The policies of
the Israeli military and state continued during the Oslo years (between 1993 and 2000) – Jewish
settlements in the OPT were built, Palestinian houses were demolished and land was
expropriated. Furthermore, all the major borders were controlled by Israel, these including the
borders to Jordan and Egypt as well as to East Jerusalem and the internal borders within the
territories (ibid.).

The first and second Intifada differed significantly in the way the fighting took shape. While the first Intifada consisted mostly of non-violent actions and civil disobedience with the
occasional hurling of rocks and Molotov cocktails, the Palestinians during the ‘Al-Aqsa Intifada’
began using more violent means, such as IEDs (Improved Explosive Device) and suicide bombs,
on both military and civilian targets. I will come back to this issue when discussing the type of
conflict this Intifada represents.

As a result of this the IDF understood the conflict more and more in terms of a war,
especially since the Palestinian Authority was present in the OPT at the time; they hence used
material and manpower appropriate for such a conflict. Especially in the beginning, the Israeli
strategy made use of a lot of force to come down hard on the protests and resorted to the
extensive use of snipers (ibid.).
In the following years, the situation on the ground became increasingly hard for the local population. As shall be discussed later on, Palestinian daily life is under the control of Israeli forces, almost on every level; simply travelling from one point to another means getting permits and going through checkpoints. Leaving the OPT is almost impossible for most Palestinians. The years of the Intifada have also involved many suicide attacks by Palestinians on Israeli civilian targets such as buses, hotels, restaurants and discotheques in Israel’s main cities. After almost eight years, this cycle of violence seems self-reinforcing and (unfortunately) seems never to come to an end. It is, however, the bleak background to this study; a clearer picture of the reality of Israeli soldiers within this situation will be given throughout this work.

1.2 Key concepts

In order to position the research more precisely, I will now go on to introduce some of the key concepts that will be used throughout this work. This section will introduce the concepts of ‘a-symmetrical conflict’ and ‘perpetrator versus victim’ (or bystander) the way they have been developed during the research and as they will be used in this study. I will, furthermore, discuss the way I intend to use the concept of ‘misbehaviour’ when speaking about the actions of Israeli soldiers.

A-symmetrical conflict

In the years before the Cold War, nation-states in the West were engaged in so called ‘all-out wars’. This concept refers to ‘classical’ wars between the militaries of different nation-states, usually concerning border and ideological issues. ‘The conflict that is characteristic of classical wars has a core of activity that takes the form of a series of clashes between professional organizations of combatants. These clashes take place in battle fields away from areas of non-combatants work and residence’ (Kasher and Yadlin 2005: 7). This concept of war is easily grasped by outsiders but also by the soldiers involved. There are clear lines between sides within the conflict and clear goals to aim at.

However, with the end of the Cold War in 1989, massive battles between Western military forces are no longer to be expected. The conflicts that arise today are much more complex, involving numerous sides that often do not have regular, uniformed and recognizable militaries. Militants who are not distinguishable from civilians take part in such conflicts. Furthermore, soldiers are now regularly engaged in constabulary tasks, performing duties that were not part of soldiering in the Cold War era. The nature of conflict changed and became more ambiguous after 1989. It is no longer clear who exactly is the enemy and where he or she is
situated and what kind of action is expected of the soldiers of regular armies, for example when they face a civilian population with militants in their midst. Such conflicts are referred to as ‘New Wars’ (Kaldor 2006) or, for example, ‘Fourth Generation Warfare’, a term coined by W. Lind, K. Nightengale, J. Schmitt, J. Sutton and G. Wilson (1989) to denote a kind of warfare where national boundaries are dissolved into cultural or religious entities.12 Where the ‘distinction between war and peace [is] blurred to the vanishing point … the distinction between “civilian” and “military” may disappear’ (1989: 23).13 Shamir and Ben-Ari further emphasize the ‘blurring of the conventional concepts of “front” and “front-line battles” and … the distinction between civilian and military’ (1999: 15). They especially focus on the new kinds of military leadership that are necessary within such a changing field of conflict.

The term that will be used here for such conflicts is ‘a-symmetrical conflict’. This type of conflict brings moral ambiguity and complexity with it. Importantly, the a-symmetry in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is, first of all, one of means of power. The Israeli side has a military with a vast array of weaponry, fighter jets, tanks and money from the Israeli state to back up its operations, not to mention the support of a relatively stable government. On the Palestinian side, the Palestinian fighters are not part of an organized military; at most they belong to one of the militias (that also often fight each other) or to one of the political parties that exist within the OPT. Their access to weaponry and financial means is limited and the political structure within their society is very unstable. Furthermore, Palestinian fighters move amongst civilians and can often not be distinguished from them.

On a different level there exists an ‘inherent imbalance in power between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians’ (Maoz 2001: 244). By looking at the daily life in the OPT, it becomes obvious that there is a great power a-symmetry: Israel is a powerful occupying force and the Palestinian citizens are virtually powerless.

A third characteristic of the conflict making it a-symmetrical is the nature of the operations of the Israeli military. These operations tend to push soldiers into constabulary roles that involve intense contact with a civilian population. The Israeli military man checkpoints, patrol the streets and conduct house and body searches, activities for which soldiers usually are not specifically trained. Examples of such situations can be taken from the Israeli case where soldiers are at times instructed to maintain the closure of a village or town while being confronted with ambulances that urgently need to get through a checkpoint. In these confusing

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12 The Vietnam War, which also involved confrontations with civilians in a guerrilla war, is generally not seen as a case of ‘Fourth Generation Warfare’ because of the massive battles that took place between two conventional armies. Also, the US Army did not have any constabulary tasks in Vietnam.

and complex situations, decisions have to be made on the spot, introducing an element of moral complexity to soldiers’ tasks that was absent during the Cold War.

Looking at the specific case of the ‘Al Aqsa Intifada’ discussed above, it is, thus, a very clear case of an a-symmetrical conflict, which is ‘difficult to define … as a “war” because there are no clear state boundaries and because there is almost no use of conventional fighting techniques such as artillery and long, swift, armoured manoeuvres’ (Ben-Shalom, Lehrer and Ben-Ari 2005: 66). Furthermore, ‘both sides are very different from each other in terms of their military power and potential and of their aims and modes of operation’ (ibid.). Here it has, for instance, to be noted that on the side of the Palestinians the boundary between combatants/militants and civilians/non-combatants becomes very blurred, adding to the insecurity of the other side. Besides the constabulary tasks Israeli soldiers are sent to perform, however, these men also find themselves in battles that can be rather intense (ibid.), battles such as Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, which will be discussed later on.

Situating ‘perpetrators’ and ‘misbehaviour’

Here I will explain how Israeli soldiers are situated within this work as ‘perpetrators’. I will furthermore explain what I understand by ‘misbehaviour’ and other related acts carried out by soldiers. Both concepts, that of perpetrators and that of their misbehaviour, might seem very straightforward terms not needing any introduction. However, I feel that this is not the case because the context of the group I am talking about here is so complex that they, the Israeli soldiers, can be seen as perpetrators and victims at the same time; the same goes for the Palestinians.

Furthermore, an explanation is needed about what I take as ‘misbehaviour’ in this work as this is such a general term with many layers. Misbehaviour can range from innocent, childish jokes to actual evil-doing or ‘wrongdoing at its absolute worst’ (Vetlesen 2005: 3). Although all these gradations can occur when speaking about the behaviour of Israeli soldiers towards Palestinian civilians, or militants for that matter, I will give a more thorough explanation of how this term is used within this work.

Perpetrator and victim

This research looks at violent or harassing behaviour from the point of view of the perpetrators of such acts. While in many instances of conflict it is not necessarily clear who is the victim and who the perpetrator, especially in cases of a-symmetrical conflict such as the Intifada (Maoz 2001: 246), in this case I will frame the group that, in the situation of the encounter, performs acts of
violence or harassment and that is in control over the other group as the perpetrator. In this work I will, furthermore, deal with strategies of legitimacy and disengagement. In the literature on these subjects an analytical opposition is made between perpetrator and victim. Thus, Israeli soldiers whose often violent behaviour is the focus of this research are framed as perpetrators in an analytical sense. The term ‘perpetrator’ is, then, used in a decriminalized manner. This does not imply that none of the actions of the soldiers are criminal or illegal, just that they are not necessarily so. The soldiers are, however, the executors of violence or harassment vis-à-vis Palestinian civilians.

Importantly, within Israeli society soldiers are sometimes regarded as the victims of the conflict (alongside the Palestinians, if they are taken into account at all). The young soldiers sent by the military into the OPT come back with difficult stories resulting from their experiences. There is even a special organization that takes care of those soldiers and citizens who experience psychological problems ‘with a nationalist background’.14 Soldiers here are, then, portrayed, not without reason, as victims of the situation they were put in. In some ways, of course, they are.

Here, however, as explained earlier, I will imagine them largely as perpetrators in the analytical sense in terms of their interaction with Palestinian civilians. Looking at violence from the side of the executor of violent acts is certainly not an approach many choose to use. Especially within the social sciences it often seems easier to look at happenings from the victims’ point of view, in order to give them a voice. While this is a noble and important goal, one which has also been propagated by anthropologists in particular (see Nancy Scheper-Hughes 1992b), my strongly-held opinion is that to highlight the other side and uncover processes in the social production of perpetrators while trying to deeply understand their point of view is also very valuable, indeed essential. My decision to do research on a powerful group that often uses physical or verbal violence came from a desire to understand this violent behaviour more deeply in its social and physical context.

When focusing on the perpetrator, it is important to emphasize the power relations that are at play. By definition a perpetrator has power over the victim and, as was mentioned before, in this case the perpetrator is in control of a multitude of factors influencing the life of the victims, in this case the Palestinian civilians. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

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14 This organization is called NATAL, see http://www.natal.org.il/eng/eindex.aspx

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The misbehaviour of soldiers

In December 2007 research by the Israeli military reported that one quarter of its soldiers had been involved in ‘humiliating conduct’ towards Palestinians.\(^{15}\) To many Israelis this might seem surprising. For people who have visited the OPT, however, or who have read reports by human rights organizations in the region, it is not. Such behaviour stands in stark contrast to the image the Israeli state and military want to promote to the outside world. The IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) is portrayed as ‘one of the most moral militaries in the world’ and certainly the most moral in the Middle East. As more and more stories about misbehaviour of soldiers are being told by the press, human rights organizations and soldiers themselves,\(^ {16}\) the state and the military find themselves in need of strategies to explain and legitimize soldiers’ conduct. This is, nowadays, an important internal debate in Israel. Usually strategies emphasizing the exceptional nature of misbehaviour (‘it was an isolated incident’) or of contextualization and uniqueness (‘the country finds itself in a very specific situation’) are used to justify such behaviour (Cohen 2001: 109–10).

The present study aims to look at the conduct of Israeli soldiers at a more micro level, to understand more deeply what processes are at work when Israeli soldiers are doing their job in the Occupied Palestinian Territories on a daily basis. The focus will be a ‘moral’ one, which means that this work will be dealing with behaviour, discursive strategies and the decision-making of soldiers involving others as the domain of the moral is ‘understood most generally as the domain where the weal and woe of others is at stake’ (Vetlesen 1994: 350). My interest lies in trying to understand the Israeli soldiers in the OPT without explaining away their behaviour or legitimizing it and without referring to some invariable universal code for judging human conduct. I believe, however, that by understanding the factors that influence their behaviour, the issues that occupy their minds and what their perceptions of right and wrong are, we can get closer to comprehending the behaviour of soldiers in the OPT and also similar behaviour in other places beyond the Israeli context.

It is important at this stage to clarify exactly what I mean when speaking of misbehaviour, as this can take many forms. Within this research I will use this term when talking about recognized illegal acts or physical violence (according to army regulations and the code of conduct), but most importantly I will use it to indicate acts of humiliation, daily harassment and verbal aggression, all of which occur on a daily basis when one is in the situation of controlling another people. Such acts are often not seen as misbehaviour by soldiers and their commanders,


\(^{16}\) See the organization Breaking the Silence, [www.breakingthesilence.org.il](http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il)
as they occur daily and often do not result in anyone getting physically hurt; indeed, such acts are
almost never punishable within the military system. Often they are not even in conflict with
military orders and are seen as completely legitimate.

I will be more concerned with the daily behaviour of soldiers which in their own eyes can
be seen normal but which is often contested and basically unacceptable. The actions of the
soldiers I most commonly deal with are mainly concerned with a civilian population and are not
so much encounters with an enemy. The greatest friction between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians
does not occur during military operations or militant actions but occurs between soldiers and
civilians at places like the checkpoints of the West Bank.

From this research it became clear that soldiers do not discuss their moral behaviour or
decision-making amongst themselves. Often this is because such behaviour is completely
normalized and is thus not seen as a valuable or necessary subject of conversation. Sometimes
after certain events have occurred soldiers will discuss them but usually questions and opinions
are not aired, certainly not during an operation. This adds to the normalization of their behaviour
and of the events they witness; when no one talks about it or poses any questions, events are
taken as natural and not out of the ordinary.

Code of ethics

The question that might be posed here is in what ways Israeli soldiers are prepared for the moral
challenges that await them in a conflict such as the ‘Al-Aqsa Intifada’. The IDF has always
presented itself as being a moral army and in the early 1990s the code of ethics or ‘the Spirit of
the IDF’ was written, this now being taught to all soldiers. Both the state and military use this
code of ethics to emphasize the moral professionalism of the soldiers and the pure motivations
of its military leaders. For example, at a conference in March 2008 in Jerusalem, then Foreign
Minister T. Livni was quoted as saying that she was not afraid of facing the international
community concerning Israel’s military operations in the Gaza strip because ‘the limitations we’ve
placed on ourselves are based on our moral values’.17 Another example comes from an excerpt
taken from a talk by the Chief of Staff of the IDF, G. Ashkenazi, concerning the death of a
soldier during a military operation: ‘There, in the alleyways of the camp in the heart of the Kasba
[centre of an Arab city], a battle erupted in which our soldiers once again showed determination,
professionalism and courage. We paid a heavy price … [name of soldier] was shot and killed. His
comrades were not deterred and continued fighting. They killed the terrorists who shot their
friend and are completing the mission, in keeping with the Paratrooper Brigade’s tradition and

17 From http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3523848,00.html as accessed on 02-04-2008.
the spirit of the IDF.\textsuperscript{18} What we can conclude from both examples is that in public speeches the code of ethics of the IDF is still used to emphasize the values IDF soldiers have and the way these values are supposed to guide their behaviour.

The Israeli military does not have a military academy; all officers come from the ranks. During basic training, when all basic knowledge is given to the newly conscripted soldiers, the code of ethics of the IDF is also discussed. The code of ethics of the IDF once had eleven but now has ten values that are meant to guide a soldier’s behaviour in any situation he might find himself in.\textsuperscript{19} This code is seen as ‘the moral and normative identity card of the IDF as an organization, which stands as the foundation for all actions carried out by all men and women soldiers in the framework of the IDF’.\textsuperscript{20} These core values are:

1. Tenacity of purpose in performing missions and drive to victory
2. Responsibility
3. Credibility
4. Personal example
5. Human life
6. Purity of arms
7. Professionalism
8. Discipline
9. Comradeship
10. Sense of mission

Soldiers are taught these values during basic training and during every commander course, if they choose to take one of these. Each soldier receives a pocket-sized booklet with the code in order to always have it with him or her. From interviews with commanders it became clear that the values of the code are discussed with the soldiers that these commanders are responsible for, but not in an organized manner. Every commander has a certain freedom to decide in what way to discuss the values, the time spent on this and on what values to put an emphasis on. It could, thus, well be that value-briefings are being given to soldiers after shifts of ten hours at a checkpoint, at a time when the soldiers have difficulties concentrating. It could also happen that a

\textsuperscript{18} From http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3451872,00.html as accessed on 02-04-2008.
\textsuperscript{19} In 2005 Israeli professor of philosophy Asa Kasher, responsible for the original code of conduct, drafted a new version of the code for use within low-intensity conflict, like that found in the OPT.
\textsuperscript{20} ‘Taken from the ‘Spirit of the IDF’ http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/about/doctrine/ethics.htm, as accessed on 02-04-2008.'
commander does not see the values of the ‘code of ethics’ as important and, thus, does not teach the code at all. One commander said the following:

‘In my opinion the ethical code is absurd. I will explain. Absurd is to think that because someone decides you have to be nice, everyone will be nice. It is not absurd, because the military has to define what it believes in. About the internalization [of values in the field]: it happens, but I don’t think because of the ethical code. Every soldier of the IDF has the code in his pocket and probably if he was bored at some guard duty he has read it. But I never was in a situation that I thought of doing this and the ethical code of the IDF said something different …no, its not obvious, it’s like teaching someone to be a leader, you can teach him all kind of techniques but if he doesn’t have “it” he doesn’t have it and he probably will never be a leader…The same with the ethical code, if you have a bad person, he won’t say ‘oh but the code says this’ … I don’t think in the end that what is written in the ethical code influences the conduct of the soldiers; it is who their commanders are and what they learn from their commanders.’(5)21

After speaking to soldiers about the code of ethics it became even clearer that they do not see much use in it. It does not correspond to their daily experiences in the OPT and hence has no value for them. Because of this, they do not actively use it and when asked none of the informants could list all of the ten given values. A preliminary conclusion can, then, be that the IDF does not provide soldiers with the necessary tools to deal with morally difficult circumstances within the OPT. The code is, therefore, not responsible for their moral attitude. It could also be said that the values they do use come primarily from upbringing and education and only in the most favourable of cases may be sharpened or brought out by (reading or being taught) the code.22

21 Quotes coded numerically are from interviews conducted and translated by the author. Quotes coded with ‘BS’ are from testimonies collected by the organization Breaking the Silence and translated by them or, when additionally coded with ‘EG’, by the author. When translating the words of the informants I tried to stay as faithful as I could to the original, while at the same time trying to make the meaning of the words comprehensible for the reader. At times this has resulted in grammatically flawed sentences that represent the informal speech of the informants.

22 For work on the effectiveness of codes of ethics in other corporate settings, see Cleek and Leonard 1998 and Schwartz 2001.