

Beyond Mystification: Hegemony, Resistance, and Ethical Responsibility in Israel

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ABSTRACT

This article reevaluates the usefulness of the theoretical continuum between hegemony and resistance in light of recent Israeli experiences. Specifically, through the comparison of “conscientious objection” and “draft evasion,” I find that the breakdown of hegemonic consciousness is not sufficient to understand why some disillusioned Israeli soldiers choose public resistance against the state, while others choose evasive tactics. I argue that the space between ideological discontent and resistance is fraught with social and ethical considerations. The source of political discontent for disillusioned soldiers is problematization of their military service as an ethical dilemma, though the ethical concerns of these soldiers extend well beyond the overtly political sphere. I contend that this presents a challenge to the opposition of hegemony and resistance, but also to many accounts in political anthropology that implicitly privilege the political sphere as a natural site of self-fulfillment. Many accounts of hegemony and resistance isolate political consciousness from the broader ethical life in which people engage, and thus do not recognize that rejecting public action can be based on prioritizing other values, not only mystification. I find that one’s readiness to resist the state is dependent on the degree of “metonymization” of the individual with the state project, and that cynicism is one way that people articulate

the differentiation of their interests from those of the state. [Keywords: Hegemony, resistance, ethics, Israel, military, conscientious objection]

Hegemony and resistance have long been thought of as two poles of a continuum of power. Here, I would like to ethnographically reconsider the usefulness of this continuum through cases in which the “mystification” of hegemony breaks down, but in which individuals come to different decisions regarding the choice between public resistance to the state and remaining illegible and out of the public eye. Looking at Israel, I compare the choice available to disillusioned soldiers between declaring oneself a conscientious objector (*leserev l’sibot matzpooniot*) and evading the draft through other means.¹ This article highlights the shades of gray that inform disillusioned Israeli soldiers regarding whether or not to become a conscientious objector with its concomitant public performance and ethical stance. It also suggests that public resistance is not indicative of the degree to which hegemonic consciousness has broken down. I posit an approach in which hegemony and resistance are decoupled, and propose to explore the interstitial zones between hegemony and public resistance in a broader social field. I suggest that the gap that lies between individual conviction and collective action is nebulous and fraught with ethical considerations.

Conscientious objection refers to the public declaration of conscientious refusal to comply with the universal draft of Jewish Israelis to service in the Israeli Defense Forces.² This has often been done in groups and accompanied by declarations of principle delivered, by letter, to the government. Most conscientious objectors have served time in military prison for their refusal and faced severe social consequences, including public notoriety. Public conscientious objection in Israel, which has ebbed and flowed since it first appeared in the early 1980s, has caused significant social agitation and infused a level of doubt regarding the morality of military activities into the public discourse. It has also challenged the state by forcing it to respond to soldiers’ accusations, to use techniques of punishment (rather than those of control), and to justify itself. “Draft evasion” refers to avoiding military service by exploiting sanctioned exemptions that are not actually applicable to the individual, before or after joining the military. For example, one can receive a medical or psychological exemption from the Israeli military with relative ease. In Israel, draft evasion is not socially

recognized as resistance, but rather is understood in non-ideological and non-ethical terms.

First, I examine the dramatic shift in which hegemonic consciousness breaks down, creating a crisis of conscience for many soldiers who become conscientious objectors. I will contrast the experiences, reasoning, and stances of these soldiers with those of soldiers who similarly went through a process of disillusionment and conscientiously opposed their military service, but who either continued to serve or left the military through evasion. I find that the decision to publicly become a conscientious objector is determined not only by disillusionment, but also by a wide range of considerations found in traditionally “non-political” spheres. Though the choice of publically declaring conscientious objection is binary and temporally limited, the deliberations over such political action take place in a multi-vector ethical matrix and continue long after the action has been taken. In other words, the source of political discontent is the identification of an ethical problem, and, as an ethical problem, its areas of consideration are considerably broader than the overtly political sphere. I contend that this presents a challenge to the opposition of hegemony and resistance, but also to many accounts in political anthropology that implicitly privilege the political sphere as a natural site of self-fulfillment. Many accounts of hegemony and resistance isolate political consciousness from the broader ethical lives with which people engage, and thus do not recognize that rejecting public action can be based on prioritizing other values, and not only mystification. Such accounts implicitly suggest that individuals metonymize completely with the state. By this, I mean that individuals identify wholly with the state, and see their lives and moral worth entwined with it. Throughout the article, I propose a broader view of hegemonic forms and content, beyond the overtly political, which allows for more nuanced stances than knee-jerk resistance. As a result, individuals often face situations in which they have failed to fulfill some of their ethical obligations for the sake of others—in this case, they sacrifice political beliefs for personal responsibilities. I suggest cynicism is one way to cope with such an irreconcilable disparity. Specifically, the distancing mechanisms of cynicism serve to bridge the gap between ideological discontent and public dissent.

The processes I describe here have significant implications for the ethical terrain of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict. After the Oslo Accords, the political Left believed collective action could force the Israeli

government to negotiate for peace with the Palestinians. The organization Peace Now became the standard bearer of this vision of conflict resolution, and public conscientious objection was very much part of this dissent movement intended to advance the peace process. Since this time, the collective action of the political left (sometimes referred to as the “peace industry”) has weakened significantly. Common explanations of this shift include popular disillusionment following the Al-Aqsa Intifada and rapid implementation of neoliberal policies with accompanying processes of depoliticization. These are no doubt significant factors, but they only address political consciousness. To understand the full extent and mechanisms of such depoliticization we must also ethnographically examine institutions, practices, and relationships.

Conscientious Objection and Draft Evasion

In Israel, Jewish men serve three years of basic military service and women serve two years. Afterward, many men and some women can be called for reserve duty of up to one month per year until the age of 45, reflecting a significant civic burden as well as a repeated opportunity to show both compliance and dissent. Conscientious objection began in Israel in the 1980s, peaking during the Lebanon War starting in 1982 and the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000–2005). Conscientious objection is public, often organized, and explicitly attributed to reasons of conscience—most often ethical resistance to the treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and sometimes to Israel’s use of disproportionate military force. During these periods, most conscientious objectors served significant time in military jail as punishment for their actions. In publicly refusing to continue as Israeli soldiers, conscientious objectors made forceful accusations of unethical conduct against the Israeli state. Because the Israeli state had invested heavily in representing its military operations and the actions of its soldiers as ethical through public relations efforts (*hasbara*), accusations by the state’s own soldiers to the contrary were particularly damaging. Conscientious objectors won widespread recognition within Israel for their refusals, which could easily have been seen as treason had they argued their case less convincingly. Much of this social recognition was based on their willingness to serve time in prison—to “pay the price” for their convictions—in accordance with hegemonic expectations of citizens to sacrifice for the state (Sagi 1998). Conscientious objectors were frequently

interviewed in the media and invited onto news programs, each time challenging the ethical legitimacy of the state's actions. Despite the uproar, the conscientious objection movement never became large enough to bring about widespread social change, such as the modification of Israeli military rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or an end to universal military conscription.

By all accounts, draft evasion is a much larger, if far more illegible, phenomenon. Draft evasion has always been present, since the beginning of the state and before, when some avoided joining Jewish paramilitary organizations during the British mandate. People have used many different types of sanctioned military exemptions—including medical, religious, and social—to evade military service. In the early years of the state, soldiers would sometimes injure themselves to be exempted (Algazy 2006). Today, information regarding how to evade military service by manipulating or faking symptoms to fit sanctioned exemption criteria is traded anonymously online, and sometimes through face-to-face encounters, if trust and political alliance can be furtively established. The military has released statistics showing that 48 percent of Israeli youths do not enlist in the Israeli Defense Forces (Pfeffer 2010). Some are automatically exempt, but some 25 percent actively evade service (Rosenfeld 2009). This reflects an estimated 7,000 draft evaders each year, compared with less than 3,000 conscientious objectors in the peak year (Zelikovich 2008). Because draft evaders do not publicly declare their reasons, it is not known why they refuse; however, my own research and that of others reveals that ethical dissent is sometimes a contributing consideration. Ariel Dloomy estimates that draft evasions for reasons of conscience outnumber those who publicly refuse by a margin of ten to one (2005:706). The ethnography in this article circumvents the strict differentiation within draft evasion between conscientious motivations and “non-conscientious” motivations, noting that many who hold ethical objections to Israeli military policy use draft evasion to avoid involvement.

Declaring conscientious objection is a public performance of ethical stance and an explicitly political act, while draft evasion obscures the intentions of the refuser. Because conscientious objection is explicitly critical of the state and forces the state into a self-defensive posture, it is clear that conscientious objection is public resistance. Draft evasion, on the other hand, is illegible to the Israeli public as resistance. Although the intention of draft evasion is often ethical or political dissent, in Israeli society

draft evasion is represented as an egocentric shirking of responsibility. This dissent is an implicit refusal to participate in the state project while one's individual intentions remain mostly veiled; it therefore does not conform to conventional notions of political resistance. Hannah Arendt's claim that in order for individual concerns to be valuable, they must be "deindividualized" and made "fit" for public appearance reflects this conventional understanding of intervention (Arendt 1998:50). We see here that whether people turn discontent into public resistance depends on their ethical obligations as well as their models of freedom, responsibility, and the capacity to bring about change. Accordingly, this article posits a decoupling of hegemony and public resistance as polar opposites, which has consequences for how we think about the relationship between citizens and the state, the centrality of this relationship to anthropological theory, and the meaning of political membership.

Hegemony Versus Resistance in the Literature

Antonio Gramsci once tried to explain why the European working class was not rising up against the capitalist state, and to plot a path through which workers would find solidarity and be moved to political action. His work spoke to a feeling of frustration among socialist revolutionaries regarding why the "inevitable" socialist revolution had not occurred, and why the working class was mystified by the structures of power keeping them oppressed—structures that were obvious to socialist revolutionaries. His concept of hegemony was a persuasive explanation of this paradox, suggesting that capitalist domination was not only kept in place through violence, but also through the rendering of bourgeoisie values as common sense (Gramsci 1996:51, 160, 189). As a result of this process, the working class was made to essentially consent to their own coercion through processes of mystification, preventing their rebellion (1996:201). Gramsci's ideas about hegemony have been enormously influential to understandings of dynamics like political power and resistance, even though the normative focus dividing consciousness into true and false has fallen from favor among academics.

The legacy of Gramsci's opposition of hegemony and resistance has continued to influence the ways anthropology and its interlocutor disciplines think about dynamics of power. Much of this work references Raymond Williams's discussion of hegemony and ideology. For Williams

(1977:100), hegemony is unconscious and unarticulated, one's very sense of reality; while ideology is conscious, objectified, and contested. Many use this work to think about issues of political consciousness, which they understand to be necessary for resistance. I contend that Williams has been read somewhat narrowly. He observes that hegemony involves "not just intellectual but political facts, expressed over a range from institutions, to relationships and consciousness" (1985:118). Though the popular focus on ideas and consciousness has neglected other manifestations of hegemonic power, in this account I seek to rehabilitate the focus on the two more neglected aspects of this definition and consider the effects of locations of accountability unrelated to matters of consciousness, such as institutions and relationships.

The theoretical manifestation of the opposition of hegemonic mystification and resistance reached its height in the 1980s, though it continues in some forms today. The Subaltern Studies group (1982–1987), James Scott (1985, 1990, 2009), and Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) have been especially interested in how "powerless" and "disenfranchised" groups resist attempts of the powerful to establish and maintain hegemony on an everyday basis. Likewise, Jean and John Comaroff (1991:30) argue that once hegemonic ideas slip into consciousness as ideology, they become available for contention and dissent. Specifically, consciousness of contradictions or hypocrisy will lead to articulated resistance (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:26). Mindie Lazerus-Black and Susan Hirsh's edited volume, *Contested States: Law, Hegemony, and Resistance*, claims that hegemony and resistance are mutually constitutive, and that resistance is "evidence that subordinate people are capable of thinking themselves out of hegemony" (2012:8). Such accounts posit mystification as the turning point between hegemony and resistance.

Some resistance to the theme of resistance started in the 1990s (Brown 1996, Ortner 1995), and recently non-liberal submission has emerged as a popular theoretical topic (Fader 2009, Hirschkind 2006, Mahmood 2005). While appreciating the intervention of this literature, which importantly divorces resistance from assumptions about progressive politics, I argue that the unqualified shift to the question of consent avoids problems with theories of hegemony and resistance, neither rejecting nor addressing them. There is a need, for example, to explore the murky relationship between the individual, collective action, and modern citizenship. The ethnography that follows demonstrates that the relationship

between mystification, popular discontent, and practices of resistance is not straightforward and should be rethought in order for these categories, which refer to observable and empirical social phenomenon, to be ethnographically relevant. Given the break in the direct relationship between disillusionment and dissent that I am suggesting, I identify cynicism as one way in which people justify their decisions to themselves and others across highly contradictory spheres of ethical demands.

The Symbolic and Cultural Weight of Military Service

There is a deep consensus on the performance of military service in Israel, and conscientious objectors face social rebuke for their dissent. Partly, this rebuke mirrors that faced by conscientious objectors in many parts of the world. Refusing to serve in the military is a rejection of the terms of the social contract of modern citizenship as understood since the 18th century (Tilly 1992). Conscientious objectors are accused of reaping the benefits of communal association without shouldering their share of the burden. Norms of citizenship are challenged by the fraught ethical space that exists between communal responsibility and individual autonomy. Tobias Kelly (2011) has studied cases of conscientious objection in Britain, particularly during World War I, arguing that the issue raises a constitutive anxiety in liberal political cultures between obligation and dissent. In Britain then—as in Israel today—conscientious objectors faced significant public hostility, and Kelly finds that the decision to become a conscientious objector was often accompanied by strong angst and ambivalence. In many parts of the world, conscientious objection has been accompanied by harsh penalties such as jail and public ridicule.

The issue of military refusal has further resonances in Israel. The Zionist national project sought to actively overturn European stereotypes of the diasporic Jew as feeble, defenseless, and effeminate—stereotypes that were used to deprecate Jews during the Holocaust. The new ideal citizen of Israel was thus expected to embody the characteristics of masculine strength and self-defense. Accordingly, since before the creation of the state, military service has been framed as a form of self and communal liberation. Oz Almog (2000) details how early Zionists sought to create a utopian subjectivity and physicality among the new generation of Jews born in Israel, potently manifested in the archetype of the soldier. Thus, military service is imbued with a strong moral imperative. Military service

has also played a central role in the socializing processes of Israeli society, as a rite of passage that structures cultural patterns of peer group interactions (Ben-Ari 1998, Ben-Eliezer 1998, Popper and Lipshitz 1992), gender interactions (Kaplan 2000, 2006; Klein 1999; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2003; Sasson Levy 2003a), and class interactions (Sasson Levy 2003b).

At the same time, domestic controversies concerning the military have surfaced in recent years. Moral and ethical dilemmas concerning military service have engaged the ontological tensions inherent in the Zionist project itself. Yaron Ezrachi's book *Rubber Bullets* (1998) is a good example of the features of this internal debate. There, we see evidence of the tension between universalism and particularism familiar to the Jewish experience, manifested anew in Israeli state and military policy. Specifically, while the military is explicitly framed as a "people's army," the country's significant Palestinian minority does not serve in the military, and the military cannot be said to represent their interests. This raises questions regarding whether the state should be a state for *all* of its citizens, regardless of ethno-religious background, or whether, as a Jewish state, it should privilege the interests of its Jewish citizens. Another controversy concerns the line between self-defense and military aggression, especially regarding the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and its non-democratic military administration of the residents of these territories. Yet another tension lies between the ethos of collectivism focused on military service that characterized the early years of the state, and the value of individualism and individual autonomy that has become increasingly entrenched in recent years (Levy et al. 2007). This shift has meant that the desires of young people not to serve can now be articulated in terms of the good of the individual, at least within leftist political circles. Yet, refusal of military service remains far outside the mainstream, and there is public consensus regarding the need for severe social sanction against those who do not serve.

The Genesis of an Ethical Problem

For most young Israelis, joining the military is not an ethical problem. However, there are some for whom military service becomes problematized because of experiences they have while soldiering, or through political and ethical reflection. I will illustrate the different political responses to this discontent through the story of three "army buddies." The first of the

three friends that I met was Amos, a Jewish Israeli from a secular Ashkenazi family in central Israel. He served the three years of basic service required of men, as well as serving (often for almost a month each year) in reserve duty afterwards. He was a combat soldier, and most of his close friends were also combat soldiers. He always considered himself and his family to be among Israel's secular left, opposing himself to Israel's religious nationalists and those whose ethno-nationalist politics he saw as frustratingly unattached to the secular humanism he believed had informed the Zionist vision of the state's founders.³ He felt that Arabs in Israel should have equal rights without discrimination, and he was against the occupation. However, Amos once believed deeply in military service as central to the intervention of the Israeli state project in the history of Jewish victimhood, as did most conscientious objectors of his generation (Weiss 2011). I met Amos early in my research, when he had already refused military service. We became friends and I interviewed him on several occasions as well as shared in many casual conversations, alone or together with other conscientious objectors among whom I conducted fieldwork.

During Amos's military service, he was frequently required to intervene on behalf of Jewish Israeli settlers in confrontations with Palestinians. Stationed for part of his service in Hebron, his responsibilities included guarding the 500 Israeli settlers living in a city of 30,000 Palestinians. Hebron settlers feel that the city (which includes the tombs of Biblical patriarchs and matriarchs) is an unabandonable place of Jewish history and identity. Hebron settlers are reputed to be among the most ideologically extreme, and Amos would witness settlers' abuse of Palestinians on a regular basis. But the orders from his commanding officers rarely required intervening to stop settler violence; instead, settlers had relative impunity, while Palestinian movement in the city was tightly controlled. Amos recalled that his required complicity with settler conduct was enormously frustrating. He told me that he began to complain about this dynamic with some like-minded soldiers, especially two, Asaf and Shahr, who were also secular and who did not feel attached to the Occupied Territories as necessary for an ideal Israeli national existence. Together they became more and more disillusioned, and Amos recalled their progressive rejection of the state's claims regarding the peace process. They eventually came to believe that these claims gave mere lip service to coexistence with Palestinians, in the interest of putting more settlers on the ground and making Palestinian life unbearable. Amos felt duped by the state. He

described his shift in consciousness as one of seeing things he had not seen before, and the “melting away of ideology.”⁴ Amos’s experience is extremely typical of the type of hermeneutic breakdown described by many conscientious objectors (see Weiss 2011).

Deliberating Dissent

When Amos refused to serve, Asaf and Shahar—the two friends from his unit who had also experienced dramatic shifts in political consciousness—did not. This is not unusual. I conducted 20 months of fieldwork between 2007 and 2009 among conscientious objectors and those who evade military service in Israel. This included participant observation in organized activities with groups supporting formal (public) and informal (evasive) military refusal, that included rallies, meetings, and other events. I conducted ongoing conversations with dozens of interlocutors involved in military refusal and their families and friends in my home and theirs. Ethnographic methodology allows us to understand the political implications of spheres traditionally considered apolitical due to their categorization as personal and ethical. In seeking to conduct fieldwork not only among conscientious objectors, but also among those in the midst of deciding whether or not to refuse, I made contact with many people who still served in the military. I met some by personal referral, but often such people would reach out to one of the groups supporting conscientious objection for information, or to participate in one of their activities on a trial basis. Despite this overture, the great majority of the people I met who had conscientious problems with military service but had not yet refused either continued service or avoided it through draft evasion. I asked Amos to introduce me to his friends from his unit who had decided not to join the refusal letter in 2002, and they articulated their positions in ways that aligned with those of others I met who were wrestling with the decision of public refusal. Their backgrounds were very similar to Amos’s, coming from the same area in the center of the country, the same upper-middle-class background, and with similar educational exposures and leftist political affiliations.

Amos and Asaf both worked in the technology industry, and saw each other occasionally. I met Asaf at his apartment which he had just purchased with his wife, where he was taking care of his young daughter after school. He offered me a coffee from his espresso machine, and we sat on their white sofa in the air conditioning. He still served in the military on reserve

duty, but he was no longer being sent to Hebron. He told me “After what happened [the refusals] they don’t send the reserve soldiers [*miluimnikim*] to the territories anymore.” I asked about the period of time leading up to Amos’s refusal. Asaf said, “Well if you came to me through Amos, you probably think I am a coward.” I told him I didn’t think that at all, that I was trying to understand how his decision was different from Amos’s.

What can I say? At the time, I was furious like Amos, that we had to defend those asshole settlers, that with all the military talk of being a hero and the past wars, this is what we were reduced to. But at the end of the day, I couldn’t do it. I don’t hold it against Amos that he did, everyone needs to decide for themselves how they can live with themselves. I couldn’t live with myself if I left my fellow soldiers there to be exposed to all that shit and I would be sitting at home watching *Survivor*—well they didn’t have *Survivor* then, but whatever there was. Those were good guys and they took a lot of risk, and when I joined I agreed to be there with them. For me it was an issue of loyalty and also democracy. When you are a civilian you can vote however you want, but once it is decided collectively what needs to be done, everyone needs to take their part of the risk. To me it seemed selfish to say “conscience” and then go home. I thought I had to stay and deal with my issues, even though it was the harder decision.

We can see that for Asaf the values of loyalty and democracy became counter-posed to other parameters of conscience that caused Amos to refuse. In Israel, as in the US, values like bravery, patriotism, loyalty, and democracy are part of the counter-narrative to war protests.

I met Amos’s other friend Shahar at a coffee house in Tel Aviv. He is no longer in regular contact with Amos or Asaf, and it was not easy for Amos to get in touch with him. After we sat down and began talking, he requested that we move to a corner of the café farther away from people, because he thought they might be listening in on our conversation. Shahar told me he was surprised to hear from Amos, and speculated that they had drifted out of touch because he (Shahar) wasn’t married and didn’t have children like the other two. Shahar was no longer doing reserve duty. I asked him how that had happened, and he told me he was released. I asked him about the time before Amos’s refusal. He told me:

Look, it wasn't hard to see that it was all bullshit. There was no point to any of it in our being there. There was no honor, we were definitely not war heroes. I don't know, I thought about refusing. But I was thinking that these guys are going to step forward, single themselves out, and get completely smashed by the military, and become like Cain, socially. In fact, [Defense Minister Ehud] Barak just said that, that shirkers should be made to wear the mark of Cain. I didn't want to be one of the few suckers (*freierim*) to step forward and volunteer for that. Now, listen, if I thought that it would actually make a difference, I would have done it, I would have refused. I didn't decide against it. I was waiting, and if I thought it would really make some kind of change, some impact, I would have joined them. But, you see that it didn't. It was just a bunch of guys sitting in jail to feel good about themselves. That's what Amos became, a leftist, radical sucker (*freier*) who still believes that if he [is] straightforward and sincere, things will actually change because people deep down have good intentions. I know better. The Right, the Left, all the same shit. If anything, society is more to the right than ever before.

Shahar called me on the phone a few days later. After reconfirming that I would not use his real name, he told me that he had had enough of reserve duty and started going to a psychologist that had helped a friend of his get out of the military, to build up a record of mental issues that would give him an exemption. After a few months, he brought a letter from the psychologist with a vague characterization of anxiety issues to the mental health officer of the military, and after some bureaucratic shuffling he was released from further duty. "So I became a shirker instead. What is there to say? I thought since you are doing research I should tell you the truth." The term "shirker" came into popular use through an extensive privately-funded, 5 million shekel (about \$1.5 million USD) advertising campaign on TV, radio, newspapers, buses, billboards, the Internet, flyers, and guerrilla campaign-style bracelets, whose tag line, "A real Israeli doesn't shirk," encouraged Israeli youth not to evade service, and suggested that doing so would result in becoming a social outcast.⁵ The campaign was funded by advertising executive Rami Yehoshua, Chairman and CEO of Yehoshua/TBWA advertising agency and father of a draft-age son, with military approval. A vice president from the firm said that the goal of the campaign was to reintroduce shame and social condemnation to the practice of

military evasion. Thus, we can see that this campaign was a concerted effort to shift the conversation away from a discourse of conscientious dissent and reinstate the hegemonic moral discourse of military service. The term “shirking” ensures that evasions are not read as conscientious resistance, but as personal moral failures.

Asaf and Shahar articulated perspectives that I heard repeatedly during my fieldwork. They went through the same crisis of conscience as Amos, in which they no longer accepted the representations that underwrote state control. Their military service no longer seemed reasonable or ethical. But for a combination of reasons I will elaborate below, Asaf found his ethical obligation to refuse to be in contradiction with other incommensurable demands on his conscience, and had to decide which obligations would be compromised, choosing to sacrifice his public, political obligation for the sake of others. Shahar took a cynical stance regarding the possibility that conscientious objection could create change, and opened up important questions regarding the boundaries of the political and the ethical, which I will return to in a later section on cynicism.

Amos, Asaf, and Shahar each defended their own choices regarding refusal, and said that they would make the same choice again. Yet, they all told me that they had gone back and forth regarding their decisions. Amos said, “The arguments for and against refusal pulled me in every direction, sometimes it felt like it would cut me down the middle. I had stomach pains, constantly in the bathroom...” Even Shahar said, “I almost refused. I really almost did it. I even told someone that I had made up my mind to do it.” While none thought their final decision was arbitrary, Asaf said that he found it extremely difficult to “measure the weight” of the different obligations he felt. In the end, each described his decision as more of a tipping point than an unadulterated reflection of his conscientious beliefs. As we see above, the men express more confidence in their decisions after they have been made, but even post-decision statements show evidence of deep cracks in certainty. These were complicated choices that brought about troubling ethical consequences for each man. Amos was surprised by the social consequences of his refusal, including alienation from a number of close friends. At least one friend told Amos he felt betrayed and no longer trusted him. Amos told me that he periodically dealt with feelings of guilt for having abandoned his military unit, and this was especially true after refusal, when they socially shunned him. In our second meeting, Asaf shared with me that he also often felt guilty when comparing himself to

Amos because of the high public price Amos paid and continues to pay. Shahar told me that after the others refused, he felt like a coward for not doing so himself. Though the public moment of refusal was binary, and publicly defines the individual as a consenter or a dissenter, we would be mistaken to attribute too much clarity or certainty to these acts, or to understand them as a directly proportional to the degree of breakdown in hegemonic consciousness.

Contradictory Responsibilities of Ethical Life

Some have noticed that the breakdown of hegemonic consciousness does not always correlate with political action. For example, Alexei Yurchak, speaking of the late Soviet era, has said, “a subjective recognition of ideology does not have to lead to its contestation, to an empowerment of the oppressed or to their resistance against the official representation of the social world” (1997:165). In her consideration of Giriyama spirit possession, Janet McIntosh (2004) likewise challenges any clear dichotomy of hegemony and resistance. By highlighting the “simultaneity of conscious resentment and habitual deference,” she demonstrates that awareness of power is not equivalent to resistance (McIntosh 2004:104). Indeed, there does not seem to be a consistent relationship between levels of popular discontent and political action. I find Danilyn Rutherford’s (2012) account of state–subject relationships during Dutch colonialism in West Papua, *Laughing at Leviathan*, helpful for thinking about this issue. She suggests that the state is always addressing an audience to justify its rule. For their part, subjects are the audience of the state’s performance, but even if they evaluate this performance as “ridiculous,” that does not imply a failure to simultaneously recognize that the consent sought by state officials is accompanied by the threat of force (Rutherford 2012:47). But political ideology and force are not the only deterrents to dissent.

Another deterrent is a matter that Asaf focused on a great deal. His calculations demonstrate that political ideology is not the only site of ethical accountability, nor even the dominant one. He agreed with Amos regarding the falsity of state ideology, yet the other values and social relationships that held him in military service were not subject to this disillusionment. Specifically, his relationship of loyalty to his fellow soldiers did not suffer the same breakdown. Asaf evaluated the value of conscientious objection not in a vacuum, but in the context of his other values

and obligations, recognizing that the effects of conscientious objection would bleed into other areas of responsibility. Though loyalty, courage, friendship, self-realization, and other dimensions of responsibility may not be overtly political, they nevertheless have highly political ramifications. Other cultural practices of virtue that are not often considered political are peer bonding from a young age through the military, civic volunteerism, and family-focused policies, as well as memorial and commemoration ceremonies. This aligns with Danny Kaplan's (2006) demonstration that the politics of male friendship are at the base of modern nationalism, and that passionate attachments play a literal rather than metaphorical role in national solidarity. These virtues reveal that even if the state is seen as an ethical problem, people are still held in other relationships of obligation that can ultimately benefit the state. This does not imply the state is passive in these spheres. On the contrary, it suggests along with Williams that hegemony is manifested not only in political consciousness but also in relationships and institutions. While, for James Scott (1990), subordinates' identification with the state is the basis of hegemony, Carol Greenhouse (2005:359) shows how causation often flows in the opposite direction, with states appropriating the signs and values of their constituents in order to legitimate their rule. Thus, government initiatives in less politicized arenas still reference and exert hegemony in the worldviews and values of its target population.

One (deceptively simple) insight in recent work on the anthropology of ethics is the recognition that people are usually trying to do the right thing (Laidlaw 2010:143, Lambek 2010:40). This insight implies that we should not assume that only the person who has engaged in a legible "act of conscience" is evaluating the ethical landscape and trying to live up to his or her responsibilities. Another insight from this literature is that people are engaged in multiple relationships of responsibility that often present contradictory demands, which the individual must balance and negotiate. From this perspective, we understand that Asaf was not denying the virtue of refusal; rather, he determined that his other ethical obligations took precedence over the call to refuse. In Amos's view, Asaf had shirked his conscience, and Asaf expressed suspicion that privileging the issue of military ideology was an unbalanced, even selfish position. Interestingly, both claimed that they had made the more difficult and burdensome choice, Amos through his jail time and public condemnation, and Asaf through his suppression of conscientious objections.

I have also heard over and over from at least 14 disillusioned soldiers that refusal of military service is an economically privileged position because soldiers who are supporting their families cannot afford the loss of income associated with extended jail time, or even the risk to job security that faces most conscientious objectors. Indeed, most conscientious objectors are drawn from the upper middle class, and are able to weather the financial instability involved with incarceration. Lev told me: “These guys, they can go to jail for a year and come out and nothing has changed, their house, their dog, just the way they left them. I go to jail and in about two weeks my kids, my wife, and my old mother are homeless and hungry.” I didn’t meet Lev through the network of conscientious objectors. He was an immigrant from present day Belarus who attended the same public Hebrew language school (*ulpan*) in Tel Aviv as I did. He lived outside the city with his family and his mother in a small apartment. I had told some of the students about my work and, subsequently, I overheard some people, including Lev, discussing my research motivations in the hallway. The language school had a small kitchen and an outdoor area where students would congregate, often in mother-tongue groups. During one of the breaks, I was making instant coffee with a friend when Lev approached me to express his irritation with my research. “They tell me you are doing research on the ones that aren’t willing go to the army, the ones that are very worried whether the Arabs are comfortable.” I confirmed my interest in conscientious refusal without addressing his political instigation. “I also want to leave the army! Who wouldn’t?” he yelled at me and proceeded to berate me for my apparent ignorance. After that, he visited me daily during break periods. He softened his tone and would tell me about the difficulties of life in the former Soviet Union. He would also tell me stories about how miserable military service in Israel was—stories that got more vivid after he was called for reserve duty a few months later. While I never knew the response he was looking for, it was clear to me that his stories were meant to be pedagogical. He wanted me to understand that he was continuing to pay a heavy price, that he was burdened with a responsibility that, from his perspective, the people I had come to research did not share. He often described this responsibility as financial, but on occasion he also hinted that as an immigrant he faced added pressure to prove his national loyalty. And indeed, the rates of enlistment, especially in combat units, of Russian immigrants, Mizrahim, and Ethiopian immigrants are a topic of significant interest in Israeli public discourse.

Others shared with me concerns that blurred ethical and non-ethical considerations, for example, the impact that their refusal, jail time, and public notoriety would have on their loved ones. People discussed the impact that public notoriety would have on their ability to earn an income in the future, citing the ability to support a family as a concern. The responsibility to family is an ethical consideration in deliberating conscientious objection that weighs disproportionately on the economically disadvantaged. This resonates with Jessica Winegar's (2012) observations during the recent revolution in Egypt that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak. She demonstrates that in order to be one of the iconic, young revolutionary men photographed in Tahrir Square, generally one had to be economically privileged (2012:69). Many people with informal employment, like taxi drivers and vegetable sellers, could not risk the loss of pay needed to support their families. As Winegar notes, those who prioritize these less glamorous ethical concerns do not get the media attention of their revolutionary counterparts. One can witness a similar struggle among Israel's historically marginalized Mizrahi Jews. Meir Amor (2010) describes the phenomenon of "social refusal," which is the evasion of military service through non-official means, such as desertion, disobedience, or even serving with indifference and refusing ideological enthusiasm. Many Mizrahi Jews refuse in this way because of discontent with their social discrimination and marginalization within Israeli society, but their refusal does not receive the moniker of conscientious objection and is not legible as dissent. This represents a potentially deeper breakdown in political consciousness than conscientious objection because this resistance is not designed to seek recognition of dissent from the establishment, but rather seeks to avoid it altogether. In the case of Mizrahi draft evasion, both the reason for the dissent and the choice of draft evasion is related to class, demonstrating that the public performance of conscience cannot be separated from materialism. Also, since Mizrahi social refusal is for their own "benefit," rather than the benefit of Palestinians (as is the case with formal conscientious objectors), it raises the question of whether this would be socially recognized as "conscience" and, thus, whether conscience itself reflects a position of relative social privilege. We can also observe that the differential distribution of civic rights produces various ideas of civic loyalty. Those from abandoned social positions feel less compelled to meet state expectations of a sacrificing citizenry.

Ethics and the Public Sphere

Responsibility to fellow soldiers and family demonstrates that military service is not substantiated only by political consciousness. Rather, while state ideology plays a part, military service is substantiated by many relationships of accountability as Williams suggests. For this reason, when one element such as political ideology fails, it is not at all clear that this will override all the other social relationships that tie people to their cultural practices. In other words, it was never only pure commitment to the state that made people complete military service; rather, it was the coincidence of this commitment with many other commitments that substantiated their actions and made for a deep-rooted and broadly-networked norm. In fact, those who did publicly become conscientious objectors can be characterized precisely by their exceptionally strong investment in the nation and their metonymization with the state. I take the idea of metonymization with the state from a public lecture by Gayatri Spivak (2004). She does not greatly elaborate on the idea, but it has helped me think about how people can imagine an intimate relationship between the mission, meaning, and ethical worth of the state and the mission, meaning, and ethical worth of themselves. It is because some people's sense of metonymization with the state is so dominant in their lives that when the state becomes an ethical problem, they respond dramatically through refusal (Weiss 2011). Though the mission of the Israeli state is very explicitly articulated in Zionism and encourages metonymization among Jewish citizens, there are many in Israeli society—including Palestinians, but also Mizrahim and ultra-Orthodox Jews—who do not so completely identify with the Zionist state project for various reasons.⁶ In the next section, I show that over the years many Israelis have moved to separate their identity and interests from that of the state, reversing the metonymization process. Today, there are many for whom the political is not central to the meaning of their lives, which may be a more significant long-term threat to state control than public dissent.

The tendency of privileging resistance to other actions or inactions is also related to several problems that James Laidlaw (2010) has identified with the concept of agency. Specifically, Laidlaw argues that the concept of agency often contains a normative judgment towards certain types of activities that the researcher finds to be a more valid form of "human flourishing" than others (2010:144). Agency, he says, is traditionally applied to acts with specific ends and outcomes—specifically empowerment, liberation, equality, and so on—which are imputed as values and interests

to all members of the human race (2010:144). We might notice that the values he cites all tend toward political manifestation. Moreover, he says, academics privilege the creative capacities of individuals against structural constraint and laud the prevailing of individuals over sociocultural structures (2010:144, 145). Accordingly, we can posit that the opposition of hegemony and resistance in the literature is unreliable because it assumes a consistent identification of the individual with state politics that presumably will override other considerations. Laidlaw's insights question the tendency of many theorists of hegemony and political resistance to privilege the state and the individual's relationship to it as the central site of personal fulfillment and, so, to offer exclusively political explanations for people's engagement in public dissent. Certainly, in the writing of Gramsci (1996), or more recently in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001) or Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Multitude* (2005), hegemony is considered in order to bring about a move toward a certain type of "radical democracy." This is the most extreme form of normative privileging of state politics in social life.

But even accounts that are not explicitly normative consider the dynamics of hegemony and public resistance to the state as the sole ethical horizon. James Scott (1990) privileges political consciousness of subordination and domination to all other forms of responsibility. Likewise, as noted by Webb Keane (2003:224, 238), James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta define human self-determination through resistance to political power or the capacity to change it. Exclusive focus on political recognition in such accounts risks moving from a descriptive account of the effects of state exclusion to a normative statist account that assumes state recognition is necessary for agency, and reifying the state as a natural unit of analysis and a naturalized source of social worth. Such accounts implicitly assume the solution to discontent can be found in another, more ideal form of citizenship. Asaf's recognition that his ethical responsibilities extend beyond the field of his political convictions suggests this bias might be unwarranted.

The exclusive focus on political motivations is extremely relevant in the case of Israel and Palestine, where the outside observer's gaze tends to become increasingly myopic with physical distance, and where the politics of the region are read onto and into all aspects of life. Consider the contrast between Amos and Asaf: while both experienced a shift in political consciousness, only Amos joined a public political movement. Yet, Asaf's decision was not made passively or without judgment. His

negotiation of his different, and suddenly contradictory responsibilities, did not make him less efficacious simply for acting in accordance with his judgment of state ideology. This recognition, following Laidlaw (2010), is important even as we acknowledge that the adoption of these non-political values is state-encouraged, as part of a hegemonic sphere of state intervention (Greenhouse 2005). It enables us to recognize that positively-framed values compete with political values, and, as such, not engaging in public dissent is not necessarily a matter of mystification—nor apathy, for that matter.

Hegemony and the Cynical Stance

The final consideration I would like to take up concerns cynicism as an approach to discontent. Cynicism is apparent in Shahar's statement that those who resist through conscientious objection are suckers (*freierim*) for sticking their necks out for their beliefs. I would like to examine the implications of the cynicism in this comment. The word "freier" is heard in Israel on a nearly daily basis. It refers to being a sucker or a chump, someone who lets himself be taken advantage of. The word was used in 23 other interviews I conducted to refer to a reason why one would not become a conscientious objector. One informant, Guy, expressed the sentiment common to many Israelis considering refusal. He had attended a few conscientious objector meetings, but eventually decided not to refuse and stopped appearing. I called him up and asked to meet in person. When I met him in a coffee house, his ambivalence about refusal had hardened into conviction. "I know where you are from [the US] everyone is a bleeding heart (*yafe nefesh*, literally beautiful soul), but this is the Middle East. That's not how it works here. You have to be a freier to act like that here. Maybe if I lived in America, I could be a very ethical guy." By the end of his sentence he was smiling broadly, but yelling aggressively enough that people turned to look. Culturally, freier-hood is judged very negatively, and being a freier is something to be avoided through suspicion and indeed cynicism, by maintaining vigilant awareness toward manipulative relationships, and especially one's relationship with the state (Yair 2011). The word was originally used to refer to someone with misplaced faith in the political leadership and its demands for citizens' sacrifice. In this example, we can see that political cynicism is used as a means of public explanation and justification. Cynicism offers a logical bridge to connect

the gap between ideological discontent and public dissent—a gap which is the subject of this article.

Cynical reasoning has been identified as a type of logic that prevents political action (Sloterdijk 1987, Žižek 1989:28-29). Alexei Yurchak (1997:164) has identified cynicism as a strong force in the late-Soviet era, showing that while it seemed everyone was “aware” of the comic and even pathetic extremes of state ideology, everyone still believed that no political change was possible. Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002:159) has claimed that cynicism is necessary for state power to maintain itself—specifically, that cynicism as habitus of everyday life in Turkey reinstates the state over and over again.⁷ Juliana Ochs (2011:62) has noted that cynical reason is strong in Israel as well. In the early 1970s, the term “Golda’s Freier” referred to someone who enthusiastically responded to the government call for volunteerism and military sacrifice which, at that point, under the leadership of Golda Meir, was heavily suspected of ideological manipulation (Roniger and Feige 1992:260). By this time, the pioneering or *halutz* mentality of the early Zionists was considered by many to be anachronistic. While the pioneering mentality is oriented toward historical heroes in the past and to future generations, the anti-freier mentality is oriented toward present conditions and sustainable living (Roniger and Feige 1992:261). In Israeli cultural outlets, many have expressed that the heroic character of early settler efforts and ideology was ultimately unsustainable because of its high demands for sacrifice, volunteerism, and doctrinal orthodoxy from Israeli citizens. “Freier” indexes the rejection of the state’s moral expectations for sacrifice in a radical rebuff of the conventional terms of the social contract as unjustifiable.

In this context, Shahar’s cynical position against being a “freier” dictates self-preservation against hegemonic demands for sacrifice, or collective responsibility, even when it is directed against the state. Shahar expresses disdain for both official ideology, as well as Amos’s sincere leftist counter-hegemonic stance (which he impatiently sees as naïve—apparent when he expresses that the only good to come of Amos’s incarceration was his feeling good about himself). Amos’s engagement with state-controlled discourse and norms is seen by Shahar as falling for state mystification. In contrast, the freier discourse suggests a belief that engaging with the state is a rigged game that one cannot win. It does not seek the moral improvement of the state, but calls for symbolic and material investment elsewhere.

Cynicism infuses political discourse in Israel. Just as it has long been popular for Israelis to profess that the country has no partner for peace, in recent elections many opined that there was no one to vote for—that no politician had anything meaningful to say or to offer. This does not mean that Israelis do not vote for such politicians. In fact, a party newly created by a politician who had no political experience and almost no political platform won the second largest block of votes in the recent elections, ensuring it a central place in the new government. This has led some to note the incongruity between, on the one hand, the ubiquity of political debate in Israeli life and, on the other hand, the general lack of politicization of the population. Cynicism reflects the understanding that one's own interests are different from those of the state, and also the need to protect one's own interests from state intrusions. Such a reversal of metonymization implies an attempt at self-protection from the perceived bad faith of the state. Whether this reflects an alternative understanding of citizenship that rethinks the terms of communal obligation, or whether it reflects despair from citizenship altogether, may only be evident with time.

Conclusion

Through interrogating recent Israeli experiences with the draft, I question the opposition of hegemony and resistance and argue that a dense social and ethical terrain lies between the recognition of ideology and the act of public dissent that can impact how one responds to discontent. For some Israeli soldiers, hegemonic representations break down and military service becomes an ethical problem. Once this occurs, we can see that the field of ethics does not lay perfectly over the traditional field of the political, and other considerations come into play despite explicit discontent. Since becoming a conscientious objector or not is a binary decision, choosing this path depends on how one prioritizes political ideology among other obligations. The different degrees to which people metonymize with the state are determined by how much the state enables them to see themselves reflected in it, by how much the state's mission and interests corresponds with their own, and by their social privilege. The ubiquity of cynicism regarding the state in modern Israel attests to the way people differentiate their interests from those of the state in the public sphere, without political discontent always leading to public resistance.

Having evaluated their interests and the possible outcomes of resistance and compliance, many disillusioned soldiers adopt a stance towards state ideology that is not mystified, but rather one that is strategically compliant or evades normative expectations altogether.

Traditional accounts of hegemony suggest that mystification prevents resistance of the powerless to the exercise of power from above. But, the ethnography here suggests mystification cannot be assumed and that discontent should be interrogated on multiple levels. In this spirit, I examine some of the locations beyond the traditional political sphere that make public resistance either unappealing or ethically complex. The Israeli experiences I present show that political consciousness cannot be circumscribed from other aspects of social life, and our theoretical frameworks on state–citizen relationships should reflect this entwinement. Draft evasion suggests we should be alert to the ways transformations outside the traditional political sphere affect practices of citizenship. Citizenship is usually thought to express political membership, but here we can see that there are many gray areas that contribute to people’s stance vis-à-vis their own political convictions. In sum, conscientious objection is a rather bad indicator of discontent with military service. ■

Endnotes:

¹This is often referred to as “shirking” (*hishtamtoot*) in Israel.

²Some Palestinian Israelis, such as the Druze populations, are also required to serve in the military. And some groups of Jewish Israelis are exempt from service, the largest of which is the ultra-Orthodox community.

³This is a typical narrative of the Israeli left, and carries ethnic undertones through which blame for the failure of the secular project is put on Mizrahi and non-liberal Jews.

⁴To clarify terminology, Williams would describe this as the movement from the hegemonic to the ideological.

⁵This mixing of private and public efforts shows both the ways that the military project is taken up as a self-making project by everyday Israelis, as noted by Uri Ben-Eliezer (1998) and Baruch Kimmerling (2005), as well as the ways state power is often found in the private sector, as noted by Carol Greenhouse (2005).

⁶These reasons are related to the modern state’s origins in the history of Europe and secularism.

⁷By contrast, Lori Allen (2013) identifies Palestinian cynicism towards the human rights industry to be a potent political critique.

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Foreign Language Translations:

Beyond Mystification: Hegemony, Resistance, and Ethical Responsibility in Israel

[Keywords: Hegemony, resistance, ethics, Israel, military, conscientious objection]

超越神秘化：霸权，抵制，与伦理责任在以色列

[关键词：霸权，抵制，伦理，以色列，军队，拒服兵役]

Para Lá de Mistificação: Hegemonia, Resistência, e Responsabilidade Ética em Israel

[Palavras-Chave: Hegemonia, resistência, ética, Israel, forças armadas, objeção de consciência]

За пределами таинственности: Гегемония, сопротивление и этническая ответственность в Израиле

[Ключевые слова: сопротивление, этика, Израиль, военные силы, отказ от военной службы по соображениям совести]

ما وراء الحيرة: الهيمنة، المقاومة، والمسؤولية الأخلاقية في إسرائيل
كلمات البحث: الهيمنة، المقاومة، الأخلاق، إسرائيل، العسكر، الاستنكاف الضميري

