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Competing ethical regimes in a diverse society:

Israeli military refusers

A B S T R A C T

All Jewish military refusers in Israel defy state law and incur public acrimony for their transgression. Yet different social groups use distinct ethical regimes to justify this controversial act. While liberal Ashkenazi refusers cite personal conscience, ultra-Orthodox refusers rely on scriptural authority, and Mizrahi refusers often appeal to familial responsibilities. In addition, refusers of different groups condemn one another as ethically misguided, despite their shared act. The stakes of these ethical rifts concern not only questions of military service and legitimate refusal but also larger issues of cultural hegemony, the social contract, and collective legitimation within the Israeli state. The framework of "competing ethical regimes" captures the intersection of the ethical and the political, revealing the deep entanglement of cultural values and civic virtues. [*ethics, citizenship, military, refusers, politics, Israel*]

כל סרבני השירות הצבאי היהודים בישראל מפרים את חוק המדינה וסופגים בשל כך זעם ציבורי. עם זאת, קבוצות חברתיות שונות של סרבנים משתמשות במודלים מוסרים מובחנים כדי להצדיק את המעשה השנוי במחלוקת. בעוד שסרבנים אשכנזים ליברליים מדברים במונחים של מצפון אישי, סרבנים חרדים נשענים על סמכות מקראית, וסרבנים מזרחיים פונים לעתים קרובות למחויבויות משפחתיות. בנוסף, סרבנים מהקבוצות השונות מגנים אלו את אלו. למרות אקט הסרבנות המשותף, הסרבנים רואים בסרבנים מהקבוצות האחרות כטועים מוסרית. . על כף המאזנים ניצבות לא רק שאלות בנוגע לשירות הצבאי וללגיטימיות הסירוב אלא גם סוגיות רחבות בנוגע להגמוניה תרבותית, האמנה החברתית, והלגיטימציה הקולקטיבית במדינת ישראל. המסגרת של "משטרים מוסריים מתחרים" תופסת את ההצטלבות בין המוסרי לפוליטי ובין ערכים תרבותיים למעלות אזרחיות.[מוסר, אזרחות, צבא, סרבנות, פוליטיקה, ישראל]

كل من يرفض الخدمة العسكرية من الإسرائيليين اليهود يتصدى بذلك لقانون الدولة ويواجه ردا لاذعا في الحيز العام. إلا أن المجموعات المختلفة تلجأ لمنظومات أخلاقية متباينة ومتميزة لتبرير رفضها هذا المثير للجدل. فبينما يستند الليبراليون الأشكناز في تبرير رفضهم هذا على مبدأ حرية الضمير الإنساني، وبينما يعتمد المتدينون الأرثوذوكس من اليهود على سلطة النصوص الدينية، يستند اليهود الشرقيون في تعليل رفضهم على المسؤوليات الأسرية. كما أن كل فئة من الفئات الرافضة تستنكر نظيرتها على أنها ضالة خلقيا رغم وجودها جميعا في خانة مشتركة ألا وهي رفض الخدمة العسكرية. تبعات هذه الفجوات الأخلاقية تتخطى قضايا الخدمة العسكرية والرفض الشرعي لها، بل تصل هذه التبعات لمسائل مثل الغلبة الثقافية، العقد الاجتماعي، والتشريع الجمعي داخل الدولة الإسرائيلية. ولذلك فإن مفهوم "المنظومات الأخلاقية المتنافسة" بقدرته أن يكشف عن التقاطع السياسي-الأخلاقي، كاشفا بذلك تورطا عسيرا ما بين القيم الثقافية و الفضائل المدنية. [أخلاق، المواطنة، العسكرية، يرفض، سياسة، إسرائيل]

J ewish men and women in Israel are required to perform military service. Yet, throughout the Jewish population, some refuse to serve. There are many reasons why people refuse, but many believe that serving would be ethically wrong. In a society where military service is central to the national ethos and serves as a litmus test of belonging, these refusers would seem to have a shared interest in defending one another in this controversial act. But, in fact, despite their common transgression, military refusers make sharply conflicting claims and are deeply divided along semiotic, ethical, and political lines. Each group rejects the state demand for military service as a national obligation in a different way, while the state seeks to neutralize and dismiss these challenges. These competing practices of justification reveal significant and reciprocal misrecognition, raising important questions about ethical norms, civic participation, and national belonging in a culturally diverse state.

The material I present here is drawn from 20 months of fieldwork with military refusers from three groups: liberal Zionists (mostly secular Ashkenazi Jews), ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Mizrahi Jews.[1] Deep cultural rifts exist among the groups. Refusers from different groups gave contrasting justifications for their act, justifications that are rooted in divergent ethical regimes. The reciprocal condemnations exchanged among the different groups regarding proper reasons for refusal show that these social groups do not recognize the legitimacy of justifications articulated in other ethical grammars. Moreover, military refusers' practices of justification and condemnation reflect the struggle for cultural hegemony among the groups. They reveal differing ideological bases for collective legitimation, as refusers assert contrasting ideals of citizenship, including conflicting hierarchies of allegiance and loyalty. These ethical rifts express competing understandings not only of "the good" but also of civic belonging and participation. They demonstrate that sources of political authority are enmeshed with sources of moral authority.

Ashkenazi liberal-Zionist Jews articulated their refusal as a matter of conscience, a self-imposed obligation to reject participation in military activities, specifically activities that violate Palestinian human rights. Simultaneously, they dismissed claims made outside the discourse of conscience as nonethical. In contrast, ultra-Orthodox Jews explained their military refusal as a scripture-based obligation, denouncing liberal Zionists' claims to moral autonomy as unreliable and dangerously unmoored. Mizrahi Jews explained their military refusal in terms of obligations of care based on perceived circles of proximity, wherein one owes allegiance to those close to one in terms of kinship, ethnicity, residence, and friendship before those perceived as distant according to these same criteria. These obligations required them to place familial obligations above those to the state and refuse military service. They critiqued liberal-Zionist refusers for violating this same proximity principle by placing their obligation to Palestinians above those to other Jews.

These competing claims are embedded in divergent nexuses of cultural meaning. But the ethical and semiotic disparities do not prevent the groups from vigorously engaging one another. In fact, given the stakes of the debate, including which group will attain cultural hegemony in the public sphere and over the norms of Israeli civic life, members of the different groups enthusiastically debate in public. Each group seeks to assert its influence and make claims on the Israeli social contract. Further, the state attempts to domesticate refusal by categorizing it in ways that neutralize its ethical claims and cast it as a social malady. In doing so, the state tries to control the terms of citizenship by influencing the meaning of military refusal.

Grasping the intersection of the ethical and the political, the framework of competing ethical regimes introduces a wide analytic lens on ordinary ethics—an ethics that is "tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself" (Lambek 2010, 2). In the case considered here, we see that although ordinary ethics is tacit, implicit ethical assumptions are often not universally shared in a culturally diverse society. Efforts to be virtuous cannot simultaneously satisfy the contradictory expectations of multiple ethical regimes that compete for hegemony in the Israeli public sphere. Moreover, we know that ethical judgment is both social and intersubjective (Faubion 2011, 120). This case demonstrates the challenges of intersubjective judgment of ethics in a culturally diverse reality in which the criteria for evaluating ethical reasoning are at odds. People fundamentally need their community to recognize their self-representation, expressions, speech, professions, and justifications:

> Sometimes people are called on to give an account of themselves by the very nature of their activity. The

giving of reasons is itself a kind of consequential action, to be understood like any other social practice. Among other things, the practice of giving reasons can enter into those of making moral claims—and of ethical self-formation. This kind of talk characteristically responds to the demands posed by social distance and moral or ideological differences. But the differences are not absolute, since they separate one from others who must be persuaded or to whom one owes self-justification. (Keane 2010, 78; see also Keane 1997)

In Israel, military refusal is an act that requires such "accounting," because army service is the ethically laden norm of citizenship for Jewish Israelis. By "giving reasons," refusers seek to convince others that their controversial act is ethical and legitimate. Yet they "owe" an explanation to more than one group by nature of their citizenship in a culturally diverse state. The audiences for their justifications are multiple and cannot be simultaneously satisfied because they adhere to incompatible ethical regimes.

Recent research has drawn attention to the ways people take responsibility and distribute blame for various acts in everyday life (Hill and Irvine 1993; Keane 2010; Mattingly 2013). Many such accounts, however, neglect that practices of taking responsibility are often manifested (and thwarted and misread) in a culturally diverse society with competing ethical regimes. Such a society is the context in which I consider a case of ethical deliberation between multiple groups, in contrast to the anthropology of ethics described above, which has until now considered practices of ethical persuasion and negotiation only between individuals and the group that shares their ethical regime. Because so many people today live in diverse societies containing multiple ethical regimes, such an approach is widely applicable. Furthermore, fluency between these different ethical regimes is often partial and marred by misunderstanding, which intensifies the difficulty of their high-stakes engagement.

Liberal Ashkenazim, the ultra-Orthodox, and Mizrahim in Israel

Historical context

The clash among rival regimes of justification in Israel must be understood in light of the political and demographic changes that have taken place before and since the country's founding. Although the immediate contention that conscientious objectors make is that their military refusal is justified, the broader context includes the waning hegemony of the founding class of Israeli society and the entry of two historically marginalized groups into the public sphere and political power. The region that is today the state of Israel has experienced dramatic demographic shifts over the past 150 years. Palestinian Arabs composed the vast majority of the territory's population in the 19th century. Based on

the desire to create a Jewish state in the land of Israel, many European Jews participated in a settler-colonial movement that populated present-day Israel with Jewish residents in late 19th and early 20th centuries (Kimmerling 2005). After the Israeli state was created in 1948 and more than 700,000 Palestinian refugees were expelled (Pappe 2007), secular Ashkenazi Jews made up about 80 percent of the population. They defined the cultural norms of the public sphere and held most of the positions of political authority (Mautner 2011, 107). The state's laws and institutions were largely based on their vision of a secular European-style society. This group is sometimes referred to by the acronym *Ahusalim,* which is composed of the first letter of the Hebrew words for *Ashkenazi, secular, old guard, socialists, and nationalists* (Kimmerling 2005).[2] Their political power was concentrated in the Labor Party, which dominated the Israeli establishment for nearly 30 years.

Since 1948, Israel's Palestinian population has remained relatively stable (about 20 percent), but the Jewish population has become much more diverse. At the formation of the state, a mere 0.4 percent of Israelis were religiously observant "ultra-Orthodox" Jews, but today they make up 12 percent of the population, and their numbers are growing fast. In the early years of the state, the ultra-Orthodox communities shunned Zionism and the Jewish state as heretical. They believed that they violated the religious prohibition against using force to redeem the land of Israel for the Jewish people (Schwartz 2009). In contrast, the hegemonic secular majority in Israel commonly believed that religious piety was a symptom of exilic degeneration (Almog 2000) and that such practices would wither away after one or two generations in Israel. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, offered the religious communities very favorable conditions, including social support and exemption from military service, because he and the secular European leadership assumed such accommodations would be temporary. Since then, most ultra-Orthodox schools have come to terms with the Israeli state and have been increasingly reluctant to accept their status as an insular fringe group, expressing new assertiveness in bringing their group's values into the public sphere (Stadler 2009). They have sought public recognition and the right to influence the political and cultural direction of the Israeli state.

Furthermore, in the two decades after 1948, Mizrahi Jews from the Middle East and North Africa immigrated to Israel, dramatically changing the demographic makeup. Today, these Mizrahi Jews outnumber Ashkenazi Jews by a small margin. When they arrived, they faced explicit ethnic discrimination from the European establishment, which considered the newcomers to have insufficient culture and education, to be unsophisticated, to lack a suitable work ethic, and to be suspect in their Zionist allegiance. Mizrahi Jews were sent to live in the less economically vital peripheral areas of the country, where they found only low-paying jobs (Yiftachel 2000). It wasn't long before this group began to protest the terms of its second-class citizenship, and in the late 1970s, largely in protest of the Ashkenazi establishment, the Mizrahim flocked to the Likud party, ending the era of Labor Party dominance and marking a new era of political power for Mizrahi Israelis.

The three groups today

Today, Mizrahi and ultra-Orthodox Jews are challenging the political hegemony of the liberal-Zionist Ashkenazim. In the process they are pressing for the right to influence civic norms and demanding that the public sphere and public policies reflect their own cultural and ethical values. The three groups do not represent all of Israeli society. There are many other groups: Palestinian Israelis (or "1948 Palestinians"), as well as immigrant Jewish groups from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and elsewhere. Further, each of the three groups is internally diverse. Secular Ashkenazim include Jews from all over Europe, while Mizrahim came to Israel from all over the Middle East and North Africa. The ultra-Orthodox have many schools that operate separately from the rest of Israeli society. In addition to the intragroup diversity, there is also no hermetic separation between the groups, their worldviews, or their ethical regimes. While secular Ashkenazim abide by a liberal ethical regime, not everyone in this group adheres to these values, and there are Mizrahi and ultra-Orthodox individuals who do.

There are, however, compelling reasons to consider these groups and their ethical regimes as sufficiently separate to allow comparison. Both the ultra-Orthodox and the Mizrahim have, since the founding of the state, chaffed against the hegemonic liberal institutional foundations implemented by the Ashkenazi establishment (Fischer 1991; Mizrachi 2016). My interlocutors frequently and explicitly mentioned their group affiliation and used phrases such as "in our sector" or "in our community" to refer to their distinct values and justifications for military refusal. Another reason for comparison is the groups' partial physical separation. Ultra-Orthodox often live in relatively self-contained communities. Mizrahi Jews do not intentionally live separately, although their integration into hegemonic Ashkenazi society is limited, and many geographically peripheral development towns and cities are primarily populated by Mizrahi Jews (Yiftachel 2000). Though secular Ashkenazi culture still defines "Israeliness" for many people (Lavie 2014, 77–80), this culture is not, in fact, universally shared. Despite their diversity, ultra-Orthodox in Israel share many cultural attributes and values that set them apart from secular society (Heilman 1992; Stadler 2009; Weiss 2014). Similarly, despite the diverse origins of the Mizrahim, their shared experience in Israel has forged cultural commonalities beyond those shared by virtue of their Middle Eastern heritage. Mizrahi ethics and political traditions shape

expectations of civic engagement and citizenship that differ from those of their Ashkenazi counterparts (Lavie 2011, 2014; Mizrachi 2016). Furthermore, since the time I conducted this research, Mizrahi academics and activist groups (e.g., Ars Poetica and Ahoti) have increasingly called for the recognition of Mizrahi Israelis' separate culture and values, contesting the assimilationist claims of Ashkenazi and Zionist ideology (Margolin 2015).

The social and material role of military service in Israel

As a pillar of Jewish Israeli citizenship, the military mirrors, creates, and amplifies social, cultural, and class dynamics. For example, serving in the military provides material advantages, such as scholarships, savings deposits, and preferential treatment in employment. Lack of access to these benefits harms groups that do not serve, including most Palestinian and ultra-Orthodox Israelis, who are often already impoverished. The ultra-Orthodox are regularly exempted from service, and this has become a controversial issue among both the ultra-Orthodox and the non-ultra-Orthodox majority. Many outsiders believe the ultra-Orthodox should serve and thereby share in the national sacrifice (Hammer 2013). There are also ultra-Orthodox voices calling for participation in military service, especially among the younger generation (Stadler 2009). Since the time I conducted this research, this issue has become even more contentious. In 2014, Israeli lawmakers decided that ultra-Orthodox Israelis would be drafted or face jail time, but in 2015 they reversed this decision.

While the military can serve as a stepping-stone for some, offering elite positions (combat and noncombat) and educational opportunities that translate into jobs in technological fields, these positions and opportunities are often available only to those who have already been prepared for them by their privileged backgrounds. Although the military does not maintain ethnic quotas, in practice, Ashkenazim frequently claim these positions, while Mizrahi and new immigrant soldiers occupy what are called blue-collar military positions, which do not prepare soldiers for competitive jobs or integrate them into elite social networks, contradicting the social mobility promised by the nationalist "melting pot" ideology of military service (Sasson-Levy 2003). Mizrahim and immigrants from the periphery are overrepresented in war casualties (Levy 2006). This dynamic replicates the Israeli class hierarchy, a central reason behind Mizrahi military refusal (Amor 2010), which I discuss below.

The small voice of conscience: Liberal-Zionist refusers

One weekday evening in 2008, I sat in a private home in Israel on a folding chair of dubious stability, among skeptical, middle-aged Jewish Israelis. They had come to hear conscientious objectors explain their decision to refuse military service as part of an ongoing public campaign to publicly justify their controversial acts. The meeting was advertised online and by word of mouth, drawing an audience of liberal Zionists, like the conscientious objectors themselves. There have been waves of military refusals in this group since the 1980s. During peak years there were as many as 2,000–3,000 refusers, but most years there were far fewer. Asaf, one of my interlocutors, was about to speak.[3] I watched from the side as he walked to the front of the room with more gravitas than I had ever seen in him. Forgoing the casual T-shirt that is the unofficial uniform of his secular Israeli-born Ashkenazi men, he wore a short-sleeved polo shirt. Asaf paused and looked at the floor for a moment that stretched into awkwardness before he began speaking.

> I remember my father in uniform. I grew up in a very Zionist home, and all my childhood I was looking forward to joining the military. I did not even think about not becoming a combat soldier. It was not a consideration. After I joined, I was assigned to Gaza, and things started to go badly, but I couldn't admit it to myself. All the time I heard a small voice that was telling me things were not right, but I would ignore it, pay attention to something else. I was really shocked by what I saw. Every day, I was shocked, but I continued. I hadn't seen poverty like that, but what was worse was the violence that I participated in myself.

Asaf gave a graphic account of an incident in which he came very close to seriously harming a Palestinian child, avoiding doing so only by chance. He described it as a wakeup call.

> After that, I could not continue like I did before. I could not continue lying to myself. I could not continue serving in the military. It was against my moral judgment. I was not being authentic or sincere with myself, or with the military. That was a very difficult period, and I struggled for a long time. I went back and forth because I felt responsibility to fulfill my commitment in the military. I realized that I had the obligation to refuse. Once I was willing to be honest with myself and let my conscience dictate what to do, everything became clear to me. That was my truth. I refused and I was sent to jail. But now it doesn't matter what the price is. Even if they send me to jail for a hundred years, I cannot go against my conscience. I don't believe that I am special. I am a completely average guy. The only thing that separates me from other soldiers is that I was honest with myself. But I didn't do this for myself. I did this for my country. When I was a soldier, I was hurting the country. Now I am doing something to help us.

The audience nodded sporadically during Asaf's testimony, which he would repeat at other events to different audiences throughout Israel. Asaf's testimony resonated with them. Afterward, many in the audience told me they respected Asaf's decision, though they did not agree with his actions. One man told me,

I understand he needs to obey his conscience, and I be-
lieve he truly searched for his authentic conscience and
did not make this decision lightly. I think that his being
a combat soldier and then being in jail shows that he is
not just trying to avoid his responsibilities.

I became aware that recognizing conscientious objec-
tion hinged on the correct presentation and performance
of the bundle of signs invoking "conscience," which plays a
significant role in ordinary ethics in the liberal West (Feld-
man 2006; Schinkel 2007). It is tightly entwined with the
concept of moral autonomy and the Kantian position that
freedom of thought is necessary for morality. In this tra-
dition, an insight arrived at through self-interrogation is
more valuable than one based on explicit and externally im-
posed rules. The inward and individual understanding of
conscience is today well established in common usage and
the ethical imaginary of liberal individualism. In the mod-
ern understanding, the dictate of conscience is an ethical
guide that is at the same time both internal and indepen-
dent of the individual's less noble impulses. It is understood
as a reliable ethical compass, but one that is not imme-
diately legible and thus must be deciphered through pri-
vate reflection and self-interrogation. These principles are
assumed when liberal refusers bring their claims of con-
science into the public sphere.

During his testimony, Asaf deployed a number of the
signs of conscience to establish his ethical personhood and
claims. He told the audience that early in his military ser-
vice, he heard a small voice telling him that something was
not right. The voice is one of the most prominent symbols
of conscience (Schinkel 2007, 118). Embodying conscience,
the voice is separate from the individual's stream of con-
sciousness and immediate reactions. In Asaf's narrative the
voice that warned him is understood to be his authentic
conscience, and the narrative implies that by ignoring the
voice, he was denying the truth of his "less noble motiva-
tions," which he identified as social pressure and fear of be-
ing ostracized. It is the commonly understood separation
between the individual and the internal ethical guide that
allows the audience to make sense of statements such as
"lying to myself," "being honest with myself," and "every-
thing became clear to me." Likewise, his justification that he
could not continue military service is coherent only through
the grammar of conscience, which does not permit media-
tion or compromise through social dialogue or intersubjec-
tivity. Conscience is a "binding force," and because it is in-
ternal to the individual, outward consultation with rules or
other people is likely to be misleading (Feldman 2006). His
statement that he must refuse "no matter what the price"
was also consistent with the intractability of the ideology of
conscience.

The performance of this ethical regime was repli-
cated throughout conscientious objectors' activist events.

Speakers demonstrated a high level of mastery of the perfor-
mance's speech style and were loyal to the discourse of con-
science, even across diverse interactions with the audience.
In keeping with their sober tone, they did not allow their
speech to become lighthearted, cynical, or defensive. They
also insisted on conscience as the source of authority for
their refusal and explicitly rejected other reasons for justi-
fication suggested by the audience. The following exchange
is one example of how they policed ethical boundaries:

> Audience member: But if you don't agree with the
> government policy, why not just conduct political
> activism—
>
> Dan: It is not a matter of disagreeing with policy. I didn't
> agree for many years. That isn't why I refused. I refused
> because my conscience did not allow me to continue,
> that's it. It's not about agreeing or not agreeing with
> policy.

The conscientious objectors firmly and repeatedly rebuffed
audience members' challenges suggesting that something
other than conscience was behind the refusal. The audience
greeted the insistence on the language of conscience with
relief and approval. We can interpret the audience's chal-
lenges as a test of consistency between those who share
the same ethical regime. The semiotics of conscience that
position the individual in opposition to external power led
liberal military refusers to engage in a declarative political
act, followed by dissident activism, which can be contrasted
with the other cases of military refusal.

The Torah way of life: Ultra-Orthodox refusers

Israel's ultra-Orthodox are exempt from service as long as
they maintain a religious lifestyle. For women this requires
a basic demonstration of religious observance. For men this
also involves continuous study in a yeshiva. This has be-
come a highly contested status quo, but secular Israelis do
not recognize that this exemption is related to any ethical
imperative. Yet the ultra-Orthodox explain their refusal as
necessary to maintaining the Torah way of life, that is, living
in accordance with the 613 religious commandments that
observant Jews must follow. They argue that military ser-
vice renders this lifestyle impossible and impedes the ideal
of lifelong religious study. Although most secular liberals
think the ultra-Orthodox are seeking to avoid the sacrifices
of service, Pini Rozenberg, an ultra-Orthodox spokesman,
has said they would rather "fill the prisons" than enlist in the
military (Zipken 2013). Rabbi Yitzhak Tuvia Weiss echoed
these sentiments, telling ultra-Orthodox parents, "This is
our task, to teach our children the value of self-sacrifice for
the sake of the Torah. We will not allow them to take yeshiva
students to the army or the police" (Sharon 2012). Many

ultra-Orthodox claim that maintaining the Torah way of life protects the state and is the only justification granting the Jewish people legitimacy to live in Israel. Thus, their ethical regime contributes to their political understanding of Zionism, which inextricably links the land of Israel, the Jewish people, and the Torah way of life.

There are a small number of ultra-Orthodox youths who decide to enlist in the military (about 2,000 a year). But even in the military, these youths seek to maintain the Torah way of life, such as keeping the Sabbath. To enable their service, the military has created special units that provide special considerations for observant soldiers, such as gender segregation. Even with this accommodation, situations arise in which these soldiers are ordered to participate in activities they believe to be incompatible with their Torah obligations, and in these cases, soldiers sometimes refuse to continue their military service. During my fieldwork, 30 young religious soldiers refused to continue their service because the military gave orders to evict two Jewish families that had been illegally residing for months in the wholesale market in Hebron, a Palestinian city in the West Bank that has been occupied by the Israeli military since 1967 and Jewish settlers since 1968. The soldiers believed that evicting Jewish settlers violated Torah prohibitions.

To understand their reasons for refusal, I went to Jerusalem, where most of the refusers lived, to attend events supporting them and to interview the soldiers, their families, and the rabbis who had encouraged these young soldiers to refuse. As soon as I arrived and began to speak with people, I was drawn into the elaborate networks of ultra-Orthodox social support (Weiss 2014). While secular conscientious objectors were easy to contact directly and referred me to other conscientious objectors, the refusal of the ultra-Orthodox soldiers was very much a community affair. My initial contacts with the latter referred me to parents of the refusers, to volunteers who were organizing activist events on their behalf, to the rabbis of the refusers' yeshiva, and to international donors who had supported the refusers' family. Though conscientious objectors were eager to narrate their personal refusal story, the ultra-Orthodox refusers were reluctant to do so. They balked at questions that seemed to frame their refusal as an individual decision and immediately suggested that the explanation for their refusal was better acquired elsewhere, offering up a list of phone numbers, often of senior figures.

At one event organized by a group called SOS, I began speaking with people and expressed my interest in speaking with the soldiers in attendance who had refused. No need, I was told. There were very important men present at the event, and they would be best qualified to explain why the refusers' actions were a sanctification of God's name. Portable room dividers separated the men's and women's sections, but in the back of the room the dividers ended, and there was a fluid exchange between families and mixed-gender conversations. I was introduced to a number of significant figures in the ultra-Orthodox settler movement, to whom I described my research objectives regarding conscientious objection. One rabbi I spoke with that evening was immediately eager to differentiate the refusal of his soldiers from that of liberal conscientious objectors.

> I listened to some of these soldiers [liberal conscientious objectors], and I read some of … that letter that they wrote. I really don't know what they want. What they said didn't make sense. For example, they said … what was it … they said they *cannot* continue to serve, not even one more day. What is that? Obviously they can, they did until now. Maybe now they feel differently or maybe they feel regret, but this whole thing, "Today I can't," it shows that they are not serious. It is very childish, to only think about yourself. Yes, the conscience is very important, but they are not disciplined. They just say what they think, but it is only their opinion. It is not educated. My students can point to the Bible and the Talmud to explain their refusal. These guys only say, "My conscience told me," and we are supposed to believe them? That is not the basis for community. That is everyone alone doing whatever they feel like.

His skepticism echoed that of many ultra-Orthodox military refusers I met regarding their liberal counterparts. While they theoretically supported the right of anyone to refuse based on serious ethical objections, they had deep reservations concerning the seemingly chaotic mechanism of conscience that was not grounded in anything but a person's own inner ethical navigation, which they found to be unmoored from any stable shared norm.

My fieldwork with ultra-Orthodox refusers raised two related concerns about conscience. One is that claims of conscience are focused on satisfying an individual's introspective ethical reasoning, not the ethical consensus of the group. This caused the rabbi to say that conscience leads people to childishly think "only" about themselves and do "whatever they feel like." He incredulously questioned a society that would invest accountability in the individual testimony of idiosyncratic judgment. Here, he makes an argument akin to that of Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009) against the idea of "private language," according to which language that is understood only by a single individual is incoherent. Similarly, the rabbi was concerned that liberal conscience is not based on an authoritative source. The ethical compass of conscientious objectors is introspective, unanchored by any stable text or counsel. By contrast, the ethics of Orthodox Judaism is largely based on the fulfillment of specific enumerated rules or commandments (*mitzvot*). Ethical authority is not self-authorized but derives from texts, a defining feature of scripturalist traditions (Geertz 1971). This contrasts with the ideas of liberal-Zionist refusers,

whose characteristic rejection of ultra-Orthodox claims results from the liberal privileging of Kantian ideas of moral autonomy at the expense of scripturalist ethics.

The rabbi told me that most of his students did not go to the military and are well respected in their yeshiva community, but the few who do join the military studied the Torah and the subsequent religious commentaries for years in order to cultivate an ethical sensibility. His students who enlist receive extensive preparation regarding the dilemmas they might face, and they are in constant contact with one another and their rabbis, who assist them through difficulties. Whereas refusers establish their ethical personhood through testimony alone onstage at their events, here the refusers rely on respected leaders of their community to establish their ethical legitimacy. Dressed in black suits, the refusers sat to the side in the audience while important rabbis occupied the raised stage together, defending and praising their actions. While conscientious objectors gave testimony about the secular Zionist roots of their families and military service to establish their ethical credentials, in this case rabbis testified to the strict religious observation of the refusers and their families. As supporting details, the rabbis spoke of the young men's modesty, strictness in diet (following the religious rules of kashruth), personal conduct, and family relations. One of the rabbis noted that the mother of Baruch, one of the young refusers, had come to him several weeks earlier to report that her son had been so careful in the military to keep the highest level of kosher observance that he often returned home on the weekend very hungry. At her home, where he was assured of the strictness of the kashruth practice, he would eat enough for three people. These details were brought to establish the young men as trustworthy, pious, and capable of mature deliberation. Liberal refusers discussed their conscience as a revelation after an inward investigation, a self-authorized ethical insight. In contrast, the rabbis referred to the Torah and the rabbinic literature, such as the Mishnah (a book of Jewish oral traditions), to authorize the actions of the soldiers.

He always helped his family: Mizrahi refusers

Mandatory enlistment has always applied to Mizrahi Jews, yet in every generation some refuse. Yet they almost never align themselves with the conscientious objectors. Unlike their liberal Ashkenazi peers, Mizrahim who refuse military service are not organized into groups that advocate their position, so estimating their numbers is difficult. My interviews and previous research suggest, however, that the phenomenon is widespread (Amor 2010). In contrast to conscientious objectors, Mizrahi refusers are wary to publicize their cases for fear of retribution from current or future employers. As a result, their actions are often considered cases of "gray refusal," which in the Israeli discourse implies that the reasons for nonservice are unknown or "egotistical."

The concept of "gray refusal" also assumes that refusal that is socially or economically motivated is not simultaneously ethical, a perspective that has not stood up to scholarly investigation (Amor 2010; Levy and Mizrahi 2008) and is likewise challenged here.

Using networks of personal acquaintances and snowball research techniques, I was able to conduct repeated interviews throughout Israel with many Mizrahim who refused military service. One of my interlocutors from this group was Meir, whom I visited twice in a working-class city close to the center of the country. When I interviewed him at his home, Meir said something I heard many times during these interviews: "I am not a conscientious objector. I just hate the army." When I asked him why he hated the army, he told me,

> They don't care. They don't care about anything. I explained to them, I only have one brother older than me, and he doesn't work. I have two younger brothers, and my mother doesn't have a job, she has pain. I have to work, I explained to them. They don't care. "Army is important, army is important, it is a privilege to serve." So I go to the army, and when I come back on the weekend, I see everything is a mess, everybody is yelling and upset. My sister doesn't have clothes, and my brother doesn't have books for school. During the week the social worker was at the house harassing my mother about these things. They don't understand why the army won't give me an exemption. They think I didn't try. But instead of working and helping my family, I am sitting like an idiot at the base, with all these assholes.

Meir refused because he felt a duty to provide for his family, a duty he could not fulfill while in the military. As he spoke, his mother and her friend entered the kitchen, where we were sitting, and overheard part of our conversation. The mother's friend interrupted Meir to assure me that he was a very responsible young man and that he had not left the military because he wanted to laze about at home:

> He has always worked and helped his mother and his brothers. Helped them very, very much! Even when he was a young boy and all the other children were playing, he was helping his mother, and even the neighbors. All the neighbors know he is a good boy. I will take you, and you can ask them [*she playfully takes my wrist as though she is going to take me around the neighborhood right then*]. They all respect him for returning home.

His mother smiled and nodded. Meir's story is consistent with what Meir Amor (2010) describes as the widespread phenomenon of "social refusal" among Mizrahi Jews. Amor observes that Mizrahi youth practice a muted form of military refusal, refusing to protest and correct their neglect and oppression by the state and the military. This is especially the case after they find that the military reinforces

discrimination by funneling them into menial jobs and reserving white-collar jobs for those who are already socially advanced (see also Sasson-Levy 2003).

While other Mizrahi refusers supported the military and its activities in the abstract, I heard forceful condemnations of the military from refusers and their friends, families, and neighbors. In conversations with older relatives, I found that Mizrahim had refused to serve in the military for decades. While the military refusal of conscientious objectors often caused a major rift between refusers and their family and communities, here I found that people were much more supportive. Like Meir, many of the younger refusers cited social conditions that made service impossible or experiences of discrimination in job assignment. Older generations offered even more strongly worded critiques of the military as an Ashkenazi institution of oppression.

Despite the prevalence of military refusal among the Mizrahim, military refusers of this group did not identify with liberal conscientious objectors. Meir and his mother were appalled at the comparison, agreeing that conscientious objectors' concern for Palestinians was a demonstration of deluded and foolish ideas about where they belong and to whom they owe loyalty. Oren, a Mizrahi man in his 30s and one of my neighbors in Tel Aviv, always mocked the liberal conscientious objectors who visited me, even though he himself left the military in the early part of his service. "Yes, they love the Palestinians," he said, adding,

> They forget who their brothers are. What about me? What about my family? My parents live in the south, and these sissies wish they didn't exist. They go to the territories to sit and eat with Palestinians, but they would never go to where my parents live. Why don't they want to help their brothers?

Meir's and Oren's reflections on military refusal and "conscientious objection" aligned with the perspective of other Mizrahi refusers I interviewed. Together, they produced a concrete ethical regime linking responsibility and proximity. Oren did not oppose the values of military service: he subscribed to ideologies of Jewish self-defense and believed that all Jews should serve in the military. But he objected to the demand that he should betray his obligation to his family to fulfill this more distant social obligation, which would distort ethical priorities. In an extension of this hierarchy of responsibilities, Oren expressed the belief that conscientious objectors were ignoring their obligations to their "brothers," in favor of Palestinians who were farther away, and that this was an erroneous ethical stance.

One of the most common Mizrahim complaints about liberal conscientious objection is that its hierarchy of worthy victims places Palestinians above the oppressed who are "closer to home." Ashkenazi-dominated activism against the oppression of Palestinians has met with consistent critiques from Mizrahim that Ashkenazim address only the wrongs done to "strangers," while perpetrating crimes of neglect and discrimination against their own coreligionists (Lavie 2011; Mizrachi 2016). For example, Mizrahi academic and activist Smadar Lavie writes favorably of activism that follows the "old Jewish 'sages of blessed memory,' who advised, 'Put the poor of your home before those of your town, and the poor of your town before those of the next town'" (2011, 65). This ethical approach contributes to the Mizrahim's rejection of liberal Zionism and their assertion that Israeli citizens should honor this proximity principle. In contrast, liberal ethics maintains an "ethos that compels people to address the suffering of strangers" (Brown and Wilson 2009, 2). In fact, a "proper humanitarian" would even defer obligations to kin in order to care for strangers (Bornstein 2012, 146; Redfield 2012, 367). This approach clashes with nonliberal assumptions that one should help those with whom one has relationships and not abstract others (Bornstein 2012). This distinction characterizes Oren's retort to the claims of conscientious objectors.

The stance of Mizrahi Jews often reflects their ambivalent position as both part of the privileged majority as Jews and as marginalized outsiders because of their Middle Eastern roots. On the one hand, militant patriotism and an aversion to public critique of the state or the military is very strong among Mizrahim (Mizrachi 2016). On the other hand, Mizrahim also frequently express antistate and antimilitary sentiments, including harsh criticism of government policy (Lavie 2014). For example, welfare fraud among lower-class Mizrahi single mothers can be understood as a political act of resistance against state exclusion and maltreatment (Regev-Messalem 2013). Similarly, male Mizrahi soldiers do not base their gender or national identity in the military; rather, they cultivate what Orna Sasson-Levy calls a "home-based masculinity" (2003, 319) that privileges the family over the military and the state. Consistent with the justifications for refusal we see here, they place the emphasis on the ethical role of the "provider" above that of being a soldier.

In contrast to refusal based on conscience, the source of ethical legitimacy for ultra-Orthodox and Mizrahi refusal is not private or internal, and thus these groups do not employ personal declarative statements to justify ethical acts. Reciprocally, conscientious objectors reject the claims of other groups because of this difference, and they often express resentment at the rising political influence of these other groups at the expense of their own. Danny, one of my interlocutors from this group, offered a stereotypical response to my inquiry about other refuser groups:

> No. These other groups aren't refusers, because it isn't a matter of conscience. The religious don't think for themselves; they only do what their rabbi tells them to do, so it isn't ethical. And the Mizrahim, most of them,

anyway, they are not doing it for ethical reasons. They want to do other things, to work, also sometimes they have personal family problems or maybe drugs.

For him, the model of an epiphany of conscience was essential to understanding an experience as ethical and as a legitimate expression of civic intervention.

Rival regimes of justification

For Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), cultural systems have their own logics and rationalities through which different social groups think and problematize moral and ethical issues. These systems, which he calls traditions, and their corresponding rationalities and values are largely incompatible. But in lived reality this does not prevent interaction and exchange between traditions. In fact, James Laidlaw (2013, 23–27) has argued that different cultures should not be considered so morally distinct as to be mutually incoherent. In the case of military refusal among different groups, we can see that the incompatibility of regimes of justification actually spurs reciprocal ethical evaluation. The inability or failure of those holding divergent ethical between rival regimes of justification to recognize and acknowledge each other raises the political stakes of engagement.

A failure of recognition is evident, for example, when liberal Zionists conflated conscience, their specific cultural expression of the ethical, with ethics in general. It was also evident when the semiotics of liberal conscience confounded the ultra-Orthodox rabbi who rhetorically asked, "What is that?" in response to the conscientious objectors' statements that they *could not* continue military service. Claims regarding the inviolability of conscience are pivotal to the rhetoric of conscience. But the rabbi concluded that, of course, they *can* continue military service if they choose. Oren's statement that liberal conscientious objectors were wrong to prioritize loyalty to Palestinians is a negative evaluation of their reasons for refusal, but the condemnation is about more than their refusal. Many Mizrahi Jews perceive this as a pattern of ethical error on the part of secular Ashkenazim and claim this error has led them to neglect Mizrahi Israelis in favor of the more distant Palestinians. Similarly, the rabbi makes a broader claim when he affirms the value of conscience but then reinterprets it by denying its foundation in moral autonomy and insisting that it cannot be individual. He rejects the conscientious objectors' definition of the ethical on the ground that they lack religious training, asserting that good citizenship practices and public ethics must be grounded in religious tradition, a position that is not currently hegemonic. Thus, ethical regimes are tightly intertwined with politics, power, and practices of collective legitimation.

While the groups employ different ethical regimes to make claims about citizenship, the state itself is far from passive. The state claims that military service is a national obligation for all Jewish citizens of Israel, seeking to configure full, authentic, and normative citizenship as synonymous with military service. In trying to hold a monopoly over the mediation of the civic obligation to serve, the state tries to deflect the ethical content of all claims against service, and this greatly affects the treatment of these claims in the mainstream media and public discourse. For example, military personnel eagerly exempt people from military service if they are physically or psychologically incapacitated, thereby pacifying military refusers and preempting their political claims before they can garner public attention.[4]

The state's ability to control the ethical meaning of military service is aided by its bureaucratic powers of administration. As a way of denying these acts of resistance, it compartmentalizes each group under a different sociological profile. While the ultra-Orthodox are generally handled under the category of exemptions (*ptor*), conscientious objectors are handled as refusers (*sarvanim*), and Mizrahim are treated as draft dodgers (*mishtamtim*). Military law further contributes to the divisions among these groups by meting out different punishments: some are summarily and unceremoniously sentenced for disobedience, while others are given extensive trials for refusal.

Although liberal Zionists have lost much of their political hegemony, the case of military refusal demonstrates how this group has structurally maintained some of its cultural hegemony. Their ethical claims are the most difficult for the state to dismiss because they are made in the same ethical grammar as many of the state's founding documents and regulations, which construct the state as both Jewish and liberal-democratic. The Israeli Declaration of Independence specifically guarantees freedom of conscience, while not referring to obligations based on the Torah or proximity. While most military refusers are summarily jailed, those who invoke conscience are more difficult to criticize and marginalize. They are more frequently brought before a military court (Algazi 2004), and their claims have been argued in the Israeli Supreme Court. The courts generally recognize the ethical origins of liberal refusal, even if they do not absolve conscientious objectors of responsibility. The mainstream media follow suit, having dedicated a great deal of time to liberal-Zionist military refusal and treating conscientious objection as a form of ethical dissent. In the process the media spontaneously redeploy the semiotics of conscience as real and natural whether or not they explicitly approve or condemn conscientious objection (Misgav 2013).

The privileged status of conscience in state law demonstrates the stakes of competing ethical regimes in a multicultural society. Because of the resonance between the ethical regime of liberal Ashkenazi Zionists and the unmarked, tacit, and supposedly neutral ethical regime of the state, members of this group appear to be the most capable citizens even in dissent because the semiotic ideology of laws

and civic norms is rigged in their favor.[5] Thus, in a society with competing ethical regimes, one must ask, which ethical regime is recognized, and thus which does the state legally respect? This has significant consequences for the collective legitimation of groups. For example, could religious claims based on scriptural authority be acceptable and deliberated *as such* in the courts and the public sphere? Currently, it remains in the realm of culture that, unlike conscience, must be translated into "neutral" secular liberal political terms before it can be deliberated in the public sphere. The argument that secular political ethics is neutral and fit for public debate, but that religious political ethics is an inappropriate grammar for the public sphere, is made by liberal theorists such as Jürgen Habermas (2006). This requirement for ethical translation to the hegemonic grammar not only is less democratic but also contributes to the misreading of these justifications for refusal as based in unethical sources.

Ultra-Orthodox refusers have struggled unsuccessfully to publicly legitimize their collective ethical claims that run counter to hegemonic secular and liberal political norms. In contrast to liberal ethics, Orthodox Judaism is largely nonconsequentialist; its adherents must fulfill specific duties rather than act to create certain effects. Because this form of Judaism is based on scripture and rejects natural law, self-guided introspection, and ideas regarding empathetic responsibility to others, the liberal mainstream media do not recognize ultra-Orthodox refusal as an ethical issue. For the same reason, the state has never recognized religious Jews' obligation to live according to the Torah as the basis for their military exemption. Commentaries in the media consistently deny the ethical significance of the Torah lifestyle; for example, they do not seriously engage with Orthodox claims that maintaining this lifestyle benefits society and grants legitimacy to the state. Ultra-Orthodox refusal is generally attributed to a wide range of explanations that evacuate ethical choice, including a desire to avoid the burden of military service, a lack of feelings of obligation to the state, a lack of democratic responsibility, insufficient masculinity necessary for the rigors of service, and a fear of military life and "modern" life. Some secular liberals argue that ultra-Orthodox refusal to serve is illegitimate because it is not a matter of conscience (Hammer 2013), which for them is equivalent to ethics. Secular commentators are quick to claim, without merit, that Judaism permits Jews to serve in the military. This reflects the mistaken assumption that, in contrast to liberal moral autonomy, which explicitly requires practices of discernment, the meaning of rules and texts is self-evident. This stance ignores the history of Jewish exegesis. In doing so, secular critics flatten and caricature the scripturalist tradition as one in which thought and dilemma are eliminated. Those who examine nonliberal traditions commonly make this mistake (Laidlaw 2013).

Similarly, the government does not recognize Mizrahi military refusal as ethical. Rather, state policy interprets it as delinquency and an endemic social and cultural problem (Amor 2010). The state and, increasingly, private initiatives treat boosting enlistment as a matter of social policy, which falsely equates a social group's rising rates of enlistment in the military over time with improving social conditions. For example, the privately funded nonprofit organization Aharai! targets youth from peripheral and underprivileged areas, especially Mizrahim and Ethiopians, seeking to prepare them for military service as a way to promote social advancement and the values of good citizenship.[6] The state and mainstream media do not consider the low rates of enlistment to be an outcome of dissent or an outcome of state neglect. Rather, they fault cultural shortcomings that lead youth to lack a sense of purpose, an awareness of how important it is to contribute to the state, and a connection with the Zionist democratic experience.[7] The promotional materials for the organization represent resistance to military service as backward "crying" about oppression and deprivation.

Ethical regimes, cultural hegemony, and the normative expectations of citizenship

National belonging, a strong force in Israeli society, sets normative expectations for citizenship and public participation. These expectations shape the debates over the legitimate reasons for military refusal, allowing us to consider how rival ethical regimes interact in multicultural states. The value of national belonging compels different groups to interact when they share political stakes. None of the groups discussed above—liberal Zionists, Mizrahim, and the ultra-Orthodox—compose a majority of the Israeli population, so none can unilaterally usurp political power or define civic norms. Yet, because these groups are politically enmeshed, they cannot simply face inward and engage with only those who share their ethical values. Instead, they attempt to persuade the state to recognize their demands through policy, demands such as offering underprivileged youth opportunities for social mobility, allowing the ultra-Orthodox to legally refuse military service on religious grounds, and recognizing ethical refusal as a legitimate reason for exemption from service.[8]

The practice of self-justification is not only about a refuser's attempt to restore good standing among those with whom he shares an ethical regime; it is also about the cultural group's quest for national recognition, legitimacy, and even hegemony. The framework of conflicting ethical regimes offers a new approach to examining practices of justification that focus on the dynamic between the individual and the community and techniques of persuasion. Most existing accounts document the process by which individuals attempt to explain themselves and their actions to

the group and the process of evaluating these justifications in everyday life (Keane 2009; Mattingly 2014; Pandian and Ali 2010). In examining the processes of attributing moral responsibility and the mutual and intersubjective production of ethical meaning between speakers and audiences, research in this vein delineates and describes the ethical principles that different groups employ (e.g., Robbins and Rumsey 2008). The case I have considered here allows us to consider regimes of justification in a different context, a typical one in the modern age, in which guilty parties must simultaneously plead their cases to different juries with distinct criteria for evaluating guilt and innocence. This situation is the result of concurrent affiliations with multiple groups.

In his discussion of practices of "giving reasons," Webb Keane notes, "I don't owe an accounting of myself to just anyone. I don't try to persuade people whom I consider utterly alien to me. As in gift exchange, explanations involve differences that constitute certain possible kinds of relationships" (2010, 78). It is by virtue of their national belonging that refusers must appeal to the body politic, that is, Jewish Israeli society. In contrast, Palestinian citizens are excluded from the national community that Jewish military refusers belong to automatically. The exclusion and marginalization of Palestinian citizens is illustrated by the political discourse surrounding the military refusal on the part of Druze people. The Druze are a Palestinian minority of about 135,000 concentrated in the north of Israel, as well as in Syria and Lebanon. They are the only Palestinian group regularly drafted into the Israeli military. According to the mainstream Israeli narrative, the Druze are loyal to the Jewish state, in contrast with Palestinians in general and Muslim Palestinians in particular. But there are Druze military refusers, and their numbers are increasing. While Druze refusal also critiques the terms of citizenship, most Jewish Israelis do not interpret this as an internal critique as they do with Jewish refusal—even though the reasons Druze refusers cite are not fundamentally different from those given by their Jewish counterparts. Rather, most Jewish Israelis understand Druze protest as "Arab nationalism" (Miller 2014), that is, the main "external threat" to Israel in the nationalist ideology.[9] Palestinian citizens are thus "alien" to the body politic, in Keane's sense, and most Jewish Israelis do not expect them to explain themselves or convince Jewish Israeli society that their controversial acts are justified.

But achieving civic belonging does not resolve all the dilemmas of accountability. Jewish refusers adhere to a specific ethical regime, while being citizens of a nation state that includes rival cultural traditions, and are thus accountable to multiple groups, each of which demands different terms of allegiance. This case reveals the ways that differing ethical regimes produce differing normative expectations regarding practices of good citizenship. Furthermore,

in multicultural states, groups struggle not only for raw legislative power but also for cultural hegemony over the public sphere and the norms of civic life. In the case of Israeli military refusers, this struggle manifests in a sharp rift over legitimate reasons for what are ostensibly indistinguishable political acts.

The political stakes of competing ethical regimes in shared society

Ashkenazi liberal Zionists, the ultra-Orthodox, and Mizrahim have all participated in the same controversial act, military service. But because of deep cultural divides, there is no solidarity among the groups. The above exploration of their regimes of justification puts these rifts into ethical and political context. In their justifications of refusal, liberal Zionists perform the signs of "conscience," conveying a reflective and individual process of ethical epiphany. They also deny the ethical content of other groups that use other sources of justification. Ultra-Orthodox refusers establish themselves as ethical subjects in a very different way. They understand their refusal as an ethical obligation based on textual sources and the need to live in accordance with Jewish law. Members of this group rejected the liberal idea of conscience as dangerously unmoored from external guidance. The Mizrahi refusers perform the ethical justification of their refusal through conspicuous practices of responsibility to family and those close to them. They rejected the refusal of liberal Zionists as violating this same principle by privileging Palestinian welfare above that of their ethnic cohort.

The anthropology of ethics has traditionally examined the ethical negotiations between individuals and others who share their ethical regime, often analyzing face-to-face interactions. And indeed, practices of persuasion within the ethical regime are a necessary component for self-justification among Israeli military refusers in every group. Yet this account also reveals that ethical negotiations often take place on a much larger, state-level scale among those joined by the political bonds of shared citizenship rather than shared culture. At this level, negotiations take place among different cultural groups regarding which reasons for dissent will be collectively considered legitimate. Competing ethical regimes reflect collective legitimation, the cultural content of the struggle for hegemony, and the right to define the normative expectations of citizenship and the ethical exceptions to the social contract.

Today, many people are politically entwined with those who are culturally different from themselves, an outcome of political federations, immigration dynamics, settler colonialism (as in the case of Israel), and other historical circumstances. Political systems and the public sphere, far from being neutral spaces, as liberal theory claims, are shaped by cultural assumptions, and ethical assumptions in

particular (Asad 2003; Povinelli 2006). Because of this, the privileges of cultural hegemony are great, and people often refuse to subscribe to a relativistic or pluralistic stance regarding ethical difference. Shared citizenship imposes legal obligations and often a feeling of "owing an account of oneself" to fellow citizens. But individuals may be unable to convince all those to whom they owe an explanation because of the divergent demands of distinct ethical regimes. Lack of fluency among the ethical regimes does not prevent groups from engaging with one another, a locking of horns spurred on by the ethical and political risks of shared citizenship. At stake in the deliberation over legitimate justifications for taking an ethical stand is the political questions of which ethical regime will be associated with upright citizenship, and whose values will align with hegemonic civic virtues.

Notes

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1. The research for this article, including participant observation and informal interviews, was conducted in 2007–9.

2. Here I refer to this group by the more accessible term *liberal Ashkenazim.*

3. All names in this article are pseudonyms. All quotes and conversations have been transcribed from recordings I made and translated from Hebrew.

4. The state's discursive framing of nonservice justifies inclusion in and exclusion from citizenship. This greatly affects groups like Israel's Palestinian citizens, whose exemption from service, supposedly a benevolent consideration, relegates them to a lower tier of citizenship and accompanying rights (Livio 2012).

5. While the liberal state is supposedly a neutral platform for democracy, its policies are in fact informed by deeply ideological assumptions.

6. *Aharai* in Hebrew means "follow me."

7. "Aharai! Follow Me English Subtitles," promotional YouTube video, posted by "Aharai," May 18, 2011, accessed June 29, 2016, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhnHQjmqapk.

8. Currently only pacifism is recognized as legitimate and worthy of exemption.

9. Referring to Palestinian Israelis as "Arab" is often used to deny Palestinian identity.

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