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The interrupted sacrifice:

Hegemony and moral crisis among Israeli conscientious objectors

ABSTRACT

In this article, I explain why some of the most elite and dedicated soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces ultimately became conscientious objectors. I argue that because the sacrificial moral economy, and not the state as supersubject, was hegemonically inculcated in these young people, resistance was possible. This case prompts a reconsideration of anthropological understandings of the relationship between hegemonic inculcation and resistance. Specifically, we cannot only ask to what degree subjects subscribe to hegemony but we must also ask what specifically is inculcated and how this alters agency and its object. [*hegemony, resistance, sacrifice, nationalism, Israel, military, conscience*]

On the way to the Palestinian West Bank village of Susiya, the mood in the bus was excited and jovial. I was traveling with a group of Israeli conscientious objectors,¹ former elite combat soldiers from the Israeli Defense Forces, to meet with Palestinian ex-fighters, members of the same activist organization, Combatants for Peace. At their meetings, Israelis and Palestinians tell their life stories and how they came to reject a militarized solution to the conflict between their two peoples. As we made our way out of southern Jerusalem and crossed into the Palestinian West Bank, the trip turned into a macabre guided tour of the memory sites of the Israelis' experiences as soldiers. "You see over there," Avi said, jumping up from his seat and jabbing his finger vigorously at the window, "behind the wall, you can see through the gap. . . . Now! That one! We demolished the house there like two or three times." Those who had served in the region between Jerusalem and our destination in the South Hebron hills pointed out the locations of incidents that had contributed to their refusal to continue military service. They told their war stories to each other in military jargon, as many Israeli men enjoy doing; however, their disclosure of violent encounters in blunt terms gave their stories an uncanny twist.² While many of their peers were waking up for a leisurely Saturday morning, these former elite combat soldiers, for whom the military had been a central part of their lives, were now en route to a solidarity event in a small Palestinian village.

Heavy sacrifices are demanded of the people who live in the region of Israel and Palestine, the site of struggle over land as well as over notions of community, belonging, and citizenship. In Israel, the main sacrificial economy is conducted through military service, which enlists all of Jewish society. Men serve three years and up to one month of reserve service per year until the age of 45, and women serve two years. Palestinian Arab Israelis are exempt from service, and, among Jewish Israelis, exemptions are made for those with religious duties and severe disabilities and for women who are married or have children. However, refusal by qualified individuals to perform military service is illegal, and all of my interlocutors among the former soldiers on the bus had spent time in military

prison for their decision. They also had been dismissed from the military. Military service plays a central and much-discussed role in Israeli society, and the performance of this duty is foundational to the Israeli understanding of national community and citizenship. However, as Antonio Gramsci (1971) noted, all hegemonic ideals are fragile, and thus the demand for sacrifice is renewed, resubstantialized, defended, and modified with each new generation.

There has been a long engagement in anthropology, as well as among some extradisciplinary predecessors and contributors, with research that implicitly and explicitly questions the legitimacy of state power. This questioning is accomplished to a large extent by revealing, in full view, the strategies and techniques of state self-legitimization, by revealing methods of legitimizing power and violence, and most damaging of all, by revealing the sleight of hand used to making state power seem natural and pointing out the metaphorical “man behind the curtain.” Max Weber’s (1991) definition of the state as an entity holding a legitimate monopoly on violence was refined by Michael Warner (2003), who argues that the state framework acts not only to legitimize its own violence but also to delegitimize all other uses of injurious force. Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony and its mechanisms likewise has had long-lasting impact in the field. Philip Abrams (2006), early on, demonstrated the illusory nature of the state and the difficulty of locating it as an object of study as Veena Das (2004) has more recently. Ann Stoler (1989, 2002) has challenged governing techniques by examining the mechanisms of imperial power as well as the cynical use of morality for purposes of social control. Many scholars have revealed state techniques of inclusion and exclusion on grounds of ethnicity, gender, and language as well as the suffering and paradoxes of agency that result from marginalization (Appadurai 2003; Brown 1995; Das and Poole 2004; Guha and Spivak 1988). Meanwhile, several anthropologists have been completely explicit in their attempts to break the “spell” that the state seems to assert (Appadurai 1993; Mbebe 1992; Taussig 1992). James Scott (1987, 1990, 2009) has questioned the legitimacy of state power by considering the everyday methods by which people evade its governance and control over their lives. This work has dovetailed with and inspired much anthropological work on resistance by indigenous and marginalized communities. By and large, within this ongoing dialogue, scholars share a perspective that hegemonic inculcation is a more or less effective tool of state power and that resistance to state power comes either from those who are beyond the hegemonic reach of the state, from alternative or oppositional traditions, or who break the spell of state hegemony, whether in terms of older ideas of class consciousness or more modern conceptions that do not posit an a priori political form of consciousness.

In this article, I try to explain the context and process by which elite, dedicated soldiers came to resist the

state through military refusal. Contrary to the social expectation that these soldiers would be the last to publicly refuse, I show why they were, in fact, the most likely to do so by virtue of their state-encouraged investment in the national narrative and the state-sponsored sacrificial economy of military service. This case prompts a reconsideration of anthropological understandings of the relationship between hegemonic inculcation and resistance. Resistance to the state and its authority is generally considered to come from those outside its hegemonic or disciplining sphere or from those who fall short of state expectations of the ideal subjectivity for good citizenship. However, this case demonstrates that acceptance of and identification with the state-supported hegemonic ideal does not preclude resistance to the state. As scholars, we cannot ask only to what degree subjects subscribe to hegemonic values or about the extent of nationalist inculcation but we must also ask about the ideals to which, specifically, this identification and loyalty is directed. In the case I examine, I find that inculcation does not imply loyalty to the state as supersubject but, rather, loyalty to the sacrificial moral economy, which, though emphasized through national initiatives as a cornerstone of good citizenship, engenders a turn of events that the state neither anticipated nor desired. Rather, the sacrificial economy acts as a golem, taking on a life of its own against the state that nurtured it in so many ways.

In the years 2002 and 2003, waves of refusals to perform military service surprised and beleaguered the Israeli Defense Forces. They began during Israel’s Operation Defensive Shield, a retaliation during the escalating al-Aqsa intifada. Public military refusal appeared for the first time during the First Lebanon War in 1982, when many reservists refused to serve in a war that Israel acknowledged as a war of choice. The refusals that began in 2002 were distinguished by their occurrence in the higher ranks of the military, for example, by Brigadier General Yiftah Spector and many other officers. Pilots and commandos (*sayeret matkal*) each organized their own group letters of refusal. These conscientious objectors, including my interlocutors, were mostly elite combat soldiers, reservists in their twenties and thirties sent to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. *Elite*, here, refers to soldiers who were selected for volunteer special forces combat units, which hold a great deal of prestige for the difficulty and responsibility of their jobs. Their conscientiously based refusal to serve was, for most of society, unexpected because, previously, all indications were that these soldiers were the most enthusiastic and the most dedicated among their peers to the sacrificial act of military service. They had been elevated to ideal types of soldiering, praised, iconized, and entrusted with the highest levels of responsibility. They were, as a military prosecutor told me, the face of the Israeli Defense Forces. Although the military and most politicians tried to limit the political fallout of their unexpected refusals, they were caught off-guard, and

the refusals dealt a blow to mainstream confidence in the moral soundness of the nation's elite soldiers, in the sense of collective conscience regarding military service and the military's claims of purity of arms (*tohar ha'neshek*), as asserted in the Israeli Defense Forces doctrine of ethics.

Below, I discuss the ways this group related to the national narrative that formed their expectations, as teenagers, about sacrifice in military service. I then explain how the sacrificial mode was interrupted for these soldiers through experiences that led to their refusal to participate further in military service. Finally, I explore the consequences of this case for anthropological thinking about the relationship between hegemonic inculcation and resistance to the state.

The sacrificial idiom in Israeli society

The idiom of sacrifice in Israeli society posits the soldier as sacrificial victim. The biblical story of Akedat Yitzhak, or the Binding of Isaac, is the dominant metaphor for discussing military service in Israel, with the soldier imagined as Isaac. This metaphor is found extensively in public discourse as well as the arts. Some scholars go so far as to claim that it is primarily through this myth that Israeli society speaks to itself (Sagi 1998; Weiss 1991). In the story, told in Genesis 22, God calls on Abraham to bring his beloved son Isaac to Mount Moriah, bind him, and sacrifice him. Abraham obeys, but at the last moment, he is interrupted by an angel of God, who tells him not to kill Isaac. Abraham, instead, finds a ram, which he sacrifices in substitution. God informs Abraham that because he has demonstrated his faith and obedience, "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (Genesis 22:17–18). Abraham then founds a community in Beer Sheva.³ The significance of this story for the metaphor of Jewish redemption in Israel through sacrifice is easily apparent. The theme of sacrifice leading to redemption and the foundation of a blessed and invulnerable nation clearly resonated with the Zionist ideology of redeeming the land of Israel and with Zionist leaders calling for difficult sacrifices from the new citizens of the fledgling nation engaged in near-constant wars (Sagi 1998; Zerubavel 2006).

However, what is not immediately obvious is how this myth overlays with modern military service or how, exactly, this idiom of sacrifice structures contemporary reciprocity between violence and redemption. The Isaac of the biblical story was an unknowing child, hardly the ideal soldier or a galvanizing image of heroism. Isaac's image has therefore undergone modification in Israeli public culture (in literature, theater, and art) from that of an unknowing child to an exemplar of a whole generation of youths willing to sac-

rifice themselves for national redemption (Feldman 1998; Sagi 1998). Poems and literature of the early settler generation venerate this image of Isaac in unqualified terms. Such efforts received and continue to receive state patronage and promotion. A poem of the settler period, by Uri Zevi Greenberg, which is still read publicly on Israeli Memorial Day, invites, "Let that day come . . . / when my father will rise from his grave with the resurrection of the dead / and God will command him as the people commanded Abraham. / To bind his only son: to be an offering - / . . . let that day come in my life! I believe it will" (1972:145–147). Sacrifice here leans heavily toward self-sacrifice; the soldier is both the sacrificial victim and the sacrificer, the one who makes the sacrifice, is responsible for the act, and also accrues the moral benefits of it. The move toward self-sacrifice in return for redemption has, unsurprisingly, produced some slippage in the idioms of sacrifice, and many scholars have noted Christian imagery in this secular nationalist articulation of sacrifice (Feldman 2007). One of the clearest examples of this slippage is a well-known photograph by Adi Nes, which sold for more than a quarter-million dollars at auction, the highest price ever paid for an Israeli photograph. Though the piece is untitled, it is commonly referred to as "the Last Supper" (see Figure 1). It formally replicates Leonardo da Vinci's painting of that name, showing Jesus in his final evening with his 12 apostles, but it substitutes male Israeli soldiers in the same configuration of postures as the figures in da Vinci's painting. The scene is set in a boisterous mess hall at mealtime, and the central soldier, replacing Christ, abstains from the fraternizing around him and bears a look of melancholy and premonition.

This photograph is not an unproblematic celebration of sacrifice. Criticism of sacrifice through military service began in earnest in the 1970s. Iconic authors such as Amos Oz, Yehuda Amichai, Yitzhak Laor, and A. B. Yehoshua have all used the idiom of Akedat Yitzhak to criticize the nation's demand for sacrifice from its youth, pathologizing the intergenerational relations it implies as well as pointing out the impossibility of normalization (a high Zionist goal) under conditions of continual self-sacrifice. Literary scholars understand this criticism as representative of larger shifts in the ethos of Israeli society away from a veneration of sacrifice. Despite 40 years of intermittent critique, sacrifice through military service continues. Likewise, despite the increased critical awareness that class, ethnic, and gender boundaries are created through the hierarchy of sacrifice in the military, these are far from being overturned. There are, then, many relationships to, and investments in, the Israeli state's framing of good citizenship through the national sacrificial economy.

My research in Israel investigates conscientious objection from within the Israeli military, specifically the role that the concept of "conscience" plays in soldiers' refusals to serve as well as how conscience changes their legal and



Figure 1. Untitled (commonly called “the Last Supper”), 1999. Color photograph by Adi Nes, courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

social reception. I am also interested in the process of transformation that causes dedicated soldiers to refuse to participate in such a central part of Israeli life. Through the Combatants for Peace group and former members of its predecessor, Courage to Refuse, as well as other contacts I made with conscientious objectors outside such organizations, I came to know many former soldiers who had gone through the process of refusal and its consequences, including jail, dismissal from the service, and, often, social estrangement from former friends and even family. I conducted multiple interviews with 14 ex-soldiers I became close to during my fieldwork, all of whom refused as part of this movement. I also heard many public testimonies, in which ex-soldiers narrated the experiences contributing to their refusals. Over 20 months in the field, beginning in 2007, I interacted with these ex-soldiers in meetings, at activist and solidarity events, and with family and friends at home as well as conducting audiotaped interviews in various settings. I have selected two cases, those of Avi and Dan, to present in ethnographic detail, though other cases likewise reflect what I call an “interrupted sacrifice.”

Many scholars have dissected the rites of Israeli public commemoration of military sacrifice. The symbolism,

structure, and collective nature of rituals that mourn war dead at funerals, on Memorial Day, or through public education have been shown to frame the nation as the extended network of mourning friends and family and to reinforce the sacrificial nature of the loss. Many studies treat public events as stable text, but a few consider the ways these state initiatives are identified with, modified, or rejected by their audience and explore how military service and loss are processed (Ben-Ari 1998; Kaplan 2008; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2003; Sasson-Levy 2002).

Living the nation

Avi was one of my first contacts in Israel. He grew up in a middle-class family in a suburb of Tel Aviv, where he still lives with his wife and daughter. He is the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, Jews from central Europe. He had been a commando and refused in 2002, together with many of his fellow commandos. Avi was very active in the Combatants for Peace organization. In 1990, at age 17, his heroic ambitions were informed by a romantic attitude toward the idea of communal sacrifice. This was partially because he had been exposed almost exclusively to the sincere veneration

of military sacrifice, as presented in public and educational events and activities of commemoration, and he had not yet encountered critical literature and was relatively unaffected by the ongoing disenchantment with sacrifice in the arts. But he also recognized that joining the military was his rite of passage into full participation in Israeli society, and he pursued it with vigor. Avi recognized that he would accumulate both tangible and intangible benefits through military service. He spoke to me at length about the ways in which he saw his masculinity and citizenship as dependent on service. But he also knew his service would endow him with moral worth and respect and transform his moral status in society, as Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1981) insist sacrifice is meant to do. Iris Jean-Klein (2000, 2001) demonstrated how the domestically based nationalist initiatives of ordinary persons, everyday and self-motivated forms of inculcation with nationalistic ideals in Palestine, are often more significant than organized initiatives. Similarly, considering the eternal question of why people would agree to kill or die for the nation-state, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer (1985:386) suggest that such willingness is partially due to strategies of substantialization by which the obligatory is converted into the desirable. Though Avi's service was legally required, he pursued service with vigor because of the many benefits of participation.

In joining an elite unit, Avi was also signaling high ambitions vis-à-vis a hierarchy of substitutions in military sacrifice. Not all service is the same, and therefore not all endows the same degree of transformation in moral status. Military service entails hierarchies of sacrificial value, as is common to organized sacrificial practice (Lambek 2007; Willerslev 2009). In making great sacrifice in the Israeli military, one does not seek out death or injury; however, the sacrifice is greater with greater loss in an economy of negation. Taking on what is socially recognized as additional risk, physical and mental agony, discomfort, and time contributes to the sacrificial hierarchy of military positions. Avi could have taken an office job close to home, which would have involved little danger and hardly any responsibility and would have allowed him to go home at the end of each day, but he told me he never considered such a position. Intelligence work carried somewhat more cachet, but the real elite choice was combat duty. Likewise, not all combat duty is equal; jobs like pilot and commando carry far more prestige and a greater sense of electness than rank-and-file positions do, as they are more physically and intellectually challenging, a hierarchy that is well recognized throughout society (Kimmerling 2009).

Avi went through an excruciating selection process and subsequent training to become a commando. He would often bring up in conversation his mindset when he joined the army as a teenager, sometimes sarcastically referencing his naïveté, though sometimes with chastened esteem for his intentions. On one of the latter occasions he told me,

I wanted to give the most . . . I felt like I needed to do the most that I was capable of. I believed that I should give the most, because that was like . . . an investment, that would carry through the rest of my life. So I only saw the possibility of giving 100 or 110%. But also, in my family there was a very big emphasis on volunteerism, trying to do the most you can without counting points, which you know, is big in the Israeli ethos as well. I would volunteer with my mother a lot, helping poor families or new immigrants [*olim hadashim*]. I really got from my parents, and also my teachers, that, because this is a new country, that everyone needs to give up a lot, put in a lot of effort for the "experiment" [*nision*] to work. I thought if I did something *really hard*, then my generation could set the country straight, make it stable and like . . . permanent or something. And I could be a hero in the process, so I saw no downside at all.

His words resonate with Jean-Klein's (2001) claims that nationalization (in her case, of Palestinians) often allows people to realize their fantasies as well as fulfill their political-moral commitment, which are often intertwined. Avi and other refusers found in the hegemonic demand for military service a coincidence of their fantasies, their cultural values, and a chance to advance their moral worth.

Such sacrifice is a kind of mediated self-sacrifice. The "mere," "voluntary" acceptance of this risk is a sacrifice in and of itself, a precondition for the amplified possibility of injury or death. This sacrifice is not selfless so much as it is overdetermined by what I call a "coincidence of the good" in society around military service as communal sacrifice. For the individual, the sacrificial economy involves benefits to material and moral worth from participation. Hubert and Mauss note that abnegation in sacrifice and its rhetoric are not without their rewards. "The sacrificer gives up something of himself, the victim, but does not give himself. Prudently he sets himself aside. This is because if he gives, it is partly in order to receive" (Hubert and Mauss 1981:100). Likewise, Anthony Cohen (1996) demonstrated ways in which the practice of nationality also contributes to the formation of the self. But, as Foucault's (1991) descriptions of governmentality and the self-disciplining associated with good citizenship practices make clear, there are likewise benefits to the state's ability to organize and govern. In the Israeli case, the performance of military service is encouraged by state educational initiatives and widespread social pressure to do the most to serve society, an ethic of volunteerism, the moral virtue of difficult service, and benefits to masculinity as well as personal career ambition and the social respectability that accompanies service in Israeli society.

Avi would often refer to combat soldiering as though it were coterminous with Israeli citizenship, referring to his service in an elite unit as the universal Israeli experience,

as most Israelis do whether they have had this experience or not. In fact, combat roles are taken by only some 10 percent of Israelis, and even fewer serve in elite units. The ideal combat soldier and, thus, the Israeli ideal, as described by Meira Weiss (2005), is Ashkenazi (of European Jewish extraction), male, physically able, and attractive, and, I would add, middle class. Tamar Katriel describes the demographic group of soldiers like my interlocutors as “elite pioneers from Eastern and Central Europe for whom the official tale of Zionist settlement has served as a powerful self-defining and self-legitimizing social discourse” (1997:150). Reciprocally, Danny Kaplan (2008: 418) demonstrates the national emotional investment in the welfare of this hegemonic group of Ashkenazi men, especially when engaged in the sacrificial economy of military service.⁴ Many Israelis, and many combat soldiers, do not fit this description, but nearly all of my interlocutors conformed to this mythic ideal, though they avoided discussion of their demographic homogeneity. This rather uncomplicated relationship to the national ideal of sacrifice is not a possibility for many who are not part of the hegemonic group. Despite demonstrations that combat casualties are increasingly from peripheral social groups (Levy 2006), such groups remain peripheral. All military positions are open to all, and acceptance is meritocratic; however, as is the case in U.S. universities, admission often goes to those who were raised with opportunities and is granted with an eye to satisfying institutional ideals.⁵

Refusers most often described their intentions in joining the army as “wanting to be a hero,” and, in fact, two documentary films that take up Israeli conscientious objection, *I Wanted To Be a Hero* (a 2004 Israeli film by Shiri Tzur) and *Raised To Be Heroes* (a 2006 Canadian film by Jack Silberman),⁶ are named according to this refrain. It is worth considering the subjectivity that informs an understanding of one’s actions as heroic. I believe it is best described by what Gayatri Spivak (2004) calls the ability to “metonymize” the self, to imagine the self in an active relationship with the state, the opposite of subalternity. The ability to engage in sacrifice, then, is not compatible with the subaltern subject position, as it involves an understanding of the self as hero and citizen and of self-sacrifice as a contribution to the (appreciative) community.

Many who would become refusers initially saw their military service as a personal intervention in the historical arc of Jewish history. When I asked Avi about his parents’ military experiences, he told me,

The truth is, my father had a very traumatic military experience. He was in war and he was traumatized by it, and for me this fact was always kind of embarrassing. Well, not really embarrassing exactly. I knew it wasn’t his fault. I guess I just saw it as his being too close to exile [*galut*], which made him kind of soft. You know

Woody Allen? Not that extreme, but a little in that direction, with the glasses. (I got contacts.) Anyway, I felt like I was much stronger and with self-confidence, and I was jumping at military service as a chance to correct for my father’s service.

This idea of correcting the past, the personal past being deeply entwined with the national past, was very common. Many talked about feeling like their service was a penance or even an atonement for their relatives who died in the Holocaust.

Dan was a pilot before he refused. Like Avi, he was Ashkenazi and from a middle-class family living in the suburbs of Tel Aviv. He also described his ethical intervention:

They teach you in school that since the Jews left Israel it has been one pogrom after another, only anti-Semitism everywhere. And then in the most shameful moment, the Holocaust [Shoah], only a few Jews in Warsaw even put up a fight, but it is too little too late. To me, I couldn’t understand why no one thought about fighting back a few thousand years ago! Only now do we have the self-respect to defend ourselves?!

Such statements clearly illustrate Spivak’s observations regarding metonymizing the self and the identification with history. They also resonate with Claudio Lomnitz’s (2003:142) observation that national sacrifice is often imagined as an attempt to place oneself in the national narrative. Dan’s words indicate a strong identification with the hegemonic narrative of history and the need for an aggressive posture of self-defense, as taught through public education and fleshed out at home. Rebecca Bryant calls for scholars to examine “how the epic becomes emotional,” stating that “sacrifice and aggression, love and hate, freeing the land and vanquishing the enemy cannot be separated through a single sleight of hand that substitutes epic narrative for emotional agency” (2004:181). In Israel, much of this emotional agency is developed at home, through family stories and losses. There could be no substitute for military service to fulfill what these soldiers believed was their authentic realization as post-Holocaust, native-born Israeli men. Using Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony as intellectual and moral leadership, or determining what is obvious and right, one sees that the historical imagining and subjectivity vis-à-vis sacrifice encouraged by the state is very much what these soldiers identified with and saw as building blocks of their self-worth.

The interruption of the sacrifice

These conscientious objectors all completed their basic three-year service and did reserve duty for several years before they ultimately decided to refuse, even though their

disillusionment with their military service began soon after enlistment. For Avi, it began even before he was deployed.

I remember one of the very first days, they were handing out equipment, and they handed everyone a nightstick. It really surprised me, with the gun I had all these images of using it like in movies I had seen, but I couldn't imagine using this nightstick. It seemed so barbaric! I thought about what it would be like to hit someone with it, and I pictured bones cracking under its force. I hated the thing and I decided I would never use it. Of course, later I did use it because often it is the appropriate weapon for a situation.

Refusers narrated the various ways in which their service did not fit their preconceptions about who the aggressor would be in the situations they encountered as well as about who would pay the price of their service. Uri's experience did not match his expectations. Uri had Israeli parents but grew up partly in California, where he befriended many other children of Israeli parents, a small group of whom went to Israel to join the military instead of going to college. We spoke in English.

When I joined I expected missions to make sense, that we would go to find a specific terrorist, and deal with him professionally, effectively and surgically. But at some point, I began to realize that so many of the missions were arbitrary, and so messy. I remember going to this house looking for someone with a name given to us by intelligence. We got there and of course there were only women, kids and old people there, because that's what happened every time. We had to order the men and women apart, the kids were screaming, people crying, always the same. The next week we were given another name, but were dropped off at the same fucking house! There we are again with the same women, ordering them around all over again, in the same absurd ritual, like some choreographed dance. And I knew they recognized us. It was embarrassing! To be both incompetent and cruel . . . maybe one or the other (laughs) . . . I really began to understand what was going on when my commander told me that it wasn't a good thing if things were "too quiet." I began to see in everything we did that the army was instigating conflict, not just responding defensively.

The distinction between instigation and response is a matter of moral significance for the Israeli military, which self-identifies and self-legitimizes as an exclusively defensive force. Other refusers described being disturbed to discover that they had developed a slowly grown "addiction to power."

For a long time, the refusers generally did not talk about these kinds of things with their fellow soldiers, and they would push their doubts out of their minds. Avi told himself, "You shouldn't change your beliefs about everything all

at once," and "It's not always the time for soul-searching." Even with his doubts, Avi believed for a time that he was helping by being in the Occupied Territories, that he was keeping some of the excesses of other soldiers in check. But this sense faded.

One day we were told to evacuate a house that was going to be demolished. We got there and told the family that they had one hour to leave. There was, of course, rushing around and crying and begging us to change our minds (as if I made that decision). After everyone was out, and they were going to knock it down, one of the women came running to me and begged me to go back inside because her daughter had forgotten her school backpack, which had all of her school supplies inside. My commander would not allow it—for him it was just a school bag. So, I had to tell her no. . . . But what does it mean "I had to"? From her point of view, and from any perspective that matters, I told her no. There I was trying to be the "good soldier," and there I told her no, and that's how the little girl will remember me, and if I am really honest, she's right about me, or she was. And I thought to myself—this is me sacrificing for my country? It can't be. I was the schmuck standing there on this ridiculous premise, when even a child can see that is not the truth.

Avi had conceptualized himself as Isaac until he found himself with the knife in his own hand, until he saw himself as Abraham. His commentary indicated that, being part of a chain of command, his dissatisfaction with the situation at hand did not matter; he had not allowed the girl to retrieve her backpack not because he did not want to or because he hated her but because he was only a single, notorious, and maligned cog in the machine. But he stopped seeing his service as a sacrifice. Before this encounter, he felt great doubt and ambivalence about his service, and, moreover, he attributed moral value to his own ambivalence, to being the "good soldier," but in the moment of crisis, he realized the irrelevance of his own sense of ethics to his actions and their consequences. He realized that he had unintentionally sacrificed ethics. It was a moment in which the alignment of moral good and what was good for the state split, and Avi found himself, in Gramscian terms, no longer consenting but coerced with regard to his ethics. He was prevented from taking action by fear and an inability to conceptualize what dissent would look like within that physical space; that is, he could not imagine the possible actions that he could have taken.

Avi found himself in a situation in which, through military logic of self-preservation, he was not the victim of sacrifice, as he had imagined, but, rather, he realized that most of the loss in his daily experience was Palestinian loss. This does not mean he was not frequently in mortal danger; he was. It means, rather, that he felt for the most part,

instead of his being asked to relinquish more than required in normal ethical relations, which he expected, accepted, and was prepared to give in the sacrificial context, he was demanding more from Palestinians than was ethical under the everyday moral code with which he had been raised regarding respect and dignity in human relationships. Whereas the discourse concerning just causes for military sacrifice in Israel concerned strong and clear ideas of war, national boundaries, and the enemy, the policing missions of occupation contradicted these ideals.

Others echoed similar sentiments. I heard such thoughts voiced, for instance, toward the end of an olive-picking solidarity event in the West Bank organized by Combatants for Peace. My hands had grown sore from plucking clumsily at the small bitter green olives that grow in that region. I stepped aside to stare pointlessly at them and found myself next to Dan, who had come away from the trees to get some water. As we stood there, an army jeep drove by carrying a couple of young soldiers who were monitoring our activities. They waved and chuckled at us, I supposed because they were amused by what are often described as the naive efforts of leftists. Ironically returning their wave, Dan told me,

You get into the mode of military logic, the way you are trained to protect yourself and your soldiers, and there is no choice but to follow it; if not, their lives are on your hands. But then you catch yourself doing things which are just not OK, and certainly not up to the standards I had when I enlisted. That is what happens with the whole human shield thing, which I saw some guys do. When you see it in the newspaper it looks awful, but when you are there and you get deep into the military logic, it makes perfect sense to you. When I realized that there was no way to be there and not follow that logic, I knew I couldn't be there anymore.

Dan was expressing, especially with the example of the human shield (the use of civilians as cover, forbidden by military policy), how, through the structure of military training, the sacrificing soldiers were replaced as victims by unwilling Palestinians. To say that the soldiers expected to be victims sounds extreme, but it does not mean they expected death. Rather, it refers to the mediated self-sacrifice that I have described, to exactly what is meant by the English phrase often used to describe soldiering: as individuals "putting themselves in harm's way" for the greater good. For Dan, the realization that the heaviest price was not being extracted from him interrupted his understanding of his military service as sacrifice. These soldiers were certainly exposed to grave danger and could have been killed at many times, but, for them, this danger did not characterize their service. The logic of military service stresses the avoidance of loss, whereas the logic of the sacrificial economy demands negation and loss. After a long pause, Dan

added, "When I understood there was no good coming out of it, that we weren't helping anything, in fact the opposite, I wasn't willing to risk my life for that anymore. After that, I was basically paranoid about getting injured or something, because if I lost a leg, I wouldn't be able to see myself as a war hero, I'd just be a cripple." In his consideration of voluntary death among the Siberian Chukchi, Rane Willerslev (2009:701) differentiates voluntary death from suicide, with voluntary death (in proper context) conforming to the sacrificial requirement of furthering life through the taking of life. After Dan no longer saw his service as sacrifice, he feared any loss would be suicide-like, pure loss with no redeeming value. He was, in Lomnitz's words, haunted by the "specter of meaningless death" (2003:18), or of a meaningless killing. Michael Lambek (2007:31) also stresses that sacrifice is not just dying or killing but must involve converting this loss into life.

Avi's and Dan's accounts had many elements in common with other stories of refusal I collected. The doubt was followed by the persistent belief that one could make a positive contribution, be the "good soldier" and prevent aggression. This period of ambivalence was very often followed by a crisis triggered by an encounter, often with a child or a woman read by the soldier as undoubtedly innocent (as opposed to young men, who are always suspect).⁷ Seeing themselves otherwise and fantasizing about the Palestinian gaze was universally a gut-wrenching experience for Israeli military refusers. The intersubjective experience is not a comfortable space to inhabit, and as Michael Jackson notes, is rarely achieved willingly but, rather, involves "the loss of the illusion that one's own particularist viewpoint is universally tenable, the pain of seeing in the face and gestures of a stranger the invalidation of oneself" (2009:239). This invalidation was especially devastating for these soldiers, who invested so much of their moral worth in their willingness to sacrifice in the culturally sanctioned method of military service. The moral crisis caused a realization that there was a hiatus in their understanding of themselves as self-sacrificing and of the reality of soldiering, which, afterward, they interpreted politically to mean that service was unethical and they must refuse it. Retrospectively, they described their years of service and efforts to maintain faith in the sacrificial meaning of this service as spent "in denial."

Members of Combatants for Peace recall their epiphany, seeing themselves as the emperor with no clothes, as the highpoint of their story and the moment in which refusal became inevitable. But, actually, no one refused in that moment, which was also a hegemonic manifestation in its own right. Avi did nothing in that moment. The backpack remained inside the house when it was destroyed. One should not conflate hegemony or its rupture with personal power; even after an epiphany of consciousness and even with a gun in his hands, Avi felt

absolutely powerless to act. Something else had to give way before he and others in like circumstances could overcome their own hegemonic subjectivity. This is reflected in the fact that their moral crisis did not align with the social crisis that their refusal engendered. For them, the moral epiphany was central, and their moral change often found sympathy among fellow soldiers and commanders. However, their announcement of their refusal was received as betrayal and resulted in rupture, alienation, and jail. The decision to refuse created greatly asymmetrical effects socially with respect to the moral process.

Refusers like Avi and Dan realized the failure of the sacrificial idiom to account for their service only after many years during which they continued to serve. Their combat experiences were not exceptional, and many others describe similar and often worse events. Anthropologist Eyal Ben-Ari describes, from his own experience, the way soldiers don masks during their service in the territories, which allows them to be vulgar and engage in violent behavior without feeling as though they are violating ethical norms. He quotes a company commander to express what he himself experienced: "As a soldier I am at peace with myself regarding my actions. As a human being I am not at peace with myself" (Ben-Ari 1989:384). Likewise, in the mainstream media, Israeli cinema has produced a series of popular films—*Beaufort* (Cedar 2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (Folman 2008), and *Lebanon* (Maoz 2009)—that share both a hyperrealist aesthetic of modern warfare and the theme that survival in war comes through obedience and preemptive violence, but at the cost of moral confusion and deadly error. However, this realization, although widely held or appreciated, does not dictate refusal, even among the small minority who are disillusioned with military service, because there are additional ethical dimensions. Kaplan describes the way that Israeli national solidarity is built on an idiom of friendship and fraternity that draws on "gendered aspects . . . and is central to the hegemonic arrangements that connect male bonding to militarism and sacrifice" (2008:424), which itself entails ethical responsibility. Nowhere is this responsibility more evident than in the military unit, where the notions of mutual dependence are at their most literal. Likewise, the timing of refusal and the age of refusers should not be thought of as coincidental. Many of Avi's and Dan's peers expressed amazement at conscientious objectors who refuse before entering the military for basic service. At the time of their own enlistment, they were far too invested in military service as the building block for their future to refuse, understanding service as self-actualization that would cause a metamorphosis into citizenship and manhood.

In the dominant idiom of sacrifice in Israeli society, the Isaac soldier is a victim or almost victim, and his sacrifice is rewarded. The refusers' experience as aggressors in the military served as a limit to or an aporia in this sacrificial

metaphor. For Avi and others, the realization of this limit and the decision to refuse their displacement provided a kind of moral resolution to long periods of angst, confusion, and vacillations of conscience. Avi described feelings of depression turning into elation as he organized with soldiers to refuse en masse, in a realignment of conscience and action. One can question to what degree this decision is truly the moral transformation that it appears and that it appeared to most of Israeli society. The critique presented by the refusers differs from that of literary critics who take a liberal approach, criticizing the need for sacrifice and the link implied between the staging of violence and redemption. These conscientious objectors generally do not critique the need for sacrifice or self-sacrifice but, on the contrary, criticize their substitution as victim (unlike other groups of Israeli conscientious objectors). These ex-soldiers are not pacifists, and they do not generally criticize universal conscription into the military. Nearly all I met said they would gladly serve in the same positions if they thought the Israeli army would act defensively and for good causes.⁸ This can mean different things for different refusers but definitely includes an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories.

Hegemony and resistance

The scholarship concerned with nationalist inculcation, hegemonic culture, and subjectivities generally emphasizes the indigenous or subaltern response to state efforts at producing cooperative subjectivities and citizens. Literature on this topic often considers the conditions under which subalterns can resist hegemonic inculcation or pure force. It often focuses on resistance to the state and movements of withdrawal as motivated by resistance to control, assimilation, or incorporation. Scott's latest offering, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), manifests this focus. His study characterizes the transnational marginal minority of Zomia as a community fugitive from state control. He identifies this type of state resistance with people choosing to live in the hills, which, because of geographic obstacles, are far more difficult than the valley regions for the state to govern. He describes their strategic choices to avoid state control, including even strategic illiteracy to avoid accountability. Scott attributes this resistance to evasion of such burdens as taxes and conscription (apt to my case) as well as to political and religious dissent. He notes the movement of people and peoples back and forth between the valley and hills, reminding readers that the Great Wall of China was meant to keep the Chinese in as well as the barbarians out. This work assumes a very strong link between resistance to the state and lack of hegemonic influence or intentional avoidance of hegemonic influence, and this focus is reflected in many other studies.

The idea that alternative and oppositional traditions dispute both hegemonic articulations and state power is

reflected in the work of the Subaltern Studies group, in James Brow's (1990) and Liisa Malkki's (1990) work, as well as in Virginia Dominguez's (1989) work on Israel. Ana María Alonso (1994) maintains an understanding that state control hinges on the persuasiveness of hegemonic narratives and the extent of their distribution. Studies of indigenous resistance to hegemonic cultures take on a similar theoretical framework (Kearney 1991, 1998, 2001; Lyons 2005; Smith 1990; Warren and Jackson 2002).

Many of these studies provide very nuanced accounts, which break, in K. Sivaramakrishnan's words, "the dyadic relationship between domination and resistance" (2005:349) and challenge ideas of false consciousness. These accounts subtly present multiple modes of intentionalities and loyalties and excavate the ambiguities between coercion and consent (Bach 2010; Dunk 2002; Gilroy 1991; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Silverman 2000; Valeri 1985). Though the best accounts acknowledge that hegemony is never a unified or coherent system of beliefs, they remain set in the idea that inculcation is bound to consent and that counterhegemony can be associated with resistance. Likewise, the assumption remains that resistance comes from the subaltern group, not the hegemonic one. Carol Greenhouse (2005) breaks the exclusive focus on the subaltern by locating Scott's "hidden texts" in the halls of power, deployed by those who represent the state. However, in the case of Israeli military refusal, though the soldiers are part of the hegemonic group, their identification is not with the desires of the state but, rather, with their own moral correctness (as encouraged by the state). I am suggesting that identification with hegemonic forms and narratives as well as state-encouraged political subjectivities can also lead to resistance to the state. It is not enough to examine to what extent inculcation occurs; scholars must also ask specifically about the ideals with which people are inculcated and how they alter agency and its object.

I have argued that because resisters like my interlocutors had the most uncompromising identification with the idea of mythic or heroic sacrifice, the discrepancy between the ideal and their experience caused a moral crisis. Members of this group, then, who were expected to be the least likely to refuse, as evidenced by the military investment in them and their image, were actually the most likely to refuse. The state encouraged a historical narrative that required sacrifice, a subjectivity through which a young person could imagine his or her self-sacrifice as heroic, and a conception of citizenship that required intervention. The sacrificial moral economy and not the state as supersubject, or state policy as such, is the ideal that is inculcated in these young people. Asked to participate in activities that they found violated this moral economy, they experienced a moral crisis resulting in their retrenchment into their understanding of the moral economy according to rules de-

rived from the Akedah, the hegemonic idiom of national sacrifice.

The case of Israeli conscientious objectors demonstrates that the binary predicated by many scholars of valley and hill, or inculcated and oppositional, does not characterize all paths by which people come to dissent and resist the state. Likewise, this counterexample reveals that, although we may legitimately be able to describe such evasive groups as avoiding state control, we cannot characterize their "valley" counterparts in reciprocal terms, that is, seeking to be controlled. Rather, their identification with the national narrative provides a sense of place and belonging. Likewise, the metonymizing of the self allows for certain types of agency to be imagined. When the state promotes more diffuse hegemonic values, such as sacrifice, equality, and volunteerism, and not only loyalty to the state, there is always potential for reinterpretation. Resistance is thus completely possible from those who are inculcated with hegemonic values. Moreover, this type of resistance is very problematic for the state because people who are deeply invested in their relationship with it are dedicated to changing a state they see as wrong, as opposed to avoiding it. We can use this distinction to differentiate between conscientious objectors in Israel and draft evaders and deserters.

Hegemonic subjectivity that can resist state power certainly does not preclude dynamics of subalternity and state power. Not all groups are inculcated with the idea of national sacrifice to the same extent as the hegemonic group, just as not all can identify with the ideal of the elite soldier, as described above. There are those who see military service as a contractual obligation, one that they may pay with service directly for benefits in an economic exchange. Some jobs in the military offer more direct translation into practical job opportunities. For example, Ethiopian immigrants are often streamlined into the difficult and unglamorous border police unit (M'Gav), service that often translates into regular police jobs and for this reason has been favored among this immigrant group. There are also those who see military service as a hardship to be endured, which also does not fit the sacrificial logic that elite-soldier refusers held. Refusers met many of these resisters in jail. These other soldiers often hated the army with a passion, because of the financial burden of service, exclusion, and bad treatment. However, these other soldiers, instead of going to the press or working on public statements and articulate and compelling letters of refusal, deserted or were insubordinate, or they did drugs. Although desertions have always occurred, before the first conscientious refusals during the First Lebanon War, they were not articulated as conscientious and often involved marginal members of the military service, office workers or combat soldiers filling "blue-collar" rank-and-file jobs. Such desertions are not

thought of in Israeli society as conscientious but, rather, as personal failures to adjust to the responsibility and discipline demanded by the military system or as an antisocial unwillingness to sacrifice. By contrast, the refusal of elite soldiers, who have already demonstrated their ability and willingness to enthusiastically participate in the sacrificial economy, is not taken as a personal inadequacy but as a moral critique. Orna Sasson-Levy (2002) and Edna Lomsky-Feder and Tamar Rapoport (2002) have explored how non-hegemonic and immigrant groups in Israel—those whose refusal is more likely to be viewed negatively—navigate complicated identities regarding the relationship between masculinity, the military, and citizenship.

Conclusion

I suggest that because these elite soldiers were inculcated with the (state-encouraged) sacrificial moral economy, and not with the state as supersubject, resistance was possible for them. Scott points out that the system has the most to fear from those subordinates among whom it has been the most successful: “The disillusioned mission boy is always the graver threat” (1990:107). This is illustrated by the intensity behind Israeli conscientious objectors’ activism against the state. But in this case, the soldiers did not become disillusioned with the sacrificial economy or their commitment to intervention, which they continued to uphold through difficult activism; rather, they were disillusioned with the state and its policies. This reaction certainly cannot describe all cases. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990) describes situations of loyalty to the state as *paterfamilias*, which entails a different kind of attachment, one with less focus on self-disciplining. However, the distinction between the possible objects of inculcation is relevant to cases in which the citizen is encouraged to self-govern in a certain moral economy.

The separation of hegemonic moral inculcation from consent, and, equally, from the dyadic focus on the opposition between the subaltern and the state, has implications for anthropological thinking concerning the object of moral loyalties. An explanation of this case that presented refusal as a kind of disillusionment with hegemonic values would have to ignore much of the ethnographic data, which points to experiences of disillusionment on enlistment, moral resolution at the time of refusal, and a continued enthusiasm for national sacrifice. These observations have implications for studies concerning public ideological initiatives, through education or other forms of governmentality, by imputing a degree of fragility to inculcation of values (both political and economic) rather than of loyalty to the state itself. In fact, in many places, it is diffuse values and forms of governmentality that are promoted by public policy rather than loyalty to the state or a specific leader, which in many contexts appears undemocratic and authoritarian.

Gramsci emphasizes the fragility of hegemony, in terms not only of its reach but also of its potential for going awry. His idea of hegemony is not of “a finished and monolithic ideological formation” but “a problematic, contested political process of domination and struggle” (Gramsci 1971:102). Likewise, Alonso (1994:381) notes the risk of polysemy in articulations of hegemony. This prompts asking how scholars should address the question of political consciousness, specifically in social movements of withdrawal. I suggest that certain forms need to be decoupled—specifically, that the moral crisis or crisis of consciousness should be distinguished from the social crisis, here illustrated by the distinction between elite soldiers’ moral epiphany and the uproar at their decision to refuse. To account for the powerlessness felt by Avi, an elite, armed soldier, to intervene in a situation he sees as unjust, we must distinguish between hegemony and personal power. Finally, we should recognize that resistance to the state arises not only from marginal or subaltern spheres but also, often more threateningly, from those who are highly inculcated with hegemonic and state-fostered values.

Notes

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1. I use *conscientious objectors* to refer to all those who object to military service for reasons of conscience, including selective or politically contingent objections.

2. The description of military actions as violence is taboo except in the radical Left of Israeli society. As Michael Warner (2003) asserts, the terminology of violence is increasingly used only in contrast to legitimate force.

3. The hermeneutic significance of the essential connection between sacrifice and community has been explored in the work of Abdellah Hammoudi (1993).

4. This characteristic differentiates this group’s inculcation from the subjectivity created through patronage, as described by Daniel Linger in *The Hegemony of Discontent* (1993).

5. There are always exceptions to the rule, what Orna Sasson-Levy calls “limited inclusion” (2002:377–378).

6. Tzur’s film was released in the United States with the title *On the Objection Front*.

7. This gendered aspect of the “already guilty” condition is related to the privileges and burdens attached to the category of “women and children.” I think it is worth pointing out that the “already guilty” category, for soldiers, is their own mirror image in Palestinian society, and yet it is with this group—young Palestinian men—that they are least able to empathize.

8. Following Michael Mann's idea of civil militarism, Sara Helman (1999) has termed this commitment Israeli "civil militarism."

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