

# Incentivized Obedience: How a Gentler Israeli Military Prevents Organized Resistance

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**ABSTRACT** In this article, I offer an ethnographic examination of neoliberal techniques of control through absence by the Israeli military, the state institution most associated with discipline, indoctrination, and direct coercion. I highlight the ways that the apparent withdrawal of the state from practices of indoctrination and the punishment of conscientious objectors are accompanied by a shift in recruitment and training that emphasizes self-advancement and social mobility above national and ideological commitments. While in the past the Israeli state and military focused exclusively on shaping self-sacrificing citizens, today it invests a great deal of its effort in structuring the calculated choices of self-interested individuals toward favorable outcomes. I explore the uneven but strategic deployment of incentivized governance and consider some of the effects of these techniques for the meaning of engaged citizenship and the politics of state violence in a militarized society. Further, I demonstrate that the lightening of disciplinary sanctions in favor of individual freedom is an effective form of weakening dissent and that it confounds efforts to constitute organized resistance to militarism, leaving activists floundering to find effective ways to express their political concerns. [*neoliberalism, governance, military, Israel*]

**RESUMEN** En este artículo ofrezco un análisis etnográfico de las técnicas neoliberales de control a través de ausencia de los militares israelíes, la institución estatal más asociada con disciplina, adoctrinamiento, y directa coerción. Pongo de relieve las formas en que el aparente retiro del estado de las prácticas de adoctrinamiento y el castigo de los objetores de conciencia son acompañado por un cambio en el reclutamiento y el entrenamiento que enfatiza el auto-avance, y la movilidad social por encima de compromisos nacionales e ideológicos. Mientras en el pasado el estado Israelí y los militares se concentraron exclusivamente en moldear ciudadanos abnegados, hoy invierten gran parte de sus esfuerzos en estructurar las opciones calculadas de individuos que actúan en interés propio hacia resultados favorables. Exploro la utilización desigual pero estratégica de gobernanza incentivada y considero algunos de los efectos de estas técnicas para el significado de ciudadanía comprometida y la política de violencia del estado en una sociedad militarizada. Además, demuestro que el aligerar las sanciones disciplinarias en favor de la libertad individual es una forma efectiva de debilitar la disidencia y que confunde los esfuerzos para constituir una resistencia organizada al militarismo, dejando a los activistas luchando para encontrar maneras efectivas de expresar sus preocupaciones políticas. [*neoliberalismo, gobernanza, militares, Israel*]

Orit stepped into my apartment and dropped her bag on the floor. She collapsed onto my futon, put her feet up, and asked for some tea. As I walked over to fill the

electric kettle, I asked impatiently: “Sooo, what happened?!” “I have no idea.” “What do you mean?” “They released me.” “How did that happen?!” “I have no idea.” Orit, whom I had

worked with for more than a year at this point, was flabbergasted that she had received an exemption from Israel's obligatory military service. She had reported on her enlistment day and declared her refusal to serve in the military due to reasons of conscience, specifically an ideological and ethical objection to the occupation of the Palestinians. Because military refusal is illegal in Israel and is officially punishable by prison sentences that range from about a month to two years, she had expected to be sent to military prison. But instead she, like many conscientious objectors in Israel these days, was released from service on another exemption, in her case on the basis of a nonexistent anxiety disorder.<sup>1</sup>

As is the case for most military recruits and always for women, Orit could have taken a noncombat office job, where she would not have to personally engage in violence or participate directly in any of the activities she found objectionable, such as protecting settlers or serving as a soldier in the Occupied Territories. However, Orit ultimately decided that her objections to the occupation were so strong that she did not want to lend any support to military activities. She decided that she would not enlist, and although she was scared, she was ready to accept jail as punishment for her refusal. When she informed the military of her decision, she was passed between different offices for two days, spending much of her time sitting in hallways and waiting. Eventually, Orit was sent to the *kaban*, the military mental health officer. He asked her why she felt that she could not serve in the army, about her social life, and about her anxieties. Soon, she was granted exemption from military service, something that happened to many of the young people I worked with during my first period of fieldwork from 2007 to 2009. Orit told me:

I went into the *bakum* [recruitment center] and asked them to arrest me, and they told me to go home. It shows that one girl more or less making coffee is not really relevant for them. They already have all the girls in Israel making coffee, they don't need one more who is burdened with all kinds of "conscience." I wanted to make a statement, I wanted this to be public, and it didn't occur to me until they sent me home that they would just not let that happen. Now it is obvious to me that not having any scandal is worth way more to them than anything they might want from me. What was I supposed to do at that point, chain myself to the gates? Set myself on fire?

Orit did neither of these, finding that instead her well-planned intervention into Israeli politics was prematurely aborted by the military's new informal policy of releasing people from service who do not want to serve, so long as they do not draw public attention to themselves. In the years following the Second Intifada (2000–2005), only a small number of military refusers have been jailed, those few who left the military no choice by insisting loudly to the media that their objections were conscientious and refusing to accept an exemption. This represents a significant departure from the Israeli state's approach in even the recent past, which relied on harsh punishment to dissent such as military refusal. This change in enlistment policy is part of a wider shift

that has resulted in greater cooperation with the state while weakening organized resistance in Israel. Counterintuitively, this enhancement of state control has been accomplished through an apparent retreat of the state from coercion and ideological indoctrination.<sup>2</sup>

Through the example of Israel, I show how many militaries have adopted a gentler approach. This includes easing mandatory recruitment requirements as well as relaxing harsh disciplinary methods during the training process. My research on recent changes in the Israeli Defense Forces reveals a shift in focus from nationalistic ideology to incentivization, including promises of self-advancement and social mobility. While previously the Israeli state and military focused exclusively on shaping self-sacrificing citizens, today they invest a great deal of effort in structuring the calculated choices of self-interested individuals toward favorable outcomes. In the ethnography that follows we can witness a significant but ultimately deceptive withdrawal of the state from traditional realms of governance. I present neoliberal techniques of control through absence by the military, the state institution most associated with direct intervention through discipline, indoctrination, and coercion. I explore the uneven but strategic deployment of incentivized governance and consider some of the effects of these techniques for the meaning of engaged citizenship and the politics of state violence in a militarized society. My research suggests that this shift has significant consequences for shaping individual decisions regarding enlistment, with the gentler approach seeming to be more effective in generating consent to military service.

Not only does the gentler approach better ensure civilian cooperation, my research with Israeli dissidents finds that the state's newfound restraint has been remarkably effective in suppressing organized resistance. The shift to a much more tolerant approach has led the state to essentially ignore ideological dissent as irrelevant and unthreatening. I show that when the military allows people exemption from service instead of jailing refusers, and the state ignores protest rather than crushing it, dissidents are effectively cut off from their most potent sources of criticism. We will see that this shift, which displaces older techniques of control, similarly unmoors existing techniques of dissent, which were calibrated specifically to resist the direct coercion of the state. I demonstrate that the lightening of disciplinary sanctions in favor of individual freedom is an effective form of weakening dissent and confounds efforts to organize resistance to militarism, leaving activists floundering as they try to find effective ways to express their political concerns. Finally, my research suggests that new techniques of governance call for new techniques of resistance.

## CONTROL THROUGH ABSENCE

The gentler and incentivized approach described here is consistent with techniques of control identified as neoliberal governance. Anthropologists of neoliberal governance have recently demonstrated that the absence of restraint should

not be mistaken for a “retrenchment, withdrawal, or recusal of the state” (Wacquant 2012:68). It is similarly not a ceding of sovereign power to corporate and market interests. Rather, governance through strategic absence is an intentional and effective form of controlling citizens (Rose 1996). While much early research assumed that neoliberal forces displaced and replaced the state, scholars such as Stephen Collier demonstrated that neoliberalism is a political rationality that functions within many state institutions and is itself a mode of governance (2009, 2011). Bruce Kapferer has referred to this phenomenon as the corporate state (2005). He observes that market rationality is not limited to apolitical realms of life but rather has transformed the political state—the modern state—as well as the “social order commanded by the state” (2010:126–127). This deceptively laissez-faire approach to governance relies on the self-interest of its citizens to achieve its goals and as such is characterized by a noticeable lack of coercive tactics and ideological indoctrination.<sup>3</sup>

However, anthropologists have shown that this apparent abandonment of ideology is largely illusory. In fact, the avoidance of ideological and political discourse by the state does purge the political and ethical consequences of state policy (Ferguson 2010). Aihwa Ong’s examination of neoliberal techniques of power has been foundational in revealing the infiltration of economic forces into the political and ethical domains of life (2006). More recently, researchers have demonstrated the intentional deployment of neoliberal techniques of governance in order to control the social order. In *The Moral Neoliberal* (2012), Andrea Muehlebach describes how the state plays a significant role in engineering the mass voluntary mobilization of an ethical citizenry precisely through the strategic abandonment of social welfare policies. The case considered here shows how these techniques of control through absence are used to entice individuals into the military, the very heart of state sovereignty and the institution assumed to be the most resistant to market rationality. Yet today even classic expressions of state sovereignty, such as war, deploy market rationality. Carol Greenhouse has shown the ways in which neoliberal discourse has been used to legitimize U.S. military tribunals (2005). Similarly, Kathleen Hall has examined the neoliberal “anti-politics of security,” showing how the British state, while occupying a “purportedly ideology-free and pragmatic role,” nevertheless advanced the “war on terror” and other policies with heavy political and ethical consequences (2011:14).

While these cases largely focus on government discourse and policy, this case examines the effects of neoliberal governance on individual and group deliberations of citizens. We will see that choices regarding service in the Israeli military, despite their public perception as ethically fraught and controversial, are increasingly determined by a depoliticized calculus. While Israeli militarism, and militarization generally, is often treated as a matter of ideology and political doctrine, we will see that the relationship between citizen compliance and political consequence, generally assumed to

be strong in democratic societies, is blurred by the state techniques of control. The apparent retreat from coercion, punishment, and ideology allows the state to displace much of the criticism and demands for accountability formerly directed at it. This case contributes to our understanding of the ethics of neoliberal governance by revealing the deleterious effects on organized dissent. It also has implications for anthropological understandings of the politics of military violence, demonstrating that the technocratic aspects of the military institution are as important as the ideological justifications that are the focus of much existing scholarship.

### THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF MILITARY RECRUITMENT

The changes in Israeli military practices described here can help us understand shifts in the approach to military recruitment globally. I identify two central and complementary trends: the use of incentivization rather than discourses of sacrifice and patriotism in recruitment efforts and the suppression of dissent through an easing of exemption criteria. Both of these processes are readily observable in the changing practices of military institutions in other parts of the world. The dynamics of incentivization are by now widespread, especially in U.S. military recruitment. Anthropologists have observed that U.S. recruits are frequently motivated to enlist in the military in order to obtain benefits and to better their financial situation. Matthew Gutmann and Catherine Lutz offer us valuable data in the form of the life and enlistment histories of disillusioned U.S. soldiers (2010). In these stories, we hear that for many soldiers the promises of personal advancement advertised by the military play a significant role in their decision to enlist, though often these benefits fail to materialize. These incentives include the promise of escaping a background of poverty, expanding job prospects, on-the-job training, advanced technological training, funding for education, and even a path to citizenship. The importance of incentives in the recruitment decisions of U.S. soldiers is further emphasized in the ethnographic writing of Kenneth MacLeish (2013) and Zoë Wool (2015). What stands out in all three anthropological accounts is the jarring dissonance between the often pragmatic and material ambitions of those who enlist and the violent reality of military service.

This redirection from sacrifice to incentivization is not incidental but, rather, intentional in military recruitment and training. Political scientist Alison Howell has traced the U.S. military’s shift to an emphasis on self-regulation and personal growth. In particular, she has documented a downplaying of training designed to break recruits in favor of the cultivation of resilience among U.S. soldiers. Resilience is understood as increasing happiness and mental fitness in order to produce a more efficient fighting force and save on healthcare costs in the postcombat period (Howell 2015). Similarly, current recruitment campaigns portray not sacrifice but personal achievement, as seen in such recent slogans as “Be All You Can Be” and “Army of One.” This is a clear shift to individual

advancement from such earlier slogans as, for example, “Join the People Who’ve Joined the Army” or “This Is the Army,” not to mention earlier campaigns such as Uncle Sam’s “I want YOU for U.S. Army” or “I’m Doing My Duty. Are You?” The new recruitment slogans are also notable for emphasizing the individual in an organization traditionally associated with teamwork, hierarchy, and discipline. Current recruitment campaigns emphasize technical training and job preparation while downplaying combat service or other engagement with enemy forces.<sup>4</sup>

One technique for suppressing dissent used by the Israeli military is quietly making it easier to avoid military service. This can also be seen in states that maintain a mandatory draft, for example, in Greece and Turkey. The formal policy regarding military refusal in these two states has not changed. It is illegal, and officially it is prosecuted, as is the case in Israel. However, in both Greece and Turkey we also see efforts by the state to avoid the necessity of such prosecutions, which have in the past served to consolidate dissent and attract unwanted domestic and international attention. There has been a simultaneous easing of exemption criteria and an expanding of the possibilities for avoiding military service. Similar to the Israeli case, these states have chosen not to combat dissent on the ideological level but rather to open the pressure valve on dissent by creating a system that is increasingly tolerant of those seeking to avoid military service.

Greece began to ease exemption criteria for its longstanding mandatory enlistment in 1997, but this has accelerated in recent years. In 1997, in response to claims of conscientious objectors, the military began to offer unarmed military service. In 2001, alternative service was allowed for conscientious objectors. These initial accommodations reached new and arguably more neoliberal heights in 2004, when Greece started to allow people to buy out their military service after a certain age. Also, whereas previously draft evaders living abroad were unable to get passports or visit the country lest they be forced to conscript on entry, both of these policies were reversed in 2004. War Resisters International reports (almost regretfully) that many would-be conscientious objectors are taking advantage of these eased exemptions, and as a result the number of public conscientious objectors is far below the number who avoid military service for reasons of dissent (2005). In an even bolder move, as of 2011 some draft evaders have been fined rather than jailed. Turkey has followed a similar pattern. In 2011, it allowed men of a certain age to pay to avoid compulsory service, and in 2014 it loosened this exemption further by lowering the required age and the required payment.

In the past, significant conscientious objector movements in Greece and Turkey served as rallying points for antigovernment protests. This public dissent has been a challenge for these states, which have had to defend their policies against domestic and international criticism, including exorbitant military expenditures and weapons importation, accusations of occupation (Cyprus), and in Turkey’s case the harsh repression of Kurdish populations in the eastern

regions of the country. By providing opportunities for avoiding military service, these countries preemptively suppress dissent from many of those who would have otherwise declared themselves to be conscientious objectors. Only the most ideological conscientious objectors remain, and because of their diminished numbers, they are exceptions rather than an organized movement.

### THE RETREAT FROM DISCIPLINE

The disciplinary approach aimed at shaping compliant citizens has long guided Israeli military training and the state’s administration of its Jewish population. Don Handelman has demonstrated the ways in which Israelis were trained in bureaucratic competence from a very young age for the purposes of state control, including mandatory military service (2004). This included inculcation with Zionist values such as collectivism and sacrifice to achieve consent to state demands, the foremost among them, again, being military service (Kimmerling 2001).<sup>5</sup> In the early years of the state, the military held nearly complete ideological hegemony due to early nationalist fervor and its role in the War of Independence. This was accompanied by near-complete media control by the state. As such, early ideological dissent did not find public expression and remained on the private level (e.g., through self-injury to avoid service). As the years passed and Israel’s military engaged in practices of occupation and wars of choice, critique emerged concerning the use of the military and the role of Israeli militarism in society. This resistance culminated with the phenomenon of conscientious objection, which emerged for the first time in the late 1980s during the first Lebanon war and has returned in waves since.

I conducted fieldwork during two periods, from 2007 to 2009 and from 2012 to 2014. In the first period, I conducted fieldwork with two conscientious objector movements in Israel as well as with military personnel who handle the treatment of military refusers and AWOL and disobedient soldiers. In the second period, I researched the nongovernmental organization Aharai, which encourages enlistment among marginalized youth. During both of these periods I was privy to the enlistment process of many young Israelis who joined the military without hesitation or doubt. Here, I synthesize these fieldwork experiences to demonstrate that a shift has occurred in the way in which the military attempts to motivate young recruits, secure their compliance, and preempt public dissent.

Members of one conscientious objector group, Combatants for Peace, enlisted in the military during the 1990s and performed basic service and several years of reserve duty. They refused to continue service during an intense period of the Second Intifada (2002–2003) and became activists supporting conscientious objection. The members of the younger group I worked with, Think before You Enlist, were going through the process of refusing military service. Among other activities with this second group, I conducted research with a youth group founded by the

antimilitary organization New Profile, in which young people could gather to discuss their options for avoiding military service. Each week a different antimilitary occupation text or other medium would be discussed, along with the personal developments of the members who were grappling with the enlistment process.

For the older generation, the military response in 2002 and 2003 had been swift and fairly uniform. When they declared their refusal to serve, they were incarcerated in military prison for refusal to obey orders. Their punishments attracted the attention of the national media, who scrambled to interview the refusers for print and on television. Their stories and names made headlines in all the major news outlets. These conscientious objectors represent a successful case of dissent because they convinced many in Israeli society of the heroic nature of their resistance and introduced significant doubt about the morality of Israeli Defense Forces practices into the public discourse (Weiss 2014).

During my fieldwork, I was surprised to discover that the younger group of would-be military refusers, including Orit, were encountering a very different approach from the military on the matter of conscientious objection. The military had begun to release, without legal consequence, those who claimed that they had conscientious objections to military service. Because Israeli defense laws granted the military broad discretion regarding its application of recruitment policy, no formal policy changes had to be implemented for this shift to occur. Would-be refusers were released on completely depoliticized grounds unrelated to their intentions, for example, psychological unfitness or lack of suitability. Many in this group were shocked to discover that they would not be jailed and that there would be no formal consequences.

One of my key fieldwork relationships was with Michael, a prominent prosecutor in the military's legal department. He told me that the shift in policy after 2003, from imprisonment to release, was done explicitly to disarm the symbolic power of resistance that the military had unintentionally provided refusers by punishing them. During the height of the Second Intifada, the military reacted to these refusals as it always had in the past, by cracking down on dissenters and denouncing them publicly. But since then the military, specifically its legal and public relations branches, had reconsidered this approach, concluding that the policy of jailing conscientious objectors had largely backfired.<sup>6</sup> Michael said, "We were making martyrs. But then someone came up with the great idea (*patent*) to just release them. It was brilliant! Then they can't say anything. What can they say? That the military is crushing their civil rights? No! There is nothing to say. And no one is interested in talking to them." The military had long sought to demonstrate a no-tolerance approach to refusal. But punishing refusers with imprisonment drew a great deal of attention to their cause. The state's discipline had provided the conscientious objectors with a public soapbox for dissent.

An officer responsible for handling cases of resistant recruits described some of the changes he experienced. "Years ago, there was no restraint. We would see refusers or deserters and sentence them immediately to 28 days, and everyone told you that you did a great job. Then I guess there was a big reaction and people were asking questions, so now the process is a lot slower. They see me, then they go to this guy, then they go to that guy, they try to convince them, and maybe they go to the *kaban* (mental health officer) . . . Most of the time either they enlist or they are released." This officer also described not only the easing of exemption but also a process of individual accommodation, in which recruits are promised easy service and encouraged to "just try it." He told me that he thought this gentler approach was better because both the military and would-be refusers are "more satisfied" with it.

The change in policy has been very successful in preventing organized resistance. Conscientious objection in Israel has been a key form of public protest against the military. The longevity of Israeli conscientious objector activism has far outlasted the individual terms of imprisonment. Combatants for Peace is still extremely active more than a decade later. In contrast, since the military began releasing conscientious objectors, there have been very few attempts at organized collective public resistance, and even the few attempts at collective organization have been symbolically impotent in the public sphere for not having been founded on the martyrdom of state-imposed imprisonment. Thus, the Israeli military's release of would-be conscientious objectors has effectively eliminated one of the most significant forms of domestic protest. It is clear that, for many reasons, the Israeli state cannot return to the era of ideological hegemony as in the early days of the state. Thus, its displacement of this form of collective resistance is especially significant.

With conscientious objection off the table, effective forms of protest proved elusive. Orit energetically debated her further actions, suggesting that she was considering chaining herself to the gates of the enlistment center and setting herself on fire. She repeated this sardonic statement about her impending self-immolation in the group meeting later on. The free-flowing group discussions, over vegan snacks and juice, encouraged members to raise topics of concern. Others in the group identified strongly with Orit's frustration and expressed anxiety regarding their dilemmas of accountability and the limits of their own ability to intervene. Members of the group nervously discussed the merits and appropriateness of different platforms of dissent, from voting in elections, submitting editorials to newspapers, writing talkbacks—comments on online newspaper articles—arguing with friends, going to protests, and participating in illegal solidarity events to going to the West Bank town of Bil'in in order to protest the separation wall, where they would likely be shot at by the border police. These anxiety-ridden discussions reveal that by releasing dissenting individuals, the military closed established avenues

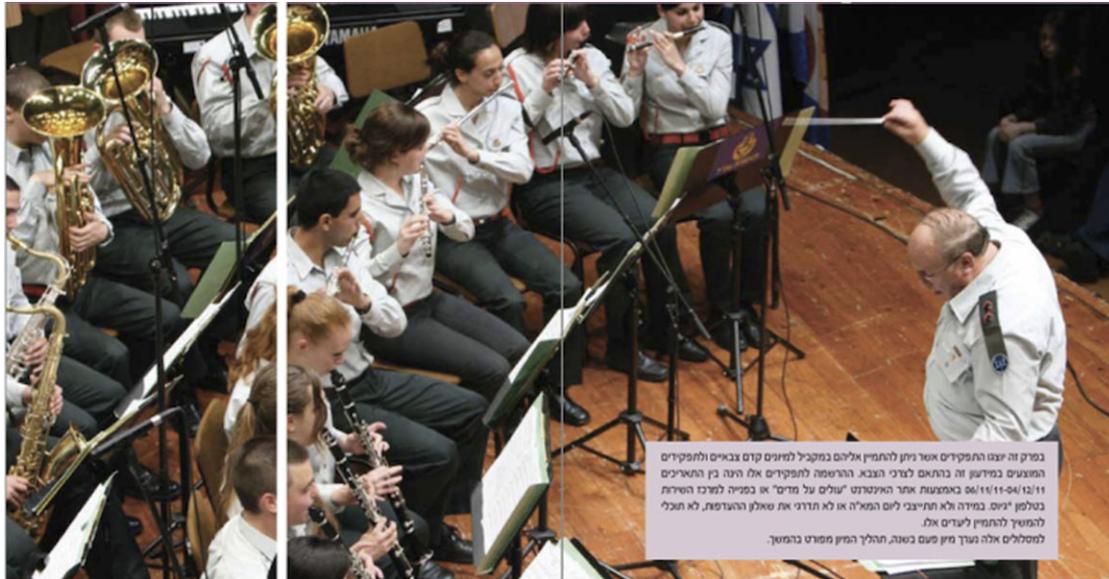


FIGURE 1. Images from an Israeli military recruitment brochure highlighting the available musical and theatrical opportunities.

of resistance, confounding the dissenters and leaving them unsure where to intervene.

### A POSTDISCIPLINARY MILITARY

Several observers of the Israeli Defense Forces have noted a shift toward professionalization and away from collectivism (Cohen 1995; Levy 2010; Levy et al. 2007). These accounts assumed that, although the Israeli military and state would prefer an ideologically committed, self-sacrificing citizen, the change was driven by the demands of the post-Fordist economy and the corresponding demands of young people. But here I will argue that the military has embraced the calculative, contractual approach as a way to convince young Israelis to invest more fully and consistently in military service, not primarily as an obligation but as an opportunity for self-advancement. The military actively promotes service as a tool for self-interest and social mobility. Years ago, a young person would report to the recruitment center on the appointed day and be assigned to a job or a unit based on physical and educational capability and military need. Today, recruitment is rationalized and incentivized, and the process is much longer, competitive, and all-consuming.

These days the enlistment process starts a year or more in advance and often involves tremendous amounts of time and energy. Many Israelis, of all classes, understand military service to be a competitive advantage in their postmilitary lives. For both young men and women, these opportunities can be found in the military's technology and intelligence units, which offer advanced technical training and educational opportunities in computer science and in other fields coveted in the technocentric Israeli job market. This symbiotic relationship is evident to young people, who see the opportunity of early advanced training and prestige as well as the opportunity cost of not exploiting this "free" resource. These young people are not misreading the economic

landscape. Israel has been undergoing a process of economic neoliberalization over a number of years that, among other changes, has reconfigured the relationship between the military and the economy. Advanced technical training in the military is a major advantage in hiring decisions, saving established companies the cost of education and on-the-job training and providing essential skills for technology start-up companies (Federman 2004; Rhoads 2007). Young men (and a very small number of women) also have the high-prestige option of pursuing elite combat positions. These recruits compete for hierarchically ranked positions, with evaluative criteria including physical ability, educational success, IQ, psychological stability, and temperament.<sup>7</sup>

Military representatives visit schools to advertise enlistment opportunities. Brightly colored packets of information arrive in the mail and are pored over by the young enlistees and their parents alike. These brochures describe options in military service in exciting and positive terms that focus on the benefits for personal development. Musical and theatrical opportunities for the artistically minded are highlighted (see Figures 1–3). Aside from the uniforms, these pictures evoke an atmosphere more readily associated with a summer camp for creative and gifted students. Recently, a campaign was launched to assure vegans that the military would meet their needs, including the provision of faux leather boots. Young people are invited to information sessions in which they are presented with further details regarding their various opportunities. When they return home, they are eagerly questioned by parents keen to be included in the decision process. Many families see the potential not only for prestigious training but also for networking with "high-quality" kids from "good families." After the information sessions, young people undergo a battery of tests according to their ambitions. There are physical tests, tests of general and specific knowledge, spatial tests, psychological tests, tests



**FIGURE 2.** Images from an Israeli military recruitment brochure highlighting the available musical and theatrical opportunities.

of popular culture, and on and on. Personality tests use the latest in organizational psychology, asking opaque but supposedly insightful questions that will allow the military to match individuals with their ideal position within the organization, allowing them to reach their full potential. Afterward, young people are invited to come and try out for different units through high-pressure interviews, physical tests, and additional psychological evaluations.

As I witnessed many young people going through the process of recruitment, including friends and relatives of refusers, families I know from personal networks, and participants in the Aharai program, it became clear that the question of whether one agrees with military actions and the ethical significance of joining the military is not often central to family discussions. Previously, when the education system and the military focused their full enlistment energy on shaping citizens' ideological compliance with demands for sacrifice, it mattered whether state pedagogical and disciplinary efforts had succeeded in producing obedient citizens. Whether they should perform military service was a question that new soldiers were forced to ask themselves by virtue of the state's narrow focus on the legitimacy of the Israeli military endeavor. The military no longer requires its recruits to answer this question actively. This is not to suggest that the military no longer offers ideological indoctrination; it invests a great deal in this effort, as can be seen in frequent lectures and ideological field trips for soldiers. But consent is no longer offered as the only or most central reason for participation in military service.

Even after one joins the military, there is a distinct lack of disciplinary techniques compared with instructional methods of only ten years ago. I learned from intergenerational interactions between parents and children that, in contrast to the experiences of the older generation, today there is no longer a dominant culture of humiliation, harassment, or breaking down of soldiers in the Israeli military. Training is run on positive encouragement, especially incentivization (Harel 2013). Parents are in constant phone contact with commanders, worrying about and advocating for their



**FIGURE 3.** Images from an Israeli military recruitment brochure highlighting the available musical and theatrical opportunities.

children's competitive advancement and gentle treatment. Many activities have been introduced that are oriented toward developing pride and self-mastery in recruits, such as intertroop competitions and races in which awards are given. Meanwhile, the violence they are being trained for is sublimated, and the assumed enemies, Palestinians and Arabs, are rarely mentioned by name. As technology plays a larger role in Israel's day-to-day warfare, jobs focusing on computers, math, and physics have become increasingly prestigious and more detached from the idea of the military as an organ whose main purpose is absorbing and dispensing violence, a characteristic commonly found in advanced militaries today. In Israel, this new approach is undergirded by the wealth, in part U.S. financial and military support, that allows not only incentivization but also the dramatic power disparity vis-à-vis Palestinians and the relative stability of the security situation for Israelis.

Incentivization is very appealing to young people taking their first steps toward social and financial independence. Members of the youth group who were planning on conscientious objection were nonetheless tempted by the military's marketing efforts and the enlistment frenzy. Einav, one of the would-be refusers I worked with, described the temptation this way:

I know I am totally against the military ethically, but going through enlistment is like taking one of those tests in the women's magazines, like finding out which character you are from *Sex and the City*. You know it is just a way to make money off of the fact that people are egotistical and want to talk about themselves, but you still kind of want to know the results . . . The tests are like going shopping, it brings out that kind of obsessive focus.

Here Einav compares current military recruitment practices to the opportunity to fulfill consumerist desire. During the youth group meetings, the enticement of the recruitment process was often discussed. Once Mor pulled unconsciously at her hair and muttered to no one in particular, "I don't even want to think about what my profile must be at this point." Because they were not investing in the enlistment process in anticipation of refusal to serve, their profile, the grade describing their fitness for service, was progressively

being lowered. In the end, if they were not granted an exemption, they would be given a very low-level assignment, which bothered these ambitious and high-achieving students a great deal. Military service had become a game of personal strategy, one that you had to play to win. This policy makes use of a key component of incentivized governance: creating the perception that you have been offered all options and chosen your own destiny.

After early rounds of would-be conscientious objectors were released without imprisonment, Orit among them, they began to understand that conscientious objection was likely no longer available. At the same time, as their enlistment dates approached and they received more promotional information about advanced training options in the military, they began to understand the increased opportunity cost of nonservice. The goals and methods of the group became confused and disparate. While these young people had experienced ideological disillusionment similar to the older generation of conscientious objectors, they faced a very different set of possibilities. For the older generation, refusal and imprisonment offered them a platform for intervention and enabled them to go through a process of political and organizational consolidation. By contrast, the younger generation found that opportunity eliminated. The military's shift in policy left them unable to achieve public intervention and anxiety ridden regarding the potential damage to their personal and professional ambitions.

Members of the youth group were relatively privileged, but the shift to incentivization targets Jewish Israelis of many demographics, where it also has the effect of weakening and displacing collective resistance. The period of military ideological hegemony was also the era of Ashkenazi hegemony in Israel. The state's European founders were entrenched in the government and the upper echelons of the military as the state absorbed new immigrants from throughout the Middle East (Mizrahi Jews) during the 1950s and 1960s. Ashkenazi hegemony involved cultural, political, and economic discrimination against Mizrahi Jews, which over time resulted in political resistance to Ashkenazi dominance. Part of this struggle included the avoidance of military service as a symbolic institution of Ashkenazi hierarchy and as resistance to the contradiction between state demands for sacrifice and the denial of full communal and civic membership. As time has progressed, Mizrahi Jews and other new immigrant groups, such as Russians and Ethiopians, have advanced in the military hierarchy and make up a significant part of combat units. At the same time, avoidance of military service as a form of resistance to social discrimination remains a widespread practice (Amor 2010). The state has certainly not abandoned its efforts to form self-sacrificing citizens, especially among geographically peripheral and new immigrant communities. However, we can see a clear shift of emphasis to incentivization that markets military service as a tool of social mobility to the lower classes, especially service in the prestigious combat positions recently abandoned by the elites for computer and technology positions.

The nongovernmental organization Aharai targets underprivileged youth from poor, often Mizrahi or Ethiopian, towns and neighborhoods to ensure they carry out their military service.<sup>8</sup> Its mission references the regional link between low levels of military service and high levels of unemployment and posits causation, claiming to reduce unemployment by promoting military service. In its appeal to underprivileged youth, Aharai highlights the potential of military service to integrate young people into the middle-class workforce and to offer more opportunities than are available in the immigrant or peripheral communities. It promises to bestow a sense of achievement, to allow you to "take your future into your own hands," "fulfill your potential," and "get ahead." The program leaders I interviewed emphasized that the behavioral patterns they teach young people in preparation for military service—such as time management, self-discipline, and drive—will transform them into desirable employees. The program is oriented toward preparing young people for elite combat units, though it is likely that many will not be able to attain this goal due to the negative evaluation of their educational and social background.

In my fieldwork with participants in these programs, many told me that they face significant social pressure to not serve in the military or to take a minimal noncombat position from their communities, especially from relatives belonging to generations that practiced military avoidance as a response to discrimination. Many parents did not want their children to take what they considered to be sacrificial risks for the state; rather, they wanted them to serve in a low-responsibility job close to home that would allow them to engage in gainful employment and come home each afternoon. But in the programs, the group leaders denigrated this approach as old-fashioned thinking counterproductive to long-term social mobility. Rather, combat service is marketed as a socially healthy, pick-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps trajectory, and during interviews, recruits in Aharai seemed to accept this approach over the shortsightedness of their parents. According to Aharai's promotional video, youth participants are encouraged to reject the pathologized crying of their stigmatized parents concerning government neglect of their communities and to make a change in their own lives. The focus on self-advancement is notable for its glossing of discourses of sacrifice most traditionally linked to military service. In fact, in my interviews with group leaders and participants, leaders were even more likely to eschew ideological motivations in favor of the practical applications of military service than were recruits, revealing a top-down character to this shift. In this case as well, resistance calibrated to the demand for sacrifice is negated by the new approach.

#### **WITHDRAWAL OF THE STATE**

The apparent withdrawal of the state from coercive tactics deflects responsibility for symbolic and real violence away from the state and onto private enterprise, which, in neoliberal rationality, cannot be held accountable in the same

way as the state. For example, the role of indoctrination and social sanction has largely shifted to the private sphere. In 2007, an advertising firm launched a privately funded campaign, with military approval, on television, radio, buses, billboards, flyers, the Internet, guerrilla campaign bracelets, t-shirts, and hats and in movie theaters and newspapers. The slogan of the campaign was, “A Real Israeli Doesn’t Shirk.”

In the youth group discussions, there was a dramatic reaction to this suddenly ubiquitous campaign. Everyone assumed that the campaign was released by the Israeli military, and for a time it was completely unknown that it was privately funded. The campaign caused great offense to group members. This was reflected in one exchange during a group meeting:

Mor: They are not saying who these shirkers are, so everyone who does not serve is suspect. Not being suitable for service is the exemption that the military gives. Now they are saying that their own exemption is not legitimate.

Neta: I’m doing civil service in place of military service. But for them I’m still a shirker. They want to put everyone who doesn’t serve into the same category. They are already trying to take our basic rights on this basis.

Here, members of the group expressed dissatisfaction at the far-reaching shadow of accusation cast by the campaign against the unspecified shirker. In addition to the slogan’s claim that not serving in the military excludes one from the body politic, the advertisements also explicitly equated combat service with virtue and often implied that manliness and sexual conquest were rewards for service.

Mor suggested that the group could write a letter of protest, collect signatures, and submit it to the minister of defense, government officials, the military, and the national newspapers. They discussed the outline of the letter, and different people were assigned sections to draft. When we got together the next week, Tal had discovered that the campaign was privately funded. The campaign was funded largely by the father of a young man who was preparing for military service, advertising executive Rami Yehoshua, CEO of Yehoshua\TBWA advertising agency. The campaign also received an undisclosed amount of sponsorship from other commercial sector partners. The relationship between the campaign and the military was kept ambiguous. Ella Goldstein, the advertising executive who managed the campaign, said, “The media campaign, ‘A true Israeli doesn’t evade his military service,’ is a civilian campaign, in which the IDF is not involved . . . . However, the IDF considers it to be a positive initiative” (Jeffay 2008). This promilitary campaign appears on the company website alongside its work for corporations like McDonald’s, banks, and yogurt and clothing companies. This changed everything regarding the group’s planned response.

Mor: But, if it isn’t the military doing it, then are we going to submit the complaint to the defense minister and the government? They will say they have nothing to do with it.

Neta: How can it be that the military has nothing to do with it? It is straight from their mouth. There is no way they don’t have a connection with this.

Mor: But they can say they don’t. It is a private company behind it, they can do whatever they want. We will just be complaining about an offensive private advertisement, and there are more offensive, more militant, and more sexist ads on TV than this one.

Dan: Damn it! So we are going to do nothing?

In the end, members decided that no media outlet would be interested in their protests against a private advertisement, however offensive. The letter was scrapped because they decided that private companies couldn’t be held accountable for symbolic violence in the same way the state can be. In this example, we see the process by which political dissent is neutralized in self-censorship before it even gets off the ground. The privatization of this campaign had a major impact on the group’s understanding of the political ground from which it was possible to organize resistance. Members were forced to capitulate to the neoliberal rationality that the government was not responsible for the activities of private companies, despite the fact that it seemed to be “straight from [the military’s] mouth,” in Neta’s words. Even in their own minds, their objections seemed nullified.

A similar displacement of accountability through withdrawal can be seen in minor but strategic moves toward military privatization. In 2007, the Defense and Public Security ministries privatized 48 checkpoints in the Occupied Territories around Jerusalem. The stated goals were the same as those in other privatization initiatives: to promote efficiency and auditability and “to reduce the friction existing at the crossing points and to increase the level of service, without decreasing the level of security screening” (Knesset Information and Research Center 2006:5). Attempting to redefine military checkpoints as offering a service to Palestinians verges on the absurd, but displacing one of the most controversial military presences onto private corporations redirects the focus of critics away from the state. For example, in one privatized checkpoint at Sha’ar Efraim, a human rights organization found that the private security company Modi’in Ezrahi was preventing Palestinians with permits to work in Israel from bringing food—their nourishment for the day’s work—across the checkpoint. The security company restricted the amount of food allowed to “five pitas, one container of hummus and canned tuna, one small bottle or can of beverage, one or two slices of cheese, a few spoonfuls of sugar, and 5 to 10 olives,” arguably not enough for the typical 12-hour day of physical labor (Hass 2009). When the organization tried to hold the military accountable and receive an explanation, their attempts to contact the Israeli Defense Forces were ignored, and they were eventually passed back and forth between the private security firm and a government office called the Overland Crossings Authority of the Ministry of Defense, with each side

making ambiguous statements and deferring responsibility to the other (Hass 2009).

### STATE TOLERANCE AND ORGANIZED RESISTANCE

In terms of surveillance, the state has likewise withdrawn to a large extent from direct efforts to enforce ideological compliance. There are exceptions to this trend, and this approach does not apply to the state's governance of Palestinians in the West Bank or in Israel, where direct coercion is forcefully applied.<sup>9</sup> While my research highlights a shift toward governance through absence for some Israelis, the broader situation in Israel should be thought of as a tension among modes of governance, coercion, and tolerance. However, in Israel, Jewish dissidents are broadly allowed to carry out their activities without interference. Conscientious objectors have conducted protests in which members of the group yelled "Refuse! Refuse! Refuse!" at active soldiers. In the New Profile youth group as well, public protests were carried out without the state responding. In one case, members of the group protested the visit of a military representative to their school by staging a protest outside the gates. They built a large-scale model of a brain from papier-mâché, painting it pink and red. They then dressed up in military uniforms and sprayed the brain with water guns, engaging it in combat-style duck-and-cover movements. The performance symbolized the military brainwashing students. Perhaps because of state tolerance, the protest attracted very little attention. Even in its social media presence, the military has shifted from a policy of removing criticism of Israel and the military from the interactive portions of its online sites, such as Facebook, to leaving the criticism intact for public viewing (Stein 2012:903–904). This reflects a shift toward understanding public ideological dissent as less of a threat to power. It also allows the state to accomplish its goals of civil obedience without violating its image as a liberal society.

As I noted earlier, this apparent withdrawal of the state should be seen as a technique of state control rather than a weakening of sovereign power. As such, this apparent tolerance is not the same as bestowing rights on Israeli citizens. One military representative told me that easing exemption criteria should be thought of as generosity from the military, but he emphasized that this is not a right and that the military is free to reverse its decision whenever it decides that another approach would be more effective. As a result, behind this apparent tolerance lies the overwhelming coercive potential of the Israeli military, something these young people know well. Rule through absence can be replaced by direct force at any moment according to the strategy of the military.

An example of this return from control through absence to direct force occurred during my fieldwork. Members of my group had been participating in antimilitary demonstrations throughout my fieldwork with complete state tolerance. But in 2009, suddenly, the leaders of New Profile

were arrested on charges of encouraging draft evasion, and their computers were confiscated. Time revealed that it was not their public stand against the military that led to their arrest. It was also not due to their main website, which featured dozens of pages and essays outlining their ethical and ideological stance against the military and obligatory service. Rather, it was their auxiliary website, a completely pragmatic, nonideological, and noncritical open forum to which young people turn for practical advice about avoiding military service.<sup>10</sup> Some young people, following the rationality of self-interested calculative choice, have concluded that they are better off working or continuing their education than performing military service. For example, though the military markets combat service as a tool to social mobility, this claim is statistically unsubstantiated (Levy 2006; Sasson-Levy 2002). On the forum, young people ask nonethical questions about different exemptions from military service, and New Profile experts, as well as anyone else posting, offer information about how to get an exemption, including what to say, whom to approach, when to be demure or aggressive, and so on. In this case, New Profile's elaborately thought out and philosophically defended ethical condemnation of Israeli militarism was less threatening than its practical information. This provocatively suggests that perhaps the more effective resistance to the malleable ideology of neoliberal governance is also ideologically malleable.

### CONCLUSION

I have charted a shift in emphasis in the Israeli military from ideology and discipline, aimed at molding citizens compliant with government demands for sacrifice, to incentivization and tolerance, aimed at structuring choice situations for self-interested individuals. In the recent past, the Israeli government imprisoned refusers and actively prevented the spread of unfavorable critique. Today, the dynamic has changed, and the Israeli state has retreated from direct coercion in favor of neoliberal techniques of governance through absence. In this shift, a clear double movement is apparent. First, dilemmas regarding the legitimacy of state power and citizens' compliance that were once front and center are displaced, obscuring and extending state power. Questions of accountability are clouded by shearing off individual ambition from collective concerns. Second, conventional forms of protest have lost much of their effectiveness under the more tolerant approach. While dissidents did not approve of the Israeli state's techniques of indoctrination and did not welcome their imprisonment for military refusal, these actions provided concrete objects for protest that were apparent to the Israeli public. The shifts I have described have significant consequences for the ability of dissidents to take a public stand and thus for our understanding of engaged citizenship and its political effects. Moreover, the dynamics of incentivization described here have been observed in many advanced militaries, including in the United States, and the strategy of suppressing dissent by

tolerating nonservice has been observed in other countries with mandatory enlistment.

This shift in governance reduces the value attached to nationalistic motivations for service and encourages people to pursue self-advancement in their military service. As ideology has become less of a central tool for state control, likewise ideological dissent has found increased tolerance in the public sphere. However, this tolerance for dissent has been accompanied by a decrease in its efficacy. Without the direct coercion of the state, acts of resistance become impossible or lose much of their symbolic force. Counterintuitively, we see that it is actually the dissidents who yearn for the old forms of coercion and punishment that in the past gave them clear sites against which they could struggle directly. We are left to question the possible locations of future forms of activism and political change in an era where familiar sites of resistance have lost influence. We might look to the arrest of the New Profile leadership on the basis of their information-sharing forum, not their antimilitary activism, as an instance that forced the state to reverse its withdrawal and make itself legible.

Resistance to neoliberal governance is still a relatively new domain of ethnographic inquiry. A number of recent scholarly contributions have addressed the role of satire and parody in the modern culture of political critique (Boyer and Yurchak 2010; Haugerud 2013). The events considered here suggest a somewhat different direction. Specifically, the most effective resistance is not critique but intervention in the calculative choice economy. By tolerating traditional ideological critique and using this as evidence of democracy, the state both undermines and reproduces the neoliberal (Muehlebach 2009). But the severe response to New Profile's informational forum, while ignoring the reams of dissident material, suggests that governance through absence is threatened more by pragmatic information than by critique. In offering information about avoiding service without consequence, the forum provides information targeted at the nonideological but calculative individual seeking self-advancement rather than the young activist. In doing so, it uses the same rationality as neoliberal governance, challenging the military's efforts on its own terms. This might suggest that the most threatening response to neoliberal governance is not critical but technocratic.

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## NOTES

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engaged reading requires significant time and effort, and I am very grateful to have gotten this from my reviewers.

1. All names in this article are pseudonyms. All interviews were conducted in Hebrew, and all translations are mine.
2. Conscientious objection is recognized only in cases of absolute pacifism. Exemptions are also provided for some Palestinian citizens of Israel and for ultra-Orthodox Jews.
3. Herbert Marcuse observed that when tolerance is practiced as laissez-faire absence of the state, or nonpractice, the result is often the reproduction of the power of the constituted authorities (1969). This form of governance was anticipated in Michel Foucault's later work on the conduct of conduct (2008) as well as in Gilles Deleuze's 1992 article, "Postscript on the Societies of Control."
4. See the recruiting advertisement "Defy Expectations: Surveyor" for an example of the way the U.S. military explicitly encourages potential recruits and their families to discard stereotypes of soldiering as dangerous and instead see it as a way to acquire valuable and practical skills: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgdNFlsFWes>, accessed July 12, 2015.
5. Ethnographic accounts of the Israeli military and state have overwhelmingly focused on strategies of ideological indoctrination and the cultivation of loyalty. Don Handelman demonstrates how Israeli citizens are inculcated to nationalism through bureaucratic logic in public commemorations, festivals, memorials, holidays, and other events (2004). Yael Zerubavel has explored the rewriting of Jewish history in Zionist discourse such that death and sacrifice are reinterpreted as heroic myth. She also demonstrates how Israeli memorials and rituals, such as those that occur with the death of a soldier, serve to further bind the bereaved to the state (2005). Jackie Feldman examines state-orchestrated Holocaust memorial practices, in which citizens are led through emotional experiences to see the Israeli state as the solution to the problem of anti-Semitism and military service as necessary for the survival of the state (2008). Ethnographies of the Israeli military also show how friendships and personal bonds are used to cultivate the loyalty of soldiers to their units and to the military organization (Ben-Ari 1998; Helman 2000; Kaplan 2006).
6. "Conscientious objectors" is the common English equivalent of the Hebrew *sarbaney matzpoon*, literally, "refusers of conscience," used by refusers as well as the media and informally by military personnel.
7. Assessments of high IQ, stable psychology, and good temperament are determined by culturally specific understandings that discriminate in favor of European culture and, thus, Ashkenazi Jews.
8. See Aharai's website for further details: <http://www.aharai.org.il>.
9. In a few cases, Israel has adopted a similar regime of self-regulation and incentivization to control the Palestinian population as well, for example, zoning laws that encourage self-deportation.
10. People from across the political spectrum seek exemptions for many reasons other than ethical or political dissent.

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