

Female Combat Soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces: Use of Force within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

June 2nd, 2011

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Abstract In the context of the occupation of Palestinian territories, the idea that the "occupation corrupts" has entered public discourse. In this study, we have interviewed IDF (Israel Defense Forces) female combat veterans, testing their attitudes towards the use of force in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are three explanations which do not find support according to the perceptions of our interviewees. Essentialist accounts of morality, attributing "ethics of care" to women and "ethics of justice" to men do not provide an adequate explanation. Similarly, we find previous exposure to use of force, and military socialization including social integration in the military, identification with the organization, and gendered socialization to be problematic and incomplete explanations. We argue that previous political attitudes have the strongest explanatory power in determining the women's behavior during service and attitudes after service, both relating to the use of force in the context of the conflict.

The ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, in the context of which the IDF is required to control a civilian population, invites situations of constant friction and places the soldiers in a position of intensive interaction with the Palestinian population. This has led to public discourse in Israel about the influences of the situation on combat soldiers and on Israeli culture, while one of the central claims is that the "occupation corrupts", meaning control of the Palestinian population changes the consciousness of Israeli society, especially of the soldiers, implanting aggressive norms and perceptions¹. Female soldiers are an intriguing aspect of this discussion.

In the last decade, the IDF has begun a dramatic process of the integration of women into combat roles, which has also led them to take part in the military effort in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The taboo on women's service in combat roles began to collapse in the wake Alice Miller's petition to the High Court of Justice in 1995. Beginning in the mid 1990's, it is possible to discern a clear process of integration of women into combat roles, the peak of which was the establishment of the Caracal Battalion, combining men and women, in 2000². Women who choose to volunteer in combat go through a sorting process, developed specifically for this purpose, which includes physical, mental and functional aspects. In most cases, those found suitable serve in joint units of men and women, and go through joint training with the men. This occurs out of the understanding that cohesion and joint service should be established from the early stages of service and socialization in the military.

Our central research question is: what role does combat military service and contact with the Palestinian population have on aiding the formulation of the positions of women towards the use of force within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? After providing a brief background on the topic, we discuss our data sources and method. We then examine the explanation of women's moral capabilities as a mechanism that determines attitudes towards use of force. Next, we examine two possible explanatory mechanisms of the influence of combat military service on

¹ Lerner (2010: 80-84).

² Ibid.

women's views: the process of identification with the military and exposure to the use of force in the context of service. Lastly, we turn to explore whether the veteran's positions towards use of force within the conflict are determined by political and policy-related opinions with which they enter their service. We argue that it is this last mechanism which accounts for interviewee's attitudes towards the use of force. We conclude by summarizing our work and recommending topics for expansion in future research.

Background

"Feminine" morality is one possible explanation for female combat veterans' attitudes towards the use of force. Feminist discourse on morality can be divided into two approaches. Essentialist feminists attribute particular moral characteristics to each gender, while non-essentialists do not. Early thinkers like Wollstonecraft, Mill, Beecher, Stanton, and Gilman discussed the dichotomy of male/female as it pertains to ethics, arguing ontologically that the more the self is attached to others, the better it is, and epistemologically that the more "particular, concrete, partial, and emotional knowledge is", the better it represents the real world³.

Essentialist feminists who support "care ethics"⁴ build upon this historical heritage. For example⁵, Alison Jaggar (1992: 364) argues that traditional ethics have neglected the moral issues that arise out of women's role in the household, seeing women's morality as inferior. In a classical work that criticizes the gender-blind developmental theory of Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan (1982: 100; 50-51) argues that the female morality is different from the male. She defines "ethics of care" as "responsibility to discern and alleviate the 'real and recognizable trouble' of this world. While for men the "ethics of justice" determines that they must not trespass over

³ Tong and Williams (2011).

⁴ While the mentioned works discuss ethics through essentializing certain traits as female/male, Sara Ruddick, Virginia Held, and Eva Kittay claim to avoid these dichotomies (See Ruddick 1989; Held 1987 and 2006; Kittay 1999).

⁵ Similarly, Noddings (2002) and Robinson (1999) have argued that the ethics of care can enrich the private sphere and the realm of international relations, respectively.

other's rights, the "ethics of care" pushes women to take responsibility for the lives of others and feel their pain as they do their own.

Several feminist researchers have criticized the normative message in Gilligan's work. Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) argued that linking women with caring could promote forcing women into occupations of caring or care work at home, at an emotional and physical cost. Mullet (1988) argued women cannot properly care in a system dominated by men. Directly criticizing the essentialism in Gilligan's study, Friedman (2001: 400-409) argued that care and justice are conceptually compatible and are necessary complements. She proposed reconsidering the dichotomy, and advocated a transformation "beyond caring", where caring is connected to a sense of justice, asking to "progress beyond gender stereotypes which assign distinct and different moral roles to women and men".

Socialization, another proposed explanation for attitudes towards the use of force, acts upon soldiers, combating their agency. The military is a powerful socializing agent because it is a total institution that alienates individuals from society, controls information, monitors behavior, and offers material inducements⁶. Soldiers arrive at basic training with unformed political opinions, ready to accept the military's values.

Group cohesion is also an aspect of socialization which promotes loyalty to the military's values and activities and identification with the organization. Initializing this hypothesis were Shils and Janowitz (1948: 280-2), who argued against the "strong Nationalist Socialist political convictions" as an explanation for the German Army's tenacity in WWII, and suggested it was contentment of personality demands through "social organization of the army"⁷. As Dinter (1985: 71) explains, "if the group is the right size and has sufficient time to grow together under relevant external pressure, cohesion will be achieved and in its wake will grow a group ethic which no member will dare to violate".

⁶ Krebs (2004: 90-93).

⁷ This includes support from officers and comrades, "acceptance of political, ideological, and cultural symbols" but only to the degree that they were "directly associated with primary gratifications", and preoccupation with physical survival.

Few studies on socialization have explicitly focused on female combatants. Herbert (1956: 10) questioned whether women can be soldiers without deviating from being a soldier and a woman in the context of the military's denial of femininity. She discusses the pressure women felt to be more feminine or masculine. Similarly, Sasson-Levy (2003: 440) states that Israeli female soldiers in masculine roles shape their gender identities "according to the hegemonic masculinity of the combat soldier" by mimicking combat soldiers' bodily behavior and discourse, by distancing themselves from traditional femininity, and by trivializing sexual harassment.

Krebs (2004: 97-9) argues that the socialization model as a whole is problematic. Positioning soldiers as passive receivers, it ignores the option of man⁸ as an agent. The political attitudes which soldiers enter their service with represent the soldier's agency in navigating the military establishment. Karsten (1978: 21) has suggested that "much of what appears to be the product of the training environment is, more accurately, a function of what the trainee himself brought into that environment".

Empirical work has found flaws in the socialization model, continuing the debate between "self-selection" and "socialization". Contrary to expectations, "most veterans of military service emerge with preexisting values and beliefs largely intact"⁹, while the anticipation that exposure to an authoritarian environment like the military will leave veterans more violence-prone is not supported¹⁰. Bachman et al (2000: 578) found that *self-selection* explains the attitude differences between civilians and American military personnel. These studies lack two aspects that we aim to address in our work. Firstly, they do not discuss how political attitudes impact military service, and in particular, the use of force during military service. Secondly, they omit women from their samples.

⁸ We use male form because the author did not include women in the study. We hope to begin to fill the deficit on this topic.

⁹ Lovell and Stiehm (1989: 192). Several other studies are in agreement with this assumption. Gabriel Ben Dor's (1979: 140) survey on the Druze in Israel has shown that political views were similar among those who had and hadn't served in the military; Micha Popper (1998) has found that soldiers themselves did not identify the military's impact on them; Military service did not significantly influence political and civic attitudes, compared to political and civic behavior (Nesbit and Reingold 2011: 68), and only modestly impacted the political attitudes of Vietnam veterans (Jennings and Markus 1977: 146); Teigen (2006: 601) argues that WWII, Korean War, and post-conscription era veterans exhibit higher voter turnout compared to those without military experience, while Vietnam-era veterans exhibit lower turnout rates.

¹⁰ Schreiber (1979: 825).

Lastly, direct exposure to the use of force is another explanation mentioned in the literature. Several studies found that exposure to the use of force leads soldiers to support it¹¹. Military experiences make individuals more likely to prefer “tough or violent solutions to disagreements”¹², and educate them to be comfortable with the use of force¹³. Horowitz and Stam (2011: 4-5) found that only those who have not had combat experience but have had military experience are most likely to use force. There are also studies which found that exposure to force does not equal its support. Huntington (1957), Janowitz (1960) and Betts (1991) argue that the risk of death in warfare and the exposure to combat make military officers reluctant to use force. In our study, we aim to address the interviewee's attitudes towards "justified" and "excessive" uses of force in the context of the military.

Data and Methods

The data for this study was compiled by conducting seven in-depth interviews with released¹⁴ IDF female combat soldiers¹⁵ with varying levels of contact with the Palestinian population during service, and one interview with a woman from MachsomWatch¹⁶. The women we interviewed, which we found through a snowballing method, were mostly from elite units. We encountered a very specific group with high qualifications and abilities, something which could have significantly impacted our results. We rely on Sasson-Levy's (2003: 441) definition of combat female soldiers as women occupying previously male roles. Our choice was based on the intent in looking at how female morality is expressed within a masculine arena of action.

¹¹ Sechser (2004) argues that the “military conservatism” hypothesis is overstated, and that military conservatism is a consequence of strong civilian control, and is not a general trait of militaries (747). While these works don't differentiate between soldiers who are on active duty and those who are veterans, Feaver and Gelpi (2004) find that preferences between the two groups are similar, and both are less likely to believe in the use of force.

¹² Schreiber (1979: 824).

¹³ Maiolo (2009: 107).

¹⁴ We chose female soldiers who were no more than five years away from their release date from service. We asked them about their attitudes towards the use of force within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before, during, and after their service, and wanted to speak with soldiers who are somewhat distanced from the military to see whether it has lasting impacts.

¹⁵ Their units were as follows: 3 women served in "Oketz" (IDF's dog breeder's unit); 2 women were from "Caracal" (Coed Battalion Unit); 1 woman from "Search and Rescue"; and 1 woman from the "Border Patrol".

¹⁶ MachsomWatch is a "movement of Israeli women, peace activists from all sectors of Israeli society, who oppose the Israeli occupation and the denial of Palestinians' rights to move freely in their land"; the women conduct observation of "IDF checkpoints in the West Bank, along the separation fence and in the seamline zone, on the main roads and on out-of-the-way dirt roads, as well as in the offices of the Civil Administration (DCOs) and in military courts" (<http://www.machsomwatch.org/en>)

It was important to us to build rapport with the women. One of us had served in the military, and the other did not. We used this fact while conducting the interviews and setting them up, as it made the women more comfortable to explain different military terms and give an in-depth account of their experience. We began by asking "softer" questions. Our first set of questions related to basic information such as name, age, and education. We then moved on to ask informative questions about military service: location of service, unit, and whether they aspired to be in combat, etc. We asked about their contact with the Palestinian population during service. We placed this question together with other questions related to "factual information" so that it does not "lead" the women to particular answers. We also asked if the women identified with the daily difficulties of the Palestinian population. Next, we asked questions about military socialization, including the unit's social life, their experience as women within the unit, and the pride they feel regarding their service. At this point, many of the women asked, "Wait, so what is your research about?" We found this to be a positive comment, proving that the ordering of our questions did not lead to particular answers.

In the next section, we asked their opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and their behavior and attitudes regarding the use of force. During these more difficult questions, we tried to empathize with the speakers, taking a non-judgmental position. We tried to listen silently, and allow for a pause after they would finish speaking. After this "awkward" pause, the interviewees usually continued talking, giving us critical and truthful information. We then moved on to ask their political attitudes directly, asking both about their personal views and their parents' views before they entered the military. Because we inquired about their attitudes at such a young age, we use their parents' views to help identify their own views. We ended by asking a few survey questions regarding the use of force, empathy with the Palestinian population, and military socialization (identification with the unit and loyalty to military values). The difficulty that the women had with answering these questions illustrated the complexity of their experience.

Ethics of Care or Ethics of Justice: Moral Codes of IDF Female Combat Soldiers

According to Gilligan (1982), the "ethics of care" is the female moral code, while the "ethics of justice" is the male. While women view morality as entangled in relationships, men form their moral outlook through universal equal treatment for all, independent of particular context. In our study, we found that female combat soldiers in the IDF interpret situation of contact with the Palestinian population through both moral codes, and neither operates dominantly. Only two of the women whom we interviewed seem to have relied exclusively on a single moral code. Thus, we support Friedman's warning against treating morality as dichotomous.

Five of the seven soldiers we interviewed exhibited moral judgment through both paradigms, while morality developed in context of their service competed with universal principles of justice. All five admitted that sometimes the use of force is necessary. For example, as Yarden¹⁷ stated, "The value of life is a supreme value. If a human being has a heart attack at the checkpoint I would do everything I can to save him, and I don't care whether he's Jewish or Arab", illustrating that the universal value of the sanctity of life is what drives her to support the use force.

Unlike her, the other women discuss the use of force within the context of a particular situation. As Liron says, as a consequence of her service, she "understood in a much better way that sometimes, reasonable force is necessary". At the same time, she describes enlisting in the military with a "highly developed" sense of justice, wanting to "fight evil". Working with a dog, which is culturally difficult for the Palestinian population, she described several tactics she used to act sensitively, calling it "playing with [the dog's presence]", illustrating an additional moral lesson she had learned from the context¹⁸.

¹⁷ All names were changed to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

¹⁸ Similarly, Yarden discussed educating soldiers that "an Arab is a human being", and understanding the cultural complexities of the fact of female presence at the checkpoints.

Like the other five women, Gal also expresses her acquired understanding of the necessity of force, yet she also uses the ethics of justice to explain her internal debate on whether to enlist on "human rights grounds"; in the end, she preferred to enlist and take an active role in "doing it differently", emphasizing being humane. She saw the solution to the conflict through the lens of the ethics of care¹⁹. On the contrary, Meital saw the solution in decreasing the interaction between the two populations²⁰. This is based on a universal morality, which does not blame "the soldiers on the ground"; rather, she blames "the establishment that led the soldiers" towards hatred, including their education. At the same time, she described post-traumatic feelings of guilt for "what I saw and what I participated in"; as she says, "at the moment a child gets hit, I get hit with him".

While Hadas describes having learnt the inevitability of using force, she also expresses a sense of universal morality when asked about the Palestinian population. "I don't want to describe it as understanding the Palestinians. I understand humans, and it doesn't matter who it is". It is this universal sense of justice which drove her to put a stop to a situation of an "exaggerated use of force" against a Palestinian.

While in the previously mentioned cases an ethics of care was intertwined with an ethics of justice, two of our interviewees overwhelmingly relied on a single moral interpretation. Neta expressed an "ethics of care", reflecting empathy towards the Palestinians and the soldiers. As Gilligan (1982:99) claims, women aim to satisfy all the participants in a situation, including themselves. Neta states that she does not believe Palestinians civilians "are responsible for what the terrorist organizations do, but on the other hand, we must protect our country". She expressed deep empathy when she states that the situation is embarrassing for *both sides* when the Palestinians pass through the checkpoints and look "really humiliated".

On the other hand, Nitsan expresses "ethics of justice". She stated that she "really really does not like [the Palestinians], to put it lightly" because of immigrating to Israel during the first

¹⁹ In particular, she supported "education of both sides, mutual projects".

²⁰ She argued "'the points of friction perpetuate hatred".

Intifada. Despite having daily contact with the Palestinian population during her service, this opinion did not change. She claimed that if a rocket was shot from Mexico to the United States, a harsh response would follow. In her case, the context does not impact her moral codes of analysis, as they are shaped by her previous experiences.

Attitudes towards the Use of Force: Military Socialization, Political Attitudes, and Exposure to Force

While finding that gendered morality isn't powerful in explaining attitudes towards the use of force, we now move on to discuss other possible accounts. We examined the attitudes of the interviewees regarding the use of force in the context of the conflict in two contexts: particular daily events that relate to the conflict, and in the desired governmental policies regarding the conflict. Perceptions on these two issues can be divided into two poles; regarding the first context, attitudes move between the two extremes of avoidance of the use of force and support in the unreserved use of force, with combinations of justification for the use and amount of force in between. Regarding the second, attitudes move between the extremes of non-forceful solution to the conflict on the one hand, and a belief in force as the central tool to the solution or mediation of the conflict on the other, with combinations in between.

Responses to the first context were collected using close-ended survey questions, with values between 1 and 5 (where 5 represented strongest agreement)²¹. Five interviewees show consistency in their answers while two out of the five (Meital and Yarden) express strong reservation regarding the use of force in all the described situations, yet they still note that there are instances when force is justified, including in their own actions²². The other three express consistent support in the use of force and low willingness to pay the price for avoiding the use of force²³. In the context of policies regarding the conflict, four out of seven supported or tended

²¹ Because discussing the use of force can be a difficult and sensitive matter, we used the surveys as close-ended questions to alleviate the need to provide explanations, which could deter the interviewees from giving honest answers. Answers to these questions can be found in Table 1 in Appendix A.

²² "When it was justified use of force then it was justified, in my case, because my life was threatened. A person tried to stab me so I broke his nose" (Yarden).

²³ In the first question, all the interviewees chose values between 3 and 5. Thus, interviewees who chose the minimal value in this question, 3, and in other questions expressed support in the use of force were identified as consistent in their support for the use of force.

to support a solution of compromise with the Palestinians, though none expressed extreme support of non-forceful solutions and all agreed that there is a justification for the use of force in the context of certain events in the conflict. One interviewee supported a forceful solution to the conflict, "I am very sorry that in 1948 and later in 1967, when we captured Judea and Samaria, too bad they didn't do a clearing of the territory" (Nitsan). Significantly, two women showed inconsistency in the survey questions and were ambiguous on discussing their political views on the conflict, illustrating the environment of moral ambiguity which they navigate.

Military Socialization

As Krebs (2004: 90-93) illustrates, the military can be seen as a central agent of socialization that combats other value-inducing influences. We explored three dimensions of socialization: social integration in the military, identification with the organization, and gendered socialization. It is worth noting that six out of seven women defined all three components as negative or positive, respectively, so that there is a certain degree of correlation between all three. Despite this, we did not find a relationship between their perceptions on these three dimensions and their perceptions on the two aspects of the use of force in the conflict.

Along the first dimension we found, generally, that most of the interviewees discuss a positive experience of integration. As Liron said, "the unit is a family". In contrast, the other two women (Meital and Alone) discussed a more negative experience. Additionally, interviewees who reported a positive social integration experience also revealed a high level of identification with the organization and the collective, supporting Dinter's (1985: 71) argument, according to which high cohesion among the soldiers in the unit leads to a joint group ethic. Liron, who reported a positive integration, expresses identification and pride in her unit, "it is an elite unit and it's a completely different thing from battalions ... they trust you more". In comparison, Nitsan who did not discuss positive integration also stated, "I felt that I couldn't advance in the system because I don't have moral and value-related trust in what the unit does".

The women also expressed the adoption of masculine identity practices, supporting Sasson-Levy's (2003: 440) and Herbert's (1956: 10) claims. For example, Meital stated, "most of the police officers measured the girls according to two dimensions: if they "flow"²⁴, there were sexual harassments all the time, and if they hit Arabs. A quality female fighter is one who "destroys" Arabs without giving a damn". Her statement illustrates the scale by which the perfect combat soldier of both genders was defined, combining aggressive and sexual elements and measured against masculine values.

While the majority of women were consistent in their perceptions of the three dimensions of socialization, they were not consistent on the connection between socialization and attitudes towards the use of force²⁵. This finding may illustrate that the system did not have a strong enough hold on the women, and that while institutions are undoubtedly powerful in their influence, it is important to take into account the agency which has some hold in combating imposed values from without.

Political Attitudes Pre-Recruitment and Self-Selection

As Lovell and Stiehm (1989: 192) claim, soldiers' political attitudes do not change during and after military service. This persistence of views leads us to expect that there could be an impact of political attitudes on the behavior and the perceptions of the soldiers during and after service. We found that four out of seven interviewees reported that they possessed leftist opinions before their recruitment. Out of them, three report leftist attitudes of their parents and one reports rightist and leftist attitudes of her parents. Two additional interviewees report moderate parents' opinions and a lack of a coherent personal opinion before service. One interviewee reported opinions with rightward orientation²⁶.

²⁴ "Flow" is a slang word that describes a woman who is sexually liberal.

²⁵ Two of the interviewees who expressed high reservations from the use of force in the first dimension and support in a diplomatic solution in the second, reported a negative socialization experience. Two of the interviewees who were characterized as inconsistent along the first dimension expressed a tendency to support a diplomatic solution along the second, and reported a good socialization. Two of the interviewees who tended to support the use of force and avoided expressing their position regarding a solution to the conflict reported a positive socialization experience.

²⁶ In this case, her parents' opinion is not relevant since she immigrated to the country in the framework of the "Naale" program and lives on her own.

While Bachman et al (2000: 578) found that *self-selection* explains attitude differences between civilians and military personnel, this hypothesis is problematic to our study because the individuals we interviewed may not represent the population of female combat unit veterans due to our method of recruitment²⁷. Some of the women discuss self-selection practices. For example, Meital refers to selection of women in combat service in Border Patrol and describes deliberate selection of women possessing rightist attitudes and fondness towards the use of force, "One of the girls said: how fun, finally I came to the Border Patrol, now I can fulfill my dream and beat up Arabs". The MachsomWatsh activist similarly reported meaningful selection of women in Border Patrol and Military Police units, "the soldiers we see in the Border Patrol, those are not my daughter, it is a particular type of soldiers, those who have high abilities go to other units"²⁸.

We find that personal political attitudes before service match present attitudes towards the use of force in the conflict. For example, leftist attitudes before service usually matched preferences towards a diplomatic solution to the conflict; similarly, moderate or a lack of political position before service matched the avoidance of answering questions regarding the use of force²⁹. This finding supports Krebs's (2004: 97-9) and Karsten's (1978: 21) arguments regarding the dominance of political attitudes of soldiers during recruitment and the limited influences of socialization and military service on these views. While there is extensive research on the impact of military service on political attitudes, our small-scale study leads us to recommend heeding

²⁷ Most of the veterans we interviewed arrived at leftist or moderate political opinions, but there is doubt if this indicated self-selection of women with particular opinions to military service. We believe this result comes from the small sample in our study, due to a selection of interviewees that resulted from our snowballing recruitment method, and perhaps as a result of a higher willingness of veterans possessing leftist and central attitudes to be interviewed.

²⁸ It is important to note that these two accounts stand out in our sample as relating to non-elite units; their descriptions of self-selection practices are examples of the stories of exactly those units who are not well represented within our sample.

²⁹ Two of the interviewees who expressed high reservations from use of force and support in a diplomatic solution, reported leftist political attitudes of their parents in the time period before their own service. One of them reported leftist attitudes of both parents, and the other reported rightist and leftist attitudes of her parents. Two interviewees who were characterized as inconsistent in the aspect of social integration and expressed a tendency to support a diplomatic solution to the conflict, also reported personal and parental leftist attitudes. The interviewee who expressed support in the use of force along both contextual and policy-oriented dimensions, expressed rightist political attitudes. Two of the interviewees who tended to support the use of force and avoided expressing a position regarding a solution to the conflict expressed a lack of political position and centrist attitudes of parents before the service.

more attention to the impact of political views on the behavior and attitudes relating to the service itself.

Exposure to Force and the Use of Force

Horowitz and Stam's (2011: 4-5) argued that the exposure to violence encourages the development of attitudes of reservations regarding use of force. However, their study did not include female combat veterans. Naturally, questions regarding observation of the use of force, and particularly personal use, are problematic due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. However, we chose to include this dimension because of its theoretical importance, but also because many of the women discussed their experiences relating to the topic.

While most women reported exposure, their personal use of force was a more difficult topic to discuss. One out of seven, Nitsan, is convinced the use of force is justified and not exaggerated. The rest of the interviewees describe instances where they believed the use of force was exaggerated. Five out of seven report that they themselves enacted force. Four out of them argue that they enacted solely proportional and justified force. For example, Liron discusses how she sometimes behaved aggressively towards and the Palestinians who she felt provoked her, but described how she avoided hurting civilians at all costs, "I had to go to the side for a moment and to relax so that the next person does not get such treatment from me". In light of the sweeping testimonies regarding the lack of the use of exaggerated force, indirect involvement in situations where force was used may be prevalent. For example, Liron reports about her indirect involvement in the use of force, although she does not describe the use of force in such cases as exaggerated³⁰.

Gal reported that she did not enact force at all during her service and Neta avoided answering the question. Four interviewees reported that while they were exposed to exaggerated

³⁰ Liron states, "it was easy to work with the Border Police... [I would say] "That guy hit me" and they'll take care of it. They would pull 7 men out of the vehicle and align them. The men would stand quietly. They were afraid. They [the policemen] would approach them aggressively. Sometimes, it was the easiest way to work.

use of force, they acted to stop or prevent it³¹. Two interviewees³² did not report exposure to exaggerated force at all. One of the two revealed aversion towards the Palestinians that could have impacted her judgment regarding the use of force: "they are natural liars, people with no values, worse than vermin, people who lack humanity, and they will receive exactly the same thing" (Nitsan). One interviewee reported exaggerated use of force, but showed empathy towards this behavior, "I can understand how you can arrive at such a situation easily..." (Neta); this supports the idea that military experience can make the soldier comfortable with use of force (Maiolo 2009: 107).

We find no consistent connection between exposure and the aforementioned components regarding use of force in the conflict. This leads us against seeing exposure to force in the military context as an explanation for a soldier's formation of opinion regarding use of force in the wider context³³. Perhaps in a larger study, this connection could be better tested. However, it is important to emphasize that attitudes towards the use of force could also determine the judgment about it being exaggerated or not, something which future research must carefully consider.

Conclusion

From the interviews we conducted as part of this study it seems that political attitudes before service are the dominant cause for establishing veterans' attitudes towards the use of force in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We did not find a clear connection between

³¹ Hadas describes, "And I got frightened, I came out quickly and told their officer come in to the room right now and stop your soldiers...I was shaking from the nerves". Meital also said, "to the few "guys" I could talk to I would always say – what do you think, you hit this kid and he returns home and "uncle Hamasnik" suggests to him to repay you, and he won't go for it? You created the next terrorist, not Hamas".

³² It is significant that one of them served in the Palestinian territories for only a short time and in a checkpoint that was relatively "quiet".

³³ Two of the interviewees who expressed high reservations from the use of force and supported a diplomatic solution to the conflict, reported that they enacted force during their service, were exposed to exaggerated force and even acted to prevent exaggerated force. Out of the two interviewees that were characterized as inconsistent along the dimension of social integration and expressed a tendency to support a diplomatic solution, one reported use of force, exposure to exaggerated force and the attempt to prevent it, and the other reported that she did not use force and was not exposed to it³³. The interviewee who expressed support in the use of force along both aspects of integration and a solution to the conflict, reported that she was not exposed to an exaggerated use of force and enacted force during her service. Out of the two interviewees that tend to support use of force and avoided expressing a position regarding a solution to the conflict, one reported using force, exposure to exaggerated use of force and an attempt to stop it, and the other avoided answering regarding personal use of force and reported exposure to exaggerated use of force but did not act to stop it because she was empathetic towards it.

military socialization and attitudes towards the use of force after service. Likewise, we did not discern a connection between the experience of the exposure to the use of force during service and attitudes towards the use of force in the context of the conflict after service. As a first glance into the perceptions of female combat veterans, we recommend future studies to build on these findings, accounting for the sensitive but fascinating nature of the questions we have raised here.

As previously mentioned, both the MachsomWatch activist and the only interviewee that served in the Border Patrol reported strong selection of women possessing rightist and aggressive attitudes into combat service in the Border Patrol and Military Police. If so, our sample poorly represents the population of interest. Future research may focus on widening the sample and modifying the recruitment of interviewees.

Not even one of the interviewees reported that she used exaggerated force herself. As mentioned, the MachsomWatch activist's and Meital's testimony indicates that female soldiers are involved and even initiate the use of exaggerated force both directly and indirectly. It is possible that the answers in the interviews resulted from the fact that the interviewees were asked to discuss acts that they themselves committed, and that could be perceived as immoral. Though we tried several techniques to derive the most honest answers, perhaps future studies should add questions that are less direct so as to minimize the threatening impact.

The answers that most of the interviewees gave about their attitudes towards the use of force in the context of the conflict did not allow a good enough identification of their positions. A few of them completely avoided answering questions on this topic. It is possible that in a future research, the interviewees should be asked more targeted questions, including reference to current events and issues, for example, what do you think about the two-state solution according to 1967 borders? Such questions would reference accepted political propositions for solutions to the conflict, both from the left and the right political map.

Regarding the normative question – does the integration of women in combat units that come in contact with a civilian population allow lowering the use of exaggerated force, we

discovered, from the stories of the women, that they believe that perhaps the integration of women can contribute towards this purpose. As mentioned, a majority of them reported that they never enacted exaggerated force and even acted to stop or prevent instances of exaggerated use of force that they were exposed to. Testimonies by Meital and the MachsomWatch activist give a different account of the events. There may also be a contradiction between the moral and behavioral aspects related to the use of force. This contradiction contributes to the moral dilemmas of the occupation, which places the soldiers in a position of ambiguity. The ambivalence that they experience regarding several moral decisions leads to the strengthening of the statement, appearing more and more in public and academic discourse, that "the occupation corrupts".

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