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The limits of socialization and the underproduction of military violence: Evidence from the IDF

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Abstract

Research on socialization can obscure the agency of its targets, presenting socialization as a uni-directional process shaping beliefs and behaviors. This assumption is even stronger for the military, a totalizing institution often portrayed as fashioning its members into violence professionals through a top-down process of domination. In contrast, this article argues that even powerful socialization processes are not omnipotent, and that individuals retain a measure of agency even under pervasive social control. Drawing on the case of the Israel Defense Force during the Second Intifada, it shows that norms inculcated during military socialization can be undermined by the more ambiguous conditions of deployment. When soldiers also subscribe to competing norms and receive social support for their dissent, resistance can emerge, increase, and become more overt. Analysis of resistance to violence underscores the power of military socialization while drawing attention to its limits. It therefore challenges homogenizing views of soldiers, illuminating the processes through which military violence is produced and curbed.

Keywords

conflict, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, military, socialization

In 2002, at the height of Israel's counterinsurgency campaign in the Second Intifada, a group of Israeli reservists announced that they would no longer serve in the Occupied Territories, in a fight aimed to 'dominate, expel, starve, and humiliate an entire people'.[1] Within months they were joined by dozens of others, forming a movement they called 'Courage to Refuse'. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) initially responded harshly, court martialing hundreds of 'refuseniks' and jailing many for limited periods. These punitive measures only accelerated the growth of the movement, which at its peak numbered nearly 1,000 members, many of whom served jail terms.[2] Concerned about the movement's expansion, the IDF changed its strategy. It transferred some of the reservists' military activity to regular forces and mostly stopped jailing soldiers, preferring instead to negotiate, and when that failed, to accommodate preferences to serve elsewhere. This neutralized the refuseniks' demands and ultimately led to the movement's dissolution (Dloomy, 2005).

In June of 1991, armed conflict broke out between Yugoslavia's federal army (JNA) and an assortment of Serb armed groups on the one hand, and the seceding forces of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia on the other. The JNA, a conscript army with a large reserve force, began calling up reservists to fight. Initially many responded to the call, but they soon began to leave the front lines in increasingly large numbers. Within months, the number of deserters reached record heights, with an estimated 50,000 reservists escaping by August 1991 (Milicevic, 2004). At the same time, hundreds of thousands of reservists were evading the draft altogether, going into

[1] See http://www.seruv.org.il/english/default.asp (retrieved 16 September 2016).
[2] Hilo Glazer (2016) 'Why did conscientious objection go under the radar?' (in Hebrew) *Haaretz* 4 February.

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hiding or fleeing the country. Widespread draft dodging and desertion led to the dissolution of the JNA and the flourishing of voluntary paramilitary groups (Sikavica, 2000).

While the contexts of these cases differ substantially, they share an underlying commonality. In both cases army reservists, who had been subject to intense military socialization, and who had served for a significant time, decided they would no longer comply with military authority. Levels of resistance varied across cases: massive in the case of the JNA, much more limited in the IDF. Forms of resistance varied as well, from evasion to desertion to outright defiance. What accounts for the emergence of resistance following military socialization? Why, in the presence of powerful pressures towards participation, do some soldiers nevertheless dissent? What forms is such resistance likely to take? And under what conditions is it likely to spread?

Existing research on the dynamics of violence in conflict recognizes that the preferences of soldiers can diverge from those of leaders, complicating and sometimes severing the link between elite strategies and empirical violence patterns (Manekin, 2013; Wood, 2009). In consequence, scholarship on wartime violence has taken an organizational turn (Checkel, 2017), emphasizing organizational control mechanisms as a means of restraining heterogeneous soldier inclinations and directing them towards strategic goals. Though definitions of effective control differ, with some accounts emphasizing formal means such as discipline and sanctions (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006), recent work has highlighted social means of control, chief among them armed group socialization. Military socialization is especially powerful, as the military is an archetypical 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961), isolating its members from society and wholly regimenting their lives.[3] Military socialization, and organizational control more generally, are therefore perceived as key tools in controlling and restraining soldiers.

In its emphasis on control as a means of restraint, however, this research typically reflects three underlying assumptions: that combatants are predisposed towards violence, that consequently, non-compliance will take the form of overproduction of violence, and that armed group control is solely top-down, flowing unidirectionally from leaders to followers. While a few scholars have allowed that, in theory, soldiers may also shirk from or resist violence (Weinstein, 2007; Wood, 2009), this alternative remains underexplored, perhaps because it is viewed as rare. In practice, however, anecdotal evidence of military evasion and dissent is abundant. The history of warfare is replete with examples of soldiers who failed to pull the trigger when required, occasionally resulting even in mutiny or mass desertion (Lyall, 2014). Yet theories of violence in conflict cannot adequately explain why soldiers sometimes dodge or resist violent orders. The phenomenon of resistance to or underproduction of violence has thus received little systematic attention.

This article draws on the case of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) during the Second Palestinian Intifada (2000–05) to develop an explanation of soldier resistance in the modern, bureaucratized military. By resistance I do not mean overt defiance but rather, following Scott (1985: 290), any behavior intended to mitigate or deny claims made by military superiors or to advance soldiers' own claims towards superiors. Resistance is thus conceptualized as a continuum, ranging from covert, everyday practices like evasion and foot-dragging, to (more rarely) outright insubordination. Though resistance in the military is a broad phenomenon, which can include resistance to disciplinary measures, living conditions, or various non-operational tasks, I focus specifically on the resistance of well-socialized soldiers to participation in violence, the military's core mission. Such resistance, even in its mundane and covert forms, represents an 'underproduction of violence', insofar as it indicates that the violence required was not produced at a particular juncture. While on their own, such local incidents are unlikely to affect military policy, they are liable to do so should they multiply and spread.

The starting point for my analysis is that soldiers, as organizational members, are generally motivated by a 'logic of appropriateness' (March & Olsen, 2006), 'fulfilling identities or roles by recognizing situations and following rules that match appropriate behavior to the situations they encounter' (March, 1994: viii). Individuals enlist with diverse notions about the appropriate use of violence, reflecting pre-existing beliefs, values, and personalities. A key tool in transforming these disparate individuals into a cohesive fighting force is socialization in the training period, which generally has two goals: first, it aims to create a shared identity, stripping recruits of their prior identities and rebuilding them in the organizational image. Less appreciated but no less important, it seeks to normalize organizationally sanctioned violence: some recruits must be induced to produce it, while others must be taught not to exceed it. When socialization is ineffective, and soldiers' identities diverge from

[3] See Hoover Green (2017) for examples of self-consciously 'totalizing', 'holistic' socialization in rebel groups.

the organization, resistance becomes more likely. However, even when socialization *is* effective, the shifting and challenging conditions of deployment can undermine the neat normative schemes imposed during training, such that it is no longer clear which rule to apply to a particular situation. When individuals also subscribe to competing norms regarding the appropriateness of violence, and when they have social support networks that validate their divergent choice, resistance is likely to increase and become more overt. Conversely, when the military reduces situational ambiguity, resolves normative conflict (or exempts those that experience it), and eliminates or discredits competing bases of social support, resistance is more likely to decline.

The Israeli case presents a hard case for the analysis of soldier resistance, as the IDF's socialization processes are generally highly effective. Initial divergence between the IDF and its recruits is relatively low: though it relies on conscription, it exempts from service groups whose identities diverge widely from its own and would therefore be difficult to control, such as ultra-Orthodox Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel. Additionally, Israel's history of conflict has generated a widespread belief that its environment is one of persistent threat to be countered with military force, a belief consistent with, and reinforced by, military socialization efforts. The IDF is one of Israel's most central and valued institutions, consistently held in high esteem by a large majority of the Jewish population. Finally, the IDF invests extensively in socialization of recruits, beginning several years before enlistment. The presence of soldier resistance even under such conditions suggests that resistance is likely more prevalent and overt in groups where incoming diversity is larger and socialization weaker.

Understanding soldier resistance has several theoretical implications. First, it directs attention to the presence of individual agency even in the face of strong situational pressures. While recent work has highlighted the agency of civilians on the battlefield (Kalyvas, 2006), depictions of soldiers remain largely homogeneous. The possibility of resistance even under such powerful circumstances calls for greater attention to the factors that cause people to resist, rather than succumb, to social influence (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014). Second, it contributes to a growing literature, demonstrated by this special issue, that challenges prevailing consequentialist portrayals of participation in political violence and highlights the social and normative dimensions of armed group mobilization. Finally, analysis of soldier resistance provides insight into the limits of military socialization and to the negotiated and evolving nature of military control, shedding light on armed group institutions and behavior.

Explaining soldier resistance

The study of soldier dissent is challenging since resistance is often covert, and neither soldiers nor generals have an incentive to publicize it. Some insight into why soldiers sometimes resist their mission can be gained from the literature on why soldiers *do* participate in combat, as well as from the small empirical literature on desertion, a relatively visible form of noncompliance. Drawing on this work I consider potential explanations focusing on individual incentives, unit cohesion, and ideology before outlining my argument on military socialization and its limits.

One approach to the question of why men fight builds on the collective action framework (Olson, 1965) to argue that participation in violence is motivated by private, often material incentives. In the military context, where the benefits of combat are typically outweighed by its costs, consequentialist arguments usually center around the costs of non-participation rather than the (often minimal) benefits of participation. Rush (1999), for example, attributes the Wehrmacht's tenacious fighting in the last stages of World War II to the imposition of 'organized terror from above', harsh disciplinary measures designed to deter desertion. McLauchlin (2014) similarly argues that soldiers are more likely to desert in rough terrain because they are less likely to get caught.

While individual incentive structures are doubtless a factor in explaining desertion, they are insufficient for explaining resistance more generally, especially when hidden, everyday forms are taken into account. These forms are by design intended to escape detection and are therefore possible even in the most disciplined units. Nor can incentive structures explain acts of outright defiance, where soldiers do not seek to escape the military hierarchy but rather enter into direct and often costly conflict with it.

Additionally, a focus on individual incentives obscures the social context that shapes the costs and benefits associated with the choice to fight or abstain from fighting (McLauchlin, 2015). Indeed, a persistent claim in the literature on military effectiveness is that men fight for their mates, not for instrumental reasons. Seminal work by Shils & Janowitz (1948) argues that the Wehrmacht's stubborn fighting was due to high unit social integration, which supplied soldiers with their primary needs. Deserters, they found, were more likely

not to be socially integrated. Though controversial (MacCoun, Kier & Belkin, 2006), the argument linking primary unit social bonds to military performance remains prominent (Costa & Kahn, 2003; Wong et al., 2003). Its logic implies that soldiers who resist participation in combat-related violence are likely to be socially alienated and poorly integrated with their primary group. Strong social ties, however, can facilitate collective resistance instead of compliance (Lyall, 2014). Nor does social cohesion adequately explain patterns in the Israeli case. Though disintegration may have led a few individuals to stray from their unit's behavior, many incidents of resistance were by soldiers who had initially been well integrated. For them, social isolation was more likely a consequence than a cause of resistance.

A third explanation for participation in combat focuses on ideology as a mobilizing factor. Bartov (1991) argues that extreme devotion to Nazi ideology rather than primary group cohesion drove the Wehrmacht's fighting. Nationalism is also posited to be a powerful force that makes soldiers more willing to sacrifice, and kill, for their country (Reiter, 2007). McPherson (1997) attributes the determined fighting of American Civil War soldiers under devastating conditions to group cohesion and patriotic ideology. This perspective implies that resistance should be more apparent among soldiers who were excluded from the state's ideological project. Indeed, Lyall (2014) shows that regimes that violently exclude certain identities are more likely to face mass desertion.

Yet while ideology, broadly conceived, can certainly be used to mobilize individuals, the emphasis on grand ideological narratives neglects the fact that such narratives must be continually interpreted in order to resonate and motivate. Lofty ideological messages can sometimes mobilize but other times fall flat, provoking cynicism, anger, or indifference. Bearman (1991), for example, shows how Confederate soldiers, initially motivated by a nascent Southern identity, turned over time to older local identities and lost their will to fight. Put differently, ideologies and identities must be reinterpreted and adapted to shifting, often demanding conditions in order to motivate soldiers. Without attention to this negotiating process it remains unclear when ideologies succeed and when they fail in driving participation.

Theories of armed group socialization address the limitations of these theories by emphasizing the military's active role in transforming diverse individuals into a cohesive, motivated force. Unlike formal control mechanisms like discipline or sanctions, socialization targets identities rather than incentives, seeking to construct and maintain a shared identity among members of a given community, so as to 'create a context in which the collective end [. . .] is experienced as an individual end' (Bearman, 1991: 325). Theoretically, socialization should obviate the need for formal control because alignment of soldier incentives with the military is no longer necessary. It should foster the kind of social cohesion that advances commitment to the organizational mission rather than undermines it. And it should communicate and adapt existing ideological frameworks such that they resonate with and motivate soldiers. Socialization therefore provides a compelling explanation for participation in violence. It cannot, however, account for the emergence and spread of dissent. Indeed, a central critique of socialization theories generally is that they leave no room for individual agency (Checkel, 2017). Using the Israeli case, I draw on the narratives of soldiers themselves to develop an explanation for resistance to violence in modern, bureaucratized militaries.

Socialization and its limits

I argue that in the presence of effective socialization, three primary factors shape the likelihood of resistance emerging and increasing, both in quantity (more incidents) and in kind (more overt): a situational trigger where it is unclear how to apply military norms; a normative background that provides a conflicting interpretation of the situation; and the degree of social support that validates dissent. I first outline the role of military socialization, and then discuss each of these factors in turn.

Military socialization: All organizations must find ways of ensuring their members act on their behalf rather than advancing individual aims. In the military, which deals in lethal violence, this task takes on particular urgency, making formal control mechanisms an integral part of military life. Formal control, however, is an insufficient means of directing soldier behavior. Formal mechanisms require continuous monitoring often impossible in combat. Moreover, punishment can adversely affect morale and inhibit autonomy and discretion, important elements of military performance. As a result modern militaries also rely extensively on social control, instilling norms and constructing a shared identity so that soldiers identify military objectives with their own.

A key element of military social control is socialization, the training phase with which military service begins. In this period, soldiers are inculcated with a set of organizational norms, at the core of which are those

regulating the use of violence. Such norms include, for example, the appropriate forms of violence, appropriate targets, authorization procedures, etc. Drawing on a variety of sources, from international law to strategic circumstances, these norms are meant to form a coherent and comprehensive guide to combat behavior.

Importantly, socialization also creates a cohesive social community, with shared expectations about what is right. Through combat training, individuals construct a professional identity, sustained by social interaction, that guides their behavior in the military context. The power of these norms in motivating behavior stems not from their promotion of individual self-interest but from concerns about social acceptance and internal coherence. Put differently, the military socialization process constructs a 'logic of appropriateness' (March & Olsen, 2006) where norms are followed not simply because of their perceived consequences but because they are seen as natural and legitimate. Since this sense of appropriateness is socially embedded, appropriate behavior is rewarded while inappropriate behavior is socially sanctioned, inducing social disapproval among observers and shame and guilt among violators.

Socialization, of course, is not always successful. Socializing agents may be unskilled at persuading, modeling appropriate behavior, or creating the community necessary to impose social sanctions on dissenters. Individuals may resist socialization efforts due to a deeper commitment to competing values, pressing material concerns, perhaps even personality factors. Some individuals do not complete military training because they are unable or unwilling to become part of the group or because the military deems them unsuitable. But when socialization is effective, soldiers who complete it emerge for the most part ready and eager to perform their military role.

At the extreme, socialization theories seem to imply that once norms have been internalized, individual behavior should always accord with normative expectations, an implication belied by incidents of resistance. Socialization is limited by the inability to regulate every situation and the existence of competing norms and communities, as outlined below.

Ambiguous situations: Military training is highly regulated, establishing concrete expectations, clear performance standards, and extensive monitoring and enforcement. Cadets learn what is expected of them and the consequences of compliance and non-compliance. This clarity stands in stark contrast to deployment, where changing conditions, a threatening environment, and unpredictable consequences can create uncertainty as to the appropriate way to proceed. Deployment thus presents even highly socialized soldiers with a multitude of ambiguous situations. Ambiguity can make it difficult to determine which behavior is appropriate in the specific situation (March, 1994). In some cases, soldiers might resolve ambiguity by observing peers, deferring to 'experts' (such as commanders or more experienced soldiers) or relying on prior experience. For some soldiers, however, the situation invokes competing norms, perhaps because it reminds them of situations they encountered outside the military, or because the behavior of others seems inconsistent with what they have learned in training.

Normative conflict: Military recruits are not blank slates on which training inscribes a single identity. They bring with them a variety of values, norms, and attitudes formed through prior arenas of socialization, such as families or schools. This is particularly true regarding the exercise of violence, a context regulated by multiple norms. Some soldiers may subscribe to norms that call for more violence than desired by the military. Others were socialized to more restrictive norms. An ambiguous situation can trigger normative tension or conflict, calling into question which rule is more appropriate for a particular situation. For soldiers in the latter category, resistance becomes more likely.

Social context: Identities are socially based, and rules regarding appropriate behavior are communally shared (March, 1994). Soldiers typically do not operate in isolation but under the observation and judgment of peers. Individuals often hide unpopular preferences to avoid social costs (Kuran, 1995). For soldiers, such costs can be particularly steep, as they operate within a close-knit social community that is relatively removed from other social networks. This begins in training, when soldiers are effectively cut off from other circles through minimization of avenues of communication, and continues throughout deployment when soldiers generally spend little time with non-military communities. Social control in the military is thus especially powerful. The shame and guilt associated with perceived violation of military norms mitigates the likelihood of resistance, especially when a soldier's behavior is seen by others.

This observation is subject to considerable variation, however. Social communities can form within the military, informally socializing recruits in ways that compete with their formal training (Wood & Toppelberg, 2017). Military units can have their own traditions that conflict with and overpower those espoused by central command. Military social control is also weaker for reserve soldiers, who lead civilian lives until they are called up to

serve for relatively limited periods, and are therefore less subject to the totalizing pressures of social acceptance or ostracism within the regular forces. When soldiers have access to alternative social networks that affirm and validate what is perceived internally as deviance, resistance becomes less shameful.

Taken together, these factors generate three expectations regarding the conditions under which resistance to violence becomes more likely even for well-socialized soldiers: first, resistance should emerge when situations do not properly fit those encountered during training, creating a sense of ambiguity that can trigger normative conflict. Second, resistance should be more apparent among individuals who hold competing, more limited norms regarding the appropriate use of violence in a given situation. Finally, resistance should increase and become more overt when soldiers have social support systems that validate their dissent. This suggests that the military can diminish resistance without resorting solely to formal control, by reducing ambiguity, resolving normative conflict (or exempting those who experience it), and to the extent possible, minimizing competing sources of social support. As we shall see, all three methods were utilized in the Israeli case.

Data and methods

This article draws primarily on 68 in-depth interviews with Israeli veterans conducted during fieldwork in Israel in 2009–10. Nearly all participants carried out their regular military service during the Second Intifada. Nine interviews were with 'refuseniks', some of whom had served in the Second Intifada only as reservists. While still belonging to the IDF's reserve corps, participants were civilians who could speak freely. To protect respondent confidentiality, identifying details have been obscured and all names used are pseudonyms. A full list of interviewees by date and more detailed information about the format of the interviews are presented in the Online appendix.

Most participants were recruited through chain referral ('snowball') sampling, using several initial 'seeds' to maximize sample diversity. To avoid recruiting solely within homogenous social networks I asked respondents to refer me to unit-members rather than friends. Some were recruited in other ways, such as in chance meetings or through social media forums frequented by veterans. The sample proved to be very diverse and included former soldiers and officers from almost all of the IDF's ground combat units. Respondents were also demographically heterogeneous, hailing from cities, towns, and villages across Israel and the Occupied Territories and differing in ethnicity, religiosity, and political opinions, though respondents with higher education and socio-economic status are overrepresented. Interviews were supplemented by data collected from various sources such as media and NGO reports.

With the exception of the 'refuseniks', I did not ask respondents about resistance directly. Rather stories of resistance sometimes emerged naturally during discussion of deployment. Resistance may therefore have been more common than I found, and soldiers simply did not raise the issue spontaneously, for whatever reason. The purpose of this article, however, is not to provide prevalence estimates (which would be hard to obtain in any event due to the hidden nature of much military resistance) but to qualitatively trace processes through which resistance comes about for the purpose of theory-building.

An advantage of immersive fieldwork is that it provides a window onto phenomena ordinarily hidden from view, allowing the collection of in-depth, grounded data on the dynamics of violence and resistance. Like any method, however, it is subject to limitations, such as problems of reconstructed memory and the impact of the interviewer on the exchange. These difficulties are compounded when conducting interviews on sensitive questions of violence, requiring particular awareness. In addition, three specific limitations of these data bear mention: first, by including only individuals who completed their service, those who dodged the draft or dropped out during training or early in deployment are excluded from the sample. This leads to a substantial underestimation of the scope of resistance to violence, and limits my ability to explore processes of resistance among less committed soldiers, to the extent these differ. Second, greater representation of individuals from lower socio-economic status may have revealed more instrumentally motivated resistance. As Scott (1985) argues, self-interest is an important element in 'most lower class politics'. I suspect, however, that such motivations would more commonly lead to dropping out completely or going on absence without leave, rather than resistance to particular acts of violence. Finally, I address only resistance to violence against Palestinians here, and do not analyze the sometimes substantial resistance by soldiers who opposed the use of force against Israeli Jews, such as forcible displacement during settlement evacuation, though the argument developed here applies to such resistance as well. I return to these issues in the conclusion.

Resistance to violence in the IDF: Findings

Military socialization

Under Israeli law, all citizens, with the exception of some exempt groups, are conscripted at age 18. Mandatory, or regular, service is three years for men and two years for women. Upon release soldiers are transferred to the reserves, where they may be called up for several weeks each year until final release between ages 40 and 50. To a large extent, Israel is thus 'a nation in arms' in which the combat soldier is identified with 'the good citizen' (Levy & Sasson-Levy, 2008). The IDF consistently ranks as the state institution with the highest level of public trust and motivation for service is generally high. As a result of these societal norms the divergence between individual inclinations of Israeli youth and the objectives of the IDF is somewhat reduced.

Yet, while combat service continues to be valorized in some parts of Israeli society, since the 1990s some scholars and policymakers have documented a decline in willingness to enlist in combat and a rise in evasion through draft-dodging or deliberate efforts to enlist in non-combat roles (Levy, 2009). In face of these challenges the IDF has allocated additional resources to align the motivation of Israeli youth with its strategic goals and needs. Together with the Ministries of Defense and Education, it administers programs to prepare high school students for military service with an emphasis on combat roles, tracking motivation trends among youth across schools. Though there is flexibility in implementation, the preparatory program is compulsory, and its primary objective is to increase enlistment generally and for combat in particular.

IDF socialization reaches its peak during military training. Upon induction, new recruits are given uniforms, their hair is cut, and any facial hair must be shaved. They are assigned a strictly enforced schedule and communication with family and friends is severely restricted. Cadets must relearn skills they had mastered long before, from properly tying shoelaces to ways of addressing young men only several months their seniors, now occupying a command position. They are shouted at and harassed, and their most minor infractions are punished. They undergo rigorous exercise and suffer physical strain and mental stress. Commanders are given extreme authority, and soldiers must demonstrate complete obedience.

These demanding procedures, aimed at divesting recruits of prior roles and identities, are followed by the communication of new norms and practices. For much of the period examined, these norms pertained primarily to the conduct of conventional, high-intensity war, with recruits practicing combat in the open and charging forward on simulated posts of enemy soldiers. At the same time, basic training is a site for constructing identification with the recruit's new role and the creation of a cohesive social community to sustain it. Soldiers are introduced to their unit's unique traditions, rituals, and songs and are encouraged to take part. They are told inspirational stories of bravery and dedication, are taught about the value of camaraderie, and are expected to make sacrifices for their peers. The initial months of military training thus instill discipline and obedience, inculcate norms and values, and forge a shared identity. Matan, a former infantry soldier, put it this way:

> Part of what I find amazing about this system is its ability, in the training process, to simply program the person. It's so crazy and extreme. The training period is when you learn to do things that make no sense to a normal person, whether it's to crawl in a field of thorns or run forward when you're being shot at, stuff like that that isn't logical. It's not something that a reasonable person would do of their free will, and part of the programming is really internalizing your place. Internalizing.[4]

Matan's reflections underscore the importance of the socialization phase in inculcating a professional identity and its associated norms. When socialization is this effective, behavior is not driven by the individual incentives of a 'reasonable person' but by internalization.

Upon successful completion of training, soldiers who have not been immediately selected for commander training generally enter their units in deployment. At this time, the messy conditions of fighting begin to undermine the clear normative framework espoused during training, presenting soldiers with new situations to which they must match the norms they have learned.

Ambiguous situations

For much of the Second Intifada, the IDF trained its soldiers primarily for 'combative' violence of the kind valorized in conventional war. Such violence was dangerous, targeted a clear enemy, and resulted in concrete military achievements, such as the conquest of territory and killing or forcing the enemy to retreat. Soldiers in the period examined generally did not engage in such warfare, but they sought to interpret the situations they encountered through these lenses. In the context of the

[4] Interview 26.

Second Intifada the operations that best fit this framework were offensive raids in the heart of Palestinian cities and towns, where soldiers sometimes encountered gunmen or IEDs and where arms and militants could be captured or killed. These missions tended to attract high levels of participation.

Accounts of resistance, in contrast, were usually associated with population-control missions, which presented ambiguous situations where some soldiers felt that the appropriate course of action was unclear. Most commonly, respondents described such ambiguities at checkpoints, which in their view bore none of the characteristics of the military missions they were eager to fulfill. Attempts to frame these missions in combative terms could fall flat, as Yoav, a former infantry soldier, explained:

> The more you're in the army, the more you start to ask, 'wait, why are we here?' They can't brainwash us anymore, you understand it's one big bluff I think, all that brainwashing, like 'you are protecting your country, you're preventing terrorist attacks,' but really, come on, we check 1000 cars a day. We're not actually going to take apart each car [. . .] the more time you spend there the more you know that no matter how much they tell you about the threats [. . .] no one takes it seriously anymore.[5]

Yoav's account demonstrates the struggle to match the content of socialization with the situation encountered during deployment. In the presence of situational ambiguity, soldiers sought appropriate rules that should govern their behavior. For some, this meant drawing on norms they had held in other, non-military contexts, especially when the situation they encountered reminded them of experiences outside the military. For example, Nir, a former infantry officer, found it difficult to apply military norms to certain situations he encountered at checkpoints. He recalled:

> I remember I would stand at checkpoints as a soldier and I'd see the old people and it would remind me of my grandfather and grandmother. And you think, what would happen if my grandfather were crossing the checkpoint right now and was being treated like this. I'd lose my sanity.

Nir's struggle ultimately led him to relax restrictions and allow people to pass despite military orders. He explained,

> It's hard to connect the face of a 90-year-old woman to a suicide bomber. And that's what they ask you to do all the time. Ultimately, it's true that anyone who passes might be a terrorist [. . .] but after some time you say to yourself, enough already, poor woman, let her pass.[6]

Indeed, several respondents reported that they sometimes let people pass without the proper permits, or dodged patrols intended at catching people bypassing checkpoints, because they felt that these tasks did not conform to military norms as they understood them. One of these respondents, a former tank officer, recalled complaining often to his superiors that manning checkpoints was inappropriate for a tank soldier, calling that period one of 'strange and unnatural' dilemmas for someone from a tank unit.[7]

Respondents also described other situational triggers for resistance, such as the occupation of Palestinian residential buildings during offensives. Gal, a former infantryman, recalled being sent on a raid to capture militants. The soldiers remained in the town for a couple of weeks occupying apartment buildings, even though the men had been captured within a few days. His sense that this was inappropriate led him eventually to opt out of combat service. He explained:

> That's where I had a political switch. Of course it only sunk in much later, but I was really angry and didn't understand what I was doing there [. . .] I felt very bitter, I felt we're mistreating the family [in the building] for no reason. It only sunk in two years later, but at that moment I decided I didn't want to be in combat anymore, and I'm going to end it.[8]

Normative conflict

For some soldiers, then, circumstances encountered in deployment trigger a questioning of military norms and their applicability. Whether or not situational ambiguity leads to resistance depends on individual background and the other, pre-existing identities and norms that soldiers bring to the situation, as well as on individual differences in the ability to withstand social pressures and not conform (Santee & Maslach, 1982). Individual differences cannot comprehensively be tested using these data, but reflections by respondents indicate some suggestive patterns. Yair, for example, was an infantry officer from a West Bank settlement. He too observed that occupying Palestinian residences could cause discomfort,

[5] Interview 20.

[6] Interview 59.

[7] Interview 8.

[8] Interview 3.

but he distinguished between how the situation would be perceived by hawkish and dovish individuals. The former, he said, may feel the task is unpleasant but would identify with its purpose nevertheless and therefore feel it was the right thing to do. Dovish individuals, who didn't identify with the task to begin with, would find the task harder to carry out.[9]

His interpretation was echoed by Avishai, a religious former infantry soldier who had attended a military preparatory academy. He argued that he was unaffected by encounters with civilians at checkpoints and elsewhere:

> I think that because I had faith in the justness of our cause, it didn't really affect me. It's hard if you don't have some kind of basic knowledge. That's what the preparatory academy gave me. If you have no basic knowledge about why you're in the military, where you come from, it could be hard.[10]

For Avishai, prior arenas of socialization reinforced the missions he was tasked with in deployment, increasing identification with the task. Gilad, in contrast, a former officer, explained that he came from a left-wing background, and several times felt discomfort that caused him to question his belonging to the organization, and ultimately, as a reservist, to opt-out. He recalled once witnessing several people being arrested to protect a collaborator's identity and thinking,

> Well, this is crazy, I don't understand this decision, I don't understand this world view, it seems really strange. And that feeling stayed with me, a feeling of not wanting to be a part of it [. . .] [11]

While competing norms raised the likelihood of resistance, it was by no means a certain outcome. In the context of social pressure to conform, resistance is a difficult step to take, even when experiencing normative conflict. Social context was thus the third most important factor in the emergence and spread of resistance to violence.

Social context

Deviance from social norms can carry a heavy price of ostracism and condemnation (Elster, 2015). When norms are internalized through effective socialization, individuals who deviate can feel that their very identity is fragmenting. In the totalizing conditions of military life it becomes difficult to even contemplate dissent. As a result, outright defiance was rare and most acts of resistance were covert, including such practices as evasion, shirking, opting-out of roles, and small efforts at mitigating harm. For example, a number of respondents recounted efforts in their unit to collect money to compensate for damage done to property or personal attempts to offer sweets to children in the course of operations.

Usually, such acts reflected moments of cognitive dissonance, in which soldiers felt conflicted between competing sets of values. For the most part, however, respondents did not question their belonging to the organization. In a number of cases, however, when such moments multiplied and conflicts were not resolved, moments of discomfort escalated into distress, making it difficult for soldiers to continue to perform their roles.

Daniel, for example, was a highly motivated infantry officer. Though initially, like many other respondents, he had been eager to join the IDF's counterinsurgency campaign, he came to feel increasingly uncomfortable with his mission. Ultimately he decided to discuss it with his commander and ask not to be involved in particular tasks. The conversation left him shaken.

> I was broken. I went home that week, I remember waiting for the bus the next morning [. . .] at that point I didn't talk to anyone from home, not my family, not my friends, and I went to an alleyway behind the bus stop and cried. I called an old teacher of mine and told him I couldn't do it anymore. I didn't believe in it anymore.[12]

Daniel's emotional response, his isolation from outside support networks, and his description of the event as a breakdown of beliefs, is indicative of the powerful role of military socialization in constructing a new identity. He felt as though his entire belief system had shattered. Yet even then, he recalled being unable to extend his resistance into overt defiance. I asked him whether he had ever considered openly disobeying an order. He responded,

> While I was in the army? God forbid, are you kidding? Definitely not. It's like when you're in a field training exercise, you'll never stop. But you might consider rolling yourself off a cliff to stop [. . .] You say to yourself, what will happen if I roll myself off of this cliff, I'll break a leg or more, but at least it'll be over and I'll be OK. It seems like a legitimate thought.[13]

A few months later, Daniel was injured, allowing him to transfer out of his unit. He recalled being flooded with joy

[9] Interview 15.
[10] Interview 55.
[11] Interview 65.
[12] Interview 6.
[13] Interview 6.

as he was evacuated, understanding that his ordeal was finally over. His reaction surprised me initially, until I heard versions of it from others. Gal, for instance, developed a mysterious stomach illness which eventually allowed him to transfer to a non-combat role. He explained:

> I welcomed the pain. I used it to get out [. . .] I remember dreaming a lot in that period that my friends were turning against me, I felt so much like I didn't belong. [I dreamt] there's a war and I'm suddenly on the Palestinian side. I just felt very rejected, and a coward. Most people treated me that way too. Even if they didn't say it explicitly. I didn't belong, they didn't want me and I didn't want them.[14]

The fact that Daniel and Gal could not contemplate outright defiance but welcomed physical injury is reminiscent of Elster's (2015) observation that escape and even suicide are associated with violations of social norms. Dissent under these circumstances can shatter an individual's sense of identity and lead to a deep sense of isolation. Conversely, access to supportive communities made resistance easier. Social penalties from the military environment could be offset by a sense of validation and belonging elsewhere. During regular service such access was extremely limited due to the minimal time spent at home. For reservists, however, who only served up to several weeks a year, social support was more readily available. Reservists led civilian lives and the power of socialization weakened as their sense of identification and loyalty turned in new directions. This raised the likelihood that resistance would emerge and that it would take more overt forms.

Alon, for example, was a reserve commander who was tasked to man a checkpoint between Palestinian villages. As locals begged him to cross he increasingly felt that the checkpoint served no purpose other than harassment and refused to continue despite explicit orders. He was eventually court martialed and sentenced to a month of military prison. I asked Alon why he had only defied orders as a reservist, when he had encountered such tasks so many times before as a regular soldier. He responded,

> When I ask myself why didn't I see it, why didn't I talk about it, well first, you're in some kind of daily grind with your friends, you're in uniform, it's your existence, you don't step out of your existence and look at yourself from the outside like I could do as a reservist. You're not a civilian, you're totally in the army and these are your friends and you can't exit, it's like your family, it's conformism [. . .] It didn't even occur to me to refuse.[15]

Alon could only find the personal and social resources to dissent when he was outside 'the family'. Similarly, Ari, an officer in an elite commando unit, described the first time he decided to refuse after receiving a reserve call-up notice:

> I decided not to go. I couldn't. And you have to understand, if you had told me ten years earlier that I would refuse it would literally be like asking me to go up to the tallest building in Tel Aviv and jump from the roof.[16]

At around that time, a group of reservists formed the Courage to Refuse movement, collectively declaring their refusal to continue to serve in the Occupied Territories. While being reservists allowed them to come together and form a new, supportive community, even they sometimes experienced a crisis in deciding, after many years of belonging, to openly defy military norms. Nathan, a former paratrooper, explained:

> This was the first time I felt like I'm leaving the fold. I'm not 'us' anymore. And not just us, I'm not me! [. . .] It's a break in my belonging to the country. Me on one side, everyone else on the other.[17]

Courage to Refuse's very public declaration, and the significant media attention it received, brought it to the attention of other soldiers who had until then felt isolated in their dissent. As is often the case when multiple individuals hide their preferences to escape social pressure, a shift in these pressures caused resistance to swell (Kuran, 1995). Within a few months, the movement grew to include hundreds of members. Ohad, for example, recalled that he received a pamphlet from a refusenik movement as a soldier. He had not heard of the movement before and decided then that he would join it upon release.[18] Yishai, who completed his regular service in the Second Intifada's early years, heard about Courage to Refuse while traveling abroad. Before his release, he had felt increasingly alone as his identification with his military missions declined. Learning about the movement validated his earlier feelings. He explained,

> I understood that people were talking about it, that I wasn't alone, that there was something I could do. It's as

[14] Interview 3.

[15] Interview 60.
[16] Interview 56.
[17] Interview 61.
[18] Interview 67.

> if I needed to sign with 'Courage to Refuse' to understand that I'm part of this thing and that it's OK.[19]

By validating the choice to dissent from military norms, outside networks of social support thus made resistance more likely.

Containing resistance

Conflicted soldiers who resist operational missions pose a challenge to military authorities. Though isolated incidents likely have little impact, the potential for them to spread presents a risk. To address this problem, the military tackled each of the factors that made resistance likely: situational ambiguity, normative conflict, and social support. Often, the task of reasserting control over soldiers fell first to small-unit commanders who represented the organization in the field. In the face of resistance during missions, small-unit commanders had to motivate combatants who struggled to apply norms from the socialization period.

One strategy some commanders used was to reframe population-control missions to the extent possible as combative, in an attempt to re-instill the identification that had faltered. By recasting missions that initially seemed ambiguous as normative, commanders could realign combatant beliefs with those of the military, establishing the necessity and value of the operations. One such commander was Erez, who pointed out that at checkpoints, commanders were not only responsible for curbing excessive violence but for pushing soldiers to produce violence, a task he found no less challenging.

> Soldiers who feel uncomfortable because of civilians, and don't strive for contact, the commander can push them [...] motivate them, serve as a personal example for aggressiveness, initiative, and charisma. [Some soldiers find it difficult] because of their personality, their opinions, everything. It's not pleasant to be harsh, it's a real problem.[20]

To illustrate, Erez told me about an incident in which a Palestinian man had approached the checkpoint and yelled at one of his soldiers. He recalled that while his soldiers wavered, he immediately took charge, loading and aiming his weapon at the man and ordering him out. He explained that the man's ability to enter the checkpoint posed a significant risk to the soldiers: had he had a knife, he could have killed them. Erez instructed his soldiers to load and aim their weapons at anyone who approached, to deter potential attackers. In effect, Erez removed ambiguity by re-establishing military norms at checkpoints, framing the man not as a civilian frustrated at the long wait but as a potential killer who may exploit the soldiers' weakness. He then drilled his soldiers repeatedly to ensure they would respond more aggressively in the future. Ultimately, he felt successful: a few months later when a man he stopped approached him and began yelling, he loaded his gun and his soldiers immediately followed suit. Erez was thus able to re-instill identification with the mission, and consequently, compliance among his soldiers.

Other times, commanders were not as successful in removing ambiguity. Perhaps they were not as charismatic as Erez or didn't identify with the mission themselves. In those cases, commanders sometimes accommodated individual resistance by exempting soldiers from situational triggers. A number of soldiers I interviewed were able to persuade their commanders to transfer them to a post that involved less contact with civilians. In other cases, negotiations with commanders could lead to the termination of a practice. Ethan, a fighter in a commando unit, recalled being asked to open fire early in the morning to provoke militants into the open. He explained

> We would wake up the entire village and make crazy noise, until our entire team raised its head and said this makes no sense. [The commanders] told us to shut up. There was some anger, they tried to explain to us that that's how it is and we tried to reach some kind of understanding. We said there's no way we'd do stuff like that again. And we didn't do stuff like that again.[21]

Sometimes, the army responded at an institutional level. For example, after realizing that the checkpoints posed problems to military control, the IDF gradually found ways to outsource the enforcement of Israel's restriction of movement regime in the Occupied Territories, over time transferring checkpoints between the Occupied Territories and Israel to a newly created unit in the Ministry of Defense through the 'de-militarization of border crossings' project, which operates the crossings through private security companies.[22]

The Courage to Refuse movement was also successfully contained, after an initial attempt at repression that

[19] Interview 65.
[20] Interview 25.
[21] Interview 5.
[22] See Knesset Department for Information and Research report (2006) Border Crossings to Israel from Gaza and the West Bank (http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m01532.pdf, in Hebrew).

only made the movement stronger. One member explained the process:

> I know that the army took two very significant steps regarding refusal: they removed reservists from the most difficult points of contact, and they stopped jailing refuseniks. Today [. . .] refusal is not much of a process. You go, you refuse, and you're released [. . .] If you want to refuse and go to jail you have to be really creative. And that's why the whole issue of refusal is fading.[23]

A final means of mitigating resistance is to delegitimize supportive networks. The IDF, together with other public and private actors, have gone to great lengths to identify military norms not only with soldier conduct, but with appropriate behavior generally. In 2007, for example, a group of marketing firms and business owners launched an extensive campaign against draft dodging under the slogan 'a real Israeli does not shirk'. These widespread campaigns raise the social penalties associated with resistance, further dampening dissent.

Discussion and conclusion

Interviews with IDF ex-combatants show that soldier resistance is a persistent feature of violent conflict, especially when everyday forms like shirking, evasion, and mitigation attempts are taken into account. While successful socialization increases participation and reduces dissent, the IDF case demonstrates that even effective socialization has limits: it cannot account for every possible contingency, and it does not erase other sources of norms and identity. When soldiers leave the carefully constructed conditions of training and encounter ambiguous situations, and when they subscribe to potentially competing norms, resistance can emerge. Though most acts of dissent are likely to be limited and covert in the totalizing social conditions of military service, external social networks can provide validation for unpopular choices, encouraging resistance to spread and become more overt. The data provide little support for explanations focusing on self-interest, lack of unit cohesion, or exclusion from a broad ideological project, underscoring instead the role of norms and conflicting identities. More generally, the findings call into question assumptions about soldiers being uniformly violence-prone, highlighting individual agency and the ability of some people, some of the time, to withstand forceful social pressures.

These findings also contribute to our understanding of armed group institutions and organizational control. To be sure, formal control mechanisms remain a consistent feature of armed organizations. But far more effective are social control mechanisms that target soldier identities. In the presence of such powerful socialization processes resistance is experienced as threatening to one's very identity and sense of belonging. Yet beyond socialization, effective control requires continuous attention to and negotiation with demands from below, and on occasion, institutional accommodation. These findings challenge the prevailing view of armed group control as a top-down process of domination.

The theory developed here seeks to account for the emergence and spread of resistance to violence among soldiers who have been well socialized. I argued that under these conditions, soldiers operate according to a 'logic of appropriateness' internalized during training, which can nevertheless become undermined during deployment. The argument would not apply to soldiers who had not been well socialized to begin with, because of poorly functioning socialization structures (see Hoover Green, 2017, for a general discussion) or because they avoided the draft altogether.

In addition, my focus on resistance to violence rather than all forms of soldier dissent has underscored the role of normative conflict. However, soldiers also shirk, dodge, or disobey for instrumental reasons, from the mundane (e.g. boredom or burnout) to the significant (e.g. pressing material concerns at home). An important task for future research is to specify the conditions under which soldier behavior is governed by appropriateness vs. consequences, and how these logics affect levels and forms of resistance. The analysis here suggests a number of propositions that await further exploration: instrumental motivations should be more apparent when socialization efforts are poor and therefore norms of appropriateness have not been internalized; they should be more common among soldiers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, for whom material concerns may be so salient that they trump rule-following; and they should lead to resistance more generally rather than to violence specifically.

This article drew on process tracing of mechanisms in a particular case: resistance to violence against Palestinians in the Second Intifada. As the insurgency receded, and in anticipation of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, a new wave of dissent emerged, this time from soldiers who resisted forcible eviction of Israeli Jews from settlements. Though the content of their dissent differed, the factors involved were the same: well-socialized soldiers encountered situational ambiguity that their training had not prepared them for. For soldiers who were also subject to conflicting norms (here, they were more likely to be from right-wing backgrounds), moments of

[23] Interview 56.

dissonance emerged and spread encouraged by supportive communities outside the military that opposed withdrawal. The potential for widespread dissent that could potentially jeopardize the mission led the IDF to take swift action, developing a comprehensive 'mental preparation' program designed to (re)socialize soldiers for the task, and negotiating with or exempting resistant soldiers (Amitai & Minka-Brand, 2010). These efforts were generally successful in minimizing resistance to what had been a very controversial mission.

Though the IDF is notable for its effective control mechanisms and high societal regard, the theory developed here should also apply to other modern, bureaucratized militaries that recruit broadly and rely on socialization to motivate soldiers. The disjuncture between deployment and training has been noted in multiple contexts, especially those involving irregular conflict (Carrick, Connely & Robinson, 2009). This disjuncture can trigger conflict for soldiers who subscribe to other norms, especially if they have outside support. For example, in her study of draft dodgers and deserters during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Milicevic (2004: 60) finds that men who served in the initial stages of the war were deterred from further service by 'poor organization, chaos, and unclear goals'. She further finds that evaders and dodgers differed from those who voluntarily joined the war in their normative commitments: they were more likely to oppose the pro-nationalist turn taken by Serbian elites following the collapse of socialist identity that had previously served as the foundation for the JNA. This is consistent with my argument about the role of situational ambiguity (which, in the JNA's case, occurred on a much larger scale) and pre-existing norms. Further research can test these propositions in other conflict contexts.

The focus on resistance does not mean that the IDF generally found it difficult to motivate soldiers to participate in its operations in the Occupied Territories. On the contrary, many soldiers participated eagerly in, and sometimes exceeded, the violence required of them. The IDF was also largely able to contain resistance so that it did not pose a significant threat to its strategic goals. Nevertheless, even this relatively limited scope of resistance is not trivial, and at times has had considerable policy impact. The refusenik movement of 2002, for example, was cited by former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's top aide as a key reason that led to the decision to pull out of the Gaza Strip.[24] This suggests that even limited resistance can have substantial implications for conflict processes.

[24] Ari Shavit (2004) The Big Freeze, *Ha'aretz* 7 October.

Supplemental material

An online appendix providing further information on interviews used in this study can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets.

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