“ARAB MOTHERS ALSO CRY”:
CONFORMITY AND DISSENT IN ISRAELI SOLDIERS' LETTERS FROM THE SUEZ CRISIS, 1953–1957

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By

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Introduction

This paper is an attempt to capture a historical moment in the Arab-Israeli conflict from a socio-cultural perspective. With few exceptions, historians have reconstructed the formative years of the conflict on military and diplomatic levels, giving little attention to how the people affected perceived events in real time. Meanwhile, another set of historians have recounted the construction of a national identity—Zionist and Palestinian—through the writings of politicians and journalists, but have not shown how this discourse (in the Foucauldian sense) was negotiated by the subaltern classes of non-elites. Instead, scholars have focused on the aftermath of events, creating a monolithic narrative that stresses a binary opposition between national groups from 1948 onwards. This perspective is potentially misleading because it can blur other views that were present at the time but suppressed thereafter for political reasons.

The question of how the subaltern classes internalized the Israeli political elite’s discourse about Arabs and war is the main focus of this research. To reconstruct these “forgotten voices”, I examine the personal letters of Israeli soldiers from the 1956 Suez Crisis (Sinai Campaign, as it is called in Hebrew\(^1\)). The letters used for the research come from a large collection that I located in the Israeli archives. They were copied each month by the military censor unit and bundled into special intelligence reports. The censor submitted the reports to high-ranking military and political figures in Israel, who used them to determine the "state of mind" of the Israeli soldiers on a variety of issues pertaining to army life.

To give meaning to the forgotten voices, I first attempt to delineate the socialization process the soldiers went through during their upbringing in Mandate Palestine and then in the State of Israel. In other words, what was the political elite (the socialization agents) trying to convey as the “conventional wisdom” about Arabs and the necessity, or lack thereof, of war?

\(^1\) Another common name for the 1956 war is Operation Kadesh.
The underlying assumption is that the socialization process the soldiers went through in school, and then in army training, influenced, at least to some degree, their personal perceptions of Arabs and war (as portrayed in their letters home).

Oz Almog, an Israeli sociologist, asserts that within the first years after the establishment of the State of Israel, there was homogeneity of opinion among Israelis about the Zionist goals:

Expressions of nonconformism and anti-establishment discontent are almost completely absent, and there is certainly no challenge to principles of Zionism such as doubts about the duty to serve in the army, the moral right to the country, or the confiscation of home and land from the Arabs.\(^2\)

Based on a few sporadic soldiers’ letters from published collections, Almog also makes the assertion that Israeli soldiers did not write about the experience of war, rejoice at the defeat of the enemy, or glorify militarism and heroism.\(^3\) Almog is not unique in this perspective, and other Israeli authors argue along the same lines. Reuven Gal, former Chief Psychologist of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), claims that combat motivation studies in the IDF showed that hatred was not a significant motivation in fighting.\(^4\) These views are hardly surprising, as research based on the cultural production of the political elite indeed reaffirms them and so do personal interviews with enlisted soldiers. Based on interviews, Edna Lomski-Feder argues that among Israeli soldiers in general, “it is illegitimate to voice subversive views, which challenge the meaning of formal national memory of the various wars. When such views are voiced, they are perceived as unpatriotic and attract wide-scale social criticism.”\(^5\) This is why the use of personal letters, not

\(^3\) Almog, pp. 59-60, 66, 70, 208.
intended for publication but secretly\(^6\) copied by the state, has the potential to unearth a more nuanced reality.

I argue that there was much more dissent and diversity among Israeli soldiers in the formative period than previously suggested. Most soldiers reiterated the known “conventional wisdom” of the Zionist elite circles—itself imbued with European Orientalist ideas of Arab inferiority—but there were also many sub-discourses and counter narratives that doubted and questioned military aims. Some soldiers even disputed the basic principles of the Zionist doctrine, including the claim that there was no distinct Palestinian form of nationalism. There were also soldiers who rejoiced at the defeat of the enemy, or expressed pleasure in killing.

**Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

To relate to the social agents in our story—the Israeli soldiers—I use the framework laid down by Pierre Bourdieu.\(^7\) Bourdieu sees *field* as the social space where the interactions between agents take place. The field is competitive and the position of the different agents depends on the accumulation of capital—economic (money or assets), cultural (forms of knowledge or aesthetic preferences), social (affiliations and networks) or symbolic (credentials based on recognition of others).\(^8\) Each field has its own unwritten “rules of the game”, what Bourdieu terms *doxa*.\(^9\) The doxa is usually constructed by agents who have stakes in the operation of the field and the

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\(^6\) It seems that some soldiers knew their letters were being read in order to make sure they are not reporting military secrets; however, soldiers did not know their letters were being copied.

\(^7\) Bourdieu is not completely innovative in introducing these ideas. He merely tries to reconcile two fundamental Marxist concepts: the superstructure and the base. He suggests that there is reciprocity between the two systems, but that the superstructure is more powerful. For discussion of the relations between the superstructure and the base, see: Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (eds.), *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1991), pp. 407-423.


necessary capital to exert influence, but the rules are shared among all the agents, including the subordinate ones.¹⁰ In Bourdieu’s words, the subordinates grow to see the doxa as “a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma.”¹¹ The understanding of the field looks natural to its agents who misrecognize the logics of practice at work in the field, “so that even when confronted with the field’s social (re)productive purpose, social agents are able to explain it away.”¹² Thus, the doxa is taken for granted, and it is shared by social agents with similar habitus.¹³ Habitus is Bourdieu’s key concept, and it refers to a cognitive system of structures that serves as a self-regulating mechanism in individuals or groups.¹⁴ In Bourdieu’s words, the habitus is both “structured and structuring structure”.¹⁵ It is structured by one’s past and present experiences (“the history”), by the social class to which one belongs, and by the specific social field in which it evolved. It is structuring because it uses the accumulated information to generate practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings, etc.¹⁶ The courses of action it illuminates seem to the social agent as necessary and natural.¹⁷ The alternate options are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.¹⁸

The habitus severely constrains but does not determine the actions to be taken.¹⁹ The “wrong choice” is rejected “without violence, art or argument” and is seen as “not for the likes of us”.²⁰

¹⁰ Thomson, p. 72.
¹² Thomson, p. 70.
¹³ Deer, p. 122.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 53.
¹⁸ Ibid., p. 54.
In the rare cases it is adopted, it would result in negative sanctions. On the other hand, the “right choice” reinforces itself within the field, and generates positive responses.\textsuperscript{21}

I attempt to delineate the social field in which the Israeli soldiers operated, that of the army. It is important to note that people may occupy several fields at a time, and the field of the army is only one social field that should be seen as a derivative of the political field.\textsuperscript{22} There is also interdependence between the different fields, and they should not be seen as completely discrete.\textsuperscript{23} Nevertheless, the army makes for a good case study for the construction of a national identity (or what Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper call “commonality”\textsuperscript{24}), because the army exposes the doxa of the elite through training and indoctrination of the subalterns and then allows us to discern the manifestation of the national identity through combat engagement with the nation’s Other on the battlefield.

The most powerful agents with stakes in the army field in circa 1956 were the Israeli Sabra elite, who made up the state political echelon and the top commanding posts in the army. As explained in Part I, this elite shaped the doxa of the field, and conveyed a “conventional wisdom” about Arabs and war. It also created the necessary social cohesion to allow the subordination of the soldiers. This is not to claim that the field was completely constructed, as Bourdieu explains:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 55.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp. 56, 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Examples of other fields a person can occupy simultaneously are the economic field, the education field, the field of the arts, and bureaucratic and political fields. Because the army field is a derivative of the political field, it can also be seen as a subfield. See: Thomson, p. 72.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Thomson, pp. 70-71.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} It is outside the scope of this paper to examine theories related to the construction of national identity. I agree with Brubaker and Cooper that as a category for analysis the term “identity” is ill suited…for it is riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations.” Therefore, this thesis attempts to discern some relational ties that link people’s commonality. In the army field analyzed here, I argue that many of the soldiers of the subaltern class shared common dispositions, some particular to the Israeli case and some universal, but also—as this paper shows—differed in many others. See: Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” \textit{Theory and Society}, Vol. 29, No. 1. (Feb., 2000), pp. 6, 20, 34.
\end{itemize}
Collective mobilization cannot succeed without a minimum of concordance between the habitus of the mobilizing agents (prophet, leader, etc.) and the dispositions of those who recognize themselves in their practices or words, and, above all, without the inclination towards grouping that springs from the spontaneous orchestration or dispositions.25

The Israeli case has an enhanced degree of the above-mentioned concordance. Most soldiers see the field as benefitting them and voluntarily participate in its reproduction (this is not to suggest that the actual drafting to the IDF is voluntary).26 As Bourdieu discerns, the social agents are subjected to “symbolic violence”—violence exercised on them in a symbolic manner rather than an explicit one—but they are complicit in that violence. Symbolic violence can manifest itself in treatment as inferior, denial of resources, and limitation on social mobility.27

In this sense, many soldiers shared similar habitus, and the decisions this habitus materialized mirrored—at least to some extent—the doxa of the field.28 The habitus, by its nature, limited the spectrum of choices deemed reasonable and directed the soldiers’ perception of reality and their moral choices.29 Indeed, it brought “together the existence of social regularities with the experience of agency,” but severely restricted that agency.30 This is not to suggest the choices were deterministic and that there was no free will or subjective experience. Bourdieu makes very clear that people are not automatons and that, in certain circumstances, individual-inflicted change is possible.31 Lomski-Feder explains that when war recollections are at play, a similar mechanism is at work:

This memory field is not an open space, and the remembering subject is not free to choose any interpretation he wishes. Cultural criteria regulate accessibility to different

29 Maton, pp. 52, 58.
31 Thomson, p. 74.
cultural models that frame memories…and, thereby, control the meaning attributed to personal recollections. These criteria "distribute" accessibility to different models of memory according to social entitlement.\(^32\)

In most cases, the habitus matched the field in which it evolved like “fish in water”, and the soldier did not sense the lens through which he viewed reality. In fact, he had the illusion that his perception was authentic and sincere.\(^33\) However, rapid and unexpected changes in the social field—such as war—sometimes resulted in disharmony between the field and the habitus, or what Bourdieu terms *hysteresis*. The hysteresis, explains Cheryl Hardy, is “a breakdown in the self-regulation (habitus) which was established to fit an individual to society.”\(^34\) The breakdown makes the agent feel awkward, out of his element, or like a “fish out of water”.\(^35\) More importantly, because hysteresis breaks the fit between the subjective structures (the habitus) and the objective structures (the field), it may bring “the undiscussed into discussion, [and] the unformulated into formulation.”\(^36\) When that happens, some agents manage to readjust their habitus to correspond to the changes in the field, while others fail to do so. For the ones that manage to adjust, hysteresis suggests new opportunities to increase their capital. For the ones who cannot readjust, it usually means marginalization.\(^37\)

In Part II of the paper, I attempt to use the soldiers’ letters to reveal the underlying structuring principles of the soldiers’ habitus. I do this in one historical moment: the 1956 Suez Crisis and the occupation of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai. I argue that the objective circumstances of the war—the fleeing of the Egyptian army, the mass killings, and the dire situation of the Palestinian refugees—created a crisis in the social field, and as a result,
hysteresis. Most of the soldiers managed to readjust their habitus to the changes in the field, so that they once again perceived the reality as natural; I refer to these soldiers as “the dominant group”, because they make the largest percentage of the writing soldiers in 1956. The ones who failed to readjust their habitus to the changing social field are referred to as “the dissenting group”, and they were the ones who wrote in opposition to the field’s doxa. Lomski-Feder argues that the “reproductive voice” in the army, or in our case the dominant group, would be able to secure dominant status in the army. And later on, as Uta Klein contends, they would “gain from their military service by accumulating social capital, establishing contacts for their professional careers (networking), and achieving material and symbolic benefits.” The dissenting group risked being ostracized if their feelings became public.

In short, upon seeing the dire result of the occupation, and especially the large numbers of casualties, soldiers of the dissenting group created a set of counter narratives that doubted and questioned the field’s doxa. Among the writing soldiers in 1956, the dissenting group was substantial (about 14% of the 465 letters examined), and I argue that it cannot be seen as “fringes”.

**Historical Background of the 1956 Suez Crisis**

Tens of thousands of infiltrations by Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to the newly formed State of Israel occurred from 1949 to 1956. These were mostly Palestinians who fled or were expelled during the 1948 war. Benny Morris argues that 90% of the infiltrations were economically or

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38 Lomski-Feder, p. 103.
40 Infiltrations were also prevalent through the Jordanian, Lebanese, and Syrian borders. This paper focuses on the situation in the Gaza Strip under Egyptian rule.
socially motivated, mostly Palestinians attempting to retrieve possessions, harvest their old
plants, or visit family left behind. Theft from the newly established Jewish settlements, some
built on what had been Palestinian villages, was also common. The other 10% of infiltrations
were small-scale terrorist and guerrilla attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers. The
Palestinians carrying out the attacks were known as fidā'īyun\(^{42}\) (Fedayeen, as is commonly
written in English). Until 1954, Egypt opposed the activity of Palestinian militants and even
attempted to cease it. This changed in 1955, when Egypt started to train and fund Fedayeen.\(^{43}\)
About 300 Israeli civilians were killed from 1949 to 1956 by Fedayeen, and millions of dollars in
economic damage were sustained. (This figure does not include Israeli soldiers killed, who
amounted to a few hundred).\(^{44}\) Israel initiated a lax, “free-fire”\(^{45}\) policy to fight infiltrations along
the borders with the neighboring Arab countries, which led to the killing of around 2,700–5,000
“infiltrators”.\(^{46}\) Israel also launched a series of reprisal attacks on civilian villages, refugee
camps, and military installations in Gaza and the West Bank to deter further infiltrations. There
was no direct connection between the targets of the raids and the places from which the
Fedayeen attacks originated, and the locations were chosen from a list.\(^{47}\) This policy was revised
after the mass killing of civilians in the village of Qibya in the West Bank in 1953. The IDF
gradually switched to striking only military facilities. Simultaneously, Arab countries (mainly

\(^{42}\) fidāʾ (single), fidāʿīyūn (plural) in Arabic means a self-sacrificer.

\(^{43}\) Morris, pp. 429–430. For Palestinian personal recollection of events, see: Ilana Feldman. “Home as Refrain:

\(^{44}\) This figure does not include the Sinai campaign casualties. Morris, p. 431–436. Terrorism Deaths in Israel 1920-
+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+before+2000/Terrorism%20deaths%20in%20Israel%20-%201920-
1999&gt;.

\(^{45}\) “Free-fire” policy refers to rules-of-engagement instructions given to the soldiers that allowed them to shoot at
suspicious characters without early warnings.

\(^{46}\) Morris, p. 431–436. Some scholars use the term “returnees” to emphasize the fact that many of the infiltrators
were original inhabitants of Mandatory Palestine who fled or were expelled in the 1948 war.

\(^{47}\) Gil-li Vardi, “‘Pounding Their Feet’: Israeli Military Culture as Reflected in Early IDF Combat History,” Journal
of Strategic Studies, 31(2), 2008, p. 300.
Egypt) started cross-border counter-strikes in Israel.\(^{48}\) Despite its policy of striking only military installations, in April 1956, in response to an Egyptian raid that killed a few Israeli soldiers, Israel shelled Gaza City and killed 58 Egyptians and Palestinians, including women and children. The IDF claimed it aimed at military targets, a claim that the UN peacekeeping forces refuted. Egypt, in response, sent approximately 200 Fedayeen on raids inside Israel.\(^{49}\) This military escalation was quickly followed by war.

Israeli historians give several reasons for the decision to launch the war in 1956, one being the rise in the rate of infiltrations and Fedayeen attacks inside Israel. In this sense, the war was merely a continuation of the small-scale border clashes that had been going on continuously since 1949.\(^{50}\) Another reason, formally declared by Israel as the *casus belli*, was the Egyptian blockade of the Straits of Tiran, which threatened Israel’s economy, as ships carrying cargo were not allowed into the Port of Eilat.\(^{51}\) The third reason usually given for the decision to launch the war was the Egyptian–Czech arms deal of September 1955 and the establishment of a joint Arab military command. The assumption that underlies this reason was that Egypt planned to attack Israel once its army absorbed the Czech weapons.\(^{52}\) However, recent research based on Czech and Soviet documents suggests that the Czech arms deal did not substantially improve Egypt’s military abilities, and also that the Israeli intelligence knew this the entire time. It is suggested that the Israeli leadership, aware of Egypt’s military weakness, decided to launch the war to “implement expansionist plans” in accordance with a detailed plan by Chief of the General Staff,

\(^{48}\) Morris, p. 436.  
\(^{49}\) Ibid., pp. 388, 390.  
\(^{50}\) Morris, for example, argues that the Fedayeen attacks were the primary reason for the war. See: Morris, p. 437.  
Lieutenant-General Moshe Dayan. This assertion still requires further research. Nevertheless, Motti Golani shows that Dayan advocated a “second round” against the Arab states before 1956 and got then Defense Minister, David Ben-Gurion on board as early as 1955. Golani asserts that “from 1955…Israeli leaders began to talk about initiating a war. At the same time they recognized the vital need for a close alliance with at least one significant Power in order to pursue their goal.”

The war, launched on October 29, 1956, was the result of a secret treaty, the Protocol of Sèvres, with Britain and France, each of whom had its own war objectives. Israel agreed to serve as the “provocateur”, to invade Egyptian territory, so that Britain and France could have a pretext to enter their own forces to “secure peace”. In return for its services, the French supplied Israel with arms—much needed by the IDF—and later (with Britain) gave Israel an aerial umbrella. French and British strikes grounded the Egyptian air force and allowed a rapid Israeli advance. In roughly eight days Israel conquered the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. Swept by the enormous territorial gains, Ben-Gurion was quick to announce “Israel’s Third kingdom”, only to withdraw five months later under American and Soviet pressure.

54 Golani, pp. 10-11, 181.
55 The international aspects of the Suez Crisis are not within the scope of this paper. It seems that Britain wished to void Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal and, as recent declassified documents suggest, to overthrow Nasser himself. France was concerned with Nasser’s involvement in the Algerian revolt and also wished for his removal. For the declassified documents of Norman Brook, British Secretary of the Cabinet from 1947-62, which suggest that Britain’s ultimate war aim was to overthrow Nasser, see: Tom Segev, “ha-reshimot ha-sodiyot shel mazkir ha-kabinet” [The Secret Notes of the Cabinet Secretary], *Haaretz*, 10 October 2008. <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=1027812>. For British and French war aims in general see: Golani, pp. 37-56, 100-120.
57 Golani, p. 191. The occupation lasted between November 3, 1956, and March 6, 1957. Israel was forced to withdraw because of pressure by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, after it was promised that its security needs be met.
The number of casualties in the Sinai campaign was particularly high: 176 Israeli soldiers were killed in the fighting, and about 6,000 Egyptians and Palestinians, a figure that included soldiers, militants, and civilians. The UN estimated the number of Palestinian civilians killed at 500. I will return to specific incidents from the time of the war when analyzing the soldiers’ letters in Part II.

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Part I
The “Conventional Wisdom”, or the Doxa, of the Army Field

To analyze the soldiers’ letters from circa 1956 and to distinguish their habitus, we first need to capture the indoctrination process the soldiers went through before their combat engagement. In other words, we must examine how the doxa of the army social field looked at a specific historical moment. It is assumed that the army field’s doxa was shaped in a gradual process by the doxa of adjacent fields, which the soldiers-to-be were a part of, especially the field of education.

Most enlisted soldiers who served in IDF during the 1956 war and its aftermath were approximately 18-21 years old, as Israeli men were drafted to the army in Israel at the age of 18, and served for about two and a half years. Taking this into account, one may deduct that the enlisted soldiers were born in the late 1930s, and attended primary school, youth movement and possibly high-school throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Thus, my analysis of the field focuses on that period.

The doxa of the political field (and of the army field as a derivative subfield) in the 1940s and 1950s was designed by agents who had the biggest stakes in its operation. For the Israeli case, these were the Sabra elite, who filled almost all the commanding positions in the IDF and in the state apparatus. For the purpose of this research, I only focus on aspects of the field and its doxa pertaining to Arabs and war. To do this, I first identify who among the Israelis constituted the Sabra elite and then examine its cultural productions which were consumed by the soldiers-to-be of the subaltern classes.

Some soldiers went through an extended period of training immediately after being drafted and were only then sent to combat; however, this time duration is insignificant for the analysis here.

More on the class characteristics of the enlisted soldiers on page 59.
I analyze the Sabra elite’s cultural productions on multiple levels: First, I survey the perceptions of Arabs and war among leading politicians and the party politics of the time. Then, I move to inspect the representation of Arabs and war in the mainstream newspapers. It is assumed that the soldiers-to-be were exposed to these to some extent at home or at school. Of special interest are children’s literature and school textbooks produced by the Sabra elite. Textbooks were used to educate the general population in primary schools and high schools, while children’s literature was read at home. Both of these enable us see the depiction of Arabs and the suggested ways of interacting with them. Finally, I analyze IDF training manuals and the 1956 Sinai campaign victory albums (both produced by the Sabra elite) to discern how the soldiers were supposed to view and behave towards Arabs encountered in battle and in occupied areas.
Chapter 1
The Sabra Elite and its Discourse

Almog estimates the Sabra class to have numbered between 5,000 and 8,000 in the 1930s and about 20,000 by the time the State of Israel was established—about 10% of the total population.\(^{61}\) There are a few works on the socialization of the Sabra elite\(^{62}\), but I focus mostly on their perceptions of Arabs and war, and the way these perceptions can be seen as the doxa of the army field, used for the socialization of the subaltern classes of non-elites.

The term Sabra usually denotes the first native Jews who were born in Palestine and distinguished themselves from the diaspora Jews, who were depicted as weak. The Sabra Jew was presented as “a new muscle Jew”.\(^{63}\) The Hebrew word for Sabra, tzabar, means prickly pear cactus, and was supposed to convey the idea of the new Jew as “soft inside but thorny on the outside.”\(^{64}\) Almog argues that this explanation is simplistic and that the term is not biological but refers to a differentiated social class with specific characteristics which was derived from the upper and upper-middle class.\(^{65}\) In fact, some Sabras immigrated to Palestine at a young age and were not born there. The Sabra elite was almost entirely from Ashkenazi (or European) background, as Mizrahi Jews\(^{66}\) were marginalized and believed to be mostly suitable for manual labor.\(^{67}\) More importantly, the Sabras were educated in a social framework as part of the labor movement of the Yishuv, in primary schools and, in most cases, high schools. The education took

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\(^{61}\) Almog, p. 3.
\(^{63}\) Klein, p. 50.
\(^{64}\) Almog, p. 4. Klein, p. 51.
\(^{65}\) Almog, p. 101.
\(^{66}\) Eastern Jews, Mizrahi Jews, or Arab Jews are terms usually used for Jews who descended from the Jewish communities of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia.
place in either *kibbutzim*, *moshavim*, or Hebrew gymnasiums (academic high schools) in the large cities.\textsuperscript{68} The Sabras also took part in the Zionist youth movements and in pre-army military training (*gadna*). In these institutions, the young Jews acquired “Sabra characteristics” such as “a rough and direct way of expressing themselves, a knowledge of the land, a hatred of the Diaspora, a native sense of supremacy, a fierce Zionist idealism, and Hebrew as their mother tongue.”\textsuperscript{69} Despite the fact that the Sabras tried to present themselves as men of action, rather than men of thought, in fact they were highly educated, with high economic and cultural capital.\textsuperscript{70} When it was time to join the army, the level of capital of the Sabra elite’s youth set them apart from the majority of IDF soldiers of the time, who only had primary school education.\textsuperscript{71} Many of the Sabra elite joined the *Palmach*\textsuperscript{72} before 1948 and later served in the *Nahal Brigade*\textsuperscript{73} and other elite units of the IDF, such as Commando Unit 101, the Paratroopers, the Marines, and the Air Force.\textsuperscript{74} They were pivotal in commanding posts during the 1956 Sinai campaign, and the victory over the Egyptians was seen as a “victory of the Sabra”.\textsuperscript{75}

The idea to create the officer ranks almost entirely from Sabra Jews was officially articulated in the 1940s by Yitzhak Tabenkin, a prominent Zionist leader who said: “In the initial period there should not be a large percentage of Separdi [Mizrahi] material, which is of dubious [quality], so that it will not introduce a bad influence.”\textsuperscript{76} The elite of the army field was blocked for Mizrahi Jews, which remained almost exclusively in the subaltern classes. Authorities

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\textsuperscript{68} Almog, pp. 2, 157. *Yishuv*, Hebrew for population or community, is a term used for the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine. A *kibutz* is an agricultural settlement where working and living is communal and the stated ideology is socialist. A *moshav* is an agricultural settlement where farmers till their own private plots.

\textsuperscript{69} Almog, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 157.

\textsuperscript{71} More on the class characteristics of the enlisted soldiers on page 59.

\textsuperscript{72} The *Palmach* was the elite striking force of the *Haganah* during the British Mandate in Palestine.

\textsuperscript{73} The *Nahal Brigade* was an army branch that allowed soldiers to combine agricultural work with military service. The brigade still exists today but as a regular infantry brigade.

\textsuperscript{74} Almog, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 16, 134.

\textsuperscript{76} Quoted in Almog, p. 101.
assumed that Mizrahi immigrants would be suitable for command only after they went through the “melting pot” of Israeli society.77

In the early 1950s, the IDF chief of staff asked to conduct a research that would explain what prevents Mizrahi Jews from becoming good soldiers and what could be done to help them. The research itself was never conducted; instead, in 1951 a high-ranking commander of one of the training bases (and a member of the Sabra elite) drafted a long memo with his personal observations. He divided the Mizrahi Jews according to countries of origin: the Turks, Moroccans, Egyptians, and Libyans (from Tripoli) were said to have “average comprehension…study well using imitation…and respond well to hygiene if they are under constant inspection.” However, “they are afraid of the night, and do not understand it at all.” On the other hand, Iraqis and Iranians were said to react negatively to hygiene and “fear jumping, crawling, and any other actions one can hurt himself in.” They were described as having “low comprehension. Low level of thought. They don’t think. They can only learn by seeing and touching, not by explanations.” More importantly, “national values have no role in their lives, and it is hard to bring them to understanding.” They have strong inferiority complexes, especially when comparing themselves to “more developed people”. As for their attitudes towards Arabs (Muslims or Christians), they were said to fear them, and only overcome this fear with learning about the Israeli military might and its advanced weaponry. The Yemenis, on the other hand, received a relatively favorable treatment, and although they have “low comprehension”, they are “very diligent, and take everything with love. They take effort as something that is obvious.”78

78 Document quoted in Torgan, pp. 68-70. Translation is mine.
These attitudes were pervasive among high-ranking officers of the Sabra elite.\textsuperscript{79} Ben Shalit, the IDF chief psychologist in the 1960s and 1970s, claimed that Mizrahi soldiers were inherently more violent than their Ashkenazi counterparts. Based on psychological questionnaires, Shalit argued that Mizrahi soldiers expressed more hatred towards the enemy, and as a result were more aggressive in battle. One reason was “payback” for their suffering in Arab countries under Muslim rule.\textsuperscript{80}

Aziza Khazzoom suggests another explanation for the alleged negative attitudes Mizrahi Jews had towards Arabs. According to her, the "Orientalization" of the Christian and Muslim Arabs in Palestine (and by comparison other Arab countries) was done jointly by Mizrahi Jews who wanted the Arabs to be labeled as “the Other” and by Sabras who relied on traditional European Orientalist teaching.\textsuperscript{81} As Part I demonstrates, many of the tropes the Sabra elite used to depict Arabs (and Mizrahi Jews) were adopted from European Orientalist thought.\textsuperscript{82} It is outside the scope of this paper to explore these tropes in detail; it suffices to say that Edward Said’s assertion about the European Orientalist worldview prevailed for the Israeli case as well. According to Said, Orientalism is composed of a set of ideas that supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. … [A] distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{79} The commander of the \textit{Givati Brigade}, for example, explained that is was common for Moroccan Jews to kiss the feet of their commanders so as not to be sent on patrols. See: Torgan, pp. 68 f.192, 70.
\textsuperscript{80} Shalit, pp. 48-50.
\textsuperscript{81} Khazzoom, p. 498. See also: Aziza Khazum, "Western Culture, Ethnic Stigmatization and Social Segregation: The Origins of the Ethnic Inequality in Israel," \textit{Israeli Sociology} [Hebrew], 1 (1999), pp. 385-428.
\textsuperscript{82} It is also worth mentioning that thousands of soldiers’ letters from 1948 onwards deal with racist perceptions towards the Mizrahi Jews. These letters will not be analyzed as part of this paper.
Similar to the European case, the dichotomy of Self/Other in the Israeli case also was maintained by “supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.”

In the pre-1948 era, various cultural productions show the Sabra elite only acknowledged Arabs of two types: the romanticized Bedouin, the “Noble Savage”, or the primitive and dirty city or village dweller. The Bedouin was to be observed and celebrated and his way of life imitated because he was a remnant to the ancient Israelites. Many Sabra elite assumed Arab attire to emphasize this. On the other hand, other Arabs were seen as backward; they ate with their hands, lived with their livestock, used primitive methods to work their land, and had a high birthrate. The control of men over women and children was also mocked, as were their local leaders (mukhtars).

There was some distinction between the Arab masses, who were seen as primitive, and the urban elites, merchants, and landowners, who were seen as exploiting the masses and, at times, inciting them. Other literary works by Sabra elite members emphasized that the Jews came to Palestine to help the Arabs modernize. In fact, throughout the first part of the 20th century, the Sabra elite’s views of Arabs did not diverge much from conventional European Orientalist thought.

This somewhat changed as the struggle over the land escalated in the 1930s. Gradually, the Arab masses were seen as an angry, incited mob and as a bloodthirsty and vengeful nemesis. The Jewish press, controlled by the Sabra elite, frequently used words such as “pogrom”, “massacre”, and “slaughter” to describe Arab attacks on Jewish communities, thus binding

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84 Orientalism, p.2
85 Almog, p. 206.
87 Almog, p. 189.
together European anti-Semitism and national conflict.\textsuperscript{88} The Sabra elite held that the Arab leaders not only wanted to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state but also to kill the entire Jewish population.\textsuperscript{89}

On the eve of 1948, the Palestinian militants were seen by the Yishuv leaders as skillful warriors who could disguise themselves well and take advantage of the geographical terrain. However, as the war began, the perception changed, and the Palestinian militants were seen as a weak, pathetic enemy, with low fighting capacity, which feared fighting at night because of superstitions. The actions of the Palestinian militants condoned, in the eyes of the Sabra elite, indiscriminate killing: Because the Arabs were the first to fire and were responsible for brutal killings and abuse of captives and corpses, they “should get a taste of their own medicine.”\textsuperscript{90}

In the immediate aftermath of the 1948 war, soldiers of other Arab armies were evaluated differently: Tran-Jordanian soldiers were seen as the best ones because of their Bedouin origin and British training. The Egyptian army was the largest and most equipped army, but its soldiers were depicted as inept peasants with deteriorated health. The Egyptian officers were described as urban elites who despised their soldiers. They were seen as working only “by the book” and as being completely unimaginative. However, Sudanese soldiers in the Egyptian army were seen as exceptionally good warriors. Thus, there was a bifurcated view of the Arab enemy: both as cowardly and inept, and as wild and stubborn, an opponent that storms the Israeli positions without giving any thought to its own casualties. According to this view, the reason for the enemy’s behavior was its love for murder and pleasure in sadistic physical abuse of the wounded and corpses. In some cases, Israeli soldiers committed suicide so as not to fall into the hands of

\textsuperscript{89} Ben-Dor, \textit{The Image of the Arab Enemy in 1948}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., pp. 48, 50-51.
Arab soldiers, thus reinforcing the image of the bestial Arab who ignores basic principles of human behavior.  

The Political Discourse

Some of the ways the Sabra elite viewed Arabs were crystallized in the political discourse of the 1950s. It could be argued that this discourse shaped the doxa of the army field, and in turn had impact on the habitus of the soldiers who were exposed to it through the media or other means.

David Ben-Gurion, one of the prominent Zionist leaders, head of the Mapai party, and the first prime minister of Israel, was not a Sabra in the conventional form of the term. Born in Poland, he was one of the founders, or pioneer (halutzim) generation that immigrated to Palestine in the early 20th century. Nevertheless, Ben-Gurion is one of the most important figures in Zionist history who influenced generations of Sabras. After resigning from his post as prime minister in 1953, Ben-Gurion returned in 1955 to the position of defense minister and was pivotal in the lead up to the Sinai campaign.

Ben-Gurion’s biographer, Michael Bar-Zohar, explains that Ben-Gurion “remained throughout his life on strange terms with the Arabs. He neither knew them well, nor understood or liked them.” His view of Arabs was for the most part stereotypical, and he did not show sympathy for their suffering or defeat. Even when meeting Arab leaders, Ben-Gurion saw them as culturally and politically inferior to the Jews. The 1948 war brought him to the conclusion that Israel is only geographically a part of the Arab east, but culturally and religiously a part of the

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91 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
92 The degree to which this discourse affected the soldiers’ perceptions of Arabs and war will be examined in Part II.
Western world.\textsuperscript{94} He also held the belief that the Arab inhabitants of Palestine do not constitute a nation in the European sense of the word. Moshe Dayan, Yigal Alon, Shimon Peres, and other Zionist leaders from the Sabra generation adopted this worldview.\textsuperscript{95}

As Elie Podeh demonstrates, even when Israel was winning over the Arabs during the 1948 war, Ben-Gurion continued to argue that a united Arab world could still annihilate the State of Israel, but that only the emergence of a strong leader in the Arab world could mobilize the necessary power to do so. Although Gamal Abdel Nasser corresponded well with the characteristics of “a strong leader”, when the Free Officers first came to power in Egypt in 1952, Ben-Gurion and the Sabra elite welcomed the new regime, hoping that it “will march Egypt to an era of modernization and social justice.” They also hoped Egypt would be less immersed in nationalist rhetoric, and in turn would make political concessions to Israel.\textsuperscript{96} But after Ben-Gurion read Nasser’s booklet, \textit{The Philosophy of the Revolution} (written by Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal), Ben-Gurion declared in the Israeli parliament in January 1956 that “the ambition to destroy Israel is planted deep in Nasser’s heart and is a cornerstone of his nationalist viewpoint.”\textsuperscript{97} After brief correspondence with Nasser through intermediates and the execution of two Egyptian Jews who were caught spying for Israel, the view of Nasser was solidified, and he was seen as a villain. The Israeli invasion of Gaza in February 1955 and the killing of 37 Egyptian soldiers further escalated the situation and caused Nasser too to stop seeing Israel as a

\textsuperscript{94} Podeh, \textit{Demonizing the Enemy}, p. 154-155.
\textsuperscript{95} Daniel Bar-Tal and Yona Teichman, Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish Society (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 134. There were some nuances to the beliefs of the other Sabra elite. Dayan, for example, apparently appreciated the Arabs’ way of life and their tie to the land. “I had no doubt we could live peacefully with them,” he wrote in the late 1970s. See: Dina Porat, “Forging Zionist Identity Prior to 1948 - Against which Counter-identity?” in Robert I. Rotberg, Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History’s Double Helix (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 47.
\textsuperscript{96} Podeh, \textit{Demonizing the Enemy}, p. 156-157.
potential partner. After the 1955 Egyptian–Czech arms deal, Ben-Gurion started publicly comparing Nasser to Hitler, saying that this time “the Jewish people in its land will not be as sheep to the slaughter.” However, Ben-Gurion was not the first to compare Nasser to Hitler. Shortly before Ben-Gurion, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden referred to Nasser as “mini-Hitler” after Nasser turned away from the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1954. To further stress the nature of the Egyptian regime, the Sabra elite officials repeatedly described Nasser himself as “a dictator” and the ruling elite in Egypt as “a gang”. The press reiterated this language in editorials and op-eds. Simultaneously, the idea of a “preventive strike” started to gain popularity.

A different point of view was presented by Moshe Sharett, who was the Israeli foreign minister from 1948 to 1956 and prime minister after Ben-Gurion’s first resignation, between 1954 and 1955. Sharett spent much of his childhood among Arabs and thus held a more nuanced perspective, but he was quickly marginalized and eventually forced to resign just before the Sinai campaign. In June 1956, he argued in parliament that Israel might have missed an opportunity for peace with Nasser:

“...two years, confined in an Arab village in order to realize that the Arabs too are human beings. They have brains, logic, honor and human touch, and instinct and they are appalled [by atrocities] too.”

Podeh, *Demonizing the Other*, pp. 76-77. More details on the Gaza raid of 1955 are on page 70.

Podeh, *Demonizing the Other*, p. 79

Golani, p. 55.

Podeh, *Demonizing the Other*, pp. 80-81.

Ibid., p. 166.

Podeh, *Demonizing the Enemy*, p. 155.


Quoted in Podeh, *Demonizing the Enemy*, pp. 159-160. Translation is mine.
Nevertheless, it does not seem that his nuanced view had much echo at the time, and eventually he too was not certain what Nasser’s true intentions were.\textsuperscript{106} Podeh argues that there was no difference between left and right in the perception of Nasser, and that this singular view reigned supreme among the general public:

The decision-making elite’s negative image of Nasser was transferred to the public through various agents of socialization, including the press, radio, and the education system. Conceivably, this process led to the creation of a large uniform image of Nasser in Jewish society. The elite succeeded in transmitting its worldview.\textsuperscript{107}

Besides the image of Nasser, a key idea the Sabra elite attempted to convey was that the Arab-Israeli conflict was an eternal one, “an uncontrollable given”, as Baruch Kimmerling describes it when delineating the patterns of civilian militarism in Israel.\textsuperscript{108} There was no solution to it, and the quicker Israelis learned to accept it, the better. As Chief of Staff Dayan explained in a eulogy for Roy Rothberg, who was killed by Fedayeen in May 1956:

We are a generation of settlers, yet without a helmet or a gun barrel we will be unable to plant a tree or build a house. Let us not be afraid to perceive the enmity that consumes the lives of hundreds of thousands of Arabs around us. Let us not avert our gaze, for it will weaken our hands. This is the fate of our generation. The only choice we have is to be prepared and armed, strong, and resolute, or else our sword will fall from our hands and the thread of our lives will be severed.\textsuperscript{109}

The idea that “Arabs only understand force” became evermore prevalent among the Sabra elite in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{110} But this too was not an Israeli invention, rather a common Orientalist trope believed by British leaders, including Prime Minister Eden.\textsuperscript{111} According to this logic, only constant preparation for war and complete mobilization of the Israeli society would allow

\textsuperscript{106} Podeh, \textit{Demonizing the Enemy}, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{107} Podeh, \textit{Demonizing the Other}, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Golani, p. 55.
survival. A similar idea was the notion of ein breira, Hebrew for “there is no alternative,” meaning that Israel is “the defensive party that resorts to force only because the implacable hostility and active belligerence of her Arab neighbours leave her no other choice.”

The planning of the Suez campaign was done by Dayan and Peres (then deputy defense minister) secretly, without informing the cabinet members from either Mapai or the other parties in the coalition. However, when Mapai’s leaders started publicly beating the war drums in 1956, almost all parties, inside and outside the coalition, quickly came on board, including Ahдут Ha-‘Avoda, the General Zionists, the Progressives, and the religious parties.

A different view was presented by the Herut right-wing party, which advocated a second round with the Arab states as early as 1950 and called for an expansionist approach that would “redeem” additional territories of the Land of Israel, such as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai, and Jerusalem. The leaders of this party only learned of the war plans hours before Israel’s attack and supported them wholeheartedly, though they questioned the timing.

On the other side of the political scale was Mapam, the United Workers Party, which was established by the Kibbutz movement political activists and held a Marxist-Zionist outlook. Mapam called for partial military passivity, together with armament of the IDF. War, the party leaders believed, should be avoided unless it was a response to an attack or an attempt by Israel to thwart an immediate threat to its existence. “There is no just war, only just self-defense,” was how one of the party’s leaders put it. After the Egyptian–Czech arms deal of September 1955, the party leaders objected to a preventive strike. They did not see the Fedayeen activity, or

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112 Kimmerling, p. 152.
113 Golani, p. vi.
114 Barzilai, pp. 29-30.
115 Ibid., p. 31.
116 Ibid., pp. 32.
117 Ibid., p. 28.
118 Ibid., p. 33.
the blockade of the Straits of Tiran, as *casus beli*. The party leaders called for small reprisal strikes that would limit the Arab civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{119} But Mapam, afraid for its political clout and cabinet portfolios, remained silent and did not voice its opposition to an all-out war, although its leaders were aware of the preparations for it. They deemed the party’s other socialist political goals as more important.\textsuperscript{120} When Ben-Gurion officially informed the party leaders of the zero hour, just before the vote in the cabinet, they expressed their objection but did not resign, fearing they would be seen as anti-Zionists. In fact, after giving token objection to the war in the party’s newspaper, Mapam called for mobilization for the war effort.\textsuperscript{121} The party also quickly found elaborate reasoning to explain its new position, arguing that it drew a distinction between “the totally unjustified war and the unjust war launched and waged under justifying circumstances,” such as the Fedayeen attacks and the blockade.\textsuperscript{122} Dissenting voices within the party apparatus, who called for resignation while the fighting was still underway, were quickly silenced. Also important were Mapam members who held commanding positions in the IDF and, as the rest of the IDF officer rank, vigorously supported the war.\textsuperscript{123}

The only party that vocally objected to the war and saw it as unjust was *Maki*, the Israeli Communist Party, which was an alliance between Arabs and Jews and defined itself as non-Zionist. Maki was never part of the ruling coalition and advocated the return of Palestinian refugees, adoption of the Partition Plan, and complete military passivity unless attacked.\textsuperscript{124} They firmly resisted the 1956 war and were marginalized as traitors.\textsuperscript{125}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] Ibid., pp. 34-35.
\item[120] Ibid., pp. 37, 41.
\item[121] Ibid., pp. 39-42.
\item[122] Ibid., p. 53.
\item[123] Ibid., pp. 42-43.
\item[124] Ibid., p. 28.
\item[125] Ibid., pp. 44, 50.
\end{footnotes}
The Mapai-controlled media rarely exposed the differences of opinion in the ruling elite and, as Gad Barzilai contends, “did not constitute a pressure group for the policy makers, nor did it make any distinctive input to the decision-making process.”\(^{126}\) All in all, argues Barzilai, “what Ben-Gurion sought was not public consent in the liberal-pluralist sense of the term, but a consensus among the other political elites.”\(^{127}\) After the war, all the Zionist parties joined in praise of Mapai’s decision to wage it, including Mapam.\(^{128}\)

**Media Discourse**

In addition to the crude political discourse, it is also possible to assert that representations of Arabs and war in the mass media had some influence on the soldiers-to-be during their teenage years. In 1950, 17 daily newspapers and 38 weekly or biweekly magazines were published in Israel. Ten of the daily newspapers were affiliated with political parties, labor unions, or the Israeli government itself.\(^{129}\) As was mentioned earlier, the Israeli mainstream media in the 1950s was a tool in the hands of the ruling Sabra elite, with few examples of dissenting voices. All newspapers were subjected to heavy censorship by military censors. Bar-Tal and Teichman explain that the media “voluntarily undertook the burden of coping with the intractable conflict and nation building by accepting the leaders’ authority to define the boundaries and contents of political discourse.”\(^{130}\)

Throughout the 1950s, the mainstream Israeli media supported the IDF retaliation raids, arguing that they were acts of self-defense and a useful measure “to educate” the ones who were

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\(^{126}\) Ibid., p. 50.


\(^{128}\) Barzilai, pp. 49, 56.


\(^{130}\) Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 141.
The mass killing of civilians at Qibya in October 1953 serves as a good case study: Following the killing of three Israelis by Fedayeen, the IDF retaliated in the Palestinian village of Qibya in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank. Israeli soldiers threw grenades into houses in the village, killing 60 Palestinians, mostly women and children. At first, the incident was not reported at all—probably due to restrictions of the military censorship—with the exception of the Maki party newspaper. Then, when the incident became public knowledge after being published in foreign newspapers, the mainstream media reiterated the official government version that angry Israeli citizens retaliated and were responsible for the killing, and not the IDF. Only at a later stage did some of the Israeli newspapers criticize the act. There was little difference between independent newspapers and those affiliated with political parties.

It is important to note that during the 1950s there were other voices that wrote against the “conventional wisdom”. These voices found shelter in publications of Arab-Jewish alliances, such as Maki’s newspaper Kol Ha-‘Am (“Voice of the People”, in Hebrew). However, these publications enjoyed only limited readership among Jews, and especially among IDF soldiers. More popular were anti-establishment tabloids, particularly Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze (“This World”, in Hebrew).

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132 Ibid. Translation is mine.
133 Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 144.
Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze was a weekly magazine published by Uri Avnery and Shalom Cohen, two veterans of the 1948 war, who were later prominent in the Israeli “peace camp”. They were a part of the Sabra elite, although perhaps on its margins.\textsuperscript{134} The two purchased the magazine shortly after the war, and under the slogan “Without Fear and Prejudice” tried to bring a different voice to the conservative Israeli journalism of the 1950s. Combining sensational writing, exposure of corruption, and mild erotica, the authors created a magazine that sought to promote a utopian, socialist, secular model for the State of Israel. The magazine often criticized Ben-Gurion\textsuperscript{135} and the security establishment, claiming it was the voice of “the simple soldier”.\textsuperscript{136} It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss the magazine in detail; however, its perception of Arabs and war deserves some exploration.

While it seems safe to argue that after 1958 the ideological stance of the magazine was firmly solidified—acknowledging the existence of a separate Palestinian nation and accepting the Palestinian refugees’ right of return (to Israel)—this was certainly not the case throughout the 1950s.\textsuperscript{137} During the 1950s, the magazine held multifaceted approaches, sometimes contradictory, towards Arabs. On the one hand, Palestinian refugees were described in sympathetic terms already in 1950, and the magazine presented articles about their dire situation in the different refugee camps, even suggesting that Israel was partially to blame for their conditions. The magazine advocated solving the refugee problem by limited repatriation or

\textsuperscript{134} Avnery emigrated from Germany in 1933, and Cohen, a Mizrahi Jew, emigrated from Baghdad to Egypt and from there to Mandate Palestine in 1946. Most of the writers for Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze were of the Sabra elite. See: Oren Meyers, “Israeli Journalists as an Interpretive Community: A Case Study of 1950s Mainstream Journalistic Attitudes towards Haolam Hazeh”, University of Haifa- The Department of Communication [unpublished], p. 25. Available at: <http://burdacenter.bgu.ac.il/publications/finalReports2001-2002/Meyers.pdf>

\textsuperscript{135} Ben-Gurion was famously quoted as saying; “Haoam Hazeh…is a filthy, despicable, lying newspaper. If I could, I would make a big fire and burn in it all the newspapers that disseminate hate and jealousy, but unfortunately I am unable to do so. But I do know: if we were able to overcome the Arabs, we will also overcome newspapers of this sort.” Quoted in: Meyers, Contextualizing Alternative Journalism, p. 374.

\textsuperscript{136} Meyers, Israeli Journalists as an Interpretive Community, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{137} Only after the Kfar Qasim massacre became known and Israel agreed to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and the Sinai, did Avnery and Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze solidify a pacifist view that maintained that there is no military solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. See: Meyers, Contextualizing Alternative Journalism, p. 380 and Erel, pp. 87, 89.
compensation. In December 1955, the Palestinians were described as being a separate nation, something almost unheard of in Hebrew media at the time.

On the other hand, articles in the magazine often expressed strong support for IDF retaliation raids, and even adopted the official state line on the matter. The retaliations were often depicted in a romantic view, the IDF soldiers were celebrated as heroes, and the Fedayeen and other Arabs were mocked. This changed to some degree after the Qibya killing. Following the killing, Avnery called on the IDF to establish a code of conduct so that Israel would return to the high morals it had demonstrated during the 1948 war. The 1955 Gaza raid was also harshly criticized; however, the magazine later called for even harsher retaliatory measures, namely a preventive war that would occupy the Gaza Strip and other areas.

Shortly before the Sinai campaign, in early 1956, Avnery suggested in Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze a comprehensive peace plan with the Arab states. Nasser, in particular, was presented as a man of honor, and many examples were given to prove that his real intention was peace. Avnery published several “open letters” to Nasser in Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze, eulogizing him as a champion of anti-colonialism and calling him to make peace with Israel. The magazine even chose Nasser as “man of the year”, and his book The Philosophy of the Revolution was praised. Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze also published supportive articles about the elites of different Arab countries, trying to stir sympathy towards them among the magazine’s readers.

At first, Avnery and others in Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze were condemned as traitors by various politicians, and a journal published by the Israeli internal security service (Shin Bet) referred to

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138 Erel, pp. 66-68.
139 Ibid., p. 85.
140 Ibid., pp. 71-72.
141 Erel, pp. 72-73. The criticism of the Qibya killing brought Israeli commandos of Unit 101 to attack Avnery and Cohen and wound them. See: Meyers, Israeli Journalists as an Interpretive Community, p. 12.
142 Erel, p. 74.
143 Ibid., pp. 75-82.
them as “Cairo’s puppet”. However, after the Egyptian–Czech arms deal became known, the magazine started supporting a preventive war against Egypt, explaining that “every day that goes by, adds bullets that will kill Hebrew fighters in the next war.” The magazine made clear that the war would not bring peace, but explained that it “might save the country from a tangible danger of annihilation.” Little by little, Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze shifted to complete support for the war.

During the war itself, the magazine partook in the militaristic discourse that became prevalent in the Hebrew press, describing the war in romantic colors and comparing it to Hollywood films. The victory over Egypt was described in an almost messianic tone. Published pictures celebrated the Israeli soldier’s superiority over the inept, cowardly Egyptian soldier. Pictures of Egyptian corpses were presented in a grotesque way and mocked. The occupation of the Gaza Strip was depicted as the retrieval of ancient territory that was taken from the Land of Israel. “Exodus, the other way around,” was a headline aimed at conveying the immense achievement. Following the occupation of Gaza, the Israeli occupation forces were glorified:

The campaign remained clean, and the Hebrew weapon pure. […] Everyone who happened to be in Gaza in the first hours after occupation must have been deeply impressed by the humane, natural attitude of the simple soldier, who did not show any signs of brutality, or gloat over the inhabitants’ [misfortune]. It was decisive evidence to the soundness of this nation [Israel].

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144 To counter the popularity of Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze, in 1956 the Shin Bet founded a competing tabloid called Rimon (Hebrew for pomegranate), that was less critical of the Mapai party and the security establishment in Israel.
145 Quoted in Erel, pp. 82-83. Translation is mine.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid., p. 86.
148 Ibid., p. 87.
149 Quoted in Erel, p. 87. Translation is mine.
Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze used official IDF photographs\(^{150}\) to show that the Palestinians were enjoying Israeli rule. Interviews with refugees mostly corroborated it: Some refugees praised the Israeli treatment of civilians, saying they did not mind under whose rule, Israeli or Egyptian, they lived. Another Palestinian child simply stated that he “loves the Jews and the Jewish soldiers.”\(^ {151}\) Avnery supported the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel but also suggested that Israel absorb around 300,000 refugees. Nitza Erel sees Avnery’s complex and often contradicting narrative as “combining imperialist and pacifist aspects.”\(^ {152}\)

The stances adopted by Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze up until, and during, the Sinai campaign could be seen as partial dissent from the doxa or the “conventional wisdom” of the field of politics. However, it is also important to note that the question remains if this dissent was disseminated among the subaltern classes that composed the vast majority of army soldiers. Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze printed approximately 13,000 issues each week in 1954, and 15,000–16,000 issues in 1957–1958. This is a significant number that placed the magazine as the second most popular weekly magazine in Israel; however, Oren Meyers concludes that the magazine’s “readers usually lived in the well-to-do neighborhoods or suburbs of the big cities, and in general Haolam Hazeh [sic] was far less successful among Mizrachi and lower-class Israeli newspaper readers.”\(^ {153}\) The magazine’s own statistics showed that its readers were more educated than the average Israeli, a profile that does not correspond with that of the majority of IDF soldiers at the time, as demonstrated in Part II.\(^ {154}\)

\(^{150}\) These photographs were later used in the victory albums. See chapter 3.

\(^{151}\) Erel, p. 70.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., pp. 69-70.


\(^{154}\) There is evidence that high-ranking officers read the magazine. See: Meyers, Israeli Journalists as an Interpretive Community, p. 31.
Another dissenting voice, this time in literature, is S. Yizhar’s 1949 book *Khirbet Khizeh*, which depicted forceful expulsion of Palestinians during the 1948 war from the viewpoint of a simple soldier.\(^{155}\) However, it seems that in most cases these voices did not penetrate the world of young people in Israel. There were some exceptions, especially among students in the Kibbutzim, but they were relatively marginal, and even when the nuanced voices were presented, they were dismissed. This only changed in the 1960s.\(^{156}\)

To conclude the reflection of Arabs and war in the political and media discourses, it is possible to argue that much uniformity prevailed. For the most part, Arabs were depicted as a dangerous enemy who only understands the language of force. “Preventive war” was also overwhelmingly supported, even among socialist parties, and liberal newspapers. Other views existed but were relatively marginal.

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\(^{155}\) There are a few other examples as well, such as Benjamin Tamuz’s *Swimming Competition* (1951) and Aharon Meged’s *The Treasure* (1949). See: Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 182.

Chapter 2
Children’s Literature and School Textbooks

The socialization process the soldiers-to-be went through has many variables that cannot be surveyed. For example, it is virtually impossible to know how the families of the soldiers-to-be affected their views of Arabs and war during their upbringing. It is probable that many of the views the grown-up soldiers demonstrated in their letters home were the result of information they had absorbed directly from their parents, or by listening to conversations between family members. Research has shown, for example, that in the United States, children whose parents forbade them from playing with black children developed prejudices against blacks as adults.\textsuperscript{157} I could not locate similar research in the Israeli case for the relevant years. More measurable, however, is the socialization process the Israeli soldiers-to-be went through in public, state-controlled, schools. The focus here would be on school textbooks and, to a lesser degree, children’s literature published without state endorsement. In the 1940s and 1950s in Israel, school textbooks and other products of mass culture were exclusively produced by the Sabra elite, and thus it is possible to argue that the content the soldiers-to-be were exposed to during their upbringing was a part of the doxa of the education field, and in turn shaped the soldiers’ habitus. There were strong similarities between the doxa of the education field pertaining to Arabs and war and that of the army field, since the Sabra elite were the primary agents with stakes in both fields.

Children’s Literature

Children’s literature plays an important role in a child’s upbringing. The child tends to regard books as truthful and imitate the behavior of their heroes.\textsuperscript{158} Thus, the books are a useful source for capturing prevailing beliefs and widely shared assumptions about Arabs and war, though it is important to keep in mind that there is no way of knowing how widely circulated these books were. Despite the fact that the books were privately published without state endorsement (or approval), they were all authored by members of the Sabra elite.\textsuperscript{159} Shraga Gafni, a famous Israeli author of children’s books, remarked:

The influence of...[children’s] literature on the shaping of a child’s character, his values and worldview is enormous. Naturally, a child, encountering fiction for the first time, is much more impressed then an adult that is already satiated with reading and every new material he reads is [merely] diluted in the previous material, losing its strength. The child’s first encounters with fiction shape him and direct him, in many respects, to the system of life the author desires.\textsuperscript{160}

One of most prevalent tropes in Hebrew children’s books in the 1950s was the depiction of Palestine as an empty land. “We will conquer the emptiness,” explained a young boy on a visit to the Galilee in a 1953 book.\textsuperscript{161} When remnants of life were discovered in archeological excavations, they proved the “Jewishness” of the terrain and showed an unbroken connection of the Jewish people to Palestine. In the Hebrew children’s literature of the 1950s, the Arabs

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{158} Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 187.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Fouzi El Asmar notes that 40% of the 205 books he surveyed (published between 1948 and 1975) were written by three authors. A quick background check of the three reveals they are all members of the Sabra elite (born in Mandate Palestine). See: Fouzi El Asmar, \textit{Through the Hebrew Looking-Glass: Arab Stereotypes in Children’s Literature} (London: Zed; Vermont: Amana Books, 1986), p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Quoted in Adir Cohen, \textit{Panim mekho’arot ba -mar’ah: hishtalfut ha -sikhsukh ha-yehudi-‘arvi be-sifrut ha-yeladim ha-‘ivrit} [Ugly Face in the Mirror: The Reflection of the Jewish-Arab Conflict in Hebrew Children Literature] (Tel-Aviv: Reshafim, 1985), p. 89. Translation is mine.
\item \textsuperscript{161} El Asmar, p. 59.
\end{itemize}
themselves admitted “This is not our land; we heard that it belongs to the Jews.” Arabs were often described as having no real attachment to the land. In general, most Arabs in children’s literature in the early years after independence were described as violent, cruel, and constantly plotting to harm the Jews. However, they were also depicted as stupid, and thus unable to carry out their sinister plans. They were cowards and quick to flee confrontation. The Jews were always the brave heroes winning over evil Arabs. *Hasamba and the Horse Robbers*, published by Yigal Mosinson in 1951, serves as a good example:

Mustafa Jamali realized that he was trapped. He rose lazily from his seat and contemplated in his heart that these Jewish children are really some fellows, real heroes. Indeed, they dared to arrest him, Mustafa Jamali, the famous robber with the scar across his cheek.

Children’s books often dwelled on the Arabs’ physical appearance, emphasizing racist, Orientalist tropes. One study found hundreds of such depictions, including “having a scar”, “having a bird of prey's face”, “having an angry and evil face”, “having yellow and rotten teeth”, and “having eyes dispersing terror”. The Arab villages were described as wretched and the children living there as filthy. These external characteristics were supposed to teach the reader on the internality of the Arabs as well. It was also stressed that the Arabs were quickly inflamed and willing to kill each other over a pittance.

Adir Cohen’s study of 522 books from 1948 to 1985 found that 63.5% of the depictions of Arabs were negative (e.g., cunning, hypocritical, arrogant, sycophantic, mealy-mouthed, etc.) and 23.8% were positive (friendly, brave, compassionate, and wise), but the latter were mostly in

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162 Ibid., pp. 60.-62.
163 Ibid., p. 124.
164 Bar-Tal and Teichman, pp. 188-189, 191.
reference to Bedouins.\textsuperscript{168} Other Arabs who came to accept the Zionist point of view were also regarded as “positive Arabs”.\textsuperscript{169} In 380 of the books, the Arabs were depicted as plotting to hurt Jews.\textsuperscript{170} In the majority of the books (61.1%), the Jews treated Arabs with contempt, mockery, arrogance, a sense of supremacy etc.\textsuperscript{171}

In most children’s literature, the Arabs were portrayed as wanting to kill all the Jews and to steal from them for no particular reason. “War-hungry Arabs” was how one book from 1953 referred to them.\textsuperscript{172} They were described as “gangs”, an “incited mob”, “robbers”, “infiltrators”, and Fedayeen. None of the Arabs in children’s books had ideological motives, and they were described as incited by their leaders.\textsuperscript{173} A 1950 book, \textit{The War of Independence} by Y.Z. Schwartz, describes Jaffa:

Jaffa, the city of fanatics, infected by leprosy and whorehouses for foreign armies...[where] everybody intends to capture the neighboring city of Tel Aviv, hopes to apportion [sic] the buildings and loot Jewish property...It was an hour of elation for the inhabitants of Jaffa, which further justified their profound time-honoured laziness.\textsuperscript{174}

Orientalist tropes especially stand out in this excerpt: Arabs were described as physically repulsive and lazy. The implied idea was that, like animals, Arabs acted out of instinct and not out of national sentiment. The book also stressed a strong sense of victimization.

The struggle over land was rarely mentioned in children’s literature, and when it was evoked the mysterious Arab \textit{effendi} (landowner) who sold his land to the Jews was blamed. It was also emphasized that the Arabs would not agree under any circumstances to live in peace with the Jews and would forever seek to exterminate them.\textsuperscript{175}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{168} Cohen, p. 72. Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{169} El Asmar, pp. 84-85.
\textsuperscript{170} Cohen, pp. 74, 76.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., p. 199.
\textsuperscript{172} Quoted in El Asmar, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., pp. 95-104, 125.
\textsuperscript{174} Quoted in El Asmar, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., pp. 65, 70.
\end{flushleft}
School Textbooks and the Educational System

School textbooks make for an even better case study than children’s literature. Daniel Bar-Tal and Yona Teichman argue that the textbooks “provide an excellent illustration of institutionalized societal beliefs...[that] constitute a formal expression of society’s ideology, ethos, values, goals, myths, and beliefs that the society considers to be important requisites for the social functioning of new generations.”¹⁷⁶ This function for school textbooks is quite common in developing countries that are on the verge of independence, or just post independence.¹⁷⁷ I argue that in Mandate Palestine/Israel textbooks impressed the doxa that shaped social functioning, especially in the army service.

Even before independence, Zionist bureaucrats saw the mandatory education system as “an instrument for Jewish nationalism,” as stated by Lord Peel’s Palestine Royal Commission report in 1937. Arabs “hardly come into the picture [in school textbooks] except when they force an entry with violence and bloodshed,” explained the report.¹⁷⁸ Sabra elite working in the Israeli Ministry of Education post independence also advocated nationalistic teachings. Michael Ziv, the head of the high-school education department in the 1950s and an author of various textbooks, explained that the teaching of history “aspires to instill specific values, to guide the students towards a particular point of view, to encourage them to adopt a clearly defined attitude sanctioned by society.”¹⁷⁹ He emphasized that the purpose of school education was not to create “national chauvinism” but to guide the students so that their views will naturally emerge. The 1953 State Education Law stipulated the aim of teaching humanistic universal values in the

¹⁷⁷ Podeh, The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks, p. 25.
¹⁷⁸ As quoted in Porat, pp. 56-56.
¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Podeh, The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks, pp. 21-22.
students while “instill[ing] a love for the state of Israel and the desire to act for it and safeguard it.”

One of the major themes in Israeli school textbooks from earlier on was the unbroken Jewish presence in Palestine. History textbooks tended to gloss over the 2,500 years from the time of the Israelites to the time of the Zionist movement. The Assyrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Muslim, Crusade, and Turkish rule over Palestine were only described in brevity as times of desolation and unjust treatment of the Jews. The Arab presence in particular was marginalized.

Interestingly, from 1953 onwards, not many books in the secular education system made explicit remarks about the divine promise of the land to the Israelites. Instead, there was much emphasis on the alleged emptiness of land in the 19th century—except for the Jewish areas—and pictures were often provided to prove it. The first wave of Jewish immigration found “a desolate and ruined country.” The implication was clear: The Arabs neglected the land and thus did not deserve it. The Jewish claim to the land was reinforced. It was also common for the Jews to be depicted (wrongly) as the majority in Palestine pre-1948.

Otherwise, school textbooks emphasized the welcome the Jewish immigrants received in Palestine. Quoting a book by Theodor Herzl, a textbook from the 1950s explained that the Arabs did not see the Jews as foreign intruders but as brothers and friends. Another textbook explained that the Arab leaders did not oppose the 1917 Balfour Declaration after the British

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180 Ibid., pp. 22-23, 26. Criticism of this approach was raised in various academic circles, but these views were the exception that proves the rule. See: Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks*, p. 24.
181 The name “Palestine” was rarely used, and instead the Hebrew term “Eretz Israel” was preferred. Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks*, p. 92.
183 Ibid., p. 111.
184 Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks*, pp. 78, 80, 84.
185 Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 164.
186 In 1947 there were about 600,000 Jews and 1.3 million Arabs in Palestine.
187 Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks*, p. 82.
government assured them it would not hinder the religious and civil rights of the Arab population. Interpreting the declaration, some textbooks made the case that it stipulated both sides of the Jordan River for a Jewish state.\textsuperscript{188}

Most of the time, the tactic chosen to deal with “the Arab problem” in school textbooks was oversight. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin explains that “the Arabs were actively cast out of memory…their existence was mentioned, but not as part of the historical discourse.”\textsuperscript{189} When Arabs were discussed they were divided into categories, with little affiliation. Rich landowners (effendis) who sold land to the Jews were portrayed as corrupt and indifferent to the fate of their own people. The Bedouins were praised for the preservation of their traditional customs, which “mirrored” those of the ancient Israelites. Some textbooks continued to exhibit a romantic depiction of Arab peasants, their foods, clothing, and customs.\textsuperscript{190} They were described as cheap labor that was “generally satisfied with a low wage…They certainly did not expect their employer to treat them with respect. None of this could be said of the Jewish po’el [worker].”\textsuperscript{191}

A recurring theme in textbooks was the ungratfulness of the Arabs, who did not appreciate that they too benefited from the Zionist development plans. As one book noted: “It sometimes happens that Arabs block with dirt and stones a canal that was dug [by the Jews]. … Here and there you see broken pipes, shattered in malice, evilness and stupidity.”\textsuperscript{192} Many books reprimanded the Arabs for being ungrateful.

A great many Arabs benefited from the Jewish immigration; their standard of living had improved tremendously, especially as compared to the Arabs living in the East Bank or neighboring Arab countries. Similarly, the conditions in the Arab villages situated near

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., p. 89.
\textsuperscript{189} Quoted in Porat, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{190} Bar-Tal and Teichman, pp. 161.
\textsuperscript{191} Quoted in Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{192} Quoted in Firer, p. 129. Translation is mine.
Jewish settlements were much better than those of the Arab villages located at a distance.\textsuperscript{193}

The 1929 riots ("Western Wall Uprising") were strictly described as religiously motivated, echoing the idea that they were only related to the regulation of prayer in the Western ("Wailing") Wall.\textsuperscript{194} In that regard, textbooks attempted to refute the holiness of Jerusalem for Muslims, arguing it was a modern development.\textsuperscript{195} It was the Arab Revolt in 1936 that changed the tone in history and geography textbooks. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Arabs were exclusively presented as "the enemy" and described as gangs or a homogenous incited mob that acted out of pure evil with no political motivation. As one textbook from 1938 described: "The haters of Israel began to incite the Arab inhabitants of Eretz-Yisrael against the Jews."\textsuperscript{196} The 1929 massacre of the Jewish population in Hebron was described in a harsh and gory way, which was usually restricted in school textbooks.\textsuperscript{197} The description was almost bound to raise feelings of hatred, and possibly even revenge.

The Palestinian violence was presented as arbitrary and malicious, incited by the elite for their own selfish reasons.\textsuperscript{198} According to one book from the 1950s, the effendis instigated the riots because they feared the poor peasants would rebel after the Jews introduced them to modernity. "Meddling European agents provocateurs" also shared some blame.\textsuperscript{199} The Grand

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{193} Quoted in Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p. 97.
\item \textsuperscript{195} Firer, p. 130.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 161.
\item \textsuperscript{197} Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 174. Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, p. 94.
\item \textsuperscript{198} Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 162. Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, p. 96. A deviation from this was the glorification in the 1970s textbooks of ‘Izz al-din al-Qassam, who did not work for his own selfish political ends, but “fought and died for the cause. A great inspiration that propelled the Arab foreword.” See: Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{199} Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, pp. 87, 95.
\end{itemize}
Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, in particular, was described as being incited by Nazi and Fascist propagandists and as receiving arms from them.\textsuperscript{200}

In the rare cases when Arab nationalism was discussed, it was depicted as a monolithic movement that encompassed the entire Arab world, with no distinction between separate nationalities. It emerged, the textbooks explained, as a response to Zionism, and not as a result of internal developments within the Arab societies.\textsuperscript{201} Obviously, the argument went, no distinct Palestinian nationalism existed.\textsuperscript{202}

These depictions also corresponded with the accounts of the period's leading Orientalists, who maintained that "the Palestinians, if left to themselves, never would have dreamed of a Palestinian identity".\textsuperscript{203} For example, Yaacov Shim'onî's book on the Arabs of Palestine from 1947 asserted that Palestine’s Arabs have no sense of nationalism, and thus their objection to Zionism is due to "extremism" and "incitement". He speculated that the Arabs would eventually acknowledge the benefits Zionism brought to Palestine.\textsuperscript{204} Yosef Vaschitz, a Zionist Marxist Orientalist, maintained in 1947 that there was no Palestinian nation and that the Palestinians were exactly like Syrians. Vaschitz had another explanation for the Palestinian uprisings: "The landowners were afraid of the rise in the standard of living, businessmen were afraid of competition, and the masses were incited by their leaders."\textsuperscript{205}

The history of the 1948 war (the War of Independence, as it is commonly referred to in Israel) was colored with a central theme in school textbooks: “a few against many”, i.e., the tiny David (Israel) who fought the mighty Goliath (seven Arab states); or 600,000 Jews with little

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., p. 98.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., p. 87.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., p. 92.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., p. 25.
weaponry who stood up against 30 million Arabs with advanced machinery. However, the Arabs, as the narrative went, could not follow through their plan “to throw the Jews into the sea,” because the Jews were culturally and socially superior.\textsuperscript{206} The fate of the Palestinians during the war was rarely mentioned. When it was evoked, the textbooks stressed that the Jews tried to convince Palestinians to stay, but they chose to flee under goading from their leaders who promised them they would soon return with the victorious Arab armies. The Deir Yassin massacre was also mentioned as a reason for the flight of the refugees,\textsuperscript{207} but the responsibility was not on the Sabra elite (the Hagana and Palmach forces), but on the Lehi and Etzel splinter groups. The students were repeatedly told that allowing the refugees to return would create “a Trojan horse” in the heart of Israel.\textsuperscript{208}

After the 1948 war, the Palestinians who remained in Israel (“Israeli-Arabs”) were not depicted as the enemy anymore. Textbooks rehabilitated the image of Israeli-Arabs and suggested that the Israeli modernization was lifting them from their backwardness. The positivity of the description depended on the level of cooperation with the Zionist authorities. The enemy label was reserved for the Arabs beyond Israel’s borders (including the Palestinian refugees).\textsuperscript{209} The textbooks described the Jews as peace-seeking, and the Arab leaders as warmongers.\textsuperscript{210} Readers used in the 1950s in Israeli schools depicted Arabs outside Israel’s borders as constantly plotting to hurt the Jewish state. The terms “robbers”, “wicked ones”, “bloodthirsty mob”, “killers”, “gangs”, and “rioters” were frequently used. Some textbooks made explicit comparison

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\textsuperscript{206} Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, pp. 102-103.
\textsuperscript{207} On April 9, 1948, Yishuv militia forces killed about 100 villagers during an attack on the village of Deir Yassin, near Jerusalem. Some of the victims were apparently executed, while others died when grenades were thrown into their homes. Among the casualties were many women and children.
\textsuperscript{208} Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, pp 105-107.
\textsuperscript{209} Bar-Tal and Teichman, pp. 164-165.
\textsuperscript{210} Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, p. 101.
\end{flushright}
to the Biblical times, and to the ancient enemies of the Israelites.\textsuperscript{211} Another prevalent trope was comparison between Arabs and European anti-Semites, making the argument that Arabs were also interested in “a Final Solution”, i.e., annihilation of all Jews, just like the Nazis.\textsuperscript{212}

Outside the context of the conflict, inhabitants of Middle Eastern countries were described according to the European Orientalist tradition as primitive, backward, and passive peasants. They were portrayed as wearing dirty clothes and having wretched, crowded houses.\textsuperscript{213} Yoram Bar-Gal, who analyzed geography textbooks concludes that Arabs were seen as “unenlighted, inferior, fatalistic, unproductive, apathetic, with the need for a strong paternalism. They multiply fast, ungrateful…easily inflamed and vengeful.”\textsuperscript{214} Arab hospitality was still praised, and at times textbooks presented stories about friendships between Jews and Arabs.

An internal report by the Ministry of Education from the early 1970s concluded that school textbooks about the Arab-Israeli conflict made students develop: “1. Hatred toward neighboring nations, and annulling any of their rights in ‘the Promised Land’; 2. Self-hatred and idling, while Justifying any acts of crime against us; 3. Hatred toward minorities, with no distinction between a civilian and a terrorist; 4. A sense of fatalism and helplessness; and 5. Contempt towards neighbors [neighboring countries]”.\textsuperscript{215} A study from 1959 conducted among children aged 6, 10, and 14 found a strong dislike for Arabs in open-ended questions about attitudes to other nations.\textsuperscript{216} These findings, based on surveys among students, show that many of the tropes used to describe Arabs in textbooks found their way into the doxa of the education field and into the

\textsuperscript{211} Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, pp. 84-85. Bar-Tal and Teichman, pp. 163-164.
\textsuperscript{212} Firer, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{213} Bar-Tal and Teichman, pp. 163-164.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., p. 165.
\textsuperscript{215} Quoted in Firer, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{216} Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 209.
future-soldiers’ habitus. Podeh asserts that there was little deviation in the first years of Zionist education:

The first generation of textbooks reflected a highly ethnocentric society that consistently denied Arab rights to Eretz Israel. Generally portraying the conflict in a simplified, one-sided manner, these textbooks were replete with inaccuracies at times bordering on distortion. ... A clear dichotomy was created between the Western, civilized, peace-loving image of the Jew and the Oriental, treacherous, belligerent, and backward image of the Arab.\textsuperscript{217}

Bar-Tal and Teichman conclude that “Arabs are constantly presented as a threat to the Jewish existence and those the stereotypes presented instigates feelings of insecurity, fear and hatred.”\textsuperscript{218}

As part II of this thesis shows, many of the soldiers’ letters reaffirm these findings, but, face-to-face encounters with the enemy also stirred different, countering, emotions.

\textsuperscript{217} Podeh, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks}, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{218} Bar-Tal and Teichman, p. 174.
Chapter 3

Army Training Manuals and Victory Albums

Army training manuals for treating Arab civilian population allows us a last glimpse at the doxa of the army field before moving to see what the soldiers actually wrote. In addition to the training manuals, victory albums, which were published in 1957, in the immediate aftermath of the Sinai campaign, also capture the way the Sabra elite perceived reality.

Army Training Manuals

Most of the IDF training manuals which deal with civilian population and prisoners of war (POWs) were written during the 1948 war or its immediate aftermath. Almog argues that much attention was given to proper conduct because it was part of the ethos of the Sabra elite. The idea of “Purity of Arms” (*Tohar Ha-Neshek*)\(^{219}\) suggests that the Zionists were capable of rising above primitive instincts of revenge and self-restrain themselves.\(^{220}\) This was not at all unique to the Israeli case. Sam Keen lists three basic “unstated assumptions”, or doxic rules, that sanction violence in 20\(^{th}\) century armies: The first assumption is that the enemy murders, tortures and commits atrocities because he is a sadist who takes pleasure in violence. The second assumption is that army soldiers—unlike the enemy—only use surgical or limited violence, and even that is because the enemy forces them to do so. The third assumption is that killing the enemy is

\(^{219}\) The “Purity of Arms” ethos has a formative story that goes back to January 1948, following the killing of the men of the "35 Convoy" on their way to supply the besieged kibbutzim of Gush Etzion near Bethlehem. As the story goes, the convoy ran into an old Arab herdsman and deliberated between themselves whether to kill him, in fear that if they do not he will run and warn the Palestinians of the convoy. The soldiers did not kill the herdsman, and he indeed alerted the villagers who ambushed the convoy and killed the men. The story has little evidence, but nevertheless it was used for years as an example of Israeli Purity of Arms.

\(^{220}\) Almog, pp. 197
justified as long as the soldiers do not take pleasure in it. Preferably, the killing is done from afar where the soldiers are not presented with moral dilemmas.\textsuperscript{221}

Israeli soldiers were threatened with court-martial for looting, abuse, robbery and rape. Humane treatment of POWs was also stressed. The manuals forbade desecrating Muslim and Christian holy sites or using them as cover in battle. The warnings were related to the soldiers not only during training, but also before battle and in the immediate aftermath of occupation.\textsuperscript{222}

Some common orders in IDF publications in 1948 were:

―Conquer yourself‖; ―do not be tempted‖; ―preserve your honor‖; ―do not disgrace yourself‖; ―no Jew will raise his hand‖; ―our lives will be pure‖; ―preserve the army’s honor‖; ―no man should dare touch their property‖; ―do not break the bounds and bring theft into our camp‖; ―the sword of our soldiers will not touch a man who requests our protection‖; ―may our camp be pure‖; ―they should be treated with respect‖; ―our war is just and pure and no man should sully it with forbidden deeds‖; ―may we never harm the deep religious sentiments of the Arab people‖.\textsuperscript{223}

In practice, it was already clear after 1948 that some acts of murder, looting and rape occurred.\textsuperscript{224}

However, the restrictive instructions remained the founding curricula for soldiers' training, and were circulated among soldiers in the Sinai campaign.\textsuperscript{225} For example, on the eve of the occupation of the Gaza Strip in 1956 the soldiers were ordered: ―Hit the enemy! Hit him over and over again until he is destroyed by the brigade warriors’ sword. Onwards to victory!‖ It was then added: ―Confront him with our full military and human prowess.‖\textsuperscript{226}

There is some evidence that the ideas articulated by commanders in soldiers’ training were more ambiguous than the training manuals suggest. To combat fear of the enemy, for example, the officer rank tried to indoctrinate the soldiers to express hatred towards the enemy.

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{223} Quoted in Almog, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{224} Almog exhibits a rather apologetic tone when explaining why massive breaches of this “rules of conduct” occurred in 1948. See: Almog, pp. 203-205.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., p. 89.
In a document entitled “The lessons the soldiers learned in battle”, published in 1950, low-ranking officers testified that they tried several methods to abate fear, including “planting the belief that war was a must,” careful planning of operations, making soldiers feel proud in their units, humor and as mentioned—stirring hatred towards the enemy. Only then, “They shall all march as one, with a self-confident heart towards the mutual danger.” Keen explains that

Ordinarily, the job of turning civilians into soldiers involves a liberal use of propaganda and hate training. A variety of dehumanizing faces is superimposed over the enemy to allow him to be killed without guilt.

Although there is not much evidence of this process in training sessions in the IDF, the soldiers’ letters analyzed in Part II, certainly suggest as much.

Victory Albums

The 1956 victory albums are an interesting opportunity to look at the doxa of the army field. Their publishers tried to cater for what they thought was the “taste of the general public”, so as to increase sales. The albums, published in 1956 and 1957, contained pictures from the war taken by official IDF photographers with captions in Hebrew and English. One album also included commentary on the war written by Benjamin Gepner, a former commander in the Lehi organization, who in 1957 headed the Ledori publishing house. Gepner specialized in military

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227 Matkal/Aka/Yechidat mechkar psichologi, Machon le-da’at ha-kahal [The Unit for Psychological Research/ The Center for Research of Public Opinion], “Ha-lekachim she-landu ha-hayalim ba-krav” [The Lessons the Soldiers Learned in Battle Learned in Battle], April 1950, pp. 8-9. Special collection: The Guttman Center Surveys at the Israeli Democracy Institute. Translation is mine.
228 Keen, p. 12.
230 One album also contains captions in French.
history. The other victory album did not include explicit commentary, besides the pictures’ captions. A third, somewhat less popular publication, was a collection of essay by politicians and military correspondents analyzing the war.

All victory albums extensively quoted Ben-Gurion. One album referred to the occupation of the Sinai, and evoked the biblical story of the delivery of the Torah\[^{232}\] and the Ten Commandments to the Israelites on Mount Sinai:

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\text{You have accomplished something which is perhaps of much greater significance than any question of policy or defense. You have brought us back to that exalted and decisive moment in our ancient history, to the place where the Law was given, and where our people were commanded to be a chosen people.}^233
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The albums referred to the Sinai and the Gaza Strip as ancient Jewish territory and echoed Ben-Gurion’s proclamation on Israel’s “Third Kingdom”. As a leaflet issued by the IDF to the soldiers who occupied Gaza explained: “Gaza is a live limb torn from the State of Israel. A clenched fist menacing the State.”\[^{234}\]

Quoting Ben-Gurion, Gepner’s album stressed the idea that the “simple people” of Egypt did not desire war with Israel. It also sneered at the defeated enemy:

\[
\text{There is no dispute whatsoever between the people of Israel and the people of Egypt. King Farouk, followed by the dictator Gamal Abdul Nasser, brought a major calamity on themselves when they incited their people to war against Israel. The flight of Egyptian army officers and then of thousands of soldiers in Sinai is very clear evidence that they saw no reason to fight against Israel in [a] strange desert.}^235
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The narrative throughout Gepner’s album goes back and forth between depicting a bloodthirsty Arab enemy and an inept cowardly one. The album opened up with a picture clearly aimed at

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\[^{232}\] The Torah, or the Five Books of Moses, include the following books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

\[^{233}\] Alobot ha-tatzlumim mi-mivtz’a Sinai [The Operation Sinai Album] (Tel Aviv: M.Biran Publishing, 1957. [no page numbers]


\[^{235}\] A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign.
conveying the first image of the enemy, and possibly to stir anger among the readers (see picture 1 in Appendix A): Next to a drawing by a Palestinian child taken from a school in the Gaza Strip, showing an attack on a Jewish bus, the editor put a picture of the slain Israelis in a Fedayeen attack on a bus at Ma’ale ‘Akrabim in 1954.\textsuperscript{236} The caption read, “The tree of knowledge and its fruit”, and the commentary explained:

Arab school children, who drew horrifying pictures of attack and murder as part of an extensive educational curriculum, merely translated into the language of dreams the world of the grown-ups, the desires of their parents and their national heroes.\textsuperscript{237} The next page of the album (see picture 2 in Appendix A) conveyed similar ideas. This time a vulgar picture of a “captured fidā’ī” was shown; he looks at the camera, and his face radiates evilness. Next to him, the editor put a picture of the synagogue in Shafrir, where in April 1956, four children were killed by Fedayeen. The picture showed the blood-covered floor, an open Bible smudged with blood, and a Kippah, possibly one of the children’s.\textsuperscript{238} Keen’s commentary of similar images in his book \textit{Faces of the Enemy} seems appropriate:

Look carefully at the face of the enemy. The lips are curled downward. The eyes are fanatical and far away. The flesh is contorted and molded into the shape of monster or beast. Nothing suggests this man ever laughs, is torn by doubts, or shaken by tears. He feels no tenderness or pain. Clearly he is unlike us. We need have no sympathy, no guilt, when we destroy him.\textsuperscript{239}

Images like that of the captured Palestinian fidā’ī were expected to stir the emotions Keen suggests.

Throughout Gapner’s album prevailed the idea of the Arabs wanting to annihilate the Jewish state. A quote was given from the \textit{Voice of Arabs} radio station, saying: “The liquidation of Israel is essential, and Israel itself knows that there in no other way.” \textit{Al-Jihad} newspaper was quoted

\textsuperscript{236} For more on the Ma’ale ‘Akrabim incident see page 67.
\textsuperscript{237} \textit{A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign}.
\textsuperscript{238} \textit{A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign}.
\textsuperscript{239} Keen, p. 16.
calling: “Our brethren men of Egyptian and Palestinian commandoes, continue to fulfill your holy mission: Murder, destroy and slay.” A letter by an Egyptian high-ranking commander to his officers from February 1956 (before the war), ordered to prepare for the “destruction of Israel and its liquidation with the greatest possible speed and by the cruelest [sic] and most brutal battles.”

To reinforce these ideas, an Arab version of Hitler’s Mein Kampf, which was said to be found in one of the Egyptian trenches, was presented in the album (see picture 3 in Appendix A). Israel was described as being compelled to wage the war to avert the enemy’s plans “to exterminate her citizens”, as the commander of the Southern Command wrote to his soldiers. Some pictures showed children in the frontier Jewish settlements hiding in bunkers, their face showing expressions of fear. A letter by a young girl to “the bravest soldier somewhere!”, echoed this when the child explained: “I am sleeping in one bed now together with my mummy, all because daddy is doing his fighting in Sinai.” The war was described as aimed to protect “the murder of children in their cradles”. Gepner falsified the number of Israelis killed in Fedayeen attacks, saying it was 1300, while the actual number was closer to 300.

The idea of “a few against many” was reiterated in the victory albums as well. The Egyptian armor was said to be superior in both quantity and quality; however, the Israeli soldiers proved to be superior in spirit. Further echoing this, the albums extensively exhibited the Egyptian officers’ flight from the battlefield. Gepner narrated: “They had gone ‘to fetch reinforcements’

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240 A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
and forgot to return.” Quickly enough, the soldiers followed, leaving their shoes behind to allow faster running (see picture 4 in Appendix 1). This was seen as cultural inferiority. 244

The boots of Nasser’s warriors, torn off and flung away in order to make flight easier. That is the mark not only of their defeat and flight, but also of the fact that Abdul Nasser’s revolution envisaged not reform at home, but war abroad. 245

Besides the ones fleeing, many enemy soldiers were described as happily surrendering. The captured Egyptian officers and soldiers were shown in humiliating positions, led to the detention camps in grotesque fashion, or groveling and flattering the Israeli soldiers (see pictures 5, 5a, and 5b in Appendix A). An Egyptian Major was quoted as begging for his life, saying “I always thought Nasser was no good”, denying he ever wanted to destroy Israel. The soldiers reassured him they had no plans to kill him, but reprimand him saying: “Be a man – tell the truth!” 246

The conception that Arab soldiers were feminine was borrowed from British colonial officers, who themselves reiterated the ideas of European Orientalists. 247

When the Egyptians learned of the humanity of the Israelis, demonstrated in medical care and food supplies (see pictures 6 and 6a in Appendix A), they were described as baffled, “stunned at the difference between the dream fostered among them and the reality. … Many cannot conceal their astonishment at the friendly treatment they receive.” 248 After being given some water the Egyptian soldiers kissed the hands of the Israeli soldiers and said: “We are your slaves. Everything you order, we shall do. You are good.” 249

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244 Similar themes could be found in the 1967 victory albums. See: Ben-Dor, Shoes in the Sand, p. 371.
245 A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign. Similar mentioning of the shoes could be also found in Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes, p. 135.
246 Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes, pp. 82-83. Translation is mine.
247 When referring to the soldiers of the Trans-Jordanian Arab Legion, John Bagot Glubb (later to be known as “Glubb Basha”) noted on several occasions that “they were not real men.” See: Joseph A. Massad, Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 140-141.
248 A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign.
249 Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes, p. 154. Translation is mine.
Echoing European Orientalist writings, Gaza City was described as calm, “subdued after surrender”, passive, and submissive, like a wild animal that was tamed.\textsuperscript{250} A military correspondent narrated: “Gaza the boastful and murderous – trampled to dust; humiliated to complete surrender, fawning its occupiers, greeting them with a hypocritical hand waves. The shameless whore [of a city]!”\textsuperscript{251} The civilians in occupied Gaza were depicted as returning to their normal daily lives, some even seemed slightly happy (see picture 7 in Appendix A). When they encountered Israeli soldiers, the soldiers (male and female) treated them in a cordial manner and listened to their grievances (see picture 8 in Appendix A), or as one caption reads, they were “conversing”.\textsuperscript{252} But this was merely a façade, as an article by a military correspondent explained:

> Seemingly Gaza surrendered and accepted its verdict. … Many faces are happy and content. But still you feel that something is going on under this jolly disguise. You don’t know for sure whether they are happy for [the conquest being] an end in the fighting and bloodshed, or whether this secret smirk is a feeling of superiority. … Here and there you see a somber, frightening face. You catch a glimpse of blazing eyes, full of hatred… What are these Gaza people up to, after drinking…from the cup of hatred for Israel?\textsuperscript{253}

The European notion of a need to modernize the Arabs (as mentioned in the segment about the deserted shoes) was carried on by Gepner, who depicts the 40-million Arabs of the Middle East as being “in a state of abject poverty and miserable Levantinism” and unable to read or write. The only hope for them, according to Gepner, is modernization, which, “Strange though it may

\textsuperscript{250} The Operation Sinai Album and Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes, p. 102. Similarly, Said asserts that “the Orient can return as something one writes about in a disciplined way. Its foreignness can be translated, its meanings decoded, its hostility tamed.” See: Said, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{251} Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes, p. 102. Translation is mine.
\textsuperscript{252} A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign.
\textsuperscript{253} Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes, p. 107. Translation is mine.
seem to say…a significant Renaissance [of the Arab world] lies in the hands of Israel.” Meaning, only Israel can introduce modernization to the Arab world, and only when peace comes.\textsuperscript{254}

Despite the strong ethnocentric, condescending tone of the victory albums, there were not many gory pictures or explicit calls for hatred or revenge. Whether these ideas were privately conveyed to the soldiers by their commanders is unknown.

Part I attempts to reflect some aspects of the Sabra elite’s “conventional wisdom” of the 1940s and 1950s in regard to Arabs and war. But the question remains: Once the teenagers-turned-soldiers actually encountered Arabs, how did they negotiate the doxa of the army field and their habitus, which were imbued with hostile stereotypes about Palestinian refugees, Arab soldiers, and their leaders?

\textsuperscript{254} A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign. More on the idea that Israel should help Palestinians modernize on page 103.
Part II

The Soldiers’ Habitus

Part II tries to unearth the underlying structuring principles of the soldiers’ individual habitus to show how they appropriated the Sabra elite’s discourse about Arabs and war. First, some socio-economic information is presented to establish the fact that most of the soldiers were from the subaltern classes, and not from the Sabra elite. Then, I delve into the soldiers’ letters to illuminate their perceptions of Arabs and the Sinai campaign.

It is assumed that the reality the soldiers discovered in 1956, first during battles and then in occupied Gaza and the Sinai, had the potential to contradict the doxa of the army field (as conveyed by the educational system, army training, etc.). Most of the time, when this contradiction—or hysteresis—occurred, the soldiers managed to explain it away and carry on “normally”; however, in 14% of the 465 letters examined, they could not explain it away, and the hysteresis evolved into dissent.

Bourdieu attempts to provide a rule of thumb to why, in most cases, continuity is chosen by social agents over dissent. According to him, the habitus, as a self-regulating mechanism, perceives new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences (“the history”). When, in turn, the new experiences are embedded into the habitus, they are “ranked lower” than the old experiences and have lesser influence in decision making. This is especially the case when the new experiences seem to contradict perceptions of the old ones. According to Bourdieu:

Early experiences have particular weight because the habitus tends to ensure its own constancy and its defense against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding
exposure to such information. … [T]he habitus tends to favour experiences likely to reinforce it.\textsuperscript{255}

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain why, at the time hysteresis occurred, some soldiers managed to readjust their habitus and not be affected by the changes in the field, while others were affected and, in fact, dissented. Instead, I try to use the soldiers’ letters to reveal the underlying structuring principles of the habitus in the two groups, the dominant group and the dissenting group.

Of special interest is the dissenting group, because most scholars tend to ignore it (see page 2). It is usually believed that only leftist parties and nongovernmental organizations held a nuanced view of Arabs and the war, and that these organizations had only minimal influence on the general public. Podeh argues that they were marginal to the Zionist discourse and politically unimportant.\textsuperscript{256} The writings of the dissenting group among the soldiers prove otherwise. We have no way of knowing whether the soldiers from the dissenting group were members of these parties and organizations. It could be assumed that some of them were; however, according to their writings, it seems more likely that most of them were not politically affiliated, and that the changes in the field affected their habitus and not their predispositions.

**The Letters as a Source**

Part II is mostly based on Israeli soldiers' letters that depict the author’s thoughts and feelings about the war and the Arabs they encountered. These private letters were sent to families in Israel in the years before, during, and right after the 1956 Suez Crisis. The letters were secretly copied by the military intelligence service, which incorporated them into reports entitled “The

\textsuperscript{255} Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 60-61.

\textsuperscript{256} Podeh, *Demonizing the Enemy*, p. 154.
Opinion of a Soldier.” The reports were originally used to determine the "state of mind" of the Israeli soldiers on a variety of issues: army life, commanders, war conduct, political tendencies, and perceptions of the Arab enemy.\(^{257}\)

Before the letters reached their intended recipients, they went through the Office of Censorship for Soldiers' Mail. This office was staffed by about 15 female soldiers who received the entire volume of IDF letters each week.\(^{258}\) Working off a list of forbidden topics, they searched for military secrets and erased them before delivery. In addition, they copied (“quoted”, in the military lingo) excerpts from letters on specific topics, as was designated by the unit's commander. The list of topics was periodically revised by the IDF Intelligence Branch. However, censors also exercised personal judgment in deciding what was interesting enough to quote. The commander of the Office of Censorship for Soldiers' Mail received transcripts of the quoted letters and attempted to identify trends and patterns. Then he would choose letters representative of the soldiers in each “trend” to include in a final report. At times, letters deemed interesting, but not representative, were also included, and this was mentioned in the report.\(^{259}\) The “Opinion of a Soldier” reports were published once a month, or more, and each report included a few hundred quoted letters. These reports were sent to high officials from the political and defense establishments, including the defense minister, the IDF chief of staff, and other high-ranking officers. The names of soldiers who wrote the letters were omitted from the reports.\(^{260}\)

\(^{257}\) Intelligence reports based on soldiers' letters are not an Israeli invention. Britain and France relied heavily on this source, as did Nazi Germany.

\(^{258}\) For the most part, combating units' letters (mostly relevant for this research) were censored completely.

\(^{259}\) For statements in the reports that indicate that the letters were representative of the soldiers who expressed themselves in writing, see: Excerpt 846 in IDFA 367/535/2004. This is corroborated by officials who worked in producing the reports.

\(^{260}\) Interview with Y.S, former commander of the Censorship for Soldiers' Mail. August 24, 2009, Tel Aviv.
According to IDF statistics, Israeli soldiers sent 676,212 letters in 1953; 899,172 letters in 1954; 1,060,596 letters in 1955; and 1,366,044 in 1956 (the Sinai campaign year). The censorship read an average of 50% of these letters each year. As mentioned, of the 50% of censored letters, a few hundred were selected each month to appear in the “Opinion of a Soldier” report. This paper examines 465 soldiers’ letters, sorted from a selection of a few thousand that appeared in the reports from 1953 to 1957. The chosen letters all deal with perceptions of the war and the enemy. The majority of the letters were written by enlisted soldiers (as opposed to reservists). All translations of the letters are my own.

Lionel Lemarchand, who compared similar French censorship reports from World War I to stacks of letters that were seized by the censors, concludes that sometimes the censors deliberately falsified the soldiers’ perceptions in their reports. It is possible that they did this to please their superiors, especially when discussing the soldiers’ morale. The Israeli censorship reports are somewhat different from the French ones because after 1950, the censors stopped giving commentary of their own, and merely reproduced letters (unlike the French censorship, which did not give many quoted letters in the reports).

The apparent advantage of letters written by the people who have done the fighting (and not generals who are usually excluded from fighting) is that they are a genuine "history from below", which provides us with "the most faithful historical record of the individual's experience" as witnessed in real time. Lemarchand contends that “since this material was not meant to be read by others, it divulges and expresses certain thoughts and feelings that memoirs

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263 Alex Vernon (ed.), *Arms and the Self: War, the Military, and Autobiographical Writing* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005), pp. 2, 23.
Joanna Bourke explains that after World War II, when psychological jargon became popular, the writing of soldiers also changed, and their accounts became more imbued with emotions. An American soldier who fought in Vietnam tried to explain the complexity of soldiers’ accounts:

> It's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed….The pictures get jumbled, you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed.  

The soldiers’ impressions should be viewed as their own take on reality at a particular historical moment. As Paul Fussell shows, states and armies in the 20th century were quick to adopt euphemisms to describe the horrors of wars to the general public. The Israeli soldiers' letters remind us what these horrors really looked like, without the screen of controlled discourse of the modern state.

**Soldiers’ Socio-Economic Background in the 1950s**

We do not know much about the soldiers who wrote the letters in circa 1956. The intelligence reports that reproduced the letters only give the date in which the letter was written, its language and the soldier’s unit. The IDF did, however, collect socioeconomic statistical information about its drafted soldiers in the 1950s, though separately from the intelligence reports that reproduced the letters. The socioeconomic data allows us to conclude that the vast majority of soldiers did not belong to the Sabra elite class.

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Throughout the 1950s, soldiers served for about two-and-a-half years in the IDF. After the 1948 war ended, the IDF drafted three types of soldiers: people who did not serve during the 1948 war because they worked in agriculture, 18-year-olds (immigrants and those who were born in Mandate Palestine), and immigrants older than 18 but not yet 50 (some were drafted straight to the reserves). Around the beginning of 1953, about 22% of drafted soldiers were born in Mandate Palestine and 60% were new immigrants who came to Israel in the previous four years. The rest were immigrants who had been in Israel for more than four years. In 1954–1955, around 40% of the drafted soldiers were born in Mandate Palestine, 10% were immigrants who immigrated to Israel in the previous four years, and 50% were immigrants with more than four years in Israel. In the period 1955–1956, 89.6% were either born in Mandate Palestine or were “old immigrants” (more than four years in Israel). If we were to see the Sabra in the restricted definition of the first native Jews who were born in Mandate Palestine, then these data suggest that almost half of the drafted soldiers in the Sinai campaign were of the Sabra class. However, as explained in chapter 1, the definition of the Sabra is more complex and relates to educational as well as racial (Mizrahi or Ashkenazi) backgrounds.

In fact, in 1953–1956, 50% of the drafted soldiers were of Mizrahi origin (born in Arab countries). They were not a part of the Sabra elite but of the subaltern classes. They made up the overwhelming majority in fighting units: Data from 1951 show that Mizrahi Jews were a

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268 Torgan, pp. 35, 37.
269 Ibid., p. 36.
270 Ibid., pp. 37-38. The decline in drafting of new immigrants was not only the result of the decline of immigration, but of an IDF policy not to draft immigrants with less than one year in Israel.
271 Ibid., pp. 40-42. The fact that most drafted soldiers were of Mizrahi origin was not a direct result of discrimination, but because of the fact that Ashkenazi Jews were of older generations, as the young generations had suffered massive killings in the Holocaust period and had, by and large, smaller families.
majority in the Golani Brigade, the Givati Brigade (where 90% of the soldiers of one battalion were Mizrahi Jews), and the mechanized infantry.\textsuperscript{272}

The education level of drafted soldiers is another indication of their overwhelming affiliation to the subaltern classes, and not the Sabra elite class. Eighty percent of the soldiers in the 1952–1953 period had only a primary-level education; 8% were illiterate. In 1955–1956, 73.5% of the soldiers had only a primary-level education and 5% were illiterate. Thus, the vast majority of drafted soldiers certainly did not belong to the Sabra elite, which had post-primary educations in kibbutzim, moshavim, or Hebrew gymnasiums. Only 10.5% of the soldiers in 1952–1953 had a post-primary education. This figure went up to 19.7% in 1955–1956.\textsuperscript{273} Immigrants from Arab countries in North Africa (and Asia) were the least educated, while the ones born in Mandate Palestine were the most educated, and the European-born were the second most educated.\textsuperscript{274}

The IDF also attempted to measure the intelligence level of the soldiers through a series of tests, mostly logic, verbal, and quantitative. The tests determined the soldier’s “initial psychotechnical level” (high, intermediate, or low), which was used to decide the soldier’s placement and his compatibility to be an officer. It appears that the system benefited mostly soldiers who were born in Mandate Palestine and had high command of the Hebrew language. Thus, it is not surprising to find that 78% of Mizrahi Jews were found unsuitable for officer training.\textsuperscript{275} Army officials frequently bickered about which units would get, in the words of the chief of staff at the time, “the good stuff” from among soldiers, meaning the graduates of Hebrew high schools, or the Sabra elite youth. In 1951, this number was only 335 people (and in

\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., p. 56.
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., pp. 42-43. There is correlation between time of residency in Palestine/Israel and the level of education.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., pp. 45-46. The largest number of high school graduates was among Iraqi-born Jews; however, since they did not attend Hebrew high schools they were, for the most part, excluded from the Sabra elite. See: Torgan, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., p. 52.
1952–1953, 377). In fact, in 1951, only 67 high school graduates, or Sabra elite, ended up in
the two major infantry brigades. One-hundred-and-twenty-one high school graduates went to the
Nahal Brigade, which combined agricultural work with combat duty, but even then 90% of
Nahal soldiers were not from the Sabra elite and only had a primary-level education. Baptaloon
890 of the Paratroopers had a somewhat different composition, with 37.7% Mandate-Palestine-
born soldiers, while the rest were immigrants, with 33% Mizrahi Jews.279 Battalion 890
receives special attention in chapter 5, as its soldiers were responsible for intentional killing of
civilians.

About 85% of soldiers in 1953–1956 spoke Hebrew very well or at an intermediate level;
the rest had only weak command of the language, or did not know it at all.280 As for the
languages the letters are written in, we can see that there was a gradual rise in the letters written
in Hebrew, from 73% in 1953 to 89.5% at the end of 1956. Other popular languages in 1953
were Arabic (5%), French (5%), Romanian (4%), and English (2%).281 It is interesting to note
that the use of Arabic among Jews sharply declined throughout the first years after the
establishment of Israel. In 1952, 11% of (Jewish) soldiers wrote in Arabic, but by 1956 only
1.5% did.282 This is certainly not because of a decline in drafted Mizrahi soldiers, as noted above.
Thus, it could be suggested that the use of the Arabic language among Jews was looked down upon.

276 Ibid., pp. 55-56.
277 Ibid., p. 56.
278 No data is given about their educational level.
279 Within the officer rank of this battalion, 61% were born in Mandate Palestine and none were of Mizrahi
background; and among the non-commissioned officers, 40.6% were born in Mandate Palestine while the rest were
immigrants, with 22% of Mizrahi background. See: Torgan, note 138, p. 59.
280 Ibid., p. 50.
281 There were also letters in Spanish, German, Yiddish, Bulgarian, Persian, Dutch, Hungarian, Polish, Turkish,
Italian, Russian, Czech, Hindi, Slovakian, Portuguese, Rashi script, and Greek; however, all together they make up
less than one percent.
I now move to analyze how the subaltern classes of soldiers perceived the war and the Arabs they encountered, in order to distinguish their habitus. For the most part, the analysis follows a chronological order, while echoing both the dominant and the dissenting (when applicable) groups.
Chapter 4

Soldiers’ Perceptions during Training and Pre-War Retaliations

During the 1948 war, the Unit for Psychological Research and the Israeli Center for Research of Public Opinion held an extensive poll among soldiers from 12 combat battalions and asked for their opinions about combat experience, fear, and their views of the Arab enemy. When asked what are the enemy’s special tactics in battle, the soldiers named 17 tactics, among them artillery used to “soften”, traps and ambushes, bloodcurdling shrieks while attacking, and massive raids. The two last tactics were said to be used mostly by gangs.\textsuperscript{283} When asked what is “the psychology of the Arab enemy?”, most soldiers who participated in the survey replied: “The Arab is a great soldier in the first ten seconds of battle, and as long as he succeeds. However, once you hit him, he runs away. The first failure and he loses heart.” Others explained that “Arabs do not usually hold on in tough situations. … That is why we must sometimes leave them a way to retreat, if we cannot destroy them. Because when faced with dead-end situations, they show hyper-bravery.” Some soldiers suggested to “kill [a few] at the beginning of battle so that they will grow weak” and take advantage of the fact that the Arabs are scared of the dark. It was also widely believed that the Arabs fear face-to-face battles, and that by coming close to them they would flee.\textsuperscript{284}

Many of these ideas reiterate the doxa of the army field as it was designed by the Sabra elite and show that the soldiers’ habitus “adopted” much of the doxa. The Arab soldier was believed to be cowardly, to use primitive methods (e.g., shrieks), and to fear one-on-one encounters. Many soldiers also said that to improve the army’s fighting the commanders should

\textsuperscript{283} The Lessons the Soldiers Learned in Battle Learned in Battle, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., pp. 20-21. Translation is mine.
do a better job of explaining what they were fighting for.\textsuperscript{285} This shows once again that the soldiers were part of the reproduction of the field, and that it was not entirely constructed.\textsuperscript{286}

**Conformity and Dissent during Training and Incidental Meetings**

Soldiers in training rarely wrote about politics to their families. The few that did, allow us to examine soldiers’ perceptions before they were actually involved in fighting or as occupying forces. A few incidental meeting with Arab soldiers in training sessions abroad, allow another glimpse at the soldiers habitus.

The overwhelming majority of soldiers who mentioned politics in their letters during training seem to mirror the doxa of the army field; meaning, their habitus were affected to a large degree by the prevalent “common wisdom”. One example is the establishment of a connection between the mythical biblical towns and the physical reality in newly established Israel: Soldiers of one battalion in the Golani Brigade told their families that “every commander has a Bible in his pocket, and every time we get to a location mentioned in the Book, we get a comprehensive explanation.” The soldiers explained that this had taught them a lot “and lifted our spirits.”\textsuperscript{287}

Reiterating an idea found in many textbooks, another soldier, writing in 1955, conveyed a wish that the Arabs’ yearning to “throw us into the sea” would not be realized.\textsuperscript{288} The only dissenting voice during training came from a cadet, who tried to protest army indoctrination:

This is the first time in my life that all that I am doing is learning the best methods and ways to kill people. Every second word is war and war. I’m already dreaming about war and related things during the night. It’s interesting, all my life I’ve learned how to grow plants and agriculture, then I studied education, pedagogy, how to grow children and

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., p. 24. Other more obscure questions include the relationship between civilian occupation and having “a good mood” (81% of kibbutz members have good moods, but only 50% of store owners) and how well “the spirit of the unit” is maintained. See: The Lessons the Soldiers Learned in Battle, pp.25-26.

\textsuperscript{286} On the participation of the subaltern classes in the reproduction of the field see page 6.

\textsuperscript{287} Hebrew. 17 March 1954 [B467]. Also: 13 March 1954 [B468].

\textsuperscript{288} Infantry Battalion 104, Hebrew. 9 September 1955 [B588].
prepare them for life, and now—I learn the opposite. I keep thinking if I’ll manage to go through this period without turning into a soldier in soul too.

*Training Base 1, Hebrew. 7 November 1952 [B435]*

The evident fear of becoming a killer at heart reveals a dissenting voice, writing in opposition to the basic principles of army training; however, it is not a result of hysteresis. There is no way of knowing what “component” in the soldier’s habitus is responsible for the dissent. The social class to which he belongs is one option.

Meeting Arab soldiers during Navy training with foreign armies outside Israel created a rare situation of face-to-face encounters with Egyptian soldiers outside the battlefield. The Israeli sailors’ habitus immediately shaped a perception of Egyptian inferiority. Looking at their warships, the Israeli sailors concluded that the Egyptians do not know how to operate them. However, the inferiority was not merely on the technical level, as a letter from Venice reveals:

> Even when we’re on shore and out to have some fun in town, they are way more inferior. Even the brothels won’t let them in, because you have to be “polite” there, and they don’t know what that is. In the stores, the locals rip them off every time. … They’re ignorant, and “Kurdish”, as we say. It’s obvious that after meeting them like that we considered ourselves superior.

* [Navy Training in Venice], Hebrew. 18 July 1954 [B490]*

Another soldier added that “an average Egyptian officer is equal in his intelligence…to our average private.”\(^{289}\) When interaction took place, the Israeli sailors seemed to enjoy it. However, it did not change their sense of cultural and military superiority. The Egyptian sailors were described as shocked to learn that “all of us speak Arabic.”\(^{290}\) In one night of dancing, “no girl approached them” and they sat by themselves. Eventually, the Israeli sailors invited them to dance together with them, but that too did not help them with the girls. Nevertheless, as one soldier described, the Egyptian sailors quickly became the Israeli sailors’ best friends, a result of their “nature” to quickly give in.

\(^{289}\) Navy Ship Jaffa, Hebrew. 5 May 1956. [B659].

\(^{290}\) Ibid.
They are so stupid. … One told me over lunch that the day would come when they would occupy Israel, but he would search for me and protect me. I told him to go to the Negev and see who has more captives.

*England, Hebrew. 7 January 1956 [B640]*

At other instances, when the Egyptian sailors said they were waiting for the day of revenge (for the 1948 war), the Israeli sailors replied that they were also eagerly awaiting that day. Then, the Israeli sailors exclaimed that, as expected, the Egyptians started flattering them, saying: “Allah created us all, and we are all the sons of Allah, so why should we fight?”291 Any “peaceful advances” on the part of the Egyptians (sincere or not) were immediately seen as weakness on the part of the Israeli soldiers. The doxa of the army field that shaped the perception of a submissive Arab in the soldiers’ habitus seems to prevail.

**Pre-war Retaliations**

During the period from 1951 to October 1956 (when the war broke), Israeli combat soldiers were engaged in retaliation to Fedayeen attacks in Israel, both on military and civilian targets. Although the political echelon seems to have had various justifications for launching retaliation raids, at least from the point of view of the IDF, the main purpose was “to kill the maximum number of Arabs,” as one military planner put it.292 The reprisal operations (*peulot tagmul*) were short and rarely created a situation of hysteresis, probably as there were few face-to-face encounters with the enemy. As a result, there was very little dissent among the Israeli soldiers.

The year 1954 marked a watershed in Fedayeen activity with the attack at *Ma'ale 'Akrabim* road in the Negev. On the night of March 16, 1954, Fedayeen ambushed a civilian bus on its way from Eilat to Tel Aviv. The militants shot at the bus and then boarded it to kill whoever survived the initial attack. Eleven Israelis, including women and children, were killed. Three, who were

291 Ibid.
292 Comment by Eli Zeira, Dayan’s Chief of Staff. Quoted in Vardi, pp. 300-301 f. 18.
assumed dead by the militants, survived.\textsuperscript{293} Many in Israel called for revenge; however, Sharett, then prime minister and a dissenting voice himself, feared that the international community would not approve of massive retaliation so shortly after the civilian killings in the village of Qibya in the West Bank. It seemed that his position was supported within the cabinet and the press, but certainly not among the soldiers, who called for “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”.\textsuperscript{294} One soldier explained in a letter that they were waiting for such an opportunity, in which the wolf would show his teeth, and now “we are good dentists, and we will make sure that the wolf will have no teeth left after we take care of him.”\textsuperscript{295} Another soldier called for revenge against all Arabs, because they all wanted to destroy Israel.\textsuperscript{296} An infantry soldier echoed this sentiment:

\begin{quote}
At first I thought that the relationship between us improved, and that after what we did to them, they had lowered their heads a little bit. But it seems they have already forgotten all about that. Since there is no alternative, we’ll have to remind them once again! I have to conclude this topic, my dear friend, since it stirs a blind lust for revenge in me, towards this circle of ignorant people, this dopy mob that follows crazy leaders, whose brains and minds lack 200 years of development.

\textit{Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 20 March 1954 [B450]}
\end{quote}

The soldiers’ habitus seem to closely follow the doxa of the army field in their reactions. First, all Arabs were to be blamed because they wished to annihilate the Jewish state. Second, in line with European Orientalist tropes, the Arabs were depicted as a primitive, backward people. They were also described as an incited mob, who sought killing for the sake of killing. As shown in the discussion of the doxa in Part I, a strong sense of paternalism was exhibited, and the ideas

\textsuperscript{293} Morris, p. 309. See picture 1 in Appendix A. To take the picture, the government officials returned the dead bodies into the bus, after they have been already removed by soldiers. Jordan was mistakenly blamed for the attack. The attackers actually came from Egyptian controlled territory.
\textsuperscript{294} Morris, p. 310.
\textsuperscript{295} Infantry Battalion 52, English. 18 March 1954 [B454].
\textsuperscript{296} The Military Boarding School, English. 24 March 1954 [B460].
that “Arabs understand only force” and that “there is no alternative” (*ein breira*) but to retaliate, also prevailed.

Among the writing soldiers there was only one dissenting voice, justifying Sharett’s position, writing that “the Israeli government should be commended for not using armed retaliation, as this policy [of restraint] is always worthwhile in the end.”297 However, even when the government made up its mind not to retaliate, the army ignored it. In fact, Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon found that on several occasions he was manipulated or lied to by IDF officers. He was certain that Major Ariel Sharon and other officers from Unit 101298 disregarded the commands of the general staff. In one meeting with the generals, he commented: “We should start forcing the army to have some respect for the state.”299 Nevertheless, the restraint after the killing in *Ma‘ale ‘Akrabim* did not last for long, and following another attack near Jerusalem (with one Israeli casualty), Israel resumed retaliation against Jordan at the end of March 1954, as well as against Egypt.300

When on June 30, 1954, the Jordanian Arab Legion shot at civilians in Jerusalem, many soldiers hoped the opportunity for massive reprisal had arrived.301 A Golani Brigade soldier wrote to his family: “The Arabs’ backs are itching, and they want to be tickled. Our army takes

297 Nahal Battalion 908, English. 27 March 1954 [B462].
298 Unit 101 was the main unit responsible for retaliation attacks. The unit’s doctrine followed the teachings of the British army, and specifically those of Orde Wingate, a British officer who was sympathetic to the Zionist cause. The unit relied on small experienced forces and conducted guerilla attacks on the enemy’s territory. The unit was dismantled and integrated into the Paratroopers after the Qibya killing. See: Vardi, pp. 298.
299 Quoted in Vardi, p. 301. It seems the chief of staff was sympathetic to “occasional mistakes” in retaliation raids that led to high numbers of Arab casualties. For the most part, he justified Major Sharon, only changing his mind in 1956 when the number of Arab casualties was extremely high. Trying to explain his change of mind to the general staff, he said: “The majority of the Israeli press, the parliament and the government are in favour of limited actions.” See: Vardi, pp. 302, 307.
300 Morris, p. 314-315.
301 “hayalei ha-ligion hemtiru esh ‘al shecnot ha-sfar be-yerushalayim” [The Legion Soldieries Shot at the Frontier Neighborhoods in Jerusalem], *Davar* [Hebrew daily newspaper], 1 July 1954. During the retaliation, 4 IDF soldiers were killed and 20 Jordanian soldiers. Two Jordanian soldiers were taken as POWs.
good care of them and grants their wish.” A non-commissioned officer advocated mass killing of civilians to teach Arabs a lesson:

In order to silence them, I think we need to take two villages, and do to them like they did at “Deir Yassin”. Then they will shut up out of fear. The UN won’t help here…but only the rifle and the bayonet. This is the only cure against the rampage of the Arabs.

*School for Non-Commissioned Officers, Brigade 1, Hebrew. 2 July 1954 [B500]*

A female soldier from the Military Police makes up the only dissenting voice among the soldiers who responded to the incident:

Alas, the blood is spilled in vain. Sometimes, I think, are human beings really that bad, and the bestial instinct in them so developed, that they are willing to murder and shed blood of innocents? Or is it the feeling of revenge that palpitates in people’s hearts?

*Training Base 13, Hebrew. 1 July 1954 [B502]*

More so than the incident in Jerusalem, the frequent retaliation operations in the Egyptian front stirred hundreds of soldiers to put their thoughts down in writing. In February 1955, shortly after the return of Ben-Gurion to the defense minister’s office, Israel launched the Gaza raid, also known as Operation Black Arrow (*mivtza hetz shahor*). Officially, the operation was a response to an infiltration by Egyptian intelligence agents, who broke into a military installation in Rishon Le-Zion and stole classified documents. The Egyptian agents were discovered after they stumbled into a cyclist nearby and killed him. Two IDF companies from Battalion 890 were supposed to be sent to a small military installation one kilometer north of Gaza City and blow up the facilities there. Enemy soldiers were to be fired at only if they interfered, and Dayan predicted some 10 Egyptian casualties. However, this quickly turned into the bloodiest attack

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302 Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 2 July 1954 [B495]. A similar idea was given in 1957 by another soldier, who explained: “The Syrians felt like teasing us a bit—I’m sure they regret it now!!!” Non-Commissioned Officers Battalion 334, Hebrew. 11 July 1957 [A449].

carried out by Israel against Egypt since 1948.\footnote{Morris, p. 341.} As it turned out, Major Ariel Sharon, the commander of Battalion 890, expanded the original scheme to include three different targets: a pumping station, the original military installation, and another one inside a train station.\footnote{Michaelson, pp. 18-19.} In fact, it was common for Sharon, with some backing from Dayan, to ignore explicit orders and expand military aims, and sometimes to act without authorization at all.\footnote{Ze’ev Drori, “Hashpa’at ha-dereg ha-tzvaai ha-zutar ‘al ha-haslama ha-bitchonit” [The Impact of the Low-Ranking Officers on the Military Escalation] in Motti Golani (ed.), \emph{Black Arrow}, pp. 141, 143,146.}

As soon as the soldiers entered Egyptian soil, they were ambushed, but they managed to kill two of the ambushing Egyptians. Sharon decided to press on, but a faulty map caused the soldiers to walk into an Egyptian army base, instead of the pumping station. In the firefight that ensued, the Israeli soldiers eventually managed to conquer the camp and also to locate and blow up the pumping station. The toll on the Egyptian side was especially heavy, with 37 killed. A Palestinian boy and an adult were also killed. On the Israeli side, eight soldiers were killed. Sharett realized right away that the rules of the game had changed because of the high number of Egyptian casualties.\footnote{Morris, p. 342.} The incident caused Nasser to make his first visit to the Strip since he assumed power, where he declared that from then on Egypt would pursue a policy of “an eye for an eye”.\footnote{Morris, pp. 344-345. In private, Nasser related to foreign diplomats that the raid was a great shock to him and that it drastically changed his views of the prospects of political settlement with Israel. It was also claimed that the raid caused Nasser to seek weapons from the Czech Republic. For a different view on the impact of the Gaza raid, see: Michel Oren, “haim heviah peulat ‘aza le-mifne be-mediniyut mitzrayim?” [Did the Gaza Raid Bring a Turning Point in Egyptian Policy?] in Motti Gollani (ed.), \emph{Black Arrow}, pp. 35-47.} Indeed, a month later, Egypt started sending Fedayeen squads into Israel on a massive scale.

The Israeli soldiers overwhelmingly supported the raid in Gaza. Referencing the killing near Rishon Le-Zion, a soldier wrote: “Can you imagine a situation where a man…gets up one
morning to find himself slaughtered?" Another soldier added, "This time we've talked to the Arab in his own language—blood—and we rest assured that he found it clear and understandable." Among dozens of responses quoted in the intelligence report, the only dissenting voice was from an infantry soldier lamenting: “I really hope that wisdom and human common sense will defeat the urge for revenge and provocation.”

The situation quickly deteriorated into a brutal tit-for-tat, with the Egyptians sending Fedayeen into Israel and Israel responding with retaliations. The Khan Yunis raid was one such reprisal, on September 1, 1955. After Dayan threatened to resign, Sharett, still Prime Minister, approved a large-scale strike on an Egyptian military installation in Khan Yunis. The orders this time called for killing as many Egyptians and Fedayeen as possible, but to avoid targeting women and children. Indeed, 72 Egyptians and Palestinians were killed by either heavy artillery or close-range shooting. One Israeli soldier was killed. As a result, the Egyptians stopped the raids inside Israel and agreed to a UN-brokered ceasefire.

The majority of soldiers saw the raid as an opportunity to settle the score with Egypt and with Nasser personally. Examination of the soldiers’ letters affirms Podeh’s assertion that the political discourse about Nasser diffused to the subalterns. “Most of the time we are making courtesy visits to the neighbors around us. … And with the most braggart neighbor, Abdel Nasser, we picked a fight.” The sense of military and cultural superiority was pervasive among the soldiers. Some soldiers used the derogatory term *Arabush* (literally meaning “little Arabs”)

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310. Intelligence Corps Headquarters, Hebrew. 2 March 1955 [A59].
311. Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 10 March 1955. [A61].
313. For example: Paratroopers Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew. 3 September 1955 [A87].
314. Paratroopers Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew. 10 September 1955 [A80].
from the Yiddish language, saying: “The Arabushim [plural for Arabush] finally got what they deserved.” There were almost no dissenting voices among the soldiers writing about the Khan Yunis raid.

However, a series of clashes with the Egyptian army in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) next to the border, one year before the all-out war, partially changed perceptions among soldiers. Israel regarded the DMZ as its own territory, although it was not formally designated to the Jewish state. Throughout the 1950s, Israeli and Egyptian soldiers were engaged in low-level clashes in the DMZ, with few casualties. The UN peacekeeping force tried to negotiate a deal that would stabilize the DMZ, but despite initial readiness on both sides, the understandings did not hold. Israel claimed it had to leave some armed non-military guards to protect its settlements, which the Egyptians refused to allow. In October 1955, Egyptian forces raided a police outpost in one of the Israeli settlements in the DMZ, killing one and capturing two prisoners. Sharett, in his last days as prime minister, was on a visit to Paris, and the acting prime minister, Meir Eshkol, agreed to launch a large-scale strike against Egyptians’ positions in the DMZ. On the night of November 2, 1955, Operation Volcano (mivtza har ga’ash) was launched with a brigade-sized attack, far larger than any retaliation attack thus far. Eighty-one Egyptian soldiers were killed and fifty were captured. On the IDF side, five soldiers were killed. All the Egyptian positions were captured and destroyed.

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316 Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 3 September 1955 [A91]. Israeli military commanders also used the derogatory name Arabush. See for example: Vardi, p. 306 f. 45.

317 Morris, p. 371. The area was originally inhabited by Bedouin tribes; however, they fled to Egyptian territory in 1948. When other Bedouin tribes later return to the territory—apparently with Egyptian goading—Israel expelled them to Sinai.

318 Morris suggests that Egypt retaliated in response to Israel capturing Syrian soldiers, because it was bound by the Egyptian-Syrian defense treaty. See: Morris, p. 374.

319 Morris, pp. 374-376.
In depictions of warfare, face-to-face encounters are often described as the climax of battle, and soldiers throughout history and around the world tend to depict these climactic moments at length. The soldiers’ letters from Operation Volcano show that this strategically insignificant incident was of major importance in the field, primarily due to the face-to-face killing of Egyptian soldiers. Although dissent is still marginal (around three soldiers out of a few dozen), it is possible to assert that a situation of hysteresis gradually began here; however, it would only emerge in full after the outbreak of the Sinai campaign.

The assertion that Operation Volcano was substantially different from previous engagements with the enemy is clear by the numerous mentions of fear. Soldiers wrote that they inscribed their service number on their body parts, to make sure their corpses would be easily recognizable.

While storming I felt some fear, but I immediately remembered what the commander had told me: ‘everyone is scared, but know this: The Arab is ten times more afraid than you are!’ And then all at once, without delay and with mighty roars, we climbed the hill. The Arab positions were vacant—the Arabs had fled. But then, a black lump peeped [at us] from inside the bush—an Arab with a semi-automatic rifle in his hands. But he didn’t move—was afraid that we’ll see him—he was wiped out immediately. And then, four others got up, their hands on their heads, and shouted: ‘bnslam’ [sic] (we surrender). … What immense fear the Arabs have. I didn’t imagine as such, and it encouraged us all.

*Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 4 November 1955 [B604]*

Army officials regarded excessive fear as especially dangerous. They were concerned it would paralyze the soldiers’ fighting capabilities. On the other hand, fear on a limited scale, and especially if the soldiers managed to overcome it, was deemed desirable; it could be converted

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321 Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 4 November 1955 [B603].
322 Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, p. 220. 39% of Israeli soldiers who took part in psychological research explained that they were most frightened before battle, 35% said they are most frightened during battle, and 16% said they experienced fear mostly after battle. See: *The Lessons the Soldiers Learned in Battle* pp. 5, 7.
into fury against the enemy.\textsuperscript{323} The president of the American Psychiatry Association and an advisor to the Navy explained in 1944 that fear created “a tremendous reservoir of potential fighting strength, which when transformed into dynamic fighting power [would] gain the determining victories on the battlefield.”\textsuperscript{324}

Once the Israeli soldiers overcame fear, revenge went into play and the soldiers could, in the words of one soldier, “kill with clear understanding and knowing. Working like human machines made out of steel that cannot be harmed.”\textsuperscript{325} The face-to-face killing was something the soldiers were already prepared for:

After much tough training, I said that I am willing to stab and kill with excitement and without hesitations, and even to get satisfaction from that—well, this is exactly what happened. In cold blood and clear thought I did what I did that fatal night, and I felt quite satisfied with “my craft”. … To tell you the truth, I don’t mind doing something like that again.

\textit{Nahal Command Training Base, Hebrew. 10 November 1955. [B608]}

What seems like sadistic pleasure in violence was not very common before the war, but there were a few instances of it. Some soldiers mentioned “fantasy” when they got to kill Arabs.\textsuperscript{326} Others “were angry they didn’t get to kill”.\textsuperscript{327} On the question of pleasure, Wilhelm Stekel showed that as far back as 1929, "man is cruel for the sake of pleasure which the barbarous act produces.”\textsuperscript{328} Others argue that the soldier's status as a man is enhanced by the number of enemy troops he kills.\textsuperscript{329} A different view by Graham Fuschak is that "killing…is an incidental, dispassionate means to an end to the soldier, if not to his government. Soldier correspondence

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{323} Bourke, \textit{Fear: A Cultural History}, p. 221.
\item \textsuperscript{324} Quoted in Bourke, \textit{Fear: A Cultural History}, p. 212.
\item \textsuperscript{325} Nahal Command Training Base, Hebrew. 6 November 1955 [B607].
\item \textsuperscript{326} For example: Border Police Unit, 7 December 1954 [B532].
\item \textsuperscript{327} Nahal Command Training Base, Hebrew. 6 November 1955 [B607].
\item \textsuperscript{329} Bourke, \textit{An Intimate History of Killing}, p. 21.
\end{itemize}
celebrating the death of an enemy actually celebrates the soldier's own survival".\textsuperscript{330} One letter seems to correspond with Fuschak's idea:

The \textit{Arabushim} who were there were Sudanese—what giants! God save us. They lived in pup tents inside trenches, and we went from tent to tent and stuck our bayonet rifle into it. I already saw death in front of me. … I was in charge of mopping-up, and I went first. I ran through the trenches, and right before every curve put out a volley from my assault rifle. And in one of the turns there was a giant Sudanese with a bayonet rifle. At the outset, I was almost hit with a stroke, but before the giant reached the stabbing range, I shot him a volley straight in the face, and his entire head lost its human form and he fell down.

\textit{Nahal Command Training Base, Hebrew. 4 November 1955. [B609]}

The idea of "kill or be killed" or "it's either us or them" served as justification for such killings.\textsuperscript{331}

As American and British soldiers' letters confirm, killing was also easily condoned when the enemy was regarded as racially inferior. The Japanese in World War II, and later the Vietnamese, were sometimes officially referred to as “Oriental human beings”, or non-whites. According to Bourke, by classifying them as inhuman, their killing became a fair game.\textsuperscript{332}

However, other Israeli soldiers stress more explicit pleasure in killing:

My biggest fear is to die…Aviva,\textsuperscript{333} I saw a man walking, clearly seeing death in front of him. It was a frightening, black figure, gigantic and massive. He behaved towards our friend not as he should have—he killed our friend, so I hated them all and especially him. I was always afraid of abusing them. But now, me and another kid—a great guy—killed him. We took a long time, like in a game, [but] without smiling. He screamed, and cried, no human being believes he is really going to die. The hard thing in these moments when you kill him is that he wants to rise up against you. He ran wild, [but] I didn’t feel sorry for him at all.

\textit{Hebrew, 29 October 1955 [B595]}

The soldier described torturing an Egyptian to death, after himself stating that he was afraid of dying. Although there might be a connection between his fear of dying and his abuse of the Egyptian, he also appeared to feel some satisfaction from the torture itself. Bourke suggests that

\textsuperscript{330} Graham Fuschak, Review: [untitled], \textit{The Journal of Military History}, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), pp. 915-916.
\textsuperscript{331} Bourke, \textit{An Intimate History of Killing}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid., p. 193.
\textsuperscript{333} Aviva is a common name for an Israeli female.
"the military establishment tended to accept that hatred was a desirable emotion for men in combat… and training regimes were developed to encourage it."\textsuperscript{334} In many cases, though, the soldiers were not convinced, and hate propaganda was left to the home front. Polls conducted among American soldiers in World War II suggest that the majority of combatants did not fight the enemy (and kill him) out of hatred.\textsuperscript{335} Bourke argues that "most men only became willing to take another human life after seeing their wartime companions slaughtered."\textsuperscript{336} Interviewing American veterans from the Vietnam War, Jonathan Shay contends that “at some deep cultural and psychological level, spilling enemy blood is an effort to bring the dead back to life.”\textsuperscript{337} In the letter quoted above, revenge for the soldier’s comrade played an important role. Other soldiers told similar stories about being willing to kill only after their friends were killed.\textsuperscript{338}

Besides Egyptians, the Israeli soldiers now encountered more and more Palestinian Fedayeen in large numbers. These encounters had much significance in the eyes of the soldiers, especially as they reaffirmed what they already “knew” about Palestinians. One soldier asserted: "We saw that the fidā’ī, which the public is so afraid of, is not but a poor, miserable Arabush that looks more like a child who went astray, than a 'fighter.'”\textsuperscript{339} For the soldiers, if the Fedayeen were in fact children, there was no reason to fear them.

Many soldiers demonstrated curiosity toward the Fedayeen and wanted to inspect them up close. What they discovered, for the most part, corresponded with the “conventional wisdom” about Palestinians.\textsuperscript{340} The soldiers were not surprised with their discovery.

\textsuperscript{334} Bourke, \textit{An Intimate History of Killing}, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{335} Ibid., p. 145.
\textsuperscript{336} Ibid., p. 215.
\textsuperscript{338} Nahal Training Base, Hebrew. 6 November 1955 [B607].
\textsuperscript{339} Company 50, Company Commanders School, Brigade 5, Hebrew. 14 April 1955 [A101].
\textsuperscript{340} It is also possible to locate some positive depictions of the Arab enemy, such as a soldier who praised their navigation ability. See: Paratroopers Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew. 10 April 1956 [A107].
Yesterday I had the honor of peeking at the scummy face of one who was admitted to one of the hospitals. … He made the exact impression you'd expect from a *fidā'ī*. Sour face, black bristles, all evil. It's apparent from his devilish eyes. … He says he was forced to go and blow up [places], destroy and kill. I think he was just looking for an outlet for that hidden instinct in every Arab's soul, it doesn't really matter who the victim is. For food and money, he will kill not only Jews. For him, it's not the mission and the nation's honor that count, [but] the money.

*Armored Corps Battalion 82, Hebrew. 11 April 1956. [A106]*

Relying on the doxa the soldiers absorbed throughout their upbringing, their habitus “illuminated” the notion that the Palestinian militants have an evil essence that explains their behavior, a blood-thirstiness that is “hidden…in every Arab's soul”. The idea that the Oriental enemy “killed for the sake of killing” was a prevalent one among soldiers in the 20th century, a result of training indoctrination. Fedayeen were viewed as common criminals that were willing to kill anyone, not just Jews, for money. Obviously, it was not national sentiment that drove them.

Lack of national sentiment and self-respect was perceived to be characteristic not only of Palestinians but of Egyptians as well. Soldiers frequently mentioned their disappointment in the Egyptian soldiers, who were “smitten like battered dogs.” Only few showed valor.

I was very disappointed by their looks. They made a pretty lousy impression. Their behavior was not a military behavior. For a cigarette and a glass of juice I gave them, they thanked me dozens of times. They are deprived of any self-respect. When I said to one of the captives ‘yil'an abu Abdel Nasser’, he answered me ‘yikhrab beito’, an Arabic curse meaning ‘may his house be destroyed’, meaning may he die. That made them look worthless in everyone’s eyes. I know that even had someone beaten me, I wouldn’t [curse] our prime minister, and the country for which I had fought.

*Infantry Battalion 13, Hebrew. 7 November 1955. [B622]*

Soldiers’ obsessions with groveling and flattery, which would be even more emphasized during the war, made their first appearance in 1955. These perceptions, directed by the soldiers’ habitus, correspond to a high degree with the doxa of the field, which fixed Arabs as un-politicized

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342 Infantry Battalion 13, Hebrew. 13 November 1955 [B623].
creatures who only act out of instinct. But not all the soldiers manage to readjust their habitus after the hysteresis.

It is not a pretty sight. It is a sight of horror. There are even good people who turned cynics. I can’t turn into a cynic. As long as I don’t have to, I won’t be tough. I can kill a human being with a bullet, but I cannot kill a human being with a knife or any other kind of cold weapon. War, it is not hard, it is despicable. You have not yet smelled the scent of blood. It is the most dreadful smell ever created.

Paratroopers Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew. 5 November 1955. [B612]

Despite the fact that the use of knives or bayonets was greatly reduced in modern armies around the world and replaced by more lethal weapons, commanders still insisted that soldiers be trained in killing using cold weapons. It was believed that soldiers’ mastery in bayonets and knives would create “confidence in their ability to kill” and “lust for blood”. The soldier in this letter goes against these attempts, saying he would only kill in a sterile way, using a rifle; however, as other parts of his letter indicate, he did not change his mind about the necessity to kill the enemy at large. At times, the screaming of the wounded or the faces of the captives created more substantial change:

I looked into the eyes of the captives. Others looked at them with hatred and anger, while I out of compassion and sympathy. From afar—you hate him, but as you see him close to you, you see that they are miserable human beings, who suffer like anyone else, and you have this feeling of guilt and empathy.

Paratroopers Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew. 5 November 1955 [B619]

Sympathy for the enemy in the battlefield, or after battle, has been recorded in other historical instances as well, for example among French soldiers in World War I. However, this sense of affinity rarely lasted long, or had long-term consequences. Some soldiers in the dissenting group seem to have had an inner struggle of what should be the right way to treat captives. An incident in 1955, when five Israeli soldiers were sent to change batteries in an intelligence bug

on a Syrian telephone line in the Golan Heights, had a major impact on this question. The five were captured and tortured by the Syrians. One of the soldiers, Uri Ilan, committed suicide. A note later found on his body read: “I did not commit betrayal; I killed myself [instead].”

Dozens of soldiers called for revenge, and some called to treat Syrian POWs the same way. One soldier articulated the dilemma:

And there is still the question of how should we behave in such a case? For example, if another Syrian aircraft falls into our hands. Should we behave like them? Repay them in kind? Or should we keep the principle that in any condition, even among brutes and beasts of prey, we shall not lose our humanity, and always abide by the written and the unwritten laws?


The dilemma of how to treat the enemy, especially when being reduced to inhumanity, continued to haunt the soldiers throughout the war, and later during the occupation of the Gaza Strip. What the soldiers experienced before the war certainly affected their behavior toward captives during it.

Besides the constant clashes between Israeli and Egyptian forces on Israel’s southern border, clashes were also a matter of routine on the Israeli-Jordanian border, and especially in the West Bank. Because the same Israeli soldiers who fought on the Egyptian front were also brought to retaliate in the West Bank, these cases are of relevance to the analysis here.

Of major importance was an incident that occurred on September 10, 1956, in the Hebron foothills, when the Jordanian Arab Legion attacked a thirty-man IDF unit inside Israel and captured six soldiers, some apparently still alive. The soldiers were brought into Jordan and killed, their bodies mutilated and their genitalia cut off. Then the bodies were returned to Israel. A similar fate befell other Israeli civilians who were killed by Fedayeen.\(^{346}\) IDF officials made


\(^{346}\) Morris, pp. 408, 412.
the mutilation of the corpses public, and the Israeli soldiers quickly became outraged. "I saw the bodies of the six soldiers. It is hard to believe that human beings are capable of such an abuse of corpses and of the injured. I saw a lot of horror in my life, but not like this."\textsuperscript{347} His friend expressed a wish that "May god avenge their blood (hashem yinkom damam)."\textsuperscript{348} The depiction of enemy brutality was often used to mobilize soldiers for revenge in the American armed forces. In World War II, for example, rumors were spread that Japanese cut off American soldiers’ tongues in POW camps.\textsuperscript{349} In the Vietnam War, stories of Vietcong brutality were circulated in letters sent by Americans to their families.\textsuperscript{350} Some American veterans reported that these stories, whether they witnessed the actual events or were told, made them act more aggressively towards the enemy.\textsuperscript{351}

In response to the killing of the six soldiers, Israel initiated a series of retaliation attacks against Jordanian military targets in the West Bank, killing dozens of Jordanian soldiers and a few Palestinians.\textsuperscript{352} After Fedayeen killed two workers near Even-Yehuda on October 9, cutting their ears off as proof, the IDF launched a massive strike on Qalqilyah’s police fort (Operation Samaria). The orders stipulated to try and avoid civilian casualties, and indeed civilians apparently were not hit, but the Jordanians showed fierce resistance, killing eighteen Israeli soldiers. Between seventy and ninety Jordanian policemen and soldiers were also killed.\textsuperscript{353} It seems Major Sharon again expanded the operation plans without informing his superiors.\textsuperscript{354}

The soldiers writing after battle stressed that it was a turning point. Some soldiers expressed fear, while others explained that “a soldier, running, seeing his friends drop on his right hand and

\textsuperscript{347} Company 50, School for company commanders, Brigade 5, Hebrew. 16 September 1956 [A109].
\textsuperscript{348} Company 50, School for company commanders, Brigade 5, Hebrew. 13 September 1956 [A110].
\textsuperscript{349} Fussell, \textit{Wartime}, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{351} Shay, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{352} Morris, p. 408.
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., p. 414.
\textsuperscript{354} Vardi, p. 304.
on his left, becomes a beast of prey and can even bite the enemy with his teeth.”

Apparently, this particular soldier did bite an Arab soldier in order to paralyze him, when he ran out of ammunition. The relatively large number of casualties among Israeli soldiers stirred dozens of responses among the soldiers, mostly calling for revenge:

There is tiredness from reading the newspaper headlines—one is murdered, a second is slaughtered, reprisal, victims, and all over again—until doom! Till when?!! Either we live with peace of mind or we take full retribution for each drop of blood, and turn retaliation into occupation. With all humanism—there is a limit.

*Nahal Unit 906, Hebrew, 12 October 1956 [B694]*

The raid in Qalqilyah produced a significant number of dissenting voices. Their emergence can be seen as a result of the hysteresis soldiers experienced by the death of their comrades. This death led them to contemplate reality in general.

Human lives are of no value right now, they are being played as [one plays with] numbers. Why is there a need for an army? Why do people make their lives difficult? You see, our enemies are human beings as well, they suffer too. They also have mothers and wives that suffer when they get killed. So, why do we need to keep on killing one another while we can live in peace?

*Headquarters for Manpower and Personal Branch, Hebrew. 12 October 1956 [B696]*

Another soldier, writing shortly before the Qalqilyah raid about another bloody retaliation in the West Bank, almost seems to explain the psychological mechanism of hysteresis:

Not far from us, when lying down, we saw a pool of blood, and it is common that one little shocking detail can change your entire worldview. … For example, if you know of an area that is used as a nest for murderers, how should you behave with these civilians? When I sit quietly and think, it seems to me appalling that I would kill a man with my own hands, and see him quiver, drip blood, and die. But I know that during battle I turn into a human beast, but how could I not? When you see your friends being killed, die without doing any harm, and the general atmosphere is one of revenge, and everyone does it.

*Unit 88, Hebrew, 13 September 1956. [A120]*

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355 Unit 88, Hebrew. 12 October 1956 [B690].
356 For the recorded interview with the soldier, see: Shay Hazkani, “Hayalim kotvim ma-hamitle ve-hatzenzura pokachat ayin” [Soldiers Write from the Mitle and the Censorship Keeps and Open Eye], Channel 10 News, 2 July 2008. <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=563663&ssv=0>
The habitus of some soldiers could not easily readjust after the hysteresis in the field took place. The bloody images in the battlefield at the tangible level, and the hysteresis at the conceptual level, brought the soldier to rethink what he already “knew” about reality. For him, revenge did not seem like a sufficient justification for killing, but the fact that everyone did it eventually condones killing.

Following the raid on Qalqilyah, the IDF abandoned its reprisal strategy. Instead, a full-fledged war with continuous occupation of territory was pursued.

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357 Vardi, p. 299.
Chapter 5

Soldiers’ Perceptions of the Suez Crisis

The Israeli soldiers were not surprised by the outbreak of the war. Most of them anticipated it for a long time and supported it wholeheartedly. They were also certain of the Israeli victory, because the war was imposed on Israel, they held, and was the only way to avert the Arab desire to “annihilate us all”.358

I sit and wonder how I feel about war. How easy it is to sit in a café in Tel Aviv with Marilyn Monroe’s picture in front of you, and how this thought becomes heavy and cumbersome, cruel and bloody in the field, when in front of you [all you see] is the animal called war. So, why despite this…aren’t we fleeing, running away from this monster called war? The answer is simple, really. Because we love, we love our homeland, and without clichés and exaggerations. Our homeland is the security of the dear ones we left behind. … Our homeland is the freedom and the air that it is our natural right to enjoy.

Artillery Battalion 822, Hebrew. 13 October 1956. [A253]

Some soldiers called to restore what they saw as ancient territory, allotted to the Jews by God, and others argued that only war would bring real peace.359 Few soldiers opposed war and advocated a peaceful, non-violent solution.360

The campaign started on October 29, 1956 when Israeli aircrafts dropped 385 paratroopers from Battalion 890 at the Mitle Pass, 30 kilometers east of the Suez Canal. Other forces, under the command of Sharon, advanced on foot.361 After initial setbacks and heavy fighting with the Egyptian army, on October 31, the Israeli soldiers encircled the Egyptians in Um-Katef and Abu-Ageila, and on November 2, the Egyptian army command ordered its soldiers to retreat. The occupation of the Sinai was complete, and was followed by that of Sharm

358 Nahal Unit 902, Ashdot Ya’akov Platoon, Italian. 15 March 1956 [B653].
359 For example: Field Hospital 282, Hebrew. 3 November 1956 [B749].
360 For example: Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 29 September 1955 [B593].
361 Once again, Lieutenant-Colonel Sharon disobeyed a direct order from Dayan and moved his Paratroopers westward into the trap of the Mitle Pass. See: Vardi, p. 310.
al-Shaykh and the opening of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships.\textsuperscript{362} Shortly after, the Gaza Strip was occupied on November 3. There is some evidence that the rapid Israeli advance was not in line with the pre-war plans, but more extensive. Apparently, the high-ranking commanders did not know about the tripartite agreement and sought to conquer as much territory as possible, eventually reaching the Suez Canal. Dayan, who was aware of the situation, did not, at first, report it to Ben-Gurion, who was suffering from a flu.\textsuperscript{363}

Similarly to the victory albums, upon entering Sinai, many soldiers immediately invoked biblical images. A formative biblical tradition in Judaism is that Moses (\textit{Moshe Rabenu}) wandered for 40 years with the Israelites in Sinai before entering the Promised Land. "Moses was a bad scout if for 40 years he dragged the Jews in the desert, while we are doing it in half a week," was a very common remark, seriously narrated by Israeli soldiers.\textsuperscript{364} Another soldier tried to recapture what the Israelites felt, and commented "you can't imagine how good it feels to walk about where our fathers made their way from enslavement to redemption."\textsuperscript{365} Mount Sinai, where the Torah and Ten Commandments were delivered to the Israelites held another important pole in the soldiers' letters and they were deeply influenced by it.\textsuperscript{366}

Biblical tropes were also used to describe the enemy. Israeli soldiers used the term "our cousins" when referring to the Arabs.\textsuperscript{367} The term relates to the biblical tradition which sees the Arabs as descendants of Ishmael (\textit{'Ismā‘īl}) whose half-brother Isaac (\textit{Yīzḥaq}) is believed to be a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{362}{Ahron Bregman, \textit{Israel's Wars, 1947-93} (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 38-40. The Anglo-French operation began on October 31, when bombing of Egyptian forces, allowing Israel aerial defense. On November 5, British and French troops started their ground operation along the Suez Canal.}
\footnotetext{363}{Golani, pp. 142-144.}
\footnotetext{364}{Infantry Battalion 771, Hebrew. 31 October 1956 [A191]. An identical story was given in the victory albums: "Why did he [Moses] wander around here for 40 years? He must have been lost. He should have taken us with him, and been home in four days!" See: \textit{Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes}, p. 65.}
\footnotetext{365}{Armored Corps Battalion 79, Hebrew. 5 November 1956 [B758]. Similar writing can be found in the victory albums. See: \textit{Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes}, p. 112.}
\footnotetext{366}{For example: Infantry Battalion 127, Hebrew. 2 November 1956 [B744].}
\footnotetext{367}{For example: Battalion 88, Hebrew. 15 September 1956 [A118].}
\end{footnotes}
part of the lineage of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", who gave birth to the Israelites, or the Jewish people. By using the term "our cousins", soldiers referred to themselves as the superior family member who needs to discipline his wicked brother, as the book of Genesis mentions about Ishmael: "He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." In other instances, the Arabs were described as modern-day Philistines, and the Israeli soldiers as completing the task begun by King David, of destroying an ancient enemy. This idea was part of the doxa of the field and prevalent in school textbooks.

The notion of the cowardice of the Egyptian enemy—also deeply embedded in the doxa of the army field—quickly found itself in their personal letters. Soldiers wrote that the enemy soldiers were frightened and “fled like chickens.” Another added, “It was more like a picnic than a real war,” and “the Nasser legend went down like a house of cards.” Another frequent idea was the abandonment of shoes:

This is an interesting journey. The defeat of the Egyptians is dreadful. Every second, Egyptian soldiers arrive to turn themselves in. The entire area is sown with packages, steel helmets and mostly shoes. I think they should’ve called this operation “Operation Shoes”.

*Infantry Battalion 890, 3 November 1956. [B721]*

The shoes were seen as a symbol of the entire campaign, stressing the ineptness of the Egyptians. The victory albums epitomized this as well.

After the height of the battle, many soldiers took the time to observe the Egyptian POWs. For most soldiers, looking at the enemy reaffirmed what they already “knew”. A soldier of the

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368 *Genesis* 16:12. See also: Almog, p. 189.
369 Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 2 November 1956 [B728] and Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 3 November 1956 [B729]. Less common is comparing the occupation of Sinai to the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. See: Signal and Electronics Corps Brigade Platoon 364, Hebrew. 2 November 1956 [B735].
370 Combat Engineering Corps Platoon (BANCHTASH) 579, Hebrew. 11 November 1956 [B712].
371 Artillery Battalion 872, Hebrew. 4 November 1956 [A182] and Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 2 November 1956 [B726].
Armored Corps explained to his family: "I tried to see in their face an expression of anger, sorrow, grief, or any kind of emotion, but all I saw in their eyes was obtuseness, on the verge of robotization." Unlike the Israeli soldiers, who had a strong sense of conviction, the Egyptian soldiers were described as merely mercenaries. The behavior of Egyptian officers in particular reaffirmed the old ideas of the doxa that Arabs were not willing to genuinely fight for their countries and lacked social cohesion:

Their commanders immediately asked to be separated from the *shabab* [meaning, the simple soldiers], and when some of them [the *shabab*] wanted to join the officers, they sent them away firmly, while cursing them. If you ask me, you can find the main reason for our victory in this.

*Infantry Battalion 11, Hebrew. 4 November 1956. [A159]*

One soldier referred to the Israeli victory as exposing "the Egyptian bluff that the whole world was swept by, in the past three years." Another added: “The enemy simply would not fight for his country, and more than that—for his regime.” Some Egyptian officers were described as bursting into tears when realizing they were lied to and led to believe that they were superior to the IDF.

The war itself turned out to be especially bloody, with more than a few instances of war crimes. While it went on, Arab states blamed Israel for expelling Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip (into Egypt proper) and intentionally killing civilians and Egyptian POWs. In December, the secretary-general of the UN decided to send an emissary, Lieutenant-Colonel K.R. Nelson of the U.S. army, to investigate these claims. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked the military censor to ban the media from reporting on the arrival of the UN personnel,

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372 Armored Corps Battalion 52, Hebrew. 10 November 1956 [A156].
373 Infantry Battalion 771, Hebrew. 3 November 1956 [A190].
374 Infantry Battalion 128, Hebrew. 4 November 1956 [A179].
375 Infantry Battalion 771, Hebrew. 1 November 1956 [A181].
376 Reconnaissance Unit, Brigade 1, Hebrew. 4 November 1956 [A162].
fearing that “if the thing gets published, it will goad the Arabs of the strip to rush to the two [emissaries] with complaints, real or fictional.” The censor refused. According to Nelson’s report, there were no expulsions, but he raised doubts over whether all the civilians killed were “Palestinian refugees [who] formed part of the resistance,” as the Israeli authorities had claimed.

According to the UN investigation, massive killing of civilians did take place in the Rafah refugee camp. On November 12, 1956, Israeli soldiers called all Palestinian men to arrive at a designated hour to a certain screening point, but the men never had sufficient time to walk there. As a result, shortly before the designated time, in fear of being late, many Palestinians started running towards the screening point. According to Nelson: “Some Israeli soldiers apparently panicked and opened fire on this running crowd.” He reported that 111 people were killed in the incident. Other UN officials, who were quoted in newspapers at the time, claimed the number of casualties was 50–60. An IDF spokesperson and a few Israeli officials, including Dayan and Ben-Gurion, gave several explanations for the incident and argued that the soldiers were met with resistance while trying to search for Egyptian soldiers and weapons. They explained that the day before the shooting, the IDF unit in Rafah was replaced by another unit. The Palestinian refugees mistakenly thought this to be an Israeli withdrawal and started looting the UNRWA warehouses and demonstrating. The entering unit then imposed curfew and called all men to report to a specific place for identification. When no one arrived at the designated hour, the soldiers went to forcibly bring the men, and that was when the soldiers opened fire.

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379 Ibid.
Israeli officials also claimed the refugees were the first to shoot. Only the Maki party newspaper and Ha-‘Olam Ha-Ze reported the event, apparently because of censorship restrictions. It seems the killings went almost unnoticed in Israel, excluding a short discussion in the parliament.\footnote{Sacco, pp. 393, 395-396, 397-398.}

An internal classified IDF investigation into the matter found that while there was no premeditated massacre, soldiers opened fire at Palestinian refugees who tried to escape, and also at “people who refused to listen to instructions.” It is not clear what the term “refused” means and it is possible it refers to the killing of people who did not flee. The battalion commander\footnote{The battalion which operated in Rafah was Battalion 44 of Brigade 12, “The Negev Brigade”\footnote{Yagil Henkin, “Tevach rafich, 1956-ma kara be-emet? [The Rafah Massacre, 1956-What Really Happened?], Fresh (forum article), 25 February 2010. <http://www.fresh.co.il/vBulletin/showthread.php?t=505283> Hankin analysis relies on reports in IDFA 111/849/1956 and IDFA 8/776/1958.}} explained that people refused to come to the detention facility, so they had to bring them out by force. The platoon commander said that there was a direct order to shoot at whoever tried to escape, besides women and children. The battalion commander added that by killing “a few Arabs, the fleeing process stopped.” The report states that there was no armed resistance, excluding one incident when a sergeant was wounded from unidentified shooting. The soldiers, who were ordered to bury the killed Palestinians, reported that the number of dead was forty, including one woman and two children. In home searches, approximately 200 Egyptian soldiers and Fedayeen were located, in addition to arms.\footnote{Burns, pp. 303-304.}

Nelson’s report also claims that in Khan Yunis an additional 275 Palestinians were killed.\footnote{Burns, pp. 303-304.} There seems to be no other documentation from the period for that event. A handful of eyewitnesses who were interviewed for Joe Sacco’s \textit{Footnotes in Gaza} claim that on November 3, 1956, when the IDF captured Khan Yunis, the Israeli soldiers shot some people in their homes and then assembled the rest of the men in the city center. According to one eyewitness, the
soldiers opened fire from machine guns. Another eyewitness reported that he saw about 100 corpses lying near a castle located at the city center. Sacco himself asserts that some of the testimonies seem to be false, and says he cannot reconstruct the events in Khan Yunis. Israeli soldiers who fought in Khan Yunis could not remember any vast killing of civilians.

In August 1995, it was revealed that a massacre of Egyptian civilians did take place in 1956. A few Israeli journalists, relying on an internal IDF investigation, concluded that on October 31, 1956, soldiers from Battalion 890 of the Paratroopers Brigade executed about 50 unarmed Egyptian road workers who were employed by the Egyptian public works department in Ras Sudar. Aryeh Biro, the officer who was in charge of the killing, admitted in an interview: “We tied their hands and led them to the quarry. They were frightened and shattered. They were a burden, a pain in the butt, and until we finished them off we could not find the time to deal with the other matters.” After the information became public in 1995, Israel initiated an official investigation and eventually concluded that the massacre of the road workers did occur and offered compensation to the families of the victims. The Israeli investigation also concluded that Egyptian soldiers killed Israeli POWs.

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385 Sacco, pp. 84-99. For similar eyewitness reports see: Masalha, p. 58.
386 Sacco, pp. 112-116.
387 Ibid., p. 119.
389 One Israeli newspaper claimed that there were 273 Egyptian soldiers in total who were killed out of battle, mostly by Battalion 890 on its way from al-Tur to Ras Sudar. The accuracy of this claim could not be verified. See: Fisher, p. 154.
390 “Mitzrayim shokelet li-drosh mi-yisrael pitzuyim ‘al retzach ha-shvuyim” [Egypt is Considering Asking Israel for Reparations for the Killing of POWs], Ynet, 5 July 2004. Egypt has recently demanded that the officers who were in charge be brought to trial. <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2942305,00.html>
Although it is difficult to directly tie specific soldiers’ letters to the above-described incidents, the extensive writing among soldiers about killing, including reports of indiscriminate killing, suggests that at least some of the letters describe these incidents.\footnote{It is difficult to connect individual letters to specific incidents because the letters, for the most part, do not contain enough information about the events they describe.}

A minority of soldiers reported that they actively took part in indiscriminate killing for either pleasure or revenge. Dave Grossman suggests that this group in any given society amounts to roughly 2% of the male population. “The 2% group” is predisposed to aggressive acts and “if pushed or if given a legitimate reason, will kill without regret or remorse.”\footnote{“The 2% group” concept was originally developed by Roy L. Swank and Walter E. Marchand in relation to World War II. According to Grossman, this group often mistakenly presented as the majority of combat soldiers. See: Grossman, pp. 180-181.} However, a majority of soldiers reported being appalled by the killings. It is obvious that hysteresis—as a result of the carnage—affected their habitus. However, among “the affected ones”, about a half eventually managed to reconcile the killing and accepted that it was a necessity; the other half—the dissenting group in this case—could not reconcile the killing (the hysteresis) with their habitus, and it shook their worldview. The following chart summarizes the responses among soldiers who express themselves about killing:
One soldier describes finding sadistic pleasure in killing. The killing was apparently payback for not being allowed to go see his girlfriend:

It has been a month and a half since I was last home, and that’s a lot of time. Tamar, only the Arabs are to blame for this, and at every chance I have I take revenge on them. I do not find satisfaction in those I already killed among them; we killed hundreds, but for me this is not enough. Every chance I get, I take revenge. And there are many chances, especially these days that I am among Arabs. They are under curfew and that is a great opportunity to do everything to them, and I do it, and I won’t stop till I get a pass to go home, so I swear.

*Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 6 November 1956 [B757]*

Relying on the letter’s date and the above information about documented atrocities, it is possible that the soldier refers to Khan Yunis, in which the Golani Brigade was stationed. Shay shows that American soldiers in Vietnam also used brutality towards the enemy as an outlet for their anger at their commanders. Nevertheless, this particular letter is singular for the Israeli case.

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394 Tamar is common name for an Israeli female.
395 Shay, pp. 201-202. Shay argues that the Israeli army does not employ this tactic.
Another soldier explained that he had managed to conquer his fear, and now that he had “gotten into it”, he depicts himself as "blood-thirsty", wanting to knock over as many enemy soldiers at one time as possible. He bragged that he had become “a fighter”. Similar pleasure in killing can be found in a letter written shortly after the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Sinai:

Sing and dance and be happy in spite of the evil, ill-willed people, the cowards, the faint-hearted, the ignorant who try to conspire against our lives, against our borders, because their countries are too small, because…[they] can’t think or understand. That is why we must annihilate them, kill them to the bitter end, and destroy them all, these human robots, them and the ones who send them. The guys are practicing marksmanship. When I finish this letter, I will go shooting as well, and this time I will aim right, so I will hit exactly into the eye of “the cousin”, in order to crush his skull, so he will not add insult to injury, so he will stop his bad deeds.

*Nahal Unit 906, Karm abu-Salam, Hebrew. 1 June 1957 [B815]*

It is not clear if the soldier referred to any events that took place in the real world, or whether this was merely his philosophy, articulated in a letter to a relative.

As mentioned, about half of the soldiers seem to be bothered by the carnage—suggesting that hysteresis in the field took place; however, they were then quickly able to justify the killings (and readjust their habitus), arguing that there was no other alternative. It did not change their basic view of the war being a just one. Lomski-Feder suggests that “normalizing war” or “banalization of the war experiences” is a psychological mechanism frequently used by Israeli soldiers to give meaning to war recollections. Her explanation for this process among soldiers who fought in 1973 seems to work for the 1956 case as well: For many soldiers “traumas are a part of life and this war was just another one that people go through, like difficult childhood experiences or ‘life events’. “ The soldiers who managed to normalize the war and make it a part of their normal life course were the ones living to the ethos of the Israeli fighter.

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396 Company Commanders Battalion 334, Hebrew. 14 July 1957 [A451].
397 Lomski-Feder, p. 95.
Normalizing allowed them to carry on as usual. On the other hand, the ones that allowed themselves to be influenced by the war—and could not readjust their habitus—were tagged as “extreme” and even “screw-ups” by their friends. They were seen as not being in control over their lives.  

As killing became a daily occurrence, more and more soldiers stated that they “witnessed here acts of brutality that are truly exceptional, but no one was impressed.” One letter, from a few months before the war, explicitly mentioned the mechanism of getting used to killing:

I am already recovered from battle. It left a very depressing impression on me—human beings turn into animals…corpses of the killed, wounded who are crying, and wounded who can no longer cry, but just make their last death rattle—as a slaughtered hen before drawing its last breath. ... How good would it have been had there been no wars. Do men have to use such wretched means to persuade their enemy? But we shall get used to it...as we get used to everything.

*Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew. 14 December 1955 [B640]*

From the actual war days, a typical example of the normalizing mechanism—or readjusting the habitus after hysteresis—is a letter written after the killing of comrades: “It is hard for me to describe to you how we changed overnight. We turned into murderers. But we don’t kill for no reason, but to show Nasser and the rest of the world that there is a limit to our patience.” Although the soldier was bothered by the killing, he could eventually explain it away. It seems that thwarting what soldiers saw as the imminent danger from Nasser, was commonly used to justify killing:

Who are all these faceless people that I've murdered and that my comrades killed? It's hard to say that I felt any hatred while pulling the trigger. I've done my duty peacefully and quietly, as something that is obvious. We were never concerned with the individuals, the faceless. It was the spirit and flame of Nasser that we wished to eliminate, and that couldn't be done without slaying the living carriers of that spirit.

*Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 8 November 1956 [A135]*

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398 Lomski-Feder, pp 96-98.
399 Infantry Battalion 12, Hebrew. 6 November 1956 [A134]. The date and the soldier’s unit could suggest that this letter refers to the killing of civilians in Khan Yunis.
400 Reconnaissance Unit, Brigade 1, Hebrew. 31 October 1956 [B713].
The soldier in this letter specifically mentions that he did not feel hatred towards the enemy while killing him. He explained he did this as a political act, to eliminate the flame of Nasser. Other soldiers expressed their scorn of war in general, saying "I hate war" and "It is an ugly and sick phenomenon that is a shame to the entire human race." But they also quickly explained it away: "I hate what I do, but I do it because it is the calling and I am a soldier." One soldier asked: "When will understanding and harmony come to our poor world?", but then quickly added “our enemies made us fight [them]."

Sometimes the soul-searching took a more personal tone: "A day after the fighting when I saw the hundreds of dead bodies, swollen and slashed, at first [it bothered me], and I said to myself: 'Uzi! You've participated in a massacre—here are its results.' However, on second thought, Uzi was able to reconcile the mass killing when he remembered his friends that were killed in battle. Even when soldiers stood on the edge of dissent, they usually took a step back and managed “to normalize” their experience. The idea that there is no alternative and that the Arabs forced Israel into killing had never been more pervasive.

Another and quite different form of psychological reconciliation with killing was shown by a soldier from the Golani Brigade:

A few officers have expressed their admiration for my impatience and cruelty, but to tell you the truth, only during battle am I like this. Later on, I am sorry for each and every one I killed. … At night I fight, and during the day I am sorry, or the other way around—fight during the day, roll around in bed at night for a few hours [out of guilt].

_Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 3 November 1956. [A314]_

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401 Infantry Battalion 13, Hebrew. 10 November 1956 [A137].
402 Infantry Battalion 61, Hebrew. 3 November 1956 [A140]. Similar ideas of normalizing war were conveyed by French soldiers in World War I. See: Audoin-Rouzeau, pp. 181-183.
403 Infantry Battalion 91, Hebrew. 8 November 1956 [A142].
404 Uzi is a common name for an Israeli male.
405 Armored Corps Battalion 9, Hebrew. 8 November 1956 [A143].
406 Ibid.
Guilt that accompanied mass killing was not unique. American and British accounts from World War II depicted similar feelings. In fact, despite army officials’ attempts to eradicate feelings of regret and guilt among soldiers, for fear these feelings would impede fighting, soldiers actually perceived limited guilt as desirable. According to Bourke, “It was precisely this emotion that made them ‘human’, and enabled them to return to civilian society afterwards.”

Another peculiar case is of a soldier who aspired to be able to kill without having second thoughts; however, when his religious sentiments came into play, he repented.

I thought myself to be a bit of a wuss, that I would break in the face of battle; however, I was mistaken. The enemy soldiers, standing hopeless in front of the tank I commanded, were all run over. That's what I instructed the driver to do. The thirst for blood drove us all insane. I was so glad when I knocked down an Arab with my Uzi [rifle]. After the fight, while cleaning my weapon, I was suddenly struck with a sense of disgust…One day we went looking for captives. While searching them, I saw one of them trying to hide something in his undershirt. I threatened him with my rifle, but then [I saw] it was an old worn-out Quran. Then, my human spirit suddenly emerged, because at the same time I held a bible book which was given to me by the Military Rabbinate.

*Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 4 November 1956. [A148]*

The soldier's fear to be tagged as a "wuss" seems to have played a role in his brutality. “Being a wuss” is regarded as effeminate and thus viewed negatively in the army, a masculine institution. Indeed, many American and British soldiers explained that they feared being thought of as cowardly more than they feared being killed. With respect to the latter part of the letter, it seems that some religious affinity made this soldier see himself in the eyes of the enemy. The fact that they both carried their religious scriptures was of enough importance to make the soldier not want to shoot the enemy combatant. It could be inferred that soldiers with intense religious sentiments had an added layer of reflection upon killing enemy soldiers or civilians.

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The dissenting group is composed of soldiers who could not reconcile the mass killings. Unlike their friends, they could not readjust their habitus after the hysteresis in the field took place. The soldiers in the dissenting group ended up not condoning killing, and it could be suggested that their worldview changed.

You look continuously at these young faces and wonder: Did they pretend to destroy our country? You look around and you see their bellies ripped-open, without a hand or a foot, mutilated but still breathing, asking for your help—the enemy's help. Well, in these moments all the past scores are forgotten, and your heart's hidden emotion awakens.

*Artillery Battalion 858, Hebrew. 4 November 1956. [A152]*

The fascination with enemy corpses was very common among soldiers in different armies, including the Americans in World War II.\(^\text{411}\) Observing the slain, the soldier here had second thoughts about whether the Egyptian nation truly intended to annihilate the Jewish state. Another soldier who reflected on both his friends that were killed and the enemy soldiers concluded: “All mothers (the Arab ones as well) cry in the same language.”\(^\text{412}\) A clear dissent is conveyed by a soldier who contemplated the commands he received:

> The horrors of war don't have a good influence on me. In days of peace, trials are held for murder, and here we perform wholesale killing, and we are even encouraged to do so. I find it difficult to cope with this.

*Headquarters of Brigade 4, Hebrew. 5 November 1956. [A144]*

Encouragement from commanders and a feeling of anonymity among soldiers are decisive factors in convincing soldiers to kill the enemy. The group not only allows anonymity, but also distributes the feeling of guilt and intensifies existing aggressiveness.\(^\text{413}\) However, encouragement or a crowd of other soldiers were not always sufficient. One of the soldiers stated his inability to reconcile reality, saying, “Something in me shattered, and broke into many

\(^{411}\) It was also common for American soldiers to collect parts of Japanese corpses as souvenirs. See: Fussell, *Wartime*, p. 117.

\(^{412}\) Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew. 5 November 1956 [B759].

\(^{413}\) Grossman, pp. 146, 150-152, 225.
pieces." It is also possible to locate soldiers who complained that the dire reality in the battlefield contradicted “the fancy words”, probably referring to the euphemisms used by army and political leaders. When soldiers saw their own selves in the face of the enemy, the dissent was even more marked:

Isn't the man who stands in front of you a soldier like you? Doesn't he have a wife, a girlfriend, kids? Aren't they expecting him? These questions follow one another in a rapid pace, and you can’t control them. However, [one] pull of the trigger and the stream of hesitations stops and the conscience goes into action, the conscience that doesn’t give you rest. In front of your eyes, the pictures of a shattered family, a world in miniature that ceased to exist, an orphan crying, a broken-hearted woman walking the streets—and you go crazy.

_Armored Corps Battalion 82, Hebrew. 1 November 1956. [A310]_

Grossman argues that at close range “the interpersonal nature of the killing has shifted. Instead of shooting at a uniform and killing a generalized enemy, now the killer must shoot at a person and kill a specific individual.” However, despite Grossman assertion that most men could not do it, the soldier in the above letter, after some pondering, eventually pulled the trigger (physically or discursively), and was then left with post-action pangs of conscience.

Lomski-Feder explains that dissenting voices among soldiers in relation to war usually do not accuse their enemies but rather their leaders. They “express a fundamental crisis of faith with regard to the carriers of the hegemonic ideology and a deep disappointment with those who put it into practice.” One letter stands out in this regard. It shows complete and absolute contempt for the doxa of the army field. The soldier, exposed to the atrocities of war, disputes the basic ideas that were supposed to guide his habitus.

How nice it is to close your eyes real tight. Eyes, no matter where they look, fall upon a ubiquitous presence of steel. Cover your ears whose eardrums are almost torn by the

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414 Infantry Battalion 51, Hebrew. 4 November 1956 [A149].
415 Infantry Battalion 13, Hebrew. 10 November 1956 [A136]. The date and the soldier’s unit could suggest that this letter refers to the killing of civilians in Khan Yunis.
416 Grossman, p. 119.
417 Lomski-Feder, p. 99.
roars that call you to kill the enemy with as little ammunition as possible. I remember being a child and reading these instructions in a training manual. … I was shocked. A slogan that condenses the essence of our generation—to do it [kill with as little ammunition], and contemplate the word "peace" [at the same time]. Whisper it, sing it, think about it, and most importantly give it life and vitality. Or maybe the other way around? … Open your eyes, fill your lung with air, clench your fists, and cry out the good word [peace] in the face of this stupidity called "the army". … I have not created anything lasting that brought any use to anybody; I have not even loved properly, and here I am being trained to demolish, destroy, kill, and inflict injury. This is how I encountered life, and oh…I almost forgot, the enemy is at the gates! There's no choice!

Unit 99, Hebrew. 20 November 1956 [A309]

There is no knowing what brought this particular soldier to break away from the social conventions to such a large degree. It seems that he could not readjust his habitus after the hysteresis in the field, and that his dissent was total. He disputed many of the prime ideas of the field’s doxa, including the notion that Israel is a peace-seeking nation, the euphemisms used in army training, and the idea that there is no alternative (ein breira). Nevertheless, it is important to note that his dissent is singular. Most soldiers did not reconsider their entire socialization on the account of the war.
Chapter 6

Experiences of Occupation from the Gaza Strip

The occupation of the Gaza Strip was ultimately short; however, Israel was planning on a longer stay and imposed military rule on Gaza. Some ambiguous evidence suggests Israeli officials were discussing a plan for either forceful resettlement overseas of the 1948 refugees who were in the Gaza Strip, or financial compensation aimed at encouraging them to emigrate. A commission was set up to suggest policy on the matter.\textsuperscript{418}

Shortly after the occupation, the Israeli cabinet approved a detailed plan to restore order and institutionalize Israeli control, including the restoration of municipal authorities in Gaza, cooperation with UNRWA, distributing food supplies from Israeli emergency stocks, marketing of agricultural produce in Israel, opening of banks and factories, and improvement of electricity and water supply. In addition, plans were made to plant fruit trees in uncultivated areas in the strip.\textsuperscript{419} Not many of the development plans were implemented before the withdrawal.\textsuperscript{420} Colonel Zvi Peleg of the Military Government Unit recalled that the occupation was a friendly one without the need to exercise any military force.

We placed the Gaza branch [of the unit] in the office of the strip's Egyptian governor, General Muhammad Digwi. ... It was a fancy office with a platform where his desk was stationed, and behind it, a wooden wall with the words “Allah and the homeland” engraved on it. ... For four-and-a-half months of our stay in Gaza, there was full cooperation of the local population with the Israeli military government, although the incitement from “The Voice of Arabs” in Cairo against the Israeli presence in the strip, and the call for rebellion, did not cease. The serenity continued till the day of withdrawal. ... An indication of the quality of the relationship between the population

\textsuperscript{418} Masalha, pp. 60-61, 64, 68.
\textsuperscript{420} One of the only steps taken, besides supplying of food, was replacing Gaza's license-plates with new Hebrew ones. See: Roy, pp. 70–71.
and the military government was the praise by the mayor [of Gaza], Rushdi al-Shawa, for the Israeli military government on the night of withdrawal.\textsuperscript{421}

In the immediate aftermath of the Israeli invasion and the Egyptian forces’ retreat from Gaza, Palestinians ransacked the UNRWA warehouses, leaving thousands of needy refugees without necessary food and medicine supplies.\textsuperscript{422} The fighting also caused severe damage to civilian infrastructures in the refugee camps along the strip.\textsuperscript{423} It is assumed that for many soldiers, witnessing these conditions created hysteresis.

Relying on European Orientalist thought, the doxa of the army field often stressed that Arabs were primitive, inclined to subjection, and lacking national sentiment. Upon the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the habitus of the Israeli soldiers seems to point to exactly these traits. The soldiers characterized Palestinian behavior as subordinate and even servile, and this brought them to the conclusion that the Palestinians did not qualify as a real nation, but merely a collective of “savage natives”. Upon the entrance to the Gaza Strip, a soldier depicted what he saw as the pitiable surrender of Palestinians:

We’ve completed the journey from Gaza to Khan Yunis today. Along the way Arabs are running, holding a white flag and pathetically waving “hello” at us. Every house now has a white sheet hanging out of a window, and the Arabs, in general, look bewildered. On a board in front of me [in one of the villages] it is written: “The End of the State of Israel”. The dead here make no impression; even little girls approach them and inspect them with curiosity. High-ranking Egyptian officers grovel in front of every soldier and smile at them with great humiliation.

\textit{Signal and Electronics Corps Brigade Platoon 359, Hebrew, 5 November 1956. [A180]}

The notion of contempt runs through most of the soldiers’ letters. The captured Fedayeen (and Egyptian soldiers) had proved to be an unworthy adversary, and as one soldier explained:

By the look on their faces one might think that they are innocent and that there is no reason why we touched them [in the first place]. They are crying and moaning in a

\textsuperscript{423} Roy, p. 70.
really pathetic way. What hypocrisy! To murder and then to cry. They don’t even know how to fight.

*Infantry Battalion 13, Hebrew, 3 November 1956. [A186]*

Another soldier who was welcomed into a Palestinian family’s house was furious at what he saw as lack of self-respect:

I thought to myself how these people lack any character, any patriotic feeling. They are really like brutes, they could be happy living anywhere—this is where they belong. All this flattery and their way of speaking really makes me angry. Oh Lord! [ribono shel ‘olam] Where is these people's self-respect? Yesterday they were our enemy, and today they are so nice, smiling and flattering… They just lack any sense of conviction, they have no ideals in life, they are hollow, they don't have a homeland, they are treated like dogs [by the Egyptians], they are not valued, they weren't given any education…they don’t have a home, they don’t have any human conditions—in short, all their lives are the lives of a brute and not of a human being.

*Armored Corps Training Base, Hebrew. 17 November 1956 [A282]*

Grossman notes that for men in battle, “The enemy’s humanity is denied, and he becomes a strange beast.”\(^{424}\) This was even more emphasized when the enemy was labeled as Oriental. In the eyes of this soldier, the comparison of Palestinians to brutes explained their submissive behavior. The doxic principles, that the Arabs quickly adjust and that they did not expect to be treated respectfully, were demonstrated in this letter. There are also striking similarities to American soldiers’ letters, both from World War II and from the Vietnam War, which expressed views of the Japanese and Vietcong as beasts.\(^{425}\) The Israeli soldier contended that because the Palestinians lacked education and ideals, they also did not have a patriotic feeling, homeland, or even simple homes. The soldier was obviously affected by the hysteresis the occupation caused, but also, as quickly, managed to readjust his habitus. He did not see any connection between Israel’s actions and the dire condition of the Palestinian refugees. Other soldiers did see Palestinians as a nation, but as a defective one:


\(^{425}\) An American soldier wrote from Vietnam: “Charlie [the Vietnamese enemy]—he had no feelings. Charlie never cared whether he lived or died. ... They had no concept of life.” Quoted in: Shay, p. 105. For similar ideas from World War II about Japanese soldiers: Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 116-117.
It's weird to wander around freely, but armed, in the streets of this township, which was the nest of murderers and Fedayeen, and [see] all these people who just a month ago were willing to rip every Jew into shreds, standing, smiling, groveling in front of you. With all my attempts at understanding, the feeling of scorn rages in me for this nation that surrenders in such a way. How many options they have! To assassinate soldiers, to rebel, to blow up facilities—and they don't dare. This lack of daring is not the result of brutal oppression, but of the nature of this nation, and each one of its people, to be obedient to the stronger.

*Battalion 13, Hebrew, 21 November 1956. [A287]*

The soldier characterized all Palestinians as enemies and terrorists rather than civilians and militants. Both groups were judged on the same terms, and that is why the soldier was surprised to find that the “nest” of Fedayeen was so passive. The fact that the Palestinians were not rebelling against their subordination made the soldier conclude that they were not a real nation, as this concept was seen by Israelis. Echoing doxic principles and Orientalist tropes, the Palestinians’ nature was described again and again as obedient. Soldiers ruled out the option that the IDF occupation (“oppression”) was the cause for that obedience. These depictions justified the occupation in the soldiers’ eyes.

In the perception of many soldiers, after the Palestinians were deprived of national sentiment and pride, they were reduced to the level of the derogatory “native”:

We basically live here like American soldiers: for a cigarette you can tell the “native” to climb up the palm and fetch you some dates, and for three cigarettes you can get your shoes brushed.

*Armored Corps Battalion 272, Hebrew, 15 November 1956. [A292]*

The soldiers evoked racist attitudes of “savage natives” who would agree to do anything for money because they have no other purpose in life. However, the Palestinians were also described as benefitting from the occupation. The Israeli rule over Gaza was seen in similar terms to the French *mission civilisatrice*, or civilizing mission. In the 19th century and early 20th century, this term was used to justify imperialist expansion by European powers, and especially by France in
West and North Africa. The basic notion was that colonization would improve the natives’ lives and eventually modernize them. The modernization was often presented as being desired by the colonized.

The soldiers, upon arrival in Gaza, emphasize many times that the population was amazed by their humanity, as they were expecting extreme brutality.

There’s no doubt that our treatment of them was a big surprise to them, because the Egyptians told them that the Israeli soldiers are barbaric beasts and murderers. And here they see the opposite; the Israeli soldier is first and foremost a human being! And I can testify that our treatment of them was genuinely humane, which surprised them.

Armored Corps Training Base, Hebrew, 17 November 1957. [A282]

Another soldier added: “No doubt, they are earning quite a bit from these ‘wars’.” These comments show how much the reaffirmation of the “pleasant occupation” was important for the soldiers’ self-justification. Some soldiers even made the explicit assertion that Israel would be the one that would reform the Palestinians and bring them modernization.

One thing is clear: the inhabitants of this place, if they stay, will enjoy their new government. What primitiveness, ignorance, and poverty rule this area, despite its pleasant look. A few rich people used to rule this area, and the remaining hundreds of thousands lived in dumps, tents, and holes in the ground. We have children wandering around whose parents died, and they have nowhere to go. We feed them and water them. ... A child is a child anywhere. I would like for this child to play as any other child on this planet. The major issue we discuss among us is what should our treatment [for these people] be like? Since the hot-tempered will always tell you: what if they came to us [occupied us]? This does not justify a brutal approach, but there is something to it.

Headquarters of Brigade 11, Hebrew, 5 November 1956. [A209]

The dire conditions in Gaza created a strong sense of hysteresis in the soldier’s eyes. However, the soldier did not feel he, or the IDF, shared any blame for the dire conditions of the refugees.

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426 There is fierce debate among scholars over whether the concept of *mission civilisatrice* was used just as a pretext for material gain of the colonizers or if some colonial officers and political figures truly adhered to the idea. What is rarely disputed by scholars is the dire consequences this policy had on the colonized nations. See: Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 246–258.


428 Infantry Battalion 11, Hebrew. 5 November 1956 [A157] and Battalion 13, Hebrew, 20 November 1956 [A289].
Instead, he quickly readjusted his habitus with the old doxic principles, so he could too perceive the Israeli rule as benefiting Palestinians, ending the corrupted rule of the effendis.

Nevertheless, the thought of being an occupying army bothered many soldiers and often evoked the collective memory of World War II. Seeing the children of Gaza, one soldier wrote: “I remembered the post-war movies, when they showed the armies entering the occupied lands. This feeling is unpleasant.”

Another soldier, from the military police, who had much contact with the civilian population in Gaza, made a more explicit comparison:

The behavior of the Arabs who stayed is despicable. They are such flatterers, but we don't pay much attention to them. In that respect, they are like the Jews in Hitler's time. But the condition of the Jews was very bad, while we here do not treat them the way the Germans treated the Jews.

Military Police Commanding Unit 390, Hebrew, 12 November 1956. [A291]

Despite the sense of disgust, most soldiers still regarded the occupation as a necessary evil. Partial dissent can be located among some soldiers, who found it hard to reconcile the hysteresis the occupation had caused with their habitus. Some lament civilian suffering in occupied areas; however, for the most part they do not directly interfere to solve it. When empathy was evoked, all soldiers distinguished those who were worthy of their compassion from those who were not.

Some [Israeli soldiers] see heroism in murdering and looting helpless people who are at their mercy. Maybe I am too good for them [the civilians], but I am sure this is not right. ... I am convinced that there are some among them who deserve to be murdered in cold blood, and I would even be willing to do it myself, but there are also good people, just like us, and it will be injustice to hurt them. I cannot think of a bigger crime than killing an innocent. I’m mostly moved by the frightened eyes of these people. Big eyes, innocent and frightened. ... I pity them mostly because of the eyes. They say so much.

Unit 906 of the Nahal Brigade/Érez Platoon, Hebrew, 17 November 1957. [A288]

The hysteresis that was caused by face-to-face encounters with civilians led the soldier to rethink his habitus. He compared it to that of his friends—who were willing to kill and loot helpless people—and concluded he would not do such a thing. He felt compassion towards the people

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429 Headquarters of Brigade 11, Hebrew, 5 November 1956 [A209].
that reminded him of himself. In this context, Shay notes that “men cannot kill an enemy understood to be honorable and like oneself.”

At times, religious feelings were brought up to explain the evoking of compassion. This corresponds with the belief that compassion is one of the qualities of God, and that man should also aspire to it.

In the last three weeks I've learned a lot. ... I've learned that only a split second separates life from death. Fortunately, we've learned this not on our own people. ... But still, our enemies also have God's breath of life in their nostrils [nishmat adonai be-apam]. If this can happen to them, it can as easily happen to us too. Not only have I learned of life and death, I have also learned of life's conditions. ... Small, innocent children scatter through the garbage, while you eat meat, fat, and all the best that you desire. Who says I am more entitled than others to good food? I've always seen poverty and wealth, but not to this extent.

*Infantry Battalion 13, Hebrew, 14 November 1957. [A283]*

Not only religious sentiments stirred compassion in this case, but also the ability of the soldier to put himself and his fellow friends in the place of the impoverished children.

Soldiers felt compassion the most when they could associate their surroundings with familiar, pleasant feelings and sights from home. In these cases, the compassion was sometimes translated into action. A soldier complained that he is “sick of seeing soldiers and civilians fleeing like dogs,” like ugly, inhuman creatures. Then, he contrasted this by saying: “Yesterday I performed a good deed. I gave a young very beautiful Arab woman some food, to her and to her little baby.” It is clear that the attraction to the Arab woman is what stirred the compassion and the action of giving food that followed it. At times, the appearance appeal is intertwined with another “surprising” element, such as knowing the occupier’s language:

430 Shay, p. 103.
431 Compassion in Judaism is regarded as one of God’s Thirteen Qualities of Leniency [shlosh-esre midot ha-rahamim].
432 *Genesis* 2:7.
433 Brigade Reconnaissance Company, Armored Corps 133, Hebrew. 4 November 1956 [A285].
434 Ibid.
Suddenly, a beautiful seven-year-old girl approached me and asked—to my great surprise in perfect Hebrew—that I give her 10 pennies since she hadn't eaten in two days. The hunger that glowed from her innocent eyes and her plea touched me deeply, to the degree that I couldn't bare the look in her eyes, and I gave her a decent amount of money. But she was not the only one. Many more children, like her, were left without parents and they were starving. I cannot stop thinking about them, even now. What is the sin of those whose parents were Fedayeen or just cowards that abandoned them? ...Who will take care of them? What will be their destiny? Surely they will starve to death. Very bleak condition.

Infantry Battalion 13, Hebrew, 18 November 1956. [A284] 435

Beyond the specific circumstances of the meeting with the girl, the incident made the soldier contemplate the general situation prevailing in the conquered area. In that sense, his writing constitutes dissent from the doxa of the army field, but in most cases soldiers seem to demonstrate compassion without all-together objecting to the occupation. They still saw it as a necessity, as part of a justified war. In fact, at times compassion was used as a mechanism to justify the occupation, because the soldiers could view themselves as good conquerors. In that sense, the Israeli case resembles other historical episodes in times of war; the Italian soldiers conquering the Balkans in World War II, for example, also sympathized with the civilians, but did not necessarily oppose the occupation. 436

Total dissent, involving more than compassion, was rare among the soldiers, but it did exist. By total dissent, I mean a realization that the Palestinians in occupied Gaza did have their own strong sense of nationalism.

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435 A similar encounter with a child in occupied Gaza was narrated by a military correspondent in one of the victory albums: “At the outskirts of a small Arab village, we hear a little boy crying. A six year-old looking for his parents. . . I take the kid into my arms and ask him where he’s from. The look on his face shows he is scared. He shivers and doesn’t answer. I look at his little face that seem clean and healthy and my heart shivers. His face is like the face of any child... What should you do and how should you pacify him? Should you explain to him that whoever wanted to give him the Jewish state, also took his father away? That him becoming an orphan was as senseless as were the occupation desires of the tiny tyrant from Cairo [Nasser]?” See: Operation Sinai: A Selection of Episodes, p. 151.

436 Although there is not much similarity between the occupations, as the Italian occupation was far more violent, Davide Rodogno argues that some Italian soldiers also sympathized with the occupied population, but were obliged by their duty as soldiers “because of their sense of discipline, because they feared punishments, or, simply, because they felt they had no other options.” Their sympathy was manifested, however rarely, in admitting injured civilians to military hospitals. See: Davide Rodogno, “Italian Soldiers in the Balkans. The Experience of the Occupation (1941–1943),” Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans, Volume 6, Number 2, August 2004, p. 135, 137.
What an expression of fear on their faces. Interesting. I looked for hatred, but couldn't find any, just an expression of awe. A nation that is so scared of us will never get used to the idea that it might live with us as equal among equals. All these calls for binationality are bullshit. And the other side of the coin: In the city of Gaza, kids are assembling around the governance building, offering the soldiers all kinds of bargains (lighters, cards, and sorts), trade that is, of course, legally forbidden for both sides. Suddenly, a jeep with four posh MPs [military police officers] arrives; the casquettes on their eyes, they sit straight, tough, on the jeep, catching one of the kids with Egyptian stamps. Confiscation, two smacks and off they go. I am not moved by the smacking—I might have done it too, and with the same pleasure—but the way they were sitting on the jeep reminded me too much of a picture of German SS officers on a jeep in the occupied lands. How can you possibly not hate these soldiers, and how can you like the nation they represent?

*Paratroopers Infantry Battalion 890, Hebrew, 5 March 1957.* [A389]

It seems that the comparison to the Nazi occupation made the soldier contemplate the political situation in general, and grasp some realities that the other soldiers failed to realize, such as the cumulative effect of Israel's conduct. He could not readjust his habitus, as many of his friends did, and it might be suggested that his worldview changed. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the letter, this soldier opposed the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and Gaza that was decided upon in 1957. As most of the writing soldiers, he argued that Israel would soon be compelled to conquer these areas again because of Fedayeen activity.

To conclude the soldiers’ experiences of occupation, it seems that for most, the bleak conditions in occupied Gaza did not fundamentally change their perceptions of reality. The hysteresis that resulted was quickly reconciled, and the soldiers managed to readjust their habitus to correspond with the doxa of the field. The idea that “there is no alternative” (*ein breira*) prevailed. As a result, the “reproductive voice” of the dominant group secured its dominant status in the field.437 It is possible that the soldiers of the dominant group also managed to

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437 Lomski-Feder, p. 103.
transform their status into capital that benefited them in the civilian sphere.\textsuperscript{438} A minority of soldiers could not readjust their habitus and, as a result, dissented. They realized Israel played a major role in the situation that was created in Gaza. Had their dissent become public, they could have become marginalized, losing the status they gained.

\textsuperscript{438} Almog, p. 105.
Conclusion

In many respects, Israeli soldiers’ narratives correspond with other writings of soldiers, especially American, British, and French. Revenge for killed comrades, guilt, and even singular incidents of sadistic pleasure in violence are all part of the bloody history of modern warfare, and are not unique to the Israeli case. Various western techniques of army indoctrination, aimed to allow soldiers to kill without exercising moral judgment, also prevail in the Israeli case. Echoing European Orientalist thought, the Israeli soldiers learned how to see the Arab enemy as culturally inferior, and eventually as subhuman. This facilitated the transformation of the soldiers’ fear of the enemy into fury and brutality. As in other armies, the Israeli soldiers sometimes repented their actions and sympathized with their enemy.

Bourdieu explains that the guards of the doxa would go to great lengths to protect it and prevent dissent. To do that, they fixed the doxa as “a system of euphemisms, of acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world, which rejects heretical remarks as blasphemies.” The Sabra elite—the guards of the doxa in this case study—managed to do this to a large extent. The main reason for this was that the Israeli soldiers saw themselves as sharing a collective history with the Sabra elite, a fact that was demonstrated by the extensive use of biblical traditions in the soldiers’ letters. The soldiers also believed that the reproduction of the field benefited them. The result was that there was practically no dissent among the soldiers in the period that preceded the Sinai campaign (1953–1956), and the doxic principles held almost entirely. The soldiers adopted the discourse of victimization, which condoned, in their eyes, most of their actions. Their habitus tended to favor experiences that were likely to reinforce it. Even when the soldiers were exposed to information that contradicted the doxa, they rejected it,

preferring what they already “knew”. Throughout the period of reprisal raids, the Arabs were seen as primitive people, either incited to act against the Jews by their leaders or trying to satisfy their bestial instinct to kill. To avert what the soldiers saw as Nasser’s plan to annihilate the Jewish state, the only measure deemed fit was the use of force. The soldiers also argued that it was the only measure Arabs understood.440

However, when more and more soldiers encountered the enemy face-to-face, the immutable image of the Arab started to crack. The objective conditions of the 1956 Sinai campaign—the fleeing of the Egyptian army, the mass killings, and the dire situation of the Palestinian refugees—created hysteresis among most soldiers. The overwhelming majority articulated that the hysteresis was an undesirable situation, but most of them still regarded it as a necessity in a just war that was imposed upon Israel. The dominant group perhaps despised the killing, but quickly reconciled it as a must and managed to normalize it so it would be perceived as a part of the ordinary course of life. They held that to amend the situation there was no alternative but the use of force.441 By amplifying the Orientalist idea of subordination and servility of the defeated Arabs, the soldiers could argue that the Palestinians did not have any national sentiment—as opposed to the Israelis—and thus could be occupied justifiably. Seeing the occupation as benign also served as a justifying mechanism.

Despite the pervasive unanimity of approximately 86% of the writing soldiers in the dominant group, dissent did emerge. The fact that 14% could not readjust their habitus and dissented is of major importance, especially because this group is usually ignored by scholars.

440 It seems reasonable to assert that the Israeli society at large shared some of the traits of the soldiers’ habitus, especially because most Jewish men served in the army; however, the lack of sufficient sources prevents us from determining what traits of the soldiers’ habitus were shared by the society at large.
441 Golda Meir’s famous quote from 1967 articulates this idea: “When peace comes, we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons. But it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons.” See: Marie Syrkin (ed.), Golda Meir Speaks Out (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 242.
The dissenting group could not reconcile the killing, or explain it away. Nor could the soldiers see themselves in the position of occupiers. Instead, the hysteresis made the soldiers dispute some of the basic principles of the Zionist doctrine: A few objected to killing as a deterrent, and others did not see Israel as a peace-seeking nation and refuted the idea that there was no alternative (ein breira). A handful saw Israel as at least partially responsible for the dire situation of the refugees and felt a strong compassion toward them; some acknowledged the existence of a distinct Palestinian nationalism. All of these were virtually nonexistent in the mainstream discourse of the Sabra elite, but they found their way into the perceptions of the soldiers. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain why this happened. Further research might be able to answer this question, and perhaps also show how the soldiers’ perceptions changed over long periods of time. If research would show that there was even less dissent following the 1967 War, for example, this might suggest that the state agents managed to turn the doxa into an almost-hegemonic perception.

It seems that the soldiers in the dissenting group did not act on their dissent. They did not desert the army or, as far as we know, refuse to carry out orders. It is most likely that the dissent was never made public, but only conveyed to family members in confidence. Thus, the soldiers probably did not suffer the consequences of their dissent, i.e., marginalization. In turn, they also did not have a probative effect on policy, which might have been the case had their dissent been made public.
Appendix A: Pictures from the Suez Crisis Victory Albums

Picture 1
Un des Fedayin capturé
One of the captured Fedayeen.

LA SYNAGOGUE à Chafrir, après la sanglante attaque dont les enfants du village furent victimes en Avril 1956.

THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE in Shafrir, after the murderous attack on the children of the village, in April 1956.
Picture 3

Source: A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign
Picture 4

Source: *Alobom ha-tatzlumim mi-mivtz’a sinai* [The Operation Sinai Album] (Tel Aviv:, M.Biran Publishing, 1957).

Picture 5

Source: *A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign*
Picture 5a
Source: A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign
Picture 5b
Source: A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign

Prisoners proceed hand in hand to their concentration points, from which they are sent north.

Picture 6
Source: A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign

Picture 6a
Source: A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign
Picture 7

Source: A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign
Picture 8

Source: A Picture Story of the Sinai Campaign
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