Introduction

In June 2008, the Israeli government decided against launching a wide-scale military operation in Gaza, despite the escalation in the firing of Qassam rockets by Hamas towards Israeli population. As an alternative, though a temporary one, it chose to accept the Egyptian-mediated truce (tahadiyeh), between Israel and the Hamas government that controlled Gaza. Considerations of international legitimacy informed its decision, as well as doubts that a military operation would be productive. Another consideration voiced was concern over casualties among soldiers. Assessments by politicians showed that a ground incursion into Gaza, with its teeming towns and militias trained by Hamas and its satellites, might result in the loss of the lives of hundreds of Israeli soldiers, about 200 to 300 casualties, including reservists. Facing such a price some claimed that Qassam rocket-fire, however disagreeable, had inflicted far fewer civilian casualties than the anticipated cost of a military operation.

That consideration sparked criticism that the government and the army had become oversensitive to soldiers' lives, to an extent that they were apparently considered more valuable than the lives of civilians - in this case, the residents of the border town of Sderot and the communities around Gaza. Critics said that the role of soldiers is to risk their lives for the sake of civilians and in their stead, a hierarchy that had become inverted, since the hasty withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 (Lebel, 2008). Inverting the hierarchy was presented in Hobbesian terms as violating the social contract that constitutes the state, in which citizens concede some of their freedoms in exchange for the state's taking on the obligation to provide them with security. In the name of that
protection, the state had gained monopolistic control over the means of violence (Inbar, 2006).

The report of the Winograd Commission of Inquiry, appointed by the government to investigate the flawed performance in the Second Lebanon War (2006), expressed this line of criticism (2008, 252):

> With considerable pain and caution, we add that the IDF conducted itself during the war as if its concern about casualties among its soldiers was a central element in its planning process and operational considerations. With all the sensitivity with which the soldiers’ lives must be addressed, and the need to include this factor in the guiding considerations, it is hard to accept the unusual influence that this consideration had on the decisions of senior commanders (and of decision-makers at the executive level)... We note that a fundamental component of Israel’s security approach is that the army’s role is to protect civilians and ensure they live their routine lives.

That hierarchy of soldiers over citizens contributed to hesitations about a ground operation inside Lebanon to take control of areas from where rocket-fire on Israeli communities in the Galilee had injured civilians. Indecisiveness over ordering a military operation in Gaza expressed that inverted hierarchy once again. How can the inversion be explained?

I argue that the realistic political arrangement differs from the normative one: it ranks soldiers, whom the state protects, higher than citizens on the hierarchy of risk – not the contrary. The hierarchy of risk in which the state positions its citizens and soldiers, results from the encounter between two variables: the ability of different social groups to choose whether or not to endanger their members’ lives, and the challenge that their respective choices might pose to the stability of the political order. Declining motivation for military service among privileged groups is the key to how the variables took shape, and it can be understood in terms of a violation of the Israeli republican equation that compensates privileged groups in return for their military sacrifice. I begin with this, and later present expressions of the decline, its implications for attitudes to
bereavement, and those attitudes’ reflection in constituting principles of the hierarchy of death.

The Republican Equation

Historically, the nation-state was founded on the republican order that established a reciprocal relationship between the state and its citizens, according to which citizens were willing to sacrifice their lives (as soldiers) and wealth (as taxpayers) for bearing the costs of war and preparations for it, in return for civil, social and political rights granted them by the state.

Seeing military sacrifice as the supreme civic obligation underlined the republican tradition that ascribed great value to active participation in democratic politics in order to promote the ‘common good’ (Oldfield, 1990). This exchange of sacrifice for rewards constituted the mutually generating mechanism between war and state formation, as reflected in Tilly’s ‘war makes the state’ argument (Tilly, 1992). In turn, the war-incited state formation laid the foundation for Western democracies and the creation of the welfare state. By definition, therefore, modern military service fulfilled a historical role in defining the boundaries of citizenship, by equating it with bearing arms (Burk, 1995; Tilly, 1997, 193-215).

This pattern of exchange is ruptured when the republican equation is violated, as when the gains made in the military or owing to which— the level of security, the level of perceived external threat, social rights accruing to serving groups, etc. — are socially devalued relative to the level of sacrifice. In this case, collective or individual action may have been aimed at reconstituting the republican equation, either by decreasing the burden (such as antiwar groups), or increasing the return (by demanding rights), in a manner that may hinder the state’s ability to manage its military policies.

It is worth noting that the Hobbesian contract is based on abstract exchange, namely the exchange of readiness to sacrifice life for state protection. As Margaret Levi (1997, 5) argues, Hobbes' argument embodies a tension:

It is to protect one's life that an individual agrees to submit to the regulations of states. Thus, the demand by government that a young man potentially give up his life for his country puts a
tension at the heart of political life, a tension Hobbes recognizes but does not satisfactorily resolve.

Levi, therefore, offers a partial solution to this tension by suggesting that motivation for sacrifice is strongly determined by the level of burden-sharing. Observing that compliance with conscription has been largely contingent upon citizens' perceptions that both the government and other citizens are acting fairly, Levi’s model of ‘contingent consent’ is an effective tool for understanding variations in motivation for sacrifice. However, the fair division of burden does not by itself increase the sense of fairness, for the social rewards that accrue to sacrifice also play a role. An unequal burden that also guarantees privileged rewards is less likely to give rise to disobedience, resistance or the avoidance of military service, than a situation in which the bearers of an equally imposed burden lose their trust in the state's capacity to reward them appropriately (see Tilly, 2004).

The theme of the republican equation goes one step further by proposing that the implementation of the Hobbesian contract is anchored on a social hierarchy. As the school of state formation contends, the more the modern armies relied on massive civilian-based recruitment since the eighteenth century, the more receptive the state was to bargaining with the groups that controlled the human and material resources needed for waging war. Military sacrifice was exchanged for a variety of rights ranging from political to social rights (Tilly, 1997, 193-215). However, this exchange also constructed social hierarchies based on one's status in the military, with initial marginalizing effects on women, ethnic minorities and other groups backed by differential citizenship discourse, through, for instance, the manner in which state policies intervene in market processes by providing exclusive social benefits (Gifford, 2006).

This hierarchy shapes a more tangible contractual relation based on exchange between military sacrifice and social gains. True, the state provides protection, but protection is a public good, access to which is not contingent upon one's contribution. To overcome the ‘free rider syndrome’, the state rewards those whose sacrifice is required, in the form of the republican contract. Violation of this contract thus impairs the state's power to sacrifice those who feel affected by this violation. Therefore, the state is constrained to shape accordingly the hierarchy of death.
Israel's Republican Equation and its Violation

Jewish Israeli society has assimilated the republican principle of the citizen-soldier as a core value deeply ingrained through compulsory service for all Jewish men and women in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Ashkenazi (Jews of European descent), secular, middle-class Jews formed the core of this service, as the group that founded the army, staffed its upper echelons and was identified with its achievements. Due to the republican ethos that defined Israeli society’s devotion to the military effort as a supreme social value under the guise of the statist ideology—mamlachtiyut (statism)—military service became a decisive standard by which rights were awarded to individuals and groups that were portrayed as acting in the service of the state (Shafir and Peled, 2002). Accordingly, male Ashkenazi warriors succeeded in translating their dominance in the military into what was regarded as legitimate social dominance. Through it, they were granted preferential social status relative to groups that were relegated to peripheral status in the military, primarily the Mizrahim: Jews who emigrated from Muslim countries in the 1950s, who were subjected to the state-established and unequal social structure that rigidified their peripheral social status (Levy, 2003, 33-81). Gradually, the secular Ashkenazi middle-class was joined and reinforced by the mobile Mizrahim, those who enjoyed upward mobility into the middle-class, particularly following the economic growth generated by the 1967 Six Day War. In other words, the exchange between sacrifice and social gains yielded a social hierarchy ensuring the middle-class groups' high motivation for sacrifice.

The 1980s marked the turning-point at which the legitimacy accorded to military sacrifice began to erode, similar to the process that took place concurrently in Western countries. Several factors accounted for this trend which mainly affected middle-class groups.

A crucial factor was the cultural and economic globalization of Israeli society, from the middle 1980s, and the structural changes wrought in the economy in the spirit of neoliberal doctrines that transformed Israeli society into a market society. Globalization strengthened the ethos of the market economy with its characteristic liberal discourse, which challenged the previous collectivist commitments and symbols. Prominent on the liberal agenda were new values such as individualism, privatization, competition, achievement, and efficiency, values that did not accord with military culture. In this framework, moreover, violent conflict was portrayed as
an obstacle that impeded Israel’s participation in the global economy. Naturally, the market-society discourse also laid the basis for an increasingly strident critique of the army’s resources, as its budget was the largest single element of government spending.

Military service lost even more of its value as the army became a less relevant source for acquiring professional skills useful in a contracting, technology-based and capital-intensive labour market. The army’s vertical hierarchy failed to offer professional socialization for an economy characterized by high-tech organizations with horizontal structures, the rise of the values of business entrepreneurship, and a shift in management focus from product to customer (Avrahami and Lerner, 2003). Reserve duty also became a heavier burden in both absolute and relative terms, hampering reserve soldiers both from effectively competing in an increasingly competitive labour market, and fulfilling their roles as fathers in a society that favoured a more equal division of labour in the family (Nevo and Shor, 2002a, 18). In short, competition developed between 'military time' and 'civilian time'.

Second, the ethos of the market economy, combined with the empowering liberal ethos, eroded the army’s role in defining the social hierarchy. The value of one’s contribution to the state through military service was no longer necessarily the criterion that would determine the distribution of social goods and justify the social domination of a particular group. Instead, individual achievement replaced the test of statism (Ram, 2007; Shafir and Peled, 2002). Furthermore, groups that did not serve in the army, or who made a lesser contribution – such as the Haredim (orthodox Jews), Palestinian citizens, and women – were now able to collect some rewards not based on the test of military service but rather on their own political power, wrapped in the liberal discourse of citizenship (Levy, 2007, 48-56). Nothing was more symbolic of this than the decisions made by Yitzhak Rabin’s government (in the early 1990s) to drop the requirement for military service as a basic condition for employment in the public sector, and to make the payment of child benefits no longer exclusive to ex-servicepersons (Aronoff, 1999, 44). In short, strong forces worked to untie the Gordian knot between soldiering and citizenship.

This trend most affected the kibbutzim and moshavim, which were symbolically identified with having made a vital contribution to the establishment of the state. Most notably was the political upheaval of 1977 that brought the Likud to power, a party
supported by a large proportion of Mizrahim, thus ending decades of Ashkenazi-supported Labour Party rule. A mélange of ethno-national and market-oriented discourse then discredited the historic role of the kibbutz, which combined a national contribution in republican terms with a collectivist alternative to the market. The result was an increase in the alienation of youngsters from the kibbutzim and moshavim from serving in the IDF.

Third, from the 1980s on, the general public perception was that the external threat to the country had receded. In public opinion polls, a composite measure of threat, which combined perceived threats by the Arabs against Israel, the perceived threat of 'land for peace' and the perceived threat of a Palestinian state, showed a decrease by more than 10% from 1987 to 2006 (Arian, ND). The idea that Israel was in danger of being wiped out was replaced by the motif of 'security borders'. This was a concept that dismissed existential danger and aggrandized Israel’s military might, if only it would be allowed to preserve part of its post-1967 borders. Even recurrent military failures—such as the 1973 War, the subsequent First Lebanon War (1982-1985) and the First Intifada (1987-1993)—did not shake the assumption that the state provided a high enough level of security to its citizens.

At the same time, the real cost of security was actually increasing. The need to rehabilitate the army after the 1973 War added to the public’s fiscal burden by increasing external and internal government debts and elevated investment in security to the peak of about 30% of the GDP in 1974-1976, from around 20% during the period prior to the war. Similarly, military service became even more onerous because the human resources of both regular and reserve soldiers were utilized more frequently and more heavily (Barnett, 1992, 185-209). In short, the state was demanding a higher payment for reduced returns, thereby violating the terms of the republican equation.

The violated equation spurred privileged groups to a series of strategic steps, intended to reconstitute its values. As a dominant group that had exhausted its ability to reap more significant benefits from military service, it was natural that Ashkenazim would focus on the other side of the equation, namely reducing the military burden, by seeking to limit the army’s autonomy. Practically, the tangible expression was the increased political protests emanating from the ranks of the army via reservists and their social networks. They ranged from the unprecedented protest movements after
the 1973 War, followed by the later wave of Peace Now, organizing during the First Lebanon War, and the Four Mothers movement towards the end of the war of attrition in Lebanon (1997-2000). All sought to reduce the military burden by implementing political steps, together with setting conditions for the privileged groups’ willingness to make sacrifices. Their efforts curtailed the state’s ability to manage its military policy autonomously, and it was channelled towards measures for moderating Israeli military policies – reducing the burden and adapting it to a lesser exchange for sacrifice – culminating in the Oslo process with the Palestinians (1993-1996) and the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000.

In conjunction with the collective endeavour, attempts to lighten the burden found expression in individual efforts too. This trend was apparent in the slow and continual decline in the general willingness to enlist, particularly for combat units, and the significant increase in the number of young recruits dropping out before and during their service on the grounds of apparent mental ill-health (for various aspects, see Nevo and Shor, 2002b, 9-35). Those who preferred to serve bargained with the military, in person or via their social networks, over the terms of their service to determine their individual role in the army, or made missions conditional on economic remuneration or political consent in the form of selective and ‘grey’ refusal. Various assessments showed that exemptions on psychological grounds rose from about 3% in the 1980s to about 5% in 2007. As army heads admitted, a psychological exemption is simply a mechanism for negotiating with the army. The growing exemption phenomenon was part of a process in which compulsory service became a semiselective model, since 25% of Israeli men liable for service do not in fact serve, and another 17% do not serve the full period.

The picture is sharper in the reserves army. During the 1990s the recruitment model was redesigned after a monetary price-tag was attached to reserve service. This change provided an incentive for the army to rein in its usage of reservists and divert resources to other purposes, resulting in a dramatic reduction in the number of overall reserve duty days, from some 10 million days in 1985 to about 3 million days in 2006 (Knesset 2003; 2007). In short, the reform of the reserves brought about a semiselective recruitment model for the first time, exacerbating the inequality in calling up reservists.
The vacuum that the secular Ashkenazi groups left was filled by groups previously relegated to marginal roles in the military. They now saw military service as a suitable arena for consolidating their identity, acquiring social mobility, and leaving their ideological imprint. Among them were religious youth - with a notable presence of settlers from the West Bank, immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, Mizrahim from the periphery of the large cities, or from peripheral development towns, Druze and Bedouin who are part of the non-Jewish minority in Israel, and eventually women too (on these processes, see Levy, 2007).

These processes also projected onto attitudes towards the ultimate sacrifice, namely attitudes towards death.

**The changing ethos of bereavement**

Prior to the First Lebanon War, the hegemonic model of bereavement focused on justifying the loss of life, recognizing its unquestioned necessity, and ascribing national significance to it (Lebel, 2006). Bereaved parents refrained from entering the political scene, and would certainly not challenge military policies.

The Yom Kippur War (1973) changed that order only slightly, when a few families entered the political arena to join demands for Defence Minister Moshe Dayan’s dismissal for his responsibility for the blunders in preparations for the war. The post-war waves of protest came mostly from newly released reservists; bereaved parents’ presence was relatively marginal.

The politicisation of bereavement began after the first week of the First Lebanon War, in the form of the ‘Beaufort Family’ – parents of soldiers killed in the battle to capture the Beaufort Castle in South Lebanon on the first night of the war. While the parents could have interpreted the circumstances in which their sons died as heroic (which predecessors had done in similar situations), they construed it instead as an unnecessary operation. The outcry they sparked off helped generate the unprecedented and effective protest against the First Lebanon War (Rosental, 2001, 95-98). Protest movements that emerged at the same period were *Parents against Silence, Soldiers against Silence*, and *Yesh Gvul*, along with the veteran *Peace Now*, whose efforts had jointly influenced the IDF’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 1985.

Nonetheless, during 1985-2000 Israel was dragged into a war of attrition against Hezbollah guerrilla forces in the security zone that Israel occupied in the southern part
of Lebanon. A new wave of protest unfolded in 1997 after the ‘Helicopter Disaster’, in which 73 soldiers, mostly from elite units, were killed en route to Lebanon. This accident led to the founding of *Four Mothers*, an organisation whose efforts helped keep on the public agenda the struggle for Israel’s withdrawal from the Lebanon. Ultimately Ehud Barak, leader of the Labour opposition party, and who became prime minister in 1999, acceded to the organisation’s demand and in May 2000 ordered a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon.

The protest had an ethno-class base. Most of the fallen came from the secular, Ashkenazi middle-class, the group for whom the republican equation had been violated and that wanted to curtail the state’s ability to demand sacrifices from them. Most of the activist parents were drawn from that group. Illustrating this is the fact that three of the six soldiers killed on the Beaufort were kibbutz members, and the fourth was from the Harnick family, which is well-known in Israel’s media. In the helicopter accident, around 70% of the dead were from the secular, Ashkenazi, middle-class, long-established kibbutzim and moshavim, or Mizrahim from the middle-class and above. Air transport was used mainly for elite units, which were still dominated by soldiers from the upper-middle class, despite the general changes occurring concomitantly in the social composition of the army’s field-units.

Apart from *Four Mothers*’ activity, involvement of parents, mostly from the secular middle-class, in military affairs also increased, mainly in the way training accidents and operational accidents were investigated within the IDF. Parents did not restrict themselves to expressions of anger or pain, but rather uttered penetrative criticism that directly or indirectly struck at the root of professional practices in the army. The combination of a lack of faith in the military, particularly since the First Lebanon War, along with a culture of consumerist privatization, in which parents can be perceived as customers who paid society with the lives of their sons and are now demanding payment - in the form of compensation, an explanation, or a change in patterns of behaviour - has ensured that the parents, acting as social-political entrepreneurs, have attracted the attention of the public (Doron and Lebel, 2004).

To some extent, the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005) restored the discourse of bereavement to its former conservative pattern. I explain this below by its claiming fewer casualties from privileged groups, which made it hard to attain a critical mass of protest. An exception to that pattern was the Vishinsky family, whose son was killed
in May 2004 when his APC was blown up along the Philadelphi Corridor (separating the Gaza Strip from Egypt). The family linked their bereavement to the struggle for the IDF’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, and since then the parents have publicized their opinions, in the name of their loss. From that viewpoint, protest helped to consolidate consensus over the withdrawal plan that Prime Minister Sharon had already announced (for a thorough analysis, see: Levy 2007, 122-158).

Consequently, the sceptical attitudes of middle- and upper-class youth towards challenging military service made it problematic to justify death during army service. It is death out of choice, since from the 1990s onwards, privileged young Israelis had greater freedom to choose whether to enlist and, if so – whether to join units where service was life-endangering. The dwindling presence of the secular middle-class in combat field-units, making way for immigrants, residents of the periphery, and religious youth, attests to the choice that many young people made. As army service became more selective, especially reserve duty, freedom of choice intensified and with it the inherent challenge of justifying military death. Even in cases where life was sacrificed, the voices of protest raised by bereaved parents from the secular middle–upper classes - from the Beaufort family, via the Four Mothers and the Vishinskys – challenged the political leadership, weakened the legitimacy of sacrificing one’s life, and stirred up objections to the army’s policy alongside support for political alternatives. Military procedures formerly within the consensus were now called into question, not because of an objective change in the war’s goals but because the groups could detach themselves from military thinking, and analyze sacrifice in a critical light.

For the first time, the declining motivation was reflected in the public debate around the prisoner exchange with the Hezbollah in Summer 2008, when the bodies of two Israeli soldiers (reservists whose kidnapping by Hezbollah was the incident that triggered the Second Lebanon War in Summer 2006) were exchanged with the terrorist Samir Kuntar. The asymmetric transaction was justified not only in moral terms, as in the past, but instrumentally too; in other words, without the transaction the army would have later found it hard to dispatch soldiers on life-endangering missions entailing the risk of capture.

The process in Israel mirrors the similar one that has occurred in Western societies, highlighting intensified sensitivity to casualties. The literature is divided regarding
explanations for the growth of the phenomenon (also termed ‘casualty phobia’) and
for its very existence. The main analyses show that sensitivity to casualties is affected
by political variables such as: (1) the likelihood of obtaining benefits from the war,
namely, the extent to which the war is portrayed as successfully attaining its original
goals (Feaver and Gelpi 2003), which can extend to cost-benefit calculations (Larson
1996: 10-12); (2) the definition of the war’s goals in relation to the level of perceived
external threat, where the greater the perceived threat and the role of the war in
eliminating it, the greater the legitimacy for sacrificing human life (Jentleson 1992);
(3) the public’s views regarding the rightness of the war (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler
2005/6); (4) the decline of public support as the number of casualties increases
(Mueller 2005). The type of wars Israel has waged since 1973 and the political
disagreements over their necessity or outcomes, brought into operation sensitivity-
enhancing variables that intensify in a social climate where the legitimacy of self-
sacrifice is eroding among privileged strata because of the breached republican
equation.

The challenge of granting legitimacy to death during army service is especially
significant, the more that declining willingness to volunteer to die erodes the political
order. In Max Weber’s irreplaceable definition, the modern state is an entity with a
monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, including a monopoly to manage its
citizens’ lives and deaths. The state has the authority to stipulate who will be
sacrificed as civilians because the price of protecting them is too high; who will be
sacrificed as soldiers protecting civilians and, of course, who will be killed in another
country – those defined as enemies – in order to defend the state’s civilians. It is
generally the army that manages death, and when its authority to do so is questioned -
which happens once it becomes difficult to induce its youth to sacrifice their lives
willingly - the implication is that the state’s ability to function is impaired. It is no
accident that commemoration endeavours – the military funeral, perpetuating the
memory of the dead, and honouring the bereaved families’ status – are all aimed at
imbuing military death with unique significance, differentiated from other forms of
death. It is a kind of death requiring the state’s involvement, and is not regulated like
other forms of death (see Ben-Ari 2005). Even if the state can mobilize its young
people to die, it must still try and do so at the lowest cost possible. Enlistment coupled
with protest, of the kind that emerged from the army’s social networks when
privileged groups dominated there, implies limiting the state’s autonomy to manage its military policy.

The state was therefore constrained to maintain a ‘hierarchy of death’ that in many situations prefers the lives of citizens over those of soldiers, which is the inverse of the norms constituting the military organization, and the state as well.

**The constituting principles of the hierarchy of death**

The ‘hierarchy of death’ that the state maintains is the outcome of two variables: space for choice by those whom the state potentially designates for death, and the degree of political cost inherent in the state’s potential failure to justify their death, and thereby mobilize its youth to die at a low political cost (in short: the political cost resulting from the choice). The higher the group is located in the ‘hierarchy of death’ the more protected it is, in the sense that the state tries to minimise its deployment in life-endangering areas. To a great extent, the ‘hierarchy of death’ overlaps the social hierarchy in Israel, because the groups’ power resources – that can be translated to space for choice with costly results – derive from the social hierarchy. I describe the hierarchy of death through the following chart, and analyse it by discussing the various groups’ reactions to wartime sacrifice.

This matrix positions reservists as the most protected group. Now that the recruitment model of the reserve forces has become more selective, reservists can choose whether
to endanger themselves. In the short-term, a possible decision by the group to avoid danger would undermine the legitimacy of the army’s recruitment mechanism, and affect motivation to serve in the reserves, and that in turn would undermine its ability to exist. In tandem, avoiding danger could be construed as a political protest harming the state’s capacity to manage its military policy autonomously. Middle-class members are represented in the reserve army to a larger proportion than in the compulsory army. This is either due to the fact that social composition of the reserve army naturally mirrors the composition of the compulsory army of about 10-15 years previously, with the middle class in the centre, or because of mobility acquired in civilian life. That social positioning projects the capacity for political organising. As the above analysis shows, organizing by reservists were key to increasing political protests after 1973, which changed the army’s space for action.

Citizens from privileged groups are positioned lower. In the case of a security threat, their space for choice is more restricted than that of reservists, though still broad; using their financial clout, they can leave home and relocate temporarily to a safer place. An illustrative case is that of Tel-Aviv, where a higher proportion of citizens left town temporarily during the First Gulf War (1991) because of the Iraqi missiles – a phenomenon that Shlomo Lahat, then Mayor of Tel-Aviv, called ‘desertion’. If it continues, the phenomenon can lead to political protest, because these groups do not tolerate prolonged damage to their routine lives and can lever their political power to influence the government to act.

Below the citizens are secular middle-class conscripts. Not only do they have room for choosing whether to assume life-endangering roles, but their refusal to do so, or their parent’s objections, also have a political impact because of their greater access to social networks with organizing abilities. This is demonstrated by the various organizing cited here, mainly those by bereaved parents. Still, they are placed lower on the hierarchy than the reservists, because the mechanism for enlisting and allocating positions in the conscript army is still more coercive. Organising, moreover, depends on using the parents, not on the soldiers' direct action – as in the case of reservists. On the other hand, wide-scale refusal by conscripts is more significant than that of reservists; by jeopardising the political order, it is likely to challenge the recruitment model. As conscripts, they have less room for choice than civilians, but any move challenging the enforcement of conscription would challenge
political stability no less than organized protests by citizens taking issue with the state’s failure to remove a danger to their security.

Since the 1990s, the higher positioning of reservists and middle-class soldiers has created a casualty-averse policy, resembling the policy adopted by western democracies – particularly the USA after the Vietnam War. Theoretically, a policy of risk-aversion is inherent when leadership doubts the public’s willingness for sacrifices, whether or not their doubts have a factual basis (Mandel, 2004). A casualty-averse policy generates a military doctrine that strives to limit risk, or even avoid missions that could result in military fatalities. This is the backdrop to the Winograd Commission’s criticism about over-sensitivity on the part of the government and army during the second Lebanon War. That policy was a direct outcome of falling motivation and its cultural expression in the changing bereavement ethos and bereavement discourse.

From this juncture, safeguarding life became a major operational consideration. It was unlike the past, when Gen. Moshe Dayan, Head of Operations Division in 1953, ranked the sanctity of adhering to the mission above that of human life, and threatened to fire commanders who abandoned the battle before a large number of soldiers were injured (Perry, 1999, 383). Philosopher Asa Kasher, who headed the drafting of the IDF’s Code of Conduct in the 1990s, and included the sanctity of human life in it, asserted that the army’s combat heritage does not engage with the question whether heroic acts, such as conquering the Syrian Hermon Mountain (1973), or Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem (1967), might have been accomplished with fewer casualties (testimony by Asa Kasher to the Winograd Commission, Commission website, pp. 17-18).

To recall, parents' intervention in military affairs amplified the impact of the subversive bereavement discourse. A major impact of this activity was the growing number of inner-military investigations of accidents that resulted in bringing commanders to trial. Commanders consequently tended to avoid risks, a pattern that generated the partial crippling of the IDF during the final years of its presence in Lebanon (Harel and Issacharoff, 2008, 21).

That policy was balanced by four mechanisms, which partly restored to the army its capacity for functioning autonomously: (1) distancing reservists from dangerous
arenas - which led to the deployment of conscripts in the war of attrition with Lebanon; (2) implementing the ‘counter fire’ doctrine, that is, heavy reliance on aerial assaults, precision weapons and artillery with no use of intrusive ground troops. In the 1990s, the ‘Grapes of Wrath’ and ‘Accountability’ operations in South Lebanon reflected the new doctrine, enabling fighting without casualties to IDF troops, at the cost of sowing death and destruction on the Lebanese side; (3) the above-mentioned social realignment of the ranks, with the shift from reliance on the secular middle-class to that of religious and peripheral groups (Levy, 2007); (4) basing part of the fighting on South Lebanese Army forces, who replaced IDF troops after the first withdrawal in 1985. These changes have military parallels in Western countries which have taken matters a step further, by gradually phasing-out the draft and turning to a professional-vocational army.

In the Second Lebanon War, those principles were reapplied. The General-Staff led the method of using air-strikes and deferring a ground operation for as long as possible, due to the concerns over casualties that the Winograd Commission had discussed. Indeed, documentation of the decision-making process shows how pivotal that consideration was. Chief-of-Staff Dan Halutz was more aware of the sensitivity to casualties than the politicians who were still inexperienced in the (political) deployment of an army force. On 16 July, during a closed army discussion, he remarked (Winograd, 2007, 98):

[a ground operation could lead to] IDF soldiers being killed on Lebanese territory...if it takes place in the range of fifteen or ten kilometres from the line, then it makes absolutely no difference what we explain. It will be a ground operation in Lebanon, which is not part of the mandate given us by the government. It’s not in our interest, not in terms of the Israeli public, nor of the international community.

Two weeks after war broke out, in a closed discussion conducted by the Defence Minister and documented by the Winograd Commission (2008, 106), it transpired that:
As for a ground incursion into Lebanon, the Defence Minister and the Head of Military Intelligence believed that the general public was confident that the Air Force could do the work, and preferred it to a ground operation. In their understanding, the public was still very much under the trauma of entering Lebanon. The head of the Mossad addressed their position: 'To my mind, the trauma of Lebanon exists more in the politicians’ minds than those of the public.'

At the height of the war, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert explained to Moshe Arens, a former defence minister, why the army was not embarking on a ground operation (Harel and Issacharoff, 2008, 342).

If the IDF launches a land operation, thousands will take to the streets of Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv to demonstrate against the government. Kaplinsky and Shamni [Deputy-Chief of the General-Staff, and the Military Secretary to the Prime Minister] tell me that an operation of that kind could cost the IDF 400 dead.

Moving down the hierarchy, conscripts from the peripheral groups are positioned lower in the hierarchy. Their room for choice is restricted, for two reasons: first, most of them have an ingrained ethno-nationalist orientation and other aspects of military motivation (social mobility and social recognition) that weaken motivation to resist military dictates. Second, as a group it is less capable of maintaining social networks (parent-based) outside the army.

Religious soldiers deviate from this rule: they are the most organized group in the conscript army through networks maintained by the rabbis of institutions they attended before enlisting (mainly the yeshivot hesder, literally ‘arrangement academies’ and mechinot, the pre-military religious colleges), and the rabbis’ institutional status within the army. As a group with a strong nationalist orientation, its members did not object to the possibility of risking their lives in battle, except in extraordinary situations. For example, following PM Olmert’s declaration during the
Second Lebanon War that a victorious war would improve Israel’s position in future diplomatic efforts towards disengagement from parts of the West Bank, religious reservists threatened to refuse to serve. At the same time, if soldiers from religious or peripheral groups object to endangering their lives, it would challenge political stability by symbolically challenging the state’s authority and its ability to maintain an army. One can also assume that with increasing future dependence of combat units on those groups, in view of the dwindling presence of the secular middle-class group, the arena for objections by the former group will grow proportionally.

Attesting to this orientation of the lower groups, the Al-Aqsa Intifada did not generate significant protest, with the realignment of the IDF’s social composition playing a role: only 45% of the 230 casualties came from secular-middle class families (including kibbutzim and moshavim) – the groups that formerly generated protest - relative to the 68% killed in the first week of the First Lebanon War –the week that sparked the initial waves of protest – and a similar proportion in the helicopter disaster. The vast majority of those killed in the Intifada were from peripheral and religious groups, and their families tended to accept the sacrifice with submission, acceptance, even pride. It was a reaction matching their motivational ethos, their ideological approach to the Israeli-Arab conflict, and their attitude to military service in general. The bereavement discourse was not only a response to disaster; to a great extent it was also a symbolic resource through people acquire the sense of contributing or belonging to a community. And so the voices of bereavement differed immensely from those once heard. In those groups, even parents who voiced criticism usually strove to act as advocates for the army, calling on the political leadership to lift restrictions on military activity in order to enable the IDF to act more forcefully and thus reduce the number of casualties.

The same pattern recurred in the Second Lebanon War. A mapping that compares the first week of the First Lebanon War, in which much of the army fought, with the casualties of the Second Lebanon War, shows that representation of the urban secular middle-class - comprising Ashkenazim and Mizrahim who had climbed to the higher rungs of that class – was reduced by 20% (from 56% to 35%). This is 30% more than the demographic change and reflects declining motivation.

Conspicuous in the protest movement that emerged following the war were religious families, including settlers, who criticized the government for preventing the army
from winning the war, as well as for the IDF’s ill-preparedness and poor performance. This was the first time that parents of religious soldiers joined in public outcry. Of course, this protest was well entrenched in military thought and thus aimed at expanding the military’s freedom of operation. Voices questioning the justification for the war remained in the minority. At the heart of the new rhetoric was not casualty aversion by avoiding war, but the avoidance of unnecessary casualties by improving the military’s performance and the quality of political directives given to the IDF. The potential for anti-war protests diminished (data taken from Levy, 2007).

In comparison with those four groups, people living in peripheral regions of the state, like the residents of the communities around Gaza, are on the hierarchy’s lowest rung, which explains the events highlighted in this article. Their location along the borders is not the result of free choice, and this is particularly true of Sderot’s residents, who are mainly 1950s’ Mizrahi immigrants and 1990’s immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. Their limited financial capacity prevents them from leaving the region. The market economy is an important mechanism preventing migration, as Zohar Avitan, an activist in Sderot, points out (2007): “Our region has no buyers. We aren’t traded on the stock exchange, and the land that we are entrusted with has no capital-generating real-estate value”. For families from the low ethno-class ranking, even options for finding refuge with relatives living in central Israel are more restricted. Nutman-Schwartz (2008) notes that in a social mapping performed among residents of Sderot, only 4% reported their ability to move elsewhere temporarily if the security situation deteriorates. Her findings show that the method which most citizens use for coping with danger is reconciling themselves to the situation. Demonstrations by the residents had only a limited impact.

On the contrary, a certain rate of abandonment, particularly by the more privileged residents, does not endanger the political order, and even strengthens it – because it is the weaker, and therefore less organized, citizens who remain in vulnerable places. In the case of Sderot, close to 3,000 citizens left the city because of Qassam rocket fire (that had intensified constantly since 2004), according to data published in late 2007 (Yediot Aharonot, 6 November 2007). Against this backdrop it is understandable why state institutions made only minimal efforts to reduce the town’s vulnerability to rockets fired from the Gaza Strip. The state rejected the option of a ceasefire, but did not endanger the lives of many soldiers. It preferred aerial attacks and limited ground
incursions, that risked religious soldiers, Mizrahim from the periphery, immigrants, Druze and Bedouin, who to a great extent form the mixed units fighting in the Gaza arena. Ground operations requiring a mix of elite units and reserve battalions were rejected. Even a budget-intensive project to blast-proof buildings was conducted at a leisurely pace, and failed to reduce the citizens’ exposure to danger.

There was nothing new in this. In Israel’s first years, the state left the mostly Mizrahi residents of the border areas vulnerable to infiltration by Palestinians. Although it provided some protection by conducting retaliation operations against the infiltrators, the need to protect civilians was secondary to other needs, such as shaping the new border. This in turn became a source for constituting the new social order (see Tzfadia and Yiftachel, 2004). The state used sophisticated enforcement tools to prevent settlers in the frontier areas from decamping (Kemp, 2002). Constructing enmity with the Palestinians was part of the de-Arabisation process; that is, shaping the new Israeli identity of the Mizrahi immigrants as an identity distinct from the Arab one, contrary to it, and positioned above it in the civil hierarchy (Shenhav, 2006).

Conduct typifying the hierarchy was reflected in the evacuation of the Zikkim basic-training camp. In September 2007, reacting to the firing of Qassam rockets on the camp which is close to the border, soldiers’ parents besieged the camp demanding that their sons be evacuated to a safer place. Initially the army rejected the parents’ demand, though it did equip the camp with better blast-proofing than that given to civilians living in the region. In summer 2008 the army decided to evacuate the basic trainees from Zikkim (ynet, 16 June 2008). It follows that some occurrences challenged the political order even more than protests by residents of Sderot and the communities around Gaza, who reacted angrily to that step: the parents’ unprecedented intervention in the army’s conduct; the resulting impact on motivation to serve under an increasingly selective enlistment model; and most particularly, the prospect of parents ‘removing’ their children if the camp would be attacked again.

The government only confronted a genuine dilemma when the rockets’ range of fire increased to include the Ashkelon area, and with injuries sustained by members of kibbutzim around Gaza – citizens of a geographically peripheral area, yet still part of the political ‘centre’ for all intents and purposes. Its decision reveals much about ways of solving tensions stemming from the hierarchic structure shown in this paper.
In the short-term, the groups of soldiers heading the hierarchy (reservists and conscripts from privileged groups) enjoy preference, i.e. protection by the state, as compared to citizens from privileged groups. It is preferable to avoid endangering soldiers rather than endangering civilians, some of whom temporarily decamp to safer areas. This was how the Israeli government acted in the Second Lebanon War, when Hezbollah fire hit the city of Haifa, not only the small communities on the northern border. In the case of fighting on the Gaza border, it was preferable to avoid danger to soldiers, including damage resulting from the inevitable call-up of reservists, in a ground operation with multiple casualties, as long as the civilian casualties were in Sderot. But in the case of continuing casualties among privileged citizens (the Second Lebanon War) or if the circle of casualties extended outward - from residents of the periphery to more privileged residents (the Gaza border, since 2008) - the state’s tendency to protect its soldiers clashed with its enhanced vulnerability to pressure from organised citizens. In this case, the dilemma was resolved by opting for a military-diplomatic arrangement, namely the Egypt-brokered cease fire agreement in June 2008. It happened when the state realized that it had no other way of resolving the inherent tension between groups placed high on the hierarchy of death – between military and civilian groups. Similarly, in the Lebanon case, the state chose a cease-fire instead of a massive ground operation, even at the price of not achieving most of the war’s original goals.

But if calm is not a viable option, and warfare has returned to the agenda, the state will strive to mitigate the tensions inherent between its duties toward various groups placed on different rungs in the death hierarchy. This strategy of mitigation revealed itself in December 2008: Hamas violated the six-month ceasefire, or at least that was the general perception, and refused to renew the truce agreement. Meanwhile it intensified the rocket attacks on Israel's civilian population, increasing the rockets’ range to about 40 kilometres, thus placing 750,000 Israelis under threat.

Only then could Israel claim legitimacy - both from the international community and its citizenry – for an overwhelming attack, by using its weaponry arsenal in a more liberal manner. Accordingly, in December 2008 Israel launched the Gaza War. It claimed the deaths of close to 1,300 Palestinians, nearly half of them non-combatants, and only nine Israeli soldiers. Its use of overwhelming firepower—air strikes followed by a massive ground thrust – reduced the soldiers' exposure to risk. Unlike
in former battles, when in doubt, the forces returned fire towards the source of hostile fire even if civilians were in the vicinity; they would even initiate a fire-fight to avoid risk. As an Israeli brigade-commander explained:

I will not send ten soldiers into a house suspected of being booby-trapped in order for them to blow up, before I have created the conditions that will guarantee their safety (quoted in Harel, 2009).

‘Guarantee their safety’ meant a pre-emptive, massive fire strike. Thus, the state balanced its two obligations: protecting its soldiers and citizens, but under specific conditions - namely, high level of legitimation for using force, permitting actions that mitigated the tensions stemming from the death hierarchy.

Summary

The modern state manages its citizen’s lives, and therefore their deaths as well. In this case, managing death implies managing the degree of exposure to risks that might result in death, and it takes place hierarchically. Shaping the hierarchy are the bargaining power of the various social groups and the political implications of this power. In many cases, the hierarchy positions soldiers as a group that the state protects more than its civilians.

Ostensibly, it is a preference contradicting the normative order, that is, the exchange arrangement between the state and its citizens, in which the citizens receive the state’s protection in return for their obedience to the state, even at the cost of risking the lives of those designated to protect it – the soldiers. While the normative argument represents the Hobbesian arrangement, this paper has suggested a realistic argument, grounded on the theme of the republican equation that draws on the school of state formation.

In many democratic states, once the republican order was undermined, it was replaced by the commodification of military service, which became paid service. The draft was phased out, with a gradual return to mercenarism. But in the indeterminate stages between paid service, and service as a remunerative civil dictate - in other words, when the republican equation is perceived by those who are required to bear the sacrifice as not promising a symmetrical reward for it - the state faces the challenge of
granting meaning to military death. It is a challenge that prompts it to design a
hierarchy of sacrifice, as this paper has suggested.

When the state opts for a commodified military service, it provides another partial
solution for two factors: first, the soldier’s service is acquired in the market rather
than politically enlisted, enabling compensation for hesitancy over sacrifice through a
monetary premium. Second, vocationalization weakens the presence of the upper
middle-class in its ranks, thus reducing its ability to generate antiwar protest. The
price incurred, of course, is the weakening of the state’s democratic profile (see
Bacevich 2007; Levy, 2008; Vasquez 2005). Another solution, as the Gaza War of
December 2008 suggests, is using excessive force, with great reliance on precision
guided weapons, to reduce the risk to which the soldiers are exposed (Schörning and
Lembcke, 2006) at the expense of damage caused to enemy civilians (Smith, 2002).

Acknowledging that hierarchy must, therefore, be the basis for acknowledging the
limitations entailed in using military force and preferring political solutions.

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