

“Our Forces” Become Alexei, Yuval and Liran: The Transition of the Israeli Soldier’s Media Image from the Collective to an Individual

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Modern society recognizes individuals as worthy of consideration each in their own right. The modern individual chooses to join a collective as a way to satisfy needs, but no longer sees him- or herself as obligated to sacrifice in the name of a higher collective good. Yet, while we live in a world that no longer asks what we can do for the collective, but what the collective has done for us lately as individuals, the collective has not entirely lost its importance.

This article will look at the complex idea of identity and examine the transition from collective to individual representation through the media image of soldiers in Israel. Soldiers, and the Israel Defence Force (IDF) in general, enjoy a uniquely central position in Israeli society, as will be described at length below. Civil-military scholars in Israel agree that soldiers are a source of public pride and national ethos. Few images in Israel attract as much public attention as soldiers do. For this reason, examining the identity of soldiers is telling of social trends in Israeli society at large and can serve as a litmus test for more general changes in Israeli identity.

The ever-growing presence of the media in the public sphere and the fact that it is the public’s main source of information¹ have served as an impetus for scholars to examine the role it plays in society. The framing theory in communication studies posits that the media organizes and classifies social knowledge and the world of social images for its audience and thus determines what does or does not appear on the public agenda. This organization and classification is done selectively and in accordance with society’s prevailing norms and values. Put differently, the media reinforces the status quo. It plays a part in formulating society’s beliefs, in framing its hopes, in consolidating its vocabulary and its collective memory. But it is society that allocates the channels through which the media can operate and sets down the rules. In other words, the media is part of the system of social, cultural and political modes of expression and works within it (Roeh, 1994).

While it plays these central roles, the media is incapable of reflecting reality perfectly. What it actually does is redefine and reshape events by creating images and meanings. While doing so it classifies subjects into different categories, determines which details should be emphasized and which point of view should be presented. During this process, society’s central values become set and their significance sealed by the media. Change in those values is both reflected in and promoted by media coverage.

¹ Cf. Cohen-Almagor, 1994 ; Cohen-Almagor & Novitzky, 1999.

An examination of the Israeli soldier's image in the media in Israel can thus shed light on processes that Israeli society has undergone in the last decades. The focus will be on the *combat* soldier,² defined as involving the presence of a defined external enemy,³ and how his image has evolved – from a part within the collective to a figure with an individual identity and a life-story fit to print – through the framing of the Israeli media over the last three decades (circa 1980-2010). Content analysis will be applied to items from two central Israeli national newspapers: though mentioned in the succinct overview of the recent historical background to follow, the electronic mass media is left out of empirical account.

After a survey of the relevant literature, the study's methodology and the criteria employed will be made explicit. Its findings will then be analyzed in light of the selected criteria, and discussed in terms of the changes brought to the soldier's image during the period considered. Lastly, some explanations of these changes will be offered, as well as suggestions as to what can be learned from them about Israeli society in general, and possible wider implications.

Literature Review

Identity has always been seen as an important component when discussing armed forces (Krebs, 2004; von Busekist, 2004). Understanding it gives us insight into recruitment policies, unit cohesion and, perhaps, into success on the battlefield. As scholars often emphasize, it is still a difficult concept to define and comprehend with academic tools. Krebs thus notes that identity is not necessarily "*the property of individuals*", and insists that it is "*more useful to conceptualize [it] as a property of social relationships*" (Krebs, 2004, p.88): this is especially the case when discussing collective identities (von Busekist, 2004). As highlighted by political philosophers, the search for individual identity has meaning only within context (Sandel, 1984; Walzer, 1983). Consequently, individuals must have a collective context if they are to choose and shape a personal identity.⁴ If that is so, then the manner in which society interacts with, and understands the identity of, its military is crucial in this case, since Israelis see their conscription-based armed force as a "people's army" mirroring society.⁵ We will therefore begin by discussing master trends that affected Israeli perceptions of collective and individual identity, and then tie these tendencies to civil-military relations in Israel.

As was the case in the entire Western world during the late 20th century, Israeli society started to redefine its perception of the collective and the individual. From the 1980s onwards (and even more so during the 1990s), it began to change from a monolithic social group to a collection of communities. Parts of it gradually adopted post-national,

² While the larger study from which the present findings are derived covers these categories, this article does not examine soldiers in support roles, female soldiers, cultural minorities, etc. For the purposes of the present study, we use Harel and Cohen's definition (2012, p.7) of the combat soldier as someone who is "*in mortal peril during the course of duty*".

³ The selection of events will be clarified below.

⁴ For an Israeli example, see: Perez, 2013.

⁵ Cf. Shor & Nevo, 2002; Lomsky-Feder & Ben-Ari, 2003; Cohen, 2008.

individualistic, secular and liberal-democratic norms and values in tune with a worldwide tendency. This trend inspired a consumerist outlook and brought about a wish to own products, dress, listen to music, and be a part of a cultural scene “*like everywhere else*”.⁶ During this time, names such as McDonald’s and Starbucks began to make an appearance on the streets and shopping malls of the greater Tel Aviv area.

This tendency intensified in light of the economic boom and the wave of privatizations Israel experienced in this period. These processes changed Israeli society’s attitude toward the welfare State and Israel’s entire socio-economic policy.⁷ Collectivist values waned, bringing individualist values to the fore, which in turn affected the public attitude toward the IDF, public health, welfare, land re-appropriation, as well as the role of the media. These phenomena added up, and turned Israeli society from a collectivist to a more individualistic one (Ben Eliezer, 2012). Just as Western media began to show a growing interest in the common man rather than in leaders and decision-makers (Liebes & Kampf, 2007), the Israeli media started to pay closer attention to individuals and their personal stories (Almog, 2004).

Not only that: other recent global trends made themselves felt in that time bracket. Using the 1980s as a baseline, the idea of the importance of community and collective identities has hardly declined in the early 21st century. Present scholarship notes that they are apt to be multi-faceted. It is possible to see them as “*attentive to the individual and to free choice*” while still utilizing the power of the collective to satisfy individual political, religious or cultural claims (von Busekist, 2004, p.96). Yet, if it is true that nationalism has survived in different guise, there is a major difference between the past and now : as individuals no longer feel as strongly attached to larger collectives as they were earlier, their sense of belonging has shifted to smaller communities that will give them context.⁸

Following these ideas, and running parallel to globalization trends, parts of Israeli society turned to neo-nationalistic, local-patriotic norms that stress particularist identities (Nachmias *et al.*, 2010). The main trend is thus a mixed one, integrating local cultural elements with global ones (Robertson, 1995). As a result, while Israel is very far from a “me society” (Katz *et al.*, 2000), the collectivist emphasis is now on family, community and local roots. In other words, Israeli identity in the 21st century has become more complex, with both local and global facets influencing it (Ben Eliezer, 2012). The salient fact is that the *glocal* mindset has weakened the national collective identity (Ram, 1999), even if it has not obliterated it.⁹

⁶ Sofer, 2011 ; Nachmias *et al.*, 2010.

⁷ Levy, Lomsky-Feder & Harel, 2007.

⁸ Walzer, 1999 ; Miller, 2000.

⁹ It is important to note that globalization/ individualization trends are stronger in the greater Tel-Aviv area geographically while the local/ collectivist trends remain stronger in peripheral communities. Another aspect of these changes is that of secularization in Israel. This process has many similarities to that of individualization. See : Ben-Porat, 2013.

Israeli Civil-Military Relations as Mirrored in the Media

Despite this plethora of changes, Israel is still considered by scholars a “*society under siege*”, at times described as militaristic, and is subject to varying security pressures.¹⁰ One of the main ramifications of this situation is that the security establishment plays a central role in Israel and service in the IDF remains one of the more important – if not the most important – symbols of Israeli nationalism.¹¹ The IDF in general and its soldiers in particular, are a source of national pride. As noted above, the IDF is also considered a source of ethos and social/cultural concepts: service in the IDF defines who belongs to the collective and who does not, what the correct forms of “masculinity” and “Israeliness” are, who is a “good” citizen, and so on.¹²

The Yom Kippur War (1973) is widely regarded as a watershed in Israeli civil-military relations. The public became more critical of the security establishment, and the media treatment of the IDF mirrored that stance. The new critical attitude continued in the 1980s and reached a peak during the 1990s. This period also saw a decline of the perception that Israel was facing an existential threat. The peace processes (especially the peace treaty with Jordan and the Oslo Accords) initiated during that decade, and the less tangible fear of another war, also contributed to this feeling. As a result, the importance of national security issues declined (Peri, 2003). War-induced fatigue also had an effect. This public mood manifested itself in an unwillingness to fight, difficulty in accepting high numbers of casualties, and a wish for “normalcy”.¹³

In addition, events such as the First Lebanon War (1982); the First Intifada (1987), the reality of a “grey routine” which included the on-going presence of the IDF in the Security Zone in Lebanon (1985-2000), accidents which took place during periods of active duty and training drills,¹⁴ all contributed to the decline of public faith in the security establishment: these events, perceived by the public as failures on the part of the IDF, brought about a growing intensity of the criticism against the military, the status of which continued to decline (Peri, 1999).

A weakening security ethos and the individualistic tendencies described above soon generated change in civil-military relations. With individualism now in the ascendant, no longer was the common good the leading value, but rather the good of the individual. Israel is not unique in this, as such phenomena can be seen in Western society at large (Yishai,

¹⁰ Horowitz & Lissak, 1990 ; Kimmerling, 1993 ; Ben Eliezer, 2001.

¹¹ Maysesless, 1993; Ben Ari & Lomsky-Feder, 2003.

¹² On masculinity in Israeli society in light of the military ethos and on the changes brought about by ethnic, cultural and social minorities in the accepted image created by the military, see for instance : Ben Ari & Lomsky-Feder, 2003.

¹³ Eran-Yona & Ben-Hador, 2013 ; Ben-Dor, 1998.

¹⁴ For example, the first Ze’elim disaster (July 17th, 1990), the Second Ze’elim disaster (November 5, 1992), an initiation rite in the Air Force in which one soldier was badly wounded and another killed (July 21st, 1992), an Air Force training exercise in which two soldiers were killed (August 10th, 1992), the Helicopter Disaster (*Ason Ha-Mesokim*, February 4, 1997), the Shayetet 13 (the elite naval commando unit) disaster (September 5, 1997), among others.

2003). The new Israeli soldier tends to ask himself how military service can benefit him, rather than being motivated first and foremost by the question of how his service, with very little personal choice involved, could benefit the country. Research shows that over the first decade of the 21st century motivation has become more complex. Selfless altruism has ceded pride of place to a perception of service as a way to benefit the community while also “benefiting myself” (Avidar, 2013). Young Israelis consider service venues depending on the benefit they stand to reap from their postings, and expect their personal preferences to be met by the IDF.¹⁵

Another reflection of these changes is the involvement of conscripts’ parents in the IDF. Unlike their predecessors in earlier decades, since the 1990s, most parents who have children in the military are Israeli-born, served in the military themselves (sometimes also as reservists), are familiar with the security establishment, and are not afraid to confront it (Sofer, Kattan & Shochat, 1992).¹⁶ These parents feel that they have every right to voice their opinions about the way things are done in the military and that the common good is not a good enough reason for their children to be treated in ways they perceive as unfair.

The changes described also affected the media. The First Lebanon War reinforced critical tendencies on the part of journalists (Barzilai, 1991). The trend intensified during the First Intifada and reached a high point in the 1990s, when most of the media coverage of security affairs was unsympathetic.¹⁷ However, this critical coverage was directed at the higher echelons – generals and the IDF as an organization – while it continued to empathize and identify with individual soldiers (Israeli, 2000). This was part of a broader change in the media establishment: the substantial addition of new TV and radio stations, the keener competition which ensued and growing importance of rating considerations, all caused the media to follow society’s lead and emphasize personal, individual stories and aspects.¹⁸

In the first decade of the 21st century, several events took place that further transformed civil-military relations and returned the security narrative to the centre of public attention. The failure of the negotiations at Camp David (2000) and the subsequent outbreak of the Second Intifada brought about the collapse of the euphoric expectations of a “New Middle East”. The concept that Israel was destined to be a “society at war” resurfaced. In contrast to the preceding decade, peace was now viewed as a false hope and conflict as insoluble. According to this renewed outlook, Israel was condemned to live by the sword for the foreseeable future, and the challenge was to contain the conflict and learn to live with it (Peri, 2007). This mind-set was reinforced after Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (2005), the on-going missile attacks on the area surrounding Gaza, the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009).

¹⁵ Until the mid-1990s, personal choices of recruits were not necessarily considered by the IDF when assigning military postings. In the 21st century, personal choices of recruits are accorded much weight and the IDF makes an effort to place recruits in positions they requested before induction.

¹⁶ The IDF itself is aware of this pattern and since the mid-1990s has made efforts to involve parents more, giving parents the phone numbers of their children’s commanders, inviting them to attend parents’ days etc.

¹⁷ Nossek & Limor, 1995 ; Peri, 2001.

¹⁸ Almog, 2004, p.291 ; Peri, 2007.

Media coverage also became more complex during this decade. On the one hand, there was mobilized coverage which voluntarily took the side of the military (or the government) and cooperated with the establishment. On the other hand, there was also criticism (Nossek & Limor, 2006).

Despite the portrayal above, and the multifarious changes in values and attitudes toward the IDF, Israel remains a patriotic society. Motivation to serve in combat units – even in the 1990s – has remained stable and the level of the public’s trust in the military is still high.¹⁹

In order to unravel these seemingly contradictory trends, the present study hypothesizes that they are reflected in the way the Israeli soldier is portrayed in Israeli media : the main influences bearing on its coverage of war and the military are the overarching cultural change (value shifts and ideological drift) and the more immediate circumstances (intensity of combat and the larger public’s threat perceptions).

This article presents a small part of the findings of a far larger study focusing on the period in which, according to previous research, a major shift in military-media relations took place. In that parent research, the concept of soldier image was operationalized into a series of indicators, such as the framing of wounded soldiers and casualties, soldiers from cultural and national minorities, female soldiers, and gay soldiers. Interestingly, contrary to the findings based on such other variables in our larger study, when it comes to discussing the media image of the Israeli *combat* soldier in terms of his collective *versus* individual identity, we detect a slow but clear change. However, this individual identity does not mean that the collective disappears completely. The relationship between the two only becomes more complex, as we shall see below.

Research Design

The present study is based on an analysis of two newspapers: *Haaretz* (a broadsheet) and *Yediot Aharonot* (a tabloid). Ten newspapers are published daily in Israel today : *Calalist*, *Haaretz*, *Hamevaser*, *Hamodia*, *Ma’ariv*, *Makor Rishon*, *Yated Ne’eman*, *Yediot Aharonot*, and *Yisrael Hayom* ; most of these existed during the period covered by our study. Due to Israel’s small geographical size, local dailies do not exist and the aforementioned papers are all national. Having said that, most of these newspapers are sectarian, targeting a specific reader population (for example, *Makor Rishon* has a religious, politically right-wing readership, *Hamodia* targets the ultra-orthodox population, etc.), and therefore have low circulation. For these reasons, when studying national trends, media studies in Israel tend to focus on the two main newspapers : *Haaretz* and *Yediot Aharonot*. These papers boast a stable readership and, as established in earlier studies,²⁰ have substantial influence on public opinion.

¹⁹ Shor & Nevo, 2002, pp.58-76 ; Avidar, 2013.

²⁰ See for example : Limor, Leshem & Mandelzis, 2014; Caspi & Limor, 1999.

Due, among other things, to the fact that it is the favoured platform for the elites' discourses and it plays an important part in shaping their outlook (Caspi & Limor, 1992), *Haaretz* has an elitist image. Various studies have shown that its news coverage refrains from emotional and sensational descriptions and tends towards the ironic and realistic (Nir & Roeh, 1992; Roeh, 1994).

Beginning in the 1970s, and including the period under review, *Yediot Aharonot* was the most widely-distributed newspaper in Israel. In the electronic age, *Yediot* became a "television newspaper" in the sense that the changes made by the paper in order to attract more readers and increase profits included a condensation of the text, an expansion of the percentage of images and a colourful layout, all of which appeal to a wide, diverse audience (Caspi & Limor, 1992; Almog, 2004). Using both papers allowed us to examine the change in the framing of the soldier over time and validating our hypotheses.

Chronological Scope

As the period under study spans three decades, we first selected and characterized the security-related events which took place during this time. Since our focus is the image of combat soldiers, the events examined all feature the active presence of a well-defined external enemy.²¹ However, beyond this common factor, the combat episodes chosen were of varying levels of intensity, duration and number of casualties. Thus there are "large" events with many casualties and/or substantial combat, alongside "small" ones with fewer casualties and limited combat. In keeping with this definition, we reached two main categories of events examined here:

High Intensity Conflict (HIC)

Events in that first group are usually concentrated and of short duration: such was variously the case during the First Lebanon War's initial phase of (June-September 1982); Operation Electric Lead (*Tzinor Hashmal*, 1986); Operation Law and Order (*Hok vaSeder*, 1988); Operation Blue-Brown (*Kahol-Hum*, 1988); Operation Reckoning (*Din veHeshbon*, 1993); Operation Grapes of Wrath (*Invei Za'am*, 1996); Operation Burning Torch (*Lapid Eitan*, 1999); the Second Lebanon War (2006), and Operation Cast Lead (*Oferet Yetzuka*, 2008-2009). The reports on these events were examined in their entirety.

Low Intensity Conflict (LIC)

Events in that category were usually of some duration. For instance: the later phase of the First Lebanon War (October 1982-June 1985), and Israel's on-going presence in the Security Zone in Lebanon (1985-2000). These episodes were usually characterized by routine combat situations which included lulls in the fighting. They were examined intermittently: twice a week (Sundays and Fridays)²² throughout the entire events.

²¹ As opposed to events characterized more as police activity and contact with civilians, such as those during the disengagement from the Gaza strip in 2005, or actions in the West Bank during the Intifadas.

²² Sunday is the beginning of the work week in Israel, and Friday the day on which weekend newspapers are distributed. Friday papers include supplements, magazine additions and a generally expanded edition.

As part of this study, we only examined *informative* media coverage (news reports and feature articles, *not* editorials or op-ed pieces), including photos and captions.²³ The corpus of materials examined included news pages, daily and weekend supplements. Over 1,800 relevant items were collected and classified.

Our findings are thus based on content analysis of both text and images, including headlines and captions. Headlines are especially important for newspaper readers who are considered “headline consumers”. In addition, they are usually composed by the editor, and can therefore be viewed as the paper’s opinion (Nir & Roeh, 1992).

Qualitative content analysis was based on the theory of framing from the field of media studies. According to this theory, events are made up of innumerable details and can be seen from many points of view, all of which cannot be presented simultaneously. An event is rendered comprehensible only if placed within a range of familiar cultural and social codes. In describing an event, the media creates images and meanings (Caspi, 2001). As part of this process, it classifies the issues into various categories, deciding which details to emphasize and which angles to present. Preferring one point of view over another is, in fact, a function of a particular framing. Thus certain meanings are framed in relation to issues pertaining to society’s basic values (Entman, 1993). The study examines metaphors, the use of previous events, slogans, and adjectives as well as angles, size and focus of photos.

A pilot study was conducted in order to identify dominant interpretive framings. Its findings allowed us to compile a list of criteria for use in sorting and classifying items.²⁴ To repeat: this article restrictively focuses on one of the most prominent points detected– the framing of the combat soldier as part of the collective *versus* his framing as an individual.

When examining each item (photo, captions, headline, news article, feature piece) from each paper, we classified it and placed it on a continuum ranging from portraying the soldier as devoid of personal attributes, merely a part of a greater organization (the IDF), serving the greater good and willing to sacrifice himself to this end, to framing the soldier as an individual, with a given social and personal background (such as family, hobbies), who cares more about what the collective can do for him than about what he can do for the collective. Special attention was given to photos: were soldiers photographed alone, or in a group, and in that case a small or a large one? Were the pictures close-up shots or were they taken from further away? Are the individual soldiers photographed decision-makers or rank and file soldiers? During content analysis of captions and articles, we noted if there were personal interviews with soldiers and junior officers, and in such cases, if they were quoted by name, whether their personal and social background was mentioned, and so on. In such a way, we could determine where on the continuum most of the items during a

²³ To be more precise: news pages (reports and commentary); daily supplements (24 hours in *Yediot Aharonot* and Part B in *Haaretz*) containing feature articles and background coverage; the weekend supplement containing articles, feature pieces, interviews and commentary summing up the events of the week.

²⁴ The larger study on which this article draws explored the following criteria (the first two of which are dealt with by the authors in a 2014 article in Hebrew): the framing of the soldier as a capable warrior *versus* as a confused survivor; as a competent adult *versus* as a helpless child; the framing of causalities; of soldiers from cultural and national minorities; of female soldiers; of gay soldiers, and a few others.

certain time-frame were placed, what sort of image was more or less dominant and whether there were changes over time.

It should be noted that our analysis is influenced by the local Israeli cultural context of which we are part. It is possible that scholars from other cultures might identify different framings and different messages. However, since the newspapers in this study are part of that same Israeli cultural context, it is reasonable to assume that our analysis is in line with the original framing of the items and how they were expected to be perceived by Israeli media consumers.

Findings

The 1980s: “Our Forces Have Returned Home Safely”

This decade marked the start of a transition in the image of the soldier. It began with the First Lebanon War, a war that started as a military operation – Operation Peace for Galilee – but soon developed into a HIC (June-September 1982), and finally entered a LIC phase after the events of Sabra and Shatila (September 1982). Soldiers were framed as part of the IDF collective and were barely presented in any other way. This is reflected in the use of “an IDF force”, “IDF forces”, “the IDF”, in headlines as well as in photos: soldiers appear in groups and photos of individual soldiers are rare.²⁵

Between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, conflict downscaled from HIC to LIC. The Air Force carried out the majority of missions and the role of the ground forces diminished. Accordingly, there was a sharp decline in the amount of references to soldiers in the media. In fact, during this time, a new pattern emerged, whereby coverage of routine combat and LIC events becomes technical and brief, and usually does not include photos at all. Soldiers rarely featured in coverage of this kind; rather, it was the heavy machinery – mainly tanks and airplanes – that took centre stage.²⁶ A typical example: “*In less than 12 hours Air Force planes attacked a base of Abu Nidal’s organization east of Sidon yesterday morning. All our planes returned safely to base*”, appeared in *Yediot Aharonot* (November 13, 1989, p.1) with no accompanying photo or reference to individual figures.

The IDF and its soldiers only featured prominently in news coverage on the occasion of specific operations, especially in mid- to high-level intensity episodes giving rise to a number of casualties. Thus, for instance, during Operation Law and Order, we find images of tank convoys in the distance, with captions such as: “*Coming Home*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, May 4, 1988, p.3), or: “*An IDF Force Killed Two Terrorists*”; “*Two terrorists were killed yesterday after an clash with our soldiers in the western sector of the Security Zone in Lebanon. No one from our forces sustained injuries...*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, January 1, 1988, p.1); “*After the battle of Maydun – The IDF returns home*” (*Haaretz*, May 5, 1988, p.3), to

²⁵ Thus, for instance, the main page of *Yediot Aharonot* with the headline “The War for Peace in the Galilee” carries a large picture of a tank with a group of soldiers in its shadow taken from a distance (*Yediot Aharonot*, May 11, 1982, p.1).

²⁶ Exceptions were events with fatalities. Such cases were given completely different coverage, as shown in a subsequent study focusing on the image of the fallen soldier.

mention only a few examples. Clearly during this period, soldiers are not framed as having a distinct personality and events are not presented through their eyes, but rather through the IDF as an organization and a collective group. Furthermore, when they are not actually involved in combat, soldiers disappear completely from the front- or even the inside pages of newspapers.

Change set in from the middle of the 1980s in two respects. First, the media began to refer to various corps within the IDF by name, giving them a unique identity, as opposed to treating the IDF as one monolithic organization: “[The] *Golani* [brigade] *acted against Hizballah north of the Security Zone*” (*Haaretz*, November 1, 1987, p.2); “*In a pitched battle in Maydun [...], Paratroopers, supported by the Armoured Corps, artillery and helicopters*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, May 5, 1988, p.1), to cite two examples. This trend became stronger in the 1990s and points to a gradual process of individualization: attributing a distinct identity to each unit rather than lumping the entire force into a single collective one.

Second, references to casualties increased and were given more attention than before. If in the past the media did no more than publish the names of the fatalities – without accompanying photos or specific details about each fallen soldier –, as of the mid-1980s the personal stories of the casualties became part of the media’s agenda. Large photos of injured soldiers being taken to hospital began to appear, and comprehensive information about the wounded and dead, including pictures, were prominently placed. Military funerals were covered in detail and personal accounts began to appear, such as: “...[he] *led the forces, the first to return fire [...]. A sea of purple berets of Givati soldiers covered the cemetery*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, September 11, 1989, p.3); “*Pfc. Omer was killed on a ship opposite the shores of Tyre...*” (*Haaretz*, February 19, 1986, p.1); “*Sgt. Yoav was killed during an IDF raid beyond the security zone*” (*Haaretz*, 7 September 1986, p.1).

In conclusion, while at the beginning of the 1980s, the image of the Israeli soldier barely existed outside the collective of the IDF, as war dragged on and LIC events multiplied, some soldiers and military units were given individual identities. This trend would intensify in the 1990s and more soldiers would be afforded this privilege.

The 1990s – The IDF Advances; Yuval is Afraid of Going Back to Lebanon

Change in the media framing of soldiers proceeded apace in the 1990s, a period mainly characterized by LICs. As in the preceding decade, here too the change in the soldier’s image can be linked to the intensity of events: during LIC or routine security occurrences, the image of the soldier is hardly noticeable outside of the collective. It is only during HIC events that the soldier’s individual image begins to appear on the media’s agenda. Additionally, the trend towards individual identities acquired after death on the battlefield continued in the 1990s.

Our findings show how processes which began hesitantly in the middle of the 1980s became more noticeable in the 1990s. Differences between the various newspapers are more marked during this period. In *Yediot Aharonot*, a clear change took place in the media

image of the soldier, now portrayed as a significant individual. In contrast, these changes were not as clear in *Haaretz*, where they became apparent in the following decade only.

During the 1990s, the focus of media coverage extended to individual living soldiers, not only casualties. As opposed to earlier periods, soldiers were photographed and interviewed individually, using their names and personal characteristics. As part of this trend, instead of pictures in which soldiers were photographed from afar and in groups, we found close-ups of individual soldiers or soldiers in small groups (up to four at a time). For instance, a photo of soldiers at a funeral carried a caption reading : “*Shai [...], who was wounded in an operation in Lebanon, was determined to join his fellow paratroopers who attended the funeral of their commander*”. The title given to the photo was “[Commander] *Eran’s soldiers*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, February 23, 1992, p.1).

Coverage of these soldiers thus included their personal background. As is clear from the above examples, their military unit is identified, continuing the trend that began at the end of the previous decade. For example: “*Alexei immigrated to Israel four years ago. After conscription, he served as a Merkava tank driver*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, December 4, 1998, p.3). Covering another soldier, who was wounded in action, the article noted his parent’s names, how many siblings he had and their ages (*Yediot Aharonot*, October 6, 1998, p.3). Stories such as these were accompanied by pictures of the soldiers, sometimes with their families (see also: *Yediot Aharonot*, August 2, 1998, p.5) giving them faces and a personal voice. This not just a soldier but a young man, a civilian, with an entire social context when out of uniform. Typical coverage of a soldier who was killed in this period would usually contain quotations such as : “*Yuval grew up in Rechovot. He went to the De-Shalit high school, and completed his science studies with distinction. He loved sports, especially basketball*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, June 1, 1997, p.2).

In addition to photos and descriptions, soldiers were quoted in the first person. “*Get us out of Lebanon*”, “*I am scared of going back to Lebanon*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, February 7, 2000, p.2); “[...] *no one wants to be the last casualty in Lebanon*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, February 10, 2000, pp.2-3); “*we all understand that each one of us might be killed at any moment*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, 10 February 10, 2000, p.2). In a nutshell, the media focused on the individual’s viewpoint : how a single soldier sees reality, as opposed to the more collective vantage point of the past.

However, during HIC events when conflict escalated, traditional framing returned and media coverage shifted to focus on the collective again, rather than the individual. Thus, for instance, during Operation Reckoning (*Din veHeshbon*, 1993), photos featured convoys of tanks photographed from afar, as well as marching groups of soldiers with their helmets on. The captions accompanying pictures of this kind marked a return, in such circumstances, to collective rather than individual framing : “*The IDF reinforced its forces at the end of the week*” (*Yediot Aharonot*, July 25, 1993:1); “*The IDF started to withdraw*” (*Haaretz*, August 2, 1993).

In other words, during the 1990s, when events were mostly of LIC nature, the Israeli soldier has a name, a military unit and an identity of his own and is clearly presented as an individual. In contrast, during HIC events, once again the collective is the dominant framing.

The 21st Century's First Decade: Liran is Protecting His Mother (and the Nation)

Two HIC events dominated this decade, influencing the soldier's image: the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009.²⁷ The findings from this period again show a growing tendency to focus on the soldier as an individual *versus* the soldier as part of a group.

During this decade, both newspapers framed soldiers as individuals and focused on their personal stories. However, a difference existed between them: in *Haaretz*, soldiers as individuals were not the focus of the coverage to the same extent that they were in *Yediot Aharonot*. For instance, *Haaretz* seldom sent reporters to accompany forces and cover events from the soldiers' point of view, unlike *Yediot Aharonot* which did this often, and even dedicated special supplements to issues related to soldiers (for example: *Yediot Aharonot*, February 5, 2009). However, *Haaretz* did deal with soldiers as individuals at times, mainly from the perspective of specific groups, such as soldiers who immigrated to Israel without their immediate families, or soldiers from the dismantled Gaza settlements (*Haaretz*, August 3, 2006, pp.1 and 5; *Haaretz*, August 1, 2006, section B, p.2; *Haaretz*, January 5, 2009, p.6. Another interesting example of a report written in the field and published on the front page was “*With the Soldiers*”: *Haaretz*, July 27, 2006. In other words, they are individuals within a context of a defined collective (family, social group, cultural minority).

As in the 1980s, *Haaretz* emphasized military equipment and major weapons. Typical photos focused on soldiers firing – without showing their faces – and on tanks, artillery, ships and so on (for example: *Haaretz*, August 7, 2006, p.5), and at times no soldiers appeared in photos at all (for instance: *Haaretz*, July 16, 2006, p.2. An entire issue of *Haaretz* (January 2, 2009) and parts of its weekly supplement on January 16, 2009 (p.1) provide further examples. Yet when *Haaretz* did focus on the soldiers, it too framed them more as individuals rather than as part of a group, quoting individual soldiers by name and mentioning personal stories (e.g., *Haaretz*, 27 July, 2006, p.3). In these cases, photographs focused on individual soldiers (for example: *Haaretz*, January 4, 2009, p.1; *Haaretz*, January 9, 2009, pp.3-4).

For its part, *Yediot Aharonot* continued to frame soldiers as individuals and this tendency only grew stronger during this decade. The paper stressed the stories of rank and file soldiers and junior officers throughout the 2000s. It frequently embedded reporters within regular forces where they covered operations “*at ground level*”, quoting conscripts and bringing their stories to the public (see for example: *Yediot Aharonot*, 5 February, 2009.

²⁷ As explained earlier, only violent events against a clear enemy are included in our sample, excluding events involving civilians directly and policing activities such as occurred during the Second Intifada and the Disengagement from Gaza.

The entire edition includes personal accounts and stories of combat soldiers and casualties). The result was a very personal and intimate framing of the soldiers from both the standing army and the reserves.

Another way *Yediot Ahronot* stressed the individual identity of soldiers was by focusing on their families. During the Second Lebanon War, for example, the paper ran a series of articles following the wives and families of reservists (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 11, 2006, week-end supplement, pp.20-21). A later example was the tendency of the paper to interview soldiers fighting in Gaza whose parents lived in the area being shelled by Hamas. *Yediot* stressed that these soldiers were fighting to protect their parents and through this framing gave them a personal context and distinct identities: “*I’m fighting for Mom [...] the first bullet I’ll shoot at Gaza will be for my mother who is sitting in a stairwell [for protection from rocket fire] because we have no protective space [MAMAD] at home*” (*Yediot Ahronot*, 4 January, 2009: 4-5). Here, too, the individual identity of the soldiers is given a context : family, neighbourhood, small community.

At the same time, *Yediot* did not abandon the collective entirely. Soldiers were not only fighting for their families, but also for the nation: “*The first bullet [I’ll fire] is for my mother [...]; the second is for the People of Israel*” (*Yediot Ahronot*, 4 January, 2009, pp.4-5). During this decade, the paper reminded the public of the importance of the collective and that at times the individual must sacrifice himself for the greater good. For example, *Yediot* stressed the commitment of soldiers to their comrades in arms – wounded or dead – and how soldiers are prompted to risk their lives to bring bodies home (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 29, 2006, p.3), and told readers in a front page headline: “*We Must Remember, in War there are Casualties*” (25 July, 2006, p.1). This tendency was stronger during the middle of the decade, but was not as prominent by the end of the period surveyed.

To sum up, it seems that at the end of 2000s, the media frequently covered events from the viewpoint of the soldier, perceiving him as an individual, important in his own right and emphasizing his own unique personal story. At the same time, this individual had a person identity and context: he was also a son, a neighbour, and, at times, a citizen of a nation in need of protection from enemies. This even applied to HIC episodes, though in *Yediot* more often than in *Haaretz*.

Discussion and Conclusion

The last thirty years have seen the traditional image of the Israeli soldier evolve from a cog within the military organization towards an individual figure worth considering in its own right. As previously mentioned, this article is part of a larger study covering many criteria. Contrary to our other findings, where variables usually moved back and forth along their possible range of values over time, the change under consideration here has been mostly steady and continuous : we do not see a pendulum swing in the opposite direction. Even though *Haaretz* does not keep up with *Yediot* when it comes to the scope and prevalence of such individual framing, it follows *Yediot*’s lead.

A number of factors may have contributed to the change. As hypothesized, among these, two are dominant: the first is related to the value shifts and the ideological drift which took place in Israeli society. The second resides in the variable nature of the combat episodes to which the Israeli soldier has been a party and the public perception of threats.

Ideological Change and Value Shifts

As noted above, during the 1990s, Israel shared with the West master trends which placed a growing emphasis upon individual self-fulfilment, while at the same time minimizing the importance of wider ideological worldviews.²⁸ As has been shown by Israeli scholars, this affected the general perception of the IDF in Israel.²⁹ It seems that this perception also influenced the framing of the soldier in the media, which responded to cultural change among the Israeli public (Almog, 2004; Peri, 2007).

This rise of individualism enabled the identity of the soldier as a unique human being, with fears, hopes and aspirations, to develop and to gain legitimacy. The decline of collective values in this period allowed the individual to demand self-fulfilment, even if this now comes at the expense of the group.³⁰ However, individual identity cannot exist in a vacuum and the social context in which the soldier lives is significant: far from being disconnected from community and family, he is very much a part of them.

Intensity of Combat

However, when combat escalates we detect a tendency to stress collective contexts: the individual soldier is important and worthy of attention because he is fighting for the collective. His individual choice is important: one senses that had he chosen to distance himself from this collective, and balked at the idea of sharing the fate of his family and community, he would not be worthy of attention and print.

In light of these findings, it is easy to understand why, despite the shift from collectivist values to individualistic ones, Israeli society is still considered patriotic, and in times of crises tends to revert to a familiar ideological pattern. The “old” conservative, patriotic pattern of cooperation, mobilization and willingness to fight is reflected in the media during crises (Peri, 2001). Additionally, on such occasions, belonging to a collective lends meaning to individual identity and bolsters it through dimensions beyond the person holding it that allow the individual to feel connected and empowered. True, political theorists tend to view social context as relevant only when discussing smaller communities (family, neighbourhood and so forth, as described above). But it seems as if when discussing critical events such as HIC, context can also include wider, national dimensions.

²⁸ For a survey of these trends and explanations of global changes in regards to individualism vs. collectivism, see Triandis, 2001.

²⁹ See, for instance, Cohen & Suliman, 1995 ; Ben-Ari & Lomsky-Feder, 2003.

³⁰ Similar findings can be seen when advertisements from the 1990s are examined. In the 1950s and 1960s, the military was the source of national pride and national identity. This trend was reversed in the 1990s, and the image of the soldier was used to reflect the transition from collectivism to individualism. Soldiers were used to promote products meant to further the good of the individual. See Lemish, 2000.

On the other hand, this may also be a more distinctly Israeli characteristic. Since Israelis usually feel there is a shared ethos and identity focusing on soldiers and security issues, this feeling may broaden the boundaries of the collective to include a larger reference group: not only a small community, but a national community that is perceived as a family of sorts – all the more so as due to the limited size of Israel's territory, distance between national and local echelons is modest at best. This idea is worthy of further research.

It is also important to highlight the differences detected in our findings between *Yediot Aharonot* and *Haaretz* regarding their framing of the soldier. Clearly, *Haaretz* is a decade behind *Yediot* in this respect, framing the soldier more as part of the collective than awarding him an individual identity. Additionally, *Haaretz* devoted less time and space to the individual soldier in general; in line with its characteristic as a more intellectual broadsheet. *Yediot Aharonot* focused more on the soldier's personal story – emphasizing the individual – beginning with the late 1980s, while *Haaretz* focused more on the military operations themselves. This is contrary to previous studies dealing with other aspects of coverage (Israeli & Rosman-Stollman, 2014) and disagrees with the claim prevalent in the literature, according to which differences between various newspapers are smoothed out in times of crisis (Nir & Roeh, 1998).

However, these findings are in line with literature which addresses the differences between tabloids and broadsheets. According to this literature, tabloids and popular newspapers try to contribute to social cohesiveness, to foster a sense of identification and belonging and solidarity. With this aim in mind, they frequently adopt a discourse of sacrifice, appealing to emotions and giving precedence to the human story which expresses the situation of everyman, the “vox populi”. On the other hand, broadsheets prefer to adopt a discourse of distance, appealing to the world of knowledge, information and rationality, ignoring popular sentiments (Roeh, 1994).

In summary, the image of the Israeli soldier as framed in the media reflects both reaction to crises, ideological changes and value shifts in Israeli society together with the search for context and meaning within a larger group. In turn, this follows global individualist trends. While the Western world places more emphasis on the individual as a citizen of the world than in the past, it is also fearful of losing context, collective belonging and specific national identities.

Following the transformation in the Israeli soldier's identity, it seems that a synthesis can be reached. The modern individual does not have to be an indistinguishable part of the collective in order to have context and purpose. He can have a personal, recognizable identity, with rights, wants, and needs, and still understand he has a social context and must act within it. Based on the assumption that the media present us with images and social concepts we want to see and identify with, it seems that this is the image Israelis wish to see in their armed force and in themselves. Perhaps this is true for other societies too.

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