Deconstructing the Military’s Hegemonic Masculinity: An Intersectional Observation of the Combat Soldier

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The military is one of the most significant institutions for the construction of masculine identities, since it is socially, culturally, and historically perceived as a male organization that relies on dichotomous definitions of femininity and masculinity (Enloe, 1983, 2000; Sunindyo, 1998). Within the military, the most significant model of idealized masculinity is the combat soldier. The existing literature regards the image of the combat soldier as unitary and homogenous and as reflecting hegemonic masculinity. This article challenges that assumption by deconstructing the image of the combat soldier and demonstrating that this image, in fact, varies.

In analyzing the image of the combat soldier, previous studies relied mostly on studies of gender conducted in terms of men’s versus women’s roles, and examined the way in which hegemonic masculinity informs that image. This article argues that the gender category, although fundamental, is not sufficient for the study of the combat soldier’s image, and that there are additional categories that come into play. Based on the intersectionality theory, it also argues that the image of the combat soldier is composed of an intertwining of gender and ethnicity.

Alongside research on gender in the military, other studies have exposed the way in which the military uses the mechanisms of stratification, segregation and marginalization of particular ethnic groups (Enloe, 1980, 2000; Levy, 1998). To date, however, no studies have examined the combination of gender and ethnicity in the combat soldier’s image. It is this author’s main contention that these two lines of research are linked through the ethnoculture of the military formations that serve as the basis for constructing combat soldiers’ ethnic masculinities.

This study thus highlights the intersection between masculinity, organizational culture and ethnicity, and its importance in the study of group hierarchies, segregation mechanisms, processes of constructing military identities, and challenging hegemonic masculinity. The combat soldier’s image is composed of diverse masculinities that are created from an intersection of masculinity and ethnicity. In the construction of these masculinities, ethnicity, or more specifically, ethnic organizational culture, serves as a means of creating an alternative legitimate image to hegemonic masculinity.

The research focuses on two infantry brigades in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). These two brigades, Golani and Paratroopers, were chosen for their similarity in training regime and military combat role, as well as for their cultural distinctiveness. The Golani Brigade is perceived as “Mizrahi,” which refers to Jews of North African and Middle


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Eastern origin. The Paratroopers Brigade is perceived as “Ashkenazi”, referring to Jews of European and North American origin. While the masculinity of paratroopers represents hegemonic masculinity, Golani soldiers represent an opposite, subordinate masculinity. This article examines the way in which the ethnic culture of each brigade contributes to the process of constructing the combat soldier’s masculinity, and how Golani soldiers construct an alternative to the hegemonic masculinity of the paratroopers.

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality emerged at the end of the 1970s in feminist theory as a new way of examining social, cultural, political, and economic inequalities (Wilson, 2008). The theory focuses on the interlocking of social and cultural categories, concentrating on how power is constructed through an amalgamation of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Hooks, 1981; Collins, 1998). As such, intersectionality involves not only research on gender differences between and within groups of men and women (Knudsen, 2007), but also concerns the analysis of social and cultural hierarchies within various discourses and institutions (Yuval-Davis, 2005).

Intersectionality provides a critical view of how an individual or group becomes “the other” in normative surroundings within Western cultures (Knudsen, 2007). Rather than focusing on one dimension, intersectionality theory emphasizes the complexity of multidimensional categories. Not all categories, however, are necessarily mentioned, and different types of integration can be identified within the same categories, in which the significance of a specific category is the subject of ongoing discussion (Yuval-Davis, 2005). Without discounting the importance of other categories, this preliminary research into intersectionality in the military refers to gender and ethnicity, which are the two categories most studied. In order to understand the complexity of intersectionality, Leslie McCall’s (2005) three approaches will be used.

The first approach is anti-categorical complexity, which relates to post-structuralism and deconstruction. This approach rejects, or undermines, categories, stressing that the construction and deconstruction of categories is a matter of language, and emphasizing the multiplicity and fluidity of subjective definitions and structures. Thus, the anti-categorical approach analyzes power and knowledge with mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion.

The second approach is intra-categorical, which examines cross-categories and identities. This approach is critical of the general use of categories and views them as misleading constructs that ignore the diversity and heterogeneity of experience. In this approach, however, categories are used to define the subjects of analysis and to express broader structural dynamics that are part of the lives of the subjects. The main subject of analysis is usually “either a single social group at a neglected point of intersection of

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Footnote:

2 The distinction between the two long-standing ethnic identities of “Ashkenaziness” and “Mizrahiness” is deeply rooted within Israeli society and in Israeli public discourse. Mizrahi Jews are Sephardic Jews. Although these terms do not share exactly the same meaning, they are considered very similar. The term “Mizrahi” has been preferred over “Sephardic” because it is commonly used when referring to cultural differences, which is the focus of this study.
multiple master categories, or a particular social setting, or ideological construction, or both” (McCall, 2005, p.1780). This approach is connected to the beginnings of analysis using intersectionality, but it has also been used in recent studies.

The third approach is inter-categorical complexity. As opposed to the other two approaches, this approach is quantitative and researches structural relationships in many social groups, rather than within a single group or category. It is therefore comparative, and studies the intersection of multiple dimensions of multiple categories.

The present study principally employs the intra-categorical approach, focusing on two groups – the Golani and Paratroopers brigades – in order to examine the complexity of neglected points of intersection between gender (masculinity) and ethnicity (“Mizrahiness” and “Ashkenaziness”). Specifically, it examines the intersectional organizational culture that forms the basis for the construction of different ethnic masculinities. Prior to focusing on the combat soldier, however, one must first introduce the two intertwining categories of masculinity and ethnicity in the military.

**Masculinity and the Combat Soldier**

The combat soldier is associated with physical strength, power, aggressiveness, independence, discipline, sexual potency, violence, heterosexuality, invulnerability, commitment to mission, the ability to face difficult situations, and above all, manhood. Hegemonic masculinity operates as a set of practices in which normative masculinity is embodied, and as such, is positioned at the top of the masculinities hierarchy scale. Moreover, it is perceived as the standard against which different types of masculinities are constructed.

There are various opposing images of the combat soldier, and although some of the characteristics do overlap, there are also significant differences between these masculinities. Recent research has paid more and more attention to the multiplicity of masculine identities, and to the processes by which masculinity is experienced, performed and negotiated. In addition, there has been a rise in the critical research of hegemonic masculinity, and alternatives have been proposed. The present study adds to this line of research. The intersection of gender and ethnicity, as the following will attempt to show, creates contesting masculinities, and challenges the conventional interpretation in order to construct an alternative model.

**Ethnicity in the Military**

After many years during which ethnic and racial groups struggled to eliminate segregation, the military began to serve as a means, and even a model, for social

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3 See for example: Crenshaw, 1991.
7 Godfrey et al., 2012; Barrett, 1996.
8 Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005.
integration.\(^9\) Militaries around the world opened their doors to various ethnic groups by incorporating them, thus serving as role models of social integration (Moskos & Butler, 1996). In practice, however, as armies act as agents of the State, they perpetuate inequality in both the military and society (e.g., through mechanisms of social stratification and segregation of different groups: Enloe, 1980; Levy, 1998). Furthermore, the skills acquired in the military serve as a source of mobility for the dominant group and a source of reproduction for ethnic and racial groups.\(^10\)

A similar process can be seen in the Israeli military. In contrast to other Western armies, the IDF was established through a collectivist, universal, “melting pot” ideology and was considered a “people’s army”. As such, the IDF was, and still is, involved in national projects such as education, settlement (hitvashvut), absorption of immigrants, and professional training (Ben-Eliezer, 2003; Cohen, 2008). As part of this perception, the military acts to reduce the ethnic gap, shaping the image of Israeli society, and consolidating all citizens into a single nation with shared national values (Bowden, 1976; Roumani, 1979). The “melting pot” of former times attempted to eliminate ethnic affiliation as part of the process of blending groups into a homogeneous collective composed of people of one nationality (Shenhav, 2004). Mizrahi Jews were expected to undergo a process of “desocialization”, whereby they would shed their “inferior” traditional cultural customs, and resocialize by adopting a value system that considered itself Western and advanced, in order to “progress” and be equal to Ashkenazi Jews (Weiss Bar-Yosef, 1980).

While military service in the IDF could have provided Mizrahi men with a means of social mobility, instead, it reinforced social hierarchies, particularly ethnic divisions, and actually strengthened the marginal status of ethnic groups (Samoocha, 1984; Levy, 1998). Under the guise of officialdom, the State conferred legitimacy on mechanisms that gave the Army its image of equality. However, the ethos of equality became a mechanism that contributed to perpetuating the division of labour in society (Levy, 2003). The ethno-status division of labour positioned soldiers of Ashkenazi (Western) descent in white-collar jobs, whereas those filling blue-collar positions were soldiers of Mizrahi descent, or immigrants from the former Soviet Union (Levy, 2003, 2008; Sasson-Levy, 2006).

Furthermore, Mizrahi soldiers were largely blocked from combat and senior officer positions until the 1970s and were marginalized in the IDF, further underlining their peripheral status in society (Levy, 1998). As a result, the IDF did not constitute a “melting pot”, but instead perpetuated ethnic stratification, thus emphasizing the inferiority of Mizrahi status (Roumani, 1991). Although Mizrahi soldiers today serve as combat soldiers and senior officers, the ethno-status division of labour is still present in the military, and ethnicity constitutes a central distinctive category, both in the military and in society.


Methodology

The present study is based on sixty interviews with soldiers serving in the Golani and Paratrooper Brigades (thirty soldiers in each), and relies on a comparison between these two leading combat infantry units. The interviews were held with soldiers who had completed their compulsory military service one to three years previously, since interviews with soldiers during their service is against regulation.

Data Collection

The interviews were semi-structured, and the interviewees were presented with a number of similar, though not identical, questions. Interviewees were at liberty to expand their answers beyond what they were directly asked, and they were encouraged to elucidate their answers through anecdotes, on the assumption that these narratives could enrich the data. All interviews began with a general question about the interviewees’ military service. Following this question, the soldiers were asked specific questions regarding the characteristic features of their brigades, their military identity and their perception of a combat soldier. The following questions were presented to the interviewees:

- How did you get to this particular brigade? Tell me the story of your service from enlistment until you were discharged.
- How would you characterize your brigade? What are the rituals, dress codes, behaviour, musical styles, etc. that differentiate your brigade from other brigades?
- How do you perceive your brigade? How would you describe your brigade?
- What characterizes a combat soldier?
- What is your ethnic identity?
- How is ethnicity reflected in the Army?
- Did you detect a change in your ethnic identity during your military service?

Because of my own past military experience (military service in Israel is obligatory for both men and women), it was easy for me to communicate with the interviewees. However, as a female, I did not serve as a combat soldier. Furthermore, I am Ashkenazi, and older than the younger interviewees, who represented diverse ethnic groups.

In order to bridge these gaps, I quickly became familiar with the habitus of each brigade – including language and norms – which created a sense of shared ground. However, I assume that the gender and age difference may have impacted the answers collected from the interviewees. It is possible that a male interviewer with combat experience might have elicited additional or different responses. Alternatively, my “otherness” may have allowed me to obtain responses that the “similar other” would not have elicited. In other words, being a “stranger” offers a number of benefits, such as the unique status as researcher. For instance, Lomsky-Feder (1996) indicates the openness, honesty and freedom made possible in the encounter between female researcher as a “stranger” with male soldiers.
I was concerned that soldiers from a different ethnic group (mainly the Mizrahi soldiers), would find it difficult to share their stories with a middle-class Ashkenazi woman. Ironically I discovered that the interviews with soldiers from my own ethnic group were much more difficult and required more effort. The main reason for this difficulty stemmed from the fact that Ashkenazi soldiers, as the hegemonic group (see for example, Shohat, 1997), were aware of their ethnicity primarily during their service in the Golani Brigade, where ethnicity was overt, in contrast to the Paratroopers Brigade where they were indifferent to ethnicity. Golani soldiers, on the other hand, were very aware of their ethnic identity. As a result, the interviews with Golani soldiers were longer and more detailed, and provided a richer platform.

The Golani and Paratrooper Brigades

The Golani and Paratrooper brigades were chosen as a result of their similar designations and cultural diversity. On the one hand, both are land-based infantry brigades, in which combat soldiers are required to do physical work and engage in combat and operational activities. On the other hand, since the Army has, for many years, replicated the ethnic structure of Israeli society, each of the brigades still has a very different ethnic composition, and is also perceived very differently.

The Paratrooper Brigade is perceived as prestigious and elitist, and is highlighted by the Army itself, using distinctive symbols. It is a volunteer-based brigade, and soldiers are recruited via a rigorous selection process. Its members wear a different uniform (shirts untucked and cinched by a belt), boots of a different colour (red/brown instead of black), a distinctive and prestigious red beret, and the parachute course qualifies soldiers for paratrooper wings. Paratroopers define themselves as a distinguished brigade, with a celebrated heritage and history of memorable operational successes. Despite the ethnic diversity that characterizes the brigade, it is still perceived as a respected unit with an Ashkenazi character.

The Golani Brigade has been known, since its establishment, as “the people’s brigade”, a trademark that has remained a significant motif its ethos to this day. It is not volunteer-based, has no selection processes, and is perceived as being open to all applicants. However, many soldiers aspire to the Golani Brigade, due both to its family-like culture and to its “Mizrahiness.” In contrast to the Paratrooper Brigade, which stresses the values of excellence and superiority, the organizational vision of the Golani Brigade emphasizes family values and mutual support.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the research was based on an interpretative approach, in keeping with a hermeneutic reading, which involves searching for repetitive patterns in order to decipher concealed meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This approach allowed me to understand the soldiers’ experiences and interpretations rather than impose a particular framework on them. The data were analyzed in four stages:
When reading the interviews during the first stage, it was clear that soldiers described the brigade culture and identity using ethnic characteristics. Having collected all quotes related to ethnic characteristics and identities of the brigades, I noticed that soldiers defined the brigade’s ethnic identity by echoing both the ethnic discourse in Israeli society, and the particular ethnic heritage of the brigade. During the second stage, all quotes were read anew, and classified according to the ethnic and gender characteristics of the brigades and their combat soldiers. The third stage made it plain that in their responses, the soldiers of both brigades more or less overtly referred to characteristics of the combat soldiers’ masculine identity in ethnic terms, and that ethnicity played a crucial role in the process of constructing two different images of the combat soldier – not only a means of demarcating the brigade’s uniqueness.

It was in the fourth stage that the ethnic culture of the brigades was revealed as the basis for the construction of various military masculinities – the masculinity of the combat soldier is a product of the intersection between masculinity and ethnicity –, leading to the realization that ethnicity is the reason for the various images of the combat soldier and the basis for challenge of the hegemonic masculinity.

The process of data analysis and sense-making provides further validation of the interrelation between gender and ethnic identities, as well as of the ways the latter, based on each brigade’s organizational culture, construct various contested military masculinities.

The Ethno-Culture of the Brigades

Each brigade constructs its own culture through various characteristics, such as uniform, dress code, language, and music. For example, Ami, a paratrooper of Mizrahi origin, described the differences in uniform that the military assigns each brigade:

The colours of the berets are very different. In Golani, they decided that it would be the colour of the terrain [the colour of Golani berets is brown]. Our [Paratroopers’] beret is red, which is more prestigious. Elite units all over the world wear a red beret. It also looks better. In my opinion, if someone sees red or brown, red is always more attractive. The type of uniform is also very different, and it is really distinct between both brigades. We wear our shirt outside our pants. And of course we wear red boots. The other units are not that different, they all wear black boots and a regular uniform. The colour of the beret is the only thing that makes them distinctive. In the Paratroopers, in fact, everything is different, everything.

Liran, a Golani soldier of Mizrahi descent, describes the unique way in which Golani soldiers wear their uniforms:

In Golani, when they [the soldiers] go home, they do not straighten the elastic band on top of the boots, as the master sergeant requests. They place it downwards. And they also wear their pants very low, as low as they can. Then they shorten the weapon strap, so you can see the top of the weapon over their shoulder. All sorts of stupid Golani stuff. The Paratroopers, on the other hand, whenever you see one of them at the central bus station, they look very neat: the elastic band is on top of the boots, and the weapon strap is the standard length.
These quotes illustrate that each brigade has different habits constructed through various practices. While the military allegedly demands the same from both brigades, in reality, both the Army and the soldiers take part in creating two different sub-organizational cultures. The military provides the paratroopers with unique uniforms and symbols and the soldiers comply with the military disciplinary rules; i.e., they do their best to adhere to a strict dress code which represents order, discipline, and prestige. In contrast, Golani soldiers set for themselves different rules that feature disobedience towards the military’s demands: they dress messily, and thus reflect disorderliness and a general lack of compliance with wider military norms.

At the heart of these cultural differences lie ethnic characteristics. Eliran, a Mizrahi Golani soldier, sums up the ethnic differences of the brigades and the connection to the ethnic division and hierarchy in Israeli society:

Let me explain it in terms of soccer. It’s like Beitar Yerushalayim and Hapoel Tel Aviv [two soccer teams considered to be rivals, whose fans are identified as ethnically distinct: Beitar’s supporters being Mizrahi and Hapoel’s Ashkenazi]. Beitar represents the people, the lower class, the poor people, the towns in the periphery; it represents simplicity, the neighbourhood and everything that goes along with it. The paratroopers [on the other hand] are yellow; “yellow” in the Army means … Ashkenazi, someone who has more than fifteen letters in his last name, and that name does not have the prefix “Ben”, such as Ben-Abu, Ben-Chamo [examples of typically Mizrahi surnames] and so on. “Yellow” is someone from a wealthy home, a high socio-economic class, a good home. Someone whose parents wanted him to attend the best schools and wanted him to be an outstanding student and a member of a good youth movement. And when he joined the Army, they wanted him to serve in a good-quality brigade.

Gilad, of Ashkenazi origin, who served in the Paratrooper Brigade, adds:

The paratroopers are perceived as Ashkenazis: as “yellow,” and the majority are indeed of Ashkenazi origin. In the battalions, for example, I’d say they are about half and half. But on the squad commander training course, where you find the best people of the brigades and the battalions, you can see the difference. A good number of paratroopers who get there are “yellow”, that is, Ashkenazis, good kids, wearing glasses. They are always on time, they don’t get into trouble, they don’t argue. Well, they do argue but … only about professional stuff. They think they are the smartest. They are good soldiers. You ask them to do something and they will do it. Golani soldiers, on the other hand, are the “Arabs” of the course; they are like, from the “hood”.

Golani soldiers undermine the hegemonic culture and generate a subculture that relies on Mizrahi characteristics that mainstream Israeli society perceives as inferior, primitive, delegitimized and problematic (Shenhav, 2004). They proudly place their ethnicity on display. By using the nickname “Arabs” to describe themselves, Golani soldiers take on characteristics that have been forced upon the Mizrahis and instead of trying to eliminate them and adopt the hegemonic Ashkenazi culture, as might be expected, they have embraced an extreme Mizrahi identity that goes back to its Arab roots.
The culture of insubordination among Golani soldiers serves as a way of claiming their place alongside the hegemonic culture. It is a reflection of their struggle to repudiate an undesirable, inferior status and inequality. In other words, instead of trying to become the dominant group, they claim a legitimacy of their own through their ethnicity. This process of creating, perpetuating, and maintaining an ethno-culture is the basis for the construction of diverse masculinities.

The Masculinities of Combat Soldiers

Based on these cultures, combat soldiers construct different images and identities. Through cultural characteristics such as the uniform, musical tastes, and language, alongside cultural norms that are embodied on the soldiers’ body such as grooming practices and phenotype, the soldiers construct different types of masculinities.

Ehud, of mixed ethnic background, served as an officer in the Paratrooper Brigade, and describes different expectations regarding phenotype and behaviour from the soldiers in each brigade:

When I became a team commander, I was certain that it would be very easy; that everybody would be blond and do as I say. When you imagine a paratrooper, you think of a blond soldier with blue eyes, while Golani soldiers are “Yemenites”. This is expressed by their mentality. Paratroopers do everything “by the book”. For example, they put elastic bands on their boots … and Golani soldiers are perceived as those who do as they wish, with no elastic bands. They don’t give a damn about the military police… you know… like, “I’m a man, I’m an Arab”.

The present study depicts two different masculinities, only one of which is portrayed in terms of gender and ethnicity. This exposes the transparency of the Ashkenazi hegemonic group, which does not define itself as an ethnic group but, similar to “whiteness” in the West, as the neutral starting point that sets the norms (Dyer, 1997). It is the Mizrahi population that confers the name “Ashkenazi” on them (Shohat, 1988). Indeed, it is the Golani soldiers who reveal the ethnicity that forms the basis for these identities.

Rami, a Mizrahi who served in the Golani Brigade, describes the differences in the soldiers’ masculinities that are also reflected in their dress codes and behaviour:

When we go home, elastic bands are down and shirts are untucked… unlike the paratroopers, we dress sloppily,[with] the dog tag in the back ; we wear second-rate uniforms [work uniforms are worn on base only], We don’t mind having a charge filed against us by the military police if necessary. It’s no big deal. Their clothes are always sloppy and the gun is thrown over the shoulder [the gun is supposed to be carried crosswise]… The pants are low… you know, we are men. Golani soldiers resemble an Arab Sheikh.

Vladimir, of Russian origin, who served in the Golani Brigade, describes some of the Golani grooming practices:

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11 Among the Mizrahis, Yemenites are considered the most Mizrahi because of their dark skin color.
There was a rule that said that you don’t shave; hair grew wild. We look like men, not shaved and dandified like the paratroopers.

While the military presents soldiers with clear dress, behaviour and grooming rules, the Golani Brigade sets a different code. Through cultural characteristics the soldiers construct a defiant masculinity. Although it is customary for soldiers to leave the external signs of the sometimes messy work they do within the confines of the base and the field, Golani soldiers consciously choose not to spruce up when leaving the field, instead proudly exhibiting the dirty and messy aspects of their jobs. Golani soldiers display the genuine aspects of their roles, refusing to undergo a metamorphosis and present the image instead of the reality.

Liran, a Mizrahi Golani soldier, adds:

The paratroopers are all dandified with permanently neat and pressed uniforms …They have a special type of shirt that you wear untucked with a belt over it – it looks like a dress… like a Scottish dress. We laugh at their dress… and the colour of their beret ; our brown looks much prettier than theirs. What is that red colour ? It’s like a menstruation on the shoulder… Golani is the exact opposite… When you think of Golani, you immediately think of combat soldiers who make a big mess.

Not content with claiming an alternative masculinity through appearance and behaviour, Golani soldiers go so far as to assign feminine traits to the paratrooper masculinity. Drawing a symbolic parallel with traditional power relations between men and women in society, they reserve for themselves the men’s role and picture the paratroopers as women. Turning upside down the very symbols on which the paratroopers’ prestige rests, Golani soldiers portray them as female in order to position them as inferior. Blending gender with ethnicity, the “feminization” of the paratroopers is aimed at challenging Israeli society’s symbolic and power hierarchies, which historically attribute higher prestige to the paratroopers and their “Ashkenaziness”, thereby deriding the combat soldier’s hegemonic masculine image. Their messy style and flaunting of military norms are thus not disobedience for the sake of disobedience. Instead, Golani soldiers wish to construct an alternative (ethnic) image of the combat soldier – one that ultimately undermines and deconstructs hegemonic masculinity.

**Conclusion : Intersectional Observation of the Combat Soldier**

This study’s findings indicate that, far from being neutral and homogeneous, the image of the combat soldier is indeed diverse. However, while the Golani combat soldier’s image constitutes an alternative that lacks acknowledgment, he is in fact part of the warrior model of masculinity he contradicts. This process involves ethnic characteristics.

As previously mentioned, studies of the combat soldier’s image have, so far, relied mainly on gender literature, emphasizing the contrast between masculinity and femininity, and the manner in which the combat soldier represents hegemonic masculinity, through which other masculinities may be constructed (Sasson-Levy, 2006). In addition, research
on ethnicity in the military often concerns the ethnic division of labour, demonstrating that different ethnic groups occupy different roles, which affects the skills they acquire, and consequently, their options for mobility within the Army and without. These studies indicate that, in contrast to other ethnic and racial groups, the dominant groups are usually discharged from the military with higher cultural capital that contributes to their social mobility (Levy, 2008).

Drawing on intersectionality theory, the present study interweaves the two approaches in order to examine the way in which ethnicity becomes part of the process of constructing different types of masculinities. While both brigades studied share one military objective, they exhibit different cultures which serve as fertile ground for the creation of different masculinities. Intersectionality enables a deeper understanding of structure, division of labour, mobility, and various social mechanisms in the military. The use of intersectionality theory has allowed the deconstruction of the homogeneous image of the combat soldier and introduced additional categories that influence its image and characteristics, and therefore, its multiplicity.

Moreover, unravelling diverse images of the combat soldier points to the connection between these images which embody the power struggle between two ethnic identities within Israeli society. The masculinities described here are not merely competitive images aiming for primacy. Instead, intersectionality exposes the struggle of “the other” to become a legitimate alternative identity, masculinity, and culture.

Within the boundaries of the military, and serving the central role of combat soldiers, Golani soldiers challenge broad social and ethnic perceptions and hierarchies. Although risking being identified, yet again, as inferior and disadvantaged, their use of “Mizrahi” ethnic, marginal, low-status characteristics and the adoption of an Arab identity in fact disrupt and challenge the hegemonic characteristics and claim an alternative, legitimate identity. This affects the combat soldier’s role in particular, and the ethnic group in general.

This article demonstrates that the construction of different combat soldier masculinities takes place via an intersectional organizational culture. This is not an individual action, but a collective one. Each brigade makes cultural demands of its soldiers that represent the appropriate habitus, such that, in order to be accepted to a specific brigade, the soldier is required to perform according to the particular habitus. The present study shows that being accepted to a group (brigade), as well as constructing and performing military masculinity is, in fact, a diverse ethno-gendered process that is influenced by the cultural and organizational traits that characterize the group.
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