

The 'immunized integration' of Religious-Zionists within Israeli society: the pre-military academy as an institutional model

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the process of establishment of pre-military academies amongst Religious-Zionist society in Israel. The phenomenon is discussed as a transition from a model of a gated community to an 'immunized' community. Through institutionalization of psycho-social ideological preparation, the community leadership is trying to ensure that community members maintain their identity and loyalty when they integrate into general society. The article rests on analysis of the discourse of the community's epistemic leadership – mainly rabbis and leaders of the settler movement. It contributes to the perception of the pre-military academies as institutions that are Religious-Zionist launching pads for senior positions in the IDF and pipelines for future leadership of Israeli society. At the same time, they are a means of ensuring that Religious-Zionists will integrate within Israel society, not through assimilation and dissolution, but rather with cultural and ideological commitment to their community of origin. The article also discusses the development of other similar 'immunizing' institutions that aim to facilitate integration of Religious-Zionists in spheres other than the military. These developments are presented as an attempt on the part of the community leadership to maintain its status and relevance, in view of the younger generation's desire to break out of the gated community boundaries. Thus, these institutions might be viewed as more of a rearguard battle on the part of the leadership than as a behavior-guiding ethos among the younger generation.

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In the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge (2014), during which Israel launched a military operation against Hamas in Gaza, an article that appeared in the *Yisrael Hayom* [Israel Today] daily named a long list of IDF commanders of different ranks who had participated in the battles, some losing their lives, and noted what they had in common:

All of them are not only among the IDF's finest combatants in recent times, but also graduates of the pre-military academy in Eli . . . a major supplier of officers and combatants. Some 89% of its graduates have pursued a combat service track, 65% became squad leaders and nearly 50% became officers in the IDF's leading units. (Sahar, 2014)

This paper examines the establishment of the pre-military academies as the realization of a new ethos propagated by the Religious-Zionist leadership in Israel over the past decades.

This ethos developed as a response to the sector's sense of isolation in relation to broader Israeli society, which grew increasingly acute in the wake of the Oslo Accords (1993), the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1994), and – especially – the Disengagement Plan, carried out in 2005 with the support of the majority of the Israeli public (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2009). Many Religious-Zionists felt that the Israeli public was alienated from their ideological aspirations, did not view them as legitimate partners for leadership of the country, and was acting to exclude them from the public discourse (Lebel, 2008). The new ethos comprises two, seemingly contradictory, attitudes towards the relations between Religious-Zionism and Israeli society.

1. A 'culture war' against Israeli elites

To this view, secular Israeli elites have 'imported' neo-liberal and post-national values that have turned Israel into a 'sick', defeated state that has lost its national conscience. The chief culprits, to this view, are the judicial system, the media, academia, and the world of Israeli culture – all power elites led for the most part by upper-middle class, secular adherents of a post-modern world-view that prefers peace and territorial compromise to maintaining the integrity of the Land of Israel and acting to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

In a lecture entitled 'The Attitude Towards the State of Israel', Rabbi S. Yosef Weitzen of Yeshivat Beit El mentioned that Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, the spiritual leader of the rabbis and settlers of Judea and Samaria, had anticipated that 'the secular national movement will not persist for long . . . it will soon become a movement opposed to the national idea,' because the secular Zionist 'has been influenced by the ideas of the gentiles and the Left . . . [and may be compared to] an "infant taken captive"¹ . . . by the *religion of democracy's* values of false freedom.' Weitzen also wrote, 'Not only can the State not be trusted in matters of religion, it also cannot be trusted in matters of nationality', explaining that 'this is a *cultural war*. A war for life and death . . . a war against confused people who are dragging the nation towards terrible deeds. Acts of self-destruction' (Lebel & Lubish-Omer, 2012, pp. 182–183. Emphasis here and elsewhere my own).

2. 'Penetrating' the arenas of the elites

In parallel, and sometimes among the same speakers, there developed a discourse which called upon the younger generation of Religious-Zionists to integrate into the public institutions and arenas of power controlled by the same elite against which the 'culture war' was supposed to be fought – including, notably, the IDF. In a widely distributed leaflet addressed to Religious-Zionist youths by Rabbi Eli Sadan, founder of the first pre-military academy in the settlement of Eli in Samaria, there is emphasis on the concept of 'taking responsibility', and the religious public is repeatedly asked the same question:

Where were we when they established Hashomer [the pre-State Jewish defence organization], the work battalions, the Palmach and the Haganah? *Where were we* when they established pioneering settlements, the underground organizations, and later on the IDF? *Where were we* when they founded the national institutions and prepared a leadership that assumed responsibility for the establishment of the Jewish State, which to our regret has become a Jewish-secular state? . . . It is much easier to blame others, but we should look in the mirror and ask ourselves some hard questions. (Sadan, 2007, pp. 7–9)

Sadan explained to the younger generation that their sense of disappointment and anger towards the State, especially in view of the evacuation of settlements as part of the Disengagement Plan, would be worthless if they now chose to view the army or the government as secular arenas in which there was no place for the religious public. Instead, Sadan proposed the ‘great and sacred ideal to leave the religious study-hall and “assume responsibility”’ (Sadan, 2007, p. 31) – in other words, to integrate into state institutions, especially the army, in order to influence the shaping of their policy from within, rather than demonstrating in protest from the outside.

In the same spirit, on the tenth anniversary of Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip, Rabbi Abraham Wasserman wrote:

During the past twenty years extra-parliamentary forces have gained power and the nation is being led also – perhaps mainly – from outside the Knesset . . . Despite their small numbers, the members of these groups work consistently, powerfully and systematically, winning over many MKs (parliamentarians) and gaining much power . . . The weight of the individual or the small group has become central in political, military, social, cultural and economic decision-making . . . Over the past 35 years, a majority has voted – almost consistently – for parties whose platforms support settling the land, but small and persistent groups that are highly influential in the media, the legal system, the cultural sphere, and academia, lead their elected representatives to implement a completely opposite agenda.

His conclusion is clear: ‘We will not [be able to] consolidate our path solely by settling in our sacred land . . . From now on the aim is to *settle within the centres of influence*’ (Wasserman, 2015).

Seemingly, these two approaches contradict one another. The former indicates a general loathing and fear of any contact with the ‘sick’ Israeli secular world. This view had advanced a ‘gated community’ ethos during the 1990s, manifest in the growing numbers of Religious-Zionist children and youth attending sectorial educational institutions and youth movements, increased consumption of sectorial newspapers and media, and, most importantly, accelerated migration to homogeneous religious neighborhoods or communities, the quintessential gated communities (in both the physical and the symbolic sense) being the settlements of Judea and Samaria. The latter approach, in contrast, seeks to bring Religious-Zionist youth right into the frameworks that disseminated the ‘wrong-headed’ ideas which, to the minds of proponents of this strategy, were the reason for Israel’s ‘sickness’.

Our thesis will be that these two approaches are not contradictory, but rather part of a new psycho-political ethos molded by the Religious-Zionist leadership – an ethos calling for a new social activism which, inspired by the writings of Roberto Esposito, we shall refer to as ‘immunized’ activism (Esposito, 2004). This call, inspired by a vision of future leadership, involves training Religious-Zionist youth and integrating them within the power elites, without the latter influencing the former. The only influence would be their own impact on the policy molded in those centers of power and the values they disseminate. This is an ‘avant-garde’ rather than a ‘melting-pot’ approach, envisioning the arrival of Religious-Zionist manpower in the secular arenas, not with the aim of assimilating within it and becoming ‘infected’, but rather with the aim of healing.

This ethos of communal leadership sits well with what Esposito refers to as *Communitas-Immunitas*: a communal ethos expressing a desire to maintain ongoing commitment to an epistemic community, and especially to its leadership, even as the gated community

becomes integrated within the broader society. We propose that in the case of Religious-Zionism, this approach embraces and channels a trend that is becoming apparent anyway: the aspiration on the part of Religious-Zionist youngsters to integrate within broader Israeli society, having had enough of being sheltered from it. This sense of disenchantment was considerably intensified in the wake of the Disengagement and a sense that this sheltering had prevented their fierce opposition to the move from having broader impact. Their conclusion was that the sheltered, gated community approach should be abandoned in favor of a strategy of 'settling in the hearts': integration within broader society. The sector's leadership opted to cooperate with a social trend that it was powerless to arrest.

The rhetoric of the leadership of Religious-Zionist settler society in relation to the younger generation reflects an awareness that the need to beware of secular society and the need to be part of it are hybrid rather than dichotomous phenomena. The tension is resolved by proposing the establishment of intermediary institutions and making legitimacy for integration within broader society dependent on a willingness to become 'immunized' in them, and to serve as agents of communal values. The focus of the present study – the pre-military academy – represents perhaps the first practical implementation of this idea, as an institution that provides 'immunization' for its students (who then serve in the IDF) as well as ideological loading and a sense of communal commitment and responsibility. The idea is that graduates will not consider themselves released from the epistemic community but rather part of it and active agents on its behalf.

2.1. Structure of the article

Below, we present the concept of 'Communitas-Immunitas' and its connection with the perception of the epistemic community. Thereafter we illustrate the transition of the Religious-Zionist sector in Israel from a 'gated community' ethos to one of immunized integration within Israeli society in general, and the IDF in particular. This ethos will be presented as the central narrative of the Religious-Zionist settler rhetoric. We then analyse the pre-military academy as the institutionalization of this ethos, and discuss the cultural revolution that it has effected, allowing increasing numbers of youth from this sector to perform military service not within 'gated' frameworks, but with an attempt to serve as community agents. Finally, we discuss the extension of the concept behind this institution to other areas of public life, and also raise questions as to the degree to which the youth remain faithful to this ethos.

2.2. Methodology

The present study follows on from the pioneering work of Wilson and Cox (2012) who examine the discourse of leaders acting to perpetuate their status by structuring communal discourse in support of that aim. Our focus will be on this communal leadership discourse, which is conducted 'top down' (Curtis, 1999) and 'on stage' (Goffman, 1959, p. 65). For this reason, the article does not examine 'bottom-up' communal discourse (Nickels, Thomas, Hickman, & Silvestri, 2012). The research here is based on analysis of religious lectures, publicist articles, media interviews, halakhic literature, speeches at ceremonies, and other expressions and statements emanating from the communal

leadership with regard to military service and other social issues. The methodology seeks to identify opinion leaders who act to mold communal consensus (Kim, 2011), and their statements are interpreted through frame analysis (Johnston, 1995).

2.3. *Managing a sub-culture and molding of the 'immunitas-communitas'*

Leadership and control of a gated community is facilitated mainly by virtue of its panoptic character (Caluya, 2010), where every member is subject to constant visibility. In contrast, a leadership seeking to maintain its epistemic status amongst a group that is not a social enclave (Sivan, 1995) employs biopedagogy: the socialization and education of its members such that they will become active agents who consistently fulfill and embody community expectations of them. To this end it is necessary to imbue them with awareness, to inculcate behavioral and functional expectations and to provide them with cultural 'immunization', so that later on, when they are integrated within the broader society, they will play an ideological function that might be envisioned in biological terms: constantly isolating and removing harmful foreign influences, knowing what belongs to the body and contributes to its inner harmony and integrity, and what has the potential to bring pathological damage (Bird & Short, 2013, p. 7).

What Esposito refers to as *Communitas-Immunitas* is in effect the community's control over its members by means of boundaries that are not concrete and physical but rather symbolic, existing in the realm of consciousness. They are established by providing instruction and training that allow them to deal with threats to the integrity of their identity when they find themselves amongst society at large. The 'immunization' is the inculcation of a filter through which the 'outside' passes 'inside'. The function of communal leadership, then, is to inculcate relational filters (Esposito, 2012, pp. 87–88). The members of the community are able to maintain their identity even in the absence of regular communication with communal leadership, thanks to their shared approach to decoding and interpreting reality, leading to similar conclusions and behavioral directions, through what Adler and Haas (1992) call epistemic understanding.

One of the central questions in the study of politics and culture concerns the source of expectations. Adler and Haas (1992, p. 271) explain that only institutions are capable of inculcating communal expectations and commitment. March and Olsen (1998) likewise point to institutions as the central molders of behavior and values within a society. To connect this back to Esposito, his studies illustrate the success of those institutions which provided 'communitarian immunity', such that their graduates, after integrating within broader society, were not 'infected' by its values, and even managed to advance their own. This approach was implemented, for example, by Islam Karimov, President of Uzbekistan. Realizing that the infiltration of global elements into his country could not be avoided, he concluded:

In order to protect our people from various ideological threats, to formulate in society an ideological immunity, it is necessary to arm it with an authentically humanist ideology, comprising in itself a powerful impulse toward the spiritual uplifting of the nation. (March, 2003, p. 215)

2.4. *From 'gating' to 'immunity': Religious Zionism in Judea and Samaria*

The establishment of the State of Israel was led by Zionist-Socialists, whose secularism was one of the most significant components of their identity. Zionism was perceived as a

rebellion against the 'old Jew' – religious, living in the diaspora, and aspiring to be a *talmid chakham* (Torah scholar). Zionist leaders viewed this model as contemptible, and held that in order to achieve the national dream, a secular 'new Jew' had to be created. Instead of dedicating himself to Torah he would dedicate himself to militarism and settlement, and would concentrate on developing physical rather than spiritual skills.

Alongside the *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) religious parties who refused to recognize the Zionist endeavor, a few Religious-Nationalist parties were established, led for the most part by activists with rabbinical and academic training. Their activities were limited to minor efforts to exert influence in the religious realm, in areas such as kosher food, observance of the Sabbath, conversion, the marking of holidays, etc. and even when these parties were included in government, their leaders were awarded minor ministries. In the eyes of the general Israeli public as well as the Zionist-Religious population itself, Religious-Nationalist leaders occupied the 'last coach of the Zionist train' with no special accomplishments or contribution to their name (Leon, 2015).

A second generation of Religious-Zionist leadership came into existence in the wake of the Six Day War (1967), when Israel captured Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, along with the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. While the position of most of Israel's leadership was that these territories would not become part of the sovereign State, an alternative political approach was advanced by the students and followers of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, expressing the Religious-Zionist aspiration to settle these territories and annexe them to the State, in fulfillment of the biblical command of settling the Land of Israel. This ideology, expressed in messianic-religious rhetoric, was first institutionalized in 1974 with the establishment of the Gush Emunim social movement, whose leaders spearheaded a replacement of leadership of the Religious-Nationalist Party (Mafdal). While prior to the appearance of Gush Emunim the rare individual attempts to settle in 'the territories' had generally been regarded as an esoteric and marginal phenomenon, from this point onwards settlement became the dominant ideology within Religious-Zionism.

Gush Emunim had a tremendous impact on Religious-Zionist society. The Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria represented, for many, the opportunity to replicate in these regions the ideology and actions of Socialist-Zionist leaders during the establishment of the State: settling the land and 'causing the desert to bloom' (Harnoy, 1994). Over a short period of time, increasing numbers of settlers became official and non-official leaders of the Religious-Zionist camp. In parallel, Judea and Samaria quickly became an inseparable part of the lives of most Religious-Zionists in Israel, both because of their visits to the many sacred ancient Jewish sites situated in these areas, and because their children built their homes in new settlements, many of which were established as religious communities. Most importantly, the vast majority of the educational institutions orientated to this sector were established in Judea and Samaria, thereby making this region an inseparable part of the childhood landscape of the younger generation (Leon, 2015). Thus, in effect, Religious-Zionism became overwhelmingly affiliated with the political Right, with support for annexation of these territories and opposition to any territorial concessions as the top item on its ideological agenda (Pedhazur, 2012). A slew of surveys and studies indicate that the Religious-Zionist sector is the only sector in Israel for whom there is no *de facto* 'Green Line', and that the vast majority of this population votes for Right-wing parties (Mozes, 2009).

The embedding of Religious-Zionism in Judea and Samaria was a double-edged sword in terms of its image vis-à-vis Israeli society. While the sector now took part in political and defence discourse, it was widely viewed as being identified exclusively with the settlement campaign and, as such, as having deviated from the democratic game. A 2004 study found the Israeli Left to be more antagonistic towards the settlers than it was towards the Palestinians, and the settlers, more than the Palestinians, were perceived as obstructing the peace process (Moore & Aweiss, 2002, 2004). Academically, most studies on the Religious-Zionist movement during the settlement period were based on theoretical models borrowed from the academic realms of criminology, fundamentalism and colonialism (Lebel & Orkibi, *in press*).

Such perceptions were not limited to the Israeli Left. A number of studies showed evidence of alienation and apprehension towards the settlers even amongst secular right-wing populations (Lebel, 2008), and even those sympathizing with their cause asserted their willingness to evacuate settlements as part of a peace process (Billig & Lebel, 2013). Over time, Religious-Zionism itself contributed to the growing sense of alienation on the part of the public through the development of a separatist 'gated' lifestyle in Judea and Samaria.

The third generation of Religious Zionists was born into the social enclaves of Judea and Samaria, but experienced a series of crises culminating in the implementation of the Disengagement Plan (2005). This event, experienced as a political and cultural trauma as well as betrayal trauma (Schnell et al., 2011), exacerbated the sense of aloneness and raised questions as to the viability of the gated community model. The view amongst the youth was that it was this model that had allowed the government to present them as 'others' who posed a threat to Israeli sovereignty and democracy (Lebel, 2008).

This realization led to two parallel developments. On one hand, there was a move towards secularization and full assimilation within Israeli society. On the other hand, there was a move towards religious extremism, with alienation from state institutions (Niederland, Neirich, Reikhal, & Hoffman, 2008, p. 102). Both phenomena represented a crisis for the status of the Religious-Zionist rabbinic and settler elite which represented the community leadership (Geiger, 2013). This group sought to preserve Religious-Zionism as a hybrid identity and to prevent a dichotomous split. We propose that the leadership acted to take control of social processes and channel them in productive and effective ways, both for the preservation of the Religious-Zionist-settler population and for the sake of preserving its own status. The rabbinical/settler leadership itself spearheaded a culture shift and transition from the 'settler' ethos to a 'soldier' ethos, hoping to ensure that boys who were eager to enlist in the army would do so as agents of the community and not as individuals who had separated from it. Our study focuses on the pre-military academy – the first manifestation of the institutionalization of what we shall refer to as Religious-Zionism's 'immunized integration' discourse.

2.5. 'Immunized integration' discourse

Rabbi Eli Horwitz was a prominent proponent of the complex ethos that rejects secular Israeliness while seeking to join its ranks in an 'immunized' way. His writings became popular especially after he and his wife were murdered in their home by Palestinian terrorists in 2003. During his life, Horwitz participated in many encounters with secular

and Left-wing Israelis, and was perceived within the Religious-Zionist sector as possessing 'insider' familiarity with broader Israeli society, its deficiencies and its dangers.

Horwitz's most popular work is entitled *The Culture War*. The book is actually a collection of his articles, collated by his students after his death. Horwitz speaks out against two values which, to his view, entered Israeli discourse and 'polluted' it: peace and feminism:

The war strategy of the other nations involves penetration of our internal spiritual world in order to influence us with their immoral ideas and vices. In contrast, our own strategy should be one of purifying our internal world from the negative influence of foreign cultures that infuse hatred between us and our Father in heaven. Everything depends on this war! (Horwitz, 2007, pp. 56–58)

According to Horowitz, not only do Religious-Zionists need to be immune to these values; it is their duty to immunize the entire Israeli nation:

A nation needs to protect its character to prevent foreign elements from penetrating . . . Just as animals instinctively know . . . which animals are a threat . . . the same natural instincts exist among nations . . . which naturally oppose any . . . foreign element that attempts to penetrate it and may cause it damage. The functioning of this *defence mechanism* depends on the health of the organism . . . When the organism is weak and not fully alert, its instinctive immune system is weakened and it may absorb all sorts of harmful foreign substances. The same is true for a nation. When it is weak . . . it may consume harmful cultural-spiritual nourishment. (Horwitz, 2007, pp. 98–99)

To Horwitz's view, peace, feminism and other cosmopolitan values penetrated Israeli culture because the secular Israeli leadership is not immune:

When we set out on our national path in recent generations, our national lives were fed with 'foreign fuel' . . . This 'fuel', which is not meant for us, has driven our national machine over the past few decades, but the engine is beginning to falter and it cannot go on functioning. (2007, p. 225)

In his book, Horwitz set down the foundation for the practical implementation of the ethos of ideological self-immunization (as embodied in the pre-military academy): the need to maintain immunizing institutions for those youngsters seeking to integrate into broader Israeli society. These institutions would be directed by the community's epistemic leadership, thus ensuring its relevance and influence:

For instance, in the Scouts youth movement, there are adults who set the ideology . . . Clear messages are developed . . . There is a well-organized system which passes these messages onwards to the instructors, and there is a team that accompanies them for 4–5 years using feedback to ensure that the messages are absorbed by the youth. There is ongoing contact with the adults who carry the ideology and they direct the various forces and instruct them on how to inculcate these principles and messages among the younger generation . . . If we wish to succeed in the cultural war and to make a profound impact, we too need to adopt these methods. (2007, pp. 90–92)

Horwitz argued that, before Religious Zionist youths entered the secular public arenas, they should undergo an immunizing training period, accepting the authority of an 'immunizing leadership' who will ensure that they remain immune while immersed in a secular environment. As explained by Horowitz:

We are at war . . . we are soldiers . . . soldiers in the war of beliefs and opinions. Therefore, before heading out into battle, we too must be trained. You cannot go into battle without having the foundations of fighting embedded in the depths of one's soul . . . so that in the heat of battle . . . he can react automatically . . . So it is in the culture war. A person needs to learn and build himself up gradually . . . his ideology should be clear in his mind . . . So we must ask ourselves: what are the principles that we need to assimilate in our hearts in order to fight the cultural war? What is our point of departure in this battle? What should our principles be as we head out to war against cultural movements that weaken and hinder the nation? (2007, pp. 68–70)

2.6. Believing soldiers

The culture war waged by conservative groups seeking to combat the influence of neo-liberal elites that are making inroads into the army is a familiar phenomenon outside of Israel, too. Research on the civil-military gap shows that in the US, for example, soldiers and their families are predominantly Republican voters (Inbody, 2009; Ricks, 1997) – a phenomenon even more pronounced among officers (Holsti, 1998). Moreover, a range of studies have shown that the discourse among soldiers is largely one of hostility towards the media and the political elites (Inbody, 2009, p. 10). To the conservative view, the concept of remaining faithful to the values of the 'founding fathers' entails not only the responsibility of defending the US against external enemies, but also leading the nation and protecting it from corrupt neo-liberal culture.

In December, 1994, military commentator William S. Lind expressed these sentiments in the *Marine Corps Gazette*:

Starting in the mid-1960s, we have thrown away the values, morals, and standards that define traditional Western culture. In part, this has been driven by cultural radicals, people who hate our Judeo-Christian culture. Dominant in the elite, especially in the universities, the media and the entertainment industry . . . (a source of endless degradation), the cultural radicals have successfully pushed the agenda of moral relativism, militant secularism and sexual and social 'liberations'. The agenda has slowly codified into a new ideology, usually known as 'multiculturalism' or 'political correctness' . . . (cited in Ricks, 1997)

Many of the believing soldiers who view their communities as being engaged in a culture war within American society, come from specific geographical regions of the US. In this context, there might be room to compare Judea and Samaria, where most of the pre-military academies are located, and the American 'Bible belt'.

2.7. The pre-military academy: institutionalization of communal immunization

In 1987, two IDF Major-Generals (Amram Mitzna, then head of the IDF Central Command and Yossi Ben Hanan – then the IDF's Armored Corps Commander) summoned Rabbi Yigal Levinstein, then Deputy Commander of a reserves armored battalion, to try and convince him to return to the army as a career officer. During the meeting the men discussed the problem of the army's reliance solely on youngsters from the secular population, with its dwindling motivation to serve. The Major-Generals expressed their wish that the Religious-Zionist sector educate its younger generation towards military service, rather than 'gating' them and keeping them out. Following this meeting, Rabbi Levinstein and his teacher,

Rabbi Eli Sadan, embarked on the establishment of Bnei David [Sons of David], the first pre-military academy, which opened a year later in the settlement of Eli in Samaria.

Until that time, 18-year-old Religious-Zionist men had two main options with regard to military service. One was to enlist immediately after graduating high school. Many of those who followed this route and found themselves, for the first time in their lives, immersed in a completely secular environment, came to assume a secular world-view and lifestyle during their army service. Therefore this option was frowned upon by the Religious-Zionist leadership. The other option was to join the army as a gated community, within the framework of the 'arrangements yeshivas', entailing a shortened period of service – 16 months – in homogeneous religious units preceded and followed by significant periods of intensive religious study (Cohen, 1993).

The pre-military academy was therefore a ground-breaking initiative, aiming to prepare its students for full military service in integrated (rather than separate religious) units. The one- or two-year program curriculum includes fitness training and navigation and combat practice, along with in-depth study of military history and issues of national security through lectures by current and former senior army commanders. At the same time, there is a rigorous program of religious studies, as in the yeshivas. The all-round environment frames military service as a religious commandment, and maintains a fully observant religious life. The academy itself is a sort of cross between a yeshiva and an army base, as the students' daily lives – from cleaning through guard duty, volunteer community work, and regular religious studies – are managed by the students themselves. They leave the academy premises to visit their families only on alternate weekends.

The pre-military academies have granted legitimacy to a feeling that had been suppressed amongst the Religious-Zionist youth since the establishment of the state: these youth grew up in a country characterized by cultural militarism, but were effectively barred from integration into the army (Aran, 2013, pp. 193–194). Hence the popularity of the initiative: since the establishment of Bnei David, 36 additional institutions, most of them religious and all following a similar format, have been established throughout the country. Almost half of these academies are located in Judea and Samaria.

2.8. *Ethos transformation*

As noted, in supporting the pre-military academy initiative, community leaders were in fact cooperating with a growing trend amongst the sector's younger generation of rejecting the gated environment in favor of integration into broader society or, conversely, displaying a loosening of identification and solidarity with Israeli society. The signal was given to both groups that integration in the army is a revolution, a subversive act, facilitating both integration into society and a leveraging of influence. The long-term goal was leadership of the army; the shorter term goal was to influence it. In other words, the soldiers are meant to fight not only external enemies in the name of the army, but also influences within the army itself. Ultimately, this process would prevent the military elite – which would by then be 'immunized' and 'healthy' – from adopting the sort of 'misguided' defense policy that had been advanced and implemented in the past, catalyzing the culture shift and ethos transformation amongst Religious-Zionist society from idealization of great Torah scholars and the glorification of settlers, to idealization of the religiously-committed soldier. This militaristic, heroic subculture was something that had not

existed within religious Jewish society since the biblical period and it held the promise of empowering the Religious-Zionist community and bolstering the legitimacy of its settler element. For this reason, rabbis who in the past had strongly recommended military service in separate, religious units and had supported 'gating' in relation to broader Israeli society, now upheld military service as the realization of a religious commandment, and began urging the youth to aspire in this direction. As Rabbi Horwitz wrote:

Following years in which young religious men were encouraged to become learned scholars, they are now urged to become brave soldiers . . . When war is upon us we shall not turn our backs or cry over our bitter fate. War is not like a bothersome fly that we can wish was not there. War is a challenge that we need; it deepens our self-knowledge and requires us to find and expose among ourselves and our people the powers and spiritual insights that were unknown to us until now. (Horwitz, 2007, p. 262)

2.9. Processes of differentiation: building a religious-nationalist-military sub-culture

This cultural revolution within the Religious Zionist sector was expressed in the transformation of Religious-Zionism in general and its settler component in particular into a new military sub-culture, organized around local heroes from the military sphere, whose religious faith and observance, as well as identification with the settlement enterprise in Judea and Samaria, were beyond doubt.

The pre-military academies are headed by a new style of educational figure: rabbis who are senior reserves combat officers. The combination of their military status and religious erudition is their symbolic capital and the basis of their charisma. In addition, there is veneration of war casualties who studied at pre-military academies prior to their enlistment, and their bereaved parents are elevated to the status of community opinion leaders. Even among the leaders of the party representing the Religious-Zionist public, there are some whose public status is based on military capital to a greater degree than on other symbolic foundations.

There is also a special 'cultural toolkit' (Swidler, 1986) for the religious military community based on Jewish halakhic sources: an ever-growing 'library' of works on topics relating to the army, war, and ethics emerging from religious publishers (some of which were established by pre-military academies); conferences and seminars discussing war and morality, organized by the pre-military academies and other religious institutes, and more. All of this sends a clear message to the Religious-Zionist public that opting for a military horizon does not have to entail exposure to secular or post-modern philosophy; it can be pursued within the framework of intellectual reliance on 'approved/proper' sources.

The popular culture consumed by Religious-Zionist youth likewise conveys the message that militarism and religion are not only complementary but, in fact, inseparable. For instance, a popular book among Religious-Zionist youth commemorating Dror Weinberg, a religious officer who was killed in battle against terrorists during his service as Brigade Commander in Hebron, presents religious commitment as a necessary precondition for following a military track. The following scene describes a talk that Weinberg gave at the Bnei David pre-military academy in Eli:

'Tell me – what does it mean to be a good religious soldier?' Weinberg asked the students, who offered all sorts of responses:

'Someone who prays three times a day'; 'Someone who recites the Grace after meals'; 'Eating only kosher food even in difficult conditions'; 'Observing the Sabbath' . . .

Dror's face reddened . . . "If there's anyone here who doesn't intend to pray every day – he shouldn't go to the army at all . . . We don't need him . . . A religious soldier must be one hundred percent religious. But he also has to be one hundred percent a soldier . . . You think there weren't soldiers before you came along? You think that without you, there can be no reconnaissance units? No pilots? There always were, and there always will be. The question is, what is your unique contribution to the army? . . . We in the army need people who are strong. Heroes. Heroes in strength, heroes in spirit. You're invited to prepare yourselves to be our future heroes.' (Levinstein-Maltz, 2010, pp. 213–218)

This text reflects the perception that religious piety is a necessary precondition for military excellence, and that the students are expected to combine both spheres.

In the realm of romance and relationships, too, attention is drawn to the erotic capital of religious soldiers. The same book about Weinberg's life offers a description of how Hadassa, his future wife, deliberated whether she should marry him. Hadassa discusses the situation with Uzi, a friend of Dror:

Hadassah: 'It's not what I'm looking for . . . I want to build a religious home . . . Don't you know that Dror plans to continue in the army? How can a career soldier fit what I just told you?'

Uzi: 'What do you think, that being in the army isn't devotion? That being one of those who are fortunate to be able to protect the country isn't a power station in the spiritual world? You think religion is only in books . . . There are people who study the Torah and there are those who live it. Hadassah, you could be lucky enough to live with someone who lives Torah no less powerfully than a yeshiva student . . .'

Hadassah: 'But I dreamed of a yeshiva student . . .'

Uzi: 'You have something that others only dream about – a religious military commander in the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit– there aren't many of those . . . When Maimonides codified the Laws of King and Their Wars, he dreamed of people like that, who could bravely and justly command the wars of Israel.' (Levinstein-Maltz, 2010, pp. 65–69)

2.10. Communal commitment

The pre-military academy places an emphasis on creating a class consciousness and a unique communal identity among the students that will be maintained even during military service. The pre-military academy remains a 'home away from home' for the soldiers – a place for meetings, ceremonies, and joint celebration of festivals. Each graduating class has a contact whose role is to stay in touch with the students while they are soldiers. Representatives of the academy attend their graduates' military ceremonies, and the soldiers themselves participate in ceremonies held at their academy, with the approval of their army commanders. Newsletters from the academy are sent to its graduates by post or by email. During the students' army service, the heads of many pre-military

academies remain a source of encouragement, advice, problem-solving and even advocacy within the army. They visit their graduates in the mobilization areas to wish them well. The term '*mechinistim*' (referring to graduates of the academies) reflects a new group consciousness and identity within the army, and is a source of group pride among academy students and staff alike. The phenomenon is recognized and held in esteem by the IDF: the defence establishment, in cooperation with the directorate of the pre-military academies, has established an annual date honoring the pre-military academies.

2.11. '*Sent for two fronts*' – discourse of conditional legitimacy

Along with emphasizing the prestige and symbolic capital of graduates of the academies, the discourse of the Religious-Zionist leadership de-legitimizes the option of army enlistment without the preparatory mediation. Religious high-school graduates who enlist directly into combat units are regarded as unreliable in terms of their loyalty to the epistemic community, since they are not been equipped with the necessary tools for the culture war within the army. This discourse reminds Religious-Zionist youth of the fact that in the army, they will in fact be fighting two wars: the one in which they represent the IDF (against Palestinian terror), and the other, which is theirs alone, as agents of the Religious Zionist community: a war against the 'corrupt secular culture'. Rabbi Lior Engelman describes how, during his military service, the Religious Zionist soldier finds himself on 'a battlefield that involves no live fire, sweat and blood . . . A real battle! . . . In his battle, the enemies are people who are close to him. They are not on the other side of the border . . . a battle for his own religious backbone.' He, too, notes that the danger of the public arena in Israel is that it has been infiltrated by elements from 'completely un-Israeli' sources, and maintains that 'healing for our public pain will surely come from all those heroic soldiers whose moral and religious steadfastness is beyond question' (Engelman, 2007).

An article entitled 'And your camp shall be holy' states that a religious soldier who cannot manage to observe the commandments within the framework of his military service harms not only himself, the institutions in which he was educated, and his community, but also the IDF as a whole, because

the contribution of a religious soldier during his IDF service is more than just a contribution to defense . . . his contribution is far broader: a religious soldier contributes to the IDF's unique image as a Jewish army. When a religious soldier fulfills his obligations to both his Creator and his people, he represents the connection between the Jewish heritage and the present day. (Sharir, 2007)

2.12. Conclusion

The pre-military academy revolution led to widespread integration of Religious-Zionist youth in general, and settlers in particular, within the combat and officers' ranks of the IDF. Graduates of the pre-military academies, the great majority of them Religious-Zionists living in settlements in Judea and Samaria (Lebel, 2015), show figures about three times higher than the national average in all parameters (enlistment figures, applications for combat units, commanders' and officers' courses), although they comprise only 4% of the national intake. This represents an image resource: after years of being viewed by

the military establishment as a ‘problem’, mainly because of settler groups that would engage in confrontations with the army in order to try and impose their will to establish and maintain settlements that were illegal, they have now become a group that represents a ‘solution’: in the face of an ongoing decline in the willingness amongst the post-heroic upper-middle class to serve in the army, settlers have positioned themselves as a heroic community bearing an ethos of sacrifice and service (Lebel, 2015). However, our focus here is on other, intra-communal aspects relating to this process.

3. ‘Influencing from within’: ‘culture war’ discourse

The Religious Zionist-settler leaderships takes pains to explain that the pre-military academy revolution is more than a lever for Religious-Zionists to attain senior leadership positions; it is also a community lever for advancing moral, ideological and cultural influence on the army and society. It is a means of influencing ‘from within the system’. In 2002, Rabbi Aryeh Stern – a member of the Religious Zionist sector and the current Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem – wrote an article entitled ‘Towards a Jewish Leadership’, in which he wrote:

It’s time to dare to take action that would result in the integration of Religious-Zionist leaders in senior positions within the country’s central leadership . . . Extensive efforts must be invested in the struggle against the ideological secularism which has gained a place for itself in the urban setting and among the elites controlling the main systems that affect our lives. There is no doubt that the only power that can counter this situation is the power of Religious-Zionism, which – with the right organization and good leadership – would be able to provide talented people for any position and offer an alternative in governance to the secular movements. (Stern, 2002)

This discourse represents empowerment of the Religious-Zionist community and depicts the departure from the ‘gated ethos’ as the advancement of a long-term vision of Religious-Zionist influence on the leadership of Israeli society, while clarifying that this will be possible only on condition that its representatives maintain the religious-community loyalties and are not assimilated within secular society. Professor Elisha Hass, who headed a Right-wing academic forum whose members were mostly Religious-Zionists living in Judea and Samaria, defined as follows his view of what should characterize the third generation of Religious Zionism, by virtue of the ‘immunization’ that it receives via institutions such as the pre-military academies:

I hope and believe that the third generation will not allow for a phenomenon of auto-immunity, like that which spread amongst the second generation . . . Just as every type of biological organism is able to renew itself on the basis of its DNA, so the Jewish People is renewing itself in its homeland on the basis of its ancient tradition. (Hass, 2015)

4. Replicating the model: establishment of other ‘immunizing’ launch-pad institutions

The success of the pre-military academy model led the Religious-Zionist settler leadership to initiate institutions in other areas that on one hand serve as a launching pad into secular society while on the other hand providing immunizing ideological loading. These institutions provide legitimacy for Religious-Zionist youngsters seeking to branch out into other areas which were previously off-limits. For example, initiatives were founded to

aid mainly Religious-Zionists (but also others holding conservative views) seeking to integrate into the humanities and social science faculties in the academic sphere. The two most prominent examples are the Institute for Zionist Strategy, established by Yisrael Harel – a resident of the settlement of Ofra and former head of the Yesha (Judea, Samaria and Gaza) Council and editor the settler magazine *Nekuda*; and the Jewish Statesmanship Center, headed by Dr. Assaf Malach – also a resident of Ofra, and Amit Halevy, a resident of the settlement of Kedumim. The students at these institutions are given systematic exposure to national-republican academic material, a critical view of post-modern and post-national discourse, and a class consciousness of candidates preparing to be launched into an academic career in order to advance a conservative agenda and serve as a counter-culture to the prevailing post-national and neo-liberal spirit. The Maaleh school for cinema and the Mizmor school for music, both established and directed by Religious-Zionist settlers, serve as launching pads for the Israeli cinema and music industries. Their teaching staff include rabbis, and the legitimacy for seeking careers in these spheres is conditional upon enrollment in such institutions.

Recent years have witnessed an expansion of the ‘religious nuclei’ enterprise. The phenomenon of young Religious-Zionist families, mainly settlers, moving to secular neighborhoods throughout Israel, is awarded legitimacy when carried out as part of a ‘nucleus’ – meaning, as part of a group of families that will live in the same neighborhood, operating on the basis of the same ideological and educational vision: the dissemination of Jewish and national values, while providing educational and social support for the local community. This endeavor is pursued under the direction and with the involvement of Religious-Zionist leaders, especially settler rabbis, out of commitment to the Religious-Zionist community and as its representatives.

5. The religious soldier

This article has adopted the ‘top-down’ perspective of the leadership of the Religious-Zionist-settler epistemic community. But are its expectations internalized and realized by the youth? Are they engaging in a culture war, in the army and in other arenas of influence in Israeli society, without being influenced themselves? Answering these questions will require further studies. For the present it seems that the discourse is maintained mostly amongst the leadership. Two anecdotal examples might illustrate this.

Tamar Ariel was the first Religious Zionist woman to serve in the Israeli Air Force. For her pilot graduation ceremony, in 2012, she chose to wear a special uniform complying with the strictest religious code of modesty: a long skirt and long sleeves. The next day the Israeli media devoted extensive coverage to the first religious woman in the IAF, including her special uniform. However, following her tragic death two years later during a hike in Nepal, her friends’ Facebook posts showed ‘everyday’ photographs that showed a regular young Israeli woman, wearing pants and in the company of male friends.

Ofer Winter, the highest-ranking officer to have issued directly from the pre-military academy revolution, is regarded as the most prominent representative of the Religious Zionist-settler public in the IDF. He is a settler and a member of the first graduating class of the Bnei David academy in Eli. At the public ceremony in which he was promoted to the rank of Colonel and named commander of the Givati Infantry Brigade, Winter invited his teacher, Rabbi Sadan, to deliver an address; he opened his own address with

a prayer, mentioned his rabbis at the academy, and held a ceremony in which the writing of a Torah scroll was completed. In an official dispatch to battalion and company commanders during Operation Protective Edge, he cited biblical verses. Nevertheless, in his military role, as he testified at a commanders' seminar held at the IDF Military College, he did not consult with Rabbi Sadan nor even maintain regular contact with him. He also asserted that his decisions as a military commander were motivated completely by a universal humanitarian rationale and not a religious ethos – as expressed in his cancellation of many military operations when there was some chance of unnecessary harm to Palestinian non-combatants.

These examples illustrate what Goffman (1959) refers to as dramaturgical management, where the subject draws a distinction between his behavior and style of expression when 'on stage', in the public eye, and his everyday routine.

Within the Religious Zionist community there are many voices that are opposed to the pre-military academy revolution and the entire trend of integration within broader Israeli society. They seek to preserve the gated ethos, regarding the vision of 'influencing from within' as hopeless. They present some of the decisions implemented by the IDF, including evacuation of illegal outposts or refraining from firm (but, to their mind, essential) activity to combat Palestinian terror, as proof that 'influencing from within' is a fantasy in relation to the army as well as in other areas.

6. Religious-Zionist social mobility

Even if the transition from a gated community ethos to one of immunized integration does not ultimately afford the Religious-Zionist sector any significant influence on broader society, we cannot ignore the fact that this rhetoric has empowered the sector and facilitated its social mobility, by virtue of two resources that it has nurtured:

- (1) Social capital: By virtue of having performed their military service within regular units rather than in gated groups, Religious-Zionists in the army (and other arenas) are increasingly able to make use of social capital in the form of empowering circles of support, acquaintances, and socio-cultural affiliations (Carmeli, Ben-Hador, Waldman, & Rupp, 2009).
- (2) A sense of political efficacy: The growing numbers of Religious-Zionist representatives with experience in the media, culture, and cinema, and with symbolic military capital, offer a sense of political efficacy (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005), placing them squarely 'in the game' of democracy and its rules, thanks to their sense of being able to influence it.
- (3) Leadership capital: For the first time Zionist-Religious are being framed and recognized as legitimate leaders because of their 'military capital' which can be converted to 'leadership capital' (Lebel, 2016). It is the Israeli Cultural-Militarism that shapes the 'leadership capital regime': an agent with no military capital will be in its marginality (Lebel & Hatuka, 2016).

7. Moral panic in the face of religionization (HADATA) and theocratization

Since the advent of the pre-military academy revolution, neo-liberal opinion leaders in academic, media and political spheres within Israeli discourse have advanced moral panic

(Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994) over what they call religionization or theocratization (Levy, 2014) of the army: a fear that the growing numbers of Religious-Zionist commanders will lead to a situation where rabbis, rather than senior commanders, will hold real authority, and there will be an attempt to imbue the IDF with a religious culture and militarist-colonialist aims. The real fear is that ‘the loyalty [to democracy] discourse amongst Religious-Zionism is a bluff’ (Shani, 2015). In a similar vein, a researcher with the Molad Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy has warned of ‘the new agenda of the Religious-Zionist leadership’, which is poised to ‘conquer [the state] from within’, leading to ‘the end of the State of Israel in its classical Zionist form’ (Ben-Sasson, 2015). A methodological study of these texts shows that they are based on the ‘top-down’ discourse adopted by the Religious-Zionist leadership, without any investigation of the reception afforded this discourse ‘from below’ (Smyth, 2009) and the degree to which it is internalized and expressed as concrete behavior – i.e., its transformation into the identity of a praxis community (Wenger, 1998). Rabbis are quoted without consideration for the broader context and the fact that within the Religious-Zionist community their defensive discourse serves internal communal needs.

Whether or not the religious soldier will ultimately act to influence the prevailing military and social ethos and to as to award his own community elite status, the transition from the gated community ethos to one of immune integration is a strategy of the leadership of an epistemic community that is acting to preserve its community and its own status during a period of accelerated cultural change.

Note

1. Talmudic term referring to a Jewish individual who sins inadvertently as a result of having been raised outside of a Jewish community and hence lacking awareness and appreciation for Jewish principles and practices.

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