**“The Chain of Hebrew Soldiers”: Reconsidering “Religionization” during an IDF Bible Seminar**

Nehemia Stern, Uzi Ben-Shalom, Udi Lebel, Batia Ben-Hador

**Abstract**

This article presents an ethnographic analysis of the educational and religious tensions that emerged during a five-day biblical seminar run by the Israel Defense Forces’ Identity and Jewish Consciousness Unit. We argue that despite the official focus on professionalization as a pedagogical parameter, the seminar participants themselves reacted to biblical narratives in ways that indicate a distinct kind of personal and individualized discourse. Examining how seminar participants interpret biblical narratives can enable scholars to portray a more nuanced account of how religion and “religionization” function within the Israel Defense Forces.

Keywords

Bible, IDF, identity, Jewish consciousness, religionization

**Introduction: A Bureaucratic Reshuffle**

In January of 2016, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) transferred its Jewish Consciousness Unit from the Military Rabbinate/Chaplaincy Corp to the auspices of its Manpower Division (Krasner 2016). The newly entitled Identity and Jewish Consciousness Unit (IJCU) was to be a partnership composed of officers who had previously served in the IDF’s Education and Youth Corps and those who had served within the rabbinate. This newly formed unit was tasked with providing lessons and pedagogical material distinctly related to Jewish history, tradition, and lore to commanders and soldiers. For the military command, the IJCU provides an additional and necessary motivating force for both IDF recruits and officers.

This transfer of authority among units signaled more than just a simple bureaucratic reshuffle; it also reflected the impact of the thinly veiled but politically charged issue of “religionization” within Israeli society. The IDF shift represented a response to the claim that the military rabbinate, which is generally seen as being dominated by the national-religious sector of Israeli society, was becoming overly involved in shaping the broader educational and identity framework of the IDF. It was deemed important to counter the accusation that the IDF, and specifically its command and officer cadre, was becoming too religious and politically right-wing, as well as beholden to certain rabbinic elements and political movements from outside the military.

Over the past decade or so, social scientists have noted the increasing influence that religion plays within Israeli public life (Cohen and Susser 2012; Fischer 2012). This phenomenon elicits the most controversy with respect to the IDF, whose system of mandatory (near) universal enlistment results in military service reflecting much broader tensions within the larger Israeli society (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999; Stern and Ben-Shalom 2020: 257). Academic and lay observers have noted the tensions that the increased participation of religious, specifically, national religious soldiers, has generated when the military seeks to balance the specific ritual and religious demands of these soldiers with wider operational, as well as societal, objectives (Drory 2009; Elbshen 2013; Harel 2011; Levy 2011: 69; Levy 2014; Lubell 2016).

The social sciences have tended to view these tensions through the prism of power relationships. Yagil Levy, for example, sees religious forces both within and outside the IDF as seeking to “theocratize” various aspects of military culture (Levy 2014: 273). Likewise, Lebel (2016) and Agbaria and Shmueli (2019) view the increased participation of national religious soldiers in command and combat positions as part of an impetus to assert their communal influence over Israeli society. This perspective, rooted in the political economy of religionization, highlights the various ways in which classically religious and secular institutions compete with one another for levers of power in the public forum. More specifically, it sees the IDF as either passively allowing excessive religious influence within its ranks, or even actively encouraging such influence. However, this scholarly vector tends to overlook the competing and often contradictory modes through which Jewish cultural and religious traditions are interpreted and mobilized within the IDF.

In a classic and early essay of interpretive anthropology, Sherry Ortner defined what she termed as “elaborating symbols,” which “provide vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action” (Ortner 1973: 1340). For Ortner, certain cultural items and activities can function for members of a group as mediums through which various elements of social experience can be made to “hang together” into a working whole (Ibid.: 1341). In this respect, certain social symbols can effectively function as means through which individuals can reason about and classify some of the daily conflicts and contradictions that pervade social experience.

Drawing on Ortner’s insight, this article diverges from classical studies of the political economy of Israeli religionization within the IDF and applies a more interpretive and ethnographic approach to examine the educational and religious tensions that emerged during one five-day Biblical seminar hosted by the IDF’s IJCU. We contend that far from passively or actively encouraging the influence of religious perspectives within its ranks, the IDF is actually quite sceptical about incorporating Jewish heritage and biblical seminars into its pedagogical program. Essentially, the IDF tends to view these subjects as a kind of loose cannon that can all too easily impart contradictory and unpredictable messages to soldiers, thereby also undermining the normative political and ideological messages that are meant to unify military units (Hacker 1993: 1). Taking this background into consideration, we demonstrate how the IDF attempts to officially frame its use of Jewish traditions in ways that are professionally relevant to soldiers but stop just short of promoting specific religious beliefs. However, we contend that this framing does little to mitigate the classically religious and personal interpretations that individual soldiers give to biblical texts and Jewish traditions. Nonetheless, we find that the IDF is not supporting, either actively or passively, religious pedagogy within its ranks. Rather, by reverting to professional discourse, it is trying – albeit perhaps ultimately failing – to mitigate those influences.

Notwithstanding the power struggles between various parties within the military unit producing the seminar and others outside the IDF regarding the pedagogical parameters of the program, the individual participants brought their own independent interests, goals, and spiritual longings to the biblical seminar. By highlighting how the IDF’s use of biblical imagery and narrative is in actuality detached from the ways in which individual soldiers actively envisage the boundaries of religious discourse, this article also demonstrates the limitations of larger institutional entities (whether governmental or civilian) in either promoting or discouraging certain kinds of religious experiences within the Israeli public arena.

**Religious Influences within the IDF**

The IDF is widely seen as reflecting many of the prevalent currents and substantive tensions within Israeli society itself (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999: 3–4). As a result, social, political, and religious shifts within the IDF’s enlisted or officer corps have become a source of contention for both scholars and lay observers. One cause of tension has been the increased number of national religious soldiers serving in command and combat positions. Between 1990 and 2008, for example, the number of combat infantrymen who had attended religious state high schools affiliated with religious nationalism rose by 23.5 percent (*Ma’archot* 2010: 53).[[1]](#endnote-1) Many of these religious Zionists often attend pre-military rabbinic academies that are designed to spiritually fortify students for meaningful and long-term military service (Lebel 2015; Rosman-Stollman 2014).

This interest in the increasing religious character of the IDF has focused primarily on the ways in which both the military command and regular soldiers respond to religious ideas and practices. Levy (2010: 203; 2014), Libel and Gal (2015: 216) and Yefet (2016), for example, have observed how the increased presence of national religious soldiers in the military has placed excessive pressure on the military structure to accommodate their personal, ritual, and, at times, even political needs (Bick 2007; Cohen 2004; Levy 2016). Others have expressed concern that religious nationalist soldiers may feel an undo amount of loyalty to civilian (mostly politically right-wing) rabbinic authorities and thus possibly endanger the ability of the military to execute West Bank settlement evacuations (Levy 2016: 310; Rosman-Stollman 2014: 141). Taken together, these trends and their political and social implications are known in Hebrew as *hadata* (religionization), and the Israeli military is often seen as either actively encouraging the phenomena, or passively accepting it. Certainly, there are also scholars who do not see the increasing religious observance of IDF soldiers as representing a broader trend that limits the choices and freedoms of others (Ben Porat 2016; Rosner and Fuchs 2018; Statman 2019). Despite the range of this debate, very little of it is based in ethnographic and qualitative evidence.

The fundamental question arising from the increased number of religious soldiers is the role that religious discourse, thought, and practice ought to play within the military, and how that role may then shape the overall social and legal structure of Israeli society. An ethnographic and qualitative analysis of one Bible seminar can better illuminate how IDF officers on the ground grapple with competing religious and political loyalties. Such an analysis can add needed complexity to the unilinear focus of the religionization argument within military contexts by looking beyond the unilinear production and reception of religious content, focusing instead on the conflicts and tensions within and between military units regarding the interpretations of religious messages, practices, and ideas.

**Jewish Consciousness: Between the Rabbinate and the** Education and Youth Corps

A growing concern over the place of Judaism within the Israeli military served as the social and political context for the bureaucratic shift that occurred in January 2016 when the IDF’s Jewish Consciousness Unit was transferred from the IDF Rabbinate to its Manpower Division. However, this organizational restructuring was also the culmination of years of political controversy regarding the role that Jewish content and tradition should play in military units.

In 2001, Yisrael Weiss, then Chief Rabbi of the IDF, established what he termed the Jewish Consciousness Unit to instill combat values through what was viewed as the generational arc of the Jewish tradition (Hare 2008, IDF, n.d. b). This move by Rabbi Weiss deviated dramatically from the military rabbinate’s traditional role of simply supporting “the standards of religious observance maintained by troops from religious backgrounds” (Cohen et al. 2016: 4; Kampinski 2009: 147).

The subsequent Chief Rabbi, Brigadier General Avi Rontzki, went further in distinguishing a philosophical foundation for the rabbinate’s new interest in combat motivation and individual empowerment. For Rabbi Rontzki, the primary purpose of the military rabbinate was to “aid the commander in strengthening the combat spirit from the sources of Torah and the rabbinic sages” (Rontzki 2017). In this way, the military rabbinate participates in cultivating a sense of historical meaning and moral purpose within the commanding levels of the IDF’s combat units. As Rabbi Rontzki wrote in the rabbinate’s monthly newsletter *L’Halakha-Ul’Maase*;

A soldier who sees in himself a link in a long chain of Jewish military fighters with a national history behind him that is thousands of years old, and that placed before him a distinct Jewish mission and vision—that kind of soldier can call forth immense inner strength before going out to combat in defense of his nation and land. (Rontzki 2009: 1)

In the second decade of this century, Rabbi Rontzki and his rabbinic officers could often be found on the front lines as Israel repeatedly faced off against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in the North. “We explain to the regiment and brigade rabbis,” Rabbi Rontzki wrote in the rabbinate’s monthly newsletter published after 2008’s Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip, “that they have to be located with the field units wherever they may be—in training, exercises, operational activities, and even in combat” (Rontzki 2009: 1). Rontzki carried this expansive notion of the rabbinate into civilian life, when he frequently visited forward combat units, gave lectures, and worked to raise the morale of soldiers. In fact, the first author of this article recalls Rabbi Rontzki visiting his reserve unit in August of 2014, when they had been called up during Operation Protective Edge.

 Apart from its motivational activities in times of war, the rabbinate’s Jewish Consciousness Unit has taken an active part in more routine educational activities with specific religious connotations. For example, responding to an Information Request, the IDF Spokesperson’s office disclosed on its website that in the two years directly prior to the Jewish Consciousness Unit being placed under the authority of the Manpower Division, 15,090 soldiers took part in 200 of its educational seminars (IDF 2018). In addition, in 2017 alone, 26,700 soldiers took part in 442 “penitential tours, ” located mostly in and around Jerusalem.[[2]](#endnote-2) Of these tours, 124 were held in the City of David, a well-known archaeological site that is also a Jewish neighborhood bordering the contested East Jerusalem Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan.

The rabbinate is not the only unit tasked with offering pedagogical material on Jewish life and culture to IDF soldiers. The Israeli military has a well-funded and extensive Education and Youth Unit, which in many ways has competed both ideologically and bureaucratically with the rabbinate’s Jewish Consciousness Unit. The Education and Youth Unit is bureaucratically situated under the IDF Manpower Division, and its Chief Education Officer, like the military’s Chief Rabbi, also holds the rank of brigadier general and is directly answerable to the Chief of the General Staff. The unit “focuses on educational and command activities,” and is tasked with “strengthening the connection between the army and society, as well fostering an understanding and appreciation” of the IDFs own ethical code, known as the Spirit of the IDF (IDF n.d. a). As does the rabbinate’s Jewish Consciousness Unit, the Education and Youth Unit places a distinct focus on the command levels of the military, seeing the military “as educators who accept the nation’s children into their hands for a significant period of time” (IDF n.d. a).

In light of this prolific activity, individuals within the military, as well as some civilian commentators, have harshly criticized the Jewish Consciousness Unit’s new and more expansive role in cultivating combat motivation through their appeal to distinct Jewish pedagogical resources (Ben Simhon 2014), with opposition to the unit’s activities coming from a variety of overlapping sources. Observers both within and outside of the military have claimed that in presenting pedagogical material to soldiers and commanders on issues related to Jewish life and culture, the Jewish Consciousness Unit was not only subverting the traditional role of the Education and Youth Unit, but were doing so to further a right-wing political and ideological agenda (Amiran 2016; Asman 2015; Cohen 2015). Likewise, the State of Israel’s governmental State Comptroller’s report of 2012 criticized the relationship between the two units, stating that “there were flaws in regulating a reciprocal relationship between the Education Corps and the Military Rabbinate, and this affected the overall educational activity of the IDF itself” (Mevaker 2011: 1603).

When, in January of 2016, then IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot decided to transfer the Jewish Consciousness Unit from the rabbinate to the Manpower Division, he placed them on equal bureaucratic, as well ideological, footing with the Education and Youth Unit. The renamed IJCU was staffed with both religious Zionist rabbinic officers and representatives from the Education and Youth Unit. Instead of competing with one another, they were to work together under the watchful oversight of the Manpower Division—a supposedly politically disinterested arm of the Israeli Military. As Lt. Gen. Eizenkot wrote in a letter to his senior officers,

It [the tense situation] demanded a change in the current policies, where at its focus would be [the idea] of preserving the IDF as a Statist military, in a democratic country, that takes care to unite and unify all soldiers and that promotes enlistment for all. (Cohen 2016)

For Chief of Staff Eizenkot, the IDF was and should remain a neutral and unifying meeting ground where Israelis of all backgrounds would feel comfortable serving. The reassignment and renaming of the Jewish Consciousness Unit was meant to ensure that neutrality and unity.

What this change also meant, however, was that two opposing, and in many ways contradictory, perspectives on the role of Judaism within the military were to coexist organizationally under one command. Yisrael Weiss, the former chief rabbi of the IDF under whose authority the Jewish Consciousness Unit expanded its educational role, was emphatic about this problem in his sharply worded criticism of the IDF rabbinate for allowing this shift to take place.

The military Rabbinate today announced its own death. Her heart has been uprooted. There is no other Jewish army in this world, and it has no divine spirit. Its soul has run out. (Ezra 2016)

At stake for Weiss and others in the activities of the Jewish Consciousness Unit was something far removed from the stated official goal of promoting motivation and unit cohesion through cultural lessons. The unit’s ultimate—and perhaps unspoken—purpose was to cultivate a “divine spirit” within the ranks of the military. However, there was tension between Weiss’s and Eizenkot’s respective visions of Jewish consciousness within the pedagogical setting of the Manpower Division’s new IJCU biblical seminar. Interestingly enough, however, the junior and mid-level officers who participated in the seminar did not meaningfully relate to the vision of either of these leaders. Rather, for these participants, biblical narratives and tales resonated on a very different and personal level. For some, the seminar was a pleasant break from their normal duties and an opportunity to increase their military salaries. For others, the seminar was seen as providing a personal and spiritual connection to Judaism. Yet, in all cases, the military’s goals, as well as the fears regarding religionization on the part of some in the general public, were detached from the lived experiences of these participants.

**The Seminar: Background**

***Method***

As a new and controversial unit within the military, the IJCU itself is interested in both developing its pedagogical apparatus as well as better positioning itself within the wider politics of the IDF General Staff. In its attempt to achieve both goals, the IJCU engaged the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Ariel University in a research project to determine whether commissioned and noncommissioned officers who had participated in its seminars intended to use the pedagogical material with their own subordinates. The Department was engaged following a previous research project conducted by the authors of the present paper on the original Jewish Consciousness Unit while it was under the command of the Israeli rabbinate.

That original project analyzed the organizational development of command training within the rabbinate’s biblical seminar (Ben-Hador et al. 2020). From a theoretical perspective that was grounded in business administration, the original project found that while, in the short term, participants used biblical narratives in shaping their command and leadership styles, in the long term, a focus on biblical material only cultivated a “clash of values” between the individual soldier and the military structure (Ibid. 2020: 19). This current article complements the previous research in several ways. First, while it focuses on similar pedagogical material, the specific biblical seminar analyzed in this article was situated in an entirely different military context. Second, that change in setting enables this article to focus not on command organizational structure but, rather, to examine more directly the wider social and philosophical issue of religionization within the Israeli military that is empirically grounded in ethnographic experience. Finally, this article offers a thicker analysis of the seminar and its sociopolitical context by engaging with both current and classical theoretical literature in anthropology and religious studies.

According to general staff regulations, IDF commanders are required to present educational material related to Jewish life and tradition to their subordinates several times a month. Authorities within the IJCU were very aware that few commanders comply with this regulation, and were curious as to the social or cultural issues preventing commanders from doing so. This research was designed as a small-scale, although penetrative, ethnographic project. To that end, the first author was inducted into the reserves by the IJCU and contracted by the unit to participate in one of its week-long seminars, entitled “Leadership in the Pathways of the Bible.” All authors were given interview access to participants from previous seminars. In most instances, however, this access was fairly superficial, consisting primarily of phone calls, and did not really generate the kinds of in-depth responses that we had hoped for. At the same time, we were able to meet with a select group of officers who had participated in previous seminars on their individual military bases. Upon completion of the contracted project the authors applied for – and received – permission to publish the results of the research in academic presses from the IDF’s Behavioral Sciences Division.[[3]](#endnote-3)

The data and insights for this article were gathered while the authors were engaging in ethnographic research on behalf of the IJCU, and under the supervision of the Behavioral Sciences Division. Despite this working collaboration with the military, the results of the project were produced entirely independently from military oversight. The first author was given the same access to the seminar, under the same conditions, as every other participating officer. At no point during the course of the project did officers from either the IJCU or the Behavioral Sciences Division interfere with the ethnographic research design, or in the interpretation of the data. Indeed, the results were ultimately fairly critical of the military’s design, planning, and execution of the “Jewish Consciousness” pedagogical material. Moreover, the approval to publish granted by the Behavioral Sciences Division was not conditional upon any requirement on our part to censor portions of our data or analysis. This hands-off approach was certainly welcomed by the first author, who capitalized on it in his many informal conversations with seminar participants. However, it should be noted that while the IJCU did not interfere with the research design, it did, during various preliminary meetings, imply that it would have preferred a quantitative rather than a qualitative research design. It is possible that the unit’s openness to ethnographic research was the result of it perceiving such research as less authoritative than “objective,” quantifiable data.

This research was designed as a qualitative ethnographic project with the aim of exploring the subjective inner experiences of seminar participants as they related to the objectives and goals of formal military procedure and pedagogy. This kind of limited, yet in-depth, case study follows in the anthropological tradition of seeking to “extract the general from the unique” (Burawoy 1998: 5). Here, the actions, thoughts, and experiences of individuals in specific cultural contexts “reflects the [full] complexity of social structure” (Kempny 2006: 193). That is, through data grounded in local experiences, anthropologists extend out to offer tentative comments on wider social phenomena. While these data might be considered anecdotal in more quantitative contexts, they are no less grounded in the empirical experience of both the ethnographer and the ethnographic informants.

***Seminar***

The seminar was geared toward all commissioned and noncommissioned officers regardless of gender or religious persuasion. Seminar classes were held on the military base of Tsrifin (Sarafand), not far from the central Israeli city of Rishon LeZion.[[4]](#endnote-4) A total of 61 individuals were enrolled in the course, with ranks ranging from staff sergeant to lieutenant colonel. Although we did not conduct a specific survey, most participants seemed to identify as either secular or traditional. Also participating were several religious nationalists (identified by their knitted skullcaps) and two ultra-Orthodox officers. Due to the analytic complexity of differentiating between secular and traditional identities, this paper only specifically notes when a soldier openly identified as “religious” (Yadgar 2010). All Israeli high schools, both secular and religious, have a required course on the Bible, and most participants can thus be expected to have some familiarity with biblical narratives. However, any prior knowledge was not referred to during the seminar, either by the educational staff or the participating officers. Indeed, in light of the experiential focus of the seminar, it appeared as if the pedagogy was intended to supplant the dry material students had been required to study in high school.

The week-long seminar included both day-long classroom and field trip components. Classes ranged from a general overview of biblical literature and a history of the IDF’s use thereof, to lessons analyzing specific biblical battles from the vantage point of current IDF tactics.

Field trips included an excursion to the City of David in Jerusalem, a trip to a Hasmonean battlefield in the Ayalon Valley, a tour of some of Samson’s battle sites, along with tours of Nebi Samuel (traditionally believed to be the prophet Samuel’s burial location). The commander of the course was a reservist with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Throughout the course, he acted as something of a father figure for participants, organizing light snacks and drinks during classes and field trips, and even baking a cake at home, which he decorated with a picture of all participants and presented to them at the conclusion of the five-day course.

The seminar itself was an optional course in which participants could enroll for various personal and professional reasons. The IJCU framed its Bible seminar as a professional development opportunity for the IDF’s officer cadre. Similar to many other career development courses the IDF offers to its professional officer corps, officers were given salary raises as an incentive for enrolling in and completing the seminar. That is, the Bible seminar was framed for potential participants in the same way the IDF “sells” many of its other professional development courses, such as those on public speaking or stress management.

However, the funding requirements starkly differentiated the Bible seminar from other professional development courses. While for most courses, the participant’s home unit generally must transfer funds to the unit conducting the professional development course in exchange for that soldier’s participation, such payment was not necessary for the IJCU’s Bible seminar. As a result, there was less disincentive for units to release officers who would ordinarily have pressing duties in their home units to the seminar. As one religious captain in an air force programming unit noted, “Listen, it doesn’t cost anything to send me here, it helps me make more money, which we need since my wife is pregnant, and it’s also kind of interesting.”

What really differentiated this seminar from other IDF professional development courses was its unique content, which straddled the worlds of religious expectations, professional development, and the personal desires of participants. Nevertheless, each stakeholder within the seminar viewed its pedagogical goals somewhat differently, which resulted in a detachment between the thoughts and aspirations of the participating officers and the goals of the IDF as a state institution in promoting biblical seminars and Jewish heritage pedagogical material and.

Officially, the IDF uses biblical motifs and materials in ways that are quite dissociated from their overt religious contexts. Thus, discussing biblical stories at the site where they purportedly actually took place is meant more to cultivate unit formation and group cohesion than to raise religious consciousness (Shneur 2018: 65). In this way, biblical narrations become tools that relate more to military sociology and tactics than to individual piety or religious zealotry.

## For example, in one class on the first three verses in the fourth chapter of the Book of Judges, the lecturer, a former combat officer and rabbi, began discussing the military background to the Israelite war against Sisera and the Canaanites.

## [F]or he [Sisera] had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel. (Judges 4:3)

## The lecturer was quick to note the “intelligence” and political failure that must have occurred leading up to the events. Sisera’s collection of 900 chariots was similar to “Lebanon, where we missed or ignored the collection of thousands of missiles.”

## While highlighting the professional lessons one might infer from the Biblical narrative, the lecturer made sure to ignore the repeating spiritual cycles of sin and redemption that form the primary contextual theme of the Book of Judges (Stern 2018). In practice, however, the two paradigms are so easily intertwined in the hearts and minds of individual soldiers that it is often difficult to separate the professional from the spiritual contexts of the biblical narratives (Daprin et al. 2012: 46). In essence, there remains a distinct personal and pietistic subtext to the Biblical narratives that cannot be so easily elided by State or military dicta. The ways in which the official and subtextual interpretations of biblical narratives become detached from one another occur along a variety of vectors, not all of which are overtly spiritual.

**Social and Political Detachment**

***The Bible and Religionization***

## One way in which the IDF’s use of biblical themes becomes detached from the everyday experience of its soldiers quite simply revolves around the political position of religion within the IDF itself. In this sense, one mid-level officer in a combat infantry unit noted how a commander needs to be careful with his or her soldiers, especially when first taking up a commanding position, in that not all soldiers share similar religious thoughts, ideas, and practices. In this way, the officer remarked how a smart commander needs to know how to “walk between the raindrops,” and sometimes the Bible or Jewish heritage is too sensitive of an issue to discuss within a military unit. In daily command, the discourse of religionization itself – or the notion that the military is becoming beholden to external religious forces –influences the ways in which soldiers interpret the use of biblical pedagogy in military settings. As another noncommissioned officer noted, “I have so much to focus on, why fall into that trap? I don’t want it too look like I’m talking about religion, it will just make my job harder.” These statements further underscore how, while the IDF command might see the cultural use of biblical texts as just another professional tool (within a larger toolbox) with which to build unit morale and cohesion, the soldiers almost instinctively relate this kind of biblical pedagogy on religious themes as a deeply personal matter, which ought to remain so.

This almost instinctive classification of biblical stories into religious categories—as opposed to cultural tales with professional uses – runs counter to the ways in which the IDF has traditionally incorporated biblical themes to further both military and state goals. This traditional approach was highlighted during the seminar itself, on several occasions, by individuals with seemingly very different political stakes. In one instance, for example, an officer who originally came from the IDF’s Educational Corp presented a lecture that evocatively described the first swearing-in ceremony for IDF General Staff officers in 1948. To mark the occasion, David Ben-Gurion, who also held the defense portfolio, offered the following words:

In the oath you have just sworn you join the chain of Hebrew soldiers from the time of Joshua Bin Nun, Judges-Warriors, and Freedom Fighters… This chain that was cut off from the days of Simon bar Kochba and Akiva ben Yosef has been forged anew in our days, and the Army of Israel in its own land is once again marching to battle to fight for the freedom of the nation…

The officer giving the lecture noted how Ben-Gurion was asking his staff officers to see themselves as historical reincarnations of personages within Israel’s book of “national consensus,” the Bible.

A similar message was also echoed during a field trip the seminar took to the Judean foothills, an area traditionally considered the site of Samson’s biblical adventures. The seminar’s tour guide was affiliated with Israel’s national religious camp and worked for a right-of-center educational tour agency promoting the millennia-old history of the Jewish people in a way that “strengthen[s] the Jewish legacy, the love for the Jewish country and the connection to Israel and its roots” (Eshkolot, n.d.). In a manner similar to that of the educational officer, the guide noted how Israel’s early operations in its war of independence, as well as its military units, were named after biblical figures. He then played a popular song for the group originally written during Israel’s War of Independence about the IDF Samson’s Foxes commando unit:

Samson’s Foxes / They are once again raiding / And carrying the flames at night / From Gaza to Gat / once again the battle is joined /… yes the machine gun that spits its fire is new / But the fire itself is very old.

With these lyrics – “yes the machine gun that spits its fire is new / But the fire itself is very old” – the guide emphasized how Israel’s army, at the direction of David Ben-Gurion, has always viewed itself as the continuation of an ancient biblical tradition.

Scholars have long commented on the ways in which Israel’s first prime minister marshaled biblical motifs to serve national and political ends (Kedar 2013: 162; Shapira 1997). Nevertheless, while the Bible held national and even redemptive importance for Ben-Gurion (Shapira 1997: 664), its centrality to the act of State-building was far removed from any theological or deistic motif (Shapira 2004: 12). In practice, this discursive and nationalizing separation came across as somewhat artificial to many of the soldiers participating in the IDF’s Bible seminars. It is simply too difficult to divorce the Biblical narratives from a religious or otherwise spiritual context.

This complexity bears its own social weight within military units. As one non-commissioned intelligence officer claimed, “in my unit everyone jokes around with each other. It would just be weird to start talking about the Bible.” This sentiment was repeated by several individuals, who expressed how the biblical narratives, legends, and traditions were too weighty a topic to talk about in the very informal contexts that can often characterize IDF units. A young religious captain in an Israel Air Force (IAF) programming unit put the matter succinctly at the summation of a lesson on the prophetess Deborah, commenting to the first author, “I think if you would to start talking about this [biblical themes of Jewish heritage] in my unit you would come across as either disconnected [from the social setting] or patronizing.” Behind the captain’s words was an understanding that biblical narratives are personal spiritual matters and ought to remain so, at least within the context of the military unit.

**The Personal–Professional Detachment**

***The Bible as Spiritual Development***

Another related tension surrounding the seminar pertained to the ways in which the goal of professional development advocated by the IDF became detached from a notion of personal development expressed by the participants themselves, which manifested itself in various ways. For one, the religious context of the course became a source of confusion and tension. This disconnect first became apparent upon entering Tsrifin, when the first author asked directions from a secular or traditional officer who seemed as though he might have been participating in the program. When asked, “Do you know where the seminar is?” the officer responded simply, “You mean the Rabbanut [Rabbinate]?” Although an apparently insignificant response to a request for directions, it does reveal how, in the popular mindset of participating soldiers, the seminar itself was still related to the rabbinate, thus making it distinctly religious (as opposed to professional) in character.

The biblical subject matter of the seminar further highlighted the tension between the goals of the military that seeks to develop the professional skills of its officer corps and the more personal motivations of participants who might be interested in a salary raise or a simple distraction from routine activities. Several of the religious participants, for example, almost intuitively noted a distinct incongruity between the various pedagogical elements of the seminar, conveyed by representatives of both the rabbinic and the educational sides of the IJCU, as well as representatives of religious Zionist and secular civilian educational institutions. On the first day of the seminar, for example, a class on the history of biblical literature given by a representative of the City of David, the archaeological site and religious Zionist neighborhood in East Jerusalem, as already mentioned, was followed by a class on citizenship given by an officer formerly assigned to the Education and Youth Unit. The officer presenting the latter class, for example, began her presentation with the question, “Why is the army giving a seminar on the Bible?” Her answer centered on unit solidarity: since the founding of the State, she argued, the Bible has been seen as one common denominator unifying the different elements of Israel (Jewish) society. Citing such secular Israeli luminaries as Amoz Oz and Moshe Dayan, her answer was certainly given in the context of framing biblical literature as an integral part of national culture, yet it fell short of the more religious connotations that some of the national religious soldiers may have been expecting.

Indeed, some of these soldiers were expressly disappointed when these expectations were not fulfilled. As another junior officer, a religious programmer in an IAF unit noted, “At first, I was excited to attend the course; I thought it was religious, isn’t this the *rabbanut*? Now I’m not so sure.” Religious participants in previous courses were also sensitive to similar tensions. As one noncommissioned officer in the navy recalled in an interview concerning a previous seminar he had attended:

We came to the course under the assumption that the lecturers would be rabbis, a course that would be appropriate for a religious soldier, the kinds of courses that are given by the *rabbanut*. We got to the course and we realized that wasn’t the situation… there were a few lectures that we really got up and left because [they] bothered us.

 The social tension surrounding this conflict between religious expectation and the secular reality of the seminar was viscerally expressed in the interviews. The noncommissioned navy officer, for example, was willing to be interviewed only together with his navy base’s military rabbi (who did not participate in the seminar). The rabbi himself was a junior officer, just starting out in his military career. As a result, he refused to be recorded and was very circumspect in his criticisms of the seminar. Nonetheless, he noted that the seminar was not entirely appropriate for every soldier, some of whom come from traditional and religious backgrounds. This helps demonstrate how, in the mindset of some participants, the five-day seminar on the Bible was inherently infused with a religious or spiritual undertone that is quite distinct from the unifying message of cultural heritage promoted by the IDF.

## This disconnect is highlighted by an article authored by David Schneur (2016), a former commander of the Bible seminar, published in the IDF’s official academic journal *Ma’archot*. Schneur described the IDF’s use of biblical pedagogy in terms of a cultural heritage that does not require one to be a “kippa wearer” or to express a specific religious Jewish outlook (Schneur 2016: 64). The author quotes from Orde Wingate, a British army officer and passionate devotee of the Hebrew Bible who was instrumental in creating and training the pre-state elite guerrilla force known as the Palmach: “I’ve taken a great interest in the Bible, the Book of Books of generations. The supernal creation of the Nation of Israel. The eternal testament to your life in this land, by which right you exist today” (Ibid.).

## Schneur was emphasizing how Wingate used the Bible in a way that attested to the connection of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. While Wingate was certainly not an Orthodox Jew, he was, undoubtedly, a very religious Protestant Christian Zionist (Lehenbauer 2014: 56; Royle 2014: 18; Tulloch 1972: 44–45). It is indeed possible that Schneur perhaps missed the very real religious connotations of the passage. Here, cultural heritage and indigenous claims to the Land of Israel cannot be easily separated from a religious context. The Bible seminar presented a similar paradigm. Some participating soldiers could not help but expect to receive personal and spiritual value from a biblical seminar built around a professional learning ethos.

***The Bible as Personal Development***

In contrast to the above examples, where the pedagogical material fell somewhat short of the normative spiritual expectations of the religious participants, the seminar’s religious undertone could manifest in a number of ways. That is, the seminar itself might have been used as a venue through which participants could explore and better clarify their own spiritual leanings and personal beliefs.

The first author met Major Eitan,[[5]](#endnote-5) an intelligence officer in the Central Command, on the first day of the Bible seminar. Eitan at times came to class wearing a small knit kippa, ostensibly identifying him with the national religious sector of Israeli society, while at other times, he chose not to wear a head covering at all. The choices regarding head coverings for Jewish religious nationalists in Israel can often denote distinct religious, social, and political allegiances (Harel 2019). Eitan claimed he did not want to come to the course while publicly identifying with one specific stream of religious thought and practice.

Eitan tended to challenge seminar speakers with controversial questions. During the first class, for example, the lecturer, a representative from the national religious City of David archaeological site, asked participants with which Biblical figure they most identified. Eitan stated that he identified with Moses, since he married a gentile woman. The “Judaism expressed in the Bible,” he noted, “seems to be more open and diverse than what is practiced today”; he added that he wished the State of Israel could return to that more ancient Biblical formula. This somewhat politicized statement in a military context elicited some raised eyebrows from the other participants, yet the speaker simply responded by commenting how the Bible has strong contemporary relevance for Israeli society—a statement that certainly paralleled the pedagogical goals of the course.

At the same time, during one of the breaks between classes, Eitan was overheard asking one of the lecturers about moving to the City of David. Although widely frequented as a popular Jerusalem tourist attraction, the City of David is not known as one of the more pluralistic Jewish communities in Israel. When the first author asked him about this discrepancy, Eitan confirmed that he was interested in moving to the City of David and tried to explain how his seemingly maverick and pluralistic persona corresponded with his desire to move to a right-wing religious Zionist enclave. Eitan responded with a personal comment:

I have a dream to not be religious. To be secular, and to come to religion voluntarily and not through obligation. I said [to myself] I’m going to come to this course [on identity and Jewish consciousness] without a kippa… I want to talk about the Bible in a language that’s not religious. I wanted to look at things differently. … True, there is a conflict [between my pluralism and my interest in living in the City of David], but all our lives we live in this conflict around Judaism and religion. I was born religious, but now I want to build myself.

For Eitan, the IDF’s Bible seminar provided a medium through which he could build his own personal spiritual identity that included both a pluralistic adherence to open questioning alongside a fidelity to zealous religious nationalism. This venue for personal exploration starkly contrasted with the IDF’s broader goals of mobilizing themes of Jewish heritage to produce organizational cohesion and professional development. While Eitan may not have disagreed with viewing the Bible as a form of cultural heritage that could be drawn upon to improve organizational performance, he saw within the IDF’s Bible seminar something uniquely capable of molding one’s personal character, rather than a vehicle for mere professional development.

Eitan’s emphasis on personal and spiritual development was echoed by other participants. For example, in one informal conversation with a captain who was then serving in the IDF rabbinate, the captain noted, “I’m enjoying every moment of the workshop, but it’s not a professional course. I see it as something to help build myself, as personal development.” For her, the course offered historical lessons, interesting outings, and a chance to meet officers from the military beyond her own unit, but it fell short of the kind of practical and pragmatic instructions that she could use with her subordinates.

*The Bible as Personal Experience*

The experiential nature of the workshop itself, as seen through its heavy emphasis on field trips, helped to strengthen the personalized ways in which participating officers interpreted the pedagogical messages of the course. These field trips are viewed as integral elements of the seminar imparting professional and operational lessons to participants, including making soldiers familiar with local terrain and building a personal connection between the individual soldiers and the land they are sworn to protect (Shneur 2016: 65).

The first field trip, for example, was held on the second day of the seminar and brought participants to the City of David, directly south of the Old City of Jerusalem. The importance that the IDF itself placed on this specific component of the course was underscored by an offhand remark made by the commander of the seminar. The commander (a lieutenant colonel in reserves) mentioned to a participating officer how the head of the IDF’s manpower division – a full general – had called that evening to inquire as to how the field trip had gone. The inquiry itself was unusual in that the head of the Manpower Division had skipped over several command levels to speak directly with this lieutenant colonel. IDF generals serving on the General Staff rarely, if ever, personally call lieutenant colonels serving in the reserves. To be sure, the general’s call came on the heels of the death of an IDF private from dehydration on a similar trip to Jerusalem a few years earlier, but it also highlighted how sensitive the course was to the Manpower Division.

The excursion took the participants to portions of the archaeological site that are usually inaccessible to general visitors. The field trip included a somewhat arduous climb down a ladder dozens of meters beneath the ground to the lowest portion of the Iron-Age wall that once surrounded the City of David. The physically demanding portion of the seminar echoedhow Zionists have classically “consecrated”’ their connection to the Land of Israel through experiential and arduous fieldtrips (Katriel 1988; Rabineau 2014; Stein 2009). There, sitting sat at the foot of the wall and highlighted by the shadows of artificial lighting, the participants took turns reading verses from II Samuel, Chapter 6, which describe the Ark of the Covenant’s return to Jerusalem from its Philistine captivity. In this biblical scene, David is observed by his wife Michal dancing raucously with the people as he accompanies the Ark of the Covenant back into Jerusalem. Michal is disgusted by behavior that she views to be beneath the decorum of a king (II Samuel 6:2). The City of David’s guide for the group began referring to this chapter to discuss the ways in which leaders ought to relate to the common people. Participants were asked to debate the extent to which a commander ought to cultivate or transcend the professional distance that exists between officers and their subordinates.

## At the same time, however, participants viewed this trip not so much as a means to develop professional command skills but rather as an enjoyable outing meant to develop their personal appreciation for Jewish and biblical history. As one participant noted, “it was a fun trip, it gave me a new perspective on the Bible, and maybe even on Judaism, but it’s not really something I can *use* with my soldiers.” The IDF’s attempt to concretize an experiential field trip to the City of David into a lesson centered on professional development did not match the ways in which the participants personally assimilated the field trip.

**Conclusion**

In 1928, the famed linguist and cultural theorist Edward Sapir published an article entitled “The Meaning of Religion.” There, he argued that:

[Certain religious sentiments] persist even among the most sophisticated individuals, long after they have ceased to believe in the rationalized justification of these sentiments or feelings… (Sapir [1928] 1949: 137)

In contrast to most academic and lay perspectives of religious experience in the early- to mid-twentieth century that were predicting the victory of rationalism and science over what was seen as the more primitive and primal experiences of religious passion (Hadden 1987; Pepper 1989: 452), Sapir understood that religious pathos transcended the kinds of bureaucratic rationalism that modernity so often demands. Sapir, with his inimitable focus on the importance of appreciating individual experience in social analysis (Sapir 1938), implied that religious pathos was something that was quite inescapable by individual practitioners themselves and could not be easily subsumed under the reified rubrics of organized religion. While one can certainly critique the theoretical accuracy of Sapir’s concept of “religious survivals,”’ his point, at least in its ethnographic sense, was quite apt. Religious experience and contemporary Judaism cannot be easily subsumed under the categorical rubrics of professionalization, consciousness, or heritage.

Sapir’s conclusion is reinforced by the tension between how Judaism is experienced by individual officers in the IDF and how it is mobilized by the institutional framework of the Israeli military Here, biblical narratives fall between the cracks created by these two opposing views of how Jewish traditions ought to function within a military organization and civil society in general. On the one hand, the military would like to use biblical texts to both motivate its forces and offer a mode of professional conduct grounded in ancient sources. On the other hand, soldiers themselves who participated in the IDF’s Bible seminar saw biblical narratives, legends, and lore as fitting into distinctly personal and religious categories that do not easily coincide with the professional goals of the military. For these soldiers, biblical narratives function in ways that allow them to “sort out”—as Ortner implied (1973: 1341)—a different kind of social experience; one that is deeply vested in a discourse of personal growth and individual spirituality.

Scholars of religionization have linked the increased presence of religiously observant soldiers within the command and combat ranks of the IDF to an increase in the role that Judaism plays within the IDF itself. However, these analyses have not engaged in actually examining how soldiers mobilize religious discourse within their own military units. In this way, the discourse on religionization has overlooked two important factors. First, members of the IDF officers are tasked with utilizing biblical narratives to cultivate a Jewish consciousness among their subordinates. At the same time, the IDF itself realizes that these officers rarely choose to do so willingly. For participants of the seminar, biblical narratives cannot really be mobilized for professional ends. Rather, participants saw these narratives as falling into religious categories, meaning they must remain personal and deeply individualistic. Second, the social composition of IDF units tend to minimize at least the overt modes through which Biblical pedagogy and religious messaging can influence the professional character and operations of these units.

Considering the tense social context of these courses, one wonders why the IDF continues to insist on incorporating Jewish consciousness or religiously inflected pedagogical material into its military classrooms and field units. One could argue that in choosing to continue these courses, the IDF is pursuing a path of known least resistance. That is to say, canceling them would likewise precipitate a chaotic controversy within the ranks of the military, as well as within Israeli society more broadly, which the military would prefer to avoid.

 While academics, the popular media, and the military argue over the religious or professional souls of Israel’s soldiers, servicemen and women have their own personal and vernacular modes through which they address the dilemmas inherent in modern Israeli Judaism (Stern and Ben-Shalom 2020). In the context of the IDF’s biblical seminars, one finds these soldiers both critiquing the divergent messages within the IJCU and questioning the ways in which the Jewish tradition be professionally relevant. By examining how soldiers relate to contemporary Judaism, scholars are able to paint a thicker and more complex image of how religion and religionization functions within the IDF.

**Bibliography**

Agbaria, Ayman, and Zach Shmueli. 2019. “The ‘Social Soldier’ and the Mission to ‘Retrieve the Lost Honor’: An Ideal Image of the Desired Graduate of an Israeli General Pre-Military Academy.” *International Journal of Educational Development* 66: 88–95.

Amiran, Revital. 2016. “Security Problem: The War between the Military Rabbinate and Education Corps is a Recipe for Explosion.” Maariv.com <https://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/Article-549773> (accessed May 13, 2020). [Hebrew]

Asman, Itai. 2015. “The Education Corps wants to Instill a New Religion in the IDF.” https://www.kipa.co.il/ חדשות/דעות/חיל-החינוך-חפצים-להנחיל-דת-חדשה-בצהל (accessed May 13, 2020). [Hebrew]

Ben Simhon, Kobi. 2014. “The Strongest Army in the World: When and How did the Israeli Army Turn so Religious?” *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/.premium-1.2472342> (accessed March 4, 2020). [Hebrew]

Bick, Etta. 2007. “Rabbis and Rulings: Insubordination in the Military and Israeli Democracy.” *Journal of Church and State* 49 (2): 305–28.

Burawoy, Michael. 1998. “The Extended Case Method.” *Sociological Theory* *16* (1): 4–33.

Cohen, Asher, and Bernard Susser. 2012. “Religious Pressure Will Increase in the Future.” *Israel Studies Review* 27 (1): 16–20.

Cohen, Gili. 2015a. “Israeli Soldier Dies from Heatstroke after Collapsing in Jerusalem’s Old City.” *Haaretz[.](.%20https%3A/www.haaretz.com/soldier-collapses-dies-from-heatstroke-in-jerusalem-1.5383148%20)* [https://www.haaretz.com/soldier-collapses-dies-from-heatstroke-in-jerusalem-1.5383148](.%20https%3A/www.haaretz.com/soldier-collapses-dies-from-heatstroke-in-jerusalem-1.5383148%20) (accessed March 4, 2020).

Cohen, Gili. 2015b. “IDF prepares to Close its Jewish Consciousness Branch in the Military Rabbinate.” *Haaretz.* <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.2787669> (accessed May 13, 2020). [Hebrew]

Cohen, Gili. 2016. “Starting on Friday the Jewish Conciousness Branch will Leave the Military Rabbinate and be Subordinate to the Head of the Manpower Division.” *Haaretz.* <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.2896524> (accessed March 4, 2020). [Hebrew]

Cohen, Stuart A. 2004. “Dilemmas of Military Service in Israel: The Religious Dimension.” *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 12: 1–23.

Cohen, Stuart A. 2010. “Relationships between Religiously Observant and Other Troops in the IDF: Vision versus Reality.” In *The Relationship of* *Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and* *Non-believing Jews*. http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm.749586/Rabbi%20Dr.%20Aharon%20Lichten stein/Relationships%20Between%20 Religiously%20Observant%20and%20 (accessed March 4, 2020).

Cohen, Stuart, Aaron Kampinsky, and Elisheva Rosman-Stollman. 2016. “Swimming against the Tide: The Changing Functions and Status of Chaplains in the Israel Defense Force.” *Religion, State & Society* 44 (1): 65–74.

Daprin, Carmel, Noa Azulay, and Nurit Hamo. 2012. “The Israeli-Jewish Identity of IDF Commanders.” *Ma’archot*, 444: 42–47.

Drory, Zev. 2009. “The Nahal Haredi: The God-Fearing Battalion of the IDF.” *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 37 (2): 161.

Elbshen, Yuval. 2009. “How the IDF Turned into a More Religious Army” *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/study/.premium-1.1987593> (accessed March 4, 2020). [Hebrew]

Eshkolot. n.d. “Jewish and Israeli Culture Centers.” <https://www.eshkolot.org/eng.php> (accessed March 4, 2020).

Ezra, Guy. 2016. “Yisrael Weiss: The Army No Longer as a Soul”. *Srugim*. https://www.srugim.co.il 136107- -הרב-וויס-הרבנות-הצבאית-מכריזה-היום-על (accessed March 4, 2020). [Hebrew]

Fischer, Shlomo. 2012. “Yes, Israel is Becoming more Religious.” *Israel Studies Review* 27 (1): 10–15.

Hacker, B. C. (1993). “Military Institutions and Social Order: Transformations of Western Thought since the Enlightenment.” *War & Society* 11(2), 1–23.

Hadden, Jeffery. K. 1987. “Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory.” *Social Forces* 65(3): 587–611.

Harel, Amos. 2008. “That’s How the Chief Rabbi gets the IDF to Repent.” *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/education/1.1355654> (accessed May 14, 2020). [Hebrew]

Harel, Amos. 2011. “Is the IDF Becoming an Orthodox Army?” *Haaretz*. [https://www.haaretz.com/1.5032934](https://www.haaretz.com/1.5032934%20) (accessed March 4, 2020).

Harel, Asaf. 2019. “Under the Cover of the Kippah: on Jewish Settlers, Performance, and Belonging in Israel/Palestine.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 25 (4), 760–77.

IDF. n.d. a. “About the Education Corps.” https://www.idf.il/אתרים/חיל-החינוך/חיל-החינוך/אודות-חיל-החינוך/ (accessed May 13, 2020). [Hebrew]

IDF. n.d. b. “About the Military Rabbinate” [https://www.idf.il/אתרים/הרבנות-הצבאית/לשוניות/אודות-חיל-הרבנות-הצבאית/](https://www.idf.il/%D7%90%D7%AA%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A6%D7%91%D7%90%D7%99%D7%AA/%D7%9C%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%97%D7%99%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A6%D7%91%D7%90%D7%99%D7%AA/) (accessed 14 May, 2020). [Hebrew]

IDF. 2018. “Information Request Concerning the Military Rabbinate.” Spokesperson’s Report. https://www.idf.il/media/38344/תשובה-לבקשת-מידע-בנושא-הרבנות-הצבאית.pdf. [Hebrew]

Kampinsky, Aaron. 2009. “The Military Rabbinate and the Question of Dual Loyalty.” In *The Kippa and the Beret*, ed. Moshe Rahimi Elkana, 145–169. Orot, Israel.

Katriel, Tamar. 1988. “Touring the Land: Trips and Hiking as Secular Pilgrimages in Israeli Culture.” *Jewish Ethnology and Folkore Review* 17 (1–2): 6–13.

Kedar, Nir. 2013. “Ben-Gurion’s View of the Place of Judaism in Israel.” *Journal of Israeli History* *32* (2): 157–174.

Kempny, Marian. 2006. “History of the Manchester School and the Extended Case Method.” In *The Mancheter School: Practice and Ethnographic Praxis in Anthropology*, ed. T. M. S. Evans and Don Handelman, 180–201. Berghan Books.

Krasner, Efrat. 2016. “Now it’s Official: The Jewish Consciousness Branch Left the Authority of the Military Rabbinate.” *Kipa*. [https://www.kipa.co.il/חדשות/עכשיו-זה-סופי-ענף-תודעה-יהודית-יצא-מאחר/](https://www.kipa.co.il/%D7%97%D7%93%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%A2%D7%9B%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%95-%D7%96%D7%94-%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%99-%D7%A2%D7%A0%D7%A3-%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%93%D7%A2%D7%94-%D7%99%D7%94%D7%95%D7%93%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%90-%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%97%D7%A8/) (accessed March 4, 2020). [Hebrew]

Lebel, Udi. 2015. “Settling the Military: The Pre-Military Academies Revolution and the Creation of a New Security Epistemic Community—The Militarization of Judea and Samaria.” *Israel Affairs* 21(3): 361–90.

Lebel, Udi. 2016. “The ‘Immunized Integration’ of Religious-Zionists within Israeli Society: The Pre-Military Academy as an Institutional Model.” *Social Identities* 22(6): 642–60.

Lehenbauer, Mark. 2014. *Orde Wingate and the British Internal Security Strategy During the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936–1939*. Pickle Partners Publishing.

Levy, Yagil. 2010. “The Clash between Feminism and Religion in the Israeli Military: A Multilayered Analysis.” *Social Politics* 17 (2): 185–209.

Levy, Yagil. 2011. “The Israeli Military: Imprisoned by the Religious Community.” *Middle East Policy* 18 (2): 67–83.

Levy, Yagil. 2014. “The Theocratization of the Israeli Military.” *Armed Forces & Society* 40 (2): 269–94.

Levy, Yagil. 2016. “Religious Authorities in the Military and Civilian Control: The Case of the Israeli Defense Forces.” *Politics & Society* 44(2): 305–32.

Libel, Tamir, and Reuven Gal. 2015. “Between Military–Society and Religion–Military Relations: Different Aspects of the Growing Religiosity in the Israeli Defense Forces.” *Defense & Security Analysis* 31 (3): 213–27.

Lomsky-Feder, Edna, and Eyal Ben-Ari, eds. 1999. *The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*. SUNY Press.

Lubell, Maayan. 2016. “Israeli Military Struggles with Rising Influence of Religious-Zionists.” <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/israel-military-religion/> (accessed March 4, 2020).

*Ma’archot.* 2010. “The Position of Kippa Wearers in the Tactical Command of the IDF.” 432: 50–57. [Hebrew]

Mevaker. 2012. “62nd Annual Report for Year 2011 with Financial Statements for Fiscal Year 2010.” <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Pages/117.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1> (accessed March 4, 2020).

Ortner, Sherry B. 1973. “On Key Symbols 1.” *American Anthropologist* 75 (5): 1338–46.

Pepper, George. 1988. “Peter Berger: Modernization and Religion.” *CrossCurrents* 38(4): 448–56.

Rabineau, Shay. 2014. *Marking and mapping the nation: Simun Shvilim and the creation of Israel’s Hiking Trail Network.* PhD diss. (Brandeis University).

Reform Movement. 2016. “Position Paper on the Discussion in the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee on Transferring Jewish Consciousness in the IDF from the Rabbinate to the Manpower Division.”

<http://www.reform.org.il/heb/public-agenda/opinion.asp?ContentID=3070> (accessed May 13, 2020). [Hebrew]

Rontzki, Avichai. 2009. “The Military Rabbinate in Operation Cast Lead.” *Lehalacha U’leMaase: The Military Rabbinate Newsletter* March. [Hebrew]

Rontzki, Avichai. 2017. “Sits in Tents.” *Olam Katan*. https://www.olam-katan.co.il/ מאמרים /item/2869 (accessed March 4, 2020). [Hebrew].

Rosman-Stollman, Elisheva. 2014. *For God and Country? Religious Student-Soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Royle, Trevor. 2014. *Orde Wingate: A Man of Genius 1903–1944*. Pen and Sword.

Sapir, Edward. (1928) 1949. “The Meaning of Religion.” In, *Culture Language and Personality: Selected Essays*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum. University of California Press.

Sapir, Edward. 1938. “Why cultural anthropology needs the psychiatrist.” *Psychiatry* 1 (1): 7–12.

Schneur David. 2018. “Bible Trips in the IDF: Deepening a Connection to the Land and Improving Operational Ability.” *Ma’archot* 479: 62–65.

Shapira, Anita. 1997. “Ben-Gurion and the Bible: The Forging of an Historical Narrative?” *Middle Eastern Studies* *33* (4): 645–74.

Shapira, Anita. 2004. “The Bible and Israeli Identity.” *AJS Review* 28 (1): 11–41.

Stein, Rebecca. 2009. “Travelling Zion: Hiking and Settler-Nationalism in Pre-1948 Palestine.” *Interventions* 11(3): 334–51.

Stern, Nehemia. 2018. “The Social Life of the Samson Saga in Israeli Religious Zionist Rabbinic Discourse.” *Culture and Religion* 19 (2): 177–200.

Stern, Nehemia, and Uzi Ben Shalom. 2020. “Beyond Faith and Foxholes: Vernacular Religion and Asymmetrical Warfare within Contemporary IDF Combat Units.” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31 (2): 241–66.

Tulloch, Derek. 1972. *Wingate in Peace and War*. Macdonald and Company.

Yadgar, Yacov. 2010. “Maintaining Ambivalence: Religious Practice and Jewish Identity Among Israeli Traditionists—A Post-Secular Perspective.” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9 (3): 397–419.

Yefet, Karin Carmit. 2016. “Synagogue and State in the Israeli Military: A Story of ‘Inappropriate Integration.’” *Law & Ethics of Human Rights* 10 (1): 223–94.

1. Due to military regulations, the IDF’s quasi-academic journal, *Ma’archot*, often refrains from publishing the names of authors who are actively serving in sensitive roles. While the IDF refrains from recording the religious allegiance of its conscripts, the article argues that such beliefs can be inferred from their graduating high schools. As a result, the statistics cited are far from exact; many graduates come from traditional homes, and many cease identifying as religious during the course of their service. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. It is customary for observant Jews to recite certain penitential prayers in the month leading up to the Jewish High holidays. In Israel, many combine these prayers with pilgrimages to Jerusalem, specifically to the Western Wall in the Old City. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Behavioral Sciences Division (or *Machleket Mada’ei Hahitnahagut*—*MaMda”H*) is ultimately responsible for all social scientific research projects conducted on military personnel and within military frameworks. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. While we were told the pedagogical material presented was also appropriate for Druze Christian or Muslim soldiers, all participants in this seminar were Jewish. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Name altered to protect privacy. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)