The paper is based on a forthcoming book from Routledge Press (2017), authored by Prof. Edna Lomsky-Feder and myself. The book looks at Israeli women’s military service as a gendered rite of passage through which they learn to become gendered citizens. In other words, through military service they learn the meaning of citizenship for women.

Research on citizenship primarily emphasizes questions of policy, law, and legal regulations, thereby studying citizenship from a top down perspective. Conversely, our analysis shows how everyday concrete experiences shape citizenship as a lived experience (Lister 2007). We do so by focusing on daily emotional and embodied interactions with state institutions, as understood and interpreted by women soldiers.

The military is one of the main arenas for civic participation, since it is the institution most closely identified with the state, both in its ideologies, and its practices (Enloe 1988). Thus we can conceptualize the military as a ‘contact zone’ (Linke 2006), where the citizen and the state meet. The encounters with the state are always shaped by gender ideologies and interests, which are especially pronounced in the military, a hyper-masculine organization. Therefore, we analyze military service as a citizenship-conferring institution, and focus on how military service shapes the way women perceive the state and experience their citizenship.

The military is an especially effective test case for examining gendered encounters with the state for a number of reasons:

First, in the Israeli context, most Jewish men and women constitute their citizenship through military service. Yet, citizenship is not a homogenous experience and therefore we adopted the "Intersectionality" approach, according to which subjects are always located at the intersection of a number of power axes, foremost among them gender, class, race or ethnicity, and sexuality.
Second, the military is an organization that embodies the power of the state, whose mandate is to manage the violence on behalf of the state. Every encounter with the military is fraught with inherent violence, either overt or covert, and our analysis highlights this violence as an inherent part of being a citizen.

Third, the military is a hyper-masculine organization and therefore its gender regime is very visible. However, since the mid-1990s the military's gender regime has undergone significant changes, such as opening up combat roles to women, dismantling the women's corps, and gender integration of military courses. The military's gender regime is no longer homogenous and coherent structure but rather a highly dynamic field operating under the influence of conflicting pressures and opposing forces. The military is being subjected simultaneously to religious and conservative forces pressing for the preservation of a clear and distinct, separated gender order, and to bureaucratic and liberal forces that are working to disrupt this gender order.

In light of these dynamic changes, we seek to discard binary notions of gendered power relations, and examine the organization as one comprised of multiple gender arrangements (Haney, 2000). Gendered analysis of women's military service tends to assume a binary perspective, arguing that military service is either a mechanism for social mobilization and equal citizenship, or a reification of martial citizenship and a form of cooperation with a patriarchal and violent institution. We reject these two schemas of the military as too simplistic, and aim to problematize these assumptions, arguing that the military's inequality regimes both create varied opportunities and set obstacles for different intersectional groups of women, thereby generating diverse encounters with the state.

If one begins with three assumptions, there can be no more discussion of "women in the military" In general. Rather, the critical question is “who serves where?” Why are some groups of women tracked into clerical positions and others into prestigious training roles? What is the subjective experience of each gendered and classed group during military service? That is: military service experiences of different groups of women must be examined on the basis of their social status, and the positions in which they serve.

Having said that, we do not ignore the masculine nature of the military, and argue that all of the women in the military experience military service to one degree or another as "outsiders within." This is a dual positioning, rife with internal
contradictions, which is experienced differently in various military arenas, but has concrete ramifications on the military service experience.

Against this backdrop, the research asked how women interpret their encounter with the state through their participation in the institution associated more than any other with citizenship. The study was based on more than 120 interviews with and testimonies by women about a decade after their military service. Based on the analysis of the interviews, we contend that the gendered encounters with the state can be understood through three interrelated concepts: Multi-level contracts; Contrasting gendered experiences; Dis/acknowledging violence.

Together, these concepts allow us to examine the complexity of women’s encounters with the state at high resolution and not through broad and all-inclusive social categories, while simultaneously addressing the ‘carrot and the sting’ of the state and its institutions.

Multi-Level Contracts

We argue that the experience of military service of various intersectional groups is shaped by differential social contracts between the state and the citizen, which reflect both official citizen duties and rights and unofficial expectations and obligations. The contract of individuals with the military consists of three interrelated layers: the civic contract that defines the link between the citizen’s rights and obligations; a group contract that reflects the specific needs, interests, and privileges of a given intersectional groups; and an individual contract involving actual bargaining and agreements with the organization.

The contract, which is a product of the negotiations and power relations between the sides (Rubin 2012), derives its unique character from the cultural schemas that shape the women's expectations of service. Thus the experience and interpretation of military service are shaped by the question: what is the nature of the contract between the woman soldier and the military organization and to what extent is it honored or violated?

For example: we discovered that women who served as secretaries present two contradictory narratives of their military service. Lower class women, from social and geographic periphery of Israel, who served as secretaries, described their service as a very positive, enriching and empowering experience. This interpretation emerges from the nature of their informal contract with the military, which stresses military
service as a venue to achieve a sense of respectability, which, according to Beverly Skeggs (1997), connects personal identity with national identity. For them, military service was an opportunity to leave home under the auspices of the state, gave them a sense of autonomy away from home, independence, and expanded their social experiences. That being the case, the military fulfilled its part of the contract with them – since, to fulfill the respectability contract, it is enough to enlist and successfully complete the years of service, whereas the role in and of itself is less important.

In contrast, middle class women enlist in the military with a sense of entitlement to self-fulfillment, and to gender equality. They expect to serve in a “good” position in the military, which will advance their social status, and showcase their personal abilities. Service as a secretary, which pushes them into a role that symbolizes traditional femininity in the military, is experienced as a gross violation of their contract with the military. Therefore, they portray their service in terms of despair, disappointment, suffering, boredom and alienation.

Thus, if for lower class women, military service is perceived as a path to acquiring respectability and inclusion in the collective, and the military fulfills its part of the contract; for middle class women, military service is supposed to ensure their preferred status within the borders of the collective, and service as a secretary is considered an abrogation of that contract.

Other groups have different contracts. For example, religious women, who are now enlisting in rising numbers, are told by their rabbis and teachers not to enlist, for fear that they will compromise their modesty, or abandon the religious way of life during military service. For many of them, voluntary enlistment is a personal expression of their objection to the religious establishment, and identification with Israeli religious feminism (see Ross 2004, Irshai 2012).

Therefore, their unique contract is formulated in light of the religious ban on military service, and emphasizes that women can serve in the military like men, while continuing to adhere to a modest religious lifestyle as religious women. The challenges to fulfilling the contract that integrates religiosity and militarization colors their gendered military experiences, and every experience is interpreted through this prism.

During their service, for example, they are preoccupied with cultural boundary work, in order to shape a religious visibility. Insisting on wearing a long skirt during
their daily work, for example, is intended to show the military's secular environment, and the religious environment at home, that they are succeeding in maintaining a religious lifestyle.

Moreover, for the first time in their lives, they must make their own decisions regarding Jewish Law: Should they eat a slice of pizza that secular friends ordered and paid for on the Sabbath? Should they sit with secular friends who are listening to music on Friday night after the Sabbath comes in? When the women rely on their own judgement in constituting their religiosity, they develop religious autonomy, which undermines the basic principle of obedience to the Orthodox rabbinic model.

Thus, the religious women’s contracts shape their military experience in ways that are tense and rife with contradiction: As religious women in a secular world, modest women in a permissive world, women who negate sexuality in a world of young people, and women in a masculine environment. It is an experience in which religiosity and gender inseparably intersect and shape each other, and separates them from the rest of the women and men soldiers.

**Contrasting Gendered Experiences**

Although the military is an "extremely gendered organization" (Sasson-Levy 2011), it does not maintain a uniform gender order. Gender reforms in Western militaries over the last 15 years have created a diverse map of women’s integration into the military. As a result, women may occupy highly varied positions in the organizational gender regimes, which, in turn, produce and reproduce different gendered experiences that have long-lasting effects on women’s gender awareness.

Hence, the experience of citizenship is also shaped by the different opportunities to do gender open to the women.

Despite the military organization being hyper-masculine, it actually offers the women a broader range of gendered experiences in comparison to the civilian labor market. Military service pushes some of the women into clear traditionally feminine roles (as secretaries), to others it offers “worthy femininity” in roles as the man’s “helper” (like welfare officers). The military accords some women the opportunity to cross gender boundaries, for instance as infantry instructors or combatants, and finally, a large group of women receive the rare opportunity to experience a blurring of gender differences to some extent, in units such as Intelligence. These experiences
create very different gendered experiences from the point of view of body, sexuality, and emotion management.

Through embodied experiences, the women learn their positionality in the army, they learn the boundaries of the use of their feminine body or their military power, they learn which emotions are permitted and which must be concealed, what is the right command model, how they can or should respond to sexual harassment. These experiences provide concrete meaning to the women’s participatory citizenship, and teaches them their position vis-à-vis the state.

Thus, for instance, we found that women who served in high prestige feminine roles as welfare or education officers, learn to accept and even to enjoy the traditional role of “helper” to the combat soldier, and they integrate easily into the existing gender order. It seems that certain roles anesthetize the women soldiers’ gender awareness, while simultaneously strengthening their commitment to the traditional gender regime.

In contrast, women in so called “masculine roles”, get a unique opportunity to cross gender boundaries, physically and spatially. Experiencing so-called “masculine” roles teaches the women that gender boundaries are largely arbitrary. They learn to sever the link between sex and gender, distance themselves from essentialist gendered perceptions, and question traditional gendered structures. However, they are constantly aware that crossing boundaries is temporary and contingent upon the men’s approval. Moreover, blurring feminine behaviors and adopting masculine practices, which were an advantage in the military, turn out to be a disadvantage in civilian life and upon their discharge they are subjected to pressures to perform “worthy femininity”. The experiences of crossing gender boundaries and the return journey to normative femininity develop and sharpen their gendered lens. They acquired gendered reflexivity and understand gender as a fluid category through which they interpret social reality in general and their military service in particular.

Surprisingly, women in Intelligence roles experience a unique blurring of gender differences. Women, just like men, are accepted into intelligence roles largely on the basis of their academic record in high school, their mastery of foreign languages and their sophisticated knowledge of computers. The intelligence work of both men and women is done for the most part facing a computer screen. Reducing the importance of the warrior’s masculine body as criteria for evaluation creates conditions for blurring gender differences. Indeed, women who served in intelligence
described a relatively egalitarian experience and a safer environment for women. Another factor that mitigates gendered power relations in the intelligence is the high visibility of gay soldiers in these units, which apparently allows for a more flexible gendered identities regime. Thus, the military offers a rare opportunity in these roles to experiment with relatively egalitarian gender relations.

Although the military offers women varied gendered experiences, these experiences are always shaped and interpreted in light of the image of the combat soldier, who stands at the top of the military hierarchy and embodies the ultimate citizen. This image demarcates the women’s marginality and limits them. That is, the military opens up opportunities for a variety of gendered experiences, but at the same time clearly lays down the patriarchal boundaries.

**Dis/acknowledging violence**

Violence is inherent to every military organization. Militarized violence is intentionally directed at an external enemy yet it unavoidably penetrates into the organization and is often directed towards the men and women soldiers themselves as well. The external and internal violence feed into each other, and are always gendered. Consequently, men and women soldiers in the military are both agents and victims of violence, regardless of their intentions.

However, most of the interviewees did not discuss the military’s violence. Despite the fact that some of the women served during the First Lebanon War (1982 - 2000) and others served in the Occupied Territories, these experiences were not mentioned in their service stories. There was a "thunderous silence" regarding violence, so much so that it sometimes seemed as though they were discussing a civilian workplace, and not service in a military that engages often in premeditated wars or military operations, and controls a civilian population.

It is, of course, plausible to argue that they do not discuss the violence since they did not encounter it directly, as most of them served on the home front. Yet, it is clear that their silence is part of the denial and silencing mechanisms of the Occupation in Israeli society. In an attempt to preserve the image of the just society and the moral army, Israeli society activates various mechanisms to deny the military violence both within the military organization and within larger society (for instance, by emphasizing victimhood, the Holocaust, stressing the traumatic discourse, and
ignoring Palestinian suffering). In this context, any discussion of the military’s violence is perceived as treacherous criticism.

However, we argue that in addition to general silencing mechanisms, there are specific gendered silencing mechanisms that are deployed against women soldiers. The women have difficulty talking about the violence in the military because of their status as ‘outsiders within’ the military organization. As outsiders within, the women do not have the social legitimacy to critique the military’s violence and to undermine the institution that bestows upon them, seemingly, the opportunity to be equal to men. When women serve in the military, and especially in combat or semi-combat roles, they are made to feel grateful that they are allowed to participate in this endeavor, which had been previously closed to them. Thus, they find it difficult to undermine the legitimacy of the institution which grants them the opportunity to ostensibly be equal to men. Hence, the women's entry into the military arena subjugates them even more to masculinist hegemony whether out of identification with masculine actions or as a form of self-censorship. The status as “outsider within” then, is a silencing and silenced one, which does not permit criticism.

The few women who broke the silence and gave testimonies to the organization “Breaking the Silence” are those who served in the Occupied Territories, and use their exposure to violence to gain legitimacy to voice political opinions. The testimonies of these women fully reveal the silencing mechanisms that operate on women soldiers. The testimonies expose their feelings that they could not criticize military conventions during their service: the women did not speak up during their service because of the very real fear of being socially ostracized and labeled, as well as due to a sense of weakness and being in the minority. The few who dared raise even the most measured criticism were marked as leftists and informers, and had to pass more initiation rites than others to prove their loyalty to the army and the state. Their professional knowledge was undermined, and they were excluded from the inner circle of military knowledge. Indeed, even women in non-traditional roles learn very quickly that it is not worth their while to talk about the violence the army perpetrates.

Hence, the military’s violence of war is absent from the women’s narratives because, as women, they ‘don’t know’, they ‘are not entitled to know’ and ‘It is not worth it to talk about it because the personal cost will be too high.’ Hence, silencing
mechanisms are enacted regarding their knowledge, their ethics and their vested interests.

These silencing mechanisms work differently with regard to sexual harassment. The main silencing mechanism that emerges from the interviews is that they “don’t know” if they have been harassed or not. The women described a wide spectrum of behaviors that caused them to be offended, embarrassed, or caused them actual physical discomfort, but they were unable to clearly define them as incidences of sexual harassment, and, therefore, found it difficult to oppose them. For the most part, they did not talk about harsh sexual assaults or rapes (like the epidemic of rapes in the US Military), but rather described ongoing banal harassment that arises from serving in a masculine chauvinistic environment that perceives women first and foremost as sexual objects.

Such harassments are experienced, for example, when during training, the commander orders the women soldiers to spread their legs “like a whore”; when soldiers collectively sing lewd songs to any woman soldier passing by on base, or when soldiers invite a woman stripper to an air-force unit’s social evening of men and women pilots. These incidences of daily harassment are so widespread, that we propose defining the Israeli military’s culture as a “culture of sexual harassment”. Nevertheless, the women soldiers had difficulty identifying the harassment as harassment. They frequently said “Today I know that it was harassment, but then I did not”, or “I thought that if it is not rape then everything is fine.”

From an interpretative point of view, these behaviors constitute 'gray areas' of sexual harassment that are hard to understand or address. As these gray areas leave the woman soldier uncertain of the situation, sexual harassment remains ubiquitous and ambiguous. The difficulty interpreting the incident reduces the woman’s ability to act, thus she continues to be injured, without the ability to explain the damage, respond to it, or stop it.

One can argue that these “grey areas” of sexual harassment are the “natural” outcome of intense and crowded living between young men and women in a chauvinist culture. But we argue that this fuzzy interpretative space where women do not know whether they have been harassed is actually a social construct that preserves the woman as the Other in the military. Despite the fact that today there is clear legislation, education, and punishment for sexual harassment, the military culture succeed in maintaining the phenomenon of routine sexual harassment by shaping it as
an area which is impossible to clearly define, and thus shape women’s military service as an ongoing experience of discomfort, insecurity, and threat.

The existence of these two opposing processes – of de-gendering and re-gendering the military sphere – shows that the struggle for women’s place in the military is still perceived as an ongoing problem. As more and more women are present in the military space and cross gender boundaries, the need to mark them as Others grows more acute; Hence, the women are harassed not because they tempt the men, but because they “pollute” the masculine space, and the harassment is intended to draw the boundaries of the military as a masculine territory.

The concept of dis/acknowledging violence allows us to analyze women's dynamic movement on the spectrum between knowing and not-knowing about the violence, without succumbing to binary perspectives

**Conclusion**

The women’s encounter with the state at such a formative time, during an active violent conflict, becomes an initiation process into gendered citizenship, where the women learn their place as women vis-à-vis the state; they learn to be obedient and at the same time act as agents and maximize the capital the state can give them; They strongly experience their marginal location as women in a masculine organization and at the same time some of them get to enjoy the opportunities the state grants them. They are exposed to the state’s violence but they are socialized to deny this violence and to cope with it.

The three key concepts we proposed – the multi-level contract, the contrasting gendered experiences, and dis/acknowledging violence – enable us to learn the complexity and multiplicity of encounters with the state: The contract demarcates what different intersectional groups of women may expect to receive from the state – Thus, it signifies the state’s power to benefit or damage the woman citizen. In contrast, through dis/acknowledging violence a woman must come to terms with the oppressive power of the state, and learn the manner in which she contends with that violence. Finally, the gendered experience shaped by women’s different military roles teaches them the gendered meanings of citizenship as a lived experience in everyday life.

The significance of these concepts is that they provide an especially effective tool to examine any encounter with the state: to every encounter with a state
institution the citizen arrives with specific contract and certain interpretive schemas; every state institution offers contrasting opportunities to doing gender, and every encounter contains some element of violence. The power of these concepts lies in their ability to examine gendered citizenship at high resolution and not through broad and all-inclusive social categories, while addressing simultaneously the ‘carrot and the sting’ of the state. Thus this approach allows us to study women relations with the state in a critical but non-deterministic way.

Bibliography

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