

HURLED INTO THE HEART OF DARKNESS: MORAL LUCK AND THE HEBREW LITERATURE OF THE INTIFADA*

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This paper proposes an ethical reading of literary works that describe the Israeli soldier in the Intifada. It examines the experiences of Israeli soldiers, the nature of the situation, and the protagonist's choices and identity, in the light of the philosophical concept of moral luck (following Nagel's categories), which is generally defined as a state where a moral agent is assigned moral blame or praise for an action even though a significant part of what he does depends on factors beyond his control. Reading representative works, I show that the Israeli soldiers in many literary works find themselves in a state of bad moral luck that is both circumstantial (stemming from the Occupation) and constitutive (stemming from the military socialization process). By covering moral and immoral protagonists, realistic and non-realistic prose, the paper examines the reflection of the complexity of the conflict and the place of the individual in a situation of national and political dispute.

In 1988, I was seventeen years old. My brother, a soldier in a combat paratrooper unit, was serving in the Occupied Territories. He was twenty years old. It was the period of the first Intifada, and after weeks of fighting, he had returned home to celebrate his birthday, which fell during Purim, the Jewish holiday when dressing up in masks and costumes is a religious tradition. Instead of celebrating, though, he sat in his room, played his guitar, and sang the following lines: "I'm disguised as Haman the villain, a red beret on my head." Haman the Agagite is the main antagonist in the book of Esther, which is read in synagogues during Purim. In the book of Esther, Haman appears as an evil man intent on destroying the Jewish people. In my brother's song, he referred to himself as Haman, and symbolized evil by his red beret, the specific part of his uniform indicating a paratrooper unit. In his song, the army uniform is transformed into the Purim costume of Haman, and he positions himself as an evil-doer.

What can we learn from these lines about the experience of Israeli soldiers during the Palestinian Intifada? To what extent do they have an ethical meaning? My brother's song sheds light on the grim feelings of someone hurled into a realm where he finds himself disguised as a villain. This feel-

* This research was supported by The Open University of Israel's Research Fund (grant no. 37056).

ing is found in many literary texts that focus on Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and during the two Intifadas,¹ where friction was at its utmost between soldiers and Palestinian civilians.

My paper proposes an ethical reading of literary works that describe the Intifada. I focus on four literary texts presenting different angles of this experience: Yitzhak Ben-Ner's *Ta'atuon* (Delusion, 1989) and Roy Polity's *Arnavonei gagot* (Roof rabbit, 2001), both deal with the first Intifada, and Liran Ron-Furer's *Tismonet hamahsom* (Checkpoint syndrome, 2003) and Asher Kravitz's *A'ani Mustafa Rabbinoitch* (I, Mustafa Rabinovitch, 2004) are set in the 1990's and the second Intifada.

I examine the experiences of Israeli soldiers, the nature of the situation and the protagonist's choices and identity, in the light of the concept of moral luck,² which is generally defined as a state where a moral agent is assigned moral blame or praise for an action even though a significant part of what he does depends on factors beyond his control. Following Thomas Nagel's categories, I attempt to show that in these works, Israeli soldiers find themselves in a state of bad moral luck that is both circumstantial and constitutive. I discuss two main aspects of soldiers' experiences. The first is a state of feeling responsible, guilty, or confused for deeds committed and an ensuing state of personal disorientation and loss of identity; the second is being hurled into a situation that no one can handle morally or successfully. In my analysis, I focus on the circumstantial aspects of this experience stemming from the Occupation, as well as the constitutive aspects of the soldiers' personalities structured by the military socialization process.

¹ The first Intifada, directed against Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories, broke out in 1987. Palestinian actions ranged from civil disobedience—demonstrations, stone throwing, and aggressive behavior in civil society, with the participation of women and children—to resistance movements, general strikes, boycotts of Israeli products, refusal to pay taxes, graffiti, and barricades. The second Intifada, another period of intensified Palestinian-Israeli violence, broke out in late September 2000. The Intifadas were also characterized by terrorist attacks and suicide bombers inside Israel.

² As formulated in T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Nagel's book has been translated recently into Hebrew (*She'elot almavet* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2010]). The contemporary Hebrew translation gives an opportunity to reread this philosophical text and to understand its relevance to the Israeli condition. On moral luck, see also: B. Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); B. Williams, "Postscript," in *Moral Luck* (ed. D. Statman; Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 251–258. Although William's work is very inspiring, I chose to focus in this paper on Nagel's investigation of the term, since his categorization of different types of moral luck is detailed and helpful to my discussion. In using the philosophical term moral luck in my discussion of literary texts I follow Marta C. Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). In this article I do not discuss the philosophical issue of the validity of idea of moral luck. I show the relevance of this term to the literary corpus.

I focus on four literary texts presenting different angles of this experience. Some of these have also been documented in soldiers' testimonies and in academic research investigating the effects of the Intifada on Israeli soldiers.³ While I refer to these testimonies and research, the article is primarily an analysis of literary texts. Naturally, the literary mode often stresses things differently, and uses poetic and artistic styles and techniques. It is therefore worth noting that my study in general, and the application of moral luck in particular, are not intended to make a statement regarding the Israeli Occupation and Israeli soldiers, but only to examine specific, related aspects within a certain political and literary arena. Moreover, this analysis is not designed to defend or to justify the Israeli soldiers and their actions nor is it meant to judge their deeds. The theory of moral luck ascribes moral blame or responsibility that should not be removed. Nevertheless, this investigation can help understand the complexity of the conflict and the place of the individual in a situation of national conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ISRAELI SOLDIER OF THE INTIFADA IN ISRAELI PROSE

The literary community in Israel has always been an important part of the cultural arena by supporting hegemonic stances or criticizing them in direct and explicit or indirect and implicit ways. However, unlike Israeli drama (e.g., Hanoach Levin, Joseph Munday, and later Yehoshua Sobol) and Israeli poetry (e.g., Meir Wieseltier), Hebrew prose has usually been slower to respond to political situations. In fact, in the first two decades of the occupation (1967–1987), Hebrew prose rarely engaged with these political issues.⁴ The years before the Intifada, nevertheless, reveal some re-examination of

³ See for example: P. Kidron, ed., *Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience* (London: Zed Books, 2004); R. Gal, ed., *Hamilhama hashviet: Hashpaot ha'intifada al hahevera be'israel* (The seventh war: The impact of the Intifada on Israeli society; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990); E. Ben-Ari, M. Maymon, N. Gazit, and R. Shatzberg, *From Checkpoints to Flow Points: Sites of Friction between the Israel Defense Forces and the Palestinians* (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, Gitelson Peace Publications, 31, November 2005); A. Hendel, "Me'ever latov velaro'a: Hatismonet busha ve'ahrauit be'edyot hayalim" (Beyond good and bad: The syndrome of shame and responsibility in soldiers' testimonies), *Theoria ubikoret* 32 (2008): 45–69; R. Rosen and I. Hamerman, *Meshorerim lo ichtevu shirim bemadim be'erezt Ishmael* (In the land of Ishmael, poets in uniform do not write poetry; Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1990). See also the website of "Breaking the Silence." Online: http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/index_e.asp.

⁴ See: Y. Oppenheimer, *Hazhut hagdola lomar lo: shira politit be'israel* (The right to say no: Politic poetry in Israel; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004); Y. Oppenheimer, *Me'ever lagader: itzug ha'aravim basiporet ha'evrit vaha'israelit 1906–2005* (Barriers: The representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli fiction, 1906–2005; Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved and Sapir, 2008).

the occupation as reflected in David Grossman's important text *Hiuch hagdy* (The smile of the lamb, 1983),⁵ which can be considered the precursor of Hebrew prose on the Intifada.

The outbreak of the Intifada created an enormous amount of debate over the occupation and the role of the Israeli soldier. The first two texts that deal with the Intifada and focus on the Israeli soldier were published in 1989. Avi Valentain's *Shahid* (1989)⁶ tells the story of two individuals. The first is an Israeli Jew doing reserve duty during the Intifada. He is an insurance agent from Ramat Hasharon, who is married with three children, and sick and tired of his routine life. The second is a Palestinian, a story-telling painter who finds himself in the center of a nationalist struggle. The novel describes the encounter between the two, in light of questions regarding the occupation and military rule in the occupied territories.

Itzhak Ben-Ner's, *Ta'atuon* (Delusion),⁷ one of the texts I focus on in this article, was published that same year, but chose a different poetic path to describe the situation. Ben-Ner presents an allegorical text that contains graphic descriptions of Israeli soldiers torturing Palestinians. The novel consists of four parts, each of which is narrated by a different character. The first part, narrated by Holly (a man), describes the gradual moral decline of an Israeli soldier. Raised and educated in a typical family that believed in the liberal values of justice and eschewed violence, he gradually learns to be violent and cruel and finds satisfaction in torturing Palestinians while serving in the Territories. His sadistic behavior leads to his arrest, and he is sent to a military jail, where he begins to emit a stench. The terrible stink that emanates from his body is clearly a metaphor for the moral turpitude of the army and the state. Because of his bodily decrepitude, he is sent to a mental institute. Yet not everyone thinks Holly stinks. A group of settlers interpret his stench as a wondrous perfume, a kind of sacred symbol and rescue him from the institute with a celebration of song and dance to make him their spiritual inspiration. The odor perceived in the text is an illness no one can cure. Moreover, it is contagious—even the psychiatrist expresses messianic enthusiasm and the madness continues to spread like a disease.

The second part is narrated by Holly's father, Oded Tzidon, a doctor who lost his wife in a shooting attack and who describes himself as a warrior for peace. Holly's father collapses after he learns that he has lost not only his wife but also his son. He cannot get over the terrible smell produced by his

⁵ D. Grossman, *Hiuch hagdy* (The smile of the lamb; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1983).

⁶ A. Valentain, *Shahid* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1989).

⁷ Y. Ben-Ner, *Ta'atuon* (Delusion; Jerusalem: Am Oved, 1989).

son. Oded finds himself in the midst of an inner struggle, where his beliefs are tested to the extreme. As a former peace activist, he has to face the death of his wife in a terror attack and the behavior of his son who deviates from the moral norms he instilled in him.

The third part of the novel is narrated by Charul, a secret service agent searching for wanted Palestinians. This part also presents the clash between beliefs and ideology and the actual situation. Charul causes a military operation to fail when he decides, without consulting his commander, to kill a Palestinian who is later found to be a double agent employed by the Israelis. His eagerness to perform an extraordinary operation ruins him and destroys his career. The final part is narrated by Michel Sachtout, an Israeli soldier institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital. Sachtout is a kind of mirror image of Holly, but he does not attract the attention paid to Holly and his odor. Rather he is left in a twilight zone of insanity where he is unable to reach out to people or speak clearly.

Ben Ner's novel confronts ideologies, values, and military norms in a boundary-less realm. No one is apparently immune from the situation or can maintain attitudes that he considered right and humane. The disparity between values and principles and the actual situation is highlighted in Yuval Shimony's text "Aomanut hamilhama" (Art of war, 1990).⁸ In this short story, the commander of an operation decides to train for combat in a built-up area by constructing a perfect life size model of a residential combat zone. In a Kafkaesque manner, the model becomes the essence of the operation—the whole group works on every detail of it, trying to model the people and even the birds. They are never ready to carry out the operation, and they cannot make the model perfect. Thus training and improving the model replace the "real thing." Shimony's text mocks the military situation *ad absurdum* through allegory. Places and times are not mentioned in the text, and thus the whole event is apparently distanced from the Israeli context.

During the 1990's with the optimism regarding a possible peace agreement with the Palestinians, Hebrew literature experienced a short period of escapism⁹ that produced texts dealing with the marginal existence of young writers in Israeli culture and their attempt to "break the rules." However, as seen in Shimony's text, the decision to use an unrealistic plot does not

⁸ Y. Shimony, "Aomanut hamilhama" (The art of war), *Siman Kri'ah* 20 (1990): 71–83.

⁹ A. Balaban, *Dor aher basifrut ha'ivrit* (A different wave in Israeli fiction; Jerusalem: Ketter, 1995); D. Gurevitz, *Postmodernism* (Tel-Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1997); G. Taub, *Hamered hashafuf* (A dispirited rebellion; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1997).

necessarily mean abandoning references to the political situation. Thus, even during this period there were works that were directly and indirectly affected by political upheaval such as Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City* (1992),¹⁰ which depicts the occupation and the role of the Israeli soldier through the distorted world of an insane mother.

Later on, the 1990's and early in 2000, when it was acknowledged that there was no magical solution to the Palestinian problem, the Intifada became a fact of life and part of many novels, such as Ronit Matalon's *Sara Sara* (Bliss, 2000),¹¹ Orly Castel-Bloom's *Halakin enoshiyim* (Human parts, 2002),¹² A. B. Yehoshua's *Shlihuto shel hamemune al mashabey enosh* (Woman in Jerusalem, 2004), and his latest novel, *Esh yedidutit* (Friendly fire, 2007),¹³ and Yaniv Iczkovitz's *Dofek* (Pulse, 2007).¹⁴ In these texts, the Intifada is not the main theme, but it exists and affects the readers' understanding of the background and the nature of the trauma experienced by the protagonists.

The outbreak of the second Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 after the failure of talks led by Ehud Barak led to crises among the left wing parties¹⁵ and resulted in intensive writing on the Israeli soldier. This period is characterized by mostly realistic depictions of soldiers, which tend not to suggest solutions but rather focus on unbearable real experiences.

Roy Polity's novel *Arnavonei gagot* (Roof rabbits), another text I focus on in this article, was published in 2001¹⁶ but is based on a story about the first Intifada. Similar to trends in the cinema, where the second Lebanon war stirred memories of the first, the outbreak of the second Intifada encouraged writing on the first Intifada. The novel describes the lives of Samir, a Fatah activist, and Opher, an Israeli Secret Service (Shabak) agent, and the inevitable tragic encounter between them. When Samir was seven years old, policemen took his ball while he was playing with his friends and deliberately

¹⁰ O. Castel-Bloom, *Dolly City* (trans. D. Bilu; London: Loki Books, 1997; first published in Hebrew; Tel-Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1992).

¹¹ R. Matalon, *Bliss* (trans. J. Cohen; New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003; first published in Hebrew; *Sara Sara* [Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2000]).

¹² O. Castel-Bloom, *Human Parts* (trans. D. Bilu; Boston: David Godine, 2003; first published in Hebrew; *Halakin enoshiyim* [Kineret, 2002]).

¹³ A. B. Yehoshua, *Woman in Jerusalem* (London: Halban Publishers, 2006; first published in Hebrew; *Shlihuto shel hamemune al mashabey enosh* [Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2004]).

¹⁴ Y. Iczkovitz, *Dofek* (Pulse; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2007).

¹⁵ The book *Zman emeth* (Time for the truth; ed. A. Ofir; Jerusalem: Ketter, 2001) deals with this issue.

¹⁶ R. Polity, *Arnavonei gagot* (Roof rabbits; Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2001). Roy Polity, born in 1968, served in the police force in various intelligence and explosives related positions. *Roof Rabbits* was written during his service in and around the city of Hebron. At the same time, he studied law at the Hebrew University. Today he works as a lawyer.

threw it down a hill. Samir, with the naiveté of a child, asks, “Why?” In response, he is slapped by a border policeman. He then “understood, before his time...the place he belonged to.”¹⁷ This single vignette sets the stage for the process of Samir’s maturation and helps explain his motivation to join the Fatah after his beloved uncle dies in an Israeli jail. Like Samir, Opher also takes his first steps in the reality of the occupied territories. He tries to prove to himself that he can collect new intelligence and be extremely successful on his missions.

Opher is portrayed as a sensitive man with a moral compass. Nevertheless, the novel depicts the terrible essence of the unequal power relationships between Opher and Samir. Samir is a young junior activist in the Fatah. It is doubtful whether Opher would have paid any attention to him if Samir’s father had not been ill with cancer. Opher decides to exploit Samir’s distress, brought on by his cancer-ridden father’s desperate need of treatment in an Israeli hospital, and forces him to cooperate with the Shabak and disclose information regarding militant groups. He admits that “the whole affair was really shameful and unjust. Abu-Hamad was trying to save his father,”¹⁸ yet Opher’s confidence, based on his position on the “powerful side” of the conflict, leads him straight into the hands of Samir, who eventually avenges his honor, and kills him.

The direct encounter between the Israel soldier and the Palestinians took on a major role in literary works written in 2003–2004. The growing interest in this subject was evidenced by the large number of submissions to the Best Short Story competition in the Israeli daily newspaper *Ha’aretz* in 2003 (it is considered to be the competition with the largest number of submissions). Many of the stories focused on the occupation and the Intifada that year. Some of the most striking are the stories by Efrat Naveh and Bambi.

“Ketem” (Stain), by Efrat Naveh, which won the Best Short Story award in 2003,¹⁹ describes a group of Israeli soldiers in a helicopter transporting a dying Palestinian terrorist to the hospital. The narrator, overwhelmed by the firefight that took place minutes earlier in which his best friend was killed, tries to memorize his friend’s face while looking into the eyes of the wounded terrorist, whose life he must now try to save. The story deals with the moral and psychological dilemma of saving the person who killed your friend. Another story sent to the same competition, written by an author under the pseudonym of “Bambi,” deals with an Israeli army unit during

¹⁷ R. Polity, *Arnavonei gagot*, p. 72.

¹⁸ R. Polity, *Arnavonei gagot*, p. 406.

¹⁹ E. Nave, “Ketem” (Stain), *Ha’aretz*, April 15, 2003.

operation Defensive Shield in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002.²⁰ The narrator, a reserve soldier, describes the banal cruelty of the way he and his friends shot a handicapped Palestinian, simply because he did not stop moving his wheelchair when ordered to.

The Ha'aretz story contest reflected the main stances regarding the Israeli soldier. In Naveh's story, the soldier takes a humane and moral approach towards the enemy. The plot embraces the mainstream approach which sees the Israeli army as having established and lofty moral values. Bambi's story, on the other hand, unveils the army's actual lack of morality by showing the brutality and inhumanity of Israeli soldiers. Yet, although they present different ethical stances, both attribute their protagonists' misery and despair to Israeli reality.

Liran Ron-Furer's experimental book *Tismonet hamahsom* (Checkpoint syndrome, 2003),²¹ which is another text I focus on in this article, continues to characterize the Israeli soldier as an immoral protagonist. Ron-Furer's text is characterized by its harsh and extreme style and describes events at a checkpoint built by the Israeli army in the heart of the occupied territories, a meeting point for the omnipotent Israelis and the helpless Palestinians. The text is written in short, broken poetry-like lines, and does not form a linear narrative. Rather, each episode recounts a different experience, real or imagined. Overall it illustrates the process of moral demise of young soldiers who out of boredom enter into a routine of torture, competing among themselves as to who will carry out the most "awesome" actions, "Shachar stood above/the Arab, took out his cock/and started pissing on/the Arab's head,"²² "while Dado forces an Arab to kneel on all fours and orders him to bark like a dog, while shouting at him 'bad dog! why /did you piss on the carpet?'"²³ The descriptions of the daily horrors at the checkpoint soon deviate into the realms of fantasy and the imagination as the narrator dreams of rape, murder, and physical abuse.

Gilead Evron's *Mare'e makom* (Other places, 2003),²⁴ a volume of short stories, also sheds light on the process of moral corruption. In the story

²⁰ Bambi, "Hara vehartziot: shnei sipurim meJenin 2002" (Two stories from Jenin 2002), *Ha'aretz*, April 22, 2003.

²¹ L. Ron-Furer, *Tismonet hamahsom* (Checkpoint syndrome; Tel-Aviv: Gvanim, 2003). Liran Ron-Furer was born in Givataim in the 1970s. Ron-Furer went to the private Thelma Yalin High School for the arts, enlisted in the army, and served in the Shimshon unit, which operated exclusively in the Occupied Territories during the late 1990s.

²² L. Ron-Furer, *Tismonet hamahsom*, p. 62.

²³ L. Ron-Furer, *Tismonet hamahsom*, p. 65.

²⁴ G. Evron, *Mare'e makom* (Other places; Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2003).

“Habaz” (The falcon), a relationship between a military officer and the owner of a house in a Palestinian village the army takes over during the fighting leads to mutual violence, culminating in a conflict over the falcon—who is the owner’s pet and actually represents the Palestinian uprising. The military officer wants the falcon, asks to buy it, and even threatens the Palestinian, until he discovers, in an allusion to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* that the Palestinian has cooked the falcon and everyone has eaten it.

In contrast to Ron-Furer’s text, and Evron’s story, Asher Kravitz’s book, *A’ani Mustafa Rabbinovitch* (I, Mustafa Rabbinovitch, 2004),²⁵ the last text I focus on in this article, attempts to depict the protagonist as a moral individual. The novel is narrated by Yair Rabbinovitch (who goes by the name of Mustafa when he is disguised as a Palestinian Arab), an Israeli sniper waiting for the right time to shoot the right person. However, Yair vows not to kill, but throughout the novel, Yair’s beliefs are put to extreme tests. At first he feels that his duty is to “protect the home front”; however, after an extended conversation with an Israeli who was wounded in a terror attack in the hospital, he begins to see things differently. As a soldier trained to disguise himself as a Palestinian Arab, he decides to go to Nablus and blend in, this time not as part of his military duty, but to see things from the Palestinians’ point of view. He spends two days as a Palestinian, until he is caught by Israeli soldiers, and is sent to be interrogated, where he is treated harshly by other Palestinians who suspect that he is a Palestinian informer. However, after this episode, when discussing the experience with a mental health officer, he says he is unsure whether the experience gave him a new perspective or whether he has learned something about the situation that can lead him to change his values.

2. THE SITUATION

I began the article with a reference to the lines my brother sang, and moved to check the literary representation of the Israeli soldier of the Intifada in Hebrew Literature. By focusing on Ben-Ner’s, Polity’s, Ron-Furer’s, and Kravitz’s novels, I intend to understand the specific situation the soldier has to confront and examine the ways the different protagonists

²⁵ A. Kravitz, *A’ani Mustafa Rabbinovitch* (I, Mustafa Rabinovitch; Bnei Brak: Sifriat Poalim—Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 2004). Asher Kravitz, born 1969, is a pilot, a photographer, and a physics lecturer. He served in the police force in a unit for serious crimes. This is his third book. It has recently been republished in a revised version, entitled *First Sergeant Mustafa Rabinovitch* (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2008).

handle it, make choices, and shape their military identity. From this point of view, it seems that my brother's lines articulate the nature of the situation described in the novels I discuss. I claim that this state has two major components: the first is the feeling of being trapped in a realm that is totally different from normative life that forces soldiers to deal with radical situations. The second state is an acknowledgment that I—the soldier—am part of evil, and will bear the blame all my life.

Ben-Ner's *Delusion* and Ron-Furer's *Checkpoint Syndrome*, Polity's *Roof Rabbits*, and Kravitz's *I Mustafa Rabinovitch* describe different types of protagonists. Ben-Ner's and Ron-Furer's protagonists are violent and disturbed and are on the verge of insanity. By contrast, Polity's and Kravitz's protagonists are sensitive to the situation and its toll. Nevertheless, all the characters experience a state of entrapment in an extreme situation. They feel discontinuity, which stems from the difference between their civilian lives, values, norms, and the ethics of military life and suffer from a shattered identity.

"The army conscripted me at the age of eighteen / and discharged me at age / twenty one,"²⁶ writes the unnamed narrator of Ron-Furer's *Checkpoint Syndrome* in the very last lines of the book. The army is not an integral part of his life but rather a different reality, a kind of a jail that has robbed him of three years of his life. The chasm between personal life and military life is also apparent in Polity's novel, *Roof Rabbits*. The two worlds are so distant that Opher cannot act in both. He detaches himself from his personal life and his girlfriend and plunges into his secret security service. These differences are also underscored in Kravitz's book, *I, Mustafa Rabinovitch*, when Yair's personal vow as a civilian not to kill a man cannot be adhered to in his military life.

The military life and culture receive an extreme reflection in the four novels. The military masculine peer group nurtures violent action as part of boys' attempts to adhere to manly norms of roughness and aggressiveness.²⁷ Gentle and hesitant behavior is classified as feminine and weak. The

²⁶ L. Ron-Furer, *Tismonet hamahsom*, p. 94.

²⁷ Meisels showed that military service, especially in elite units, consists of the adoption of "manly" values such as "power, coarseness, bluntness and emotional distance." See O. Meisels, "Likrat gius" (Before recruitment), in *Mitbagrim be'israel: heibetim eishiyim, mishpahtiyim vehevratyiyim* (Adolescents in Israel: Personal, Family, and Social Aspects; ed. H. Plum; Even Yehuda: Rekhesh, 1995), p. 98. See also The UNESCO expert group meeting report, "Male Roles and Masculinities in the Perspective of a Culture of Peace" which argues that "Boys' peer group life, military training, and mass media often promote a direct link between being a 'real man' and the practice of dominance and violence." UNESCO's program: Women and the Culture of Peace, September 24–28, 1997. Online: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001096/109628eo.pdf>

narrator's sister in Ron-Furer's text is disparagingly called "the leftist psychologist." Even Holly Tzidon in Ben-Ner's book, *Delusion*, who tortures the Palestinians, is defined in the beginning of his service as a "leftist": "Com'ere... you stinking Tel Aviv lefty... c'mon, kick their ass."²⁸ Holly needs to be egged on by his friends to begin his descent into cruelty. In recalling this episode, he explains that he needed external motivation ("I have always been a guy who needs a push"), and he thanks his friends for letting him be part of the group.

Holly and the narrator of *Checkpoint Syndrome* want to lose their "leftist" image since it is perceived as delegitimized—"so that they will not see it, so that there will be no embarrassment,"²⁹ and make desperate attempts through their violent acts to show that they belong to the group. In Polity's text, it is said to Opher, "try to be a humane security person,"³⁰ as suggesting this is impossible; in Kravitz's book, one of Yair's friends tells him secretly he is afraid that "If the guys hear his opinions they will misunderstand him and he could be banished after being branded with a humiliating 'leftist' label."³¹ Yair who tries to preserve his humanity by quoting from the Talmud saying, "in a place where there are no men, try to be one,"³² and Opher, who tries to be humane, have to struggle for morality against the general militaristic atmosphere.³³

The protagonists of Ben-Ner's and Ron-Furer's books suffer mental deterioration as a result of their experience. They feel trapped in activities they perform mechanically to be part of the masculine military group, and by suppressing their gentleness and morality, they repress their civilian and personal lives. They are absorbed into a realm of violence, unaware of their behavior; and act like blind automata. Their attitude turns torture and the violence into neutral, normal behaviors. These two texts thus illustrate the dissonance between the authors' graphic descriptions of horror and the mindless, entertaining way the soldiers perceive their actions. The radicalizations of the situations and the soldiers' lack of self-criticism create chaos and incoherence in the text. As David Fishelov commented, this attitude

²⁸ Y. Ben-Ner, *Ta'atuon*, p. 36.

²⁹ L. Ron-Furer, *Tismonet hamahsom*, p. 15.

³⁰ R. Polity, *Arnavonei gagot*, p. 118.

³¹ A. Kravitz, *A'ani Mustafa Rabbinovitch*, p. 7.

³² A. Kravitz, *A'ani Mustafa Rabbinovitch*, p. 79.

³³ For an analysis of distancing mechanisms in military settings see S. D. Grossman, *On Killing* (Toronto: Little Brown, 1995). See also R. Holmes, *Acts of War: the Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), pp. 276, 361; H. Ball, *Prosecuting War Crimes and Genocide* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1999), p. 220.

toward horror “constitutes a continuation and an indirect collaboration with the horror itself.”³⁴ However, the identity crises that characterizes soldiers like Holly and the narrator of Ron-Furer’s, bringing them to the edge of insanity, is also an integral part of the inner conflict faced by the thoughtful, moral soldiers in the other books.

In particular, this disparity between the civilian world and the military world is evident in Opher’s experiences depicted in *Roof Rabbits*. Whereas Holly and the narrator of *Checkpoint Syndrome* distance themselves from their emotions and their sense of morality and are sucked into violence, Opher does not lose his sense of morality but still chooses to cut himself off from his emotions. Instead of coming back home every evening, he prefers to wander the Palestinian streets and take unnecessary risks that eventually lead to his death.

A similar form of self-alienation is found in *I, Mustafa Rabbinoitch*. Yair feels that the army has defiled him. When Yair Rabbinoitch has to break his vow and kill the female suicide bomber just before she attempts to blow up his friends, he feels his action was unwarranted. His total experience stained his identity and values.

In all four texts, there is a discontinuity between the life before and after the military service, which results in a split identity—involving self-disappointment, feeling of guilt, and moral and mental deterioration.³⁵ These attributes, the sense of entrapment, the feeling of guilt and personal disorientation, may link the situation in these books to the discussion of the philosophical term of *moral luck*.

3. CIRCUMSTANTIAL MORAL LUCK

When Thomas Nagel describes the nature of moral luck, he defines a situation: “where a significant aspect of what someone does depends on factors beyond his control, yet we continue to treat him, in that respect as an object of moral judgment, it can be called moral luck.”³⁶ Nagel stresses that “ultimately, nothing or almost nothing about what a person does seems to be under his control,”³⁷ yet we judge people by these actions. Nagel presents

³⁴ D. Fishelov, “Megamot bashra bishnot hashmonim” (Trends in the poetry of the 1980s), *Achshav* 67/68 (Fall-Winter 2002–2003): 184–185.

³⁵ In some, the characters’ names often express this split of identity. Yair is Rabbinoitch but also Mustafa, Holly’s first name hints at sanctity (holy), but his surname is Tzidon (Sidon), a city in Lebanon that has been the site of many battles.

³⁶ T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 26.

³⁷ T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 26.

four types of moral luck: constitutive, circumstantial, causal, and resultant.³⁸ The cases in the four novels analyzed here can be categorized as circumstantial luck, which is defined as “the things we are called upon to do, the moral tests we face.”³⁹ Nagel claims that the situations we must handle are, in many cases,

importantly determined by factors beyond our control. It may be true of someone that in a dangerous situation he would behave in a cowardly or heroic fashion, but if the situation never arises, he will never have the chance to distinguish or disgrace himself in this way, and his moral record will be different.⁴⁰

Nagel illustrates a kind of moral luck for the case of Nazi Germany:

Ordinary citizens of Nazi Germany had an opportunity to behave heroically by opposing the regime. They also had an opportunity to behave badly, and most of them are culpable for having failed this test. But it is a test to which the citizens of other countries were not subjected, with the result that even if they, or some of them, would have behaved as badly as the Germans in like circumstances, they simply did not and therefore are not similarly culpable. Here again one is morally at the mercy of fate, and it may seem irrational upon reflection, but our ordinary moral attitudes would be unrecognizable without it.⁴¹

It may be harsh to make a comparative statement regarding an Israeli soldier and a Nazi officer.⁴² This comparison is clearly problematic, and I do not wish to consider it as legitimate. Yet the kind of situation that places a person in extreme circumstances and sets him an unfair moral test is, to a certain extent, a common feature of war that Nagel presents in his investigation of the term *moral luck*. Young men of eighteen, who do not live in Israel and are not obliged to enlist, are spared such circumstances. Yet it is clear and

³⁸ *Constitutive luck*—the kind of person you are, your inclinations, capacities, and temperament. These depend, at least partially, on factors beyond one’s control.

Circumstantial Luck—the kind of problems and situations one faces.

Causal Luck—concerned with how antecedent circumstances are determined.

Resultant Luck—luck in the way one’s action turns out.

³⁹ T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 33.

⁴⁰ T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 33–34.

⁴¹ T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 34.

⁴² The link between Israeli soldiers and the Nazis was made for the first time in Israel in a statement by Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994), an Israeli philosopher and scientist known for his outspoken, often controversial opinions on Judaism, ethics, religion, and politics, who accused Israeli soldiers of becoming “Judeo-Nazis.” His words stirred a public outcry amongst Israelis, and still today any reference to Nazis within the Israeli army context is perceived as illegitimate. Nevertheless the comparison has never left the collective unconscious of Israeli society and is cited extensively in soldiers’ testimonies.

proper to judge the deeds of those who have been raised in the country and have to go to the army.⁴³

The state of moral luck is paradoxical, since we are used to judging people by their actions when they are free and can control their lives. Here, though, the novels present a situation where a person is being judged and perceived as responsible for actions in circumstances dependent on factors beyond his control. Daniel Statman⁴⁴ points out that moral luck upturns our basic sense of morality and justice:

First, justice as equality. If morality is immune to luck then the option of being moral is open to everybody everywhere and furthermore, it is open to everybody *equally*. Second, justice as desert. If morality depends on luck, then at least sometimes people are judged morally for things that are beyond their control. This seems to be unfair; one does not deserve to be held responsible for what is beyond one's control.⁴⁵

The term moral luck reveals a kind of “flaw” in modern morality. In fact, many writers have tried to show that morality is in fact immune to luck.⁴⁶ Thus, before adopting the term “moral luck” in this context, alternative ethical options should be examined as regards the texts investigated here.

I claim that there are two facets to the situation in which the soldier finds himself. The first is a sense of guilt or personal disorientation, and the second is a sense of entrapment in a foreign space with different rules, such that the soldier has to deal with things that are not fully under his control. Dismissing the relevance of moral luck can be done in two ways: first, by

⁴³ This argument is implicitly advanced in the stories of conscientious objectors. Refusing may be the only way to avoid bad moral luck—to refrain of being in a situation where they may find themselves participating in such immoral activity.

⁴⁴ D. Statman, “Introduction,” in *Moral Luck* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 1–33.

⁴⁵ D. Statman, “Introduction,” pp. 2–3.

⁴⁶ “Moral luck” is a controversial term, and has been extensively discussed. See for example: J. Andre, “Nagel, Williams, and Moral Luck,” *Analysis* 43 (1983): 202–207; B. Browne, “A Solution to the Problem of Moral Luck,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 42.168 (1992): 345–356; D. Enoch and A. Marmor, “The Case Against Moral Luck,” *Law and Philosophy* 26 (2007): 405–436; R. Hannah, “Morality *De Re*: Reflections on the Trolley Problem,” in *Ethics: Problems and Principles* (ed. J. M. Fischer and M. Ravizza; Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College, 1992), pp. 318–336; H. Jensen, “Morality and Luck,” *Philosophy* 59 (1984): 323–330; R. Norvin, “Luck and Desert,” *Mind* 95.378 (1986): 198–209; N. Rescher, “Luck,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 64.3 (1990): 5–20; D. Rondel, “Equality, Luck and Pragmatism,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 21. 2 (2007): 115–123; B. Rosebury, “Moral Responsibility and ‘Moral Luck,’” *Philosophical Review* 104.4 (1995): 499–524; D. Stanovsky, “Stealing Guilt: Freud, Twain, Augustine and the Question of Moral luck,” *American Imago* 63. 4 (2007): 445–461; S. Steven, “Crime and Moral Luck,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988): 79–95; M. J. Zimmerman, “Luck and Moral Responsibility,” *Ethics* 97.2 (1987): 374–386; M. J. Zimmerman, “Taking Luck Seriously,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 99.11 (2002): 533–576.

dismantling the concept of guilt and responsibility for immoral deeds and second, by refuting the concept of entrapment in the situation.

Now we can test the first aspect—guilt and personal disorientation—caused by implicit or explicit responsibility-taking. Can the protagonists of these works, who believe they have limited control over the situation, shake off their feelings of unease?

The four literary texts present three ways to escape a sense of guilt and personal disorientation, all of which are eventually doomed to fail. The first is by adopting a utilitarian point of view that justifies the soldier's mission. The second is by arguing for control over every single action, and free choice within the situation, which thus enable a theoretical possibility of moral conduct, whereas the third dismisses the notion of responsibility and hence any feeling of guilt, since there is no free will.

Opher, the protagonist of Polity's book *Roof Rabbits*, serves in the Israeli Secret Service. Unlike the protagonists of the other three works, he is not a soldier. He chose to take part in a secret mission intended to prevent terror attacks by Palestinians inside Israel. Opher tries to explain his unrelenting attitude toward the Palestinian population from a utilitarian perspective. This is how he explains his work to his girlfriend:

It's very brutal to become the father of a hostage, but it's also very brutal to allow terror units to roam around and murder ... you hurt one limb in order to help the rest of the body. That's exactly how I see my work. To help society as a whole, I have to hurt part of it.⁴⁷

Opher considers his mission a necessary evil. To justify his acts, he uses the metaphor of the body. In his view, the Intifada is like a disease requiring radical treatment. In order to cure a sick body, you must hurt part of it, perhaps even amputate an arm or a leg. So in order to prevent violent attacks liable to kill many, you can—and even must—act violently against certain people. This argument is utilitarian, since it authorizes certain (limited) evil acts to avoid a greater evil.⁴⁸

Beyond the fact that this kind of utilitarian argument is clearly historically incorrect—in the first Intifada, casualties on the Israeli side were only about one-tenth of the Palestinians', and in the second Intifada, they were

⁴⁷ R. Polity, *Arnavonei gagot*, pp. 374–375.

⁴⁸ In light of Opher's argument concerning the body, see Rawls's argument on utilitarianism, J. Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 22–24.

close to one-fifth⁴⁹—this argument cannot prevent Opher from feeling distressed about his deeds. Since a literary text is not a philosophical argument, the sense of personal responsibility and guilt are not always explicitly articulated. In Polity's text, the gap between Opher's justifications and his life is made explicit. He tries so hard to adhere to his rationalizations that he represses his feelings altogether and functions like an automaton. Opher cannot nurture his relationship with his girlfriend, he moves to a new apartment but is unable to unpack. Instead of going home every evening, he prefers to wander the Palestinian streets and take unnecessary risks: "I will definitely not stay at home this evening. I'm going out of my mind, and this is more dangerous than going for a meeting with no security."⁵⁰ The endless and risky work that Opher takes up on himself helps him forget his pain; even worse, "as with all pain relievers, he has to increase the dosage from time to time."⁵¹

In an article by Ayala Malach-Pines that discusses the phenomenon of burnout in the context of the first Intifada, she defines burnout as a

sense of emotional, physical and spiritual exhaustion, caused by constant and continuing psychological overload. Its characteristics are chronic tiredness, feelings of personal failure, depression, helplessness, hopelessness, and hostility and rejection towards those deemed as causing the situation (a person or organization).⁵²

Opher appears to be in a state of mental exhaustion and burnout—his behavior becomes ever more obsessive; he ignores his personal life, hardly sleeps, and is totally immersed in his tasks. His obsessive state impels him to take unreasonable risks and ultimately leads to his death.

Furthermore, in this novel, not only is Opher himself torn between rationalization and emotions, but the narrative itself indicates that Opher is actually morally responsible. The narrative ends with Opher's death, which

⁴⁹ There are different estimates as to the casualty figures in both Intifadas. B'Tselem, an Israeli non-governmental organization, which defines itself as the "Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories," notes that in the first Intifada (1987–1993) 1,593 Palestinians and 84 Israelis were killed (civilian and security forces), and in the second Intifada (2000–2008), 4,944 Palestinians and 1,011 Israelis were killed. The only way to defend this argument is to assume that Palestinian casualties are not equivalent to Israeli ones, or to prove that the number of casualties from each terror attack that was thwarted was higher than the casualties from the military operations that aimed to prevent this terror attack.

⁵⁰ R. Polity, *Arnavonei gagot*, p. 205.

⁵¹ R. Polity, *Arnavonei gagot*, p. 264.

⁵² A. Malach-Pines, "Et mi shoheken ha'intifada" (Who suffers burnout from the intifada), in *Hamilhama hashvieit: Hashpaot ha'intifada al hahevra be'israel* (The seventh war: The impact of the Intifada on Israeli society; ed. R. Gal; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990), p. 55.

comes as a kind of punishment for his sins. Samir exploits the fact that Opher failed to use the required security precautions. After his father's death from cancer, Samir has nothing to lose. Hence, eventually, Samir wins the game, and Opher pays the price.

The second way to avoid guilt, and thus dismiss the moral luck explanation, is to believe that one has free will, even in such extreme situations, and thus can in fact behave according to one's moral principles.

This is examined in *I, Mustafa Rabinovitz* by Asher Kravitz. The book opens with Yair's vow never to kill a human being:

I've decided to serve my life on this wretched planet without killing. I don't want the responsibility for cutting down the soul of a human being weighing on my conscience which, according to the best of sources, was created in God's image ... most people would find it very easy to adhere to such a vow. Not me. That's how it is when you're a fighter in *Duvdevan*.⁵³

Yair is aware of the contradiction between his vow and his military profession as a sniper whose role is to shoot people. At first he tries to avoid killing by aiming his gun at the person's legs and deliberately missing the target.

Throughout the novel, Yair tries to look for ways to act in compliance with his values. He is confused after the conversation with a wounded man in a hospital and decides to enter the Palestinian city of Nablus, disguised as a Palestinian. Yair's decision stems from his humanistic vision—his desire to see how things look from the other side. However, this action also exemplifies his confused identity; his military role requires him to be disguised as a Palestinian, as part of the mission of his unit. By disguising himself during a non-military mission, he breaks the rules and blurs the boundaries between Yair Rabinovitch and Mustafa: "I look in the mirror. Half of my face with makeup, the second half without it. Which half is the one with makeup?"⁵⁴

Following this episode, he is sent to the army mental health officer. In *Catch 22* style, the psychiatrist maintains that Yair is "too normal to serve in the army"⁵⁵ but promises not to reveal his findings. Yair's failure to comply with his values in the military world of the Intifada reaches a peak in the last scene of the novel, when Yair has to break his vow and shoot a woman sui-

⁵³ A. Kravitz, *A'ani Mustafa Rabinovitch*, p. 6. *Duvdevan* (Hebrew for "cherry") is the codename of an elite combat unit whose members operate deep inside Palestinian areas, often disguised as Arabs and blending in with the local population.

⁵⁴ A. Kravitz, *A'ani Mustafa Rabinovitch*, p. 117.

⁵⁵ A. Kravitz, *A'ani Mustafa Rabinovitch*, p. 136.

cide bomber who is standing near his friends and is about to kill them. At that moment, when Yair is about to break his vow, he feels that doing so is unjustified. He looks at her children as the Red Cross takes them away, and realizes that there is no atonement for his deeds. "I imagined her kids slowly approaching, touching their mother's decapitated head. I had two souls in my body, one of a savior, the other of a murderer."⁵⁶

Yair feels that the army has contaminated him. Recalling Oscar Wilde's book *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he looks at a photo taken before he enlisted, the photo of an innocent youngster, and imagines the stains that will appear on it once his military service ends.

Dismissing the question of moral luck in *I, Mustafa Rabinovitz* must overcome the fact that the entire novel is aimed at showing that while a person can enter the world of the Intifada with the full intention of retaining one's values and morality and seeing the other as an equal, soldiers are inevitably doomed to compromise these values.

The examples from *I, Mustafa Rabinovitz* and *Roof Rabbits* demonstrate that it is not possible to dismiss moral luck for the sake of utilitarian argument, or by showing that within this realm there is always the possibility of adhering to one's values. Ben Ner's *Delusion* shows that the third justification for the non-applicability of moral luck is also invalidated.

If a situation is forced on the soldier, and does not permit him to act according to his values, then he cannot be perceived as responsible for his deeds. Certain literary texts describe soldiers as lacking any moral awareness and acting like automatons. In such cases, the soldiers often go mad, as is the case in Ben Ner's *Delusion*. After undergoing the military socialization process, Holly, the protagonist of *Delusion*, treats Palestinians brutally. He suffers from alienation while trying desperately to remain sane: as Holly phrases it during a violent action, "Just to keep my sanity. Only to keep my sanity. Let everyone go insane, I don't care. I'm staying normal, I have to

⁵⁶ A. Kravitz, *A'ani Mustafa Rabbinoitch*, p. 158. Yair's experience resembles many testimonies by soldiers who confronted the same tension between their values and the military arena. Ehud Shem-Tov explains this dynamic: "What made my service in the Occupied Territories possible until now, was the belief that when I'm there, I can influence people around me who are less sensitive, more raucous, racist, and violent, who hit and shoot more, and make them act more moderately. I felt my presence had an impact, in terms of the proper way of entering homes, searching cars, calming the innocent population's anger at checkpoints and on the roads, reducing aggression towards demonstrators, and minimizing situations that are hard to get out of without shooting. The last operation I was involved in (August–September 2001) in the Nablus area, left harrowing marks on me, and showed me that the situation in the field had changed, and that my ability to have an impact no longer existed" (in: P. Kidron, ed., *Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience*, p. 146, in the Hebrew version).

stay normal.”⁵⁷ He obsessively repeats this phrase when he is taken to the mental health institute; he cannot understand why others perceive him as insane and why they think that he stinks.

Holly’s process of alienation, reflected in his inability to identify the smell emanating from his body, affects his surroundings as well. Holly’s terrible deeds are immoral and therefore stink; this is how the narrative portrays his responsibility and guilt.

Through the character of the father, the narrative rejects efforts to escape responsibility. Holly’s father is devastated. A peace activist who educated his son to share his beliefs, and who lost his wife in a terror attack, watches his son losing his sanity in a mental institution, and can hardly approach him because of the smell. In one of the novel’s climaxes, the father walks the streets holding an ironic sign that reads “no one is guilty.”⁵⁸

Delusion clearly makes an implicit statement that takes issue with evading responsibility. It presents a protagonist who is mentally ill and thus cannot be considered responsible for or guilty of his actions. This clearly refers to a psychological analysis that identifies a medical syndrome (reflected in the title of Ron-Furer’s book *Checkpoint Syndrome*) which eventually blurs any moral assessment and exonerates people of responsibility for their actions. Such an attitude defines the “situation” as the main reason for irrational behavior that cannot be subjected to judgment.⁵⁹ Yet, although the novel presents such a situation, it does not use it to shield the individuals from the severity of the verdict. The stench that the soldier emits and the father’s ironic protest that “no one is guilty” make it impossible to accept a lenient judgment.

Thus, the overall examination of utilitarian justification, free will, and absence of responsibility show that these explanations do not apply, and that there is no way to dismiss a state of moral luck. The four texts suggest that although the soldiers lack full control over the situation they must deal with (they have no control over the political moves that led to the situation; they have no control over the military mission or the underlying reason or nature

⁵⁷ Y. Ben-Ner, *Ta’atuon*, pp. 53–54.

⁵⁸ Y. Ben-Ner, *Ta’atuon*, p. 156.

⁵⁹ See A. Hendel, “Beyond Good and Bad,” p. 54. This discussion also relates to a danger discussed by Zimmerman since it hints at a state of mental disability that exonerates the agent. According to Zimmerman, the concept of moral luck can result in a realm where “the Nazi collaborator would be no more blameworthy than the non-, but would-be, collaborator” (M. J. Zimmerman, “Luck and Moral Responsibility,” p. 379) since, “one is never in complete control of the situations that one faces, either with respect to ‘external’ matters ... or with respect to ‘internal’ matters” (M. J. Zimmerman, “Luck and Moral Responsibility,” p. 284).

of the military orders), it is nevertheless clear from the narrative that they are perceived as responsible. It is they who ultimately experience a permanent sense of guilt or disorientation.

In her article on moral luck, Margaret Walker puts forward her concept of *pure agency* and *impure agency*:

Pure agents are free, on their own, to determine what and how much they may be brought to account for determining the intentional acts and commitments they will undertake, and recognizing the limits to their control beyond these.... Impure agents are saddled with weighty responsibilities and the open-ended possibility of acquiring more, due to circumstances beyond their control. Yet agents who recognize their vulnerability to fortune are primed for dependability of humanly invaluable sorts.⁶⁰

Walker maintains that she prefers the notion of *impure agency* over that of *pure agency*. Although the pure agent can be moral, the impure agent is more humane. The first can live without referring to moral luck, since he does not feel morally reprehensible for actions that were governed by matters beyond his control, while the impure agent takes responsibilities on himself. As we have seen, literary works dealing with Israeli soldiers construct a type of *impure agency*. Though the soldiers do not have full control over the situation, they have to cope with the moral cost of their actions.

4. CONSTITUTIVE MORAL LUCK

Earlier I suggested that the concept of moral luck as it applies to the Israeli soldiers in the texts is composed of two features: a sense of entrapment in a foreign space with different rules and a sense of guilt or personal disorientation. In the previous section, I dealt with the second and showed that it is impossible to dismiss the concept of moral luck since the texts perceive the protagonist, or the protagonists perceive themselves, as responsible and therefore guilty. In this section, I examine the aspect of entrapment.

Liron Ron-Furer's *Checkpoint Syndrome* opens with the monologue below, with its special typeface and absence of punctuation:

Hello to all you human beings the little slaves how are you ... now I'm finally free and far away from all the crap you have there in your crappy country fuck I'm never going back now I'm free the crazy energies of Goa have opened up my head and my chakras ... I forgot what I was you stuck me in stinking Gaza and before that you brainwashed me with your guns and the training you

⁶⁰ M. U. Walker, "Moral Luck and the Virtues of Impure Agency," in *Moral Luck* (ed. D. Statman; Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 245–247.

turned me into dirt until I couldn't think anymore and the only thing that kept me sane at the end was the drugs ... you used me like a robot and only now on some beach in Goa ... it all came together and I saw what you tried to do to me I was afraid of smiles you turned me into something else I wasn't me it's somebody else.⁶¹

In this quotation the narrator likens himself to a puppet on a string. He talks of brainwashing and the process of becoming someone else. Now, after completing his military service, he is trying to escape from himself by going to Goa in India, and taking drugs. The narrator's monologue refers to the military experience as a trap, as though he was doomed to play a role in a game whose rules he did not set.

To prove that the concept of moral luck applies to entrapment, it must be shown that soldiers find themselves in a situation where they have limited control, which to a certain extent was forced on them. To continue applying my strategy, I try to refute this argument altogether, only to show that it is impossible. Dismissing the "moral luck" of entrapment can be negated by two arguments: that soldiers can control single military acts, and that a soldier can decide whether to join the army or not, and hence can control the situation.

First, to a certain extent, it is true that soldiers have control over their military actions but primarily in extreme circumstances. Under Israeli army regulations, there is a procedure for refusing to obey an order when it is "clearly illegal." "Clearly illegal orders" are those that violate the laws of the state, or the values of democracy. Actions such as harming civilians or any form of ethnic cleansing are illegal. Unlawful orders should not be obeyed; the soldier is fully responsible for the acts he carries out⁶² and thus may not implement unlawful orders. This provides soldiers with a way to control their actions specifically in extreme situations.

Second, although military service is obligatory in Israel, there are cases of civil disobedience when people decide not to serve. There were individual

⁶¹ L. Ron-Furer, *Tismonet hamahsom*, pp. 3–4.

⁶² As Sidney Axinn puts it in *A Moral Military* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 2, "the fact that the act in question was carried out under an order of a superior authority ... does not constitute a defense in the trial of an accused individual." See also E. Denton, *Limits of Loyalty* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979); A. Schafer, "The Buck Stops Here: Reflections on Moral Responsibility," in *Democratic Accountability and Military Values* (Canada: Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia, 1997). In the Israeli context see: A. Parush, "Bikoret mivhan hadegel hashahor" (A critique of the 'black flag' test), in *Kafr Qasim: eirueim umitos* (Kafr Qasim: Events and myth; ed. R. Rosenthal; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000), pp. 131–177; I. Schiff, "Bizhut mivhan hadegel hashahur" (In support of the 'black flag' test), in *Kafr Qasim: eirueim umitos* (Kafr Qasim: Events and myth; ed. R. Rosenthal; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000), pp. 117–130.

cases of conscientious objection in the Israeli army during the 1950s and 1960s. The first organized movement was formed in 1982 during the first Lebanon War, by the movement *Yesh Gvul* (there is a limit), an Israeli peace group; 170 people refused to fight in Lebanon, and they were sentenced and served terms in military jails. During the first Intifada, over 2,000 people refused to serve, and 180 served jail sentences. There were also cases of refusal during the second Intifada.⁶³ Conscientious objectors historically come from the political left-wing, but during the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, a movement of right-wing objectors also emerged.⁶⁴

Although it is permissible to refuse to perform unlawful acts, or avoid enlisting altogether, numbers indicate that while many declare they will refuse, only a few go the whole way and are prepared to be sentenced to military jails. Out of hundreds of thousands of Israeli soldiers who protested against military activity, only a few hundred ultimately refused.

If conscientious objection is an alternative, then entrapment in certain circumstances where the person lacks full control can be dismissed along with the argument concerning moral luck. However, the small number of people who in fact refuse to carry out orders or are objectors indicates that most conscripts do not make this choice.

To defend this claim and to reestablish the concept of moral luck, I would like to present my interpretation of Nagel's definition of constitutive luck. Nagel writes:

One is the phenomenon of constitutive luck—the kind of person you are, where this is not just a question of what you deliberately do, but of your inclinations, capacities, and temperament.⁶⁵

Such qualities as sympathy or coldness might provide the background against which obedience to moral requirements is more or less difficult, but they could not be objects of moral assessment themselves, and might well interfere with confident assessment of its proper object—the determination of the will by the motive of duty.⁶⁶

⁶³ See the following websites: http://www.yeshgvul.org/index_e.asp; <http://www.seruv.org.il/english/default.asp>.

⁶⁴ See R. Linn, "Soldiers with Conscience Never Die—They are Just Ignored by Their Society: Moral Disobedience in the Israel Defense Force," *Journal of Military Ethics* 1.2 (2002): 57–76 and S. Yoav, "Toldot tnuat hasarvanim" (The history of the refusal movement), in *Walla-News*, December 22, 2003.

⁶⁵ T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 32. Enoch and Marmor, in "The Case Against Moral Luck," reject this type of moral luck. It is true that we give place to person's inclinations and temperaments, but we expect people to control their inclinations and to improve themselves.

Constitutive luck stems from one's personality. One's personality is shaped by one's genes as well as one's upbringing. This kind of luck depicts a paradox: although a person lacks full control over his inclinations and temperament, he is perceived as responsible for his behavior and the actions he performs which stem from his personality. While Nagel describes this type of moral luck by focusing on the individual, I suggest that collective biography shapes individuals' personalities.

For hundreds of years, European Jews were seen as an inferior minority. The anti-Semitic stereotype presented the Jew as weak, miserable, humiliated, and feminine. Toward the end of the nineteenth century and with the growth of the Zionist movement, the need arose to change the image of the Jewish prototype.⁶⁷ Instead of the diasporic prototype, the Zionists established a new prototype of Jew—the *Sabra* (the native-born Israeli Jew). The *Sabra* was described as having a strong body, thick wavy hair, European facial features, and tanned skin from toiling the land. He is close to nature, rebellious, headstrong, proud, undiscouraged by failure, a man of action and of words, plainspoken and blunt, optimistic and cheerful, loyal to his friends, and instilled with a powerful sense of ideological commitment and national responsibility. The *Sabra* is the perfect warrior—brave, devoted to his mission, and willing to give his life to protect the country and its people.⁶⁸ The *Sabra* myth was born out of necessity, and for years, it symbolized the new Israeli masculinity. Israeli education and the socialization process are still imbued with this myth. School field-trips impart both geographical information and war heritage. Children learn that Israel is a democratic state that strives for peace, yet fighting is inevitable to protect the very existence of a state that provides a safe haven for the Jews. Thus it is considered good citizenship to play a significant role in military activity, especially in combat units.⁶⁹

Education within a militaristic atmosphere explains why many Israelis join the army and adopt “manly” values. Moreover, following the education and socialization process, militaristic values are absorbed into people's personalities and reinforce certain inclinations and characteristic attributes.

⁶⁷ T. Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 15.

⁶⁸ A. Shapira, *Yehudim hadashim, yehudim yeshanim* (New Jews, old Jews; Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), p. 184.

⁶⁹ See O. Meisels, “Likrat gius” and L. Sion, *Dimoyei gavriut etzel lohamin: hasherut behativot heil raglim cetekes ma'avar mina'arut kebagrut* (Figures of masculinity among combat soldiers: Service in infantry brigades as a rite of passage from adolescence to maturity; Jerusalem: The Dayan Center for Social Science Research, the Hebrew University, 1997).

As Nagel argues in his discussion of constitutive luck, a person has a certain personality (over which he has only limited control) but it dramatically affects his actions. A person may find it difficult to do certain acts if they contradict his inclination and characteristics, yet the responsibility remains his. Thus when people absorb military values from a young age, it is clear why refusing to serve in the army is unthinkable for many young Israelis. According to the national education curriculum, conscientious objectors are perceived as people who think only of themselves and exemplify a lack of responsibility for their country—they fail to protect their own home or fulfill their civic obligations.

Tamar Libes and Shoshana Bloom-Kulka argue that

The findings again bear out that youth in Israel grow up with a feeling of commitment to the IDF, and so—subjectively at least—there is an element of personal and voluntary responsibility in the way that soldiers relate to compulsory army service. A feeling of that kind is the chief condition that must be present under the laws of cognitive dissonance, to enable a sense of dissonance in a situation of “induced compliance.”⁷⁰

Libes and Kulka address the decision of joining the army in psychological terms. Young Israelis are raised in a way that encourages them to enlist, and thus they are trapped in a situation of induced compliance.

Hence although Nagel’s description of constitutive luck addresses personal inclinations and temperaments, it is quite possible to view the concept of constitutive luck as a type of luck involving a national-collective education. This constitutive luck leads soldiers straight into the military trap, where they are unable to escape their fate. Then they probably discover that the situation for which they were educated and trained is actually different, and when military values transform into something else—in the realm of an Intifada—they may feel betrayed to a certain extent for having to face such radical and even unfair moral tests, aware that they are going to pay the moral cost for their deeds.

⁷⁰ T. Libes and Sh. Bloom-Kulka, “Yorim ubochim? al hitmodedut eim dilemot mosariot beshert hatzvaei bashtahim” (Shooting and crying? On coping with moral dilemmas in military service in the Occupied Territories), in *Hamilhama hashviet: Hashpaot ha’intifada al hahevra be’israel* (The seventh war: The impact of the Intifada on Israeli society; ed. R. Gal; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990), p. 86.

5. CONCLUSION

Why Daughter of Zion have you gone astray
Your children vanquish their neighbors in the fray
They strike with clubs their eyes full of terrors
Why have they become like the swastika bearers.⁷¹

The portrait of the Israeli soldier in the Intifada cannot be praised. Nor can it be justified. In this article, I explored the complex aspects of this conflict through the perspective of the villains. Through an examination of four literary texts, I have shown the relevance of the concept of moral luck to characterize the situation of Israeli soldiers.

The cases in these texts display both consequential luck and constitutive luck. The nature of the circumstances places soldiers in an extreme situation, confronting them with a tough moral test. Moreover, the collective education and the military heritage they absorbed impede young men from avoiding military service altogether. Thus, eighteen-year-old Israelis who join the army become trapped in a situation where they lack full control. Nonetheless, they are fated to play the villain's role, and to be rightly condemned for their deeds. As a result, they are doomed to suffer incurable guilt and disorientation. And so, returning to my brother's song, the costume of the evil Haman with a red beret will remain a scar on their souls that never heals.

⁷¹ A. Kravitz, *A'ani Mustafa Rabbinovitch*, p. 148.

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