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# Commemorating a Suspended Death: Missing Soldiers and National Solidarity in Israel

Abstract: Israel's intense preoccupation with its missing soldiers provides an interesting case for examining national solidarity and commemoration. Efforts to retrieve the soldiers constitute both a site of conflictual politics and a source of wide-ranging civic engagement that takes the form of a depoliticized stance of solidarity. Framing this solidarity as an extension of friendship, I explore it along two dimensions: the relationship between the living and the dead and national conceptions of time. Missing soldiers arouse identification in much the way that fallen soldiers do, as emblems of sacrifice associated with "mythic" time. Yet their suffering is also juxtaposed to the everyday life of the community through "simultaneous" time. Merging both temporal conceptions, they become the most intimately felt of all national heroes, epitomizing the ideological transformation of absent others into beloved brothers.

[*missing soldiers, commemoration, Israel, solidarity, nationalism, time, living dead*]

*Between life and death, nationalism has as its own proper space the experience of haunting. There is no nationalism without some ghost.*

—Jacques Derrida

On January 28, 2004, all three Israeli TV channels broadcast live the landing of an Israeli airplane at Ben-Gurion Airport carrying the bodies of three Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers who had been hit by a roadside bomb and abducted by Hezbollah guerrilla forces in 2000 at Har Dov (Shebaa Farms) on the Israeli–Lebanese border. Three military coffins, each draped with the national flag, were received in a solemn state ceremony attended by a seemingly unprecedented gathering of government ministers, IDF officials, and public dignitaries in addition to the soldiers'

families and friends. The bodies were returned as part of a controversial prisoner swap, whereby Hezbollah returned one Israeli civilian in exchange for Israel's release of 436 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners.[1] On the same day that the three Israeli soldiers were laid to rest, ten Israeli civilians were killed in a suicide bombing in Jerusalem. In an Internet talkback comment following the news report of both events, one Israeli complained, "For three years three families have occupied the entire country and the media with the recovery of the soldiers' bodies, when on the very same day that they have arrived more people were killed—and no one's interested in them! … Why this exaggerated preoccupation with the three bodies?" (Ynet 2004).

This blatant voice, different from the expressions of mourning and solidarity that characterized most responses to the ceremony, discloses what everyone knew before the prisoner swap but would not publicly discuss, namely, that the soldiers died soon after the kidnapping, if not during the initial attack. Their deaths were confirmed by military intelligence a year after the event and reported to the families, yet the families opted to continue their public struggle to get their sons back (Ministry of Defense n.d.a). Accordingly, the media and politicians chose to downplay the information regarding the soldiers' fate and communicated a continuing state of uncertainty, creating a narrative of suspense. The soldiers' deaths were suspended in the public's consciousness, just as their bodies were frozen by Hezbollah shortly after the kidnapping. Only the ceremonial repatriation of the coffins provided closure, concluded the anomie caused by suspended death, and restored the social order of battle, sacrifice, death, and commemoration.

In this article, I explore how the anomie generated by suspended death culminates in an extraordinary display of national solidarity. I employ an understanding of national solidarity as a case of extended friendship (Kaplan 2007) and examine its unfolding vis-à-vis multiple perceptions of time in national settings. The association between fraternal friendship and nationalism has long been noted by many scholars yet has received little systematic ethnographic attention. Carol Pateman (1989:49) underscores how national solidarity is typically reinforced by sentiments of male fraternity, which endorses self-sacrifice as an expression of masculinity. George L. Mosse (1982) presents a historical account of this process in western Europe, describing how certain ideals of friendship and masculinity were shaped by the growing socialization to nationalism. He focuses primarily on the ways that values of friendship were transformed by national ideology rather than on the question of how national identification is dependent on the sentiment of fraternal friendship. Along these lines, Benedict Anderson argues that the modern nation can be distinguished from other imagined communities by the style in which it is imagined and that, ultimately, it is "fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to

kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (1991:7). Yet there has been little analysis precisely of this question, the style through which fraternity is imagined by members of the national community.[2]

Framing national solidarity as an extension of friendship involves examining processes of identification among members of a community. Commemoration rituals for war dead present a notable example of the process whereby one's fellow citizens, technically anonymous strangers, are transformed into friends. Known to only a limited circle of family and friends during their lifetimes, soldiers who die in war attain public recognition and are acknowledged by distant others as cherished friends of the cause. In this way rituals of commemoration connect the living with the dead and reproduce an emotional bond among citizens that is central to the nation-state. As I describe below, identification with missing soldiers triggers and sustains an even greater experience of familiarity and closeness. The missing are situated at a unique juncture between the living and the dead. On the one hand, they represent a strong presence and the prospect of returning to everyday life. On the other hand, they signify heroic sacrifice similar to that of fallen soldiers. In this sense, missing soldiers oscillate between the horizontal ties of the living and the vertical ties formed between the living and the dead.

Between 2004 and 2006 I examined various sources of public discourse and selected commemoration rituals addressing missing soldiers in Israel: media coverage in the three main daily newspapers (*Ha'aretz, Ma'ariv,* and *Yediot Achronot*) and their respective Internet websites (http://www.haaretz.co.il, http://www.nrg.co.il/online/HP_0.html, and http://www.ynet.co.il/home/0,7340,L-8,00.html); talkback responses to Internet news reports; a range of websites and associated forums run by the soldiers' families, the military, governmental agencies, NGOs, radio stations, commercial firms, Jewish communities abroad, and various private initiatives; speeches and op-ed articles by public figures; television coverage of national ceremonies related to the missing soldiers; and participant-observation at selected commemoration sites for fallen soldiers. For the sake of the present discussion, I focus predominantly, although not exclusively, on two cases: that of the three soldiers kidnapped in Har Dov—Beni Avraham, Adi Avitan, and Omar Souad—and that of Ron Arad, a pilot missing in Lebanon since 1986. Both cases have received considerable public attention despite the relatively strong likelihood that the soldiers were no longer alive. As the former case is now resolved, it also serves to illustrate processes of collective identification both before and after death has been confirmed.[3]

Some studies of missing soldiers in other militaries, most noteworthy, the U.S. military following the Vietnam War, present a conflictual relationship between the soldiers' families and the

government. U.S. families, supported by various veterans' lobbies and localized segments of the wider public, have become increasingly confrontational, insisting that soldiers remain alive in Indochina, some still in captivity, and that the government has not taken the necessary measures to retrieve them (Doyle 1992; Franklin 1991). At the time of writing, 812 soldiers still missing from the Vietnam War have been given "Presumptive Finding of Death" status (Defense Prisoner of War–Missing Personnel Office [DPMO] 2006), but the U.S. government and the majority of the public seem to have abandoned the belief that any have survived. Instead, the U.S. military focuses on attempts to bring these cases to closure in terms of recovering body remains (Wong 2005). Unquestionably, the contentious nature of the Vietnam War affected public sentiments toward the "remains of war" (Hawley 2005) and has resulted in the marginalization of veterans and in strong ambivalence toward the prospect that soldiers may have been left behind (Sturken 1997). In this sense, the U.S. case does not present an occasion for solidarity. On its face, the Israeli case is similar in its potential for conflict to arise as families differ with authorities over the handling of their sons' affairs, and such confrontation has become more visible and public in recent years. Yet what is interesting for the purpose of the present discussion is that the wider public does not play a part in this predicament and, instead, participates in an extraordinary display of identification with the soldiers. It is precisely the tension between the conflictual politics over the lack of closure and the public demonstration of solidarity despite this lack that makes the Israeli case of missing soldiers an interesting one to study from the standpoint of national solidarity. This solidarity is enhanced by the militarized nature of Israeli society. Unlike most modern states characterized by a sharp distinction between the military organization and civil society, the Israeli case presents a persistent blurring between the military and civilian spheres in both the political and the cultural realm (Kimmerling 1993; Maman, Ben-Ari and Rosenhek 2001). As a result, beyond the military, the government, and soldiers' families, a range of civic agents is actively involved in attempts to "bring the boys back home."

I begin by noting aspects of the Israeli culture of commemoration pertinent to the present discussion. I then describe cases of missing soldiers and present diverse expressions of identification with the soldiers advanced by a variety of public agents. I suggest that this display of solidarity illuminates two dimensions, by no means exhaustive, for analyzing the style through which fraternity is imagined by the national community: The first is the relationship between the living and the dead as manifested in commemoration rituals; the second is the interplay between historical and mythic perceptions of time in national context. Both aspects serve to explain the centrality of missing soldiers within national discourse and, in turn, they play a role in producing a

site of exceptional consensus for national solidarity, as I discuss in my conclusion.

**Commemorating the Sacrificial Dead**

Distinctive characteristics of modern nationalism include the establishment of commemoration rituals for fallen soldiers on an industrial scale, the attempt to instill these rituals in all members of the community, and their association with values of fraternity and sacrifice. The sacrificial dead, those killed in battle in the service of the nation, have a continuing role in shaping national solidarity (Anderson 1991; Handelman 2004; Mosse 1990; Smith 1998:140). The emblem of the hero soldier is represented by both spatial and temporal mnemonic devices. Monuments erected on the battlefield emphasize the spatial dimension of memory, whereas scheduled events in the nation's calendar, such as memorial days, reflect its temporal dimensions (Ben-Amos 2003). Most artifacts of commemoration, however, present a more elaborate narrative form combining both time and space, as is seen in memorial booklets or films. Resonating in these various forms of commemoration is a key sentiment in the relationship between the nation and its soldiers: the need to repatriate the sacrificial dead, to provide for them honorable sepulture in the nation's name, and to acknowledge that they died so that the nation might live. Official military cemeteries reflecting this national spirit were first established in the United States following the Civil War and, subsequently, in Europe in the aftermath of WWI (Grant 2005).

Caroline Marvin and David W. Ingle (1999:67) provide a concise, schematic account of sacrificial "totem" rituals in the nation-state: Members of the community travel to the community's borders, to areas at the limits of what is familiar and known, where identities are exchanged between insiders and outsiders. These members cross over, a crossing that is violent and sacrificial. Their dramatic encounter with death "marks the exact border of the community," as "the border crossers become outsiders dead to the community." Some of those who wrestle with death return, "carrying tales of the transformed." At the same time, the community punishes those who do not cross over and infuses them with guilt. The community as a whole rejoices in those who return alive and reveres and worships those who do not, commemorating them through sacred rituals. Either way, the violent border crossing, repeated in a succession of military conflicts, serves to produce and reproduce national solidarity in a cyclic fashion Marvin and Ingle (1999:67).

Israeli commemoration rituals follow a similar logic yet present several distinctive features. First, since Israel's foundation, its commemoration practices have not been limited to government and military initiative. Rather, most remembrance efforts have been carried out by families, friends, and grassroot organizations of civil society (Bilu and Witztum 2000; Sivan 1991). The personal grief

relayed in family laments has often been subordinated to the collective theme of heroism and sacrifice in the name of the nation (Oppenheimer 2002), although recent years have seen a growing shift of emphasis from collectivistic values to individualistic ones in the rhetoric of mourning (Bilu and Witztum 2000).

Second, in Israeli culture the repatriation of the sacrificial dead is associated with principal values in Jewish tradition. Marvin and Ingle (1999) stress the territorial dimension of the sacrificial dead. The community defines its dead as border crossers whose sacrifice seems to reproduce the nation. In Israel, the significance of the border crossing goes back to two central aspects of Jewish belief, the return to Zion and the promise of redemption. Since the emergence of Diaspora communities in the first century C.E., the injunction to redeem captives *(pidyon shevuyim)* has been incorporated as part of Orthodox religious law (*halacha;* Troen 1992). In contemporary Israel, this injunction has been directed particularly toward the return of captive soldiers and is often associated with the biblical verse "and thy sons have returned to their border" (Jeremiah 31:17), originally a prophecy of consolation given to Mother Rachel, who mourned the destruction of Zion and pleaded for the return of its sons, the people of Israel, from exile. A central NGO campaigning for the safe return of the soldiers abducted prior to the Second Lebanon War in 2006 has adopted this biblical verse as its name (Keren Maor Foundation n.d.). Whereas the verse, indeed, calls for the safe return of the exile community or of individual captives, in contemporary Israeli discourse, it has also been applied to the dead. In 2004, news reports and Internet talkback referring to the ceremonial return of the remains of the Har Dov soldiers were often similarly headed with the caption "and the sons have returned to their border." In other words, the notion that repatriation of the border crossers can resurrect the nation goes back to Jewish belief in collective redemption. It is also reflected in Orthodox burial customs. The halacha assigns extreme importance to the presence of all body parts during the burial of a corpse, as the body represents the site of potential resurrection at the End of Days (Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman 1997:91). Accordingly, following military action, troops are committed to retrieving all the remains and body parts of the dead and transporting them for proper burial with the assistance of a special unit of military field rabbis (Weiner 1990:105). As blood is considered part of the soul, it too must be collected, if possible, for burial with the corpse (Weiss 2002:60–61). The significance attached to the proper repatriation of soldiers is therefore highly embedded in Jewish religion. This provides additional depth to the tacit belief that the retrieval of missing soldiers, alive or dead, is vital for the very continuation of the nation.

A third feature of the Israeli culture of commemoration is the conscious negation of the category of the "unknown soldier" (Dekel 2003). Tombs for unknown soldiers, first erected in France and

Britain following WWI (Inglis 1993), have been analyzed extensively as paradigmatic emblems of modern nationalism. Anderson (1991) suggests that through their anonymity and abstractness, they disentangle the trauma of actual, personal death from the productive effect of the sacrificial dead, enabling an abstract imagining of the nation. In contrast, Israeli commemoration is premised consistently on the notion that "we don't have anonymous soldiers" (Dekel 2003). This notion has been adopted explicitly by the Unit for Detecting Missing Soldiers EITAN, a designated IDF unit established to supervise all recovery attempts of soldiers. In her opening statement on EITAN's public website, the unit's commander-in-chief repeats the phrase and connects it with EITAN's mission to recover the missing and to identify body remains (Cohen-Gefen n.d.). About 40 anonymous soldiers have been buried in various Israeli military cemeteries since the 1948 War of Independence (EITAN n.d.a). Their anonymous but concrete graves starkly contradict the logic of abstractness in tombs of unknown soldiers. The Israeli culture of commemoration adheres to a politics of friendship rather than a politics of anonymity. It subscribes to the motto "each person has a name." Thus, every soldier (and often civilians) killed in military conflict or terror attacks is elaborately described by name and other personal details in the opening items of all news bulletins. The rhetoric of friendship is especially dominant in commemoration rituals. Very often the dead are conceived of as epitomizing friendship, and their friends are summoned to tell of their bond (Kaplan 2006). This practice demands, indeed, celebrates familiarity of the dead.

**Israeli Cases of Missing Soldiers**

Israel's prolonged state of conflict with neighboring Arab countries, with Hezbollah, and with Palestinian militias has led to a series of military excursions in the borderlands, predominantly in Lebanon, from which some soldiers have never returned. Israeli soldiers went missing in the 1973 Yom Kippur War at the Syrian and Egyptian fronts, in the First Lebanon War in 1982 and the subsequent occupation of south Lebanon (until 2000), and in the ensuing border frictions during which Hezbollah carried out both successful and failed attempts to kidnap Israeli soldiers, activities culminating in the Second Lebanon War in 2006. Similar attempts to kidnap soldiers from within Israeli territory have been made with limited success by Palestinian militants since the first intifada (Palestinian uprising) in 1987 and culminated in the captivity of Gilad Shalit in the Gaza Strip in 2006. The abduction of soldiers, especially within Israel's sovereign territory, is perceived as an unbearable blow to the nation's morale and contributes to its continuous state of emergency.

The IDF distinguishes missing soldiers (the equivalent U.S. term *missing in action* [or *MIA*] is not used) from prisoners of war (POWs) and fallen soldiers with unknown burial sites. The decision

to change a soldier's status from missing to either POW or fallen with unknown burial site is often difficult and controversial. For instance, the IDF intended to declare dead three soldiers who took part in the battle of Sultan-Ya'acoub during the First Lebanon War in 1982 but had to refrain following a petition by the soldiers' families to the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice (Porsher 2004). In addition, since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel's main confrontations have been with Lebanese and Palestinian militias that often withhold information regarding the fate of abducted soldiers, limiting the possibility of declaring them POWs or dead.[4] At the time of writing, EITAN's website listed seven cases of missing soldiers (EITAN n.d.b).[5] I conducted a search of the Internet and counted the number of Hebrew websites that referred to each soldier. This search provided a preliminary sense of the level of media attention and public discussion of these cases. Table 1 presents the details of each case.[6]

Table 1. Missing Soldiers (adapted from EITAN n.d.b)[5] and Website Count October 28, 2007

| **Name** | **Date of Absence** | **Circumstances of Disappearance** | **Number of Websites** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ze'ev Rotshik | 1973 | Armored corps reservist missing on the way to his unit at the start of the Yom Kippur War. | 917 |
| Zechariah Baumel | 1982 | Armored corps soldier missing in the battle of Sultan-Ya'acoub in Lebanon. | 10,400 |
| Zvi Feldman | 1982 | Same as above. | 9,980 |
| Yehuda Katz | 1982 | Same as above. | Name too common |
| Ron Arad | 1986 | Air Force navigator, abandoned his jet in Lebanon and taken captive by Mustafa Dirani's Shi'ite militia. Apparently sold to Iranian forces in 1988 but since then his traces are lost. | 416,000 |
| Guy Hever | 1997 | Artillery soldier went missing outside his base in the Golan Heights. | 14,900 |
| Majdi Halabi | 2005 | Noncombatant soldier, of Druze background, reported missing on his way from home to his base. | 9,650 |

The case of missing soldiers differs from that of missing civilians. Around 75 unsolved cases of missing civilians are reported by the Israeli police (Israel Police 2006). Yet their details are virtually unknown. Beyond mention in a limited number of announcements on radio news broadcasts and websites seeking information from the public, missing civilians confront oblivion. In contrast, missing soldiers receive extensive media coverage, although the public can contribute very little information as to their fate, especially if they have disappeared behind enemy lines. The demarcation begins from the moment of absence. To declare a person missing, someone needs to notice his or her absence and report it. Whereas civilians are most likely to be missed first and foremost by close family members or friends, a soldier is missed first by his military unit, a formal entity operating on behalf of the nation-state. In this respect, he is lost to the entire community, not only to his family.

It is also instructive to compare the case of missing soldiers with that of fallen soldiers. Fallen soldiers are commemorated by an array of structured rituals established by the authorities and by their families and friends. The norm of publicly identifying each soldier by his name is carried out in a range of official and grassroots memorials, from the military cemetery and monuments to scholarships and competitions in the soldier's name to albums containing personal mementos. In selected cases of extraordinary sacrifice, a street may be named after one who has fallen. Such, for instance, occurred in the case of Major-General Yakutiel Adam, the highest-ranking IDF officer to have been killed in war. Streets in a dozen towns bear his name, and a new settlement was renamed after him. Missing soldiers can receive no such acknowledgment. Yet, in many regards, they attain more media recognition and public "commemoration" than other soldiers. Thus, missing soldiers are mentioned on a much larger number of websites than the high-ranking General Adam, who was mentioned on only 716 websites at the time of writing.

This far greater volume of website activity around missing soldiers compared with civilians or fallen soldiers reflects concrete expressions of public curiosity and concern that can be observed in real-life instances of commemoration. On one of my visits to the central military cemetery in Tel Aviv during the national Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers, I observed the interactions of the bereaved families, friends, and peers who attended the organized ceremonies and then gathered around the graves of their beloved ones. I noticed a commotion around a particular grave and saw that the father of Benny Avraham was standing next to the grave of his son, buried only three months earlier on the return of the bodies from the Har Dov incident. The bereaved father was talking to the press and was surrounded by people, most of them probably strangers, who had come to console him. People do not normally approach bereaved families that they do not know

personally. This disproportionate interest in Benny Avraham the fallen soldier could only be explained by his recent status as a missing soldier.

At the same time, public interest in missing soldiers is selective and unequal. In terms of website activity, references range from around 900 in the case of Ze'ev Rotschik to well over 400,000 in the case of Ron Arad. The degree of interest depends on the circumstances of the disappearance, on the soldier's military status, and on his social and ethnic background. Arad was not only a navigator in combat aviation, one of the most prestigious IDF military positions, but he also abandoned his plane in dramatic circumstances. In 1986, Arad's plane was on its way to attack Palestinian targets in south Lebanon when it was hit and Arad and the pilot were forced to perform an emergency parachute landing. Caught under intense fire by Hezbollah and other Lebanese gunmen, the helicopter coming to their rescue was unable to land but managed to hover briefly next to the spot where the pilot was hiding. The pilot leaped onto the skid and held on to it as the helicopter slowly made its way to Israeli territory. The remarkable rescue, documented on camera, left a memorable impression on the Israeli public, yet it was also a painful reminder that all traces of Arad were lost. The larger-than-life quality of Arad's story had all the appropriate ingredients for the making of a new legend of heroism in Israeli collective memory (Zerubavel 1992:108)—actual heroes, a dramatic rescue under fire, and a demonstration of sacrifice—but it lacked one crucial element: an ending. This lack of closure seems to have intensified the story's legendary qualities.

In addition, Arad's background as a middle-class Ashkenazi Jew (that is, as a member of the hegemonic group), backed by the strong standing of his Air Force peer group, magnified public interest in his case, as I elaborate below. Whatever the reasons, in no other case in modern history have so many national efforts been made to obtain evidence of a missing soldier's fate (Edelist and Kfir 2000:9). These efforts included the abduction of ten Lebanese Shi'ite citizens, among them the militia leaders Obeid and Dirani, who were officially detained as a means to gain information on Arad and as bargaining chips for his release. Despite its problematic legal basis, their detention was initially approved by the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice (Ben-Naftali and Gleichgevitch 2000). Interestingly, in contrast to the general interest in Arad's case, this court decision has stirred little public debate or attention in Israel (Barak 1999).

One finds a much lower level of public interest not only in the long-ago disappearance of Ze'ev Rotshik—listed, surprisingly, as fallen with unknown burial site on the Ministry of Defense's (n.d.b) commemoration website—but also in one of the most recent cases, that of Majdi Halabi. Halabi served as noncombat soldier at an army base close to his home and disappeared during a leave of absence, not while on active duty. In this sense, his absence could be likened to civilian

cases rather than to those of soldiers missing in action behind enemy lines. But this is only a partial explanation for disinterest in his case. Artillery soldier Guy Hever went missing in similar noncombat circumstances. Indeed, both Hever and Halabi are listed in the police records of absentees noted above (Israel Police 2006). Yet Hever receives more attention in terms of mention on Internet websites, and his case is more frequently incorporated in the mission statements of the NGOs campaigning for the retrieval missing soldiers. As government and military officials have gradually come to entertain the possibility promoted by Hever's family that he mistakenly crossed into Syria (Bachur-Nir 2005; Rapaport 1999), it appears to have become easier to add his case to the more "valued" list of soldiers missing behind enemy lines. But, more significantly, the relative lack of attention to Majdi Halabi has to do not only with his noncombat position but also with his Druze background.[7] Being less integrated in the Jewish community, his family is less likely to have social–political resources to make their case. As a result, his absence is much less acknowledged among the wider Jewish–Israeli public.

**Growing Circles of Solidarity**

Having outlined the cases of missing soldiers and the general interest they raise among the Israeli public I turn to analyze the expressions of solidarity involved. Feelings toward the missing soldier tap into the essence of military solidarity as it is extended to the national sphere. An important value in the IDF's code of ethics is fraternal friendship, defined as "[the soldiers'] constant devotion to each other, their willingness to provide valuable help, come to the rescue and even risk their lives for their fellow men" (Kasher 1996:233). This value is epitomized in the imperative to rescue wounded soldiers under fire and not to leave them behind under any circumstances (Kasher 1996:230). This value effects not only IDF soldiers but also impinges on the common folk model of friendship in everyday life held by the wider community of Israeli men, mediated by the centrality of military culture (Kaplan 2006). What happens, then, when the imperative not to leave the border crosser behind cannot be met? How does it affect his immediate comrades-in-arms? How does it affect the wider military community of friends? How does it affect the wider, national community of ostensible strangers?

The pilot who flew with Arad and was rescued under fire recalls:

> Every airman feels frustrated that Ron is still in captivity, but I feel the frustration a thousand times stronger. I was there. I was there and came back, and even though it was he who ejected both of us [from the plane] and saved us, he's the one who has eventually remained there. Although I couldn't have done anything to help him, I can't avoid a certain feeling of guilt, a

sense of responsibility that lies on me like a heavy burden. [Air Force n.d.]

The pilot feels in the most tangible way that his own survival depended on Arad's actions and sacrifice, and he consequently experiences a sense of guilt for having left his close comrade behind. But such feelings of responsibility and guilt expand to the wider military and civic community and translate into ever-growing circles of solidarity. Beyond the obvious, immediate concern and involvement of the families, friends, and military peers who knew the missing soldiers personally, I delineate additional agents involved in the expression of solidarity extending from closer circles of identification to more distant circles.

One circle involves soldiers who do not know the missing soldiers personally but who identify with them through military camaraderie and "heritage." A website run by the families of the Har Dov soldiers was still active almost two years after the bodies of the missing men were returned. A soldier serving in the same unit wrote one of the last messages in the site's guestbook:

The first thing I recall from the day I arrived at the company is a huge amount of posters with the names of the sons, their pictures and a lot of objects made by soldiers in order to remember and pass on the events of the kidnapping, for soldiers who weren't there and didn't know them, like me. I remember suddenly experiencing a huge identification with the families, with the company and with the sons. … I and every member of the company will do everything to pass on the heritage, just like it was passed on to me a year and a half ago. [Abducted Soldiers' Families n.d.]

It is striking that the soldier uses the ambiguous term *heritage*. *Heritage* may refer either to a unit's combat history, which is regularly taught to succeeding generations of its troops, or to the legacy of a military or political figure. The soldiers in this case were abducted in a tragic ambush in Israeli territory, not in a heroic battle, and it is difficult to see what legacy they represent. Although commemorative rites tend to valorize all war dead, given the universal nature of military service in Israel, the higher status of soldiers who died in combat compared with those who died in less heroic circumstances is typically maintained despite the halo effect of the commemorative space. However, in the case of the Har Dov soliders, a halo effect extends beyond their deaths to their (past) status as missing soldiers. This status renders them heroes, irrespective of their military accomplishment.

The civic community presents an additional circle of solidarity, propagated by a range of public agents. One such agent is the educational system. The Ministry of Education has prepared a detailed lesson plan for teachers who wish to discuss missing soldiers in the classroom. It instructs them in how to cultivate students' interest in the topic, how to perform a ceremony dedicated to the soldiers, and how to lead a discussion on actions that can be taken to assist the missing (Ministry of

Education n.d.). The teachers and children seem to be highly responsive to these governmental efforts. Students were reported to have sent scores of letters to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and to have hung huge posters on school buildings. In one high school, the students prepared a calendar to keep a count of Arad's days in captivity, just like prisoners do (Levi 1994).

A second and perhaps more central group of agents involved in efforts to spread solidarity in the civic community consists of NGOs established for that purpose. They fund newspaper ads and street posters and sponsor rallies and conferences, often assisted by local municipalities. Most active in this respect is the foundation Born to Freedom, which began as a lobby group representing the family of Arad but has become the central NGO advocating for all missing soldiers. Interestingly, it is headed by former senior officials of the Ministry of Defense and retired military personages, and in many ways it operates more like a government agency than an independent organization. At a certain stage in its campaign, it began offering a $10 million reward for any relevant information on Arad. The foundation is heavily funded by the government, and so, families of other missing soldiers appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice to extend the reward offer to information about their sons. Their appeal was successful (Melman 2005). This affair exposes, once again, the selectivity in the treatment of missing soldiers and some of the underlying power structures. The campaign focused on Arad has continued to be the most visible. In addition to distributing a bumper sticker popular among Israeli drivers, the foundation, as well as other groups, has sponsored spectacles such as an ATV procession, an ultralight aircraft show, a yacht sale, and a parachuting display. Throughout the years, solidarity with Arad has been signified by displaying a blue balloon. This style of commemoration campaign seems to follow U.S. customs of recollecting loved ones behind enemy lines through a public display of decorative garments or banners. Prominent examples are the display of yellow ribbons during the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis and the wearing of red ribbons by activists of the MIA–POW movement (Santino 1992).

Commercial actors are a third, intriguing group of agents of civic solidarity. For instance, a chain of gas station–convenience stores has joined together with the Born to Freedom foundation to distribute flyers in its stores, and it has conducted a street poster campaign as part of the company's stress on "contributing to the community" (Paz 2006). Even more telling is the case of a particular Middle Eastern fish restaurant. In the summer of 1994, the bathers on the beaches of Tel Aviv could observe a small plane towing a huge sign reading "Ron Arad we yearn for you—Ahmad and Salim" and carrying the image of two fish—the restaurant's logo (Levi 1994). Here, it seems, the Arab owners of the popular restaurant, situated in the Jewish area of metropolitan Tel Aviv, made a deliberate attempt to bolster their legitimacy by connecting to the heart of the Zionist–Jewish ethos:

missing soldiers.

Finally, expressions of solidarity extend beyond the circle of Israeli citizens to the greater circle of the Jewish world. A range of Jewish organizations and denominations take part in public displays of solidarity. For instance, in 1993, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism called on all its North American congregations to participate in the effort to release Israeli missing soldiers by organizing letter-writing campaigns to the U.S. president and members of Congress, posting information on synagogue bulletin boards, writing op-ed articles in local newspapers, and writing letters of solidarity to the soldiers' families (United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism 1993).

These various agents of solidarity mediate in complex ways the relationship between the military and governmental authorities officially in charge of the retrieval efforts and the soldiers' families and peers struggling to expand these efforts. Given the centrality of military and national sentiments in the general population, the commercial media nurtures public attention to missing soldiers as a means of gaining popularity, all the while retaining its critical role as a watchdog of the government. This bolstering of public opinion, in turn, pressures the government to display a visible commitment to the retrieval efforts. This pressure can result in direct government funding for the NGOs initially established to petition the government, as in the case of Born to Freedom foundation. In other words, as grassroots forces push the government to act, or to pretend to act, the government, in turn, chooses to play a part and enhance the public expressions of solidarity. Consequently, the political impetus to oversee government decisions is neutralized. Even more telling in this respect is a bill proposed by members of the Knesset (Parliament) that would require the government to fund family members of missing soldiers who travel abroad to meet with world leaders. The legislators explain that these meetings "are a national undertaking, not a private whim … [and] are indescribably more important than a meeting held by any statesman would be" (Meranda 2007). This official approval of family lobbying as a substitute for state diplomacy exemplifies the constant blurring of the boundaries between the private interests of the families, the civic sphere, and the government's international and security considerations. The contradictory interests involved are clouded by a generalized and depoliticized stance of solidarity.

**Ron Arad Ghost Boulevard**

Missing soldiers raise a dilemma at the intersection of solidarity and commemoration. They constitute a clear case of sacrifice that merits appreciation, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, no one knows their fate. The missing are left in a vacuum, and their families experience an unbearable state of limbo. How can their sacrifice be commemorated? Fallen soldiers are

commemorated by an array of practices, many of which are spatial in form, often consisting of words inscribed on solid physical material, such as stone, precisely symbolizing the fixedness and eternalness of the memory. Attempts to recollect missing soldiers in a similar way can lead to paradoxical outcomes. I was surprised, for example, during a visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., to see that the names of missing soldiers are inscribed on the wall in conjunction with those of the dead, with only a small cross to designate their special status. The mark is intended to be flexible. If death is confirmed, the cross will be replaced by a diamond, which designates fallen soldiers. But what if a person were to return alive? Oddly enough, in that case the cross would simply be surrounded by a circle, as "a symbol of life" (National Park Service 2006). But then the returning soldier's name would remain inscribed in the memorial; the living person would continue to be commemorated like the dead!

Given their uncertain fate, missing soldiers require more flexible modes of commemoration, particularly ones that are temporal in nature. An example of this flexibility is the *New York Times* special obituary section commemorating the victims of September 11, "Portraits of Grief." Newspapers are not only temporal; they are often considered an epitome of temporariness. However, as argued by David Simpson (2006), because in this case so many of the victims had no body remains that could be properly buried, the highly publicized printed homage stood to some degree in place of an epitaph. Its account of the lives of the dead was more flexible and ambiguous than a traditional obituary, as if hope existed that some might still be found alive. This nonspatial mode of commemoration replaced the physical certainty of an epitaph engraved in stone, and yet its impact was possibly far greater, as the portraits circulated to local newspapers across the United States and fed national attachments (Simpson 2006).

In the case of missing Israeli soldiers, temporal commemoration is apparent in ceremonies that mark the soldiers' *yahrzeit Yahrzeit* (anniversary of their day of absence) or birthday or in periodic daily reminders of their absence on some local radio stations. Another form of commemoration that is more susceptible to wide dissemination is the production of pop songs written especially for the soldiers. A song is an event that occurs in time, and in its popular form it can reach a wide audience. At least two songs were written for Arad by a leading songwriter, the late Ehud Manor. One song, "When You'll Come," performed by Boaz Sharabi, became a hit and marked the singer's advancement to the heart of the Israeli music scene (Ynet n.d.). It is repeatedly played on the radio whenever Arad's case is brought up in the news. The other song is a protest song entitled "You Shouldn't Abandon Your Friend," part of a campaign by a group of Arad's peers from flight school (Gadot 2004). At least two songs were composed for Benny Avraham and Adi Avitan of the Har Dov incident. On the website dedicated to their memory, one individual has written [with heavy

spelling errors]:

> I want to share something with you from the day they were kidnapped I had a hard time sleeping I think ov poor soldiers probably being torchured. … Today I am a soldier securing the most dangerous place in the State of Israel I identify very much wid your pain … I have Adi's song [Adi Avitan], accompanies me on guard duty, although I'm not supposed to listen on duty. … Yours always, Corporal Moshe. [Abducted Soldiers' Families n.d.]

Thus, unlike that inherent in the spatial specificity of monuments, the power of popular songs lies in their ability to accompany listeners wherever they are during their daily activities and to incite strong emotions of identification.

At the same time, songs lack the sense of official, certified recognition underlying monuments and epitaphs. At times, the strength of people's desire for an official token of commemoration based on spatial representation leads them to desperately struggle with the ghostlike quality of the soldiers' absence. I spotted a telling example in central Tel Aviv. Sometime in early 2006, an anonymous person covered the street sign that was placed on a temporary wall enclosing a construction site next to the Ministry of Defense and replaced it with a stylish street sign bearing the name Ron Arad Boulevard. The implications of this spontaneous act of street naming are paradoxical. On the one hand, it can be read as a protest against the government's alleged abstention from further pursuing the cause of Arad and a demand that this cause be constantly remembered. A similar action that was taken in a nearby street three years earlier was part of an explicit protest campaign, but in that case the street signs were quickly removed by the municipality (Cohen 2003). On the other hand, the sign is a reminder that only the dead can be commemorated with a street name. In that context, the sign might imply that it is time for the public to acknowledge Arad's death, properly commemorate him as a heroic fallen soldier by naming a street after him, and bring the affair to closure. Either way, it is perhaps no coincidence that the defiant street sign was placed on a temporary fence of a construction site. It thus not only avoided instant removal by city authorities but it also relayed a strong sense of the flickering, ghostlike quality of these acts of commemoration for the missing. Similar to the songs, the temporary street name does not represent closure and acceptance but, rather, instability and distress. Similar to the songs, it represents the haunting voice of a soul locked between life and death.

As Roger Luckhurst (1996) notes, the ghost flickers between presence and absence, between disjunction and domestication, between possible and impossible mourning. Such is the impossible designation of Ron Arad Boulevard, which is indicative of the ghostly imagining underlying the solidarity with and commemoration of missing soldiers in general.

**National Solidarity and the Living Dead**

Ties of solidarity depend both on a relationship of mutual identification among the living and on identification of the living with the dead. As anthropologists long ago suggested, the memorialization of the dead profoundly informs the sense of community among the living. In all kinds of communities, death marks the onset of a complex, often heavily ritualized ceremonial process by which the deceased becomes an "ancestor," in other words, a meaningful presence for the social identity of the survivor (Hertz 1990; Kaufman and Morgan 2005). Similarly, the national community enacts rituals that aim to resurrect the sacrificial dead, as the future of the living is dependent on the symbolic presence of the dead (Handelman 2004:145). Thus, fallen soldiers are socially constructed as having symbolic immortality (Bilu and Witztum 2000:4). These patterns go back to the onset of modern nationalism. Jules Michelet, one of the first European thinkers to consider nationalism discusses how the historian's task in telling the story of the French revolutionaries is an act of resurrection: "I have given many of the dead too soon forgotten the aid of which I myself will have need. I have exhumed them for a second life. … They live now among us who feel like their parents, their friends. And so a family is formed, a city shared by the living and the dead" (Anderson 1991:198). This vivid image of national culture as a ghostly town of sorts possibly led Anderson to describe the tombs of unknown soldiers as emblems of "ghostly national imaginings" (1991:9). Likewise, in a passing proclamation that, "between life and death, nationalism has as its own proper space the experience of haunting," Jacques Derrida (1992:15) draws attention to the image of the ghost as a central figure for national consciousness and for the connection of the dead to the living.

The figure of the living dead is often expressed in national culture through artistic motifs that are far more pastoral than the image of a ghost. A recurrent theme in many war poems of commemoration is the replacement of the dead with red flowers, echoing the common practice of placing fresh flowers over graves. On the one hand, red flowers signify blood, battle scars, and the very absence of the fallen, and, on the other hand, they communicate the prospects of peace and life blooming anew (Fussell 1975:243; Miron 1992:246–247). In Israel, the double, contradictory meaning of the living dead has been greatly expanded by leading poets such as Natan Alterman and Haim Guri. In many poems, especially those associated with the Independence War, dead soldiers are brought back to life to address the living and to relay their convictions, often restating and confirming the collective commitment to sacrifice (Oppenheimer 2002). The intense imagery of the living dead in these poems, which are chanted in official and spontaneous commemoration rites, serves to compensate for the guilt feelings the living have with respect to the sacrifice of the dead.

To relieve their agony, the living must view the death of the their comrades as no longer complete and final (Miron 1992:95). An important mediating theme in these commemoration rites is the sentiment of fraternal friendship. Emphasizing personal bonds with the dead helps the living to endure and partly conceals the sacrifice of the dead by celebrating the promise of eternal friendship. Thus, the living dead serve as a literary–cultural solution to the acute paradox experienced by a society that sacrifices the lives of its sons in the name of collective ideals and at the same time assigns a central value to the sanctity of life (Hever 1986).

In all these examples, the image of the living dead is attached to individuals who are known, in fact, to be dead. By playing on the limits of death, the image eventually only reaffirms the fundamental dichotomy between life and death so central to the social order. In contrast, in the case of missing soldiers it is unclear whether the individuals are, in fact, dead or alive. Their case presents a unique, concrete ethnographic circumstance of living dead in which the community faces a disorder in the categories of life and death. Following Robert Hertz (1990), Elisabeth Bronfen (1992:198) distinguishes between biological death and the social ritual of symbolic death. Immediately following biological death, or disaggregation, the corpse remains close to the living, not yet safely removed by the distancing apparatus of symbolic death. It is only the exhuming of bones once the flesh has deteriorated and their second burial in a sealed coffin that enables the safe passage from absented body to its representation in commemorative symbols. Between these two phases is a liminal phase that is threatening and polluting not only physically but also in its blurring of categories. The potential regeneration solicited by death requires the termination of the phase of liminality, the redrawing of boundaries and a re-creation of social order (Turner 1992).

Circumstances of nonclosure may figure like the double, the uncannily frozen, suspended in a nonspace populated by the living dead (Bronfen 1992). In the case of the missing, the sense of nonclosure is exaggerated because of the lack of definite knowledge of biological death. It is further magnified by feelings of guilt held by those who survive the battle, by the disturbing, haunting thought that more could be done to retrieve the missing soldiers alive. In these circumstances missing soldiers preoccupy national consciousness as concrete cases of living dead.

**National Solidarity and Alternative Perceptions of Time**

Expressions of solidarity with members of the community who act in the service of the nation transform over time—prior to death, after death, and during the suspended period in between. Whereas identification with fallen soldiers is greater than with the living, missing soldiers elicit far stronger expressions of solidarity than either the living or the dead do. These dynamics draw on

collective perceptions of time. The extended literature on cultural concepts of time (e.g., Eliade 1954; Freeman 1998; Leach 1961), in national contexts, in particular (Anderson 1991; Giddens 1990; Gupta 2004), suggests a dichotomy between two understandings. One is a consciousness of "mythical" time, whereby solidarity is anchored in events, which, contrary to the rational sequencing of time, may have occurred at different points in history but that jointly carry significance for the members of the community. In such an understanding, meaningful events are linked together by a transcendent being whose point of view is "outside" historical time. This sense of time has been typically associated with premodern, religious communities.

The second perception is of "simultaneous" time, based on an underlying, modern understanding of time as homogenous and "empty." Anderson (1991) suggests that changes in technology and in media, in particular, have enabled a growing number of people to constantly imagine themselves as living lives that parallel those of other members of the community, consuming together independent but concurrently occurring events. By subscribing to a temporal modality of simultaneous, or "transverse" time, a given community links unrelated events in time and space. As a result, without having ever met each other, community members have a strong sense of common identity and destiny, which contributes to national solidarity.

However, framing these two perceptions of time as premodern versus modern or as religious versus national does not capture the extent to which they can interact. The anthropological literature not only recognizes that time is socially and culturally constructed but also that different perceptions of time can exist in the same community (Rutz 1992:2). In particular, the national community adheres both to simultaneous time and to a mythic sense of time. The replacement of religious regimes with predominantly secular ones has not abolished people's need to overcome the threat of death and oblivion. To form a community of destiny, the nation not only reconstructs the present but also nationalizes the past and re-creates a precious heritage (Singer 1996:321). In this vein, national consciousness serves to unite several generations—the dead, the living, and the yet unborn—in a single community of fate (Smith 1998:140). Indeed, the more the nation-state is involved in rituals of commemoration, the more it is likely to draw on nationalized myths to connect contemporary citizens with heroes of the past. One could say that if identification with fellow citizens in everyday life reflects the simultaneous dimension of national solidarity, identification with fallen soldiers draws on the mythic dimension.

It is precisely here that one can understand why solidarity with missing soldiers is far greater than with missing civilians, on the one hand, and with fallen soldiers, on the other hand. What singles out their prolonged moment of suspended death is the amalgamation of the two concepts of time,

the mythic and the simultaneous. Similar to fallen soldiers, missing soldiers gain national recognition as symbols of sacrifice and are, thus, revered in a mythic way. Such mythic identification is not limited to the past but can also occur in the present. For example, U.S. discourse on MIAs in Vietnam has been loaded with mythic imagery of continued torture of soldiers in Vietnamese prisons. A "subculture with near religious overtones" has evolved whose members view any attempts to foreclose the issue as an act of betrayal (Keating 1994:245). Magnified by fiction and movies that center on MIAs as icons of veterans' victimization (Sturken 1997:88), this mythic ambience has helped to sustain public support for their cause (Doyle 1992; Franklin 1991). Similarly, Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2008) analyzes how techniques of nonclosure practiced by Israeli journalists in their continuing coverage of the Arad case have contributed to the consolidation and retention of the cultural myth that Arad is still alive. A similar stance of nonclosure has been apparent in the media coverage of the Har Dov soldiers, despite conclusive evidence of their deaths.

But the very possibility that a soldier is still alive also implies an ability to imagine his presence in ways that are more civic and less "religious," yet no less resilient, made available by the collective consciousness of simultaneous time. For instance, consider the following account by a new immigrant to Israel who writes on Jewish topics on an Internet website: "I made *aliyah* [immigration] to Israel in August 1986; Ron Arad was captured by terrorists in October 1986. It is heart-wrenching to compare the life I have experienced in the years since I moved to Israel to that which Arad has experienced in captivity, assuming he is still alive" (Katz n.d.). By immigrating to Israel and becoming a citizen, this individual has technically joined the national community. Identifying with the famous case of Arad enables her to reinforce a sense of belonging. She articulates her closeness to Arad in terms of parallel life experiences, in other words, in terms of a civic community sharing simultaneous time. This ability to bridge the gap with distant others exemplifies the transformations in time–space relations that have made place increasingly "phantasmagoric" (Giddens 1990:18–19). As members of the community relate to one another more easily across space, they can better envision their mutual lives and can, thus, develop a more intimate relationship despite their physical separation.

It is precisely this capacity for intimacy with absent others that renders the missing soldier, the epitome of absence, a source of such strong national imaginings of presence. The following account by Arad's former squadron commander is a telling description of such practices of presence: "Ron Arad lives in the squadron at every moment. … His name is mentioned in the squadron almost every day and he is talked of as if he were here. In the squadron's new building, a building he's

never seen, there's a locker waiting for him with his name on it" (Air Force n.d.). These and other examples—recall the calendar prepared by high school students to keep a count of Arad's days in captivity—demonstrate the perception that Arad is living his life, trapped in hell, parallel to the everyday life of the national community. Through this faculty of simultaneity, the living dead are constantly made present among the living in their everyday life. And, at the same time, through the faculty of mythologization, the living dead can take their places in the national pantheon of the sacrificial dead. In other words, the missing soldier lives and breathes just like any citizen, but is also holier than any citizen. As a prism that merges both concepts of time, the simultaneous and the mythic, the secular and the sacred, he becomes the most intimately felt of all national heroes, winning extraordinary declarations of love before rather than after his return, alive or dead.

**Conclusion**

The public involvement with missing soldiers provides an interesting case for exploring some of the dimensions that shape collective solidarity. The soldiers' unique position epitomizes the ideological transformation that, to a lesser degree, takes place among all members of the national community: from a community of strangers and absent others to a community of familiar, beloved brothers. Rituals of commemoration constitute one of the mechanisms that forge this collective intimacy between citizens. As Irit Dekel (2003) notes, soldiers are nameless before they die and gain a name only in dying. Israeli preoccupation with missing soldiers gives rise to expressions of identification and solidarity at an even greater scale.

Don Handelman and Lea Shamgar-Handelman (1997:110) analyze how national commemorative practices strive to turn the absence of the sacrificial dead into presence. They note that the less present the actual body in the memorial site, the more elaborate its representation. As missing soldiers present the ultimate case of absence, their representation in public discourse is likely to be the most elaborate. However, deeper dimensions of national solidarity are at stake. Whereas commemoration of the dead provides ample grounds for spatial representation of the sacrifice and its mapping onto the national territory (Handelman 2004), solidarity bordering on commemoration in the case of missing soldiers draws almost exclusively on the temporal dimension of the national consciousness. The soldiers' state of liminality is perceived as an instance of suspended death. They are experienced at one and the same time as both living and dead, inviting identification by way of two central conceptions of national time, the simultaneous and the mythic. As a prism for both modes of identification, the missing become the most intimately present of all members of the community.

Public preoccupation with missing soldiers is not always a source of solidarity. In similar cases throughout the world, families and veterans have become increasingly confrontational and exerted

organized political pressure on local governments. Such was the case not only with the American MIA–POW movement, but also with grassroots activities of Cypriot women whose relatives went missing during hostilities between local Greeks and Turks (Sant Cassia 2005) and the campaign by the Japanese Association of Bereaved Families to build a state-funded memorial to the unidentified Japanese soldier-dead of WWII (Trefalt 2003:47). Likewise, Israeli families have become increasingly active on the public scene, lobbying through NGOs, traveling to world leaders to appeal for support, and confronting the Israeli authorities in court and in public. The government, in turn, faces far-reaching and often-controversial political choices in managing these cases, whether conducting prisoner swaps, abducting enemy leaders to use as bargaining chips, or waging full-fledged war, as in the incursion into Lebanon in 2006. However, between these two poles lies public expression, if not celebration, of solidarity with the soldiers, backed by the families, the associated lobbies and NGOs, the media, and ultimately the government itself. Although the general public may often have conflicting opinions as to the specific measures that should be taken to retrieve the soldiers, it nevertheless manifests unstinting support for their cause and espouses their retrieval one way or another, alive or dead, at all costs.

The relative discontinuity between the narrower sphere of contested political negotiations among families, lobbies, and authorities and the broader, generalized sphere of consensus among the greater public demonstrates the intensity of solidarity that is generated by this unique instance of suspended death. This solidarity forms a singular public emotional experience, which breaks down the dichotomy between absence and presence, between individual life and collective life, between the personal and the political.

As this unbroken emotional experience triggers a call for action at all costs, it also entails a built-in tension between the sanctity of life and the sanctity of death. Allegedly, the devotion to the soldiers represents a deep commitment to life, a commitment to the well-being of the members of the community who were sent to the borderland on the nation's behalf. It is sometimes viewed in the local discourse as a manifestation of Israel's strong sensitivity to human life as opposed to the so-called lack of such sensitivity among its neighboring Arab societies. But often, this commitment to rescue soldiers or recover their bodies involves risking the lives not only of enemy civilians but also of additional IDF soldiers, either directly, by taking military action, or indirectly, by carrying out disproportionate prisoner swaps that encourage the abduction of more soldiers. Hence, the humanistic stance underlying this display of solidarity masks the underlying outcome, which is the continued reproduction of sacrificial death that is so central for national solidarity in the first place. The anomie that attends suspended death has to be resolved so that the social order of battle, sacrifice, death, and commemoration can be retained.

**Notes**

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1. The prisoner swap between Israel and Hezbollah included the return of Elhanan Tenenbaum, an Israeli businessman abducted to Lebanon in questionable circumstances, in exchange for Shi'ite militia leaders Abdel Karim Obeid and Mustafa Dirani, held captive by Israel to use as bargaining chips in efforts to secure the release of another missing soldier, Ron Arad. In addition, Israel released 400 Palestinian prisoners and 34 other men, mostly Hezbollah and other Lebanese militants but also several detainees of other Arab nationalities. It also returned the bodies of 59 Lebanese militants (Guardian 2004). The disproportionate number of prisoners exchanged for one citizen of allegedly dubious reputation and three dead soldiers, as well as the lack of any development of information pertaining to Arad, stirred a controversy over the government's decision to undertake the prisoner swap, as reflected in public polls (Hein 2004).

2. The term *fraternity* draws on the gendered aspects of national solidarity and is central to the hegemonic arrangements that connect male bonding to militarism and sacrifice. Throughout this article, therefore, my references to members of the community involved in sacrificial rituals take the male form. Further elaboration on fraternal friendship and masculinity in the Israeli case can be found in Kaplan 2006.

3. I do not elaborate on the case of Gilad Shalit, abducted by Hamas factions in the Gaza Strip, and that of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, abducted by Hezbollah in an event that led to the outbreak of the Israeli–Lebanese war in 2006. At the time of writing, there is reasonable proof that Shalit is alive in captivity, and a similar rhetoric is applied to the two other soldiers. Typically, they are collectively called "abducted soldiers" rather than "missing soldiers." These circumstances and rhetoric dissociate their fate from the notion of "suspended death."

4. Interestingly, public interest in the hundreds of POWs from the Yom Kippur War has been relatively low since their return. Dalia Gavrieli (2006) argues that their experience has been silenced because of the mismatch between the manifestation of passivity and subordination associated with captivity and the cultural code of heroism demanding active fighting and sacrifice.

Although the safe return of any of those currently missing would likely arouse immediate interest in the circumstances that led to their captivity, if these circumstances were deemed to fall short of the heroic code, the current rhetoric of veneration might be replaced with (unspoken) public criticism.

5. In the time of writing EITAN's website does not refer to the three soldiers abducted in the summer of 2006. It lists separately 195 cases under investigation of fallen soldiers whose sites of burial are unknown.

6. I conducted the website count on May 7, 2006, September 30, 2006, and October 28, 2007. Over this period, website figures grew around tenfold for most missing soldiers. During this time three more soldiers were abducted and the the Second Lebanon War broke out. Apparently, this spawned renewed interest in the earlier cases as well. At the same time, figures remained stable, at 500 to 1,000, for the Har Dov abductees, whose status was changed to fallen soldiers in 2004. Website numbers in the article refer to the last count on October 28, 2007.

7. The Druze are an Arabic-speaking community practicing a distinctive version of Islam. Unlike most Arabs in Israel, the Druze serve in the IDF, as do some men of the Bedouin community, such as Omar Souad of the Har Dov incident. For further discussion of Arab–Palestinian men serving in the IDF, see Kanaaneh 2005.

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