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Full Length Research Paper

Women meet soldiers: An ambivalent encounter

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Abstract

Machsomwatch (checkpoint watch) is an Israeli women protest and human rights movement aimed at monitoring military checkpoints in the West Bank. On a daily basis, in shifts, women volunteers observe the operation of the checkpoints and report their experiences to the public in Israel and worldwide (see www.machsomwatch.org). This paper examines the encounter between Machsomwatch members and the soldiers manning the checkpoints and analyzes its structural and cultural configuration. It is suggested that the specific attributes of these encounters give rise to ambivalent attitudes and emotions among both soldiers and women, but especially the latter.

Keywords: Social movement, protest, framing processes, emotions, ambivalence, occupation, checkpoints, women, soldiers, Israel.

INTRODUCTION

Over 500 different kinds of barriers, including earth mounts, ditches, iron bars, stone blocks and manned checkpoints, are spread, mostly within the occupied (by Israel) West Bank, to inspect and control the population movement around the area (The Office for the Coordianation of Affairs (OCHA) repot that in Sept. 2006, 528 physical obstacles, out of which 83 are manned, were spread around the West bank, an 11% increase compared to January of the same year (OCHA, 2005;2006). Since 2009 the number of checkpoints decreased significantly, allowing, as a result, a greater freedom of movement and transportation within the West Bank. However, it is a mistake to assume, like many tend to think, that they were abolished altogether. Our field study was carried out mainly during the years 2004-2008 when the checkpoints' regime was at its pick). Located within Palestinian populated area these barriers separate between individuals, families, villages and towns. The declared objective of the checkpoints is security, specifically, to prevent Palestinian terrorism. However, their massive implementation throughout the West Bank is, in effect, a collective punishment designed to control the civilian population in the territory, thus inhibit freedom of movement, add uncertainty to people's daily routines, and disrupt every aspect of civil life for over two million Palestinians: economic activity, access to workplace, educational institutes, and health services, as well as social interactions and family connections (e.g., Eldar and Zartal, 2007; Barda, 2012).

Machsomwatch (hereafter MW) is a women-only protest and human rights movement founded in January 2001, following the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the ensuing systematic increase in the number of checkpoints and barriers created by the Israeli army throughout the West Bank. From a small group of Jerusalemites (3 founders and about 10 activists in the first few months), within 2-3 years MW grew to become the largest women protest movement in Israel, with about 400 active members, organized in four local groups: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv (center), Haifa (north), and Be'er Sheva (south), each observing the checkpoints in the designated area (for a more detailed description of the organization's development, see Kaufman, 2008; Keshet, 2005). MW is a grass-root women movement based solely on voluntary participation. Its credo is stated in its manifesto: "[We are] Israeli women, peace activists, opposing the systematic oppression of Palestinians and the denial of freedom of movement in their land..." (see, www.machsomwatch.org). The tag women wear while on duty, declares: "Women against the occupation and for human rights." Keshet (2005), explains the decision to establish MW as an all-women movement “because of Israel’s almost universal military service and the role it plays in the identity of Israeli men in particular, we sensed that this would be both disadvantaged and

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obstructive in engaging non-confrontationally with security forces" (pg. 35). In that MW follows other Israeli protest and anti-militaristic movements like Women in Black, the Four Mothers, New Profile, that in confronting soldiers and the general public convert their weakness as women and mothers into symbolic power (e.g., Helman and Rappoport, 1997; Benski, 2001) (This is not an Israeli-specific phenomenon; Based on the gendered opportunity structure women use their imagery of maternal care and family responsibility to legitimize challenging political actions around the world and throughout history (Noonan, 1995; Faree and Mueller, 2004)).

The movement's activity centers on three main practices:

- monitoring soldiers' behavior at the checkpoints, and recording and reporting their observations, including human rights violations, to the widest possible audience;
- trying to safeguard the human rights of the Palestinians who pass through the checkpoints;
- to the best of their ability and within the limits imposed by the situation, intervening on behalf of the Palestinians when violation of rights occur (Kadmon, 2002; Keshet, 2005; Resh, 2007; Sharon-Nadir, 2005).

The framing of the movement's mission and of its *modus operandi* is an outcome of an ongoing dynamic process of internal negotiation, which vacillates between two objectives: justice - the political protest against the occupation and its manifestation in the form of checkpoints, and charity - humanitarian concern and on-the-spot interventions against abuse of Palestinians' human rights (Resh, 2006).

To carry the movement's mission, vigils of 2 - 4 women move daily (in two shifts) between several dozen manned checkpoints and summarize their observations and experiences in a report that appears on a daily basis on the MW internet site, in both Hebrew and English. The encounter between the women and the soldiers at the checkpoints is fraught with attitudinal and emotional ambivalence for both the former and the latter. Both "sides" are Israeli citizens and both are Jewish, but their interpretive frames regarding "what is going on"; that is, regarding the need and function of the checkpoints, their implications and effectiveness, rests on very different tacit assumptions concerning the situation at hand and macro-policy considerations.

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Reacting to the detainment of three Palestinians (one of them a 60 years old man suffering from heart problems), who were suspected of picking protected plants (used as a spice), and to their being held for hours at the Hamra checkpoint (located in the Jordan valley), the woman reporting this event says: *"A soldier who does not show any compassion when facing a sick person* (she points to the detainee, who is lying on the floor) *is definitely brainwashed… Do we send* ***our sons*** (emphasis mine) *to protect the flora in the occupied territories?…*" (Walla News, 7.3.2011).

The following quotations, on the other hand, come from soldier.

"The MW women pester and disturb the soldiers. They stage their protest here, take pictures and by this they distract the soldiers attention…one minute of distraction is enough for a disaster to happen. My responsibility is to get all the soldiers back safe at the end of the day and because of them I might fail on this.…they [the women] *get in the way. ….My message is, take your protest somewhere more appropriate and let us perform our duties faithfully"* (interview with A, a former combat soldier and officer, April, 6, 2010).

…"*You are simply enemies of Israel… What you are doing is simply a disgrace and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves… You defame Israel and damage its reputation all over the world…"* (a letter sent by a soldier to Machsomwatch mail,13.3.2011).

Theoretical Framework

The present study focuses on a highly unusual situation, a result of contrasting elements of social structure and emotional loyalties. It rests on well established theoretical formulations, most particularly from the recent 'cultural turn' in social movements' theory and research. What came to be labeled 'the cultural turn' has evolved in at least two different yet somewhat connected directions: theories of cognitive 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000; Gamson 1992; Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford, 1986; Snow 2004), and the more novel elaborations of the field of emotions in social movements and protest activity (Aminzade and McAdam, 2002; Calhoun, 2001; Flam, 2005; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001; Taylor and Rupp, 2002; Yang, 2005).

Since the 1990s, collective action frames and framing processes are considered central in understanding social movements' dynamics.(Benford and Snow 2000). In this paper we focus on framing as meaning construction in the basic Goffmanian sense of frame as a "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman 1974, p. 21). Along these lines, collective frames are shared meanings, the outcome of ongoing negotiations between the group members. They are cognitive readings of the situation, offering diagnostic, prognostic frames and a "call" for action (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000) Accordingly we treat the construction of meaning as a dynamic process involving an interpretive definition of reality, based on ideology, perception (or diagnosis) of the situation, and real experiences in the collective action.

Recently with the widespread understanding that cognitions are tightly linked with emotions, a central argument posed against the framing perspective is its

neglect of the emotions involved in the process ((Jasper 1998; Goodwin. Jasper and Polletta, 2001). We accept the notion that cognitive processes are inconceivable without emotions; that emotions are central to all human and social activities and play a central role in social movements (especially, those based on voluntary affiliation) (e.g., Halperin, Sharvit and Gross, 2011).

The sociology of emotions and political psychology literature usually focus on a single emotion or on an 'emotion family'. The more recent shift to the study of emotional processes in social movements has led scholars to question this narrow focus, recognizing that emotions are amorphous categories, that they tend to merge into each other, and that often they appear as complex structures that include more than one emotion at the same time or in succession in very close temporal proximity, that is, they form *constellations of emotions* (Barbalet, 1998; Benski, 2005, 2011; Collins, 1990; Flam, 2005; Scheff, 1990; Yang. 2000). Moreover, emotional constellations can be composed of *congruent emotions* or *non-congruent* or even *contradictory* emotions (Benski, 2011). We suggest that complex situations tend to give rise to configurations of incongruent attitudinal and emotional constellations in which diametrically opposed attitudes and emotions coexist and clash. We will refer to these as *a state of ambivalence.* We further contend that the specific configuration created in the MW women-soldiers encounter at the checkpoints results in such a state of ambivalence composed of a simultaneous onslaught of opposite attitudes and emotions.

The women-soldiers encounter is inherently conflictual, due to collision of their binary opposite attributes: civil – military, women – men, old – young. Moreover, their opposite framing of the situation and of their own roles within it, amplify this conflict. However, at the same token, the conflict is intertwined with strong attitudinal and emotional state of ambivalence, experienced by both sides but especially on the part of the women (Pratt and Doucet, 2000). We also claim that, in part, these ambivalences resonate the initial framing of MW as a hybrid movement, in the definition of both its mission – political activity and humanitarian help – and its *modus operandi* – observing and witnessing versus intervening and helping.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis offered here is based on the personal experience of both writers in long years of voluntary activity, and on personal participation of the first writer in MW shifts at the Checkpoints since 2004 (participant observations). In addition,

(a) 27 in-depth interviews with MW members (one and a half to two hours each) were carried out (by the first author). Most of the interviews were carried out in 2005-6 and few more in 2010;

(b) Participation in group meetings since 2004 (3-4 per year of the whole group and about 5 per year of the Tel Aviv section);

(c) Reading MW reports on the shifts at the checkpoints;

(d) Following the discourse (at times, heated discussions) on various issues within the organization's network.

The soldiers' attitudes and emotional reactions were retrieved from women's written reports, two interviews with soldiers, one of them an officer who served at most checkpoints for about three years, and a letter from a soldier that was sent recently to the women of MW. In addition we used talkbacks to four articles that focused on MW, and were posted on Ynet during the year 2006. (The four articles and their talkbacks are:*"heroes" over leftist women,* Ynet, January 2006*, Borderless Checkpoints.* Ynet, February 2006. *MW activist accused of naming a soldier "Nazi".* Ynet, may 2006*. The deteriorating situation at the Checkpoints.* Ynet, June 2006. Retrieved on September 2011), We only used comments posted by soldiers or men and women who stated that they served at the checkpoints and met the women of MW during their shifts at the checkpoints.

Data analysis followed the logic of grounded theory methodology (Strauss 1987) where themes and patterns are extracted from the data with minimal prior structure imposed on the analysis (see also guidelines offered by Spradley, 1980).

Intensive participation in MW activity, especially the vigils at the checkpoints, increased the understanding of the situation and of women's cognitive and emotional reactions in this situation. It thus helped in building insider insight. In the same token, this position carries the dangers of over-identification on the one hand, and of possible bias in interpreting the responses of both the women and the soldiers, on the other.

Aware of these dangers we first presented the draft of our analysis to a group of MW members whose questions, responses and critics served as a peer review. Most important was the on-going discourse between us, where the second writer (who was not a permanent participant in the vigils at the checkpoints) served as the "devil's advocate", questioning and criticizing the analysis of the findings, which helped in building a more profound interpretation of the complex responses that were unveiled in the data

Analysis

The encounter at the checkpoints involves three identifiable groups: The first two, namely, the women (civilians) and the soldiers (the military) are Israeli Jews and are ostensibly “on the same side.” The third group, the Palestinians (civilians), is the object of both the soldiers, who are there “to protect you from terrorist bombings," and the women, who oppose the Check points as such and monitor soldiers' action with the aim of

protecting the Palestinians' human rights. All the three parties are obviously at cross-purposes, a state of affairs that, in itself, is a fertile soil for conflict and ambivalence. This analysis focuses on the two Israeli groups: the women and the soldiers. The third group, the Palestinians, is present in this conflict and the dynamics of the encounter is very much affected by their presence. Still, since our interest in this paper lies in unraveling the clash of frames between the women and soldiers and their ensuing emotional consequences we will not include the third group in the analysis.

We shall first elaborate on the two active groups, i.e. the women and the soldiers, and then discuss the ambiguous nature of the specific spatial context within which the encounter takes place.

The women

In terms of its social make-up, this group seems relatively homogeneous, with most of the women coming from the center of Israeli hegemony: Ashkenazi, educated (the majority with academic training), opinionated, middle-class, mostly Israeli-born or Israeli-educated. The majority are non-religious and middle-aged (or even elderly). Many describe their upbringingas having taken place in the consensual Zionist, "Israeli," spirit (This description is a generalization: In effect there are also a minority of younger women and few observant Jewish women.). They all are “left” (in the Israeli jargon) and opposing the occupation. Some of them "have been there" (e.g., have belonged politically to the radical left and held anti-occupation attitudes) since their youth, but many relay that their present convictions have evolved as a result of a long process which started with the awakening from the 1967 euphoria that followed the fast victory in the Six-Days War. They describe their progress along the years as "disillusionment" and "sobering-up": initially, in the spirit of "patriotism," they unquestioningly justified Israeli policy and identified with the Israeli army (IDF); with time, however, they evolved an increasingly critical attitude towards the continued occupation, its implications for the Palestinians citizens, and its harmful effect on Israeli society. This awareness propelled them to action: *"In your name they do things that make you responsible if you act like an innocent by-stander…"; "My duty is to raise my voice, so one can't say: I did not know…"; " I am especially worried about the horrifying corrupting effect of the occupation on Israeli society…"; "This is the little I can do… so that I can look in the mirror, so that in the future I will be able to tell my grandchildren what I did 'then'."*

Since the service in the IDF is compulsory for every Israeli citizen, almost all the women have served their duty, as have their family members, husbands and children, brothers and sisters. They served in the army and sent their children to do so strongly convinced that they were *"contributing to* [their] *country defense."* However, especially among the ones whose sons served during the recent decade, other voices are coming up: *"For me, my son's military recruitment was a 'critical point'… "; "He has been brain-washed and has become a militarist, a rightist…* [This is] *very hard for me to bear…"; "I could not listen to my son's classmates' talk"* (just before beginning their military service)*…";"I came* [to MW] *because of my sons. I felt that the Israeli State was exploiting my children…"* The dual framing of the organization as political protest and humanitarian movement opened a wide gate for mobilization of women whose focus of concern varied: the more political oriented emphasized the protest dimension while other women were mostly concerned about the human suffering and personal abuse, trying, thus to help “correct” soldiers’ behavior and military arrangements at the checkpoints, which meant negotiating and coming to terms with various levels of commanding echelons.

Answering questions about their first experience at the checkpoints, two typical reactions are salient. First, there is a clear sense of trauma: *"At first, I just saw herds of people going back and forth… It looked horrible…"; "On my first shift, I witnessed a soldier kicking a Palestinian doctor. It was traumatic…"; "...When I returned from my first shift, I entered my house and lay on the floor for four hours; I could not move…"* These and similar descriptions are usually replete with emotional expressions: words such as "shame," "anger," "rage," "despair," "sadness," "helplessness" and more come up time and again – "…How can you explain their [the soldiers] impervious, mean behavior"; "*How can they, our soldiers, behave like that?*...."(This and many other comments that are quoted here evoke the Holocaust, whose historical memory we all carry: "I am ready to tear my hair out when I hear, ‘What do you want, I only follow orders’…"; "I kept thinking of the Protestant woman who had saved my father in the south of France…" Usually such comments are immediately accompanied by the following: "I do not (or ought not) compare, but…" The issue of the occupation, the Holocaust memory and the protest deserves an analysis of its own, which is beyond the scope of this paper).

Second, many women admit that, although they decided to join MW of their own accord, during their first shifts they were afraid. Having been raised on the image of the Arabs as our enemies, and not knowing what to expect, traveling into the heart of the West Bank through Palestinian villages and standing near the checkpoint with floods of Palestinians moving to and fro, especially during the tense period of the Intifada – all this gave rise to a fear that "something might happen." These apprehensions are also reflected in the reactions of friends and family to their activities: "*Aren't you afraid to go there?...*" Thus, the entrenched negative images of "those Arabs" had an effect even on women who had decided to act as witnesses at the checkpoints (Women

soon realized that if they indeed faced any risk at the checkpoints, it was mainly from the settlers who harass them and interfere with their action; in several cases they have even resorted to physical violence).

Finally, MW is an inclusive movement with no mechanism of selecting members; the only criterion is identification with its defined mission and readiness to participate in its activity. As a result, despite the relative compositional homogeneity of the movement and the anti-occupation attitudes shared by its members, a considerable variety of ideological views and motivational forces are at work among the women (Deutsch-Nadir, 2005). These ideological variations are reflected in the women's attitudes toward the soldiers, in their views about relations with higher army echelons, and in their behavioral practices.

The soldiers

The ongoing protracted conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is fed by an institutionalized sense of existential threat and a strong belief that the military force is Israel's major defense against it (Bar-Tal, 2007; for a detailed discussion of beliefs and emotions that serve as socio-psychological barriers to conflict resolution, see Bar-Tal, Halperin and Oren, 2010). As a result, in Israeli society the army is a powerful institution that has a strong impact on the collective management of the State, on policy decisions, and on the personal life cycles of individuals (Kimmerling, 1993; Barak and Sheffer, 2007; Iran-Yona, 2008) (Army service (especially, in an officer rank) is an advantage in applying for a job; it is also often used as an argument in criminal courts for bailing out a defendant or for alleviating punishment for the accused). Moreover, the almost universal army service is a central experience for (Jewish) Israeli youngsters, a powerful mechanism in defining the boundaries of collective "belonging," and for many it symbolizes the essence of "Israeliness" (Kimmerling, 1993; Helman, 1997; Sasson-Levi, 2006). Thus, as has already been mentioned, most of MW women grew up identifying with the perceived defensive nature of the IDF and, in their time, along with their husbands and children, took pride in paying their dues to army service.

Within the army, there is a clear hierarchical order between combat soldiers and service units (Sasson-Levi, 2006). The former represent the "real" soldier, the "real man": he is highly appreciated and enjoys greater prestige (In recent years high schools are rated according to their percent of graduates who serve in the army and among them, the percent who enlist as combatant). The troops appointed to guarding the checkpoints are officially defined, and convincingly perceive themselves, as combatants, although they act more like policemen (or security guards). In this respect, it is important to note that since the eighties, and especially during the first Lebanon war (1982) (The first Lebanon war started June, 1982 by Israel, was a "war of choice" and was accompanied by considerable opposition and at times also conscientious objection (Helman, 1999), that signaled the beginning of a long process of change in the military social position), a gradual but consistent shift in army composition has occurred, a result of macro social processes and ideological changes. The secular, Ashkenazi middle class (and Kibbutz) youngsters, hitherto the backbone of combatant units of the army, committed to "serving their country," have been displaying a decreased motivation for army service and especially for serving in combat units. If they do serve, they tend to use their social and human resources to gain prestigious positions in the air force, intelligence, anti-craft units, the navy etc., all of which distance them from direct involvement in the Palestinian Intifadas (the first, 1988 -1992; the second, 2000-2004) and are also less risky (Levy, Lomsky-Feder and Harel, 2007). In the field units in particular, and even more so in the troops assigned to the checkpoints, there is an increase in the proportion of "peripheral" groups: new immigrants (from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia), religious soldiers (many of whom are settlers), and residents of peripheral development towns (Levy, 2005, 2008). Their definition as combatants, even though in less prestigious units, combined with the popular conviction that they play a major role in defending the country from terrorism, endows them - especially in their own perception - with a respectful position in Israeli society that might also prove a convertible social resource in their future civic life (Levy, 2005). Obviously, the uniforms and the weapons further contribute to their perceived high status as 'combatants.'

The space

An important aspect of the situation under discussion is the actual location of the checkpoints. The encounter between the MW members and the soldiers occurs in a relatively small and hard-to-define space. Checkpoints are located in a distinctly civilian area – usually along major roads connecting one community to another, traditionally serving vehicle transportation. The people moving on these roads – Palestinians, settlers, and MW women – are almost exclusively civilians. In this case, however, the army, as the sovereign in the occupied territory, appropriates a piece of civic space, on the grounds that this is an essential security measure, and militarizes it. Indeed, the armed soldiers at a checkpoint tend to define it as a "military zone," or even a "closed military zone." (Legally, an area can only be pronounced a "closed military zone" under a number of conditions: the order must be signed by an army general on the day it is issued; the area must be precisely delimited and a detailed map must be provided; and the span of time

during which the area will remain a closed military zone must be stipulated (the dates the order takes effect and is terminated)). Through this definition they not only limit the Palestinians' right of movement, but attempt to impinge on the rights of women-citizens who are present in this space. This ambiguous status of the checkpoint area – a military zone on the one hand and an open public space on the other, is also reflected in the lack of orderly public services, be it garbage collection, running water, toilets etc. With time, adjacent to many checkpoints, informal parking lots sprouted to accommodate the mini-buses and cabs bringing in and picking up the Palestinians who moved back and forth through the barrier. Informal food markets and "coffee shops" sprang up, which were constantly "negotiated" with the army. From time to time, the soldiers overturned the booths that house these improvised facilities, only to find them back in operation a few days later. (A growing body of research literature by post-colonialist geographers discusses the formation of "gray spaces" in city outskirts through informal practices (for Israeli examples, see Yiftachel, 2009; Roded, 2011). Some of the characteristics of this process are similar to the creation of the checkpoint space).

The way the space at checkpoints is defined has implications for the presence there of MW members; in fact, this definition is being constantly negotiated between the women and the soldiers – locally, at every checkpoint and more generally, between MW and the army officials (or the "civil administration" of the occupied territory). At issue are such prerogatives as the right to stay at the checkpoint and observe its operation, the right to take photographs, the specific point from which observation can be carried out, and the possibility to talk with the Palestinians – these are all points for incessant arguments with the soldiers, whose decisions regarding them appear to be arbitrary.

The ambiguous status of the space and the power vested in the soldiers by the State, combine to create a situation where arbitrariness reigns supreme. Hence, rules are unclear and constantly changing, sometimes from one hour to the next, increasing the general sense of uncertainty.

The encounter: attitudes, behavior and emotions

The central status of the army in all walks of life, has given rise to meetings between women and soldiers, of which many are officially sanctioned ceremonial occasions that are organized by the army and carried out at specific and clearly defined times and locations. For example, memorial services, special army ceremonies in boot caps, officers' course ceremonies or volunteering positions serving food, drinks and cakes to the soldiers. These are institutionalized and consensual occasions usually at the invitation of the army and the women are there in their traditional roles as mothers and caretakers supplying support and traditional services to their soldier sons and daughters, husbands, brothers, or fathers.

To the contrary, the women - soldiers encounter is defined as a protest action and it has been initiated by the women in a controlling-monitoring position, against the wishes of the army and the soldiers. From the outset the framing of the situation by the parties is mutually contradictory; hence the encounter is inherently fraught with conflict. The women perceive the checkpoints as the long arm of the occupation, as a collective punishment of the entire Palestinian population, in violation of basic human rights, and especially freedom of movement, which causes immense suffering. Conversely, the soldiers describe the checkpoints as a critical security measure against possible terror attacks. MW activity is framed by the women as a protest and a humanitarian watch, while the soldiers frame it as interference in the army's legitimate action that damages Jewish solidarity. As far as the soldiers are concerned, all Palestinians are suspects, potential terrorists …"*I am aware of the fact that there are at the checkpoints soldiers who occasionally breaks the law (and it is wrong), but in the bottom line we are dealing with the enemy (you should put it in your head) and every Arab passing the checkpoint is a potential terrorist…".* MW women, on the other hand, perceive the Palestinians, in their majority, as innocent citizens, humiliated and deprived. Finally, while the soldiers are convinced that their activity at the checkpoints is highly effective in controlling terrorism (*"Just yesterday/last week a Palestinian youngster was caught with a knife/a pistol/a bomb…"),* women are convinced that checkpoints are a breeding ground for hatred, which will ultimately motivate a new generation towards terrorism. They also question the immediate effectiveness of this measure, arguing that a determined terrorist will find many other routes to infiltrate Israel. Moreover, since most of the checkpoints are situated at the heart of a West Bank (and not on the Green Line – the legitimate border of Israel), their 'defense against terrorism' function is questionable.

By coming to a checkpoint and observing how it is managed, women "violate" several entrenched assumptions. First, they are acting as a civil eye in a seemingly military location. This in itself is a potential source of conflict: *"This is my checkpoint and I decide what to do here…"; "It is a military area and here I am the law…"; "Are you here to control our work?..."; "You are disturbing my work here …"* – all these are typical reactions on the part of the soldiers, who are doing their best to drive MW women as far as possible from the checkpoint. At some point, to institutionalize the soldiers' position vis-à-vis the women, a white line was drawn at some distance from a major checkpoint (and a red one in another checkpoint), signifying the boundary restricting the civil eye's access to the military area. Any attempt to cross this line gives the soldiers an excuse and the right to resort to blackmail: "Halt of Life!" – the soldier declares

meaning, that if you do not obey, they will stop the flow of Palestinians through the checkpoint. (At some checkpoints various landmarks are used in lieu of an actual line: "Move back and stand behind the gate / the cement block/ down there…" etc). Since in effect the soldiers are the "owners" of the checkpoint, officially endowed with the position of power (however limited, especially vis-à-vis MW members) and fully armed to boot, they use the above strategy to curtail civilians' actions and to show "who is the boss." Similar debates are rampant over the right to photograph: while in an open public place taking pictures is permitted, it is categorically prohibited in "*our military space*."

The frequent use of the term "work" reflects the soldiers' perception of what they are doing there; it implies that they see themselves as professionals with a good understanding of "military considerations" and a know-how to cope with the situation at hand – as opposed to the women-civilians, before whom these secrets of trade are closed by definition*…."In short, all these leftists should be thrown away and leave us to do our job properly!!! No one is being held [in the checkpoint] just because we like it!!!"* This argument surfaces time and again to justify arbitrary decisions taken by checkpoint commanders: *"I can't explain; it is a military matter…"; "I can't tell you who can and who cannot pass here, it's a military secret…"*. In justifying the detainment of a Palestinian and keeping him waiting for hours on end, a soldier retorts: *"Do you want me to free him so he will come to Tel Aviv and blow you up?"* meaning, 'I, an armed soldier, am here to watch over you, a civilian, and make sure you can carry on with your life in safety.' In some instances, soldiers – and especially reservists – use "doing the work" as an excuse for being present at the checkpoint at all: *"Do you think I enjoy being here? I am just doing my work… I must obey / fulfill my duty… I would gladly go home…"* implying that he is also a civilian, temporarily in a soldier's uniform.

Paradoxically, when MW members, find themselves face to face with an armed soldier who questions their loyalty by suggesting that they or their family members evaded military service - *"Did you serve in the army?..."; "Your sons probably shirked army service…",* women frequently declare (often with a sense of pride), that they and all their family members have paid their national dues. This is how they, unintentionally, "legitimize" their action: True, they are here as civilians, but they have "earned" their rights to civil action by having served in the army and by having sent their children to fulfill their duty.

The second assumption MW member's challenge by monitoring checkpoints has to do with gender roles. In the framework of their social activism women leave their "natural" private sphere to venture into the political public arena, in defiance of traditional gender roles and the men-controlled security discourse (Deutsch-Nadir, 2005; Mansbach, 2007). Instead of acting as warm, caring and loving wives/mothers, weak creatures that need men's protection, they are out there, in a semi-military space, observing the treatment of Palestinians by the soldiers, thereby taking on a clearly political role. Thus, gender disparities that emerge in this encounter are especially salient: the army service in general, and the role of a combatant soldier in particular, is a socializing ground for structuring and nurturing masculine identity and patriarchic attitudes (Sasson-Levy, 2006). It is not surprising, therefore, that quite often soldiers try to nullify women effort by tauntingly sending us back to 'where they belong': "*Why don't you stay home?..."* ; *"Why are you neglecting your home?..."; "You had better go home, cook for your husband and take care of the family/grandchildren…"* Moreover, they expect this caring role to extend toward them as well: *"Why don't you bring us cookies and cold drinks…"* or even *"You ought to bring us cookies and cold drinks…" (*The "Blue-White" group is a group of women settlers (and their supporters) who used to come to the checkpoint with cakes and drinks for the soldiers as a sign of solidarity and support for their role. Thus, during a shift at the Beit Iba checkpoint (one of the major checkpoints around Nablus), three Blue-White women appeared carrying cookies and drinks for the soldiers, whereupon the checkpoint commander declared: "*Here come the real Israeli women!*", suggesting that there are "Israelis" and "real Israelis," that is, the ones who cling to the stereotypic image of women in their patriotic motherly role*).* Paradoxically, women, many of whom grew up in the pre-feminist era, vacillate between their commitment to radical activity and their internalized role of "a good woman" or "a caring wife/mother". In this context, the age difference between the MW members and the soldiers is highly salient. The women are usually much older than the soldiers they are confronting – sometimes by a generation or even more. This age difference prompts the soldiers to assume towards them a patronizing attitude, treating them with a mixture of sardonic forbearance and disrespect: *"…. As a former combatant soldier that served quite a bit in checkpoints, I must add my voice; the last thing that soldiers need is an elderly woman who is bored with life, and come to disturb the soldier, distract his attention and vigilance…"; "Grandma, stand aside and leave me to do my job. I know what I am doing, and you must follow my orders…"* The appellation "grandma" came up time after time. After lecturing about "the Palestinian terrorists" and the critical importance of the checkpoints, a soldier adds: *"I can't stand you, but O.K. I respect you because you are older and Jewish…"; "I realize that you could be my mother or grandmother… I respect you but please, follow my instructions* (to move further away)*…"*

From their perspective, women, especially if they are "grandmas," have no understanding of security matters and cannot possibly grasp the meaningful function of the checkpoints. Ironically enough, as with gender roles, women accentuate the old-young distinction in the encounter by appealing to the age gap when arguing with

the soldiers: *"I can be your mother/grandmother…"; "I was fighting for this state way before you were born – I am here for the sake of our state…"; "I was here* (at the checkpoint) *when you were still a school boy…" (*MW also has young members (although a minority), and their discourse vis-à-vis the soldiers is different: While the older women try to affect the latter by preaching, educating, or even pleading (if the soldiers act roughly), the younger women also resort to flirting tactics (see, Kotef and Amir, 2007)*)*

Finally, there is also a tacitly acknowledged gap in the social position between MW members and the soldiers: the women are mostly veteran Israelis, highly educated, Ashkenazi, middle class, i.e., they represent the hegemonic well-to-do center of society; conversely, many of the soldiers come from peripheral social strata, are young and less educated: *"It is woeful to realize how ignorant they are…" (*Comments like *"What occupation are you talking about?…" or " We never occupied anything, we have been here forever…"* are common responses to women attempts to explain the aims of the movement*).*

The combination of the women's characteristics, namely, civilian, woman, elderly and seemingly well-to-do middle class (nicknamed "beautiful souls"), serves to intensify the soldiers' objection to MW members systematic presence at the checkpoints: *"You are disturbing me…"; "You are interfering while I am doing my job…"* This is also reflected in discussions that erupt during the encounter: the soldiers scold the women for preferring the Palestinians and disregarding the hardships of their position *…"But what about the soldiers? Do you think of the soldier who stands for whole 8 hours, sometimes twice a day, that must cope with the complex situation, to prevent entrances without permits, to prevent entrances aimed at a terrorist activity, to prevent by-passing the checkpoint, to treat people with respect,… to physically check people, to pick their bags and check their I.D. cards…."*; they try to inform them by explaining the risks involved in their work (*"Just a few days ago/ yesterday a Palestinian terrorist was caught at our checkpoint"*); they take great pains to show that "they know better," or try to belittle the women by taunts: *"Come again, it is fun to have you here… You help us to pass the time – it's less boring that way…"* They perceive MW members as, at worst, unpatriotic or even traitorous ("Arab lovers," "Arafat's whores"), or in less virulent terms, as "strange," "weird," "leftist," "bored with life," believing that the women do not really understand how important and meaningful their mission is. Being Israeli citizens and Jewish, they cannot push the women away or, for that matter, lay hands on them at all, so they resort to threats (*"If you do not obey, I am going to call the police…"*) or to blackmail, by using their power over the Palestinians (*"If you don't do as I told you, I am going to stop letting the people through…"*) – not surprisingly, the latter option invariably proves the more effective.

At the same time, the soldiers cannot ignore the symbolic authority that is embedded in the age, education and social status of MW women. Hence, their emotions oscillate between outright hostility (*"I can't stand you!"; "I hate you!")*, disrespect bordering on contempt, and appreciation, acceptance and in a few cases even a measure of respect (*"I respect you because you are older…"; "My parents are institutionalized and do nothing, but you at your age continue to act"* – coming from an officer, a settler). In rare cases soldiers express their reluctance to the task they are performing: *"Do you think we are happy to be here? But we must obey orders…"*; "*I want to object/to refuse, but am afraid…"; or "It's good you are here to remind me of my human duties"* (coming from a young officer with whom I argued when he stopped an ambulance on the way to the hospital).

Women are more prone to such conflicting attitudes and as a result are caught up in emotional ambivalence. They come to the checkpoint as members of a political movement opposing the continued occupation, protesting against the checkpoints as such, worried about the indifference and even brutality of the soldiers and the growing human rights violations. However, on meeting the soldiers, the future members of their own civil society, *"who are like our own sons,"* as they put it, their social status, knowledge, understanding, and motherly "nature" come to the fore. As a result, the women's discourse is replete with descriptions such as "children," "young boys," "brain washed," and "victims." These terms recur in their answers to the question in interviews: Who are the soldiers? *"Those are the children that return back to our civil society, the citizens of our next generation…"; "They too are the victims of the occupation; they are very young and brain-washed…"*; *"They are my extended family... he* (the soldier) *could be my neighbor…"; "I remember looking in the soldier's eyes and seeing my own son… a victim recruited to serve the war Moloch…*" However, you also hear the following, though less frequently: *"I have not changed my mind; I do not see them as children, not my children anyway… I think they are fully responsible for their actions there…"*

The women's discourse reflects a gamut of painful emotions: shame, anger, frustration, desperation and helplessness are typical terms used to describe their feelings: (Considerable social-psychological research deals with the distinction between "shame" and "guilt," in both their personal and collective form, the implications of these emotions, as well as the mechanisms for coping with them (e.g. Branscobe and Miron, 2004; Whol and Branscope, 2008; Halperin et al., 2011). It is intriguing that "guilt" or "collective guilt" were hardly mentioned by MW women, while "shame" (also in the sense of "collective shame"), "anger," "desperation" and "helplessness" were typical emotions, expressed time and again in women's discourse), *"I feel ashamed that these are my soldiers…"*; *"Their indifference/brutality/arbitrariness drives me nuts…"*

These feelings are mixed with concern, worry, understanding and even compassion: *"I pity them too"; "They are young boys put in an impossible situation…"; "What will become of them when they return to the civil society?!…"*

CONCLUSION

The encounter of Machsomwatch members with soldiers at the checkpoints is characterized by an array of mutually contradictory structural dichotomies that challenge basic societal assumptions about the position and roles of the parties: civilian – soldier; women – men; young – old; educated, middle class, Ashkenazi – lower class, multi-ethnic, social peripheral groups. It is hard to decompose the effect of each of these contradictory features but it seems to us that the combined gender (woman)-civilian characteristics is the most salient in conflict that evolve in the encounter. The soldiers bring to the encounter their institutionalized military power position: they are men, they are armed, and they are officially in a control position; they also are trained to believe in force as a major mechanism in solving problems. The women bring in their symbolic status, which reverses somewhat the asymmetric power relations: they are older, knowledgeable, respectable, and well established in the Israeli social structure. They also oppose violence and reject force as the ultimate solution to political problems. The ambiguous definition of the encounter location – a civilian space appropriated for military use – adds to the complexity of the situation.

The conflict embedded in the parametric configuration of the encounter is further intensified by the opposite framing of the checkpoints' function and of the role of each of the parties in the encounter. "Security" is the theme that prevails in soldiers' discourse: they are convinced that their service makes a significant contribution to defending the women, civilians. Accordingly, the Palestinians are viewed as "the enemy" and a source of perpetual threat ("terrorists,"). They are de-humanized ("animals") overtly and covertly, and their human rights are deemed of no account. Accordingly, MW women are looked upon as a nuisance – by merely watching and writing reports they are interfering with the soldiers' work (*"You are getting on my nerves…"*), let alone by intervening directly, in an attempt to help and alleviate suffering. The soldiers perceive MW women as disrespecting their role as guardians of the nation's security and thereby betraying national solidarity.

Women's framing of the situation is in polar opposition to that of the soldiers, and the themes that prevail in the women's discourse revolve around "occupation" and "human rights." Thus, they see themselves as legitimate civil protesters who are concerned about human rights violations and the damage caused by the checkpoint regime to the occupied population and the Israeli society alike.

Such contradictory framing of the encounter intensifies the parties' emotional reactions, since each side is convinced of the righteousness of their cause. Women's accounts of their experiences in the encounter at the checkpoints are dominated by negative emotions, including shame, anger, disappointment, frustration, and desperation, while accounts of soldiers' emotional reactions reflect hostility, repulsion, contempt, and disrespect. However, for both parties, but especially for the women, these emotions are fraught with ambivalence. The soldiers' hostility is mixed with respect, which stems from the women's characteristics: they are educated, elderly, Israelis, Jewish, and thus, part of "us". Similarly, the frustration, shame and anger felt by the women are mitigated by their empathy towards the soldiers, who are perceived as "our children" and "victims," who, being the operative arm of the occupation, are "caught up in an impossible situation". There is also concern for the long-term individual and collective effects that the prolonged army service in the occupied territories is bound to have on the soldiers. Similar concerns appear in many other Israeli peace organizations, whose peace activism is intertwined with a vision of democratic, egalitarian, just, and humanitarian society.

Finally, the question arises whether such attitudinal and emotional ambivalences resonate the dual framing of the movement's mission as both a protest and a humanitarian organization. First, it should be noted that while the dual definition of the movement and the inclusive policy of recruitment contributed to the fast growing numbers of mobilized women, it was also a source of an ongoing discourse (in some cases heated arguments) about the movement's aims and the limits of accepted practices (cooperation with army and military administration, negotiation with soldiers etc.). It may be that, by defining the movement as championing political protest against the occupation and the checkpoints, the women dissociate themselves from the symbolic boundaries of national solidarity, and deny their "belonging" to the same social space as the soldiers. Hence, the soldiers perceive them as "traitors" and "can't stand" them; the women, for their part, are angry at the soldiers and are bitterly ashamed for them. In the framing of MW as a human rights organization that cares about the Palestinians and attempts to alleviate their suffering and provide humanitarian help at the checkpoints (and beyond), the women revert to their motherly role, in that they seek to "remedy" violations at the checkpoints and alleviate suffering caused by these infractions. In line with this role, however, they see the soldiers as "our (virtual) sons" and as "victims" who are entitled to empathy - after all, they have been placed in an "impossible situation."

The possible connection between the dual framing of the movement at the macro-level (i.e. the definition of the movement's credo) and the attitudinal and emotional ambivalences at the micro-interaction level (i.e. within the

encounter at checkpoints) warrants further in-depth investigation. Greater attention to the possibility of the phenomena of dual framing and its consequences can potentially enhance our understanding of the role of framing in producing states of ambivalence in social movement activists.

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