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“Righteous Gentile” certificate for his son. As praiseworthy as terms like “righteous gentile” or “good Arab” may seem to be, the lingering implication is that they apply to outsiders of the Jewish state.

As long as subjugated soldiers are institutionally identified by their difference, equality with dominant soldiers before death does not always go far beyond the trenches. And it is often rigid state policies that insist on distinguishing minority soldiers from majority ones, not soldiers’ behavior or sense of loyalty. In the Israeli case, the Jewish definition of the state produces policies that aim to Judaize Arab lands—by, for example, pressuring Arabs living in villages the state refuses to recognize to move to more concentrated locations. Such policies target Arabs—whatever their loyalties or records of military service. In a documentary aired on Israeli TV, Bassam complains about the demolition of his family’s home in an area unrecognized by the state, while emphasizing that he is a disabled veteran from Israel’s war in Lebanon in the 1980s. At a memorial for fallen Bedouin soldiers built by the Israeli military, Bassam confronts a state official who was one of the signatories to the demolition orders. The official responds: “I am for protecting the law. If I don’t enforce the law, then I would be neglecting my job.”

Some Arabs in Israel, such as Bassam and Ishmael Khaldi, go to great lengths to conform to the state’s requirements of its “good Arabs.” As non-Jews, however, they are structurally haunted by their Arabness. Seeing Arab soldiers and veterans as potentially both victims and victimizers, I advocate a methodology that questions the standard solidarity assumptions of anthropology and presents a complex understanding of the dynamics of empathy, trust, disclosure and critique between the anthropologist and her subjects.

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The Deployment of Moral Authority

Veteran Activism in Israel

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The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have produced a new generation of veterans in the United States. We are slowly becoming aware of the consequences of this fact, including the personal and social struggles that many soldiers bring back with them to their hometowns and families. Israeli society, with near universal conscription and a history of ongoing military conflict, represents a very different case, and an opportunity to examine the ways military combat experience can be mobilized and transformed into social activism, drawing from the moral authority to critique war that veterans gain through military experience. Here I examine how Israeli veterans redefine their social roles and utilize their identities as former soldiers for political, anti-war and anti-occupation activism.

In Israel, veterans (especially combat veterans) are highly respected, credited both historically and in current memory with the security and continued existence of the Israeli state (see Ben Ari, Lomsky-Feder and Dominguez). For most of the country’s history, this respect for veterans has inhibited criticism of the military, and kept anti-occupation activism relatively marginal. Those who wanted to escape military service would most often try to do so quietly, or risk public denouncement. However, in 2002 Israel witnessed a series of high-profile refusals to participate in military service for reasons of conscience by elite combat reserve soldiers (including pilots and commandos) who were fighting in Operation Defensive Shield, a reprisal against Palestinians for suicide bombings during the al-Aqsa Intifada. The veterans formed a support group called Courage to Refuse, and participated in anti-occupation and anti-war activism. They embraced their public image as war heroes, seeking to use their moral authority to bolster the effectiveness of their activist message.

Authority through Experience
Courage to Refuse has since dissolved, and many of its members

have united to create Combatants for Peace (CFP), a joint organization of Israeli military veteran refusers and Palestinian former fighters. They hold public meetings to share personal stories of transformation, as well as teach-ins for Israeli youth. At these gatherings, they invoke both their social authority as combat veterans and the experiential authority of

through weapon sights, we have decided to put down our guns, and to fight for peace.

Of course, many Israelis still condemn the veterans’ actions, and have tried to discredit the claim that their activism is a case of conscience. However, as honored veterans, they have been able to take a signif-

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having seen military conflict firsthand. That this “fact of experience” is transformative is familiar in the US context as well. Direct personal experience is often associated with authenticity, especially with negative experiences. Often, only those who have themselves gone through a powerful experience, and have come through it transformed, are considered sufficiently authoritative to discuss that experience.

The improbable full reversal that these veterans went through—from elite combat soldiers to conscientious objectors—rhetorically signals sincerity. These elite soldiers are unlike those who refuse to join the military, whom many Israelis assume have been “manipulated” by unwholesome ideologies. The authenticity and sincerity of their revelations concerning Israeli military policy are much more trusted than the comments of those who have not served. These veterans are aware of the rhetorical power of this position and in their public talks they narrate their story accordingly, starting with their belief and good faith in the Israeli military, followed by their disillusionment, and then their act of conscience as a return to good faith. That experience is the basis for their actions is echoed everywhere, including on their organizational website (www.combatantsforpeace.org):

The “Combatants for Peace” movement was started jointly by Palestinians and Israelis, who have taken an active part in the cycle of violence; Israelis as soldiers in the Israeli army (IDF) and Palestinians as part of the violent struggle for Palestinian freedom. After brandishing weapons for so many years, and having seen one another only

icant step toward mainstreaming the anti-occupation movement. Many people who had previously condemned those who did not serve have begun to reconsider the validity of objections to military service based on conscience.

Authority and Exclusion

In the Israeli context, the link between combat military service and political authority has historically been strong, though not usually employed for purposes of dissent. The military has had tremendous influence on Israeli government policy, and reciprocally prestigious military service was, and often is, a prerequisite to a political career. CFP veterans have used the authority of their position to fold this connection in on itself. They have succeeded in extending the imagined heroic act beyond fighting to include going to jail for one’s beliefs. Their successful involvement in politics as veterans has carved out a niche for conscientious objection to certain government actions associated with military engagement. Although not universally condoned, their activism has generally been accepted as sincere and authoritative in part because it has made use of existing social and political hierarchies to present a different political interpretation of the conflict. However, as shown in accounts of human rights activism, this method of using existing cultural norms to enhance the effectiveness of an argument or campaign is not without drawbacks (Merry 2006).

One unintended effect of deploying the authority granted to veterans by their combat military activities is the exclusion of people who do not have this experience from claiming the same authority in their conscientious objection to Israeli military efforts.

One group that this particularly excludes is women, who serve in the military, but often not in combat units. To some extent, Combatants for Peace has recognized this lack and has actively moved to include women and women's issues in their organization, but it is not a simple matter. I once sat on a CFP bus, on the way to protest settlers seizing land from Palestinians in Susiya (South Hebron hills), next to a male member who had not been involved in CFP activities for almost a year. When a female group coordinator stood up to brief us about our activities, he looked across me and asked his friend, one of the CFP founders, "What—we have girls in CFP now?!" "Of course!" the friend responded. "Things have changed since you were here last." "But what kind of combatants are they?" my seatmate insisted. His friend dodged the question.

Although this type of veteran activism is exclusionary by nature, it also clarifies the ways in which (certain types of) veterans are in a unique position to speak back to the societies that sent them into battle. They have a specific kind of knowledge about war, violence and the "enemy"—a kind of knowledge that many trust and highly value. In the past, veterans have often practiced self-censorship, for what they saw as their own good and the good of the nation. It took a specific generation to make this leap—one raised with explicitly liberal values, with confidence in their own rightness and heroism, with social and educational privilege, and who could not bear the idea of compromising their ideals.

These economic and educational factors are important to remember when considering the potential for veteran activism in general, since such activism often involves serious personal exposure. In the US, we have an expanding military, an unpopular conflict, and a growing percentage of veterans who voice disapproval with that conflict; but at the same time, most of the country's socioeconomic elite does not go into military service. Among other concerns about social justice and the armed forces, we must therefore also keep in mind the structural barriers that prevent most veterans from engaging in activism if they so desire.

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Dismantling a National Icon

Genetic Testing and the Tomb of the Unknowns

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Since World War I, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has served as a powerful emblem of collective sacrifice and a repository for national honor. The bones housed within it connect civilians to soldiers and citizens to their state. Advancements in genetic testing, however, promise—or threaten—to dismantle this cultural icon by returning names to the unknown and their remains to expectant families, rather than letting them rest in anonymous national tombs.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, DNA testing entered into and at times disrupted national discourses surrounding emblematic monuments to US war dead, especially those dedicated to the fallen, missing and unknown soldiers of the Vietnam War. As Benedict Anderson (1983) has pointed out, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier evokes in its onlookers sentiments of national sacrifice and glory: the anonymous remains foster a "fictive kinship" based on national identity rather than familial ties, a connection reinforced by such ritual acts as the changing of the guard at Arlington National Cemetery. There, before the monument to the Unknown Soldiers of four wars (World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War), silence is demanded and given; the audience, young and old, rises on command to honor the changing sentinel, their eyes riveted to the scene unfolding before them.

To disrupt this memorial would be, as Anderson puts it, a "sacrilege of a strange, contemporary kind." Yet this is precisely what happened in the case of the Vietnam Unknown buried at that memorial.

in Arlington and sent for DNA analysis. The following month, geneticists from the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory confirmed the family's suspicions, and Blassie's remains, accompanied by an Air Force honor guard, were flown to St Louis, Missouri for burial in his hometown. The occasion prompted speculation that the phenomenon of the unknown soldier was a thing of the past; then-Secretary of Defense William

Coates emphasized individual lives over collective categories.

The Promise of Repatriation

The US military's emphasis on individual recovery is by no means new. The promise of "no soldier left behind" has dictated its philosophy and practice concerning MIAs from all foreign deployments: "While patriotic duty remains the primary incentive to serve our Nation, the universal expectation that no one



A silent crowd watches a guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. Photo courtesy NCinDC

Cohen remarked, "It may be that forensic science has reached the point where there will be no other unknowns in any war."

In many ways, the Blassie case is a milestone for the achievements of forensic genetics. Beyond the dramatic rupture of the monument at Arlington, the identification of First Lieutenant Blassie has raised the stakes of the US military's Missing in Action (MIA) accounting efforts. For relatives and veterans alike, biotechnology now promises greater accuracy in postmortem identification and, by extension, a fuller accounting of the missing. Blassie's recovery

will be left behind is a fundamental article of faith that underpins the motivation and confidence of every US service member deploying to a foreign duty location" (Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, 2006). Indeed, since the Civil War, accounting for, naming and (re)burying fallen soldiers has represented the fulfillment of an implicit social contract between the state, its soldiers and their surviving relatives. Battlefields are revisited and bodies returned home. This promise of repatriation grows out of several important themes in military culture, such as service, honor, sacrifice and teamwork, all of which are instilled in US military recruits from the onset of their training.

The conditions of war, however, often have meant that repatriation takes place well after the fighting has subsided, and such

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On May 14, 1998, at the behest of surviving family members, the then-unrecognized remains of First Lieutenant Michael Blassie were exhumed from the Vietnam crypt of the Tomb of the Unknowns

through DNA testing also affected how US war dead are remembered: the use of the genetic technology to recover missing soldiers has influenced commemorative practices that increasingly memorial-

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