



Combat cuties: photographs of Israeli women soldiers in the press since the 2006 Lebanon War

Media, War & Conflict
4(3) 269–286

© The Author(s) 2011

Reprints and permission: sagepub.

co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1750635211420630

mwc.sagepub.com



Eva Berger

College of Management Academic Studies, Rishon Lezion, Israel

Dorit Naaman

Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada

Abstract

For the first time since 1948, Israeli women soldiers took part in combat in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 and excelled in their jobs. However, images of women soldiers published in the press, during and after the war, objectify the soldiers in ways that belittle their violent agency. The images tend to sexualize the women soldiers as well as their militarized skill and gear.

Keywords

2006 Lebanon War, femininity, gender, images, Israel, news media, newspapers, representation, violence, war photography, women soldiers

On the occasion of International Women's Day 2008, the official Israeli army magazine *Bamahane* (In the Camp) produced a special issue titled 'Women in Uniform' which was inserted into the regular weekly magazine of 7 March. The photo on the cover of the main journal portrays two male soldiers in full combat attire (including helmets and rifles) (Figure 1). The men are shot in profile, standing alert against a wall in what appears to be a Palestinian alley, with fingers on the trigger. The picture is shot in a snapshot style, designating authentic documentation of soldiers in action. The

Corresponding authors:

Eva Berger, Dean, School of Media Studies, College of Management Academic Studies, 7 Yitzhak Rabin Blvd, Rishon Lezion 75190, Israel; and Dorit Naaman, Department of Film and Media, Queen's University, 160 Stuart Street, Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6, Canada.

Emails: eberger@colman.ac.il; naamand@queensu.ca

גיליון 10 (12932) • ל' באדר א' התשס"ח • 7 במאוס 2008 • המחיר: 10 ש"ח

במתנה

השבועון של צה"ל



מבט נשי
לגיליון מצורף
מוסף נשים מיוחד

התחנות של ג'רי
עמ' 38

מהשבוע מדור חדש:
בית שני

56 עמ'

9 770793 959007 10
במחנה
7/3/2008

רצועה הדוקה

אחרי היעדרות ממושכת, שבו לוחמי חטיבת גבעתי
לסמטאות עזה • מבצע "חורף חם", סיקור נרחב

Figure 1 Cover photograph of *Bamahane* main magazine – 'Tight Belt', photograph by Assi Meydan. Reproduced with permission of the IDF.



Figure 2 Cover photograph of special women's insert – 'A Feminine Point of View', photograph by Dana Srebrenik – in *Bamahane*. Reproduced with permission of the IDF.

picture on the cover of the insert features a female soldier, also dressed in full combat gear, this time including camouflage makeup, and in the process of launching a hand grenade (Figure 2). In contrast to the male soldiers, the woman faces the camera, and acknowledges its presence with a direct gaze and a wide flirtatious smile. Unlike the male soldiers' action shot, the attention of the viewer is split between the action of the woman launching a grenade and the spectacle of the smile. As a result, the image 'undoes' some of the intensity associated with the action of the battle. We argue that the differences in the representation of the male and female soldiers are not incidental, but rather represent the deep social ambivalence towards women's service in combat roles (Brownfield-Stein, 2005; Lubin, 2003; Robbins, 1994).

Traditional war rhetoric postulated that women were vulnerable and in need of defence by men; their participation was coded into the realm of nurturing care for the wounded, as well as upholding the civil reality of the rear. In contrast, Israeli women have been drafted into service since the state's inception in 1948, although relegated to non-combat roles. Since 2000, women were allowed to take on certain combat roles, and took part on the battlefield in the 2006 Lebanon War. Thus it would be reasonable to expect that images of women soldiers since the 2006 war would represent their active participation in battle and training. Instead, we argue that since women combatants challenge social codes of gendered femininity in areas that are in a constant state of war, their actions are contained and minimized in the images published in the press. In this article we discuss a series of photos of women combatants that, similar to the *Bamahane* image, mediate the participation of women in combat roles away from their professional militaristic action, mostly towards sexualized and objectified pleasures. Furthermore, even when explicitly presenting arms, the images discussed here are choreographed so as to direct the viewer's gaze away from these weapons, re-positioning the women in civil and hetero-normative realms, as attractive, young and sexually available women, and as representative of the nation-state.

In order to contextualize the analysis of these pictures, we will first provide an overview of the feminist discourses around women's participation in the military in general, and then some historical background on the role of women in the Israeli armed forces. In addition, we include a brief discussion of the uses of photography by 'enlisted' media, such as the government-produced *Bamahane*, as well as by privately owned media, in various sections of newspapers, journalistic genres and diverse target audiences. To conclude the theoretical sections, we briefly discuss the representation of women in the news. While the two pictures discussed earlier are the entry point into this article, the analysis will show that similar issues pertain to a range of images that contribute to the blurring of boundaries between news and entertainment. The mythification, rather than documentation, of women combatants in Israeli news media is the end result of this dynamic. Our analysis will therefore be divided into three parts: (i) a comparison of the gendered representation in the *Bamahane* pictures discussed earlier; (ii) an analysis of images of women published in two daily papers during the 2006 Lebanon war; and (iii) a review of two fictional instances published in entertainment magazines, but drawing directly on news images. The research method in use is qualitative content analysis of a number of photographs using semiotics to interpret the texts (image, caption and context).¹

Feminist discourse on militarism

A variety of approaches to the topic of women in the military have existed for quite some time within feminist circles and can be roughly divided into two major camps. These camps – broadly described as radical and liberal feminisms – are both interested in women’s empowerment, and they both utilize the discourse of equal rights. However, their respective analyses of what that empowerment should look like are quite different. Feminist antimilitarists oppose the military for its use of violence and associate that violence precisely with the military’s culture of virulent masculinism that – they claim – depends on the oppression of women. Feminist antimilitarists believe that the military and militarism are, fundamentally, impediments to justice and peace (Chapkis, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Goor, 2005). On the other hand, feminist egalitarian militarists (as Feinman, 2000, calls them), insist that it is women’s right and even responsibility to perform martial service, because the military is the *sine qua non* of full citizenship and thus equality (Peach, 1996; Stiehm, 1989). Feminist egalitarian militarists – like feminist antimilitarists – use equal rights discourse too. But they do so, of course, to insist that women play a full role in the military.

Women in Israel’s military

In the years prior to Israel’s establishment, and during the 1948 war, women fought alongside men in the paramilitary underground movements, and later in the nascent army. However, shortly after the war in 1949, the first Knesset passed the Security Service Law (SSL) and while women were to be drafted, their service was confined to non combat roles (Bloom, 1993: 133; Izraeli, 1999). The inclusion of women in the armed forces but their exclusion from combat roles helped create Israel’s (self) image of a ‘nation in arms’, and the Israeli army as ‘the people’s army’. In effect, Israeli society has been militarized in various ways, and women’s service has helped in the creation of the phenomenon of civic militarism.² Israeli women’s conscription is unique in comparison to the US, Canada and other countries, where women can voluntarily join the armed forces, but do not have the same role in the creation and sustaining of civic militarism.

In 1995, a woman conscript, Alice Miller, challenged the army in an attempt to enter the prestigious pilot course, which was closed for women. The legal process led the Knesset to amend the SSL law in 2000 so that women can – at least in principle – perform any military role.³ By 2008, women combatants occupied 3 per cent of the combatant units’ work-power.⁴ At the same time, the army itself admits that the labour division is primarily still gendered, and 60 per cent of men serve in units that are closed, or nearly closed for women’s service.

Already during the Palmach years,⁵ photographs of women combatants (including dispatchers, communication specialists, etc.) were used to construct an ideal of what it means to be an Israeli woman. Orly Lubin (2003: 169) argues that the woman soldier becomes a dual presence: ‘a home at the army base, a soldier who is a mother/lover, a homemaker who wears a helmet together with the guys.’ The function of this duality is not solely geared towards cementing the notion of the people’s army, or of civic militarism but, in fact, Lubin argues that the female body’s presence in the armed militarized

space – and especially its association with maternity and homemaking – enables a social repression of the violence that is essential to militarism (p. 165). In the pictures, the women are usually on their own in a group of men, often without combat gear, with exposed and loose hair, acknowledging the camera directly, or with a smile, so that their presence seems not only to designate belonging, but also most importantly to be shown to be ‘inconsequential in terms of the male fraternity’ (p. 176). In the early decades of the state, when women were excluded from combat roles, pictures of women soldiers engaged in non-combat roles helped to cement the militaristic character of Israeli society (Brownfield-Stein, 2005; Klein, 1999, 2002; Robbins, 1994). The change of the SSL law attracted some media attention, but came into full force with the 2006 war on Lebanon, as we now show.

War photography and the news media

Since the inception of photography in the middle of the 19th century and up until the invention of digital technology, the camera was generally considered to produce an accurate representation of the images it captured (Sontag, 1977). The presumed authentic documentary value of photography was so socially ingrained that photographs were regarded as legal reality and served as conclusive evidence in the courts. Thus, print news media adopted photography and have used it since as a central tool of reporting and as a determining factor in the news story design. Furthermore, the availability of images (or lack thereof) determines which stories will be reported on and to what extent. Photography created a new epistemology whereby images were considered not only authentic but objective representations of reality. Photographic theory, though, recognized that the tools of the trade such as framing, camera angle, cropping and the selection of images to be featured render photography anything but objective (Azoulay, 2008; Barthes, 1970; Benjamin, 1968[1935]; Rogoff, 2000; Sontag, 1977). To this lack of visual objectivity, one must add, of course, issues pertaining to ownership of media, the type of publication and the target audience. The inherently manipulative nature of the medium of news photography is perfectly illustrated in war coverage, and in images that engender both its perpetrators and victims. Since Israel has been in a perpetual state of war from its inception, and since women have always served in the army, Israel provides an excellent case for analysis – both in terms of the official publications of the Israeli army, and the privately owned media. It is clear that photography at the service of the state represents the state’s agenda but, as we shall show further on, this agenda is often present in commercial venues as well. It is important to point out, however, that the existence of a clear agenda is especially true of local publications in any given country, and less so in foreign publications that present foreign war photographs.⁶

It is also worth noting that, as previously mentioned, the context of publication determines, to a large extent, which photographs will appear and which will not. Elements such as ownership and target audience are different in the two kinds of publications discussed here. It is true that commercial newspapers have more independence than government-owned journals such as *Bamahane*. But they do not seem to achieve that potential level of independence or, what’s more striking, perhaps having internalized visual and photographic gender conventions, they do not seem to even aim at taking advantage of

that independence. It could be that in this age of digital media and with the proliferation of personal photographs published by soldiers (men and women) on the internet, one may start to see a shift in the patterns encountered by the more classic or institutional media.⁷

The depiction of women in the news

In her now classic paper on the symbolic annihilation of women in mass media, Gaye Tuchman (2000: 164) discusses the condemnation, trivialization or complete absence of women in the media and explains that this is true of news media too, due to their structure and target audience. Symbolic annihilation in regard to women in the media was found to be true in various studies, the most comprehensive of which is the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) that has documented trends in the portrayal and representation of women and men in news media discourse and imagery, every five years since 1995.⁸ The latest report from 2010 states that the quantitative and qualitative evidence reveal that, in spite of a slight improvement in certain areas, women are still grossly underrepresented in the news media in contrast to men, resulting in an imbalanced picture of the world. Moreover, the studies have shown a scarcity of women's voices in news media content in contrast to men's points of view, resulting in news that presents a male-centred view of the world.⁹ In the specific context of war and conflict, the GMMP reports that a high proportion of stories on war and peace still reinforce gender stereotypes. Quantitatively too, women seem to be portrayed disproportionately to the role they play. Keith and Schwalbe (2010) for example, conclude that both American and Iraqi women were affected by the US-led invasion of Iraq by coalition forces in March 2003, yet women were shown in less than one-fifth of the 480 war-related photographs in a sample from 18 US daily newspapers, three US news magazines, and those publications' websites.

Furthermore, Laura Mulvey (2000[1975]: 487–492) identified a series of interlocking (cinematic) gazes that perpetuate voyeuristic and scopophilic pleasures, whereby the viewer is coded as 'male' and the viewed, a feminized and fetishized object. Traditionally, men were the ones to control and operate photographic (and cinematic) equipment, and women had little control over their projected images. It is not surprising, then, that early representations of Israeli women soldiers – all shot by men – combined two forms of chauvinism: that of the state apparatus regulating women's service to the national goal of 'civil militarism', as well as a more gendered and visual 'form of collective voyeurism for the civilians outside the military camps' (Brownfield-Stein, 2010: 11). Within this context of the general lack of coverage of women's lives, we now turn our analysis to the specific deviation of women soldiers from stereotypical feminine roles, and the fact that most images of women soldiers represent a masculine gaze.

The *Bamahane* pictures

Figures 1 and 2 serve as a very good example of some of the main differences in the way that women and men combatants are represented. Here we perform a close analysis of these images in order to exemplify the unequal visual treatment and its implications.

As is always the case with photographs that appear as illustration of news stories, headlines and captions are required to provide the context through which to guide interpretation. As already mentioned, the photo on the cover of the main journal of *Bamahane* portrays two male soldiers in full combat attire (including helmet and rifles) (Figure 1). The headline in Hebrew has a double meaning; literally, it translates as 'tight belt', but the word for belt in Hebrew, *Retzu'a*, also denotes a strip (as in Gaza strip). The subtitle provides an explanation, and reads: 'after a long absence, the fighters of the Givati Brigade returned to the alleys of Gaza. Operation "warm winter" – extensive coverage.' In the case of this photograph, however, the headline is secondary, almost redundant, as the alleys of Gaza in the background are familiar and easily recognizable – at least to the trained eye of Israeli audiences. While the caption explicates a location and a time of action, the image is grasped instantaneously and without it.

The epistemology of the insert, however, works quite differently. The picture features a female soldier, also dressed in full combat gear in the process of launching a hand grenade (Figure 2). The headline reads: 'A feminine gaze/look/point of view'. It suggests to the reader that this special issue is dedicated to a feminine perspective on women's military service. The subtitle reads: 'women soldiers take photographs: a peek into a selection of pictures depicting feminine customs in the army.' What is subsequently revealed is that the picture on the cover was taken by a fellow woman soldier for this special issue. While the image of the men designates its own authentic value, the image of the woman overtly acknowledges her performance for the camera. As opposed to the main magazine's picture, the headline here is indispensable, so much so that the image is puzzling without it.

Even if it was staged, the men's photo style connotes true 'live' documentation. The men are shot in profile, standing against a wall in a Palestinian alley, with fingers on the trigger. Such imagery does not invite the viewer to question the relationship between photographer and subject. It draws the reader/viewer's focus to the action and leads to a voyeuristic sense that actively makes the photographic device transparent. In contrast to the male soldiers, the woman faces the camera, and acknowledges its presence by both a direct gaze and a wide, flirtatious smile, all of which isolate her from the environment and emphasize the camera's presence. In addition, the background is out of focus, and she is alone – factors that contribute to her presentation as a static fetish. Rather than presenting herself as the active agent that she is (a soldier) she opts to enact the role of the passive object to-be-looked-at.¹⁰

The photographer too, chooses to align her camera lens with traditional modes of representation of women, forms that put women on a pedestal (i.e. fetishizing them), objectifying them, thus rendering them passive (Mulvey, 2000[1975]). But in the image from the 2008 *Bamahane*, the nuanced traditional forms of femininity-for-male-pleasure are produced by both female subject and female photographer. The choices of both subject and photographer are thus particularly disturbing in the context of women's combat service, the topic of that photo. We argue that, overall, the image is constructed to contain and minimize the action of the grenade throwing, but also to turn the violent act sexy, a part of a coy and harmless performance, by a woman who otherwise conforms to expected modes of femininity. The turning of the grenade throwing into a playful act is particularly striking in comparison with the image of the male soldiers.

There are two men in the picture of the main magazine, one dominating the top right corner, the other in the background, wearing sun glasses. Both men are engaged in a task, their rifles are cocked, and neither acknowledges the camera's presence. The woman, on the other hand, is centrally positioned, takes up most of the frame and is shot at a low angle. She looks as if a stylist designed the netting over her helmet, and her make-up artist carefully controlled the camouflage black and green paint, resulting in a cover of Vogue-style photography. That the magazine chose this image for its cover exemplifies the military's institutional ambivalence to women's service in combat roles. Enloe (2000: 270) provides examples from the US army, where women are asked to keep their hair short, but not so short as to be 'unfeminine'; and in the US marines, they are required to tweeze their eyebrows in the regulation arch. Sasson-Levy (2006: 157) describes how women commanders in the Israeli army were guided to erase some feminine markers (such as long or painted fingernails, jewellery, or perfume), but are not asked to cut their long hair, only to hide it beneath a military cap. At the same time, women admitted to using their femininity to obtain certain goals, and were constantly negotiating a range of gendered performative behaviours (which Sasson-Levy aptly calls 'drag') to maximize their commanding power (pp. 164–184). Enloe (2000: 119) points out that this ambivalence is captured most clearly in a recruitment brochure featuring a picture of an attractive woman in a combat helmet with a caption that reads: 'Some of the best soldiers wear lipstick.' Similarly, the page in the main Israeli army website dedicated to women's service features a couple of dozen close-ups of women, all of which, once clicked on, expand to include women in active contexts in the army.¹¹ In these close-ups, the women are often camouflaged, smiling, and otherwise presented attractively. Were one not to click on any of the photos, one could think that the purpose of women's service in the army is to provide visual pleasure for the viewer. Similarly, the comparison between the two 2008 images shows that *Bamahane* does not present women's and men's combat service on equal terms. While it acknowledges women's participation in combat roles, the magazine contains the image of the woman fighter in ways that do not challenge the gender status quo; so, while she may be an excellent operator, she is presented here primarily as an object of desire. Thus *Bamahane* provides just one example of the social ambivalence in Israel in regard to women's service as fighters. Such ambivalence is evident in privately owned mainstream daily newspapers as well.

The case of the 2006 Lebanon War

The Lebanon War began on 12 July 2006 and lasted until 14 August 2006. For the purposes of this study, two of the major newspapers in Israel were selected and archived: *Ha'aretz*, the elitist newspaper, and *Yediot Ahronot*, the populist tabloid with the largest circulation in Israel.¹² We reviewed the publication of each day during the duration of the war and will account for the major prototypes in each newspaper.

Ha'aretz

As a general rule, this newspaper reinforced the gender status quo, in which women soldiers are accepted and represented primarily as performing traditionally feminine

social roles. These roles include dealings with the civil population in shelters, providing medical care and entertainment, and basically replacing the civil services that were suspended because of the fighting. One example is a picture of an airplane arriving with new immigrants being greeted by a couple of dozen female soldiers, waving small Israeli flags (17 August 2006, news section, p. 11). The picture is shot from behind the soldiers, prominently featuring their pony tails and flags. This image is particularly striking in the context of the ongoing war as it removes the women soldiers not only from the battlefield, but also from the military space. The picture is illustrating a story whose title informs the reader that 3500 new immigrants have arrived in Israel since the beginning of the war. In other words, *Ha'aretz* legitimizes the fact that women soldiers are in the service of the state apparatus, aiming at demographic expansion rather than engaged in military tasks.¹³ Only once did *Ha'aretz* report on a woman combatant, the casualty Keren Tendler, a helicopter airborne mechanic. The article is accompanied by two pictures, the larger one is of Tendler in her helicopter surroundings, wearing full overall and helmet, and smiling at the camera. The smaller picture is a small passport shot of Tendler in civilian clothing. With the exception of the title, which reads 'the first female casualty since the 1973 Yom Kippur War', neither the article nor the photographs sensationalize women's service in combat roles.

Women combatants' presence in Lebanon during the 2006 war was minimal¹⁴ and their coverage by the media was scarce, as was the coverage of women during the war, generally. Lahav (2010) for example, discusses the gender aspects of the journalistic coverage of the Second Lebanon War by Israeli television. Her findings reveal that only in 5 per cent of television news stories on the war was there equal coverage of men and women; women were mainly portrayed in their stereotypical roles as worrying mothers or passive and helpless victims and only a small fraction of women in the news had an active role in the political sphere. In short, in TV news during the war, women were completely relegated to the periphery, while the news framed the war as 'men's business'.

Thus, *Ha'aretz*'s minimal coverage of female combatants in the war is proportional to the actual presence of female combatants, if a bit over conservative. In contrast *Yediot Ahronot* lived up to its tabloid standards, emphasizing, celebrating and sensationalizing women's presence in combat units.

Yediot Ahronot

Dozens of articles, profiles of women soldiers, and collage-type double spreads, focused on the women, their families and gendered positions in the army. While photographs of the genre of 'soldiers as civil servants' appeared in *Yediot* too, those images were completely overshadowed by the torrent of images and articles focusing on women combatants. We chose two archetypes for analysis here.

The battle of the sexes. This is the actual title of the story from 25 July 2006, which focuses on the fact that this is the first time since 1949 that women are taking part in battle (*Yediot Ahronot*, 24 Hours section: 8–9). The article interviews four women who are fighting alongside men in different units, and are quoted in the subtitle as saying: 'the

army finally realizes – beyond theory – that we can do it too.’ The double spread is dominated by three pictures, a left column is divided into two, and a right column features one full shot of a woman in combat gear with a rifle hanging across her chest as she walks towards the camera and stares straight at the lens. She does not wear a helmet or a cap and her long plait lies comfortably on her rifle belt. Unlike the made-up *Bamahane* picture, here the soldier at first sight appears effortlessly attractive. A closer look reveals that her right hand rests on her rifle and her left hand is tucked into her belt. Similarly, Sasson-Levy (2006: 158) quotes a female soldier describing how she adopted a masculine body language to assert power: ‘Putting your hands in the belts’ loops, that [gave me] a sense of [being] a man, a sense of control. You can see many guys walking about like that.’ Many of the women that Sasson-Levy interviewed described how they adopted a lower tone of voice as well as body language attributes that are considered masculine (pp. 154–161). But an even closer look at this picture reveals something else: the woman places one foot directly in front of the next. Instead of the masculine widespread stand, the woman is presented with what in effect looks like a catwalk fashion show rather than a soldier at work. The hand tucked in the belt acquires a new meaning then, representing the soldier as a model.

The complex and contradictory meaning of this image perhaps explains why it was the one selected to be the dominant visual element on the page. Next to it is an image of three helicopter pilots (presumably all women), all in full attire, including helmets, large sunglasses and microphones. While standing aimlessly, hands on their waists, near a horizontal small airplane wing, they project professionalism and engagement. The picture below this one is a low-angle shot of a woman standing in the middle of a circle made of erect rockets. She, too, is in full gear, rifle hanging on her chest, but her head is uncovered and her loosely tied hair is blown back by the wind. With her left hand she is pointing upward at something outside the frame, while smiling. With the sky dominating the background, this image resembles the soviet propaganda photography style idealizing and celebrating workers. At the same time, this image calls to mind classical Hollywood period imagery whereby the female protagonist was elevated on a pedestal and thus fetishized; it is so charged with non-traditional feminine prowess (both sexual and potential for violence) that it is no wonder it is the smallest and at the bottom of the collage. This collage covers a spectrum of possible representations of femininity, all dressed in soldiers’ costumes. The spectrum includes the asexual action of the pilot – from sexualized potential to action with the woman and rockets – all the way to the coy performer for the camera in the soldier–model image. A similar collage appeared on the cover of the same day’s issue of ‘24 Hours’ with the flirtatious title ‘Girls in the turret’, which is borrowed from a popular 1967 song, ‘flowers in the gun barrel, girls in the turret’. This rendition is in colour, and the article is framed in black and red. In the case of the pilot, the image is cropped from the larger frame, thus emphasizing the pilot’s femininity. This collage fills 90 per cent of the cover page of the magazine but, interestingly, the teaser for the story above it emphasizes how Israel is failing in its media campaign to be seen as the victim in the war.¹⁵ We argue that *Yediot* here recruits the women to fight a different war – the public relations war. In this sense, both *Ha’aretz* and *Yediot* perpetuate the essentialist assumptions about women as at once embodying the nation and being protected by it but, while conscripted, serving the state rather than the army in its

militaristic core. This shift is consistent with the ways in which Israeli women have come to represent the nation (*uma* from the same root as *em* or mother in Hebrew), and yet have been disenfranchised from nearly every centre of social and political power.¹⁶

'*Fashion Army*'. During the summer of 2006, *Yediot* featured a double-spread in its leisure section titled 'Summer 2006 – we are all soldiers: the Fashion Army' (7 August 2006, '24 Hours': 15–16). The leading text reads: 'Our wardrobe contains one or two items with militaristic character. Now – and not just because of our patriotic sensitivities – the trend intensifies.' Five models form the centrepiece of the layout (only one of whom is a metrosexual-looking young male). They are presented in a pyramid-shaped collage, featuring a well-known actor, Michal Yanai, in the centre. Yanai wears army fatigue pants and a grey sleeveless tank-top with a visible cleavage. Crouched down in a seductive pose, she stares coldly into the camera lens, recalling more than anything the prototype of the femme fatale. On both sides of her, the four other models wear less blatantly militaristic attire, mostly fatigue fabrics, and retro army caps. Accessories, such as shoes and watches, frame the entire layout.

Clearly, both *Yediot* and the advertisers capitalize on the war in opportunistic ways. The women are presented in a way that is a clear departure from classic models of the brave mother and wife, the one who obediently cared for the soldiers in the front, the families left behind and the wounded who returned. The new woman, we are told, should aim to be sexy, in this new militaristic mode, for the benefit of the nation. In addition, the layout and article address women almost exclusively, suggesting that their patriotic duty during war time is to be consumers.

From combat cuties to combat pussies

In this section, we look at the aftermath of the 2006 war, and the types of representations that emerged in entertainment magazines. Despite journalists' claims that they are simply reporting the facts, research suggests that news stories are organized in narrative frames, relying on familiar structures that employ dramatic features (complication, resolution) and a gallery of characters. Karen Johnson-Cartee (2005: 147–182) shows that these narrative frames are similar to fiction rather than just structures, relying on much shorthand, based on people's cultural and ideological belief systems. To a great extent, news stories are told in old and familiar generic formulas and, as such, both feed and are being fed by fiction.¹⁷ News images play into these story structures in interesting ways, especially as the image itself is unable to contextualize its own circumstances. Lubin recounts how a snap shot of Palmach veteran Ziva Arbel drinking from a ceramic pitcher was published in *Bamahane* (July 1948) with the title 'Who is jealous of the pitcher?' The journalistic image is contextualized as erotic content and thus functions in a fictive narrative structure. The cover image and caption at that time led Avraham Halfi to write a popular song called 'I wish I was a pitcher.' More important than the subsidiary entertainment use, Lubin (2003: 187) points out that since, in the photo, Arbel performs Palestinian native-ness (the form of drinking, wearing a *kaffiyah*), she is actively producing a fictive story within this (seemingly naïve) documentary image.¹⁸ News stories and images then do not

function in binary opposition to fiction. On the contrary, the two modes feed into each other, and are grasped and understood only in relation to each other. For this reason, it is important to examine entertainment magazines that presented photographs of Israeli women fighters (or models portraying soldiers) since the 2006 war. We have already shown that some of the women in the news sections have displayed a certain femininity associated with models and acting, and we will now look at the commercial response to those images.

In July 2007, *Maxim* – the all but nudity male-oriented magazine – published an issue dedicated to five Israeli models who served in the Israeli army.¹⁹ The issue was the result of cooperation with the Israeli consulate in New York. ‘We found that Israel’s image among men 18–38 is lacking,’ David Saranga, Consul for Media and Public Affairs, said. ‘So we thought we’d approach them with an image they’d find appealing’ (*New York Post*, 19 June 2007).²⁰ Each model is given a full-page layout in which she is scantily dressed (bikini, ropes, etc.) posing in S&M style in a setup that minimally resembles an army context. It is important to note that, were it not for the verbal descriptions, one could not distinguish the images from those of the magazine in general. The issue title reads: ‘Israeli Defense Forces: they are drop-dead gorgeous and can take an Uzi apart in seconds.’ Each photo is accompanied by a short text describing the model’s previous military job. Here are a couple of the captions:

Gal

Expertise: physical fitness

‘I taught gymnastics and calisthenics,’ says this flawless former Miss Israel. ‘The soldiers loved me because I made them fit.’

Natalie

Expertise: naval telecommunications

This beguiling blonde clearly remembers her favorite part of serving her country: ‘I met my husband. His commander kept trying to set us up.’ Lucky for him, Natalie followed orders.

No matter how professionally they fulfilled their roles during their service, the captions still emphasize the women’s traditional roles: one met her husband in the army, the other still lives at home and luckily they ‘follow orders’. The initiative of the Israeli consulate to recruit female soldiers to promote sex tourism caused an uproar in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) whereby female MPs Zehava Galon and Colette Avital criticized this chauvinist choice of tactic. The *Maxim* affair embodies both the patriarchal and nationalist aspects of chauvinism. It is still quite striking that, despite the many achievements of the feminist struggle – especially as it pertains to the selling of women’s bodies – the most official institution, the government, turned its back on Israeli women and sold them as sex objects to increase tourism to Israel. Specifically, Israeli women have succeeded in changing legislation so that they are allowed to take part in combat roles and since 2000 many do so. The Israeli Government’s action in co-producing the *Maxim* issue then publicly erases this achievement.

Not to be outdone, the January 2009 issue of *At* (feminine form for ‘You’) – a women’s magazine – published a series of photos produced by fashion photographer Yaniv Edri

for an exhibition.²¹ Edri took Israeli models, dressed them as soldiers and placed them in diverse militaristic setups. The pictures range in topics (training, guarding, dorms, etc.) and in tone (a few 'action' shots, but usually a direct gaze towards the camera and a smile). The series is titled 'Sisters in Arms' and in some of the pictures there is almost a homoerotic feeling – almost, as they seem to always direct their sexuality at the camera's gaze, even as they engage with each other. The outdoor shots tend to be activity oriented, with the soldiers engaged in bush crashing (through tall yellow flowers), practising target shooting in the foreground, while others are rolling down a sandy hill in the background, or carrying a semi-naked female soldier as if she is wounded. In these images, camouflage makeup and dirt are carefully smeared, the hair is arranged to look undone and yet reveal perfect composition, and the models generally smile, or seem to be having fun. A dormitory series is made to look as if Lolita was conscripted into service. Blonde and very young models, with minimal clothing that hint at tiny breasts and expose very long and slender limbs, caress a gun, hug it, or lean against it, smoking a cigarette.

The editor of *At*, Ofra Mizrahi, wrote in the introduction:

Carmella Menashe – the renowned military correspondent – claims that the feminine revolution in the army has not succeeded yet. Sometimes I wonder if it should succeed at all. At times I am not sure whether the road from making coffee to the commander²² to contribution to the army, to the state, actually goes through the battleground.

Indeed, Mizrahi is not calling for a feminist (liberal or radical) revolution in the army; in publishing this photo essay she is helping to minimize and reduce the actual contributions of women fighters to the social fabric of the army and subsequently of the state. What *Maxim* and *At* have done is to eroticize and objectify female combat soldiers to the point where their weapons and skills become merely a prop in a sexual (male) fantasy. To an extent, these magazines have exploited and accentuated already existing trends (albeit more ambivalent ones) in the news documentary shots of women combatants that appeared during or shortly after the war.

Conclusions

Images of Israeli women soldiers – whether appearing in news or entertainment magazines, documenting actual soldiers, or employing performers – all share a tendency to minimize the destructive potential of combat roles.

The job that women combatants perform is violent. Such violence threatens traditional notions of femininity as well as the masculine order of the military establishment, and thus has to be contained and controlled. While women may perform such roles in the army (and all evidence from the 2006 Lebanon War is that they excelled in such jobs), we rarely find images that unequivocally present such action. In order to accommodate the overt and legally sanctioned form of female violence, images of privately owned newspapers as well as official governmental venues resort not only to sexualizing the female body but also to presenting the woman soldier as participating in (and accepting) her role as an object of (male) desire, rather than as a free subject, or an agent of the nation.

We believe it would be a mistake to view an imperialist and sexist army as the location for women's liberation but this is a point of argument within feminist circles. Still, once equal service opportunities have been achieved, media representation should follow suit. Instead, our findings indicate a blatant trend in the opposite direction. Mainstream media – especially as the advertisers appeal to women as the main consumers – do not accommodate radical forms of femininity or feminism but rather reinforce and celebrate an archaic gendered status quo.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. The study corpus is: (1) *Bamahane*, 7 March 2008 ('Tight Belt', photographer: Assi Meydan); (2) *Bamahane*, 7 March 2008 ('A Feminine Point of View', photographer: Dana Srebrenik); (3) *Ha'aretz*, 17 August 2006 ('Female Soldiers Greeting Immigrants', photographer: Dan Keinan); (4) *Yediot Ahronot*, 25 July 2006 ('The Battle of the Sexes', photographers: Tal Nawe and Ephraim Snir); (5) *Yediot Ahronot*, 7 August 2006 ('The Fashion Army', photographers: Ron Kedmi and Eyal Nevo); and (6) *At*, 27 January 2009 ('Sisters in Arms', photographer: Yaniv Edri).
2. For a fuller discussion, see Ben-Eliezer (1995), Helman (1999), Kimmerling (1993) and Levy (2003). Also see Lomsky-Feder and Ben Ari (1999) on the militarization of education in Israel.
3. For a fuller account, see Sasson-Levy (2006: 40–48).
4. 2008–Women's Service: The State of Affairs (2008). Available at: <http://www.aka.idf.il/yohalan/main/main.asp?catID=40637pdf#63635>, p. 9. The document acknowledges that most combat positions are still closed for women's participation. Also, 'The Division of Gendered Labor' (2005): pdf#62680, p. 9.
5. The Palmach – Hebrew abbreviation of Plugot Mahatz – was the elite striking force of the 'Hagana' – the underground military organization of the Jewish community, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel.
6. This is clear, for example, from Don McCullins' (1990: 93) description of the rejoicing and its expressions and representations in Israel after the war of 1967 that was in total opposition to what he witnessed and photographed in Jerusalem then – 'the victors jesting over the vanquished'.
7. An example of this is a photograph uploaded by a woman soldier to her Facebook page where she is seen smiling at the camera next to handcuffed and blindfolded Palestinian prisoners. The national and international outrage that followed was, of course, justified. In the context of the thesis here, though, it seems that her purpose was not to present herself in a sexualized manner that belittled her violent agency, but quite the opposite, to brag about her power [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/16/israeli-soldier-photos-palestinian-prisoners>].
8. The full report can be found at: http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2010/global/gmmp_global_report_en.pdf
9. In the context of photography, the study found, for example, that 6 per cent of female subjects in newspapers appear in photographs (in contrast to 17% of males), but a qualitative analysis of the photographs revealed that, while men are usually pictured either from the head up

or fully clothed, women's bodies are pictured in various states of undress at a much higher frequency.

10. Likewise, in her analysis of photographs featuring an isolated Palmach female soldier, Lubin (2003: 170) argues that the women are static, participating in a representation of a 'static war', a term used by a Palmach woman to describe women's participation on the margins of battle.
11. http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/multimedia/Gallery/Female_Combat_Soldiers.htm
12. There is wide agreement in Israel and abroad as to the characterization of *Yediot* as tabloid and *Ha'aretz* as elite newspapers. As Wolfsfeld et al. (2008: 384) explain:

By far the most popular newspaper is *Yediot Ahronot*, which maintains a semi-tabloid format ... The newspaper *Ha'aretz*, on the other hand, is a serious broadsheet aimed at the more elite elements of society. This is the major reason for its relatively low level of circulation.
13. This is in line with Brownfield-Stein's (2010: 16) analysis, which shows that pictures of women soldiers in the first two decades of Israel's existence were designed to meet the 'conditions for the cultural osmosis between systems that characterize Israel's brand of "civil militarism"'.
14. In 2007 generally, there were 32,766 reserve women soldiers, out of whom 502 were combatants; and out of 10,613 women officers, 40 were combatants [http://www.aka.idf.il/SIP_STORAGE/files/3/61053.pdf]
15. The text reads:

World media does not respond anymore to the clean shaven Israeli spokesperson. They prefer the harsh pictures from the bombed Beirut. The IDF says: 'we don't look miserable enough.' And the foreign ministry is preparing a tour for foreign correspondent at the sites where Katyusha rockets fell. (Itamar Eichner, *Yediot Ahronot*, 24 Hours section: 2–3)
16. There is much research on the matter. See, for instance, the following anthologies: Fuchs (2005), Mayer (1994) and Abdo and Lentin (2002).
17. For instance, in 2003, a US soldier, Jessica Lynch, was captured in Baghdad and the reporting in the US relied completely on a 19th-century literary genre called 'captive narratives' whereby Caucasian women were captured by aboriginal tribes (see Schwalbe et al., 2008).
18. Similarly, Brownfield-Stein (2007) discusses another famous photograph called 'The Girl with the Gun' (of Ziva Arbel as well, also published in July 1948 in *Bamahane*). The image is of a group of soldiers resting in an orchard, while a cartoonist is sketching them. Arbel – the only woman amongst some 20 men – is wearing a Palestinian headscarf (*kaffiyah*), a bandage on her forehead and shorts, with a revolver tucked into her waist. The image was described by *Ma'ariv* as one of the three most famous pictures of the 1948 war, and it was widely published around the world. But as Brownfield-Stein shows, the image contains a hidden story, that of the brutal occupation of Lydda and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians that followed. The *Kaffiya* on Arbels' head was a loot from the conquest of Safed, as Arbel herself writes in her Hebrew memoir (1999: 74).
19. <http://www.maxim.com/Israeli-Defense-Forces/girls-of-maxim/gallery/1661/66.aspx>
20. http://www.nypost.com/seven/06192007/news/regionalnews/babes_in_oy_land_scuffle_regionalnews_andy_soltis.htm
21. 27 January 2009: 70–81. To see a couple of the photos, go to: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/24/ART1/845/759.html>. It leads to nine boxes of images; then click on the middle one.
22. Mizrahi here hints at the high percentage of women who serve as secretaries. In 2008, 71 per cent of all secretarial jobs are handled by women, compared to 94 per cent in 1998

[2008 – Women's Service: The State of Affairs: <http://www.aka.idf.il/yohalan/main/main.asp?catID=40637, pdf #63635:10>].

References

- Abdo N and Lentin R (eds) (2002) *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation*. New York: Barghan Books.
- Arbel Z (1999) *The Girl With a Gun*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim (in Hebrew).
- Azoulay A (2008) *The Civic Contract of Photography*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 95–136.
- Barthes R (1970) *Camera Lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Ben-Eliezer U (1995) *The Emergence of Israeli Militarism, 1936–1956*. Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 280–315 (in Hebrew).
- Benjamin W (1968[1935]) The work of art in the age of mechanic reproduction. In: Arendt H (ed.) *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Bloom AR (1993) Women in the defense forces. In: Swirsky B, Safir M (eds) *Calling the Equity Bluff: Women in Israel* (Athens Series). New York: Teachers College Press, 128–138.
- Brownfield-Stein C (2005) Beautiful portrait with a gun: visual representations of women soldiers in IDF albums 1948–1958. *Israeli Sociology* 1(2): 351–388 (in Hebrew).
- Brownfield-Stein C (2007) On ghosts resurfacing through one famous war photograph. *Sedek* 1: 50–57 (in Hebrew).
- Brownfield-Stein C (2010) Visual representations of IDF women soldiers and 'civil-militarism' in Israel. In: Sheffer G, Barak O (eds) *Militarism and Israeli Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Chapkis W (1981) *Loaded Questions: Women in the Military*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.
- Enloe C (2000) *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Feinman IR (2000) *Citizenship Rites: Feminist Soldiers and Feminist Antimilitarists*. New York: NYU Press.
- Fuchs E (ed.) (2005) *Israeli Women's Studies: A Reader*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Gilligan C (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Goor H (ed.) (2005) *The Militarization of Education*. Tel Aviv: Babel (in Hebrew).
- Helman S (1999) Militarism and the construction of the life world of Israeli males. In: Lomsky Feder E, Ben Ari E (eds) *The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*. Albany: State University of New York, 191–221.
- Izraeli D (1999) Gendering the Israeli military service. *Theory and Criticism* 14: 85–109 (in Hebrew).
- Johnson-Cartee K (2005) *News Narratives and News Framing*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Keith S and Schwalbe CB (2010) Women and visual depictions of the U.S.–Iraq War in print and online media. *Visual Communication Quarterly* 17(1), January: 4–17.
- Kimmerling B (1993) Militarism in Israeli society. *Teoria u-Bikoret* 4 129 (in Hebrew).
- Klein U (1999) Our best boys: the gendered nature of civil–military relations in Israel. *Man and Masculinities* 2(1): 47–65.
- Klein U (2002) Civil–military relations in Israeli society. *Current Sociology* 50(5), September: 669–686.
- Lahav H (2010) The giver of life and the griever of death: women in the Israeli TV coverage of the Second Lebanon War (2006). *Communication, Culture & Critique* 3(2), June: 242–269.

- Levy Y (2003) *The Other Army of Israel*. Tel-Aviv: *Tapuach-Yediot Ahronot*, 20–80 (in Hebrew).
- Lomsky-Feder E and Ben Ari E (eds) (1999) *The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Lubin O (2003) Gone to soldiers: feminism and the military in Israel. In Naveh E (ed.) *Israeli Family and Community*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 164–192.
- McCullin D (1990) *Unreasonable Behaviour: An Autobiography*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Mayer T (ed.) (1994) *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Change*. London: Routledge.
- Mulvey L (2000[1975]) Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. Reprinted in Stam R, Miller T (eds) *Film and Theory*. New York: Blackwell, 483–494.
- Peach LJ (1996) Gender ideology in the ethics of women in combat. In: Stiehm JH (ed.) *It's Our Military Too!* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 156–194.
- Robbins J (1994) *Not Soldiers in the Ordinary Sense: The Israeli Women Soldiers and the Politics of 'Non-Military' Roles in the 1950's*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University (in Hebrew).
- Rogoff I (2000) *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Sasson-Levy O (2003) Feminism and military gender practices: Israeli women soldiers in 'masculine' roles. *Sociological Inquiry* 73(3): 440–465.
- Sasson-Levy O (2006) *Identities in Uniform: Masculinity and Femininity in the Israeli Army*. Jerusalem: Magness Press (in Hebrew).
- Schwalbe CB, Silcock BW and Keith S (2008) Visual framing of the early weeks of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq: applying the master war narrative to electronic and print images. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 52(3): 448–465.
- Sontag S (1977) *On Photography*. New York: Dell Publishing Company.
- Stiehm JH (1989) *Arms and The Enlisted Woman*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Tuchman G (2000) The symbolic annihilation of women in the mass media. In: Crothers L, Lockhart C (eds) *Culture and Politics: A Reader*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Wolfsfeld G, Alimi EY and Kailani W (2008) News media and peace building in asymmetrical conflicts: the flow of news between Jordan and Israel. *Political Studies* 56(2), June: 374–398.

Biographical notes

Eva Berger is Dean of the School of Media Studies, College of Management Academic Studies, Rishon Lezion, Israel. She is consultant to public and private organizations, a commentator on Israel's media and writer of programs for the study of Communication in Israel's elementary and high school systems.

Dorit Naaman is the Alliance Atlantis Professor of Film and Media at Queen's University, Canada. She has published on Israeli media, gender and militarism, and on Israeli film and media in general. She is also a video maker and the initiator of the DiaDocuMENTaRy series.

Copyright of Media, War & Conflict is the property of University of Southern California, USC Annenberg Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.