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Liquid Legitimacy: Lessons on Military Violence from the Israeli Occupation in the West Bank

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During the past decades, militaries have increasingly used force against civilians and armed adversaries in operational settings other than war. Theories about legitimacy for the use of military force often focus on macro variables such as international law, government policy, and structural political contingencies. The strength of such theories in explaining military violence during conventional wars notwithstanding, this article argues that they fail to explain the legitimization of the use of force in situations that cannot be categorized as "classic" warfare, where institutional and international norms seem to fade, rational calculations become unclear, and governments often do not hold themselves accountable for soldiers' violent behavior. When such conflicts linger, they often develop into situations in which sovereignty is fragmented and statehood is limited in ways that further undermine institutional legitimacy. Using the accounts of Israeli soldiers deployed in the occupied Palestinian territories in the last two decades, this article broadens the analytical perspective on military violence's legitimacy by depicting its micromechanisms and local factors. In doing so, it identifies three clusters of factors: emotions, space and time, and informal organizational culture. We posit that, during intense friction between soldiers and civilians in the context of prolonged occupation, the structural variables and formal powers that typically dictate the use of force give way to more fluctuating dynamics that shape the patterns of military violence and, ultimately, influence its legitimacy.

Ces dernières décennies, les armées ont eu de plus en plus recours à la force contre les civils et rebelles en dehors des temps de guerre. Les théories relatives à la légitimité de l'usage de la force militaire se concentrent souvent sur des variables macro, comme le droit international, la politique gouvernementale et les contingences politiques structurelles. Nonobstant la force d'explication de la violence militaire au cours des guerres conventionnelles de ces théories, le présent article estime qu'elles ne permettent pas d'expliquer la légitimation de l'usage de la force dans les situations qui ne peuvent être classées comme des guerres « classiques ». De tels conflits se traduisent souvent par une fragmentation de la souveraineté et une limitation du statut d'État qui remettent en cause la légitimité institutionnelle. En se fondant sur les récits de soldats israéliens déployés en Cisjordanie au cours des vingt dernières années, le présent article analyse les micromécanismes et facteurs locaux de la légitimité de la violence militaire. Il identifie trois groupes de facteurs : les émotions, le

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temps et l'espace et la culture organisationnelle informelle. Nous postulons qu'au cours d'intenses frictions entre soldats et civils dans un contexte d'occupation prolongée, les variables structurelles et les pouvoirs formels qui imposent généralement l'usage de la force, laissent la place à des dynamiques plus fluctuantes, qui influencent la formation de schémas de violence militaire et, finalement, sa légitimité.

Durante las últimas décadas, los ejércitos han utilizado cada vez más la fuerza contra los civiles y los insurgentes en contextos operativos distintos a la guerra. Las teorías sobre la legitimidad del uso de la fuerza militar suelen centrarse en variables macro como el derecho internacional, la política gubernamental y las contingencias políticas estructurales. A pesar de la relevancia de estas teorías a la hora de explicar la violencia militar durante las guerras convencionales, este artículo sostiene que no logran explicar la legitimación del uso de la fuerza en situaciones que no pueden clasificarse como guerras «clásicas». Estos conflictos a menudo se convierten en situaciones de soberanía fragmentada y estatalidad limitada, de manera que socavan la legitimidad institucional. Utilizando los testimonios de los soldados israelíes desplegados en Cisjordania en las dos últimas décadas, este artículo analiza los micromecanismos y los factores locales de la legitimidad de la violencia militar. Identifica tres grupos de factores: emociones, espacio y tiempo, y cultura organizacional informal. Postulamos que, durante las intensas confrontaciones entre soldados y civiles en el contexto de una ocupación prolongada, las variables estructurales y los poderes formales que suelen dictar el uso de la fuerza dan paso a dinámicas más fluctuantes que configuran las pautas de la violencia militar y, en última instancia, influyen en su legitimidad.

Introduction

Although the military is one of few main actors that can legitimately use violence within the context of the democratic state, which acts are legitimate and who deems them so are up for debate, especially outside of warfare. Over the past two decades, the armed forces of democratic states have been increasingly engaged in an array of security missions in civilian settings, both domestically and abroad. These missions include international interventions, border security, coping with civilian unrest (Kanno-Youngs 2020; Schrader 2020), and missions centered on disaster relief or national emergencies, such as the COVID-19 crisis (Opillard, Palle, and Michelis 2020). Such missions, which are often framed within the "New Wars" paradigm, raise novel questions about contemporary warfare and the sources of its legitimacy (Malešević 2008), especially because they involve the potential for violent encounters between soldiers and armed opponents or civilians. When such conflicts endure, they often develop into post-Westphalian (or non-Westphalian) political settings. These include cases of political transition, "failed/failing states," civil wars, and prolonged military occupations. In such situations of "limited statehood" (Risse 2011; Risse and Stollenwerk 2018) and "fragmented sovereignty" (Gazit 2009b), formal political institutions give way to more situational forms of political control and domination. These unstable political structures also undermine the legitimacy of the use of military force and thus demand further scrutiny.

Existing literature in the field of international political sociology has examined various dimensions of military conduct in contemporary conflicts. The general trend is to focus on the scope, methods, tactics, strategies, forms of war, and the level of atrocity committed by militaries in any array of operational settings. Further, while the dominant tendency of the literature in other disciplines (i.e., International Studies and War Studies) is to concentrate on the more macro and structural

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dimensions of wars and conflicts, international political sociology has gradually acknowledged the merit in scrutinizing also the micro-dimensions of conflicts. This includes, for example, examining the phenomenology of war (Brighton 2011), the subjective experiences of soldiers during and after deployment (Finley, MacLeish, and Wool 2009; Wool 2013), the embodied and emotional experiences of warfare (McSorley 2014; MacLeish 2015), the spatial dimensions and perceptions of war and violence (Joronen 2019; Forde 2022), and the practices of killing (Bar and Ben Ari 2005; Joronen 2016). All these studies shed important light on the changing character of contemporary warfare and include critiques of the activities of armed forces of democratic states. Yet, they often neglect the question of legitimacy for military violence in such settings and the ways mundane experiences may factor in.

In this article, we ask what constitutes legitimacy when state agents use violent means in non-war martial settings and situations of fragmented sovereignty. More specifically, we concentrate on a more microlevel of conflict and examine the patterns of legitimization for military violence in the field, where microsocial dynamics are key. To theorize about the local sources of such legitimation, we draw on the case of the prolonged Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, which reveals that this phenomenon has neither continuous traits nor a single key source. Hence, instead of focusing solely on formal frameworks of legitimacy, it is also necessary to consider the emergence of *empirical legitimacy*, which is often fluid and temporally contingent, at the local level.

We begin by presenting existing conceptualizations of the legitimacy of military violence and discussing their limitations. After introducing our case study and methodology, we then focus on the sources and dynamics of situational legitimacy for military violence, which we call "liquid legitimacy." More specifically, we concentrate on three clusters of factors of such legitimacy: emotions, space and time, and organizational military culture. We conclude by delineating some avenues for future research.

Existing Conceptualizations of the Legitimacy of Military Violence

In the most general terms, "the legitimacy of military violence" means its authorization and justification against an external adversary or domestic security threat. Following Max Weber (1968), scholars define political legitimacy as "the right to rule" (Gilley 2009) or "license to govern" (Börzel and Thomas 2018). Within this broad definition, "the use of force is regarded as legitimate only as far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it" (Weber 1964, 156); hence, it is subject to legal and normative principles formally designated by government institutions. Traditionally, literature within political sociology that deals with the study of military violence focuses on mapping and examining independent variables explaining the phenomenon of military force. Whether these studies adopt an approach emphasizing the profit and loss considerations of using violence (Levy 2019) or the influence of political institutions in designing violent policies (Clark 2005; Bjola 2008), the tendency is to treat military force as a form of "state violence" and thus mainly consider state sources, whether domestic or international, of its legitimacy.

Neo-institutional theories, among others, emphasize the decisive influence of institutional settings. James Ron (2000, 2003), for example, examined how human rights and humanitarian norms fostered by the international community influence Israeli military policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (henceforth the oPt) and the actions of Israeli soldiers at the tactical level. From this perspective, the legitimacy of the use of military force is influenced by external political forces. Yagil Levy (2016, 2021), alternatively, concentrates on domestic, institutional sources of legitimacy for military violence. Such legitimacy consists of social beliefs about the role of force, its efficacy, and the nature of the adversary and the threat it poses (Levy 2016, 79). These studies join a growing body of research (Shor 2008;

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Brym and Maoz-Shai 2009; Cole 2013; Shor et al. 2014) that emphasizes the importance of norms and other sociocultural determinants of states' policies, which are institutionalized into formal codes of ethics and rules of engagement meant to guide soldiers' use of force (Kasher 2010).

Studies based on rational choice theory, on the other hand, argue that military violence is often a calculated and rational political practice. Thus, the legitimacy of violent action is dictated by the degree to which a government perceives threat and danger: the greater the perceived threat, the more legitimate the application of intensely violent means (Mitchell 2004). As in the neo-institutionalist approach, the locus of analysis is institutional, yet the focus is on the rational considerations that underlie the use of military force, not the political forces that regulate it.

These theories explain reasonably well why states exercise a given level of violence during conventional international conflicts, and demonstrate how courses of action shaped on the macro-level often determine levels of military violence at the microlevel. More broadly, they emphasize political and social institutions' impact on the legitimate deployment of violent means by armed forces (Ben-Ari 2008).

Notwithstanding the strength of these theories in explaining the legitimacy of military violence in conventional wars, they seem less useful in explaining the clear granting of legitimacy to military violence carried out by soldiers in other situations, such as military occupations or so-called New Wars (Kaldor 2012). There are several reasons for this. First, in such situations, both normative institutional parameters and rational considerations are vaguer and often do not capture the operational complexity of the conflict. Hence, they fail to offer clear-cut standards for the use of military force. Part of the difficulty is distinguishing between friend and foe, given the multiplicity of actors involved, and between combatant and "uninvolved civilian" (Grassiani 2013). Second, in such situations, which governments often intentionally define as "not-war military operations" (e.g., the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022), states seem less inclined to adhere to the dictates of international norms and laws of war that were designed to regulate the conduct of "regular war." Hence, it is often very difficult to identify clear connections between government obedience (or disobedience) of international norms (or even pursuit of declared strategic goals) and the legitimation of military violence in the field. Moreover, given the controversy about the nature of the conflict, the legality of the military's violence, according to international laws of war, is often in dispute. Finally, in military activities other than war that develop into prolonged situations of limited statehood and fragmented sovereignty, political authority is decentralized and dispersed throughout the organizational structure. As a result, the influence of both international and national institutional norms dissolves, and uncontrolled circumstantial factors and changeable local contingencies begin to carry more weight.

We should also bear in mind that state violence is not always a self-interested, calculated response to threat, as some rational choice scholars posit (Mitchell 2004). It can be subject to political and ideological motivations, which may not be rational—or, at least, not according to the economic model of classic rational choice theory.[1] In other words, the military violence's legitimacy is not always grounded in obviously institutional settings or a clear, rational course of action. Hence, diverting our analytical attention from the rationality of governments to that of ground-level agents of violence potentially breaks the direct link between ends and means that rational choice theorists propose, as it allows for greater consideration of other factors—which may not necessarily be rational—in the legitimization of military violence, which surfaces from "below," at the microlevel.

[1] Some scholars use a mixed theoretical analysis of military violence that combines new institutionalist and rational-choice approaches to explain and predict the probability of military violence and demonstrates the shakiness of institutional influences and rational choice (see, e.g., Brym and Maoz-Shai 2009; Brym and Andersen 2011; Gazit and Brym 2011).

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Re-Problematizing Military Violence's Legitimacy

Exploring the causes of military violence at the micro-societal level requires several conceptual clarifications. The first concerns the definition of "military violence." This issue is not a trivial one. It touches directly upon the exercise of power in martial contexts, which are not exclusive to war. As various studies sharply distinguish between violence against armed forces—militaries or militias—and violence against "uninvolved" or innocent civilians, we will focus on both, particularly in situations where the causes of violence and justifications for it are blurry. This blurriness, a key feature of many contemporary military operations and unstable political situations, is also a factor in the legitimation of violence. Hence, the question arises: what constitutes a violent act? Is it merely the exertion of physical force that harms the victim's body? Or should the term refer to a much broader repertoire of behaviors and actions? For example, should shooting into the air in a crowd of civilians, an act that is aimed at deterrence and producing fear, be considered "military violence"? Is delaying a civilian at a military checkpoint for hours in the scorching sun a violent act? In many ways, the distinction between physical and nonphysical (i.e., psychological or symbolic) violence seems immaterial, as soldiers often use both during not only warfare but also routine military activity such as long patrols, arrests, surveillance, and deterrence. Hence, we believe that narrowing the definition of military violence to include only instances of physical assault is analytically and theoretically flawed. We thus interpret the examples above to be instances of violence and consider threats of violence violent acts, as they are often the basis upon which real brutality is exerted against people and property.

This proposition also has implications for the meaning of "the legitimacy of military violence." As explained above, political sociologists tend to define this legitimacy as a property nested within normative values and the political considerations and constraints that define legitimate means of ruling (Geis and Müller 2013; Schmidt 2013). Hence, it is conceived as a combination of criteria that shape state policy from above (the international community) and below (domestic society). These operate as a doxa, a precondition for military violence that permits it only within specific coordinates. Here, we propose broadening this definition by not focusing solely on formal governmental directives and institutional parameters but also considering the *empirical* legitimacy of military violence, which develops in situ and is mediated by social relations, cultural perceptions, and fluctuating circumstances.

In this, we follow previous works that emphasize the importance of micro-factors of violence. In his seminal work on civil wars, Stathis Kalyvas (2003, 2006) applies the rationalist tradition at the microlevel. His analysis demonstrates how during political turmoil, local actors' animosities intersect with the strategies and motives of political elites to produce violence. In other words, in civil wars, politics are often "privatized" and "localized"—actors develop violence's legitimacy at the microlevel rather than basing it on formal parameters. Notably, the situation in the oPt is different from the civil wars that Kalyvas depicts. The Israeli occupation is a colonialist context, in which Israel violently controls the subordinated civilian population by means of both military and civilian violence (Levy 2011; Grassiani 2013; Gazit 2015). Yet, in both cases, the legitimacy of the use of military force develops from below, outside of formal, institutional settings. It is also true that in conventional wars, soldiers may adapt their rules of engagement on the fly (e.g., Tate 2010; McChrystal et al. 2015). However, in situations where formal regulations governing routine military activity are dissolved, other circumstantial mechanisms that legitimate violence become more dominant.

Randel Collins (2008) has contended that the actual drivers of violence are to be found in the microdynamics of communicative interaction. Although he scarcely discusses the issue of the legitimation of military violence, his analysis suggests that

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the incentive to act violently, along with the rationalization of violence, takes shape on the ground and with the perpetrators themselves. Anthropologists have made similar claims, encouraging a microsociological approach to violence. Veena Das, for example, shows how daily occurrences such as rumor-mongering or gossip can lead to organized, systemic hate and subsequent violence (Das 1998), while Rosaldo (1980) describes how deep grief and anger were instrumental to the headhunting practices of the Ilongot in the Philippines. And Bourgois (2003) shows how men "in search of respect" in Harlem, New York City, influenced by their marginal societal positions, construct violent lifestyles. From this perspective, the legitimacy of *military* violence should also be taken as an "emerging property" of complex conditions in the field. For soldiers, legitimizing mechanisms are often shaped by context and local military action, even if they are influenced by more general, external political factors.

To bridge the gap between the more subjective and structural facets of this phenomenon, we propose an analysis of soldiers' accounts of their violent acts. These accounts include conversations among comrades and with researchers, interviews in the media, and testimonies to human rights organizations. Following the sociological tradition of Herold Garfinkel (1956, 1967; see also Orbuch 1997; Lahire 2011), we consider these accounts of violence more than data. They not only provide rich detail related to military violence but also reveal the mechanisms of legitimization that often materialize during the violent act itself or post-factum. Given that these accounts are grounded in the broader political setting of the conflict (the Israeli occupation), they may, at times, also suggest the influence of external sources of legitimacy.

Data Sources

In this article, we use examples from a series of empirical studies that we separately conducted on military activity in the oPt during and after the second Palestinian uprising—that is, the Al-Aqsa Intifada (Gazit 2009a, 2009b, 2015, 2020; Grassiani 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, Gazit and Brym 2011; Gazit and Ben-Ari 2012, 2017; Gazit and Latham 2014). These studies are based on over two hundred in-depth interviews with officers and soldiers who served in the oPt. Some of the studies also included several focus groups with soldiers as well as observations at various sites in the West Bank, mainly Israeli Defense Forces checkpoints. Each of the studies also incorporated empirical material from secondary sources, including soldiers' testimonies collected by *Machsom Watch*, *B'Tselem*, and *Breaking the Silence*. Articles from the Israeli press on violence in the oPt were also used. All these materials were coded and thematically analyzed, along with the interviews and our fieldnotes. This range of sources allowed us to analyze the different manifestations of Israeli military violence in the oPt and the factors that shape its legitimacy. The analysis is mainly concentrated on the side of occupiers and thus based exclusively on interviews with Israeli soldiers. In light of the growing awareness to the political agency of victims of martial violence (Baines 2015), introducing Palestinian voices on Israeli violence would have had certainly given a more holistic description of the phenomenon. While fully acknowledging the suffering of Palestinians from this violence, in the following analysis we do not seek to contrast narratives, but rather explore Israeli state violence on Palestinian individuals and property, as constructed in the perpetrators' accounts.

The Case: The Israeli Occupation in the West Bank

Shortly after the war in 1967 and the subsequent occupation of the West Bank by Israeli forces, Israel declared the Palestinian territories a closed military zone. It established military rule through geographically dispersed military governorates

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that, in 1981, would evolve into the Israeli Civil Administration. Officially, the sovereign of these territories is the commander of the Israeli military's Central Command. In many respects, Israeli rule resembles historical and contemporary colonialism, as it is based on racial bureaucracy and discriminatory laws (Gordon 2008; Shenhav and Berda 2009; Azoulay and Ophir 2020). Yet, it has developed into a prolonged military occupation based on constant military presence and repeated cycles of violence. Although formally, the Israeli government controls the Palestinian territories and population through its military, in practice, its empirical sovereignty is decentralized. This characterizes the Israeli occupation as both a prolonged low-intensity conflict and a situation of fragmented sovereignty.

This has generated a very complex, not to say chaotic sociopolitical and legal environment—a "void of sovereignty" (Shenhav 2006; Maoz 2020) around which a particular political modality of localized governmentality predominates. In practice, this political modality has replaced official (although diminished) centralized military governance with autonomous, localized nodes of political power and authority in which civilian settlers and the state's ground-level agents—that is, soldiers (Gazit 2009b, 2015, 2020)—enjoy growing freedom in maintaining order and control through violence, with very weak institutional control. The lack of institutional accountability and legal measures against violent soldiers and settlers critically influences the legitimization of violence in these settings.

This raises a fundamental question: in the absence of a clear political order and government guidelines, what are the sources of military violence's legitimacy? Although anchored in specific historical and geopolitical circumstances, the prolonged Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories demonstrates the consequences of military engagement in civilian-occupied space as well as how the legitimacy of military violence is established in activities other than conventional warfare and within situations of fragmented sovereignty.

Like other military occupations of the past several decades (e.g., those in Iraq and Afghanistan), the conflict is rich with analytic potential and conducted in multifarious sites—urban and rural areas, Palestinian refugee camps, and both permanent and impermanent Jewish settlements. It also occurs in liminal political sites, such as border checkpoints and the mixed Arab–Jewish city of Hebron in the West Bank, where Israelis and Palestinians meet through a wide variety of encounters in which soldiers may behave violently. The prolonged Israeli occupation, which has lasted for over five decades, is also characterized by changing intensities of violence on the part of Israeli forces, Jewish settlers, and Palestinian insurgents. While the conflict sometimes escalates into widespread, violent clashes (as it did from 1987–1992 and 2000–2005), at other times, things appear more tranquil, although at such times, organized military violence is replaced by violent incidents that are accepted as part of the routine of occupation. This ebb and flow demonstrates, both empirically and theoretically, the dynamics of military violence's legitimation.

The Study of Israeli Violence in the Occupied Territories

A preoccupation with state violence is notable in many portrayals of the Israeli occupation. Such works often focus on Israel's military occupation as an instance of "structural violence"—an "institutional arrangement that, by its very operation, regularly causes physical or psychological harm to a certain portion of the population, or imposes limits on their freedom" (Graeber 2012, 113), rather than on the military violence itself or its legitimation that is part of this occupation. This is in line with critical scholars' work that draw on existing models of colonialism to depict the Israeli occupation as a local incarnation of familiar colonial settings alongside

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discussing some of its unique structural features (e.g., Khalili 2010).[2] Our work draws upon such works while emphasizing the analysis of the everyday reality of the occupation and its agents (see also Bornstein 2002; Rosenfeld 2004; Kelly 2006a; Grassiani 2013).

Azoulay and Ophir (2020) characterize the regime that Israel has developed in the oPt as intrinsic to its existence as a "Jewish state." This unique dual regime generates "a state within a state" whose West Bank residents live under exceptional conditions. They investigate the effects of the Israeli ruling apparatus, the concurrent judicial situation, and the constant suppression and management of their lives that Palestinians bear. Gordon (2008), on the other hand, examines historical shifts in the structure of the Israeli control system in the occupied territories. He analyzes its evolution from intense, colonialist, bureaucratic control of Palestinians' daily lives to a more distanced system of control that is based on separation and coercive military power, as do Berda (2017) and Ophir, Givoni, and Hanafi (2009). The overarching argument of these works is that the underlying principle of Israeli repression is the continuous disruption of everyday Palestinian life via ever-changing regulations, surveillance, permit issuing regime, and separate and discriminatory systems of law and documentation (see also Kelly 2006a, 2006b; Maoz 2020).

All these works shed important light on the various structural mechanisms of Israeli repression of Palestinians in the occupied territories. However, they are largely unconcerned with questioning the legitimization of violence in general, much less of military violence; their underlying assumption is that, given the occupation's repressive nature, violence is an integral element that does not require special analysis. Another possible explanation for this neglect is normative—a fear that an exploration of the perpetrators' reasoning might itself contribute to legitimizing the phenomenon.

While not ignoring the political and violent context of the Israeli occupation, we wish to take a different tack and illustrate how violence is legitimized within this context and what the interactions are between macrosocial and microsocial variables that shape this process. We will discuss this as "liquid legitimacy," the latter word emphasizing the messy, fluid nature of this ever-changing process. We will focus on three key dimensions: emotions, space and time, and cultural context. We have separated these dimensions for the sake of our analysis but wish to emphasize that they are deeply interconnected. Moreover, as we shall present, these dimensions often blend, creating an ecology of experiences and rationalization that imbues a sense of legitimacy of military violence. In cases of fragmented sovereignty, where institutional and formal schemes of legitimacy are less clear, the influence of these intersections increases.

Emotional Mechanisms of Military Violence

Microsocial studies in the fields of anthropology and especially psychology and social psychology emphasize individual and local generators of military violence. Psychologists, for example, have explained soldiers' violent behavior with personal traits such as a pathological tendency toward anxiety or aggression (Solursh 1989; Grossman 1995; Elitzur and Yishai-Karin 2012; Walby 2013). Microsociologists and anthropologists, on the other hand, tend to focus on social and environmental circumstances that trigger emotional processes leading to violence, such as moral erosion (Caffrey 2010) or dehumanization and objectification of the enemy (Shay 1994; Ben-Ari 1998). While psychologists focus on personality and sociologists and anthropologists on social conditions of behavior, both give a great deal of weight to the fluctuation of emotions as a factor in the legitimatization of violence.

[2] Interestingly, several studies do investigate dynamics of legitimization and delegitimization for violence among Palestinians (see, e.g., Allen 2002, 2006).

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In her study, Grassiani (2013) showed how the complexity of soldiers and commanders' emotional dispositions during their service in the oPt shaped their violent behavior toward civilians. She also argues that the emotional numbing of soldiers, together with other occupational factors, dulls their moral competence. Emotions such as anger, boredom, frustration, and fear impact soldiers' ability to recognize situations as moral ones and act accordingly. When they fail to do so, the result is often violence. In line with this idea, Gazit and Ben-Ari (2017) sought to broaden the relationship between emotional dynamics and violent ones. In their study, they showed how various operational situations in the Israeli occupation of the oPt produce a repertoire of emotions in soldiers, which variously inhibit or encourage the use of brutal force against civilians. They also showed how the inability to use classic military force—for example, committing assault or starting fires—encourages alternative patterns of violence associated with soldiers' emotional frustration. The cumulative effect of these acts of local brutality sometimes crystallizes into a violent ethos among units, which in turn legitimizes the violent conduct of the entire unit and not just individual soldiers.

One soldier described this experience at a checkpoint (Grassiani 2013): "Mentally—mentally, you're hot, it's August, [you're wearing a] ceramic vest [and a] helmet on your head. And why? Because of them [the Palestinians]. And they stand in front of you. . .And this goes through your mind." An important factor in soldiers' emotions and, subsequently, their violent behavior is evident in this description: the weather. Research has shown how weather conditions such as heat and cold can significantly influence soldiers' behavior (Kobrick and Johnson 1988; Winslow 1997; Grassiani 2013). Heat and other aspects of the physical and mental hardship the soldier felt resulted in his growing frustration with the Palestinians he had to face at the checkpoint. When he was interviewed years later, the soldier did not attempt to rationalize his violent behavior. However, at that specific moment of frustration and within that specific physical context, violence against innocent civilians had seemed legitimate to him.

Pain and a desire for revenge were also used to legitimize lethal violence against innocents. One former soldier nonchalantly told Grassiani of his unit suffering serious losses—a few soldiers had been killed. A few days later, the unit was in mourning and stationed in the West Bank; one night, they decided to get revenge. They assumed that the Palestinian policemen at the internal checkpoints, who worked with the Israeli forces, were responsible for letting the killers through. So the soldiers found the policemen and killed a few of them. This is an extreme example, but it shows how the process of legitimizing illegal violence works, as well as what factors can influence it.

Fear and tension, sometimes accompanied by anger and frustration, can also legitimize violence, demonstrating the interplay between external and internal mechanisms and institutionalized violence and that which is merely occasional. For example, during Operation Defensive Shield,[3] soldiers who were about to enter the Jenin refugee camp believed that they were halted because of international pressure to achieve a cease-fire. The soldiers felt exposed and vulnerable to attack and became increasingly irritated, aggressive, and tense. When the operation finally commenced, their aggression reached a new level. As one of the soldiers described it,

> We felt we were sitting ducks. The senior government officials were having their talks, and we were out there...totally exposed. You weren't only afraid of what would happen when we were inside [the camp]; you felt you want to tear the world apart [*le'hitcharea*]. People were crazy. Yes, it was real combat, but we were very aggressive [*mamash nechnasno bahem*]. (Gazit 2009a)

[3] Operation Defensive Shield (literally translated, "Operation Shield Wall") was a large-scale military operation conducted in the West Bank by the Israel Defense Forces in 2002, during the Second Intifada (Palestinian uprising).

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It is important to note how the shift from a static and vulnerable state into active warfare is used as a license for brutality. While Collins (2008) also documented this phenomenon—the release of soldiers' violent energy through their conduct in combat—here, there is a difference: the legitimization of violence is also infused with the soldiers' frustration with what they perceive to be vacillation on the part of politicians. Their experience of vulnerability thereby becomes a mechanism for legitimizing unusually aggressive violence.

Lethal violence often demands stronger legitimation mechanisms. When these are unavailable, the likelihood of violent behavior may be reduced. Many soldiers we interviewed mentioned the notion of "incrimination" (*haflala*) as an essential practice to legitimize opening fire. The interviewees were familiar with the official rules of engagement but felt unsure that they would be backed by the system in case of wrongly firing. One soldier explained,

> Sometimes it is enough that you are holding your weapon. You are given a weapon in order to use it. It is not just a stick or a broom. Sometimes it is enough that he [the target] is masked or wearing a keffiyeh [an Arabic headdress]...You will always find the right excuse. "Incrimination" is just covering your ass [*haflala ze kisuy-tachat*]. It is meant to ease your own conscience and to give you an appropriate answer if someone questions you firing. (Gazit 2009a)

Violence's legitimacy is often produced locally, yet it may also be aggregated. Institutional violence during wide-scale operations, for example, legitimizes violence among ground troops, even those uninvolved in direct fighting. Many soldiers described this dynamic as a feeling of euphoria and competence. One interviewee described how he felt when operation Defensive Shield started: "I felt I could do anything, that I no longer needed to think about whether I was allowed to shoot. It is amazing to feel that you can open fire whenever you wish. . .with no 'when?' and 'who?'." In one moment, we instantly turned from sitting ducks to combatants who can use their weapons whenever."

Violence can also be legitimized by more positive emotions, such as giddiness and amusement. Generally, these emotions result from the mental erosion soldiers experience during their routine (and often dull) service in the oPt. For example, bored soldiers at checkpoints were documented throwing small stones at civilian passersby from their posts (Gazit 2009a). In an interview, soldiers told Gazit (2009a) about an incident in the South Hebron Hills where a snowball fight between themselves and Palestinian civilians very quickly escalated into a violent clash that included the soldiers pushing and kicking both adults and teenagers. Just recently, it was reported that a soldier planted a snake in a Palestinian taxi when it was stopped for a regular inspection. Although the military's official statement harshly criticized the soldier, he shrugged the incident off as an innocent shenanigan.

Spatial and Temporal Coordinates of Military Violence

The spatial, geographical, and temporal dimensions of violence are major factors underlying the dynamics of the legitimization of military violence. From a sociological point of view, and as Henri Lefebvre (1991) theorized, space is not an ontological given but something that is produced. Space is a social construct, and as such, it is a result of power dynamics in society. At the same time, space influences the behavior and power relations that take place within it, something that is very evident in a military context (Gazit 2009b; Gazit and Ben-Ari 2012, 23). The legitimization and enactment of military violence are influenced by the space in which that violence occurs and shaped by the perpetrators' spatial perceptions. Some scholars have looked at spatial dimensions of the Israeli system of repression; Weizman (2004), for instance, argues that the Israeli strategy in the oPt centers on three-dimensional control over the totality of space and demonstrates how Israel creates

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a "politics of verticality." Graham (2003), meanwhile, calls the destruction of Palestinians' urban and infrastructure assets "urbicide"—see also Handel (2009) on not only space itself but also the struggle over the use of land in Israel/Palestine. Here, we will not look at geographical space as such, but we will investigate the spatial and temporal dimensions of military activities and closely examine how these coordinates influence soldiers' use of and justifications for violence.

Space

Military presence in the oPt comprises a variety of arenas. Although the military activities that take place in each vary according to the operational character and means of (legitimate) violence employed, all local encounters between troops and civilians are influenced by the political context of the occupation and thus are potentially violent. Yet, reducing all violent behavior to macro or mezzo factors fails to explain the diversity of sites and outcomes in specific situations. The diversity of operational spaces and the way soldiers experience and interpret them are important triggers for violence as they frame what soldiers consider legitimate and reasonable operational practices. The distinction between types of violence in various locations demonstrates the dynamic, liquid, nonlinear nature of military violence, which can, for the most part, be exacerbated or moderated by conditions, especially in situations of fragmented sovereignty.

Of the various arenas of activity in the oPt, the most violence occurs in those where there is direct friction between soldiers and Palestinians, especially if there is simultaneous contact between Palestinian civilians and Israeli settlers—as is the case at the numerous checkpoints in the territories and in the city center of Hebron.

Military checkpoints have become symbols of soldiers' violent behavior in recent decades, as photos of and films about soldiers' misconduct have increasingly been shared on the internet, leading to international attention and critique. Checkpoints often dictate close physical proximity between soldiers and Palestinian civilians, making them highly volatile spaces. Soldiers told us how, at times, standing face-to-face with Palestinians at checkpoints and being forced to deal with their pleas to pass was intensely frustrating and the cause of violent behavior; at checkpoints, therefore, frustration (and sometimes fear) can influence the legitimization of violence.

So too can the presence or absence of watchful eyes that record, witness, and report on violent acts. The beating of a Palestinian civilian at an ad hoc checkpoint in the heart of the West Bank, far from the oversight of human rights groups or media outlets, may become far more brutal than violence at checkpoints along the seam zone[4]; after all, the latter are monitored by Machsom Watch, a group of human rights activists, many of them middle-aged Jewish women, whose watchful gaze serves to reduce violence, at least in the moment. A watchful gaze can also emanate from cameras, which are increasingly present in military space as their recordings are then available to soldiers, Palestinians, and any other passerby. The presence of an external gaze is also a factor in delegitimizing violence—soldiers are conscious of potential consequences for their behavior and take those into account in their decision-making.

An additional factor in the legitimization of violence is the blurring between the checkpoint's roles as a security mechanism designed to prevent terrorist attacks in Israel and a mechanism for controlling the local population (Berda 2017). As one of the soldiers we interviewed described it,

> The very situation of the roadblock makes you more aggressive. You are a soldier, and they are civilians. You have weapons, and they are going about their daily lives. The two of you are stuck in the same place, and [you] are embarrassed by it...That's

[4] The seam zone refers to the area around the Wall or security barrier between Israel and the oPt.

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> another reason. In Lebanon, we knew we had to shoot whenever we needed to. Here you have this constant feeling that you must think two steps ahead. You block out [the fact] that you are constantly exposed to injury, that any sixteen-year-old can stick a knife in you at any moment...The only way to prevent this is to maintain constant operational vigilance and let them [the Palestinians] understand that you can stick a bullet in them at any given moment. You must be hard with them. You must give them a slap, a push, and a kick. It is a matter of pure deterrence. (Gazit 2009a)

The violence described here and, importantly, the way it is legitimized focus on uncertainty about who the enemy is (Grassiani 2013, 86). Furthermore, the soldier indicates that he uses violence to deter potential suspects, to "make them understand." Again, we see how proximity to the Palestinian population in the space of the checkpoint has bearing on the way violence is explained and rationalized.[5]

A final important factor in soldiers' narratives is the pressure they feel from settlers, who wish for them to take a hard stance against Palestinians. Setting aside, for now, violence perpetrated by the settlers themselves, which often is enabled by soldiers present (see Gazit 2015, 2020), we will consider how their very presence is often a trigger, focusing on how they egg soldiers on to use more violence against Palestinians or confront human rights activists trying to reduce violence at the checkpoints.[6]

As fellow Israeli Jews and semi-legitimate residents of the oPt, settlers strongly influence the legitimization of violence by not only soldiers but also their commanders, who sometimes perpetrate further violence as a reaction to settlers' complaints about a lack of military action.[7] As we already have seen, soldiers do not behave violently because of ready-made legitimations; influenced by many different factors, they develop their own, making the process very "liquid."

The various instances of physical violence presented here should be seen as subjective experiences on the micro, spatial level that are heavily influenced by larger contexts. For example, the monitoring of soldiers' behavior is influential because public opinion matters—to soldiers whose families are part of that public and even more so to their commanders, who find themselves scrutinized. Importantly, however, over time, these positions change. In recent years, for example, it seems that "the public" and the political echelon are increasingly uncritical of the violent behavior of soldiers, as evidenced in the case of Israeli soldier Elor Azarya, who received political and public support after performing a "confirm kill"[8] on a Palestinian man who had already been subdued.[9]

Time

The variety in the ways soldiers legitimize violence and the forms violence takes is also expressed in different spatial and temporal terms. This can be the chronological process of managing military policy in the Occupied Territories in general, but also "time" as a function in units' transitions between different kinds of activity. For example, the brutal violence used during the turbulent riots that characterized the first Palestinian uprising (the First Intifada, 1987–1993) generally differed from that employed during planned military operations—such as those carried out

[5] See, for example, this video published by Breaking the Silence: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETNpS7AN5XU, accessed on January 21, 2020.

[6] See, for example, this video published by Machsom Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zfvFE8QkB4, accessed on January 21, 2020.

[7] See, for example, this article by Yesh Din: https://www.972mag.com/how-does-the-army-please-settlers-up-its-violence-against-palestinians/, accessed on January 21, 2020.

[8] A "confirm kill" means that a soldier, after shooting someone, shoots the person again to make sure (s)he is actually killed.

[9] See https://www.timesofisrael.com/hebron-soldier-was-right-to-shoot-civilian-security-official-testifies/.

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during the second Palestinian uprising (the Al-Aqsa Intifada, 2000–2005)—and the routine operations that take place between them.

In Gazit's (2009a, 2009b) early work on the Second Intifada, he sought to show how the violent practices of commanders and soldiers at the tactical level shape the political configuration of the occupation in the oPt. While political guidelines dominate in what he termed "high-intensity occupation," over the course of military operations such as Defensive Shield, Cast Lead, and Protective Edge, routine occupation—or "low-intensity occupation"—created space for agents at the tactical level to dictate levels of violence. The study found that the interplay between institutional, organized military violence and that which is occasional operates differently over time and across spaces of activity.

The social and political zeitgeist in which soldiers commit acts of violence is another important factor in those acts' legitimation. When a military operation is widely supported by society, daily violence on the part of soldiers is easier to legitimize than it would be if the public were inclined to question their conduct. As mentioned earlier, in Israel, political discourse concerning military violence tends to change over time and, as such, influences both soldiers' behavior and how it is justified.

One aspect of legitimization that requires better understanding is the way soldiers spend their time. Soldiers and their violent activities are generally conceived of in intense terms, perhaps reflecting the reality of operations such as those discussed above. Yet, most soldiers spend a considerable part of their time simply waiting, with little or nothing to do. This is not written about widely. However, boredom is a central element of soldiering (see Grassiani 2013, 74), and this and the routine of military activity influence soldiers' violent behavior. Israeli soldiers often use the term *shkhika* ("attrition") to describe their experiences. As one soldier explained to Grassiani (2013),

> It's the *shkhika*, the *shkhika*...for about four months, you do eight-eight-eight-eight or four-four, or sometimes, twelve-twelve or six-six...[or] eight-two—[that is,] guard for eight hours, get down for two, [then] guard for eight hours again. In twenty-four hours...and there are people who, in order to deal with it, [they] shoot or something, and there are people that go crazy. I was standing at the checkpoint in the pouring rain. A vehicle with a Palestinian family arrived. The father popped his head out, laughing, "What rain, huh?!" I took it as an insult. I was raging. Words flew back and forth. I found myself saying, "Get out, take off the car's wheels. Right here, right now, in the rain!"

It is important to notice the spontaneous and gradual development of the soldier's inclination to violence; the combination of his mental condition, the Palestinian's arrival, and the weather not only makes the situation volatile but also justifies his subsequent actions.

Transitions between different phases of operational intensity also influence violence's legitimization. During wide-scale military operations, organized violence predominates, and institutional guidelines for the use of force are clearer. The transition back into the routine of the occupation throws soldiers into a state of anomie, an agential condition in which they are much freer from strict institutional mechanisms of control. Soldiers report that during such periods, they have greater leeway to act brutally without the coercion of formal guidelines and clear orders.

Nonetheless, these dynamics can go in different directions. "Emergency situations" may further legitimize violence, but they can also restrain it. In the case of the Israeli occupation, this is most evident in situations involving Jewish settlers. Soldiers tend not to intervene in violent clashes between Palestinians and settlers, which they generally interpret as "friction between civilians"—at least initially. When violence intensifies, however, it often turns into an "emergency situation," and the soldiers will defend the settlers. It has been reported that, at times, they facilitate

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the settlers' violence against Palestinians. This shows the unstable heuristics of the soldiers and its unpredictable, liquid influence on their violent conduct.

The spatial and temporal dynamics of military experiences are thus important to making sense of the way soldiers develop their narratives of legitimation when it comes to the use of violence. Where and when soldiers serve—and all the attendant micro-factors—should furthermore be considered in light of structural processes and factors such as public opinion, policymaking, and (informal) rules that are imposed from above.

Organizational Culture and Socialization for Military Violence

Military violence is enacted and legitimated in multiple cultural contexts—that is, interpretive systems of meaning or patterns, also known as the "defining coordinates" or cultural "tool kit" (Swidler 1986; Staats 1996) soldiers use or are influenced by—that shape its legitimacy. This refers to the different cultural codes within military units, the military as a whole, and society at large that dictate the patterns of violence and the red lines for its use. Here, we would like to focus on more local cultural dynamics that take shape at the unit level and sometimes in the field, influencing violent military behavior and its justification.

The military unit itself seems to be of great importance to soldiers' legitimation of violence. This is due partly to their professional training (Bar and Ben-Ari 2005; Samimian-Darash 2013) and partly to the informal socialization of violence, which results from the conduct of the tactical command staff the soldiers fall under. Since the main military's expertise is in the exploitation of violence, the socialization of violence is part and parcel of the basic training that all soldiers, especially those in combat units, go through (Cockerham 1973; Sion 2006; Lande 2007). This socialization includes instruction in the use of violent means, technologies, and tactics. It also includes a mental component. Soldiers are trained to control their bodies and their instincts, ensuring that they use violence only within the limits of authorized directives (Samimian-Darsh 2013). Hence, the formal socialization of violence also serves as a benchmark for military violence's legitimacy. Yet, the socialization and legitimation of violence are not restricted to formal military training; they also linger in the military's operational routine and informal culture.

In this context, we should consider the influence of a particular organizational culture and ethos on the patterns of violence practiced in various units. Furthermore, we should look at the cultural variables underlying the emergent properties of military violence. This means that local context and the ways soldiers enact violence are products of more general and rooted cultural systems that characterize military units. For example, soldiers—and, according to some reports, Palestinians—perceive Israeli Border Police units, the Golani Brigade, and the religious Netzach Yehuda battalion as more violent toward the Palestinian population.[10] The paratrooper and Nahal brigades, on the other hand, are characterized as having stricter ethics in this regard.

An ethnic distinction is also important here: Notably, many of the Border Police and Golani Brigade soldiers are Mizrachi (of Middle Eastern/North African heritage), while Ashkenazi soldiers (with a European background) mostly populate the Nahal and paratrooper units (Grosswirth-Kachtan 2017). Given that there is certain overlap between ethnicity and political inclination in Israeli politics, some soldiers suggested that this had an influence on the probability of anti-Palestinian violence in different units. Gender is significant as well, and Lomsky-Feder and Sasson-Levy (2021) show how Israeli women soldiers legitimate military violence in their own unique way as part of their gender positionality in the military. The authors' term for this is "implicit legitimacy"—the soldiers use violence to escape their relative

[10] See, for example, https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-02-20/the-killing-of-an-american-exposed-israel-s-weakest-link.

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organizational marginality. Such ideas can be perceived as gross generalizations, stigmatizing, or folkloric stereotypes that are not grounded in unambiguous empirical fact. However, these aspects of identity are important in intra-unitary and inter-unitary discourse, making them significant in shaping soldiers' behavior and self-image.

A unit's image and self-image are part of the informal processes of socialization that younger soldiers undergo, which commanders direct and also integrate into daily operations. These processes result in typical unit-based violent practices. For example, in one of our interviews, we discovered that a particular company operating in the Nablus area would force Palestinian detainees to perform maintenance work at the detention camp before transferring them to the General Security Service for interrogation. Another company would humiliate detainees and photograph them for the soldiers' internal newspaper, and in some units, it was customary to confiscate personal belongings such as keys, spark plugs, and even Qurans from Palestinians "who were problematic." Although the violence in these examples is not brutal or even necessarily physical, it illustrates the differences between units operating in the oPt in relation to the subordinate civilian population. While some units adopt these improper practices, commanders in other units take pride in their soldiers' ethical and nonviolent behavior.

To the extent that a unit's culture can encourage violence or facilitate its legitimation, it can also restrict its manifestations. Reserve units, for example, are characterized by a lower rate of brutal violence against civilians. One explanation for this is that the unique position of the reservists, who are simultaneously soldiers and civilians, gives them a kind of "double vision" or "double awareness" when it comes to the social reality in which they operate, causing them to develop a unitary culture different from regular soldiers (Lomsky-Feder, Gazit, and Ben-Ari 2008; Gazit, Lomsky-Feder, and Ben Ari 2021). This dual and ambivalent social stance leads to reservists developing a perspective on events that is more conscious and critical than that of people who operate solely either within or outside the military arena. Reservists are far more sensitive to how force is used, its strength, and its cost. This is reflected in the unique culture created in such units and reserve personnel's increasing criticism of the use of force by younger, regular soldiers. A prominent manifestation of this dissatisfaction is an initiative in which reserve personnel volunteer at checkpoints along the seam zone to monitor the behavior of regular soldiers and soften their negative attitudes and behavior toward Palestinian passersby. This step was a manifestation of a different military culture, one that shaped different attitudes about violence against innocent civilians. As one of the reservists we interviewed put it:

> I felt a bit like I was babysitting the young soldiers [at the checkpoint]. There was also a regular commander who openly told us that they expect the reservists to worry about things not spinning out of control, there not being any violence, and there being no "humanitarian cases." Meaning that we won't find ourselves on the news with a battered Palestinian or a woman who gave birth at a checkpoint. (Gazit 2009a)

Against the backdrop of the military's "specialization" in violence, it is therefore necessary to understand how social and cultural mechanisms are rooted in a unit's culture of violence, in the sense that violence is routine, naturalized—accepted as natural and legitimate—and normalized. This leads to each unit formulating its own rules of engagement. The normalization of violence is expressed as an integral part of both a soldier's self-image and the model of soldiering that develops during the occupation (e.g., Bar and Ben-Ari 2005; Samimian-Darash 2013).

Conclusions and Avenues for Future Research

A plethora of studies has focused on the macrosociological analysis of military violence in war and noncombat situations. Although different in their

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theoretical explanations, these studies tend to see military violence as a dependent variable that can be explained through different independent macropolitical variables. Considering military violence primarily a type of state violence has led scholars to concentrate on structural (Davenport 1997; Beissinger 1998; Davenport, Johnston, and Mueller 2005), ideological (Tilly 1978; Davenport 1996; Beissinger 1998), and economic explanations (Gurr 1986; Henderson 1991) for the phenomenon, neglecting its internal dynamics. Furthermore, scholars focusing on political dynamics to explain the legitimation of state violence confuse legitimacy with supportive public opinion (e.g., Everts and Isernia 2001) and justification (e.g., Geis and Müller 2013), hence overlooking mechanisms of legitimation that spring from society (Levy 2021) and social dynamics from below. The fact that institutional and formal schemes of legitimacy are less powerful during nonwar military activities and political situations of fragmented sovereignty only makes the exploration of local mechanisms that legitimize military violence more important.

In this paper, we sought to develop further the conceptualization of military violence's legitimacy, especially in regard to ill-defined and unstable political situations such as civil wars, regime change, and prolonged military occupation. In such situations, the structural variables and formal powers that dictate the use of military force give way to more liquid factors that not only shape the sources of legitimization but also influence its dynamics.

Drawing on the case of the prolonged Israeli military occupation in the West Bank, we showed that the legitimacy of military violence is empirically formed rather than formally granted. It is generated by multiple factors—including soldiers' changing emotional states and the place and time of their activities—and influenced by their units' often-informal cultural norms and codes of conduct. Hence, it is very difficult to outline a deterministic explanatory model of the legitimacy of military violence. Since this is a fluctuating phenomenon that often develops during the violent act or even afterward, to disclose it, one needs to trace its empirical dynamics. Hence, examining violence's legitimacy as an emerging property rather than a doxa shaped by external forces (i.e., international law, official policy, and formal directives) requires acknowledging its instability and investigating its variables.

Given the conceptual and methodological complexities of studying such a dynamic sociopolitical phenomenon, there are numerous avenues for future research. First, trying to capture the emergence of military violence's empirical legitimacy demands a prolonged ethnographic approach, which would enable a holistic description of soldiering and military conduct. Only such a direct investigation would unearth the various factors involved as well as their interactions. For example, such an exploration could trace the interaction between soldiers' changing mental conditions and the sorts of missions they complete as well as how this may influence the legitimacy of acting violently. Second, as we illustrated above, the legitimacy of military violence is often circumstantial and varies across time and space. Therefore, empirical research on questions of legitimacy should be more oriented toward subnational variations in the legitimization of violence; whether some sources of legitimacy, such as cultural norms and morals, are more persistent than others in different kinds of military forces and among different soldiers (e.g., conscripts and reserves) should be examined. Addressing such questions would not only have scientific value; it could also help policymakers and activists confront expressions of military brutality by focusing on the sources of its legitimacy. Fourth, and equally important, is tracing mechanisms that delegitimize military violence. Who are the agents of such mechanisms, and under what conditions does their influence become significant? Finally, although this article has diverted its analytical focus to micro-sociopolitical dynamics, it is crucial not to neglect the structural characteristics of the conflict under study. This does not mean limiting ourselves to deterministic sociological explanations, but rather extending our analytical effort to a

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multiscale analysis of legitimacy that captures both its macromechanisms and micromechanisms and their interaction.

The legitimacy of military violence is often liquid. It is processual, unpredictable, partial, useful, negotiable, and dynamic to such a degree that it may seem to lose social significance and explanatory power. However, its actual ramifications are substantial and real, certainly for its victims. Hence, instead of waiving its applicability, it is our scholarly and moral obligation to disclose its complexity.

While it is difficult to call for a general model based on a single case study, we view this as an opportunity to open doors for systematic, comparative research in future cases where other mechanisms of legitimization are at play. The question of the legitimacy of violence perpetrated by the military and other security agencies is becoming more relevant due to the growing friction between state security officers and civilians as well as in border control missions, assignments concerning public order, and the confronting of health regulations. Although the political context is very different in each of these cases, given that local forces are key to legitimizing any governmental violence, a better understanding of the phenomenon is badly needed.

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