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Shifting sights: civilian militarism in Israeli art and visual culture

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CHAPTER II

BODIES OF THE NATION: EROTICIZED SOLDIERS

> The body, indeed, is where it all begins: as soon as one wonders what,
> where, or who one is, one looks to the body for the answer.
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> -- Ernst van Alphen, "Bodyscapes" (114)

A number of recent Israeli exhibitions testify to a growing interest in reassessing the notion of masculinity in Israel. The exhibition *You're a Cannon: Icons of Masculinity* of 1997 announced this phenomenon, which remains relevant ten years later for exhibitions such as *Gvarim* ("Men") and *Gever Gever* ("Macho Man"), both from 2006.[34] The earlier exhibition, curated by the Limbus group, took as its point of departure the inherently militarized definition of Israeli gendered identities. It presented, in place of a curator's text, an artwork: a mural constructed from unstitched portrait tapestries of past and present Chiefs of Staff. The military phenomenon was also underscored in *Gvarim*, one of the later exhibitions, as a central aspect of Israeli masculinity that artists contend with.[35] Sagi Refael, the exhibition's curator, noted that the artists who examine Israeli masculinity through the soldier-figure are by and large openly gay, and related this fact to their outsider position in Israeli society (Refael 8).

The correlation of gender, nation, and the military, to which both *Icons of Masculinity* and *Men* allude, is indeed a central aspect of mainstream Israeli identity, and a recurring theme in contemporary Israeli art.[36] In this chapter, I analyze Adi Nes' *Soldiers* series, which portrays the Israeli soldier as an erotic object of inquiry as well as critique. The series is well known and its works feature in numerous exhibitions that deal with Israeli identity, Israeli art, or Israeli gender, including *Icons of Masculinity*, *Gvarim*, and *Uniform Ltd.*, as well as being part of the permanent collection of the Israel Museum's Israeli art holdings. The series includes dozens of

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[34] *You're a Cannon: Icons of Masculinity* (curator: Limbus group), Limbus Gallery, Ramat Ha-Sharon 1997; *Gvarim* (curator: Sagi Refael), Ramat Gan Museum 2006; *Gever Gever* (curator: Nira Itzhaki), Chelouche Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv 2006.
[35] The exhibition marked three additional aspects of contemporary representations of Israeli masculinity: self-portraits in drag; the infiltration of technology, fashion, and gay culture into mainstream popular culture; and the use of ready-made images of men from different magazines (Refael 7–8).
[36] A selection of sociological accounts that develop these issues includes Lieblich; Yuval-Davis; Helman; Sasson-Levy, "Constructing," and *Identities in Uniform*; and Sasson-Levy and Rapoport. Kimmerling interprets gender inequality as a direct consequence of Israeli militarism ("Patterns").

beautifully staged and digitally manipulated photographs that condense gender, nation, and art through the militarized and eroticized male figure. However, while the series deploys soldier-figures to explore Israeli masculinity and national identity, it does not necessarily problematize the militarized aspect of this masculinity, nor does it seem to critique the military as a frame for national identity. It thus brings up the question whether the eroticization of the figure of the soldier is critical and, if so, in what way, and to what extent.

To give a few examples, one untitled photograph from the series (figure 2.1, henceforth *Body Builder*) depicts a bare-chested, muscular man in fatigue pants and military shoes, posing and flaunting his muscles against a deserted dune just outside a military tent, on which the Israeli army seal is displayed upside down. The image condenses various stereotypes, and the figure's exaggerated muscle tone, knit skullcap, and silver dog-tag all turn him into the emblem of the "muscular Jew," a term coined by Max Nordau around the birth of Zionism to forge a contrast to the European stereotype of diasporic, effeminate Jewry.[37] Yet this soldier's blatant display of masculinity is fractured by his somewhat unsteady pose, and by his long and bent shadow on the tent. The soldier's solitude further underscores the futility of his shaky display: his exaggerated virility is undermined by its having little other purpose than to be displayed in the enchanted, deserted landscape that surrounds him.

Another image from the series (figure 2.2) depicts a soldier sleeping on a wooden bench in a bare, dark room, resting his head on a military backpack. The figure lies on his back, his right hand hanging loosely to his side. His shirt is partly unbuttoned and exposes a fraction of bare skin. The strong desert sunlight that enters through the opening behind him does not diminish the cool, dark atmosphere of this undefined interior space. Supplementary, softer sources of light direct our attention to the soldier's face and serene posture, as well as to his left hand which rests casually on his groin. To some extent, this image intimates death, through the pose of the soldier as well as the tomb-like surroundings. Yet the soft, baroque-like atmosphere of light and shade lingers on the figure's features and, together with the compositional

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[37] See Presner for description and analysis of muscular Judaism; I elaborate on this concept later in the chapter. On the relationship between bodybuilding and cultural constructions of masculinity see Van Alphen, "Masculinity" 180-184 and *Art* 128-129.
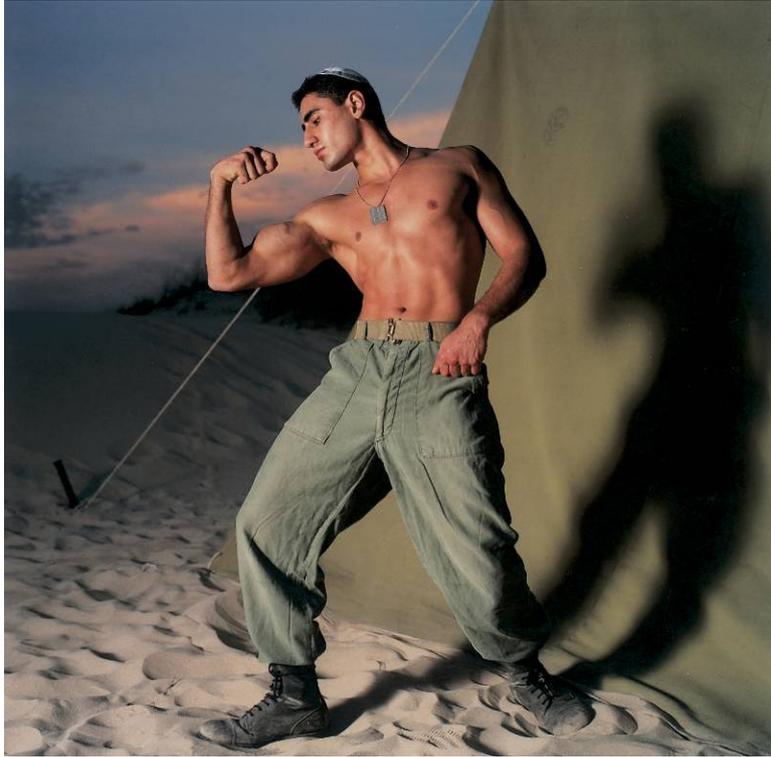
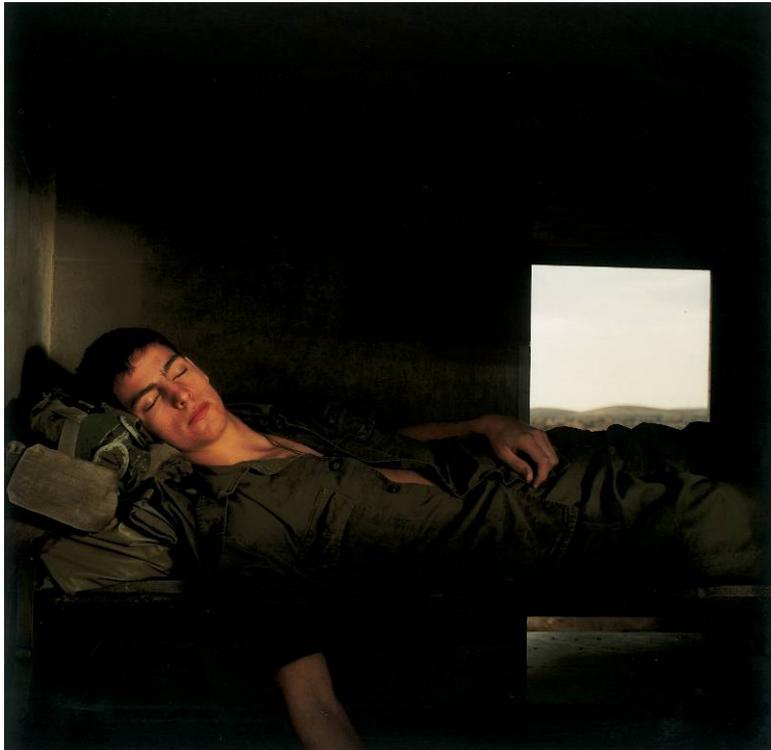Figure 2.1. Adi Nes, *Untitled* ("Body Builder"), 1996.

Figure 2.2. Adi Nes, *Untitled* ("sleeping soldier"), 2000.

allusion to Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (1510), exposes an erotic yearning that is enhanced by his unbuttoned shirt and the suggestion of masturbation.

These two artworks serve as good examples for the series as a whole. While they exhibit disparate aesthetic and conceptual attitudes, they bring up related issues and questions. First, both photographs portray masculinity as a culturally and ideologically constructed formation. One exaggerates the ideal masculine body in order to expose its underlying superficiality, and the other depicts the soldier as an androgynous sleeping beauty, according to "postmodern incarnations of eroticized masculinity" (Solomon-Godeau 9). Both those depictions move away from normative representations of masculinity only to point back at its artificial essence.[38] Second, both works stage their critique of masculinity through recourse to canonical knowledge. The reference to a well-known Israeli idiom in the first, and to both Baroque and Renaissance aesthetics in the second, is emblematic of the way in which Western art history and Israeli national visual semiotics are mobilized, disrupted, and re-interpreted in *Soldiers*. Deciphering the way in which the artworks exploit prototypes depends to some extent on the viewers' personal acquaintance with the respective knowledge fields; yet, due to the series' manifest representationality, outsiders too can enjoy the allusions if connections are spelled out, that is, if they are brought into the circle of knowledge. Finally, both works dress their figures in military uniforms. This fact may seem trivial when soldiers are indeed the declared subject. But, as I have argued in the previous chapter, frames can be used both critically and uncritically, that is, with or without attention to the way they affect the issues that they outline. Within Nes' oeuvre, the military uniform is mobilized in complex ways, shedding light on specific socio-cultural matters while sending others to the shadows.

In the first part of this chapter, I look at how some works within the *Soldiers* series merge the canons of art history with Israeli national narratives by inserting the figure of the soldier in adaptations of famous artworks and photographs. I analyze the traffic of meaning within the series' narratives according to Bal's understanding of "preposterous history," first introduced in her book *Quoting Caravaggio* (1999). The term designates the mechanism in which an artwork is re-interpreted in later works

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[38] The constructed aspect of gender is clearly delineated in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993). For the constructed aspect of masculinity in particular, see for example Halberstam, and Adams and Savran.

that reference it, and contends with the ways in which quotes affect the comprehensibility of both the newer and the older images. In the sections that follow, I detail the possibilities and effects of the visual strategy of preposterous quoting, and focus on the way Nes' quotations rethink national stereotypes and gender norms through the exposure of desire that resides in the long-lasting connections among gender divisions, aesthetic sensibilities, and national identities.

Next, I conduct a comparative analysis between Nes' photographs and the work of other Israeli artists who deal with similar issues. The comparisons are meant to tease out aspects that remain untreated in Nes' *Soldiers*, such as the place of women soldiers within the Israeli national ideal, as well as the place of those identities whose definition negates a depiction in military uniform. Here, I wish to focus on the military uniform as frame and to inquire to what extent Nes' *Soldiers* destabilizes hegemonic masculinity in its specifically Israeli, *militarized* incarnation. A renewed reflection on the political significance of Nes' erotic military bodies will bring this chapter to a close.

The Politics of Quoting

Adi Nes' *Untitled* (figure 2.3, henceforth, *The Last Supper*) is a tableau-vivant photographic adaptation of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*.[39] The work depicts a group of soldiers seated around an improvised dinner table. The poses of the figures in Da Vinci's composition and the geometrical arrangement of the architecture are echoed in Nes' *Untitled*. The food and the plastic cutlery spread on the table, the deserted background, the figures' contemporary look and posture, their fatigue dress, and the architecture of the building that hosts them all bring to mind a present-day military base. One additional figure marks the main compositional deviation from the original: a fourteenth man stands at the left end of the image, looking back at something that catches his attention beyond the commotion around the table, beyond

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[39] Nes' untitled *Last Supper* is perhaps the most celebrated image from his *Soldiers* series. The work received international acclaim and appeared in numerous group and solo exhibitions in Israel and abroad. It was sold at an auction in Sotheby's for a record price in 2007; appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* in May 2008; and is on display in the Israel Museum's permanent exhibition of Israeli art.

the space of the photograph. His uniform is the only one on which the letters Z.H.L, the abbreviation for "Israeli Defense Forces" ("Ztva Hagana Le-Israel"), are noticeable.

Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* has been the topic of innumerable interpretations in the twentieth century, to such an extent that its auratic status as a visual icon surpasses the actual wall painting in Milan.[40] Nes thus joins a long list of interpreters when he reworks the famous image of Jesus and the twelve disciples as Israeli soldiers. His adaptation displaces the Last Supper tale to a secular time and place to tease out connotations such as brotherhood, loyalty, heroism, and certain death. Nes also brings the disciples back home, to the land of Israel, and plays with the fact that they too were once Jewish soldiers of sorts. The contemporary Israeli soldier is endowed with the doomed as well as redeeming faith of Jesus at the same time that Christian canonical history is understood anew in relation to national and military alliances. According to Bal's understanding of the work of quoting, this type of two-way influence is crucial for a work of art that acts as a cultural intervention (*Quoting* 20).[41]

In *Quoting Caravaggio* (1999), Bal describes four operations of visual quotations (10–15). First, Bal writes, quotations in the literal sense endorse the iconographical precedent with authority: the quotation attests to the original's importance, its being worthy of being quoted. The work of Nes, among the many other adaptations of the Milanese fresco, authenticates the legend of Leonardo and affirms the genius of his work. At the same time, quotations allow the newer works to appropriate the aura of the Old Master (which they themselves help to maintain) and so to position themselves within the canon (Bal, "Quoting," 10). Thus, this first pair of operations reinforces both the authority of the earlier composition and the contemporary's place in the pantheon of Western art. From this perspective, a work's strength and its status as art are based on the relation it stages with its predecessor, a relation that takes center stage in Nes' *Last Supper*.

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[40] See Steinberg for a comprehensive overview of the visual reproductions and theoretical studies of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper*.

[41] I describe Nes' restaging of master artworks as adaptations at times and as quotes at others. The difference is subtle: adaptations refer to works in their entirety, while quotes refer to particularities such as details, styles, and techniques. Bal's analysis is helpful for interpreting the effects of adaptations as well as quotes, both of which subsist within Nes' oeuvre.

Figure 2.3. Adi Nes, *Untitled* ("The Last Supper"), 1999.

Nes' adaptations testify to a conscious and critical dialogue with the past. In his *Last Supper*, the additional fourteenth soldier creates an unambiguous compositional distinction between the contemporary work and its founding image. Another photograph from Nes' *Soldiers* series (figure 2.4, henceforth his *Pietà*) stages a renaissance Pietà, in which Mary is replaced by a male soldier who attends to the wounds of another with brush and colors. The gesture evokes the hand of doubting Thomas, but the brush marks the dying Jesus/soldier as his mother/comrade's own creation. Instead of a proof of truth, the touching of the wound becomes the creation of fantasy. Such compositional changes turn out to be the work's main aspect, framing it as a theoretical contemplation on both the Pietà narrative and the ethos of heroic death.

Figure 2.4. Adi Nes, *Untitled* ("*Pietà*"), 1995.

       The effects of such quoting-with-a-difference assert the mythical position of the earlier compositions, while at the same time they reinforce the contemporary work's place in the pantheon of Western art. Furthermore, following Bal's logic, the quotes validate the (canonical selection of the) discipline of art history itself.[42] However, such adaptations also bring up associations that exceed a direct comparison between two images, and contain the seed for the deconstruction of visual icons. Indeed, a third operation of visual quotations, according to Bal, points to ambiguities that exceed the artist's intentions, as it "demonstrate[s] the difference between the illusion of wholeness and mastery pertaining to the artist of art history and the somewhat messy, yet much richer, visual culture of live images" (Bal, *Quoting* 15). The fourth and final operation of visual quotation pertains to the logic of deconstruction, as it insists on the impossibility of reaching an authentic origin (11). This second pair of operations points to the vulnerability of quoting in the sense that the same quotations that endow works with an art-historical authority also open them

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[42] Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu claims that the constant reference of artworks to art's arsenal of topics and iconology is what keeps high art defined as such and differentiates it from supposedly lower forms of expression (4).

up for unexpected associative links. The moment of interpretation moves into the void between the quoted and the quotation.

The abundant layers of quotations in Nes' *Soldiers* series, which relate to Christianity, Judaism, early photography, Renaissance aesthetics, and Israeli-ness at one and the same time, can be understood as an acknowledgment of that void. The photographs offer their viewers many narratives to follow. This multiplicity may lead to a sense of satisfaction with one's ability to read visual cues, but also to a flabbergasted realization of the impossibility to ground the image in a single interpretation. The quotations take over the image and become the central characters of the visual play, while the actual images to which they belong (both "original" and "adaptation") move to the background. Thus, according to art critic Dorith Levitte-Harten, Nes' *Soldiers* series "may be seen as a plateau on which effigies and symbols, icons and paradigms are projected, an encyclopedic repository of images – but fluctuating ones, which cannot be trusted" (146). In this light, Nes' works deconstruct visual icons in their critique of reality as a codified system of signifiers. They make strange those images that are already "etched on our visual cortex" (141,143).[43]

Levitte-Harten's article is a comprehensive study of the visual cues of Nes' *Soldiers* series and their effects. However, because Levitte-Harten understands the series as a repository of images, she does not examine the *interactions* that occur among Nes' visual quotations. Yet, the works are elements in a series, and when read as serial images, the internal structure of each work connects with that of others. In her study of seriality in modern art, Jennifer Dyer argues that attention to the serial structure of artworks transforms the way they are interpreted (10). Seriality, as an integral semantic element of a work, presents itself not necessarily in terms of the image's content, but within its structure, which, in turn, defines its subject matter (19, 232). Dyer bases her analysis on John Coplans' definition of seriality as a "particular inter-relationship, rigorously consistent, of structure and syntax … that links the internal structure of a work to that of other works (Coplans 11).[44] Following Dyer and Coplans, the seriality of Nes' *Soldiers* resides more in their structure of quoting than

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[43] Another thread within *Soldiers* that links up with Levitte-Harten's allusion to enchantments or tricks ("fluctuating [images] … which cannot be trusted") resides in the series' recurrent allusion to soldiering as a circus performance. On this note see Zalmona 435.

[44] Coplans warns that "to paint in series, however, does not necessarily mean to be serial," and differentiates between a series, which is the simple grouping of forms in a set, from serial imagery or seriality, which he associates with "forms linked by a macro-structure," apprehended in terms of relational order and continuity (10, 19).

their subject matter. Attending to the serial aesthetic of Nes' oeuvre exceeds Levitte-Harten's analysis inasmuch as it exposes relations of power *within* the series' encyclopedic fluctuation of signs, and narrows down the scope of indoctrinated knowledge that *Soldiers* appraises. This focus allows for a comparison that pinpoints *desire* as the series' main target of critique.

Two particular artworks help to clarify how visual quotations operate within serial aesthetics. Both remain untitled and present adaptations of photographs that have become iconic representations of the emerging Jewish state (Presner xv, xvii). The first (figure 2.5, henceforth *Suez-Canal*) depicts a soldier emerging from a pool of turbulent dark water, smiling as he triumphantly brandishes a rifle in his left hand. The soldier seems ignorant of the commotion around him, made up of four bare-chested men who are pulling on him and on each other. The composition, with the exception of its muscular water-nymphs, is an adaptation of a photograph by Denis Cameron, published on the cover of *Life* magazine in June 1967 (figure 2.7). The cover depicts an Israeli soldier waving his rifle in victory while being half-submerged in water. The captions on the cover read "Wrap up of the astounding war" and "Israeli soldier cools off in the Suez Canal." The reference to the *Life* magazine image might escape notice but it is repeatedly mentioned in relation to Nes' version in exhibition catalogues and captions.

Another untitled work from the series (figure 2.6, henceforth *Um Rashrash*) depicts a soldier struggling to climb a pole in the middle of the desert, assisted by five comrades. This work echoes Micha Peri's *Raising the Ink Flag in Um Rashrash* from 1949, which itself refers to Joe Rosenthal's famous staged photograph depicting the raising of the American flag at Iwo Jima.[45] Peri's image (figure 2.8) is an iconic image of national victory in Israeli historiography, representing the "invasion" of present-day Eilat during the Israeli War of Independence.[46] It displays in black and white a group of armed men that help a comrade to climb a pole. But in Peri's image the pole is not bare: it supports the Israeli flag under dramatically stormy skies. In

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[45] According to Samuel Presner, Peri's photograph was an explicit reenactment of Rosenthal's (xxii).
[46] For a radical deconstruction of Peri's photograph, which goes far beyond Nes' critique of the masculine military ethos, see Azoulay, "Declaring," 170-173. Azoulay analyses the testimonies of fighters who participated in the occupation of Um Rashrash to show that, in fact, no battle ever took place. The fighters entered an empty village, and the aura of combat was added to the event after the fact. This staged aspect of the battle remains outside of the by-now uncontestable narrative that was constructed through and around Peri's image and does not interfere in its function as a mythical icon of military victory.

Nes' version all pathos is gone. Here the sky is bright and blue, the flag is missing, and the gesture is all that is left.

Both these works are critical of the military ethos and ridicule a macho ideal. Their aesthetics is not melancholic or nostalgic, as is Nes' *Last Supper* or *Pietà* adaptations; yet the visual logic that structures the four artworks is similar. Background and composition are duplicated from a well-known source, but men wearing modern-day Israeli uniforms replace all figures, and a particular detail of the source image is either taken out (the flag), replaced (Mary, the stormy skies) or added (the brush and colors, the fourteenth soldier, and the men in the water). The reference to existing images calls for a comparative analysis, for an interpretation that is situated between the quoted and the quotation, and sets all four of Bal's operations in motion, albeit on different scales. What is crucial for our case is that this single strategy is used to deal with distinct bodies of knowledge: art history and early photography, Christianity and the Israeli national ethos. Consequently, the relation between what seems at first to be an arbitrary collection of indoctrinating images becomes more coherent and clear.

As much as Nes' *Last Supper* and *Pietà* allow for preposterous interpretations of the past, they clearly demarcate what is past (Italian masterpieces, Christian tales) and what is present (secular photography, present-day soldiers). The two temporalities are combined in a way that nonetheless keeps their particulars apart: art history is positioned as the background, both in a compositional and a theoretical sense, to the Israeli nation, marked by its quintessential soldier-figure. The older works' involvement with heroism, redemption, and beauty are negotiated through this present-day context. In the *Um Rashrash* and *Suez Canal* adaptations, however, *both* past and present belong to the Israeli ethos. The propagandistic images of the early days of the state of Israel are handled as background to be revised and re-interpreted, just like the narratives of Western art. Hence, the analogous method assumes sameness and endows both revised narratives with equal valence.

Figure 2.5. Adi Nes, *Untitled* ("Suez Canal"), 1999.

Figure 2.6. Adi Nes, *Untitled* ("Um-Rashrash"), 1998.

Figure 2.7. "Israeli Soldier Cools Off in the Suez Canal."
LIFE magazine cover, June 13 1967. Photograph by Denis Cameron.

Figure 2.8. Micha Perry, "A Soldier Raising an Ink-Drawn Flag at
Um Rashrash (Eilat)," 1949.

Thus, a comparison of the divergent quotations reveals that the juxtaposition of the Israeli ethos with Western aesthetics is not the series' critical essence, as one could assume standing before Nes' Last Supper, but the series' uncritical point of departure: its frame, if you will. In accordance with the second operation of visual quotations, the "preposterous history" of Nes' adaptations cannot subsist without framing the past as past, which is then preposterously reworked. The fact that images belonging to early Israeli photography and to Renaissance art are dealt with on equal grounds, that is, as a background to be revised and revisited, points to the way in which *Soldiers* foregrounds Western aesthetics as an inherent part of Israeli historiography. As I will argue in the following section, the series requires such grounding to challenge historical and aesthetical definitions of ideal masculinity, definitions that yet contain thorny links to the narratives that reverberate in Nes' photographs.

National Bodies

George L. Mosse's pioneering research on the construction of masculinity in early modern times underscores the interconnection between aesthetics, nationalism, race, and sexuality. In *Nationalism and Sexuality* (1985) and in *The Image of Man* (1996), Mosse traces the roots of "respectability," defined as the manners, morals and sexual attitudes that are today taken for granted as normative, back to the dawn of European nationalism. Then, the newly formed respectability advocated that if one could not suppress his sexuality, one would put society, family, and state at risk (Mosse, *Nationalism* 9–11). From the prohibition of masturbation to the illegality of homosexual acts, restrictions were put in place with the expectation that the civilized human would control his passions and use his body in a socially productive way. Manliness meant freedom from sexual passion and the sublimation of sensuality into leadership (13). Mosse and others have shown that masculinity was reframed and structured as the (asexual) founding force for nation and society: fraternity marked the soldier, reason marked the civilian, and desire was absent in both.[47]

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[47] Mosse's study was revolutionary in its linkage of national and sexual identities. Subsequent studies on the meanings of masculinity in ancient, early modern and contemporary (visual) culture include

The negation of individual sexuality thus characterized early modern life; it was also mostly homosocial, constructed of social bonds between persons of the same sex. Homosocial relations between men, specifically, allowed modern patriarchy to emerge and thrive. According to Eve Kokofsky Sedgwick's influential thesis in *Between Men* (1985), homosocial relations were heavily dependent on the repudiation of erotic bonds among men, and so the latter were defined anew in non-sexual terms, their erotic aspects disciplined, transferred, and sublimated. Women operated as conduits between the trajectories of male desire to ensure the heterosexual character of the suppressed erotic traffic between men (Sedgwick 20–27).[48] Sedgwick further argues that the projection of suppressed erotic bonds onto the marginal figure of the homosexual was crucial to the creation of modern homosociality, and that homophobia is therefore a *necessary* consequence of patriarchal institutions in its disruption of the continuum between homosociality and homosexuality (3).

The neo-classical model of the male body provided the visual paradigm for hegemonic masculinity at the rise of modern political culture (Mosse, *Nationalism* 13–14; *Image* 109). It portrayed masculine bodies with an unnatural clarity and emphasized a hyper-conscious muscular tension (Potts, "Beautiful" 2, Crow, "Observations" 152). Jacques Louis David's *The Oath of the Horatii* is a paradigmatic example of the way in which the neo-classical style served the emerging ideology of hegemonic masculinity. In this painting, as in most of David's oeuvre, the distinction between the sexes is clearly marked: women are possessed by emotions, mainly grief, while men are portrayed with detached postures, representing a virile sovereignty (Dudink 156).[49] Sexuality and desire are withdrawn from all figures in favor of national ideals. The men are brought together by the virtue of their swords, as they look up and aim at the ideals of the revolution.

Men's bodies became visually omnipresent in paintings and sculpture, representing civic, moral, and ethical ideals. However, while the Greek model was steadily gaining a crucial place in national self-representation, its erotic undercurrents remained disturbing for the new bourgeois respectability. The emerging discipline of

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Bryson, Holly, and Moxey; Solomon-Godeau; Dudink; Pateman; Van Alphen, "Masculinity" and *Art* (especially ch. 5 and 6) and Connell. For a radical rethinking of masculinity in relation to the male body in theory, art and pornography, see Aydemir, *Images*.

[48] Succinct overviews of Sedgwick's thesis can be found in Solomon-Godeau (especially ch. 2, 42–97), Van Alphen, *Art* (especially ch. 5) and Adams and Savran.

[49] See Bryson, *Tradition*, especially ch. 3 (63–84), for a sharp analysis of *The Oath* in terms of the politics of gender and patriarchy.

art history came to the rescue in the attempt to purge the stereotype of masculinity from its homoerotic undercurrents; the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann were particularly useful in stripping Greek and neo-classical sculpture of passion and sexuality, and presenting them instead as representations of symbolic beauty (Mosse, *Image* 13–17).[50] In Winckelmann's analysis of ancient Greek art, exemplified by his rhapsodic descriptions of the Laocoön and the Apollo Belvedere, supreme beauty belonged to the male figure, while sensuous beauty, deemed secondary, was confined to the female nude.[51] This sublime male beauty, a model for "stoic" modern masculinity, combined a vigorous, sensuous body with a reserved soul (Crow "Observations" 158).

Regardless of the attempts to subdue the erotic aspects of the male body, or maybe precisely because of these attempts, Mosse concludes that homoeroticism had been a part of modern nationalism from its nascence (*Nationalism* 176). Sedgwick, too, gives homosexuality credit for its part in constructing modern society, arguing that "our society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged" (4). For Sedgwick, the disavowed erotic aspect of male-to-male relationships is the affective glue that shapes homosocial relations on the basis of fear and desire. Although many factors have changed with regards to gender inequality and citizenship since the early days of modernity, the fraternal social contract still thrives in social clubs and associations, and finds explicit expression in military institutions and on the battlefield (Pateman 129). Homophobia and the repudiation of femininity, too, remain central organizing principles for a contemporary Western cultural definition of manhood (Kimmel 188).

Nes' *Soldiers* series makes use of various methods to tease out the desire that is always already present within and between male bodies. In some works, such as *Last Supper* and *Pietà*, the emphasis lies on the affective relationship between the protagonists; in others, such as photographs that portray sleeping soldiers (e.g., figure 2.2), emphasis is given to the subtle erotic depiction of the androgynous male body. The sleeping-soldiers' compositions are also the ones that are most sexually suggestive, especially when they focus on the soldiers' exposed necks, or when they hint at masturbation. If, following Norman Bryson's ironic paraphrase, the history of

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[50] See also Potts, "Beautiful"; Dudink; and Solomon-Godeau.
[51] The homoerotic undercurrent of Winckelmann's writing has only been recently acknowledged. For a comprehensive overview and analysis of Winckelmann's writing see Potts, "Beautiful" and *Flesh*.

art is "a record of the creation of aesthetic masterpieces, which constitute the canon of artistic excellence in the West" (Bryson, Holly and Moxey xvi), Nes' photographs preposterously reveal the (homo)sexual undercurrents that have always informed it. They reflect on the underlying, disavowed erotic aspects of both classical art history and national imagery, echoing the conclusion of recent studies in art historiography, which show Winckelmann's description of male beauty to be more sexually charged than was understood in his era.

Other photographs from the *Soldiers* series deconstruct features of hegemonic masculinity by exaggeration, inviting ridicule.[52] One of the better known photographs from the series is the *Body Builder* introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The soldier's inflated body becomes the locus of attention rather than serving as a symbol or tool for greater ideals. His overstated virility is, however, fractured by the long and unsteady shadows that his body casts on the dune. For Bryson, "to be a subject constructed as a male involves a necessary masquerade, the masquerade of the masculine" ("Géricault" 231). Nes' photograph succinctly portrays "the effort, the sweat, of producing the masculine masquerade" (235). But it does more than that: the figure's intense stare at his own muscles further portrays the effort involved in believing the masculine masquerade at all costs.[53]

Similar gestures are found in the *Um Rashrash* and *Suez Canal* adaptations (figures 2.5 and 2.6), both of which turn the fraternal social contract on its head. The bare sky and the missing flag in *Um Rashrash* critique the constructed pathos of national memories. The naked pole is almost too obvious in its reference to the homosocial desire that fuels the striving toward national goals. The flag, in its conspicuous absence, is exposed as an excuse for the celebration of zealous masculinity. The *gesture* of conquest, rather than conquest itself, takes center stage. Consequently, the desire for triumph is stripped of its sublimation. In the *Suez Canal* adaptation, the message is spelled out even more clearly, as the masculine body turns into the target of a contest among a group of men. Here, too, Nes' preposterous quotations do not grant the erotic excess a way out of the image, and present us with

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[52] The series' allusion to circus life, specifically, was interpreted as a comment on normative masculinity on the one hand and on military mythology on the other (Zalmona 435).
[53] For a critical reading of Bryson's analysis see Van Alphen, "Masculinity."

the visual continuum of homosociality and homosexuality in the context of the fraternal social contract.[54]

Rewriting the Jewish Body, Again

Several works within the *Soldiers* series, such as the *Suez-Canal*, *Um Rashrash*, and *Body Builder* photographs, make overt references to Israeli mythology. In others, this connection is less direct. Nevertheless, the investigation of hegemonic masculinity takes place with respect to the ever-present IDF uniform, situating concern within a specifically Israeli identity. Thus, at the same time as the portrayed bodies designate the effort of sustaining the masculine masquerade even as it comes undone by their overt eroticism (Bryson, "Géricault" 233), they also point to the effort of producing a particularly Zionist national imagery.

In his study of European masculinity, Mosse goes on to discuss the ways in which non-hegemonic identities, including those of criminals, the insane, and, more importantly for our case, homosexuals and Jews, were stereotyped in opposition to the neo-classical hero (*Nationalism* 30). Against the harmony, proportion, and transcendent beauty of the Greek ideal stood the image of the distorted, nervous, unstable homosexual or Jew, representing a threat to the nation and respectability. Among other outsider groups, homosexuals and Jews were especially endowed with excessive sexuality and feminine sensuousness, and were thought to engage in secret conspiracies (*Nationalism* 25, 31–36).[55]

In his book *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (1997), Daniel Boyarin argues that the Zionist movement unwittingly adopted the European masculine ideal—*including* its negative stance towards the stereotypical Jewish body (271–77). Rejecting the pre-modern gender norms of Talmudic Judaism, where masculinity was constructed via attributes of wisdom and gentleness, the fathers of Zionism, Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau,

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[54] An analogous analysis of Nes' *Um Rashrash* and *Suez Canal* adaptations can be found in Presner xx–xxiii.

[55] Sander Gilman makes a similar argument, and goes on to show how different groups of outsiders (for example, Jews and blacks) were stereotypically conflated. See Gilman, especially the introduction and ch. 4. See also Garber 224–33 for the derogatory associations between the Jewish and the homosexual body in European cultural history.

called for the "sexual normalization" of Jewish masculinity (143-144). They argued for the need to reinvent the Jewish body in Israel as strong and virile, and to disavow the flawed body that belongs to the Diasporic Jew (Boyarin 277; Gluzman 18–19).[56] Nordau, specifically, developed the term "muscular Judaism" to envision a new type of Jew, both physically and morally fit, who would embody the ideals of Zionism and, consequently, enable the national regeneration envisioned by it to take place.[57] Other studies also point to the way in which early Zionist texts align with the Western ideal in their disdain for the feminine body and their vehement repudiation of the homosexual as a spy and a danger to the nation. Theorist Raz Yosef goes as far as to define Zionism "not only [as] a political and ideological project but a sexual one, obsessed with Jewish masculinity and especially the Jewish male body" (56).

It is not surprising, then, that masculinity remains a central theme in Israeli literature and cinema throughout the twentieth century. From the late 1940s, the ideal Israeli body in literature, film, and popular culture became unequivocally that of the soldier, while anti-heroic figures were portrayed as effeminized, suffering, and weak (Gluzman 32). Moshe Shamir's novel *He Walked Through the Fields*, written in 1948, is a foundational text in this respect, exemplifying how the newly born Jewish nation converted the European model into the body of the Tzabar. The book tells the story of Uri, a native-born Israeli Kibbutz member and a commander in the Palmach fighting brigades, who has a complicated love story with Mika, a holocaust survivor, and who dies during a military training accident as he heroically jumps on a grenade to save his comrades. The novel was embraced by the newly formed collective, and won a literary prize in the year of its publication. It has been adapted as a play and a film, has been quoted in numerous texts, and is still included in high-school curriculums. *He Walked Through the Fields* is perceived as a biography of the Israeli generation at

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[56] Boyarin challenges the derogatory view of traditional Jewish masculinity as effeminate, but he also challenges the understanding of this view as an anti-Semitic invention. As his analysis makes clear, the image of the traditional ideal Jewish male was based on mental rather than on physical strength for centuries, and became problematic only during the time of Jewish assimilation at the beginning of the 19th century (14, 68). Boyarin defines his project as an attempt to "reclaim the eroticized Jewish male sissy" as a positive role model for (post)modern masculinity (xxi).

[57] See Presner for a comprehensive study of the modern origins and invention of "muscular Judaism." Elaborate accounts of Zionist homophobia can be found in Boyarin; Gluzman; and Pinsker.

the time of the nation's founding, and its title has become a byword for the Tzabar, the heroic, beautiful soldier who dies in battle.[58]

Uri's character was based on Alik, Shamir's brother who died in battle, and whose story is told in another of Shamir's books, *With His Own Hands: Alik's Story* (1951). This book begins with the words, "Alik was born from the sea," words that have become synonymous with the indigenousness of the Tzabar: born locally, born from the sea, without the weight of the Diaspora. As with Uri, the figure of Alik is inherently connected with his heroic death. The two figures are inseparable in the early-Israeli literary canon: both are blond, well-built, composed, and indisputably heterosexual. They are the embodiment of the "living dead" ethos, which idealizes heroic death and endows its protagonists with eternal youth and beauty.[59] The Zionist body they represent is a celebration of hegemonic masculinity as well as of the fraternal social contract. Many texts and artworks refer to these figures when attempting to rewrite or critique the Israeli normative body.[60]

Nes' *Soldiers* series is not exceptional in this respect. His untitled *Body Builder* photograph (figure 2.1), for example, exaggerates Nordau's notion of "muscular Judaism," while his *Last Supper* and *Pietà* contemplate the "living dead" ethos. An overt reference to Shamir's novels is found in the *Suez Canal* adaptation (figure 2.5). Here, the triumphant soldier who brandishes his rifle emerges from the water; he is literally born from the sea. Neither this image nor its referent (the cover of *Life* magazine, figure 2.7) can be read in separation from that foundational Israeli trope. They focus not on a hero's death, though, but on his moment of triumph. Nes' composition surrounds Uri/Alik with fighting men, and so reveals a blatant desire to claim his body for the collective. In addition, while the man on the cover of *Life* magazine represents a darker, thinner body type than the stereotypical Zionist ideal, Nes' adaptation returns to a Uri-type figure, light-skinned and well-built. Hence, it employs the device of quoting-with-a-difference to tease out the inherent

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[58] The title is taken from a poem by N. Alterman, "The Third Mother," and a loose translation of the poem reads: "My son is big and quiet / And here I sew him a shirt for the holiday / He walks in the fields / He will come back here / He carries in his heart a lead bullet" (Ramraz-Ra'ukh 97–98).
[59] See Hever, and Gluzman (especially ch. 5), for elaborations on the "living dead" ethos in Israeli culture.
[60] Michael Gluzman conducts an anti-canonical analysis of *He Walked Through the Fields*. According to his analysis, Uri collapses under the collective gaze that constantly examines his body and conduct. Gluzman argues that, contrary to canonical interpretations, "the founding text of the Tzabar – which is also the founding text of self-sacrifice – is in many ways a text that deconstructs the myth of the heroic Tzabar" (188–89, my translation).

Westernization of the stereotypical Israeli body, and to comment on ethnical inequalities within Israeli Jewish society.[61]

According to Levitte-Harten, Nes' artworks operate as the "deconstruction of an old ideal" (140). Below I will add nuance to this interpretation, but for now, it is important to acknowledge that Nes' *Soldiers* series exposes and criticizes central features of hegemonic nationalism and masculinity. The works ridicule the idea of virile masculinity, expose homoerotic traces within gestures of national triumph, and denaturalize the hegemonic Tzabar body. In its exposure of the desire that lies at the base of Israeli masculinity, the series depicts the carrier of "muscular Judaism," preposterously, as an extremely fragile configuration.

If we return to Bal's theory of the politics of quoting, however, the story becomes more complicated. For we must remember that Bal argues that part of the work of quoting authenticates the fiction and endorses the iconographical precedent with authority (10–15). Nes' photographs are direct or indirect quotations of images that are already "etched on our visual cortex." Inasmuch as they are quotations, they require the authority of the originating myth to be recognizable as critical interventions. Therefore, at the same time that they call for a contemporary reconsideration of some of their precedents' concerns, they also strengthen those concerns that they leave untouched. The iterations of Peri's *Raising the Ink Flag in Um Rashrash* and of Cameron's *Life* magazine cover, for example, ridicule the masculine aspect of the military ethos, while simultaneously endorsing its narrative of victory with authority.[62] In what follows, the military uniform takes center stage as means to reappraise *Soldiers'* critique within the framework of a militarized society.

Women Soldiers

Nes critiques hegemonic constructions of masculinity in many of his works. The thread that runs through his oeuvre is the queer male body, which is not always draped in olive-green. Both his *Boys* and *Prisoners* series, for example, display young

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[61] Nes' casting choices, throughout his oeuvre, consciously comment on internal Israeli politics in terms of the state's unequal treatment of Jews of Western and Eastern origin. Texts that focus on this issue in Nes' oeuvre include Ginton, and Shenhav. For the role that the Israeli military plays in reproducing or mobilizing social inequalities of ethnic origin see Levy, "Militarizing."
[62] On the fictional and performative aspects of this narrative see Azoulay, "Declaring."

men with a homoerotic undercurrent, a polished aesthetics, and references to socio-political issues.[63] What is, then, the extra layer that the military uniform adds to his investigation of sexuality and beauty? The fact that, in the *Soldiers* series, figures personify the national body provokes certain avenues of interpretation and discourages others.

Soldiers has been often interpreted as an argument for gay social rights and visibility in its critical revisions of national myths of ideal masculinity.[64] The series, triggered by the dismissal from service of a soldier who carried the rainbow flag while wearing a military uniform during a Gay Pride parade, is indeed concerned with the marginalized gay and queer community of Israel, and with its position vis-à-vis the Uri/Alik type of ideal citizenship, embodied by the combat soldier (Zalmona 435). The combat soldier, a symbol for hegemonic masculinity, is often used as an unofficial criterion to determine levels of citizenship: one's distance or closeness to combatant-type masculinity is a measure for receiving both symbolic and material rights (Sasson-Levy, *Identities in Uniform* 5). Those with non-hegemonic identities who are also drafted, including women, Jewish men of Middle Eastern origin, Druze men, and homosexuals, frequently renegotiate their social status through their military service.[65] Nes' *Soldiers* takes part in this struggle for social, gender, and ethnic equality, but unlike the outsider communities in Mosse's accounts of early-nineteenth-century Europe, the struggle that Nes takes part in aims to broaden the masculine ideal rather than fit within its boundaries.[66]

Interpretations of the *Soldiers* series that follow the above trajectory accept a taken-for-granted militarized masculine ideal. From this perspective, Nes' erotic soldiers unequivocally question hegemonic masculinity in Israeli society. The analysis that I have offered so far is largely consistent with this line of thought. An alternate

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[63] His more recent *Bible* series, however, departs from questions of sexuality and focuses more on the preposterous quoting of Old and New Testament narratives in terms of contemporary socio-political reality.

[64] Examples include Cornell; Sherman; Schalit; and Sperber.

[65] On this note see Sasson-Levy, *Identities in Uniform*.

[66] Interestingly, erotic male soldier imagery gained currency in Israeli art during a time of liberalization in army regulations regarding the recruitment of gays and lesbians. Up until 1983, the IDF tended to discharge openly gay soldiers. In 1983, gays and lesbians were officially permitted to serve but were banned from intelligence and top-secret positions. Since 1993, they have been permitted to serve without restraints, but may be exempted or released from service if admitting to pressure connected with their sexual orientation (Belkin and Levitt 543). While recruitment regulations have indeed improved, a 1996 survey shows that 52% of gay soldiers still experience some form of sexual harassment during their army service (Shiloh et al., Lefkovits).

analysis, however, contends with the fact that Israeli masculinities and femininities *are modeled militarily in the first place*. In accordance with the findings of my previous chapter, and with the notion of civilian militarism in mind, I argue that *Soldiers* cannot be interpreted merely as a transgressive reference to Israeli masculinity, but needs to be examined for its participation in the consolidation of military-inflected national identities.

One obvious catch in this respect is that the series is made up exclusively of male figures. Even the *Pietà*, the emblematic image for a mother-son relationship, turns into a homosocial affair. The series pulls the masculine figure in different directions, but never out of the world of men: its interventions into Israeli masculinity remain limited to the confines of homosocial relations. Women play no part in Nes' reconstruction of soldier-figure imagery. This is significant because Israeli society prides itself on being egalitarian when it comes to compulsory military service. Both women and men have served in the Israeli army since its formation; women soldiers are part and parcel of the national ethos, and their representations have shaped a visual canon as well.

That canon has also been preposterously reworked, although to a much lesser extent than its masculine counterpart.[67] Nir Hod's celebrated *Women Soldiers* triptych (figure 2.9) perhaps forms the feminine complement to Nes' *Soldiers* series. The triptych is composed of three gold-framed bust-length portraits of women in military uniform. The two side-portraits reiterate the 1950s romantic representations of the woman-soldier figure (figure 2.10). In both, the model smiles tenderly as she rests her head on her fist and looks up, gazing behind coquettish pink butterfly glasses. The central figure stands out in comparison. She wears her uniform and her hair more loosely, and suggestively strokes her face with the antennae of a walkie-talkie. She is easily recognizable as the artist himself, Nir Hod, known for his self-portrayal in military drag.

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[67] Historical analyses of the female soldier canon can be found in Lubin and in Brownfield-Stein. Two recent exhibitions that have dealt with the topic are *Women Soldiers In Focus* (Curator: France Lebee-Nadav), The Tel Aviv Performing Arts Center, in 2008 and *Women of Valor: Representations of Fighting Women During the Establishment of the State of Israel* (Curator: Nitza Levavi), The Negev Museum for Art, also from 2008. The only artist who takes up IDF women-soldier representations as a serial theme is Rachel Papo, in her "Serial No. 3817131," but her concern lies less with the national ideal and more in the daily psychic reality of the girl-soldier.

Figure 2.9. Nir Hod, *Women-Soldiers*, 1994.

Hod's *Women Soldiers* received wide acclaim in the 1990s and, along with Nes' *Soldiers*, is referred to as a milestone in Israeli art, due to its unabashed treatment of desire and sexuality with respect to the military. What is interesting about the work's history is that, in the end, it was received as a work about *men*: the detail that caught the critics' eyes, more than the eroticization of the archetypal woman-soldier as such, was the artist's mimicry of femininity (Katz-Freiman, "Acrobat" 30; Talmor; Sperber). Nevertheless, Hod's gender-bending underscores the taken-for-granted sexuality of the female soldier. As curator Tami Katz-Freiman explains,

> [Hod's *Women Soldiers*] can be seen as a *footnote* to the ultimate Israeli cliché, which obfuscates all others. For "a woman-soldier in obligatory military service" is a typical Israeli invention, a unique matchless model of equality between the sexes.… Perhaps it is time to re-examine this cliché, to expose the myth of women's equality, particularly in regard to the traditional role division so common in a society that lives from one war to the next. ("Nir Hod" 50, emphasis added)

The myth of women's equality has indeed been unpacked in various recent studies, which have shown it to be a mere footnote, a facilitator, within Israel's military ethos. The differences between feminine and masculine military identities are spelled out by the respective roles that the sexes play within the military apparatus: most women fill secretarial and other auxiliary roles, and many of the more "prestigious" military occupations exclude them. In addition, men serve thirty-six months, plus compulsory

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reserve service until the age of 45, while women serve a shorter period of twenty-one months. Finally, marriage and parenthood are reasons for exemption for women, but not men (Klein, "Gender" 671; Kimmerling, "Patterns" 216). Uta Klein argues that these material differences have a symbolic effect, as they help to preserve military service as a rite of passage to male adulthood only and perpetuate the stereotype of women as subordinate ("Best Boys" 48; "Gender" 671).

The main tasks of women in the Israeli army fit traditional feminine roles, such as social work, nursing, and teaching (Klein, "Gender" 676). Feminine characteristics and appearances are appreciated for taming the behavior of men (Klein, "Best Boys" 56). Similarly, Orly Lubin argues that while women have gained entrance to the modern nation's meta-narrative through their military service, they provide that narrative with a veiling mechanism. In line with Sedgwick's theory, Lubin shows how the female body acts as conduit that protects the soldier from the threat of homosexuality, while her presence must constantly be repudiated as it provokes that exact fear of being penetrated. As a result, women are both present and absent within the military sphere, and their sexuality is a tool for their exclusion (Lubin 169). Thus, while the Israeli army is heterosocial in principle, it is still a place that maintains and nurtures male homosociality. Uta Klein concludes:

> All in all, in spite of the presence of women, the unit is perceived as a male peer group, as a place of male comradeship, as a place of brotherhood, as a community of warriors. As in companies or other institutions, many actions or conditions point to women as being different, thus constructing the difference. ("Best Boys" 56)

Nes' photographs, their edginess notwithstanding, perpetuate the female invisibility pointed out by Klein and Lubin. Reading Nes through Hod brings up the phantom of a *heterosocial* Israeli army. Clearly, no artwork or series could (or should attempt to) cover all aspects of the social issues it brings up. Nes' *Soldiers* focuses on one marginal group (gay and *Mizrahi* male soldiers) and avoids another (female soldiers). The erasure of women from the field of vision can be understood as an unavoidable consequence of the choice of subject matter. Yet, precisely because Nes' series fleshes out latent forms of desire within the military, the absence of women soldiers from his oeuvre is noteworthy. As Hod's work indicates and as we shall see shortly,

women have always had an important role in the eroticization of the Israeli military: the abbreviation used for Women's Corps, "Khen," translates as "charm" and points in this direction (Klein, "Best Boys" 55).[68]

In her thesis "Women Soldiers in the Field of Vision: A Fantasy of the State," Chava Brownfield-Stein analyses the effects of women soldiers on the military ethos. Through close readings of official state photographs of women soldiers from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, Brownfield-Stein argues that representations of female soldiers drew attention to their feminine sexuality not only to exclude them from the fraternal social contract, but also to underscore the pleasurable dimensions of military service itself (Brownfield-Stein iii). Through photographs of women soldiers in the public and private spheres,

> military space is represented and loaded with erotic imagination and sexual possibilities which are associated with "indoor domestic" places. While visual pleasures are provoked from watching images of women soldiers' bodies, they are, at the same time, and indirectly perceived as enjoying military's norms and militarism. (Brownfield-Stein v)

Thus, while representations of IDF women soldiers were used as visual instruments for the legitimization of an egalitarian ethos, they were also mobilized to naturalize militaristic values in Israeli society and make them appealing. Brownfield-Stein's analysis refers to images that are more than forty years old, but a recent incident suggests that not much has changed. In its July 2007 issue, the American men's magazine *Maxim* published an article featuring Israeli models in swimwear and military garments. The models were presented as "former Israeli women soldiers," and commended for their ability to "take apart an Uzi in seconds," for bossing male soldiers around, or for having "top secret" jobs ("Chosen" 104; figure 2.11). Significantly, the idea for the piece came from the Israeli consulate in New York, as part of its campaign to improve Israel's image in the United States. The alluring similarity between the central figure in Hod's *Women Soldiers* triptych and the

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[68] On this note see also Yuval-Davis' *Gender and Nation* (1997), especially ch. 5 (93–115). For an international perspective on the militarization of women's lives see Enloe. The IDF Women's Corps was dismantled in 2001, replaced with a Women's Affairs advisor to the chief of staff.

Figure 2.10. Moshe Milner, "Lea Klein from Nahariya Serves in the Israeli Navy," 1965.

Figure 2.11. "Israeli Defense Forces: Natalie."
Maxim, July 2007. Photograph by Jim Malucci.

models in *Maxim* goes to show that the representation of women soldiers as erotic, desirable agents of the IDF is not an issue of the past, and remains unchallenged, at least in part, to this day.[69]

When representations of women soldiers are brought into the equation, then, the subversive aspect of Nes' *Soldiers* becomes more complicated. While the series teases out the latent sexuality that fuels hegemonic masculinity and homosociality, it leaves out the female body, whose erotics were employed to turn the IDF into a locus of national desire. *Soldiers*' celebration as an outrageous exposure of homosocial desire helps, unwittingly, to ignore the fact that *heterosocial desire has never been suppressed* in the Israeli army. This oversight, in turn, underrates the ways in which Nes' soldiers are in fact *part of a long tradition* that emphasizes the pleasurable aspects of the military body, perpetuating what Brownfield-Stein terms the "erotic militarism" in Israeli society (vi–vii). According to Brownfield-Stein, the erotic representations of women soldiers contributed immensely to the fascination of Israeli society with the Israeli army. Nes similarly supplements the anthology of images that represents the military space as one "of enjoyment and fantasy in the midst of ideological structure" (v). The only difference is that this is what Thomas Crow terms "a single-sex frame of reference," since his works "imagine the entire spectrum of desirable human qualities, from battlefield heroics to eroticized corporeal beauty, as male" (Crow, *Emulation* 2). The next section will search for alternative narratives within this exclusively male frame.

Queer Dreams of the Nation

In 1967, just after the Six Day War, Yigal Tumarkin presented a statue made of bronze and firearms. The sculpture, entitled *He Walked Through the Fields*, comprises a life-size armless male figure, painted in black, red, and white (figure 2.12). The figure's head is damaged; its mouth hangs open with its tongue protruding; his pants

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[69] Even Hod's critical exposure of the inherent eroticism of the female soldier is subdued by his own impersonation, which shifts the discussion. The *Maxim* photo spread caused turmoil and the economics committee of the Knesset filed an official complaint to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemning the initiative to employ photographs of semi-naked women as a part of Israeli public diplomacy. The fact that these photographs presented soldiers raised additional indignation, as it was seen to degrade both the state and the military institution (Cachlon).

are rolled down and expose his penis; and gun barrels and cannon balls pour out of his torn intestines. Tumarkin's *He Walked Through the Fields* was controversial at the time of its making, a time when, as we shall see in chapter five, victorious military figures were omnipresent within Israeli visual culture. Today, however, Tumarkin's statue is considered to be a landmark in Israeli art, a precedent for the political art that emerged in the seventies (Manor, "Sculpture" 35).[70] The work is celebrated as an "anti-monument of commemoration" in its presentation of death (a specifically Israeli death, following the trajectory of its title) as debased and unheroic (Possek 102). The grotesque body of the soldier breaks with the ethos of the "living dead," the body that remain beautiful as it sacrifices itself for the nation.

Figure 2.12. Yigal Tumarkin, *He Walked Through the Fields* (detail), 1967.

Nes' figures are a far cry from Tumarkin's torn-open soldier, and their preposterous reshaping of the Tzabar figure comes about according to a different political vision. For Tumarkin, the allusion to Moshe Shamir's novel leads to a disparity between the idealization of death for the nation and the reality of death in battle. For Nes, the allusion ("born from the sea") is not concerned with war, but with manhood; not with national politics, but with the socio-cultural aspect of national

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[70] For a comparative analysis of Tumarkin's and Shamir's *He Walked Through the Fields* see Possek.

identities; not with the death of a hero, but with his birth. Some of the figures in Nes' *Soldiers* (particularly the *Suez Canal* adaptation most directly linked to Uri/Alik) expose bare skin, but that skin is nothing like Tumarkin's burned flesh. The juxtaposition of Nes' beautiful and campy soldiers with Tumarkin's abject corpse makes clear what issues erotic figurations of soldiers bring up, and more importantly, what issues they leave untouched.

Two recent sculptures help to demarcate further the limits of Nes' critique. Erez Israeli's *Terrorist* (2008, figure 2.13) shows a naked figure cast in marble-like material, his head covered with a stocking cap. The figure's hands are raised a bit, his palms point upwards, and a few taxidermied pigeons sit on his head, shoulder, and arms. Ari Liebsker's *The Draft Dodger* (2007, figure 2.14) presents a rough concrete cast of a life-size standing figure, dressed only in underwear. The figure squats slightly, and his hands lie deep in his briefs.[71] The two statues parallel Nes' *Soldiers* in interrelated ways: they reference the canon of art history in their allusions to outdoor sculpture; they comment on ideal masculinity in their debased representations of the male body; and they allude to the Israeli military ethos with their choice of titles.

However, the reference to the military ethos is inverted here. A terrorist is an illegitimate fighter, and a draft dodger is not a fighter at all; thus, the statues represent the soldier's alter egos. The figures' outsider social positions, stated in the titles, are put into form through the figures' sexuality. The genitals of *Terrorist* are exaggerated, and in combination with his covered face raise connotations of sadomasochism, while the *Draft Dodger*'s hands lie deep in his underwear and connote masturbation, that old enemy of respectability. Crucial for my case is the fact that both *Terrorist* and *Draft Dodger* are *naked*. In a witty and critical inversion, the naked body belongs here to the outsider. Unlike their counterpart figures of early modernity, traitors do not need external features (long nose, dark skin, special garments) to mark them as such; it suffices to strip them of the military uniform. In comparison with the sculptures of Liebsker and Israeli, who raise associated questions about the national body, the uniform of Nes' *Soldiers* takes the shape of a second skin: when men do not wear

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[71] Erez Israeli's oeuvre contends with masculinity, nationalism, and art history in complex and intriguing ways. His work, while well known in Israel and abroad, has yet to be properly researched. For a brief introduction into his oeuvre see Wizgan 86–88 and Zalmona 438–39.

Figure 2.13. Erez Israeli, *Terrorist*, 2007.

Figure 2.14. Ari Liebsker, *The Draft Dodger*, 2007.

their uniform, when they are naked, their national allegiance is at stake. Nes' soldiers, even when they masturbate, do not challenge the military uniform as a frame for Israeli manhood, but argue for an expanded space within it. At most, when Nes' figures take off a shirt or wear their uniform loosely, they intimate a diversity that lies underneath the khaki garments. Yet as a whole, the draping of queer sexuality with the national uniform runs the risk of promoting what Jasbir K. Puar terms "homonationalism," the collusion between homosexuality and nationalism.

The term was coined by Puar to indicate the emergence of a national homosexuality that "operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects" (Puar 2). The concept is based on Lisa Duggan's notion of "homonormativity," which points to the ways in which lesbian and gay movements have increasingly aligned themselves with neo-liberal culture and with heteronormative thinking and politics (Duggan 179).[72] Puar focuses on contemporary American politics in her conceptualization of homonationality, and opposes the patriot gay body to the queered body of the terrorist. Regardless of the longstanding outlaw status of homosexual subjects in relation to the nation-state, she argues, "some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formation rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them" (4). Consequently, not all non-normative sexualities should be read as a defiance of the national ideal.

Puar marks the "disciplinary queer" as a figure that assists the regularization of deviancy (xxvii). When queerness is disciplined, "freedom from norms" becomes a regulatory queer ideal that distinguishes the ideal queer from those who remain at the margins of discourse. In contemporary national and sexual politics, patriotism distinguishes the disciplined and incorporated queerness of the patriot gay body from the failed masculinity that is inscribed in the body of the terrorist as other (xxiv). In this way,

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[72] Duggan coined the term "homonormativity" in relation to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's analysis of "heteronormativity." Berlant and Warner define heteronormativity as "hierarchies of property and propriety, the institutions, structure of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent … but also privileged" (548). For elaborations on homonormativity see also Munõz; Ferguson; Stryker; and Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira. For a case study on the convoluted relationship between nationalism and queerness in the American context see Berlant and Freeman.

despite its claims to freedom and individuality, [deviance] is ironically cohered to and by regulatory regimes of queerness – through, not despite, any claims to transgression. (22–23)

Queer subjects are normativized through, rather than in spite of, their deviance. Their departure from the standards of hegemonic masculinity is embraced and celebrated at the price of the disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary (xii, 2). According to Puar, in contemporary Western culture, Muslim masculinities take the place of the pervert and traitor that homosexuals (and, if I may add, Jews) used to occupy in the imagination of the nation (xxv).

It would be unjust to read Nes' *Soldiers* series only in terms of Puar's critique of homonationalism. The series calls attention to the grand narratives of heterosexuality, virility, and whiteness that have shaped the Zionist psyche and that are still prevalent in Israeli society. That being said, Puar's thesis may partly explain the institutional embrace of these works as deviant and transgressive political images (Puar 50). Puar interprets gay marriage as a mode of "social cure-all," which confines non-heterosexual relationships to Western values and codes, refuels heteronormative logic in the production of the good gay subject, and at the same time, further oppresses and delegitimizes the practices of other minority groups (20). The conscription into military service can be read in a similar light, as it tags the participating bodies (normative or not) as civil, docile, and patriotic. The *Soldiers* series is deviant in its celebration of the erotic desire of the male body, but the series also accommodates the regulation of deviancy when it tames the queer body and enfolds it within national visual norms, within the military uniform, within the body of the soldier. Puar's work makes clear that the critical edge of queer aesthetics and politics needs to be assessed anew at each junction and in each context. When queerness is investigated through the soldier-figure rather than against it, it inevitably shares and strengthens a military ideal and thus cannot help but deflect other critiques.

Norman Bryson writes with regards to the French army at the dawn of Enlightenment and nationalism:

With its basis in national conscription, the military are no longer a group over there, and military service is no longer exactly a profession: The army in principle consists of every able-bodied male, everyone who counts fully as a

citizen. The body is no longer leased to the state, it *is* the state; the state
emerges as a new kind of biopolitical entity, and by virtue of gender the male
body belongs to the state, as state property. ("Géricault" 247)

Bryson's insight is relevant for understanding contemporary Israeli society, in its
lucid explication of the military's mediating role in the relationship between the state
and its citizens. While officially, the military is something "over there," and military
service is one profession out of many others, in fact, within the framework of national
conscription, the soldier gives shape to the otherwise abstract state apparatus, which
in turn endows *him* with full citizenship status. Nes' *Soldiers*, seen in this light, is an
argument for the broadening of the criteria that defines who counts as a full citizen.
Yet, by arguing for a place within the biopolitical entity of the state (by redefining its
military body in broader, softer terms), *Soldiers* refrains from arguing against the
hierarchy that ranks citizens according to their military affiliation in the first place.
Figures who attempt, alternately, to define their national identity against the uniform
would not enter this debate, and are in fact muted by it.

Representations of erotic Israeli soldiers in art do not necessarily reproduce
hegemonic masculinity, but they remain loyal to the idea of the hegemonic Israeli,
whether on guard, at ease, or in drag. These are debates about Israeli masculinity, not
Israeli militarism, *but they are made through military imagery*. Thus, the military
uniform is used as a naturalized container of identity that allows the debate to take
place at the price of other debates that may well have a stronger potential for
destabilization. *Soldiers*' display of desire ultimately does not break through the
naturalized, taken-for-granted position of the military as a frame for national identity;
neither does it break through the "erotic militarism" that Brownfield-Stein points to in
her analysis of representations of female soldier-imagery. On the contrary: with
regards to civilian militarism, paintings and photographs of erotic soldiers – male or
female – domesticate military service by foregrounding the pleasures involved in it
over the violence inherent to it.

When interviewed, Nes refers to his detachment from the aggression that is a
central feature of soldierhood. He says:

When I began the series of photographs about soldiers a few years ago I
decided that the soldiers in my pictures would never fight. I wanted the soldier

to be a metaphor for humanity, not to be any specific soldier of any political significance or location.… I seek to sharpen – in the image of the ultimate soldier – humanness, fragility, childlikeness. (quoted in Dugan)

The artist's proclaimed attempt to contend with the universal through the soldier, rather than to debate the legitimacy of the soldier-figure as a symbol for a nation-state, is reflected in his oeuvre. It points to an *a priori* acceptance of the soldier's eminent place in society, and makes it difficult to question that place through his work. It furthermore fits with a current trend in international film, photography, and art, in which the intimate portrayal of soldiers as "sleeping beauties" eschews the more violent aspects of battle and war.[73] However, visual quotations, according to Bal (in their third operation), point to ambiguities that exceed the artist's intentions. They "demonstrate the difference between the illusion of wholeness and mastery pertaining to the artist of art history and the somewhat messy, yet much richer, visual culture of live images" (Bal, *Quoting* 15). Quoting leads the work of interpretation to the void between the quoted and the quote; in that sense, Nes' *Soldiers* marks the gap between an ideal image and the effort that it takes to sustain it, and may open up to other ideal Israeli bodies, outside those dressed in the military uniform, that have yet to be imagined.

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[73] For a critical introduction and analysis of this trend see Dasgupta, "Spare." Dasgupta points to a growing proliferation of a specific, intimate type of soldier imagery in fiction films, documentaries, photography and visual art worldwide. He further argues that the pathos and aestheticism with which the everyday life of the soldier is being portrayed distances the work of war from combat. His answer to the emerging cultural dominant of "soldier intimacy" is the analysis of the frameworks that configure the soldier as an aesthetic object of contemplation, a solution I endorse and hope to have performed in this as well as in the previous chapter.