

James Eastwood, *Ethics as a Weapon of War: Militarism and Morality in Israel*,
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James Eastwood's *Ethics as a Weapon of War* is an original and well executed piece of scholarship which makes a welcome contribution to international sociology and political theory. Utilising a Foucauldian lens, the monograph examines the role played by ethics in shaping and bolstering contemporary Israeli militarism – militarism being understood as both a social relation and an ideological force embedded in everyday material and discursive practices which normalise war. The book originates in Eastwood's award-winning doctoral dissertation¹ and is based on a series of participant observations of ethics training sessions, and numerous qualitative interviews with Israeli military officials, pre-military school teachers, and military veteran anti-occupation activists. Eastwood is at pains to stress that the book is not about whether the Israeli military is or isn't "the most moral army in the world" (as it claims); neither does the book make moral judgements about specific instances of military action or conduct. Rather, *Ethics as a Weapon of War* seeks to reveal the limits of ethics as a constraint on war and military violence.

The book argues that the domestic discourse surrounding ethics and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) concerns the state's need to ensure that its citizens continue to serve as soldiers and support the army in the face of international criticism and condemnation. The teaching of ethics, ethical conduct, and ethical self-reflection, from official military manuals, to officer training schools, to pre-military academies, serves as an ideological force which normalises military violence and consolidates nationalistic, masculinist military identities. The first two chapters ("Militarising the Ethical Turn" and "'The Spirit of the IDF'") are theoretical and contextual in nature. Each of the remaining chapters theorises a specific site of engagement with ethics. Chapter 3 ("'Keeping a Human Image': Military Ethical Pedagogy in the IDF") examines the teaching of ethics in the military. Chapter 4

¹ See <https://www.bisa.ac.uk/index.php/quick-links-news/480-past-michael-nicholson-thesis-prize-winners>

(“‘Meaningful Service’: Ethics and Pedagogy at Pre-military Academies in Israel”) looks at the ways in which high school students who attend pre-military academies are encouraged to engage with questions of ethical conduct and self-reflection and how this training serves to make military service more attractive to these future recruits, beginning the process of constructing them as self-reflexive and morally guided future soldiers. The pre-military academies are fee-paying educational institutions traditionally attended by young people who are about to be conscripted and who spend a year after high school preparing for their military service through the study of religious texts, philosophy and ethics. These academies have been particularly important in the integration of the national-religious population, and their graduates are encouraged to serve in combat roles in the IDF. However, in recent years these institutions have expanded beyond their traditional reach to include secular students. The book highlights their growing importance in Israeli society and their role in the ideological integration between the education system and the military.

The last two chapters (“‘Between Guilt and Anxiety: Collecting Testimony in Breaking the Silence” and “‘Creating a Moral Conversation’: The Public Activism of Breaking the Silence”) would be of greatest interest to *Antipode* readers and critical activist scholars. They focus on the role played by the self-defined “anti-occupation” organisation Breaking the Silence, which is primarily staffed by IDF reservists and veterans, and their pedagogic work in pre-military academies, as well as its broader social advocacy campaigns. Although Breaking the Silence opposes the occupation, they very much remain embedded in the mainstream liberal Zionist discourse and frame of understanding. Eastwood’s original contribution here lies in his astute critique of the organisation and the way in which its emphasis on morality detracts from wider political questions concerning the socio-political structures of the occupation and settler colonialism in Israel and Palestine. Moreover, he argues that the relatively uncontested inclusion of Breaking the Silence (its activists give talks and their documentaries are screened in military and pre-military academy training sessions on ethics) serves as a disciplinary technique aimed at neutralising the political contestation and critique behind the activists’ moral claims against the occupation. For

example, their use of testimonies of wrong-doing by individual soldiers can be re-interpreted by the military trainers as examples of individual moral failing, as opposed to the outcome of a socio-political structure of systematic military violence, domination and subjugation. For their part, Breaking the Silence activists would insist that remaining within the mainstream liberal Zionist discourse is the most effective way to get their message across and to not be dismissed as “marginal”.

Eastwood’s impressive access to a range of high-ranking officials, and the openness and frankness of the interviewees themselves, is a testament to the intellectual significance and veracity of the book’s findings and conclusions. Militarist self-reflexivity clearly does not imply any sense of responsibility for the violence of Israeli occupation and colonisation. Ethical conduct becomes a question of national pride and military professionalism and not an acknowledgement that the Palestinian people have the right to live free of violence and subjugation.

Although *Ethics as a Weapon of War* stresses the lack of legal, political and even individual accountability towards the Occupied Palestinians as rights bearing subjects and not simply as objects of good soldiering, Palestinian voices and critiques are remarkably absent from the book. This omission may partly be attributed to the Foucauldian theoretical framework which places emphasis on discourse and is often critiqued for leaving little room for questions of structure and agency. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that the critique levelled at Breaking the Silence and Israel’s structural failure to bring individual soldiers to justice owes much to decades of tireless work by Palestinian human rights advocates working to redress the violence of the occupation. In fact, long before 2015 when right-wing Israeli politicians started accusing Breaking the Silence of undermining the national military morale, and demanded that they release the names of those who had testified to the organisation so that the army can deal with them internally, Palestinian and Israeli human rights organisations such as Physicians for Human Rights critiqued Breaking the Silence for failing to release these names in order to help bring perpetrators to justice through the international courts (see Ageel and Mazali 2015; Frankenthaler 2009). One could speculate that the right-wing

political attack against *Breaking the Silence* was precisely designed to preclude the possibility of international charges of war crimes against Israeli soldiers, given the military's track record of absolving them of responsibility for their actions.

I was also surprised to see that the call for an anti-militarist ethics with which the book concludes was not linked to the question of refusal. The book certainly provides a strong explanation for why Israel's once large and potent refusal movement has almost completely disappeared from public view (see Kidron 2004; Lemish 2005). The coupling of ethics and militarism in Israel over the past 30 years certainly provides a clear explanation for the disappearance of an ethics of refusal. In addition, engagement with other, less Zionist and cross-cultural organisations in Israel and Palestine such as Combatants for Peace (see Fleischmann 2016; Perry 2011; Saunders 2011), for example, may have provided the book with an opportunity to explore existing and emerging notions of anti-militarist ethics or at least alternatives to the problematic and easily co-opted activism of *Breaking the Silence*. Irrespective of the above suggestions, *Ethics as a Weapon of War* is an impressive piece of scholarship which sheds new light on the complex and problematic relationship between ethics, militarism, the normalisation of nationalist violence, and (ir)responsibility for the life and rights of the colonised and occupied Palestinian people. The monograph itself is a close reading of the discourses of ethics in the context of Israeli militarism, but the theoretical framework established by Eastwood could undoubtedly be replicated or at least tested in different national contexts inspiring yet more rich empirical and theoretical reflections on the contemporary phenomenon of ethics as a weapon of war. The book would make an excellent contribution to a range of scholarly fields including international sociology and political theory, as well as to scholarship on ethics, war, and violence.

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