


## Article

# Hi-Tech-Oriented National Service: The Free Choice of Religious Women Recruits and the De-Monopolization of the Israeli Military

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**Abstract:** In recent years, Israel has witnessed two significant processes that challenge the dominant republican discourse that prioritizes military over national-civic service (known as The Israeli national-civilian service—NCS) in terms of contributing the constitution of citizenship and of the material and symbolic convertibility offered to service candidates. The first is related to the expanding range of roles offered in the NCS. The second, related process, which is our current focus, occurs among young religious women from the urban upper-middle class who respond to this expansion by seeking to serve in technological roles, given their high qualifications. Combined, these processes transform the status of the NCS and accelerate the de-monopolization of military service. To examine the contribution of religious young women to the change in the status of service in Israel, we conducted a narrative analysis of interviews with service candidates. Our analysis revealed their strategic use of four different discourses: the neo-liberal economic discourse, the liberal rights and self-realization discourse, the ethnonational discourse, and the religious gender discourse. The way the participants negotiated the four discourses to justify their selection of either military or national-civic service structured their agency as actors transforming the power equation between the two types of service.

**Keywords:** national-civic service (NCS); military service; Israel; citizenship discourses; convertibility; agency; positioning; discursive practices; narrative analysis



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## 1. Introduction

Given the perceived security threat in Israel, the military has a monopoly on mandatory conscription and an almost absolute priority in selecting and assigning service candidates, including women. Women from the religious sector, however, are entitled to decide whether to join the military, as well as to select between military and national-civic service (NCS). For many years, this privilege granted to religious women has not challenged the primary military service over NCS in Israel. More recently, however, this begins to change given the broadening supply of advanced technological roles within the NCS. The tendency of highly qualified national-religious women to select these roles exposes the military to growing competition with the NCS. This article examines the discursive practices through which young Jewish upper-middle class women from the national-religious sector challenge the perception of national-civic service (NCS) as secondary to military service in Israel, in the sense that the IDF has absolute priority in enlisting candidates and

assigning them to various units. This question is highly relevant, as over the past few years, two significant processes have combined to undermine the assumption that NCS is less important than military service in terms of its contribution to constituting citizenship and in terms of its material and symbolic convertibility for graduates in their civilian lives.

The first process has to do with the change in the roles offered in NCS and the second—the focus of the present study—is related to developments among young religious women of the urban upper-middle class, who respond to the first process by seeking hi-tech roles. Combined, these processes promote a significant transformation in the status of NCS and in the relations between the two service types. These relations have not remained static over the years but are shaped against the background of the dynamic emergence of competing conceptions of citizenship (Ben-Porat and Turner 2011) as well as the degree of convertibility offered by each (Malchi et al. 2021). This dynamic is also well reflected in changes in the public discourse regarding the two service types and their contribution to the definition of citizenship and to the acquisition of material and symbolic capital (Levy 2013).

The authors argue that the recent opening of new service targets in the hi-tech area for high-quality national-religious women candidates in NCS (Authority for National-Civic Service n.d.; Lax 2019) is aligned with their changed perceptions and preferences. Against the background of this transformation, we can identify among them the emergence of discursive practices that contribute to a change in the power relations between the two types of service, positioning NCS as an autonomous and independent setting that does not necessarily strengthen the status of military service and competes with it.

To gain insights into the contribution of the women under study to the positioning of the status of service in Israel, we conducted a narrative analysis, mapping their dilemmas when choosing between the two service types and identifying the pressures that affect their decision making, as illustrated in the following quote:

I received plenty of summons in the military for all kinds of things, for the flight academy, 8200 [the prestigious SIGINT unit], computer science school [ . . . ]. I took some of the tests for these units, and even got good grades [ . . . ] especially in the [ . . . ] technological ones. [ . . . ] but in the end I quit because at the same time I was taking the cyber selection tests in national service [ . . . ]. I feel that had I entered the military, I would not have remained religious. [ . . . ] Specifically, our [work] place is tightly related to the military [ . . . ]. I go to a future workplace and say I did [national] service [ . . . ] so then everybody asks what's it like, and when I tell them everyone's really impressed [ . . . ]. They've already offered me a job [ . . . ] in other, similar places, such as Intel and Microsoft. For me it's the same thing [as being in the military]. The only difference is I don't wear uniform and don't do guard duty. And I don't miss it [ . . . ]. What I do contributes to the country but also to me [ . . . ]. [Only] here in my case, I also get the professional experience others don't (S).

The analysis revealed strategic use of four different discourses: the neoliberal, liberal, and ethnonational discourse, all negotiated vis-à-vis the religious gender discourse. The way the young women negotiate the four discourses and various narratives within them to justify their choice structures their agency as a factor affecting a changed power equation between the two service types.

From a broader perspective, the article sheds light on the issue of choice of military service type once alternative options become available to a population seen as having high quality potential. Its findings are aligned with insights from other countries that offered the option to choose between military and civic service (See Levy 2015, with regard to the German model). In continuing to enforce mandatory service, mainly due to an ongoing security threat, this issue has far-reaching implications for the military's ability to attract and retain quality candidates. Israel, aside from being only one of several countries that require women to serve, is also composed of two large minorities who do not generally perform military service. For Israeli Arabs and Ultra-Orthodox Jews, NCS might function

as a legitimate alternative. The present article sheds light on the potential implication of such broadened options for military service.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Citizenship, Convertibility, and Gender in the Military and NCS in Israel—Milestones

In Israel, the way service is perceived is foundational to citizenship. The service–citizenship nexus is based on one of the building blocks of citizenship—its embodiment in a system of rights and duties (Ben-Porat and Turner 2011). The relation between the two is not only legal, but involves an array of social expectations, articulated in the high convertibility service affords its graduates in civilian life, both individually and as members of specific social sectors (Levy 2007).

Over the years, the conception of service in Israel has been shaped by three main discourses: First, the republican discourse ties rights together with individual contributions to the collective. Despite the promise held by this discourse for universal service, in practice, it produces civic and social stratification based on gender, ethnicity and class, derived from the need to reward the military sacrifice and channel quality candidates to combat units. Second, the liberal discourse emphasizes the universal nature of individual duties and rights and the state’s commitment to protect them by providing equal opportunity to benefit from the capital allocated by service. Third, the ethnonational discourse anchors belong to the political community, including the rights and duties derived from it to an innate ethnonational or cultural identity (Avineri and De-Shalit 1992; Peled and Shafir 2005). This latter discourse relies on active participation and contribution to the collective, albeit based on the community’s values and in order to promote its objectives.

Given the common perception of the security threat as the main threat to the existence of the State of Israel and its citizens, the republican discourse that prevailed during its first decades ensured the primacy of military service in granting civic and social status. Service was grounded in this ethos upon the establishment of the IDF in 1948. In particular, combat service was positioned as the supreme form of civic responsibility, culminating in the individual’s willingness to sacrifice his life. The citizen–soldier model became the cultural ideal and benchmark for recruits (Sasson-Levy 2006). Adherence to it entitled veterans to both symbolic and material capital in the labor market, the civil sector and the political arena (Levy 2003; Swed and Butler 2015). In other words, the supreme status of military service was based on soldiers’ expectation for reward (Levy 2003). According to Levy (2015), this expectation supported the balancing of the “republican equation”.

Given this republican ethos embodied in military service, NCS was initially designed as not to compete with but rather support it (Ben-Ishai 2015). It began with an attempt to include young national-religious women, given the national-religious leaders’ adamant opposition to any type of military service for them (Bick 2013). Although the 1953 National Service Law required all women exempted from military service for religious reasons to serve in NCS; that duty was never enforced, and over the years, it became a volunteering track for national-religious women, who viewed it as an opportunity to realize the republican principle of contributing to the nation, in keeping with their religious identity (Bick 2020). Given the powerful status of military service as a republican virtue, and seeing that young women, and religious ones in particular, were marginal groups in terms of the IDF’s needs and prestige (Levy 2010), the military–state establishment viewed this arrangement as supporting the superiority of military service while not threatening the military’s ability to fill its ranks.

The dominance of republicanism had a direct impact on the status of women in the IDF. From the start, women’s military service was grounded in the contradiction between an egalitarian ethos and the fact that military, and particularly combat service, were constituted as a masculine arena. This contradiction was also embodied in the structure of opportunities facing women candidates: most roles were blocked to them, and as often occurs in the job market, roles open to them became devalued (Israeli 1999). The idea was that the most important task for Jewish women did not lie in the battlefield, but rather on

the “demographic front” (Berkovitch 1999). This logic structured candidates’ social status and contributed to the establishment of a gendered division of labor within the military (Izraeli 1999). Obviously, it had long-term implications with relation to the republican ethos, since the channeling of men and women to separate military tracks was not limited to the military, but also translated into civilian life (Fogiel-Bijaoui 1999; Herzog 1999; Levy and Sasson-Levy 2008; Stier and Yaish 2014).

This state of affairs began to change in the 1980s with the decline in the prestige of military service in Israel. Militarism, which raised military service to the top of the civil agenda (Kimmerling 1993), gradually made way to alternative models of citizenship, including liberal, neoliberal and post-militarist narratives of citizenship (Ben-Eliezer 2003; Helman 1999). This eroded the prestige of military service, including as a path to social mobility (Levy 2007). The process occurred in tandem with global and internal economic and political processes that weakened the republican equation, and with the establishment of mobility paths independent of one’s military record. These were particularly attractive for members of the secular middle class, and they quickly adopted values that emphasized personal achievement, individual development and the promotion of human rights as substitutes for the values of collectivist commitment (Levy 2007).

Since the 1990s, the erosion of the republican ethos and the rise of the liberal discourse and the neoliberal economic worldview could be identified in the national preoccupation with the declining motivation to serve, particularly in combat units (Gal 2015; Levy 2009; Spiegel 2001). The military adjusted to these processes by restructuring its social architecture and redirecting of upper-middle class candidates from traditional combat to technological and intelligence roles (Levy 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Another critical milestone was the collapse of the Oslo Accords and the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, which marked an about-face: the ethnonational-religious discourse intensified, accompanied by remilitarization processes (Ben-Eliezer 2012). Despite a certain similarity between the republican and ethnonational discourses in terms of their emphasis on sacrificing for one’s country, they were inherently contradictory as in the latter, the main element differentiating social groups was primordial ethnonational identity; moreover, this discourse was usually accompanied by a strong emphasis on religion (Leoussi 2001; Smith 2009). At the same time, since it did not oppose neoliberalism, its encounter with republicanism in the military produced “hybrid regulation”, in which the IDF adopted social differentiation mechanisms in managing its human resources, particularly in combat units, to relieve the tension between the proponents of each discourse by channeling them into separate units and roles (Ben-Ishai 2018).<sup>2</sup>

These changes transformed women’s military service (Netta 2013). Inspired by liberal feminism that became integral to the Israeli public discourse, there were stronger calls to open all military roles to women based on skill rather than gender. This process was evident particularly since the 1990s (Shafran-Gittleman 2018)—first in instruction, combat-support roles, and routine border security roles in mixed battalions, and subsequently also in elite combat (air force and navy) and hi-tech units. Whereas the rabbinical leadership was opposed to national-religious women’s service as combatants in mixed units, and encouraged them to volunteer for the NCS, in the hi-tech units where physical fitness had little importance, quality national-religious women candidates became highly attractive for military recruiters (Bick 2020). Thus, military service became an arena for struggle between groups promoting contradictory agendas, while the opposition of liberal feminism to excluding women from the social capital allocated by service dovetailed with a broader struggle over their civil status and ability to convert military to material capital in the neoliberal market (Jerby 1996; Raday 2000; Sasson-Levy 2013; Yefet and Almog 2016). As shown below, this struggle was aligned with that of the national-religious women candidates at the focus of this study.

The NCS path also became transformed. Whereas it started out as an option for national-religious women only, since the 1990s, many more groups began volunteering within it (Bick 2020). This was due to the confluence of several processes, including the

rise of a liberal agenda offering alternative targets for self-realization as Israeli citizens and for the justification of collective existence (Gal 2008). Liberal demands to universalize NCS were motivated by the desire to promote the social integration of sectors prevented from taking part in the military track, which minimized their opportunities for social and civil integration (Nun and Gal 2000). This approach also appeased the proponents of the republican discourse by meeting their demand for equality of service burden (Levy 2014).

Calls for formalizing an alternative to military service led in 2005 to the opening of NCS positions to all civilians exempted from military service (Almasi 2014; Langa 2013). By 2015, 15,675 volunteers served in the NCS, more than half of them national-religious women (Almasi 2016). Another milestone was the establishment of the National-Civic Service Administration in 2008, upon which “national service” officially became “national-civic service”. However, that NCS is still dominated by national-religious women.

The roles open to NCS volunteers expanded over the years, with the most interesting change being the expansion from traditional social services such as education and health to technological security roles (Lax 2019). The new roles afforded “exposure to classified and confidential technological materials related to the security of the State of Israel [ . . . ] and [ . . . ] significant two-year service that promotes [women candidates] both professionally and personally” (Bat-Ami n.d.). Moreover, not only were they defined in military terms as cyber or SIGINT roles, but offered volunteers comprehensive military-technological training, including the development of applications and innovative software-based solution (as in the Carmel 6000 Project), explicitly presented as benefitting their future integration in the civilian hi-tech industry. Moreover, this presentation was accompanied by an implicit equation of service in these roles in the military and NCS, promising the national-religious women candidate that unlike in military service, their personal safety and emotional-cultural values will be safeguarded.

## 2.2. Military and National-Civic Service among National-Religious Jewish Women

One of the major transformations in national-religious (also known as religious Zionist) society in Israel in recent decades is related to women’s status (Schwartz and Baumel-Schwartz 2012). Religious Zionism had been structured around a well-ordered program with regard to the gender division of labor, which positions the woman in charge of the home and childrearing (El-Or 2002). In recent decades, this positioning has begun to crack, as seen in the challenging of the Orthodox agenda (Kehat 2002), and in the expanded options for women in both the private-domestic and public spheres (Artzi-Sror 2018), reflecting the charged encounter between feminism and Orthodoxy (Ross 2004, 2003; Yanay-Ventura 2011, 2014). Studies indicate the broad spectrum of young national-religious women’s reactions to feminism, ranging from active resistance to indifference to ambivalence (e.g., Gross 2006; Yanay-Ventura 2011).<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned, over the years, the tradition of volunteering to the NCS became established in religious Zionism. With time, it came to be legitimized and officially encouraged by the rabbinical and political leadership, and national service came to express religious Zionist women’s commitment to the republican ethos, as it could simultaneously ensure their contribution to the collective and protect their religiosity (Bick 2013, 2020). The women would volunteer mostly within their own community, or in general society, albeit in traditional gender roles such as assisting in schools and hospitals. Conversely, in recent decades growing numbers of national-religious women choose not to comply with these expectations and enlist to full military service.

Note that among these women, in the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of service became consensual, with 97% serving in either the IDF or NCS (Finkelstein 2018). At the same time, the choice of enlisting in the military must be examined vis-à-vis the unequivocal support of the national-religious establishment for NCS (Frisch and Stoppel 2009; Goodman 2005). It is not surprising therefore that young national-religious women are preoccupied by the choice between the two types of service (Budaie-Hyman 2016; El-Or 2002; Gross 2006). This dilemma encapsulates multiple desires and tensions: the rabbinical decree vs. “new

religiosity”; the yearning for authentic Israeliness vs. the fear of “secularization”; the striving for self-realization vs. parental pressure.

From 2011–2015, 21.8–26.6 percent of all national-religious high school graduates have enlisted in the military (Finkelstein 2015) many of them from the religious kibbutz, which is more open to the enlistment of religious young women (Bick 2020, p. 56). The respective rate of NCS volunteers has been 71.1–75.7 percent. Notably, those serving in the military usually served in traditional feminine roles. However, this has also been changing recently, as growing numbers do not follow their sector’s traditional codes and serve in combat and combat support roles (Finkelstein 2015). This process is particularly interesting when it meets the military’s growing need for human resources in its hi-tech units. The attractive roles recently opened to national-religious women are probably among the reasons for the 100 percent increase in the number of these women choosing to join the IDF in 2010–2016.

Whereas for most of the candidate pool, the military still enjoys a monopoly in assigning them according to its needs, with regard to the quality woman recruits from the national-religious sector, this monopoly is limited by her ability to opt for NCS. In a series of studies conducted to examine the implications of a future mandatory civic service in Israel (Levy 2015), some indicated that one of the causes for the military’s monopoly on quality candidates was the lack of an alternative platform capable of offering service candidates options that could compete with the military, in terms of both collective contribution and convertibility (Ben-Ishai 2015; see also Malchi et al. 2021).

According to the present study, in recent years, given the opening of a broad range of cutting-edge hi-tech roles, the choice made by young, high-quality women candidates poses a serious challenge to the military, placing the two types of service in direct competition (Rosman-Stollman 2009, 2018). This is a new situation for the military, which has traditionally enjoyed a monopoly over the candidate pool. In the process, these youngsters are given the opportunity to strategically maneuver between four contradictory discourses: the neoliberal economic discourse that encourages the choice of hi-tech roles with a professional horizon, the liberal discourse that encourages self-realization and opportunity maximization without gender restrictions; the ethnonational discourse that encourages ethnonational republican contribution, and the religious gender discourse. They are able to combine them in a way that increases the convertibility of their service and maximizes the civil, social and occupational capital they may derive from their choice. This way, the De-Monopolization of the Israeli Military is accelerated and the status of the NCS is promoted as equal to military service.

### 3. Method

Exploring the issue of service by young national-religious women is highly sensitive for research. Such research requires a close familiarity with the target population and access to it, as well as the ability to discern conceptual, cultural, and linguistic nuances. To do so, we relied mainly on semi-structured in-depth interviews. To enrich our perspective and expand our interpretation of the phenomenon under study, we also conducted observations and a case study analysis of a hi-tech project in the NCS. This mixed methods approach familiarized us with the young women’s perspective while formulating their choices, regarding the dilemmas and conflicts involved, as well as various strategies used by recruiting bodies to influence their choice. Our materials were collected from December 2019 to February 2021.

The qualitative methods we have used are ascribed with several weaknesses, mainly in terms of the study’s representability and generalizability. Contemporary narrative researchers (Holstein and Gubrium 2000) have rejected these claims, suggesting that since the range of possibilities within each human group is practically limitless, narrative analysis enables the researcher to treat each case as an example for the potential relations between the narrating individual on the one hand and the sociocultural and historical conditions on the other. Thus, qualitative researchers are interested in eliciting statements and concepts on general processes, assuming human behavior is not random. They are therefore less

preoccupied with the generalizability of their findings, and more in identifying systems and concepts within which their findings are grounded. Others argue that in qualitative research, it is the readers who eventually determine which aspects of the study may be generalized into new contexts, such that the researchers are committed to supporting this process simply by providing thick description (Stake 1978), as seen in the results.

### 3.1. Interviews

We interviewed twenty Jewish national-religious female service candidates in 11th and 12th grades, at the point of having to choose between serving in the IDF and NCS. We selected interviewees from a variety of settings: students in technological or scientific tracks in state religious high schools in cities in central Israel (6 interviewees), students in other tracks in state religious high schools (4 interviewees), students in regional state religious high schools serving rural communities (kibbutzim and moshavim) (6 interviewees), as well as students from the ultra-Orthodox national-religious sector (*HARDALIM* in Hebrew) (4 interviewees).<sup>4</sup> The interviewees were selected using the snowball technique—an approach highly common in studies on unique social groups (Beyth-Marom 2001). The interviews (60–90 min in duration) were conducted based on a semi-structured outline developed by the researcher, mostly online via Zoom (due to COVID-19 restrictions). All interviews were held with the interviewees' informed consent, after the research objectives had been explained and their anonymity ensured. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2. Observations

We made two observations during the National Service Conference held in December 2019 by the National-Civic Service Authority.<sup>6</sup> The conference resembled an employment fair or events organized by the IDF to present candidates with various service options. During the conference, the candidates were given important information about the various national service organizations, with dedicated pavilions providing detailed explanations about by service representatives, pamphlets, and videos.

We conducted site visit non-participant observations. Each observer made notes in an observation journal, and the findings were then jointly processed. Beyond observing the conference activities and pavilions and the main show, we held two focus groups with candidates: a group interested mostly in women's traditional roles (as in education), and a group interested mostly in the new options (as in hi-tech and other security areas). We also used the opportunity to interview representatives of the recruiting organizations (NGOs). These observations and interviews were transcribed but not audiotaped. Two additional observations were held in school events attended by female religious students and their parents.

### 3.3. Case Study

The case study, Carmel 6000, was selected because it is a trailblazing project offering a unique integration of technological service and religious and gender aspects. Carmel 6000 is a two-year national service program that uses technology to impact society for the better. Carmel 6000 believes that technological solutions in the areas of education, health and welfare can improve quality of life immensely, with a focus on disadvantaged populations and people with various disabilities.

By the time of writing, additional similar projects are also on offer. Our study of Carmel 6000 included an analysis of its PR brochures and website texts and videos as well as media interviews with its leaders and young women serving in it.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The considerable amount of material we collected contributed to our ability to expose and elaborate on the major discursive themes relevant to the phenomenon at hand. Our analysis relied on the narrative approach, seeking insights into social phenomena by

identifying these themes and related narratives. The benefits of themes and narratives as research tools are derived from their dialogue and exchange with the social orders in which they are embedded (Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Swidler 2001). We were guided by two main concepts in analyzing and interpreting the themes and narratives obtained: positioning and the strategic power of discursive practice.

*Positioning* is a practice whereby individuals relate to a social value within a given discourse, and through it, position themselves with relation to others and the discourse (Davis and Harré 1999). Positioning is the resetting of boundaries based on changes in social situations (Sasson-Levy et al. 2013). Given multiple discourses, positioning enables us to examine how individuals choose or are channeled to a certain discourse, in order to thereby highlight a certain positioning. Such analysis may explain discontinuities and incoherence resulting from the maneuvering between discourses and reveal the options available to individuals to negotiate their social positions. Moreover, positioning analysis sheds light on processes in discursive space and power relations between discourses active in the same space and in a concrete historical context (Rom 2008).

*The strategic power of discursive practice* suggests that participation in social discourse is used by subjects in order to give meaning to their social reading (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2012). In other words, the social agent acts on the discourse and uses it, rather than being passively activated by it. This process enables us to examine forces that reproduce patterns of their participation in the discourse, together with processes that expand, challenge and elasticize the social discourse around various ethos. Thus, these ethos are shaped through dynamic, multivocal and hierarchic discourse, and their interpretation is negotiated continuously by various social actors and groups.

The first stage in the narrative analysis was mapping analysis, in which initial and recurring ideas were extracted from the materials (Shkedi 2003). In the second, focused analysis stage, sections of each source were assigned to one of the ideas, and first-order theoretical categorization was performed, mapping all ideas and their interrelations, followed by second-order categorization that combined the various ideas into master themes (Shkedi 2004). Using abductive reasoning (Bar-On and Scheinberg-Taz 2010), we constructed our conclusions gradually and recurrently (Litvak-Hirsch et al. 2003). At the end of each stage, the antecedent and subsequent research paths were re-evaluated, and the main themes were refined accordingly (Levin-Rosales 2000), out of which the research conclusions were derived.

#### 4. Findings

National-religious Jewish women service candidates seeking a future technological career are exposed to and maneuver between four distinct discourses when required to choose between the IDF and NCS. The analysis indicates, first, how these women are influenced by and use the neoliberal, liberal and ethnonational discourses. Second, it demonstrates how they offer various narratives to interpret each discourse and deconstruct the tension between these three discourses and the fourth, the religious gender discourse. Finally, we show how their positioning and maneuvering between the four discourses using the various narrative practices constitute their agency. It is this agentic positioning that reshapes and challenges the conception of the NCS in Israel as secondary to military service.

##### 4.1. “A Brilliant Future”: The Neoliberal Economic Discourse

The neoliberal economic discourse articulates a free-market worldview, wherein lucrative careers as in the hi-tech sector shape a person’s social status. This discourse is a significant aspect in the participants’ world and key motivator in their service choice. It resonates with three narratives the participants use. The first presents *the hi-tech industry as the world of the future*, promising both material and symbolic capitals. To position themselves as owners of these capitals, the participants adopt the neoliberal jargon, as evident in PR efforts to recruit them to technological roles in NCS:

Carmel 6000 is designed to emulate the Israeli army's Unit 8200, an elite signals intelligence unit [ . . . ] that serves as something of an incubator for the country's future tech gurus and startup founders. The new program is intended to "take the prestige of top intelligence and high-tech units in the IDF and brings the same status to social tech, particularly in the fields of education, welfare and health care" . (Sokol 2018)

You will get from us cutting-edge technological training, proficiency in advanced programming languages, a brilliant future in the hi-tech professions, and practical experience in developing an outstanding concept for an ingenious product. . (Carmel 6000 brochure)

In some places, national service girls work as secretaries or assistants. Not here. The future of 80 percent of the girls serving here is assured. They could head for the labor market immediately and make 15,000 NIS [\$4500 a month]. Some will even make 20,000. (Interview with the director of an NCS technological project)

Further support for this was obtained during an observation of the National Service Conference, particularly the way the defense and technological organizations addressed the candidates. At first, the recruiters asked the candidates about their school background. Next, they explained the organization and the nature of the role, highlighting the role's professional contribution to the candidate in the specific organization or in a future hi-tech career.

For the participants, the hi-tech world is one where success depended on their brains rather than physical strength, opening up equal opportunities for advancement. They talk about their mothers' accomplishment in hi-tech careers that match those of their male colleagues. This modeling motivates them to choose technological or scientific tracks in high school, with some even completing BA studies in computer sciences on the way. In their families, a technological service track is seen as the best option: "Back home, the slogan for every family event or project was 'once and for ever 8200' (after the SIGINT unit, rhymes in Hebrew: *achat* (1) and *shtayim* (2) *shmone-matayim* (8200))" (A). Whether in the military or NCS, technological service is perceived through the prism of the neoliberal discourse as preparing the candidate for a future career: "There's really a hi-tech atmosphere there [ . . . ]. It's really about how to work in a hi-tech atmosphere [ . . . ] like getting used to it" (A).

Whereas this view of service as an opportunity to gain valuable technological skills is quite common among other sectors in Jewish-Israeli society (Gal 2015), when it comes to the research population, an additional narrative is recruited to cope with the contradiction they experience between the neoliberal and religious gender discourses: *the hi-tech environment as free of gender tensions*. This narrative reveals that among the participants the dialogue between men and women in the hi-tech environment is characterized by gender equality, professionalism and task orientation, and less by the sexual promiscuity or harassment they tend to associate with the secular world. Thus, this narrative serves the participants' need to justify and deconstruct the tension involving their violation of the traditional division of labor. The young religious interviewees position themselves as players equal to the men in this field by adopting matching neoliberal values and language.

Moreover, the hi-tech environment in NCS is perceived as friendlier than the military one also because here the men are older, usually with families, and the young women spend their break and leisure times among themselves—avoiding the sexual tensions typical of the military environment, particularly in joint tasks such as patrols guard duties.

Most of the people are older than me, even much older. [ . . . ] Most of the time I'm alone but we do have the hour that all of us girls spend together [ . . . ]. We talk on the phone on the way, we meet after work. But most of the time I'm alone (R).

In the military, you meet lots and lots of boys and girls your age in the course of your duties, while in national service you meet religious girls your age. In

national service, you're in a company, in an organizational setting, within an organization employing adults [ ... ] (N).

The third neoliberal narrative is the youngsters' self-positioning as the *flag bearers of the religious career woman*, particularly as opposed to their peers who opt for traditional gender roles. They acknowledge the traditional choice as legitimate and valuable. However, they present themselves as better able to cope with the challenges of the hi-tech industry, similar to men, without needing a protective setting and without any restrictions on "feminine" roles.

Personally, I can hold my own ground [ ... ] I've been dealing with this for years [ ... ]. But I can definitely understand other girls for whom this is definitely an important consideration. [ ... ] She doesn't know how she would come out into the world, whether the secular world suits her [ ... ] (N).

Similarly, as the Israeli hi-tech industry positions itself as the engine of the future economy, the participants position themselves as pioneers, with their social environment admiring their ability to cross the boundaries of tradition:

For most people, this comes as a pleasant surprise. They see a 19-year-old kid who does such a thing. So, it's impressive. They speak to me as an equal. And when they see what we girls do they are astonished. I see problems and think about a technological solution (NT).

When we examine the participants' strategic use of the neoliberal discourse through the three narratives described, it clearly appears how, in their decision-making process, the military's priority over NCS is challenged. The neoliberal economic discourse enables them to position themselves as having free choice. Although they do enjoy that objective freedom in the first place as far as administrative rules is concerned, the use of the narratives of the neoliberal discourse charges their choice with new and empowering meanings.

*First*, the neoliberal discourse replaces the focus of the choice from deciding between military and national-civic process to the elements of the roles offered and their degree of convertibility. The candidates prioritize prestigious roles with an occupational horizon and are relatively indifferent to whether these roles are carried out in the military or NCS.

One does both selection processes at the same time now—of the military and of the national service. I do it to keep my options open [ ... ]. I need to know where I feel more related [ ... ]. And at the end of the day, it's more important what you've done and what the nature of your role is, than where you've done it (N).

*Second*, this refocusing empowers the candidates to bargain and negotiate with the two types of service. Given their high qualifications, both services seek to recruit them. In the course of the selection processes, the candidates prioritize the type of service that appears more attractive in terms of technological innovation, but also additional considerations that further feed into the competition between the services, such as responsiveness, efficiency, and social environment.

I had [an option for] a role in Gvanim [military technological unit]. During the selection process for national service, I went to be tested in the military. And then I kinda realize that they, the military, do not guarantee that role [ ... ] so I realize [ ... ] that I could lose out (M).

This entire military hierarchy is too tough. I don't quite understand how someone who's older than me by two years can start telling me what to do [ ... ]. Many kids in our age are afraid to go to the IDF because of the toughness and rigidity conveyed by the IDF (S).

Thus, this discursive practice places these young women in a bargaining position available to few other service candidates, including other national-religious women.

Finally, given that the roles offered to them are identical or similar in terms of their occupational horizons, the candidates tend to prefer NCS in keeping with the “sexual tension-free environment” narrative, which offers it a clear advantage to the military.

#### 4.2. “Whatever Role Is Best for You”: The Liberal Discourse

The liberal discourse emphasizes individual self-realization and free choice and is grounded in a humane approach that supports equality. When describing their decision-making, the interviewees strongly insist on their right to make independent decisions in pursuit of their self-realization, even if this means crossing the boundaries of their traditional gender roles. However, they are highly conscious of the subversive potential of their usage of this discourse in shattering boundaries imposed by religion and tradition, and moreover, of the fact that this poses a threat to their religious identity.

Thus, the narrative analysis clearly reveals the tension the young women experience due to the contradictory influence of the two discourses that affect them simultaneously: the liberal and religious gender discourses. As young members of the urban upper middle-class they are exposed to and “speak” the rights and self-realization narrative. They even challenge the authority of religious or educational authorities to restrict them. Conversely, they are aware that this liberation may threaten their religiosity, which is central to their identity. The way they process this tension reveals a sophisticated narrative structure: identifying with the liberal discourse enables them to argue that they are entitled to remain religious women, despite violating traditional gender norms, and also claim social recognition of the legitimacy of the religious gender modality they offer:

Some people think it is less acceptable, while others find it more acceptable. I need to know who I can befriend (N).

I also found it hard to choose between the military and civil service. I still haven’t made up my mind [ . . . ] I was really undecided. [ . . . ] I advanced step by step in both the national service and the military [recruitment]. The religious aspect is important for me, to preserve it, and the military actually means breaking out [of the religious community]. In the military it’s a bit more complex, looks more exciting to me [ . . . ] you see. I want to leave home next year. I want to go someplace else. Because I also feel like opening up more—it can teach me a lot of things. Not to choose the easy way, to get out of the box (L).

The quotes indicate that some young women are opposed to the narrow boundaries of religious society, which dictates their expressions of their religious and feminine identities, and even the people they can befriend. They describe situations at school or in their social settings where they have fought for their right to choose their own path and protested against teachers, instructors or rabbis who trying to denounce their conduct or encourage them to choose NCS against their will.

The way the rabbis would talk at school was generally male-chauvinistic. It makes sense for a rabbi to say [that young national-religious women should opt for the NCS]. Whereas rabbis taking in favor of women serving in the military and of equality is less common [ . . . ]. I actually researched this. I searched the Internet about such rabbis [ . . . ]. There was once a rabbi who would go [ . . . ] “Well, who declared already? Who didn’t declare”.<sup>7</sup> Whoever declared, he would applaud [ . . . ]. The rest of the staff was also in favor of the NCS [ . . . ] (A).

The participants face this pressure by stating that they have the power and freedom to shape their own brand of religious lifestyle:

My mother did not serve in the military. She was in national service, but she regrets it [ . . . ]. This was the norm back then, and it was unusual to serve in the military. It meant going against the current [ . . . ]. Today you really have a choice [ . . . ]. I think it happened because the girls made a revolution, the girls took the initiative [ . . . ] (A).

At the same time, as mentioned, this “revolution” threatens their religious identity. To avoid this risk, without compromising on their self-realization, some opt for a technological track in NCS, such as Carmel 6000, which caters specifically to national-religious women:

They pretty much tracked everyone who studied computers and cyber to go to the military, but I was more inclined to choose national service. [ . . . ] In the military, there can be a good religious atmosphere, but it’s not guaranteed. In national service, it’s guaranteed, and it’s a place that protects me in that respect (S).

In these cases, however, the choice of the NCS is justified based on subjective standards of free choice and self-realization:

And at home [they’d say] do what’s best for you [ . . . ]. Whatever role is best for you, for example, you have the security-oriented roles in national service [that are] similar to the military, so eventually you have to choose [between them] (N).

This discursive tension is relieved not only narratively, but also by choosing a unique path: most of the participants who choose military service have also entered religious pre-military preparatory seminaries (*mechinot* in Hebrew),<sup>8</sup> which are usually gender segregated. They describe the academies as a way to strengthen their identity as religious women, and as a kind of preservice “inoculation”. According to the interviewees, this move has a twofold objective. First, instrumentally, it communicates to their social environment that they are committed to maintaining their identity, helping reduce any opposition to their chosen service path. Intrinsically, they feel that despite being stronger than their national-religious peers in pursuing their own path, the academy can further inoculate them against the threats in the general Israeli environment.

In school, they explain to us about military service, that it is a place with lots of young people and frivolity, that can drag you to negative things, a place that is unsupervised [ . . . ]. And there’s another place [NCS] where it is safer. I’m not concerned by that because I trust myself. [ . . . ] The premilitary academy, I go there for myself [ . . . ] to set boundaries from the beginning and understand where to stop and where to go on. In the end, I don’t want to move away [from the religious world] [ . . . ]. The main reason is that I know my religiosity could become eroded in the military, so it’s like we’re on this level now, and in the academy, I’m rising to a higher level, and then maybe in order to eventually go back to the first [current] level in the military. [ . . . ] I’m not afraid of becoming less religious because of going to the military, but if that happens, it will eventually be of my own choosing. (A)

This narrative strategy helps the young women constitute their choice as aligned with both discourses and position themselves in relation to them as independent individuals able to face challenges but also retain their identity. This pattern is consistent with the concept of “moderate radicalism” proposed by [Irshai and Zion-Waldoks \(2013\)](#) as characterizing recent trends in Israeli religious feminism. According to this concept, the dual position of the moderate radical woman produces ongoing ambivalence, with the tensions involved offering unique opportunities, challenges and modes of action that may potentially generate social change. The religious feminist is radical in voicing gender criticism and in her subversive demand to transform the religious status-quo, but at the same time, moderate in being deeply rooted in her religious community and committed to Jewish tradition.

This pattern is also addressed in the typology suggested by [Rosman-Stollman \(2021\)](#) for the action strategies of religious feminism on the issue of state intervention in the relations between the individual and religion. Similar to our findings, her study suggests that religious women navigate between tensions and contradictory pressures in order to realize their feminist identity while maintaining their religious identity and place in religious society. Moreover, since their choice of self-realization transcends the immediate choice between the military and the NCS, they will have to reconcile that conflict at some point, and it is therefore better to do it now: “Indeed, I won’t remain in a religious

environment my entire life, I don't intend to stay inside the enclave like that [ ... ]. I will have to deal with it anyway" (A).

The strategic use the young religious women make of the discursive practices to regulate the tensions between liberalism, gender and religion affects the interrelations between the two types of service. Military service is considered a bigger step on the way to unprotected integration in the secular world, but it is not an objective in its own right. The objective is to maximize self-realization while minimizing religious identity loss. If this can be achieved in the military, the participants feel they can face the challenge by becoming "stronger" religiously in the *mechinot*, also using that experience in preparation of for their adult lives out of the "box" or "enclave". Moreover, if this can be performed in settings that protect their religious identity—all the better.

#### 4.3. "Hi-Tech with Meaning": The Ethnonational Discourse

This discourse relates to the collective mission associated with the military. Theoretically, it relies on a republican discourse, but in this case, the focus is specifically on Jewish contribution and sacrifice. The participants were indifferent to and ignorant of the issue of military service by non-Jews, or their contribution to the national collective. Two narratives were particularly salient within this discourse. The first, aligned with the religious gender discourse, viewed the combat role of the Jewish man as essential and irreplaceable given the security threat to the State of Israel—the pinnacle of contribution and sacrifice. The second was the duty to serve, which they saw as self-evident and consensual: "I think it comes from home. We have always gone to places and heard battle stories [ ... ]. It's in the air that at some point, you go to contribute in the military" (A).

The consensus ended here, however. Participants who grew in a religious kibbutz (collectivist rural community) viewed military service, even in traditional gender roles, and let alone in combat duty, as the national-religious woman's most significant contribution to the collective mission:

With regard to girls that choose national service rather than military service, I don't know maybe I wouldn't tell them what I think so that they don't feel they don't contribute. Maybe so that they don't feel they're taking the easier path because they have that option whereas others who do not get screwed up and have to defend the country. [ ... ] at the end of the day the military is an organization where the entire country is supposed to contribute, and it's [ ... ] hard and girls say "I don't feel like going there but I feel like contributing in a different way [ ... ] more convenient for me". [ ... ] because then kids who have roles they don't like [ ... ] can do that many religious girls do [ ... ] and go to national service and then nobody would go to the military [ ... ] (A).

Conversely, the participants who opted for hi-tech roles challenged this preference. For them, the technological world was a way of "seeing things in a different light" (S). They gladly adopted the linkage between hi-tech and their ethnonational mission, in a way that transcended gender differences:

For more than 3000 years, the Jewish people knew that to be a Jew means always making the world a better place for everyone. The main force leading this change over the past century has been technology. (Carmel 6000 n.d.)

Using this narrative, these participants justified their choice of a technological role as more important than the choice between the military and NCS. Moreover, serving in a technological role in NCS was seen as contributing added value compared to the military, as it offered hi-tech with a national-security-social significance, compensating for the participants' fear of "religiosity erosion". This is reflected in a dialogue between the director of an NCS technological project and a senior administrator in the national-religious education system:

Something in the order of what the military offers—contributing to the country by programming and computers but with a different twitch—social activism

[ ... ]. The [military hi-tech] project [ ... ] would fail, read my lips, religious girls don't go to hi-tech. It is perceived as hedonist, masculine, demanding [ ... ]. But we'll do hi-tech with meaning [ ... ] and also a cadre of professionals to pave the path for them [ ... ]. Such a meaningful role will really make a difference, rather than filling up positions with cheap labor power [as in the military]. (Lax 2019)

To conclude, our narrative analysis revealed the strategic power of discursive practices, highlighting the empowering potential of negotiating a variety of discourses. This negotiation or bargaining enables young national-religious women to position themselves in civic society as successful and independent career women realizing themselves based on equal opportunities. At the same time, it allows them to maintain their traditional gender position as women in a society committed to ethnonational religious values. It is this positioning that enables NCS to challenge military service in the competition for these high-quality candidates.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

### *Negotiating the Discourses: Positioning, Agency and the Metanarrative of Free Choice*

The strategic use of the four discourses made by the participants paints a multivocal picture, enabling them to apply the various narratives they adopt, both within and between the discourses, in order to promote their positioning and acquire individual and collective capital convertible to the civilian hi-tech market without compromising on their religious identity. This contradictory discourse structure enables the participants to both have and eat their cake, by opening up a flexible space for both maneuvering and bargaining for their identity and future. Thus, this space constitutes their agency vis-à-vis military authorities and structures their choice of the NCS as free, and their service in NCS as equivalent and even superior to military service in terms of all four discourses.

Derived from both the liberal and neoliberal discourses as conveyed by both the participants and recruiting organizations, the free choice metanarrative is representative of the young women's agency. It enables them to break through traditional settings and boundaries in integrating all four discourses, enabling them to argue for occupational progress according to neoliberal values and legitimize their ambitions by reconciling the tension between the liberal and religious gender discourses. All the while, they rely on the ethnonational discourse that constitutes both hi-tech and personal freedom as conducive to the national Jewish mission and reduces the "religious identity cost". The free choice metanarrative enables the participants to shape their identity as religious women and define the rights and duties derived from it by themselves. This choice is also at the focus of the change in the interrelations between the two types of service, because it guides the participants in deciding between them. When it comes to young national-religious Jewish women with high qualifications, this would usually support their preference for prestigious hi-tech roles in the NCS.

Unlike the traditional legal choice offered to national-religious Jewish women between the IDF and NCS, the free choice at the focus of this study challenges the military monopoly on the candidate flow. The traditional roles taken up by national-religious women in their military or national-civic service are not part of the military core but belong to the category of social missions undertaken by the military as part of the construction of its identity as the "army of the people". Conversely, hi-tech roles are essential for military operations, reflecting another historical transformation in the identity and structure of the military, with the growing reliance on remote warfare (Levy 2003). These combined processes are significant in that they challenge not only traditional gender roles in national-religious Jewish society, but also the military's monopoly on channeling candidates to these significant and high-social-capital roles.

The young national-religious women's legal and personal freedom of choice threatens that monopoly. First, given their high motivation and qualifications, the military is increasingly interested in recruiting them. Second, due to their historical legal freedom of choice and the newly offered positions in NCS, they are able—considerably more than any other

candidate—to expand their range of choices. In doing so, they attach greater weight to the characteristics of the role than to the institutional setting. When both roles are equivalent, they prefer the setting more in keeping with their desire to retain their religiosity. The outcome is a new situation whereby the military loses high-quality human resources to organizations that compete with it over the allocation of material and symbolic capital derived from the service.

In his book *Only the Paranoid Survive*, Grove (1997, p. 113) claims that “snow always melts first on the edges”, thereby pointing to the potential of seemingly marginal changes in the organizational periphery to cause significant transformation. This approach can explain why processes initiated by peripheral groups can accelerate under the organization’s radar, challenging its status and interrelations with the environment. The marginal contribution of national-religious women soldiers to the core needs of the military or to its prestige has enabled this process to gain momentum without being stopped already in its early stages. Thus, the crack that was already there due to the traditional freedom of choice afforded to these candidates by the state carried with it a hidden potential to transform the structure of NCS and challenge the military monopoly on quality candidates in the technological area.

Given that one of the factors behind the military’s monopoly on quality candidates was the lack of an alternative platform, the process described above is seminal in suggesting that the presence of a significant service option with high convertibility in the civilian job market may be enough to shatter the military monopoly. The change in the role offerings in NCS settings and the evaluation of forces that challenge quality human resources to them are essential for understanding their developing meaning for the status of military service in Israel. This is an extremely important research goal, which we believe the current study has made the first step in promoting.

Moreover, the gender religious preference met by the hi-tech roles in the NCS for religious-national women with high qualifications challenges the model of the “army of the people”, exacerbating the inequality in choices open to candidates. Naturally, the present exploratory study focused on a single process and a specific population within a single sector, given its capability of illustrating the developing trends. A broader study would need to analyze the broader implications of the changes described in the two service models for the status of military service in Israel, and the “army of the people” model in particular. When the platform of the 36th government includes a clause suggesting examining the imposition of mandatory service on all Israeli citizens, regardless of gender or ethnicity, such a study would obviously be essential. More specifically, future studies can examine how the four discourses described above, or others, affect the willingness of additional population groups seeking to be integrated into NCS, such as minorities (of both genders) currently exempt from military service, ultra-Orthodox Jews, candidates exempted for health reasons, and conscientious objectors.

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## Appendix A. Interview Outline

We are conducting an academic study on the considerations guiding the choice of young national-religious women between military and national services. We would be happy to hear from you about your considerations at this critical juncture. All individual responses will be analyzed collectively, such as your own anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Interview duration: about one hour.

### Appendix A.1. Opening: Background Questions

Please tell us a bit about yourself. Try to refer to the following aspects and to any others that seem important to you: age, residential area, occupation, general family background, school—majors/tracks and type of institution, participation in religious youth movements and settings, hobbies.

### Appendix A.2. Introducing the Topic

Are you at the point of having to choose between military and national service? How far along are you in the process?

### Appendix A.3. Specific Questions

- *Knowledge.* What have you heard about national and military services? Or about the differences between them? Do you feel you have enough information to choose between them? Do you feel that the information available to you is full and relevant to making a choice? If not, what do you feel is lacking? Why do you believe this information is less accessible to you? What were the main sources of information you used to collect data you needed to make your decisions? Do you feel they provided you with objective information? If not, why? What do you believe affected the nature of the information provided to you by the various sources?
  - Interviewer guidelines: (1) Encourage the interviewee to provide rich details on each and every source of information; (2) If necessary, enumerate various sources of information commonly affecting service candidates' decisions and ask about the specific information obtained from them: family, friends, youth movement, peer group, educational staff, religious authorities.
- *Action.* Please describe any actions taken in the process of choosing between military and national services. Whom did you contact? Who contacted you and why? Did you take part in any selection process? Did these individuals/organizations and any selection process affect your choice? How? Who made your decision with you? Whom did you consult in the matter? How did others around you perceive the "right choice"? Why? How did your parents and close relatives influence your decision? What did your friends think? What did your schoolteachers think? What did your youth movement friends and instructors think? What were the views in the synagogue prayer group? Among rabbis important to you?
- *Decision.* Have you already made up your mind on the choice between national and military service? What is your selected service target (Interviewer: this refers to type of service—technological, combat, training/instruction, gendered roles)? Why? Try to enumerate the considerations that eventually led you to make your choice? What pulled you in a certain direction and what pushed you away? Did you have any fears?
- *Implications—retrospective evaluation.* Do you believe your choice of service type will affect your future life in any way? How do you believe offering the option of technological service as part of national or military service affect the choice of national-religious women? Is that choice expected to affect their status in national-religious society? And in Israeli society more broadly? What do you think about offering the choice between national and military service to all service candidate groups, including men, Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews?

## Appendix B. Research Participation Request and Informed Consent

Hello,

We would like you to participate in a study on the service of national-religious young women. Your participation may contribute significantly to the understanding of this important issue. Participation is completely voluntary.

The study is conducted by Dr. Ofra Ben Ishai of the Open University, Dr. Itamar Rickover of Bar-Ilan University, and Dr. Ayala Keysar Sugarman of the Neeman Institute.

Your participation will include a face-to-face interview of about one hour. If you want, you can terminate the interview at any time, without it having any effect on you, now or in the future.

This study is not classified, and therefore you may not share with the researchers any classified information. All identifying details you may provide will remain confidential and available to no one beyond the researchers. After the materials have been processed for the purpose of this study, aliases will be used to prevent anyone from identifying any of the participants.

If you have any question, please contact Dr. Rickover (phone).

We thank you for your cooperation.

I, the undersigned, hereby confirm that I have read and understood the information presented to me and explained to me personally by the researchers. It is clear to me that I am participating voluntarily, at my own choice. It is also clear to me that the research is unclassified.

I hereby provide my consent for participating in this study and for having my interview data used for research purposes only.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name and signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In applying the concept of economic neoliberalism, we follow Harvey (2007) in defining it as a political-economic regime striving to minimize the market-restraining impact of sociopolitical restrictions and rules enforced on the capitalist economy and viewing it as seeking alternative rules and fields designed to construct and empower competitive market mechanisms. Regarding the uniqueness of the neoliberalism concept, see also Taylor and Morse-Gans (2009).
- <sup>2</sup> For the distinctions between the republican and ethnonational discourses in Israel, see Shafir and Peled 1998; Smooha 1990; Yiftachel 2006. In her book on national service in Israel, Bick (2020, pp. 1–11) makes a similar distinction between the republican and ethnonational discourse, referring to the latter as “communitarian discourse”.
- <sup>3</sup> This article does not relate to religious feminism. For more details on recent development in religious feminism, see Ben-Shitrit (2020); Jobani and Perez (2017). For elaboration on the tension between feminism and women’s service in the army, see Shalev Shalev Harel and Daphna-Tekoah (2020).
- <sup>4</sup> For more on service among the various currents and subsectors of the religious Zionist and ultra-Orthodox sectors, see Bick (2020).
- <sup>5</sup> The interview outline and an informed consent form were sent to the interviewees (see Appendices A and B). At the beginning of each interview, the consent requirements were reiterated.
- <sup>6</sup> The request made to the authority was as follows: “We are conducting a study about national service and would like to observe the conference, particularly the various pavilions. Our research objectives in observing the conference included changes in service targets and their impact on the positioning of civic service among the candidates, and the repositioning of national-civic service in Israel by opening up new and attractive service targets for candidates from key quality groups”.
- <sup>7</sup> According to Israeli law, young Jewish women who declare that theirs is a religious lifestyle are exempt from military service.
- <sup>8</sup> For more on the *mechinot*, see <https://www.jewishagency.org/mechinot/> (accessed on 9 July 2021).

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