

Silvia Studena's thesis discusses and analyzes the role of the Israeli Defense Forces in socializing and creating national identity. Through meticulous study of a multitude of sources Studena traces the origins of this role as well as its current state. The thesis is an excellent study that illuminates how Israel's political, social, and security conditions (and oftentimes, illusions) have contributed to making the IDF a crucial locus of identity formation. This process has taken place not least of all because of the "ghetto mentality", a view shared by many Jewish citizens of Israel that they are under constant siege, as well as the need to consolidate the heterogenous, and previously immigrant, society. Studena pays close attention to the religious, cultural, and ethnic factors that made the IDF a socializing institution, as well as the ways in which these factors still prevent the IDF from becoming completely egalitarian in the opportunities it offers.

Nonetheless, some issues could be elaborated further: to begin with, questions could be asked about political orientations, and how these are shaped or changed according to the type of military service, or, furthermore, how do they affect the choice of service. Are combat soldiers more dovish or hawkish after their service? The discussion on page 104 could be developed with regards to this.

In connection to this, the tarnished image of the IDF (pp. 84-85) is an important issue that affects candidates' willingness to join the army and their choice of service. Worth mentioning is the Elor Azaria case (2016). Azaria's execution of a neutralized terrorist has strongly divided Israeli society – while the left wing saw the incident as a sign of the deteriorating morality of the soldiers, the right wing saw Azaria's prosecution as the establishment's betrayal of a simple soldier. This event and its interpretations both reflected and affected the changing attitude of many Israelis towards the army and the state.

The question of religious Zionism could also be expanded. The increasing number of religious Zionists in the army is an important phenomenon, especially due to their strong idealism and sense of belonging to an elite that must lead the nation. The discussion on page 92 on the problems arising from integrating *haredim* in the army is relevant to this issue. Another problem arising from this integration that isn't mentioned, is that of gender equality – the reluctance of religious and *haredi* soldiers to serve alongside, or under, women is seen as a threat to the egalitarian ideal of the IDF.

Some technical issues: the introduction is very well researched and written, but also too long. It would be better to cut down significantly on Jewish history, although Studena demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.

With regards to Gellner's and Smith's works on national identity, it could be worth mentioning their specific writings about Israel and the Jews. They both seemed to view the case of Zionism as slightly different than other European national movements.

In conclusion, Studena has written an excellent thesis, that is thoroughly researched and very well written. By applying theoretical literature about national and social identity to the actual case of the Israeli military, Studena illustrates how the IDF contributes to social cohesion in Israeli society, but also how inequality and social differences withstand the intended melting pot.

Defense questions:

1. What criticisms have you encountered about the socializing and shaping of identity in the IDF? Is excessive militarism the only problem?
2. What are some differences between IDF socializing of male and female soldiers?

Grade: 1