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Review of the doctoral thesis

Ronen Itsik, „Citizens Soldier” Military - The Contribution to Socialization in the Late-Modern Era”, Poznań 2023, written under the supervision of Supervisor: dr. hab. prof. UAM Marek Nowak and assistant doctoral supervision of dr Piotr Pieńkowski

1. Choice of the dissertation subject

The thesis under review is clearly located within the area of sociology. Subject chosen by Ronen Itsik is very interesting, relevant and challenging, particularly in the context of changing attitudes towards military service not only in Israel but also in Europe and beyond. Hence, the reasoning standing behind the choice of this particular subject is perfectly understandable – the State of Israel is threatened with various acts of political violence, including war and terrorism, since its very creation and as a result Israel’s Authorities’ decision to organise its defence forces on draft and the concept of the “citizen soldier” was simply a necessity. The aim of such a military organization is not only to prepare adequate number of appropriately skilled human resources for the prolonged military conflicts of any type, but also to achieve some level of social cohesion (social and cultural functions), as large part of Jewish population in Israel are immigrants from various places, and military accepts also non-Jewish populations of Israel (Druze and volunteering Arab Muslims and Christians).

Thorough analysis of this vast, longstanding and profound Israeli experience with utilizing its military power not only as a supreme fighting force but also as an important mean of socialization, “in order to strengthen social cohesion as an element of cultural ethos” (p. 17) proposed by Ronen Itsik in his dissertation, can definitely provide essential assistance in

understanding the very nature of such efforts and its many risks, challenges as well as advantages and disadvantages and complex character of this type of social activity.

2. Substantive assessment of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of the Acknowledgements, a part entitled “Research thinking process”, Summary (in English), “Introduction and research objectives”, five main chapters divided into numerous subchapters, “Summary and main conclusions”, references (bibliography) and Attachments. It also has lists of figures and tables which helps finding important statistical data. Unfortunately there is no Polish abstract which could have been quite useful in case some members of the Polish public could have gained insight into the content of this dissertation. Five main chapters are based on five articles published in various academic journals in Poland and abroad in the period 2020 – 2022, which is acceptable by the rules of acknowledging doctoral dissertations in Poland.

These articles are:

1. 2020. Israel’s defense ethos: military service as a turning point.
Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny, 82 (3), str. 299–309;
2. 2020. Compulsory military service as a social integrator.
Security and Defence Quarterly, 30 (3), str. 65–80.;
3. 2022. The inter-generational effect in a citizen-soldier army.
The Journal of Political & Military Sociology, University of Florida, U.S.A, str. 255 - 273
4. 2021. A Battlefield of Social Challenges Military Service and Female Empowerment
International Journal of Business and Management Innovation, India, Feb. 2021, 10 (2), str. 42–50.;
5. 2022, Motivation for Reserve Military Service in Israel,
The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) journal, October 2022, U.K., str. 1 – 17.

Acknowledgements, “Research thinking process”, Summary (in English), “Introduction and research objectives” and “Summary and the main conclusions” are written purposefully for this doctoral dissertation and create a binder for the whole text. Part entitled “Research thinking process” presents the inspiration for conducting empirical research described in the doctoral dissertation based on its Author’s feeling of a discrepancy between the “theoretical” approach claiming “that the model of the ‘citizen-soldier military’ has lost its operative value” (p. 7) and the reality of serving in the Israeli army (the Author of this dissertation was a professional soldier and commander of an armoured brigade in the IDF).

In the First Chapter/ Introduction the reader will find general description of the research problems, main research question (one) and secondary research questions (four), four research “assumptions”, rather brief and definitely incomplete description of the theoretical background of the dissertation, descriptions of the effects of military service on cultural identity and values and its inter-generation effect, the problem of the integration of females in the military service, especially in combat units and the possible issue of gender conflict in the IDF, conceptual and methodological framework, the description of the population sampled, and research tools in use, as well research limitations and research importance as they are perceived by the Author. There is no even brief presentation of the work structure, nor the review of the most important literature in this part of the dissertation. The main objective of the thesis under review is to find out how compulsory military service in Israel affects its value-social sphere.

One and only main research question is proposed in the Introduction: “How does the service in a 'citizen soldier' military affect social and national attitudes?”, followed by four secondary research questions:

- “1. What kind of ethos is formulated during military service in the IDF?
2. How does compulsory military service in Israel affect social integration?
3. How does parents military service in Israel affects their children's motivation to contribute for the society?
4. What are the differences between genders concerning the social role of military service in the IDF?”

As far as research methods are concerned the author claims that “The current research combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies: The quantitative part includes correlation analysis and multivariate regressions in order to examine how different variables affect changes between two groups. The qualitative part deals with the differences between male and female in regards with their military service experience and also attitudes of reserve soldiers.”

First article/second chapter frames military service in Israel as a “turning point” for a young Israeli citizen and presents Israel’s defence ethos. It includes a short review of literature on the role of the military service in Israeli society and culture and perceiving the IDF as not only a military organization defending the people but also as an educational vehicle for attitudes’ transformation and change. Serving in the military and facing the real enemy enables demystification of the delusional image of all Arabs being fierce terrorists intending to destroy the State of Israel. In quite a paradoxical way this experience enables “humanization” rather than dehumanization of the “enemy” and changes the image of the security threats as seen from the point of view of a soldier. Second article/ third chapter presents compulsory military service

as a vehicle for “social integration”. Here the Author presents statistical and sociological analyses of a part of empirical data based on the survey research constructed and employed by the Author to test the concepts of “defence belief”, “existential threat” and other social concepts connected to the issues of security and defence, attempting to conceptualize attitudes prevalent among would be soldiers and ex-soldiers. Third article/fourth chapter is devoted to the presentation of the statistical and sociological analysis of the empirical data examining the “intergenerational” effect in a citizen-soldier army i.e. the potential influence of parents’ military service on their children’s communal attitudes and motives for military recruitment. Selected factors (variables) influencing these processes are being presented and analysed. Fourth article/chapter five deals with the important problem of military service and female empowerment. This problem is particularly interesting considering the vast participation of females in the military service in Israel, its compulsory nature and all challenges this massive presence in an organization which typically deals with males provokes. Fifth article/chapter six deals with the problem of the motivation for reserve military service in Israel. The Reserve Corps used to be an important pillar of the Israeli Defence Forces and is particularly fragile as it deals with the “triple commitment” of the Reservists: army, family and work. The Author discusses thoroughly the motivational factors and the Ethos of Reserve soldiers which are based on an original empirical research.

First Chapter/ Introduction and Second chapter are focused on “theoretical” aspects, while chapters three – six are devoted to the presentation and analysis of the empirical research carried out by the Author. Chapters fourth, fifth and sixth have a largely similar structure including “introduction, presentation of core concepts, “methodology”, “sample population”, “study variables”, “limitations of the study”, “findings”, “discussion”, “conclusion” and “references”. Chapter fifth and sixth includes in-depth analysis of the interviewees comments. This similarity in structure of originally independent articles published in various scientific journals is the primary cause for some number of reiterations in the text. Chapters from third to sixth address secondary research questions mentioned in the Introduction and provide answers to them. Chapter seven aims at recapitulation of presented research material and main conclusions and attempts to answer main and secondary research questions. As the Author states: “The main focus of the current study deals with the question of compulsory service in the military and its value-social effects. The comparison of attitudes between high school students' pre-military service and those who finished their military duty shows essential differences between the participants, relating to the core of the social-democratic discourse in Israel. The dramatic finding is that serving in the military service in the IDF leads to a change

in attitudes and in the concept of the ethos. Many believe that leading civilians through the military establishment will cause extremism and militancy. Therefore, many view Israel and its society as leading towards extreme national concepts (Peled, 2019). Some even believe that serving in the army leads to nationalism and racism (Camp and Greenburg, 2020). The findings of the current study show significant movement towards liberal values among male and female soldiers. It may be claimed, therefore, that compulsory army duty has a significant effect on civilians – mitigating extreme attitudes, balancing national and liberal values and even reinforcing essential democratic elements.” These are important and revealing claims based on interesting and vast empirical material gathered by the Author in due course of his study. He notices: “The current findings show that military service is an effective normative socialization mechanism, with almost no conflicting influence of the socio-economic background. The conflictual aspects presented by those who blame compulsory service, are resolved during the service. Hence the findings related to the effects of military service reinforce the paradigm of the army being a functional mechanism to soothe social conflicts.”

3. Methodology and formal assessment of the dissertation

Mixed research methods have been used in this dissertation, however, quantitative, statistical analysis vastly outnumbers qualitative approach, which is limited to the in-depth analysis of the interviewees comments. Empirical research is based on 3400 semi-structured interactive questionnaires passed on the social networks in the period 2015 - 2020, half of the respondents were high-school students (average age 17) and the other half have finished their military service (average age 22). Various statistical methods were properly and adequately used to analyse many variables, which are clearly formulated.

Language used in dissertation is correct though in some sections of the dissertation polemical fervour outweighs cold analytical skills.

Bibliography is arranged properly and appears in alphabetical order, references have been drawn up correctly and in accordance with accepted standards.

These methods employed in the dissertation are relevant and enough to validate the conclusions stemming out of it.

4. Conclusion:

The main problem with the doctoral dissertation under review is that it formulates a very challenging and important research problem, provides the reader with the profound analysis of

the properly designed empirical research (unfortunately, the questionnaire in itself is nowhere to be found in the content of the dissertation), but fails to explain thoroughly the most important sociological determinants of the observed phenomena. It poses the right questions, it delivers a meticulous statistical examination of quantitative data, part of which is presented in numerous graphs and tables, which is even supported by partial in-depth analysis of the quantitative data. But this vast empirical and analytical work does not lead to the profound explanation of social determinants of phenomena revealed by this research effort. For example, the Author claims: “The comparison of attitudes between high school students' pre-military service and those who finished their military duty shows essential difference between the participants, relating to the core of the social-democratic discourse in Israel.” He grasps and diagnoses this essential difference, but hardly shows social mechanisms responsible for it, not even mentioning providing the reader with the in-depth, sociological explanation of this phenomenon.

It is a pity, because these are lost chances to put this dissertation on an entirely different academic level, far above the final result – pretty “conventional” presentation and analysis of, still interesting in itself, empirical research (in the form of social media survey) carried out by the Author. The main weight of this dissertation is the quantitative analysis of social attitudes of interviewees towards most crucial issues connected to the impact of the military service on the transformation of values and core concepts, what is done properly and persuasively. But it clearly lacks any in-deep theoretical grounding in a selected sociological “theory” – the discussion on sociological theories useful to explain social processes is almost absent in the whole text, there are hardly any references (apart from some Israeli studies of concrete “cases”) to “theoretical”, classical studies in the area of interest of the doctoral candidate. Still, the rest of the work done is good enough to defend itself as a doctoral dissertation. It formulates essential and interesting research questions, ultimately answers them, providing the sociological diagnosis of an interesting sociological problem, but does not properly “explain” it. Doctoral dissertation under review is based on a wide and well-selected bibliographic material, and presents numerous arguments supporting its crucial findings, meeting the demands of the empirical sociological inquiry.

Hence I am convinced that despite some visible shortages and flaws, the Ph. D. thesis, based on already published articles, presented by **Ronen Itsik** and entitled „**Citizens Soldier**” **Military - The Contribution to Socialization in the Late-Modern Era**”, contributes well enough to the sociological research and meets the statutory requirements formulated in Article 13 (1) of the Act of 14 March 2003 on Academic Degrees and Title and Degrees and Title in Art (Journal of Law, 2017, item 1789) in connection with Article 179 (1) of the Act of 3 July

2018, the provisions introducing the Act – Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Law, 2018, item 1669, od 2019, item 39, 534), presenting the doctoral student's general knowledge and the ability to conduct independently scientific work in the field of sociology, as well as providing original solution to the clearly formulated scientific problem. Therefore I propose to accept the thesis and admit Nir Barkan Nagr to further stages of the doctoral degree procedures.

Prof. Michałowski