Subversive *Phallus Politicos*: Aspects of Manliness and Criticism in Adi Nes' Images of Soldiers

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Adi Nes (born in 1966) is a leading Israeli artist in the field of photography, with international recognition. Nes' photography is staged as theatre, with each detail carefully planned during the production process, after comprehensive visual and conceptual research. His photography engages with manliness, political and social injustice, gender, alterity, ethnicity, and religion, and his images express a constant criticism, overt or covert. This article focuses on images from his soldier series produced between 1994 and 2000. Declaring that Israel is a very male-dominated society, Nes' images of the soldiers present them in different ways: sometimes as extremely masculine and even macho, in other photos as mischievous, like a bunch of boys going wild; and in yet other photos as projecting an innocence that elicits the viewer's compassion. The present study is a comparative one, employing the methodology of classical reception studies, and incorporating an analogy to the ancient Greek concept of the manly warrior, whose body was perceived as reflecting the political ideology of the polis. This concept is summarized in the term "Phallus Politicos" coined by John Jack Winkler, and connects between virility and politics in Ancient Greece. The argument presented here is that while the body and appearance of the warrior in Ancient Greece was consolidated with the Greek *polis* and its ideals, Nes' images of soldiers manifest a disruption between the soldier and the ideology he serves, and therefore convey subversive messages alongside compassion and emotional solidarity.

Keywords: Israeli art, Greek art, *kalokagathia*, manliness, politics, religion

Introduction

Adi Nes (born in 1966) is a leading Israeli artist in the field of photography. Since graduating in 1992 from the Department of Photography, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, he has exhibited numerous solo exhibitions, participated in group exhibitions around the world, and gained international recognition. His images have become iconic and have had a great impact upon the collective mind.

Nes' photography is staged as theatre, with each detail carefully planned during the production process, after comprehensive visual and conceptual research. The production includes selection of locations, casting of figures, construction of a set, lighting design, experimental composition, preparatory photographs, make-up, and complex directing. Hence, the final result is characterized by a theatrical nature, illustrating Roland Barthes' view point that the art of photography is the closest to that of theater (Barthes, 1980).

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Having declared that: "The main issue in my art and in my work is the issue of identity: male identity and Israeli identity" (Schalit, 2006), Nes engages with manliness, and with social, political, and gender issues, as well as with alterity, ethnicity, Judaism and religion, local and universal myths, and social injustice. His criticism is a constant—overt or covert.

This article focuses on images from Nes' soldier series produced between 1994 and 2000. Regarding manliness in Israeli culture, Nes has remarked:

> Israel is very male dominated.… You can feel it in the streets, you can feel it wherever you're going—the way people behave, the quality [in which] most of the men play—aggressive and masculine. In Israel, people from different social and economic backgrounds come together into one [purpose], to fight for the country. It is the men's objective and goals. (Sherman, 2002)

Nes' soldier images, however, present a variety of aspects: some photos present them as very masculine and even macho; while in other photos, they appear mischievous, like a bunch of boys going wild; and yet in other photos, the focus is on images of sleeping soldiers, seeming to project an innocence that elicits the viewer's compassion.

In order to delve into the meanings of these images and to expand the interpretation, this study employs the methodology of classical reception studies, while incorporating an analogy to the ancient Greek concept of the warrior. The argument presented here is that while the body and appearance of the ancient Greek warrior was consolidated with the Greek *polis* and its ideals, Nes' images of soldiers represent a disruption between the soldier and the ideology he serves, and therefore convey subversive messages alongside compassion and emotional solidarity with the Israeli warrior.

The Powerful Warrior

The profile of the Israeli warrior as perceived through the prism of Nes is represented here by three photos: an image of a soldier flexing his muscles (see Figure 1); a soldier climbing a pole, supported by his friends around him (see Figure 2); and a group of soldiers having fun together at the sea (see Figure 3). All three photos represent, in their different ways, the image of the Israeli soldier as powerful and militant. Their characteristics can be compared to those of the ancient Greek warriors, since the Greek polis in Antiquity was constantly engaged in military conflicts and the need to defend itself (Garlan, 1995; Farnell, 1977; Vernant, 1992). Such a comparison can reveal insights regarding the present situation in Israel. My question is whether and in what way the soldiers in Nes' photography are associated with and reflect the political orientation of the State of Israel.

The lone soldier (see Figure 1) is standing in front of an army tent against a background of desert sand. He wears military trousers, while his upper body is naked and gleams. His "dog tag" is around his neck and he wears a skullcap on his head. The soldier is flexing the muscles of his right arm and revealing his muscular chest. There is clearly a strong connection here between physical strength, virility, militarism, and religion. Those same aspects are also the main characteristics of sculptural images of Greek warriors, as follows.
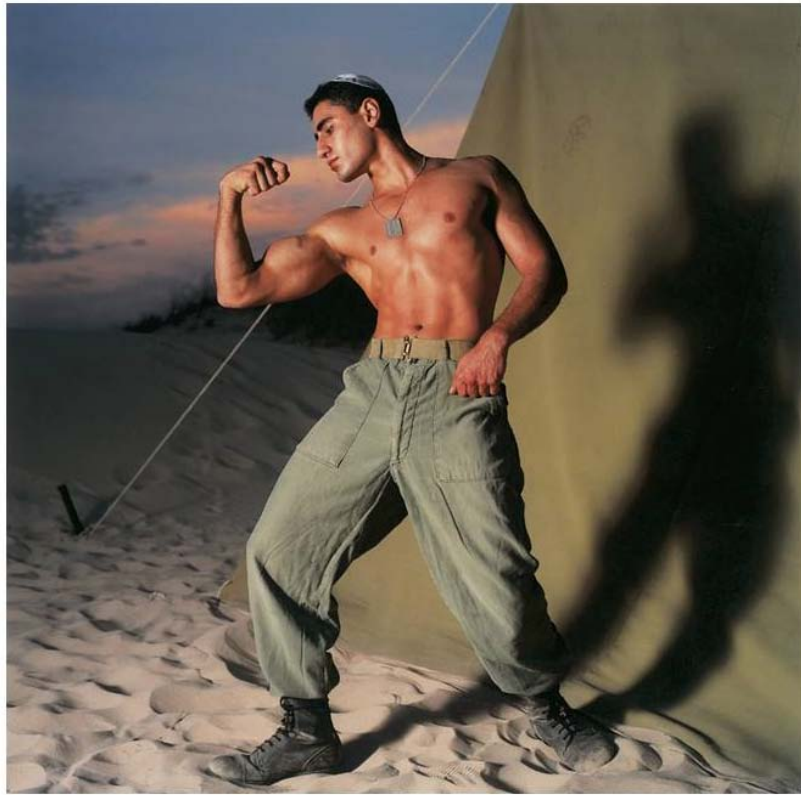
Figure 1. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1996. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Figure 2. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1998. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Figure 3. Adi Nes, Untitled, from the soldiers series, 1999. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Strength, virility and militarism are characteristics of the bronze warrior from Riace Marina (see Figure 4) dated to the fifth century BCE. This image shares similar features to those of Nes' soldier: a gleaming naked body, demonstration of muscles, and a ribbon around his head, which symbolizes victory in an athletic competition as well as in combat. This figure might well illustrate Hesiod's heroic, rough, and invulnerable Bronze Men, dedicated to battle (Hesiod, 1999). The bronze body of this image might indeed be perceived as a metaphor of the warrior's mighty body and soul (Stewart, 1997). An archetypical image embodying the concept of the equilibrium between body and soul is that of the *Doryphoros* by Polykleitus (see Figure 5), dated to the 5th century BCE, which was originally cast in bronze, and later in numerous marble copies (Stewart, 1990). The *Doryphoros* represents an athlete/warrior, the defender of the homeland, whose body is beautiful because of its usefulness to the *polis*. The concept of "the beautiful and the good" is defined by the term *kalokagathia* that connects between physical beauty (*kalos*) and spiritual beauty (*agathos*). He who is considered as possessing *agathos* is characterized by features, such as excellence (*arete*), bravery (*andreia*), modesty (*aidos*), self-knowledge and moderation (*sophrosyne*), and self-control (*enkrateia*). These were the traits required of the warrior on the battlefield, and bestowed upon him the quality of being good and, hence, beautiful (Dawson, 1996). Thus, the useful is the beautiful, a fundamental concept in Greek thought; and, hence, "beauty" actually served the Greek political mechanism (Plato, 1963).

Figure 4. Warrior from Riace Marina, bronze, 1.98m, 460-440 BC, Museo Nazionale a Reggio di Calabria.
Author: Luca Galli from Torino, Italy. Public Domain
(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Riace_bronzes_-_Statue_A_-_National_Archaeological_Museum_of_Mag
na_Graecia_in_Reggio_Calabria_-_Italy_-_14_Aug._2014.jpg)

Figure 5. Doryphoros, marble, Roman copy to an original from the 5th century BC, 2.00m, Archeological Museum, Naples   Public Domain   (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Doryphoros_MAN_Napoli_Inv6011-2.jpg)

Reflecting this concept, the muscles of the Greek warrior will never be overstated, unlike those of bodybuilders, or displayed for the sake of exposure alone (see Figure 6). However, strength and bravery underwent transformation to cruelty on the battlefield, with no mercy shown to the enemy. Metallic metaphors such as bronze and iron indicated the belligerence and uncompromising nature of the Homeric warriors, who fought each other ruthlessly and brutally (Vernant, 1992; Blundell, 1989; Hesiod, 1999).[1] Manliness in Ancient Greece was indeed associated with fighting, as expressed in the Iliad, in which Poseidon warns that any who might seek to avoid battle will be abandoned and fed to the dogs (Dawson, 1996; Homer, 1924-1925). Taking revenge upon the enemy was considered as justified and sweet, and the enemy's defeat as joyous and delightful (Dover, 1974; Homer, 1924-1925; Hesiod, 1999; Xenophon, 1994; Plato, 1975; Thucidides, 1972).

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[1] See also Paris fighting Menelaus, Homer (1924-1925), Lines 3.340-382; the Achaian troops fighting the Trojans, Homer, 1924-1925, Lines 4.422-544; Diomedes and the Achaians fighting the Trojans, Homer, 19254-1925, Lines 5.1-36, 37-84, 85-165; Diomedes and Aeneas, Homer, 1924-1925, Lines 5.166-351; Diomedes fighting Ares himself, Homer, 1924-1925, Lines 5.846-861; Hektor and Aias, Homer, 1924-1925, Lines 7.206-312; Achilles and Hektor, Homer, 1924-1925, Line 22.

The greatest death was that on the battlefield for the sake of the *polis*, and such a death bestowed imperishable glory (*kleos aphthiton*). Death in war for the State was considered as "beautiful death" (*kalos thanatos*), which is noble and lofty, glorious and honorable (*agathos aner*) (Stewart, 1997; 1990; Loraux, 1997; Vernant, 1992; Homer, 1924-1925).

Figure 6. 2012 Hong Kong Bodybuilding Championships & 3rd South China Invitational Championships. Author: istolethetv from Hong Kong, China
Public Domain   (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arms_race_(7452180634).jpg)

The concept of dedicating oneself to the State on the battlefield is deeply rooted in legends regarding the establishment of the State of Israel. Perhaps the best known is the life story of the Jewish-Russian socialist-Zionist leader and pioneer Joseph Trumpeldor, who fought both ideologically and physically for the establishment of the State of Israel, despite having previously lost his left arm in battle in the Russian army. Trumpeldor's famous last words: "It's good to die for our land", epitomize his worldview, and accord with the Greek concept of *kalos thanatos*—"beautiful death".[2]

While Nes' soldier demonstrates his masculinity by flexing his muscles, the masculinity of the ancient sculptures is manifested more literally, by the exposed phallus. This seems to reflect the expression *phallus politicos* coined by John Jack Winkler, which connects between virility and politics in Ancient Greece. As defined by Winkler, the anatomy of the male body was coded by the Greeks with social messages of class and status. The body of the Athenian citizen was considered in the Greek democracy as sturdy and autonomic against every kind of aggression and violation of honor. Thus, male anatomy was perceived as a macrocosm of the body politic, and was associated with the political power of the *polis*. The term *phallos politikos* manifested the commitment of the male Athenian citizen to the *polis*, and his involvement and contribution to its defense and prosperity (Winkler, 1990).

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[2] Shulamit Lakov (1972), biographer of Trumpeldor, has noted that although it is uncertain that he said those exact words on his deathbed, he did say on several occasions words in the spirit of a "beautiful death", and death for the sake of the State (pp. 241, 242).

An additional aspect of my comparison relates to the relationship between the militaristic character of the warrior and religion, since in Antiquity, there was no separation between religion and the State. Settlement and occupation of a land in the ancient Greek world was determined at the direction of a religious authority, the oracle at Delphi, who advised the settlers following the Pythia's divine inspiration. The founder of a colony (*oikist*) would receive authorization from Apollo's oracle to establish a colony, while myths justified and validated the settlement, and thus the colony became a "promised land", similar to the biblical notion in the Old Testament. Colonization and expulsion of the local inhabitants in Ancient Greece were justified and permitted, since the land was considered to have been given by the god Apollo.[3]

An artistic realization of the relationship between religion and colonization is reflected in the statue of the active warrior on the east pediment of the Temple of Aphaia at Aegina (see Figure 7), which is part of a scene presenting the Trojan War (Boardman, 1996; Roberson, 1981; Stewart, 1990). This warrior is naked except for the helmet on his head, and his gesture is aggressive and violent, contrasting the typical archaic smile on his face. This smile suggests his *kleos*—the glory of the warrior, his satisfaction at winning in combat, and his imperishable fame—*kleos aphthiton* (Vernant, 1992; Sevilla-Sadeh, 2019).[4] The battle is taking place in the presence of the goddess Athena, who is located in the center of the gable as the dominant authority. This image can be compared visually to Nes' muscular soldier, who wears a skullcap on his head, and whose depiction raises another essential aspect: the claim to the right to settle in a land according to religious beliefs.

Nes' soldier suggests here the yearning of religious Zionism to appropriate the Land of the Bible, and to settle throughout the entire area that is considered by them as "Greater Israel", or the biblical Promised Land. This demand is based on the right of religious validity; or, in another words, a divine right. Thus, the expulsion of the local Arab inhabitants from the biblical lands is seen as permissible and legitimate (Shapira, 2007). Very similar to the ancient pagan concept of the land as a "gift" from the god to the settlers, the settlement of the land of the Bible is considered by the religious Zionists as sacred and as the fulfillment of a divine purpose (Eldar & Zertal, 2004; Naor, 2001). In a manner similar to that of paganism, the concept of Greater Israel, inspired by Rabbi Kook's utopian messianic thought, does not separate between the religious and the political aspects (Eldar & Zertal, 2004). Hence, Nes' image of the soldier flexing his muscles, with his bare chest and a skullcap on his head, offers an equivalency to the warrior from Aegina. However, Nes' image, in contrast, also bears a subversive criticism regarding the role of religion in militaristic determinations and the expropriation of a land.

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[3] See Malkin (1987); Abraham, Gen, Lines 15.7, 18, 17. 8.
[4] On the Kouros type and its significance, see Boardman (1996); Stewart (1990; 1997); Richter (1960/1970); Ridgway (1977); Hurwit (1985); and Tanner (2006).

Figure 7. Warriors from Aegina temple, East pendiment. Plaster cast in Pushkin Museum after original in Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich Credit: Photo Wikipedia/Shakko. Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Warriors_from_East_pediment_of_the_temple_of_Aphaia_(casting_in_Pus hkin_museum_after_Munich_original)_by_shakko_01.jpg)

Another association with the expropriation of land arises in a photo presenting a group of soldiers in the middle of an arid landscape supporting their friend who is climbing a pole (see Figure 2). The situation brings to mind the pioneering settlement activity during which a pole with a flag is inserted in the ground to symbolize possession. The pole might also suggest phallic connotations. The inspiration for this photo came from a famous photo titled "The Ink Flag" (see Figure 8) by Micha Perry (1923-1998), a commander during the War of Independence (Felix, 2018). The photo shows soldiers waving an Israeli flag, created hastily in white fabric and ink in Umm al-Rashrash, which was to become the city of Eilat. The waving of the ink flag became engraved into the collective memory as the symbol of the end of the War of Independence and the Israeli victory.

The main difference between the historic photograph and the work by Adi Nes is that of the absence of the flag in Nes' photo. Nes himself has noted that he deliberately omitted elements that seemed to him unnecessary, while affirming the phallic connotation of the pole (Presser, 2012). This lack of need for a flag, as contended by the artist, seems to manifest the lack of justification for expropriating a place. Thus, the pole is left as an empty phallic symbol serving the politics of occupation.[5]

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[5] This view is also shared by Billy Moscona-Lerman (2000).

Figure 8. The ink-drawn national flag of Israel flies at Um Rashrash (now Eilat) across the Gulf of Aqaba on the northern tip of the Red Sea, 10 March 1949, photo by Micha Perry. Attribution: Micha Perry/IDF Spokesperson's Unit/CC BY-SA 3.0   Public Domain

(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raising_the_Ink_Flag_at_Umm_Rashrash_(Eilat).jpg)

Masculinity and power are main characteristics in a photo portraying a group of soldiers enjoying themselves in the sea (see Figure 3). The frontal soldier waves his gun while embracing his comrade, who also flexes his musclar arm. The soldiers are in high spirits, elated, and represent the Israeli concept of the beautiful youth who willingly serves the State. Indeed, this photo followed the cover photo in *Life* magazine by Yossi Ben Hanan, July 10th 1967,[6] presenting an Israeli soldier holding a Kalashnikov gun, cooling himself off in the Suez Canal as a symbol of the Israeli victory in the Six Day War (Moscona-Lerman, 2000; Presser, 2012). The photo by Nes accentuates the powerful image of the Israeli soldier, and in its equivalence to the *Life* cover photo, seemingly asks—are the soldiers of the 21st century still "good and beautiful" like the soldiers of the sixties, defenders of the new-born State? Nes himself notes that the water is black and the sky is dark and not bright blue; and that the water was especially cold, like ice, since the photo was taken in a natural pool in the *Golan Heights* (Presser, 2012). These features might be perceived as symbolical of the present-day situation. This

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[6]   Israeli   Soldier   Cools   off   in   the   Suez   Canal,   1967,   photo   by   Yossi   Ben   Hanan https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%91%D7%A5:Benhanan.jpg.

photo, thus, hides a subversive message regarding the current function, goals, and activity of the Israeli soldiers.

The Israel Defense Force (IDF) has been harshly criticized during at least the last two decades for becoming an occupying and oppressive army rather than an army of defense. The change took place from an army established to defend the new-born State from its enemies that sought to obliterate it, to an army that, as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin puts it: "must assign an entire company to enable children to go to a flute class". Such change occurred as a consequence of the need to maintain order and quiet in the occupied territories, to protect the settlements in the heart of the West Bank, and to protect the occupation itself. Indeed, the goal of all IDF operations in recent decades—the operations against the First and Second Intifada and the recent operations in the Gaza Strip—has been to preserve the occupation, and the IDF no longer deals with soldiers in standard armies, but instead confronts civilians. Occupation by its very nature corrupts, and therefore every army will cease to some extent to be "moral" under such conditions (Weitz, 2015). This has been attested to by an anonymous soldier whose task was to detain Palestinians at the checkpoint. He talks about the poor, elderly, weak farm workers he was forced to expel from their own soil, although he knew that their claim to remain and to work was a just one. The aim of this conduct of occupation is to make the settlement area "sterile", in military jargon, so that the Palestinians will feel helpless. The speaker concludes his remarks by saying:

> I am the executor of this injustice. I'm the one who hinders people, who drives them away, who prevents employment; who takes his time. This is me. Nice to meet you […] I am in fact supporting and sustaining something that I believe is wrong. (Ha'aretz, 2014)

A report published by the Breaking the Silence organization in 2015 indicates that the Open-Fire Regulations permit shooting at civilians in an IDF area, or at those who appear to be suspect. These regulations have led to the injury of civilians without any evidence that they were terrorists. An armored soldier testified that after indiscriminately firing at anything—"the good and the bad get a bit confused and the morals get a bit lost […]" (Cohen, 2015).[7]

It must be stated, however, in all fairness, that the Breaking the Silence organization has been sharply criticized for providing untrustworthy testimony. This criticism was expressed by Ben-Dror Yemini (2015), who contended:

> There are exceptions. The IDF isn't perfect. Breaking the Silence looks for the exceptions, inflates them, blurs the background and creates a portrait of an army that commits crimes non-stop. In every comparison between the behavior of the IDF and the behavior of other armies in similar clashes, it has been revealed that the IDF is responsible for far fewer civilian casualties than all other armies. They're not perfect, but they're much more careful and far more moral.

Yemini (2015) further contended:

> The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff has stated that the US army takes lessons from the IDF on how to avoid civilian casualties. He knows what he's talking about. But members of the anti-Israel campaign, such as Breaking the Silence, present a distorted picture with only kernels of truth.

In order to illustrate his claims, Yemini (2015) recounted how the organization intentionally exaggerates its reports:

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[7] Breaking the Silence is an organization of veterans who collect testimonies from soldiers, including soldiers who had served in the territories following the outbreak of the second intifada. The aim of the organization is to raise awareness of the daily reality in the occupied territories and to create a public discourse on the moral price of military control over the civilian population in order to bring an end to the occupation. For reports on the Breaking the Silence organization, see https://www.shovrimshtika.org/testimonies/database.

> Over a decade ago, at the height of the intifada, shots were fired from a certain neighborhood towards a settlement. The IDF returned fire in the direction of the original shots. No one was killed, and there was certainly no mass killing. Nothing. But Breaking the Silence manipulated it brilliantly. They took an event with no injuries, an event that takes place on every battlefield, and created the impression that the IDF, as a matter of routine, carries out mass killings of civilians.

The Israel Defense Force (IDF) is considered by the head of the State as a highly moral army, as expressed by Chief of Staff General Gadi Eizenkot: "Since its establishment, the IDF has sanctified important values, including human dignity and the purity of arms. These values are based on a long-standing Jewish heritage" (Oren, 2016).

As a counter-response to the organization Breaking the Silence, the organization My Truth was founded. The founders of My Truth felt that the reports by Breaking the Silence present the activities of IDF soldiers in a distorted manner, devoid of context and one-sided in an extreme manner. Therefore, My Truth's stated goal is to provide information about IDF activity by presenting the reality in which it operates, and the moral dilemmas faced by IDF soldiers (Katzman, n.d.). One of the organization's founders, Capt. Matan Katzman, has declared:

> There is one policy in the IDF and it is clear to every soldier... The policy is to act in the most humane manner in order to protect the lives of innocent Palestinians. Any statement that I or any other soldier behaves differently is a fake. It just isn't true.

Katzman also noted: "Behind every Israeli soldier there is a human being, a person who wants to defend his own country, even though he recognizes the complexity of the war" (Mako, 2015).

The criticism of the conduct of the IDF in the occupied territories culminated in one news program in which the newscaster expressed her opinion in a manner that appeared to many as extreme and rude. In reference to a report regarding fighters who abused Palestinians, the newscaster Oshrat Kotler said: "They send the children to the army, to the territories, and they return like beasts. This is the result of the occupation". This statement drew sharp criticism from a wide public, which caused Kotler to react angrily, saying:

> I want to emphasize that you, my children, and their friends, have all been combat fighters in the territories for many years, my friends too. My criticism was directed only at those soldiers whose control over the Palestinians in the territories led them to harm innocents. I will only add that anyone who really listened to my words and did not rush to comment on me online at the beginning of the program, understood that I was in favor of easing the punishment of the accused soldiers, since it was we who sent them to this impossible reality. Okay?! I will continue to express my opinion about this plan. You will not succeed to silence me! (Boker, 2019)[8]

In a following program, Kotler emphasized again, with tears in her eyes, that the IDF soldiers should not be blamed, since their activity is a result of the occupation, and the responsibility is that of the government and the decision-makers alone.[9]

According to Mordechai Kremnitzer and Nadav Berman Shifman (2018), what makes the IDF moral is its readiness to be criticized; thus, the mere claim that the IDF is supposed to be "above all criticism" in itself undermines its morality. Kremnitzer and Shifman (2018) pointed out with concern the trend to remove the IDF from the circle of criticism through legislation in the Israeli parliament. In order to validate their point, they refer to the criticism of human flaws in the ancient sources and in Jewish tradition (Kremnitzer & Shifman, 2018).

This atmosphere attests as a whole to the fact that there exists awareness and criticism of the army's conduct and the manner in which the soldiers operate. Accordingly, the core of the problem is certainly not the army and the soldiers; but, rather the policy that has sent them to deal with such a reality.

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8 See the excerpts from the TV show: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxsDeqEZnSs.
9 See program: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-86Uuy5l9Y.

In conclusion, the three discussed images by Nes ostensibly present militarism composed of virility and religion, while actually presenting subversive meanings.

Brotherhood and Innocence

A very unique, emotional, and touching aspect in the photo presenting soldiers entertaining themselves at the sea (see Figure 3) is the manifestation of the spirit of brotherhood among warriors. This is reflected also in a photo presenting soldiers entertaining themselves partly out of uniform while one of them does a somersault in the air (see Figure 9). The soldier jumps from a trampoline on the right side of the frame on to mattresses that another soldier is concealing on the left. The picture presents a kind of fictional circus in which all the characters are soldiers and the military tent is like a circus tent. As told by the artist, the inspiration for this photograph was derived from an experience he had undergone during his army service: on special occasions, such as receiving a new rank, a ceremony—the "Zubur"—would be held in which all the soldiers jumped on the recipient and "beat" him.[10] The violence connected with such initiation practices finds a parallel in the initiation rites of the ancient world, during which male youths underwent mortification of the flesh. Well-known is the old Spartan cult of Artemis Orthia that was famous for its ritual flagellation (*diamastigosis*) at the altar (Bonnechere, 1993; Bowden, 2010; Elsner, 2010). Indeed, the army is considered a melting pot and a form of initiation, crossing the threshold from youth to manhood.

Figure 9. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1994. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

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[10] This was told to me by the artist.

Another photo presents warriors at rest in a tent (see Figure 10). The remains of a cake and one burning candle on the table may indicate a gloomy birthday party. However, the main aspect is the liberated atmosphere in which the soldiers are partly out of uniform and interacting freely as friends. In this situation, one can discern the different characters of the participants: socializing and friendly versus isolated.

Figure 10. Adi Nes, Untitled, 2000. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Those two photos emphasize the human nature of the soldiers, and the fact that, after all, in the flower of their youth they are forced to defend the State and become engaged in violent acts.

Brotherhood among warriors is a very special kind of friendship. Comradeship is defined as: "the basis of all army teams. It means looking after each other, understanding that more can be achieved by working together as a team than as individuals" (Kasher, 2014, p. 380). In the IDF Code of Ethics, comradeship is defined as:

> The solidarity of the fighters, their constant devotion to each other, their willingness to provide proper assistance, to even endanger their lives in order to extricate themselves and others; and by their actions to maintain and strengthen the cohesion of their unit, with the full cooperation of the units. (Kasher, 2014, p. 382)

As explained by Asa Kasher (2014), looking after each other is purposeful, in order: 1. to enable the military activity of an entire team, which depends on constant coordination with each soldier; 2. to help a soldier in a team who needs help in the face of any difficulties, so that he can fulfill his role as part of the team's military activity; and 3. to sustain the coherence of the unity. Kasher (2014) explained that brotherhood among warriors must be rational and not emotional, and that the duty of the soldier to show devotion to his friends must not be related to his feelings towards them. Therefore, a soldier must help another soldier who needs his help, whether he loves him personally, dislikes him, or bears a grudge against him for some reason. A soldier must also come to the aid of and risk his own life for another soldier even if he does not know him at all (Kasher, 2014); whereas a civilian is morally obligated to help a person in danger, but is not obligated to risk his life (Kasher, 2014). Contrary to the claim that what a person does because he is obligated to do does not deserve special mention, Kasher (2014) noted that this is a mistake, for not every person possesses the mental strength

necessary to save another person. A very important conclusion by Kasher (2014) is that without the brotherhood of warriors there is no possibility of fighting, and without fighting, victory cannot be achieved.

Figure 11. Sosias Painter, Achilles tending Patroclus wounded by an arrow, Tondo of an Attic red-figure kylix, ca. 500 BC. From Vulci, Altes Museum, Berlin Author: Miguel Hermoso Cuesta. Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aquiles_y_Patroclo_Berl%C3%ADn_02.JPG)

A famous ancient literary scene, pertaining to brotherhood, is that of Achilles, who mourns his best friend Patroclus. The friendship and brotherhood between the two heroes is represented on a cup by the Sosias painter dated to the fifth century BCE (see Figure 11). However, the painter gave himself the freedom to portray Achilles as seemingly tending to the wounded Patroclus, although this episode is absent from the Iliad, and Achilles' best friend was actually killed in the battle against the Trojan hero, Hector. The cup painting shows Achilles putting a bandage on his friend's arm, while the latter turns his head to the side with his mouth open—an expression that symbolizing great pain. The phallic aspect in this painting is pronounced through the exposure of Patroclus' phallus, even though he is actually dressed in armor. This may refer to the homoerotic aspect of the brotherhood of warriors that underlies the Greek *polis*. The defeat of the Tyranny at the end of the sixth century BCE, the long bloody struggle against the Persian enemy, and the constant colonization events in Archaic and Classical Greece—were all events that generated a culture in which manliness was at its core. This atmosphere led to the formation of relationships between men and boys, in which a man (*eromenos*) would mentor a boy (*erastes*), and in fact taught him such habits of manliness as hunting, fighting, social drinking of wine, etc. Those relationships became usually erotic, thus paederastic, and this is presented in numerous vase paintings from the Archaic and Classical periods.[11]

In equivalence to this mythic and artistic brotherhood is a photo by Nes presenting a soldier treating his friend (see Figure 12), in which is not clear whether the latter is alive or dead. Interestingly, the instrument held by the soldier is actually a brush, while the "remedy" is watercolor, and he is ostensibly painting the wound

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[11] On pederasty in Ancient Greece, see Dover (1989), Hubbard (2003), Bryant (1996), and Schnapp (1989).

onto his friend's chest (Levite-Harten, 2007). This representation seems to equate that of the sweetening of Patroclus' fate by the Greek painter as discussed above, and thus the wounded soldier is ostensibly both alive and dead. This accords with Roland Barthes' contention that putting on make-up means marking oneself as a simultaneously living and dead body; while photography presents the living face as dead (Barthes, 1980).
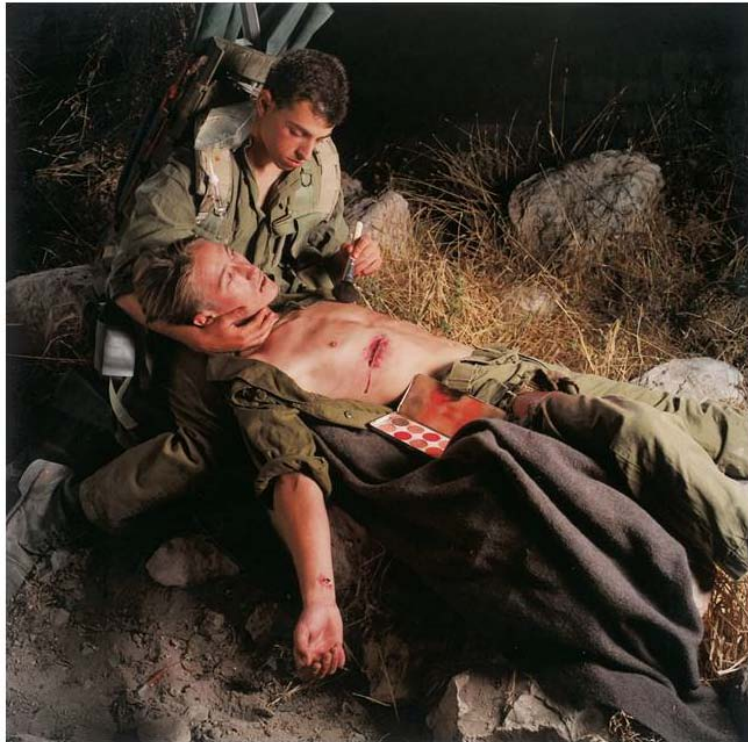

Figure 12. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1995. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Another common motif in both the ancient Greek vase painting and the photograph by Nes is the bare chest of the wounded soldier as an expression of virility, in equivalence to the phallic character of the Greek painting.

The wounded soldier in Nes' photograph also bears a certain resemblance to images of Christ, with his arms wide spread horizontally, a wound to his wrist as the stigmata of Christ, and a wound in his chest from the Roman soldier's spear. This suggests another aspect dominant in Nes' work—the victimhood of the soldiers.

This aspect is dominant in a corpus of works presenting soldiers asleep during a bus ride. The phallic connotation is combined with victimhood in a photo showing a soldier gripping his rifle muzzle in a pose perhaps connoting masturbation (see Figure 13). The close-up of this soldier, and of the two soldiers sleeping in the seat behind him, is very intimate, and thus enhances the sense of innocence of these characters. This intimacy and the hint of eroticism suggest their absence in the life of a soldier, and thus elicit compassion for the warriors who spend their youth in battle instead of joy.

In another photo, it shows soldiers who are sleeping on a bus (see Figure 14), and the rifle-stock of one of them dominates the right foreground. The oblique composition is focused on the sleeping soldiers, and creates a sense of intimacy that contrasts the rifle in front and its connotations, and the fact that the soldiers are now

being led to an unknown future. Their sleep offers an expression of forgetfulness and trust in the institutional system that has sent them on their mission. The next photo focuses on a sole image of a sleeping soldier (see Figure 15) and can be compared to the marble image known as the "Blond Boy" dated to ca. 480 BC (see Figure 16), as well as to the head of the Diadumenos dated to ca. 430 BC (see Figure 17). The common characteristic of the three images is the expression of innocence on their face. That of the Greek images stems from the lowering of the gaze in order to express moderation and subordination to an authority. These two youths are actually *eromenoi* (beloved) who are subjugated to their *erastei* (lovers). Their subordination reflects the relationships typical in the Greek *polis* between adult male citizens, and boys, women, and slaves, and thus functions as a political symbolism. Nes' sleeping soldier symbolizes his subordination to the authorities that have sent him on his mission, and hence it too is a political metaphor.

Figure 13. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1999. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Figure 14. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1999. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Figure 15. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1999. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Figure 16. So-called "Blond Kouros" head, fragment from the statue of a youth, Marble with traces of brown-blond painting on the hair, ca. 490–480 BC. Found on the Acropolis. Acropolis Museum in Athens, 689. H. 25 cm. Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:013MA_Blonde_boy.jpg)

Figure 17. Head of the Diadumenos, Roman Copy, marble, the original is from ca. 430 BC, 1.86 m, National Archaeological Museum of Athens Author: Benjamín Núñez González. Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diad%C3%BAmeno,_Atenas,_Grecia,_2019_11.jpg)

Figure 18. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1996. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

Figure 19. Adi Nes, Untitled, 1994. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY & the artist

The loyalty of the soldiers to these authorities is also expressed in two other photos showing soldiers playing cheerfully and innocently: One walks on a thin rope like a circus acrobat (see Figure 18), and the other one, in sloppy uniform, does a handstand (see Figure 19). The soldiers are portrayed symbolically as innocent children who are willing to do anything demanded from them by the State they serve. Indeed, the loyalty of the soldiers is total. The army serves the State, and therefore receives its instructions and orders from the highest authorities. However, as Israeli statesman, Avraham Burg, has pointed out, many of these are fundamentally corrupt. As also noted by Burg (2016), the Israeli army serves among others the goals of settler Zionism, which oppresses the non-Jewish inhabitants of the country. Consequently, the IDF soldiers are in fact victims of the system that they serve. An explicit expression of this was given by the singer and leftist activist Achinoam Nini, who declared that IDF soldiers are the first victims of the failures of Israel's leaders (Ben Nun, 2015). With regard to the work of Adi Nes, journalist Billy Moscona-Lerman has noted that his approach towards the soldiers he photographed is not angry, political or critical, but quite the contrary. The way he gazes at them is with compassion. He holds great compassion for youth and for the innocence that enables exploitation (Moscona-Lerman, 2012). Roland Barthes contends that photography is a kind of sublimation of the photographed, making the subject immortal (Barthes, 1980). Thus, the compassionate gaze of Nes presents a kind of sublimation of the image of the soldier, making him immortal.

Conclusions

The soldier images by Adi Nes reflect first and foremost his perception of manliness as dominating the Israeli milieu. The manly image of the soldier is manifested in the first set of photographs discussed. This image is compared here to the muscular ancient Greek bronze images, in which the body reflects virility and the principle of the Good and the Beautiful (*kalokagathia*). The physical and spiritual strength represented by Nes' images find a parallel in the political strength and the ideology of the Greek *polis*, as conveyed by the term *phallus politicos*. Other comparable concepts between the ancient Greek and the Israeli cultures are those of the Beautiful Death, and the relationship between religion and colonization. In light of those comparisons, the image of the soldier with his bare chest and skullcap on his head raises questions regarding the relationship between religion and occupation, and thus conveys a subversive significance.

Two other subversive images belonging to this group are those of the soldiers lifting a pole without a flag, and the soldiers enjoying themselves in the water. These photos raise questions regarding the current role of the army, and are connected to the criticism of the IDF, which has been widespread in the last 20 years. The consensus view that links between the critics and their opponents is that the IDF operates according to a policy that necessarily forces the soldiers to contend with an impossible reality. Adi Nes' photographs offer a subversive message in this regard.

Another category of his soldier photos focuses on brotherhood and friendship among soldiers. These photos emphasize the humanist aspect of the young soldiers, reaching a climax in the image of a soldier who is tending to the wounds of his friend. The humanist connotation of this image opens the way to another dominant aspect in Nes' soldier images—that of victimhood. This is manifested in a series of photos portraying sleeping soldiers. The motifs of intimacy and eroticism that dominate these photos tend to elicit compassion and sorrow by the viewer for these young men who are forced to fight instead of enjoying their life. Sleep confers upon the soldiers innocence; and, in comparison to images of Classical Greek youth who are subjugated to the adult male citizens in the *polis*, the IDF soldiers are subjugated to the political system that has sent them to fight. In this

respect, Nes' point of view is full of empathy and compassion; and he thereby separates the soldier from the political system that subjugates him, while the sleep symbolizes this separation. This separation is the main difference between the Israeli soldier and the ancient Greek hero whose body is consolidated with the ideology that sent him into battle, and thus defines him as *phallos politicos*. In contrast, the soldier images created by Nes, despite their virile characteristics, are portrayed by the artist as detached from the ideology that has sent them for confrontations.

To conclude, the images of soldiers by Adi Nes, who seem virile and even macho at first glance, are on a deeper level revealed as detached from the ideology they serve and, as a consequence, these images are subversive.

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