

Enabling militarism? The inclusion of soldiers with disabilities in the Israeli military

Introduction

On 22nd April 2015, Corporal Dan Korkovsky acted as a torchbearer in Israel's annual Independence Day ceremony commemorating the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.¹ Each year several Israeli citizens are chosen as torchbearers in the ceremony in recognition of their contribution to society. Like many soldiers who had come before him, Korkovsky was recognised specifically for his military contribution; but he was also distinguished from other soldiers by virtue of his disability. Korkovsky is autistic, meaning that his military role was unlike that of most other recruits. He conducted his military service in Unit 9900, a special intelligence unit in the IDF which specifically draws on autistic soldiers to complete demanding tasks such as analysing satellite imagery. This recruitment was made possible by *Ro'im Rachok* ("Looking Afar"), a special programme which recruits autistic soldiers for this purpose.

The example of *Ro'im Rachok*, along with other initiatives in the Israeli military, presents a particular source of interest for the fields of critical military studies (CMS) and critical disability studies (CDS). It complicates existing scholarship in CMS about the significance of discourses of soldier fitness. Meanwhile, it also poses questions to CDS concerning the ways in which people with disabilities are included or excluded from dominant social formations. Scholars in both fields have drawn on the work of Jasbir Puar (2007) in describing and elaborating the relevance of "homonationalism" to contemporary warfare. For Puar, contemporary discourses of sexuality have enabled Western societies to selectively discipline and include certain queer bodies as loyal, while simultaneously vilifying foreign or deviant queers as monstrous and threatening. CDS has observed a similar move in relation to disabled bodies in the form of disability nationalism. Indeed, Puar's most recent work, *The Right to Maim* (2017), seeks to integrate and advance the insights of CDS into her analysis, using Israel/Palestine as the principal empirical lens. CMS, meanwhile, has certainly analysed the role of

¹ Palestinians remember this day as part of *al-Nakba* ("the catastrophe") in which over 700,000 Palestinians were forced to leave their homes in order to make way for the new Jewish State, a process of dispossession which continues to this day.

homonationalism in the reproduction of military power (Manchanda 2015; Bulmer 2013), but it has not yet devoted sustained attention to parallel or intersecting processes in relation to disability (with the notable exception of Howell 2018). In this paper, I aim to bring these two fields of scholarship together in order to analyse the Israeli case, but also to use this case to reflect back on them.

Specifically, in what follows, I make two central claims about the implications of the inclusion of disabled soldiers in the Israeli military. First, engaging with CMS, I argue that the participation of people with disabilities in militarism is limited *neither* to that of subjects wounded in war *nor* to that of “sub-standard manpower” (Marble 2012b). Instead, such subjects can make contributions to militarism in their specific capacities as people with disabilities in ways which complicate existing accounts of soldier fitness. Second, engaging with CDS, I argue that the emancipatory potentialities associated with alternative “crip” subjectivities remain circumscribed by the structural conditions imposed not only by neoliberalism, but also by militarism and (settler) colonialism. I begin by addressing existing scholarship in both CDS and CMS, suggesting how an improved dialogue might help rethink notions of military fitness and the geopolitics of disability. I then situate this scholarship in the context of the Israeli case. This is followed by a detailed analysis of two programmes organised by the Israeli military for the inclusion of disabled troops.

Between “compulsory able-bodiedness” and “crip-nationalism”

Critical disability studies: crippin’ the international?

CDS developed from the existing field of disability studies in order to radicalise the insights gained from analysing society from the perspective of those with disabilities. One of the major achievements of disability studies had been to critique the “bio-medical” model of disability, which interpreted disability as a product of individual medical defects. Instead, scholars proposed the “social model”, which understood disability as a product of socially constructed impediments preventing people with disabilities from living like able-bodied people (Barnes 2012). CDS evolved as a further reaction to the social model, which was criticised for the assumption that able-bodiedness was the only desirable or normal way to live and for seemingly condemning people with disabilities to being passive objects of oppression rather than subjects who might discover ways of living differently (Erevelles 2011, 33–

38; Kafer 2013, 7–8; Mitchell and Snyder 2015, 35–62; Shildrick 2009, esp. 4–7, 2012). Crucial to CDS was a new approach to the social model’s distinction between “impairment” (the physical conditions of the body) and “disability” (the socio-cultural significance attached to those physical conditions). Just as queer theory had criticised the distinction between sex and gender as an attempt to naturalise a pre-discursive male/female opposition (Butler 1990), so CDS has argued that disability and impairment are not so easily separable and that the ability/impairment binary should be similarly de-naturalised. Indeed, the parallels and intersections with queer theory were crucial in making these arguments, opening the possibility for what has been dubbed “crip theory” (McRuer 2006; Kafer 2013). These scholars have called for the dismantling of “compulsory able-bodiedness” (McRuer 2006, 1–33) and for an exploration of the radical potential of crip alternatives (e.g. Kafer 2013; McRuer 2006, 33–76; Mitchell and Snyder 2015, 180–222; Shildrick 2009, 125–145).

The relevance of this scholarship to IR becomes clearest when the geopolitical implications of disability are explored. Drawing on post-colonial thought, critical race theory, and indigenous/settler colonial studies, scholars have analysed the intersections between ableism, racism, and colonialism. Initially this involved showing how racialized and colonial populations have been attacked through eugenic discourses and practices associating racial purity with able-bodiedness (Mitchell and Snyder 2003). In a further move, scholars have also traced both the material and representational practices through which bodies are (differentially and unevenly) produced and inscribed as disabled through racialised, gendered, colonial and economic violence (Connell 2011; Erevelles 2011, esp. 121–146; Grech 2015; Meekosha 2011; Soldatic 2015).

Yet CDS also observed the ways in which liberal discourses of “inclusion” have selectively sought to discipline and co-opt rights-based disability campaigning. Echoing Puar’s earlier work on homonationalism (2007), scholars noted how neoliberal and exceptionalist discourses of “disability nationalism” (McRuer 2010) sought to include a limited number of disabled bodies in order to obscure and legitimate economic injustice and imperial violence. These strategies have taken differing forms. On the one hand, states pursue an “able-nationalist” approach in which they render themselves legitimate by “enabling” certain disabled bodies through the distribution of medical treatment,

welfare, humanitarian aid, and/or accessibility adjustments (Mitchell and Snyder 2015, 35–62). This brings a limited number of disabled subjects into the bounds of citizenship, the labour market, or patterns of colonial dependence. However, this included population is always limited and, furthermore, stratified by race, class, nation, gender, sexuality, and colonial difference (Puar 2009, 2017, 50–93). Moreover, the lives thus enabled must conform to the pattern of normalised able-bodiedness and the dictates of market-determined productivity. Puar extends this analysis by noting that the “recapitulation” of disabled bodies is often accompanied by, and contingent upon, the reallocation of resources obtained through the wholesale debilitation of populations participating in the global labour market and/or at through imperial violence (2017, 63–93).

In a complementary fashion, states also pursue “crip nationalism”. This related strain of disability nationalism involves the inclusion and participation of disabled bodies not simply as “enabled”, productive, or normalised subjects but as exceptional individuals who gain recognition *because of* their perceived disability. This includes the “able-disabled” (Mitchell and Snyder 2015, 54–59) or “supercrips”, those whose prosthetic alteration allows them to attain physical prowess or even moments of transgressive alterity (Markotić and McRuer 2012; Serlin 2003). However, this population is generally limited and access is again highly circumscribed by social privilege. Furthermore, crip nationalist performance – while occasionally transgressive – tends often to reinforce able-bodied notions of success and achievement, as well as heteronormative sexualities, national belonging, colonial difference, and racial hierarchy (Puar 2017, esp. 63–94).

Against these discourses of disability nationalism, some have sought to outline crip alternatives as sites of radical resistance and possibility by building on insights from post-structuralist philosophy, radical feminism, and queer theory. This has led them to articulate crip experience variously as a practice of queer sexuality, as the embrace of the “queer art of failure” (Halberstam 2011), as an instance of cyborg post-humanism (Haraway 1991), or as the pursuit of rhizomatic “becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Accordingly, crip theorists have variously rethought notions of time and futurity (Kafer 2013, 25–46; Puar 2009), bodily integrity (Shildrick 2009, 17–38), human/machine/animal divisions (Kafer 2013, 103–128; Puar 2012, 2017, 33–62), sovereign

subjectivity (Shildrick 2009, 17–38, 146–169), heteronormativity (Kafer 2013; McRuer 2006; Shildrick 2009, 125–145), and neoliberal productivism (Mitchell and Snyder 2015, 180–222) in pursuit of this radical deconstructionist and posthumanist agenda. While it is impossible to do justice to this wide-ranging scholarship here, it is crucial to register a note of criticism from within the field. In a sympathetic but powerful critique, Erevelles points out from a historical materialist, critical race theory, and third-world feminist perspective that access to the technologies, opportunities, and resources required for the exploration of these posthumanist possibilities remains subject to the historical realities of transnational capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and indeed militarism (Erevelles 2011, esp. 25–63, 121–146). It is at this point, I would argue, that scholarship in CMS, and IR more generally, has an important potential contribution to make, as outlined below.

Critical military studies: fit for purpose?

One of the major contributions of CMS and the adjacent field of critical war studies, has been to re-centre the body in analyses of war and international relations (Dyvik and Greenwood 2016; Higate 2012; McSorley 2013; Sylvester 2012; Wilcox 2015). These studies have made the case that the body is a central site through which war and military power are experienced. This is not least because, as Elaine Scarry (1985) made clear, war is an activity centrally concerned with injury. Feminist IR has been central to this effort, highlighting the ways in which gendered bodies are essential for the smooth operation of military relations (see inter alia Conway 2012; Elshtain 1995; Enloe 2000, 2007; Tickner 1992; Wilcox 2015). Of particular interest to feminists have been the gendered processes of identity-formation which accompany military training and discipline (e.g. Basham 2013; Sasson-Levy 2003b, 2008). This analysis has also been extended to include intersections with class (Basham 2016; Sasson-Levy 2003a), race (Basham 2013, 112–137; Ware 2010), and sexuality (Basham 2013, 89–111; Bulmer 2013; Crane-Seeber 2016).

An important recent strand within this scholarship has been an emphasis on the category of military “fitness” (Howell 2015a; Lisle 2016; McSorley 2016). This notion implies more than simply physical strength. It also extends to social, psychological, and even spiritual notions of fitness. According to this scholarship, modern militaries – especially in an era of neoliberal governmentality – are

increasingly interested in the all-round capabilities of soldiers as individuals in all walks of life. At a time of austerity they are also carefully managing their resources in order to acquire the maximum fitness possible from the available soldier bodies (Howell 2015a). This has intensified the bodily hierarchies involved in military recruitment, training, and discipline as notions of fitness and become bound up with ideas of gender, race, class and sexuality (see, for example, Basham 2016).

However, this observation of the growing centrality of military fitness has also been accompanied by analyses which show this does not necessarily leave hegemonic identities unmodified.

Counterinsurgency and peacekeeping, for example, have been analysed as practices which modify and feminise hegemonic military masculinities for the purpose of supposedly “softer” population-centric warfare (Duncanson 2015; Greenwood 2016; Khalili 2011). Remote and drone warfare have also been studied as activities which seek differently embodied and gendered subjects (Wilcox 2015, 131–165; Masters 2005) Likewise, migrant and minority soldiers have been included in militaries in pursuit of multi-cultural legitimacy (Ware 2010). And, as already discussed, homonationalism has incorporated lesbian and gay soldierly identities (Bulmer 2013; Puar 2007) even as other queer identities have been abjected (Manchanda 2015).

Already, then, CMS has demonstrated that notions of soldierly fitness are central to militarism, and that these notions are modified according to the particular demands of specific forms of militarism.

This is in keeping with the observation that war is a generative force in society which actively reshapes, rather than simply passively receives, prevailing norms (Barkawi and Brighton 2011).

Fitness is therefore a malleable concept, an idea whose meaning becomes tractable through social (including military) relations. Here, the potential convergences of CMS and CDS, with its critique of naturalised notions of able-bodiedness, become very clear. The production of ability/disability has a geopolitics, and war-making is a central vector through which this process takes place. Moreover, such processes may make it possible for militaries to capture, resignify, and indeed produce the specific capacities of disabled bodies, perhaps even those associated in critical disability studies with alternative crip subjectivities, for the purpose of war-making (see, for example, Serlin 2006; Erevelles 2011, 121–146).

However, this possibility has not been adequately explored in extant scholarship. Despite the huge potential within CDS to help us rethink military notions of fitness and ability, the possibility and reality of disabled soldiers serving in the military has often been overlooked. Absent, or at least unspoken, in much of the feminist scholarship cited above is an examination of the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality with disability (for a critique, see Howell 2015b, 2018). Where disabled soldiers do figure in CMS or adjacent fields, they are usually approached as veterans, as subjects of injury or trauma resulting from war, rather than as potential or active recruits to the military (e.g. Gerber 2000; Serlin 2015; Terry 2017).² Indeed, the main edited volume which most richly and directly discusses the service of disabled soldiers, revealingly titled *Scraping the Barrel*, does so under the rubric of studying “substandard manpower”, despite evidence in several of the component studies which indicate possibilities otherwise (Marble 2012b). One of the reasons for this tendency may derive from the privileging of the category of “combat” in critical military studies. As Millar and Tidy (2017) argue, even critical scholars often assume an all-too-neat distinction between combat and non-combat roles and thereby risk obscuring manifold other military practices and their associated embodiments. Because of the frequent exclusion of soldiers with disabilities from strictly-defined “combat” roles, this emphasis on combat also marginalises disabled experience. It is hardly necessary to add that this risks making us as scholars complicit in the reproduction of ableist notions of fitness. Using the case study of the Israeli military, I show that the participation of soldiers with disabilities reveals both the potential for the resignification of notions of fitness through militarism but also the geopolitical limitations of alternative crip subjectivities.

Militarism, disability, and settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine

Israel is an important case for studying the intersections of disability and militarism in international politics. However, to understand this relationship properly, it is fundamental to situate this in the context of the settler colonial relationship between Israel and the Palestinian people, since the politics

² This is also true of Puar’s work on Israel, where she argues that “Israeli crip nationalism is secured through IDF veterans... the Israeli state relies on the spectacle of disability as trauma and victimhood” (2017, 108).

of disability and militarism play out in particular ways in these circumstances.³ In so doing, this paper adopts the insights of a growing collection of studies which approach Israel/Palestine as an example of ongoing settler colonialism (e.g. Hawari, Plonski, and Weizman 2019; Salamanca et al. 2012). As this scholarship has established, since the late nineteenth century, the Zionist movement has sought to displace and dispossess Palestinians in order to establish a state in which Jews have a demographic majority and a privileged social and political position. This has required extensive military coercion (Lockman 2012) and the creation of a racially-ordered citizenship regime (Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury 2015). These elements combine to produce what Patrick Wolfe termed a structural “logic of elimination” (2006) towards the Palestinian people. Accordingly, Palestinians who were expelled from territory conquered by Israel in 1948 have been strictly excluded from citizenship and their land and forced to live as refugees, often under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. Although those Palestinians who remained inside Israel were given citizenship, their nationality was officially designated as “Arab” and, through a variety of means, they have been oppressed and marginalised (Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury 2015). By contrast, Jews from all over the world are deemed eligible for Israeli citizenship by virtue of belonging to the racially-defined “Jewish nation”. Increasing the proportion of the population defined as Jewish is a major demographic objective of the State of Israel, as is evinced through countless public policies (Wolfe 2016, 239–270).

As in other settler colonial projects (cf. Soldatic 2015), Zionist discourses concerning race and nation-building have reshaped understandings of disability in ways which exhibit both ableism and disability nationalism. The Zionist thinker Max Nordau famously wrote that immigration to Palestine would help to produce “muscular” Jews, whose physical and mental prowess would contrast with the image (taken from European anti-Semitic discourse) of weak diaspora Jews (Sufian 2007). During the British Mandate era, Zionist medical experts wrote of the necessity of improving the physical and mental fitness of Jews in Palestine, noting with concern the high rates of mental illness among European Jews compared with the local Palestinian population (Sufian 2007). A racial and ableist

³ Here I follow Alison Howell (2018), who insists on the importance of studying practices of militarism, settler colonialism, racism, and ableism together under the rubric of “martial politics”.

focus on the “quality” as well as quantity of the Jewish stock in Palestine has also informed immigration policy. While according to Israel’s Basic Laws any Jew who wishes to move to the State will be granted citizenship, provisions in the legislation allow for the exclusion of older, infirm or less-able Jews if they could impose an undue burden on society, a measure which was disproportionately applied to North African immigrants in the early years of the state (Mor 2006, 2007). Israel has also sought to fashion itself as a “rehabilitating state” (Puar 2017, 95–125) for its Jewish citizens, in particular through the generous provision of reproductive assistance technologies. Puar also argues that the obverse of these ableist and able-nationalist discourses with respect to the Jewish population has been the structural production of debility in the Palestinian population through maiming, injury, and economic precarity (2017, 127–154). She notes a variety of practices aimed at this goal, including punitive shooting to handicap, collateral damage in airstrikes, the deliberate destruction of medical, sanitary, and welfare infrastructure, and the stunting of Palestinian economic development (see also Jaffee 2016). Puar therefore argues that the settler colonial logic of elimination in Palestine extends to the debilitation of Palestinian life and the accompanying enhancement and capacitation of Jewish life.

The continued implementation and reproduction of this settler colonial order has furthermore required extensive military coercion and has therefore profoundly shaped patterns of militarism in Israel. As Uri Ben-Eliezer (1998) argues, the birth of Israeli militarism was profoundly linked to the decision to resolve the Palestinian question by force, and particularly to the forcible expulsion of Palestinians from their lands in 1948.⁴ This led to the mobilisation of a “nation-in-arms” which continues to shape Israel’s social and political relations. The most conspicuous evidence of this is the persistence of the mandatory conscription and reserves system, according to which most Jewish men and women are required to serve in the military after age 18. The links between military service and the privileges of citizenship are well-established, with a plethora of social, economic, and symbolic benefits accruing to those who serve (and being denied to those who do not, including most Palestinian citizens⁵)

⁴ For wider analyses of Israeli militarism, see *inter alia* Barak and Sheffer 2010; Ben-Ari and Lomsky-Feder 1999; Kimmerling 1993, 2005.

⁵ For a study of the minority of Palestinians who do serve in the Israeli military, see Kanaaneh 2008.

(Helman 1997; Levy 2007). For Jewish citizens, especially men, participation in the military is a vital rite of passage, allowing symbolic entry into the national collective as well as providing material benefits. Particular kinds of service, especially combat service in elite units, offer significantly more of these benefits.

By creating hierarchies among those who participate in military violence, Israeli militarism also reproduces other inequalities among Israeli Jews as their fitness for service is determined. Despite the conscription of women, military service in Israel, as elsewhere, is highly gendered, with women exempted or excluded from a large number of (usually more prestigious and/or direct combat) roles. Where women do serve in combat or combat-support roles, they are subject to gendered oppression and sexual harassment (Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2017; Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah 2016; Lomsky-Feder and Sasson-Levy 2017). Likewise, opportunities in military service are subject to racial stratification, with Middle Eastern Jews disproportionately serving in less prestigious support roles (Sasson-Levy and Levy 2008; Sasson-Levy 2002, 2003a). These hierarchies reproduce hegemonic masculinities which privilege certain embodied military performances over others, subjecting these performances to intense social scrutiny and denigrating those, including even Ashkenazi men, who fail to approximate them satisfactorily (Sasson-Levy 2008; Löwenheim 2015).

Less commonly remarked upon, however, is the extent to which these bodily performances also depend on notions of (dis)ability (and their historical conditions, as explored above). Physical and psychological fitness are major determinants of the pathways offered to conscripts, with each recruit being given IQ tests, psychometric evaluation, and a medical “profile” in the form of a number between 21 and 97. A low score prevents conscripts from serving in combat or intelligence roles and restricts them to lower profile support roles. As a result, young Israelis often train intensively to raise their fitness before training and selection, including at specialist academies and summer programmes, in order to access the most prestigious units. These opportunities to raise one’s fitness profile are also stratified by gender, race and class. Rather than understanding these martial hierarchies separately, therefore, we should understand them as co-constitutive of overall notions of military fitness.

The predominance of these ableist hierarchies notwithstanding, Israeli militarism has also, and increasingly, incorporated aspects of disability nationalism. Disabled Israeli veterans wounded in war have long enjoyed a higher status than other disabled citizens. The first Israeli law on the provision of disability benefits was passed to provide welfare for disabled veterans and their families (Rimmerman et al. 2015, 51). Moreover, welfare provision for injured veterans far exceeds that available to other disabled citizens (Gal and Bar 2000; Mor 2006). Other evidence suggests that the image of what constitutes a fit and able soldier body in Israel has continued to change in accordance with patterns of militarism. Programmes established for socially and educationally disadvantaged youth have sought to create pathways for them to participate in military service (Sherer 1998). High-tech warfare has created opportunities for women's military participation in ways which complicate traditional gendered binaries of combat and non-combat (Harel-Shalev 2018). The military has also been proud to advertise its homonationalist inclusion of LGBT soldiers, in an exercise commonly criticised as "pinkwashing". Indeed, it recently boasted of its provision of gender confirmation surgery for a serving trans soldier. These same shifts have also created opportunities for soldiers with disabilities, as I show below. While it is important to recognise that these transformations in militarism certainly do not remove structures of oppression towards these newly included soldiers (cf Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2017), it is also vital to analyse them in the broader context of settler colonialism and disability nationalism. This is because these developments cannot be separated from a logic which selectively enables and includes certain differently abled Jewish bodies, while simultaneously and structurally debilitating the Palestinian population. I now examine in detail how this logic is manifested in specific Israeli military programmes.

The inclusion of disabled soldiers in the Israeli military

To examine the relationship between disability, militarism, and settler colonialism in Israel, I selected the two leading programmes which explicitly aim to recruit soldiers with disabilities. It is important to be clear that these programmes do not exhaust the contributions of soldiers with disabilities in Israel. As argued above, notions of (dis)ability are always co-produced with relations of gender, race, class, and colonial difference in ways that do not always track neat distinctions between "able" and

“disabled” soldiers. Rather, these programmes are useful analytic starting points because they reflect the most self-conscious attempts on the part of the military to articulate its attitude to the inclusion of soldiers with disabilities. Methodologically, I conduct a discourse analysis of media representations and promotional materials of these programmes as a means of exploring the imbrications of disability and militarism. As such, I do not claim to offer a thorough examination of the experience of these soldiers or a systematic assessment of their military contributions. Instead, I present an analysis of the discursive framing of the role of soldiers with disabilities and what this can tell us about the co-constitution of disability and militarism.

Programme 1: Special in Uniform

The Special in Uniform programme was originally founded by the Israeli NGO Yad leYeled haMeyuchad (“Lend a Hand to a Special Child”).⁶ This organisation was parent-led, seeking to improve the quality of life of disabled children and help integrate them into society. Due to the close relationship between military service and citizenship, one major barrier these parents perceived was the inability of their children to serve in the military. This was due both to their physical impairments but also to the provision in Israeli law which allows youth with disabilities to stay in education until age 21, which is past the usual draft age. The organisation therefore sought to extend the perceived material and symbolic benefits of military services to their children. In partnership with the military, and eventually with financial support from the Jewish National Fund, Yad leYeled developed a programme of activities which would allow youth with disabilities to complete a form of military service. The programme builds on well-established precedents in the Israeli military for developing pathways for disadvantaged recruits. These efforts have previously focussed on those who have dropped out of high school, are unemployed, or have a criminal record, including most notably the Centre for the Advancement of Special Populations (known by the Hebrew acronym MAKAM and established by former Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan) which recruits hundreds of conscripts each year with the aim of providing them with education and vocational training (Sherer 1998, 41–42).

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this section has been drawn from the programme’s public websites written by Yad LaYeled HaMeyuchad (<http://special.org.il/en/special-in-uniform/about/>) and the Jewish National Fund (<http://specialinuniform.com/about/>) [both accessed 29th August 2017].

Yad le Yeled targets youths with mostly intellectual disabilities, including cerebral palsy and autism. It comprises a series of phases, beginning before military service and ending after, to facilitate their inclusion. The programme begins at school, where children are given additional help developing personal independence skills on residential programmes away from home. This is accompanied by a series of volunteering activities within the military to help the students become used to the military environment and to develop skills. The tasks are varied, though generally menial, and include “computer quality control, disassembly and repair, preparation of gas masks, warehouse activities at emergency warehouses, serv[ing] in canteens and kitchens, assist[ing] in printing shops and more” (Yad LaYeled HaMeyuchad 2017). At age 21, the youths are then recruited into the military for three years. This begins with a short period of basic training, followed by a recruitment ceremony. Their abilities are assessed and they are then assigned to work at a variety of facilities, warehouses, factories and bases around the country doing similar tasks to the volunteering phase. During this time, the soldiers are either based at home or in a residential complex organised by the programme. Their military service is accompanied by a variety of additional educational activities, including academic study but also life skills and vocational training. On release from the army, the soldiers receive a substantial financial payment (the same as that given to all discharged soldiers). From there the organisation helps to place them in employment in a variety of sectors; it is currently working to establish a computer recycling centre to employ graduates.

Although the programme is still small, it has grown significantly. A precursor programme (“Equal in Uniform”) had 117 recruits over three years between 2010-2014 (Werner and Hochman 2017). The Special in Uniform programme had 158 recruits in 2015 and 300 by 2016, serving on fifteen different military facilities. Academic surveys conducted of the participants, parents, and other soldiers registered positive feedback (Werner and Hochman 2017). The programme has also received strong endorsement from national politicians, including the Defence Minister, Education Minister and Prime Minister. Media coverage was also overwhelmingly positive. The receipt of Jewish National Fund support further indicates that the programme is likely to grow in the coming years.

The programme displays many of the classic signs of able-nationalism as depicted by Mitchell and Snyder (2015). Its emphasis is on taking people who would ordinarily be excluded or marginalised by dint of their impairments and to include them in normative patterns of life. Although the programme is not therapeutic in the sense that the disabilities are not medically treated, it is intended to be “enabling” in the sense that the participants are given the training and skills to complete tasks which they would otherwise be unable to do. This is then portrayed through an array of media and public relations materials as evidence of the benefits offered by the military to society and of its inclusivity and values. However, never far from this able-nationalist imaginary are neoliberal rationalities regarding productivity. The vast majority of the tasks undertaken by these soldiers are menial, involving roles which the military otherwise struggles to fill with enthusiastic recruits and which are often left to those from the social periphery. By combining the recruitment of these soldiers with a discourse of inclusivity, the military thereby addresses a labour shortage while acquiring symbolic benefits. These benefits also spill over into the broader labour market, since many of the jobs which can be completed by graduates of the programme are located in the large Israeli technology and homeland security sectors. Consider the following media account of a soldier who recently graduated from the programme:

“The warehouse where Chen Orpaz works could be part of any technology company in Israel. Dressed in his blue fleece hoodie and matching blue knitted yarmulke, he looks like any other 23-year-old, save for his constant smile as he glides from aisle to aisle, choosing tiny parts from colored bins for customer orders. Chen, 23, looks happier than most warehouse workers as he fills orders with quiet determination; perhaps because he’s proud to be working productively when so many people doubted he ever could.” (Breaking Israel News 2016)

The condescending implication of accounts such as these is that people with disabilities are not only suited to, but are also happy to be given, menial tasks which others would reject. The horizon of the inclusion of these soldiers is therefore delimited in part by a neoliberal rationality buttressed by able-nationalist legitimacy. However, it should furthermore be noted that this programme is also governed by militarist and settler colonial logics. It is indeed striking that such an initiative to help young

people with disabilities should focus so clearly on developing pathways through military service and in homeland security industries. The benefits associated with this programme, such as employment (however menial) or social capital, overwhelmingly accrue to Jewish citizens, since Palestinians are largely exempt from military service. Moreover, the participants also assist in military coercion, which therefore includes (though is not limited to) the settler colonial debilitation of Palestinians.

For CMS, this case study should serve as an example of some of the less obvious ways in which disabled soldiers can contribute to militarism and in which “fitness” can be defined. Special in Uniform recruits soldiers who are neither injured veterans nor simply tokenistic images of diversity (though they may also be the latter). Instead, these soldiers contribute to militarism directly through their labour (for comparisons in other contexts, see Dunn 2012; Marble 2012a; Sticht 2012). From a CDS perspective, however, this programme confirms many of the problems with able-nationalism. The inclusion of these soldiers in the national collective is bounded by a highly circumscribed vision of what they can contribute, is governed by a neoliberal productivity calculus, and contributes to militarism and settler colonialism. What this programme would seem to call for is a critique grounded in the elaboration of alternative “crip” understandings of (dis)ability, which were not be reducible to the dictates of a neoliberal labour market and which eschewed violent logics. However, as the next case study suggests, overcoming these structures of oppression through crip alternatives may be more difficult than has been previously thought.

Programme 2: Ro'im Rachok

Although there is some crossover between the Special in Uniform and Ro'im Rachok programmes, the latter has acquired such prominence and displays such specific characteristics that it needs to be examined as a case on its own. As part of the growing effort to recruit soldiers with intellectual disabilities, Ro'im Rachok was developed in 2013 specifically for autistic soldiers. It was based on the perception that people with autism possess particular abilities in relation to certain tasks which set them apart not only from other disabled soldiers but also from regular able-bodied recruits. At the time of the creation of the programme, Israeli military intelligence was suffering from a shortage of labour in Unit 9900, which is responsible for the visual analysis of aerial and satellite reconnaissance

imagery (Ginsburg 2015). This work involves many hours of peak concentration, examining minute changes in images, and is therefore very mentally taxing. This work has also become increasingly important in the context of Israel's growing use of remote technological warfare (Zureik, Lyon, and Abu-Laban 2010). Although Unit 9900 is an elite unit which recruits from the best candidates drafted into the army, it often struggles to retain these recruits because they generally progress quickly to commanding roles. Drawing on a perception advanced by many specialists that people with autism can have a higher capacity for repetitive complex and visual tasks and are able to maintain their concentration for longer than average, senior officers in the Mossad (Israel's intelligence agency) therefore proposed recruiting autistic soldiers with heightened skills into these positions (Ginsburg 2015) (with the unspoken implication that these soldiers would be unlikely to progress to more senior positions). Since the establishment of the initial programme with Unit 9900, other units have begun to recruit autistic soldiers, including electronics and weapons maintenance, the ordnance corps (which electronically monitors borders), software testing, and informatics.

Selection to the programme is highly competitive. It is still small scale in terms of the numbers of recruits, with no more than a dozen recruits to each individual unit. Recruits are rigorously tested to ensure they have the requisite visual analytic skills and that they are capable of adjusting to army life. Indeed, despite the programme's proclaimed interest in people with disabilities, the recruits must in fact prove their abilities in a range of other areas, such as colour perception, fine motor skills, computer operation, or knowledge of foreign languages (Ono Academic College 2017). Once selected, the soldiers undergo a three-month training programme at Ono Academic College. Here they receive technical training related to their future roles but also related to life skills or personal independence (such as using public transportation). The final phase of the course continues at a military base in Tel Aviv. After this, the recruits decide whether to enlist and serve a full draft period (Rubin 2016).

In several respects, the analysis offered above in relation to Special in Uniform can also be extended to Ro'im Rachok. The scheme clearly incorporates the same able-nationalist, neoliberal, militarist, and settler colonial logics in its selective inclusion of people with disabilities to fill labour shortages

in performing unpopular and repetitive tasks in the exercise of military coercion. However, there are also several distinctive and noteworthy features of Ro'im Rachok. Most obviously, the recruits are not limited to undemanding tasks designed to accommodate them within able-nationalism. Rather, they are selected for difficult and complex tasks *precisely because of their disability*. The aim is not to mold their contribution to match that of normative subjectivities, but to generate a role for autistic soldiers predicated on their specific status as disabled subjects. The programme therefore embraces aspects of what Markotić and McRuer call “crip nationalism”, “an emergent neoliberal form of nationalism that works in and through contemporary forms of disability identity, community, and solidarity” which crucially “is not founded on the assumption that disability is always and everywhere excluded or marginalized” (2012, 167).

In this way the programme offers a further serious provocation to how we think about notions of soldierly fitness. Unlike previously studied examples of programmes for differently abled soldiers, such as the US Army's “Project 100,000” during the Vietnam War, it does not simply seek to recruit soldiers with “lower mental aptitudes” in order to fill labour shortages with “substandard” manpower (see Sticht 2012). Instead, Ro'im Rachok reinscribes these disabilities as capacities by inserting the disabled subjects which bear them into militarism. Indeed, we should be cautious about the idea that Ro'im Rachok is based on some natural and immutable propensity of autistic subjects.⁷ Rather, we should emphasise that these soldiers' disability is in fact being resignified, and indeed produced, as a capacity by their active participation in militarism: the disability itself is inseparable from its crip-nationalist performance. This example therefore disturbs conventional distinctions operative in CMS between fit/unfit and able/disabled, but also pushes at the boundaries even of concepts developed within radical CDS.

Some of possibilities realised by Ro'im Rachok are in fact reminiscent of those explored in CDS, though originally by way of a radical critique of disability nationalism. For example, Mitchell and Snyder offer the paradoxical term “the capacity of incapacity” to describe crip alternatives to

⁷ Clinical opinion in fact differs on the extent to which these abilities are intrinsic to certain autistic conditions or instead reflect the social isolation often faced by those with autism.

disability nationalism and able-bodied hegemony. Inspired by the arguments of Judith Halberstam (2011), they argue that the dictates of able-bodied normativity can in fact obscure crip and queer modes of being and consciousness which would in fact be more “capable”. Revealingly, they use the example of autism to demonstrate this point, drawing on the example of Mark Haddon’s novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, in which the protagonist, Christopher, is an autistic boy. They suggest that “normative consciousness” (2015, 200) often demands that people ignore many of the abundant details of everyday life in order to function socially and maintain a fiction of subjective coherence. By contrast, following Haddon, they redescribe autism as an “over-attentiveness to small details” (2015, 200) which can in fact allow people with the condition to see more in the world around them than others. They quote Christopher to this effect:

“But most [non-autistic] people are lazy. They never look at anything. They do what is called glancing, which is the same word for bumping off something and carrying on in almost the same direction, e.g. when a snooker ball glances off another snooker ball. And all the information in their head is really simple” (Haddon quoted in Mitchell and Snyder 2015, 201).

The resonances with the use of autistic soldiers for visual analysis in Ro’im Rachok (literally “Looking Afar”) are extremely clear here. While Mitchell and Snyder acknowledge that the capacity of incapacity belongs to the same neoliberal universe as the able-nationalism they attack, they nevertheless hold it out as illustrating the promise of crip alternatives which would destabilise hegemonic structures. Yet the Ro’im Rachok programme suggests that, by itself, such a rethinking is insufficient to achieve this, for the simple reason that this exploration of the possibilities of non-normative cognition has been produced with the function of filling a labour shortage in the military of a settler colonial state.

Other radical critical disability theorists also explore possibilities which are reminiscent of developments in Ro’im Rachok. Alison Kafer argues that the exploration of radical crip and queer alternatives requires a rethinking of normative temporalities. Again inspired by Halberstam, she develops the notion of “crip time”, noting that “people with various impairments move or think at a

slower (or faster) pace than culturally expected” (2013, 34). In the case of Ro’im Rachok, time is also played with to unlock the potential of autistic recruits. Indeed, it is precisely because they are able to concentrate at high levels of intensity for longer periods of time that their work is valued by the military. The Israeli military is therefore prepared to be flexible in its approach to time in other areas, for example by creating a longer training and recruitment schedule for these recruits or adjusting the amount of time they are required to be on the base. Once again, there is nothing in this temporal compression and decompression which necessarily destabilises disability nationalism, neoliberalism, militarism, or settler colonialism.

A further aspect of interest is the way that Ro’im Rachok appears to resonate with the way that cyborg and assemblage theory has been deployed in CDS. Margrit Shildrick draws on Deleuze and Guattari and Donna Haraway to suggest that the novel interactions between humans, machines, and animals explored in disabled experience may serve to undermine rigid notions of corporeal limitation. She writes:

“In a model in which corporeality is no longer to be thought in terms of given and integral entities, but only as engaged in ever dynamic and innovatory linkages, bodies are neither whole nor broken, disabled nor able-bodied, but simply in a process of becoming[...] Above all, it entails an inherent transgression of boundaries that turns the capacities of the embodied person away from normative categories of inclusion and exclusion.” (Shildrick 2009, 159)

Yet Ro’im Rachok relies in a similar way on linkages between bodies and machines in order to make the military contribution of soldiers with disabilities possible. Nearly all of the pathways available to recruits concern the use of information technology and computers, showing its heightened importance in this case. And when an autistic soldier engages in visual analysis of reconnaissance photographs, it is hard not to interpret this as the creation of a cyborgian assemblage between satellite, computer screen, and human. It is precisely this novel combination of elements which opens up alternative ways of “becoming” for the autistic soldier. Recruits themselves spoke to the media about their training in analogous terms. Interviewed for Israel’s Channel 10, two recruits used a revealing metaphor to describe the development of the programme:

“Soldier N.: We’ve just begun, this is still the first stage, we’re still in Windows ’95, which is advanced but not really, but in 10, 15 years you’ll see that it’s...

Soldier A.: Windows 10.

Soldier N.: Yes, Windows 10, more than Windows 8.” (Channel 10 2015)

What is being described in this cyborgian metaphor is not the radical undoing of hierarchies but the creation of a more efficient military killing machine, in which the data from satellite photography can be more quickly analysed so as to allow for the maiming and destruction of targets.⁸ As Kafer observes, “the same technology which allows a paraplegic to walk allows a soldier to kill more efficiently and ergonomically” (2013, 121), something which Haraway (1991, 293) also noted.

Other work in CDS has therefore rightly called for caution in the exploration of the radical potential of cyborg and assemblage subjectivities, arguing that these possibilities remain stratified by race, class, and gender hierarchies. Noting the importance of transnational and historical structures in mediating the effects of radical crip subjectivities, Erevelles points out that “it is the economic context (e.g. colonialism) which has blunted the capacity for the *severely disabled desiring machine* to realize its transgressive potential” (Erevelles 2011, 60). Following Masters (2005), she underscores that cyborg subjectivities can still be platforms for the construction of militarised masculinity and the pursuit of colonial violence (Erevelles 2011, 136–137). Indeed, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of the recruits to Ro’im Rachok are men even though Unit 9900 is a mixed unit (Rubin 2016).⁹ In a similar fashion, Puar draws our attention to “the geopolitics of racial ontology [that] condition any possibilities for becoming, for wholesale deterritorialisation of the human” (Puar 2017, 58). This is profoundly the case in Israel/Palestine, where the technological enhancement of these autistic Jewish citizens is indexed in part to the extent to which they will contribute to the settler colonial process of Palestinian elimination and debilitation. In this context, Erevelles’ provocative question seems

⁸ It is worth noting that the Israeli military has in the past devoted considerable attention to the work of Deleuze and Guattari in planning urban warfare. See Weizman 2007, 185–220.

⁹ The prevalence of autism is thought to be higher in men, but this still does not account for the vast disparity: as of 2016, only one women had been recruited to the unit (Rubin 2016).

particularly apt: “even though the deconstruction of the sovereign subject is cause for celebration, how does one celebrate in the sight of so much violated and wounded flesh?” (2011, 42)

Conclusion

In their study outlining the concept of crip nationalism, Markotić and McRuer emphasise the complexity of the entanglements between disability, sexuality, nationalism, and gender (and, we should add, race). They argue against a reading of crip nationalism which sees it as either completely subversive or completely hegemonic, preferring to highlight ambiguity and reversibility (Markotić and McRuer 2012, 166–167). Puar also warns against “an ontologising of the molecular as a thriving site of resistance” (2017, 58), pointing to ways in which assemblages of disability, sexuality, gender and race can be variously articulated as hegemonic as well as subversive. Likewise, Kafer warns that political context is crucial in determining whether crip alternatives, such as cyborg subjectivities, will truly perform radical functions (2013, esp. 126–128). This paper supports these observations, insofar as they indicate that there is no determinate political content to crip subjectivities. However, rather than opting to leave these possibilities open, unstable, and unresolved, the analysis presented here leans towards the conclusions of Erevelles that transnational and historical structures such as capitalism, colonialism, and militarism tightly delimit the potential for crip subjectivities to have transformative political consequences. This is not to discredit the important work being done in CDS, nor to imply that these scholars are not already aware of these complex realities. Rather, it is to point to the necessity of bringing additional critical lenses to bear on the problem of disability nationalism, in particular those which analyse these structural constraints.

IR may have the potential to offer some of these insights, especially with respect to dimensions of militarism, colonialism, and geopolitics. However, this also means taking CDS seriously as a hermeneutic for approaching international political, and especially military, sociology. Thus far, CMS has been insufficiently attentive to the intersections of military power and disability. People with disabilities are not simply produced in militarism through injury or through discourses of inclusivity but through participating actively in their specific capacities as disabled subjects. Their contributions are part of generative forces which reshape notions of ability and disability, continuously re-rendering

discourses of “fitness” and even corporeal boundaries as military purposes and possibilities shift. These contributions are also framed by the geopolitical and material processes which make war and militarism possible, including neoliberal economies, (settler) colonialism, and racism. This further directs our attention to the fact that the majority of those who are (literally) targeted by disability nationalism are marked not for inclusion or assistance, but for injury and elimination. Studying disability nationalism in the context of Israel/Palestine reveals its imbrication with structures of violence, oppression, and exploitation all too clearly. Disability nationalism may be enabling militarism in Israel/Palestine, but this militarism is “enabling” only in the very narrowest of senses.

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