

*“This, Too, Shall Pass”*

**Examining the Path to National Resilience in Israeli Society**

**A Grounded Theory Approach**

Corinne Miriam Baray, B.A

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*“Your wound is probably not your fault, but your healing is your responsibility”*

- Denise Frohman

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**Abstract**

The following project seeks to advance the conceptual understanding of collective trauma and national resilience among Israeli former military conscripts. In line with the intent of a grounded theory study, I used inductive analysis to allow for the generation of theory from the data I collected. I recorded interviews with 17 participants (8 male, 9 female), between the ages of 22 and 80, using semi-structured methods, in various locations in northern and central Israel. Participants mostly responded in Hebrew. Subsequently, interviews were transcribed and translated verbatim to English. Further, they were analyzed in-depth using constant comparative analysis, axial coding, and selective coding. Participant's detailed their experiences of living under incessant threat of war and terror, as well as completing mandatory national military service. Many participants provided narratives that implied negative manifestations. However, when asked to define trauma, and whether their experiences fell under their definition, most participants provided a lay definition for trauma, and argued that their experiences did not succeed with negative reactions. The findings of the present study indicate that historical experiences of persecution, combined with contemporary experiences of war and threat, have ingrained a cultural anxiety in Israelis that is counterpoised by their adaptive capacity and ability to "bounce back". Israeli continues to rank amongst the happiest countries in the world, suggesting that a strong sense of purpose, as well as the centrality of family within the culture, allow Israelis to depend on each other in times of need, allowing for positive outcomes and national resilience. The results of the study indicated that a longitudinal study that examines other demographics of Israeli military conscripts, could allow for the formation of a more comprehensive framework of experiences of

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collective trauma that lead to resilient outcomes, which can be used by other countries impacted by war and terror.

*Keywords:* Israel Defense Forces, Grounded Theory, Soldiers, Mandatory Military, Conscription, Defense Service Law, Trauma, Collective Trauma, National Resilience, Purpose, Nationalism

### **Dedication**

This work is lovingly dedicated to my parents, Charon and Sigal Baray. Thank you for always instilling the confidence to pursue my dreams and teaching me the value of education. You are my greatest inspirations.

I also dedicate this project to the memory of my grandfather, Raphael Baray - סבא רפי Saba Rafi (1939-2009). Your infectious love of knowledge nurtured my passion in learning, and helped me push through the roadblocks from the earliest conceptualizations of this project through its completion.

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Thank you to my amazing family. To the worlds best siblings – Morale and Oren, thank you for having done anything and everything that I needed throughout the course of this project and throughout life. To my mom, Sigal, you have been an incredible model of an invested and passionate teacher, and have taught me to make meaning of the world. My dad, Charon, you are my biggest cheerleader. You have pushed me to be the best I can be and have never let me give up in times when I thought I would. I would not be where I am today without your guidance, encouragement, and continued support.

My readers, Dr. Deidra Butler, and Dr. Betina Appel Kuzmarov, thank you for your time and guidance in reviewing my thesis. Writing a thesis was easier knowing that you were there to support the process and provide your insights.

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### Detailed Map of Contemporary Israel



### Key Terms

1. **Arab-Israel Conflict:** Conflict over land between Israel and its Arab neighbours originating from Israel's foundation in 1948.
2. **Aristocracy:** Greek term for "power". A form of government that allocates power to the privileged class.
3. **Conscription:** Compulsory enlistment (usually military) in the form of national service.
4. **Chutzpah:** Hebrew word for audacity (both good, and bad).
5. **Cultural Trauma:** When members of a collective share the experience of a distressing event, ultimately changing their identity.
6. **Diaspora:** Jewish people living outside of Israel.
7. **Intifada:** Tremor, or, shuddering; commonly used to describe the Palestinian uprising against Jewish Israeli settlers.
8. **Israel Defense Forces:** Military forces of the State of Israel.
9. **Incessant War:** Continual war.
10. **Levee en Masse:** French term for policy of mass conscription.
11. **Occupation:** The state of occupying or being occupied by military force.
12. **Old Testament:** Texts of law, history, and prophecy. First part of the Christian bible, most commonly referred to as the Hebrew bible. Written between approximately 1200 and 100 BC.
13. **Palestinian:** A member of the collective Arab population from the region of Palestine (present-day Israel).

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14. **Resilience:** A word of Latin origin meaning “spring back or recover quickly after an accident”.
15. **Tikkun Olam:** Hebrew phrase for “repair the world”. Jewish decree for social action.
16. **Trauma:** A word of Greek origin meaning “wound”.
17. **Torah:** The Hebrew Bible

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## INTRODUCTION

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Following more than two thousand years of exile and diaspora, the Jewish people received official statehood of Israel in 1948. Patriarchs of the Jewish people, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were the first settlers of the land in 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, however, thousands of years of persecution and expulsion forced the Jewish people to settle in the Diaspora. Following the unprecedented crimes of the Holocaust, more than six million Jewish people were murdered, and six million more were displaced. Most of them refused repatriation because of the destruction of their communities and postwar anti-Semitism in Europe. The Jewish refugees were excited about The British government submitted the problem of Palestine to the UN to avoid a crisis escalation within the region, and voted to partition the mostly barren land of Palestine into two states: one Jewish, and one Arab. From the Jewish Zionist perspective, Arab leaders refused to support the proposition, which generated decades of conflict between Israel and Palestine. With British withdrawal from Palestine in early 1948, the official May 1948 establishment of the State of Israel fulfilled biblical prophecies, and allowed the Jewish people to regain independence, and return to the land that defines their cultural, religious, and national identities as a people.

Individuals who were either born in Israel, or have lived there for the better part of their lives, are often referred to as *Sabras*. Sabra, the Hebrew word for a prickly pear, is a fruit prevalently found on cacti bushes in Israel's desert. More than 2000 years of fleeing pogroms and prejudice, as well as contemporary experiences of consistent war and trauma has earned Israelis the nickname, as the fruit's thick, rough, prickly exterior, and sweet, soft inside, symbolically encompasses the resilient character of contemporary Israeli society.

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Trauma stems from ancient Greek language, meaning: “wound”. Caruth (1996). Experts on trauma have long studied the impact trauma has on individuals; a trigger caused by an event, which leads to negative manifestations. A growing awareness of the adverse affects trauma has on people, and its relative pervasiveness has broadened trauma discourse from a purely psychological trajectory to a social phenomenon. The purpose of the present study is to examine the collective effects of traumatic experiences, in an effort to suggest that innumerable tragedies from war have embedded existential anxiety within Israeli culture. Contemporary cultural theorists have expanded on existing literature of individual trauma, and have begun researching the effects of trauma on groups, allowing for a new discipline that creates meaning from a group’s collective experience. Israeli cultural trauma theorist Gad Yair (2014) argues that Israeli cultural trauma is manifested as existential anxiety, which stems from historical accounts of Jewish persecution and exile, as well as contemporary fear of breach in state security, and loss of sovereignty. Bleich (2004) conceptualized the social impact of culturally embedded trauma for Jewish Israelis:

When we speak of trauma of national origins we also refer to an additional aspect ... to our feeling of identification and belonging. A trauma of national origins would be what we experience from the mere fact of belonging to a certain nation. As members of the Jewish nation, for example, there is no doubt that we were raised on myths such as ‘remember that which the Amalekites did to you’, and that ‘in every generation, they rise up against us to annihilate us’. Such myths may mould our psyche in such a way that we would feel, instinctively and overwhelmingly, that we are threatened by other

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nations, that we are victims of constant persecution on their part, and as a result of that develop, on our part, a suspicious and threatening attitude towards others. From a psychological perspective, this influence can be attributed to the 'collective unconscious', through which unconscious forces are expressed, because of our collective association, which have been moulded over hundreds of years of a nation's history (Bleich, 2004).

This study was conducted in Israel, where individuals encounter regular distressing circumstances. Since its establishment in 1948, the State of Israel has fought eight wars, two Palestinian intifadas, and a number of armed conflicts with bordering Arab countries. As of 2016, the war casualty toll of Jewish Israelis amounted to more than 23,000 individuals. Despite ongoing war and terror, Israel continues to rank ahead of most countries in the world, earning the title of 11<sup>th</sup> happiest country for the fourth year in a row<sup>1</sup>.

Early conceptualizations for the project began while I was interning in Israel following the completion of my undergraduate degree between 2015-2016. During this time an intense wave of violence commenced known as the "stabbing intifada". Knife attacks on Jewish people in highly populated areas all over Israel became part of the mundane and took many innocent lives. One of the more serious attacks having taken place at the bus terminal by my apartment building mere minutes after I had gotten on a bus from there for work. Following the tragedy, I was amazed that while initial reactions of fear and panic were both overt and palpable, everything returned to normal almost

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-ranks-11th-happiest-country-palestinian-territories-at-114-1.5908427>

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immediately after the perpetrator was subdued. As quickly as the traumatic event transpired, it ceased, storefronts and café's reopened, and individuals returned to their daily routines. It was at this time that I became curious of the resilient nature of Israelis and their ability to return to a state of equilibrium quickly after experiencing a traumatic event.

Trauma is a topic that has gained increased attention in public discourse, often expressing the many concerns and fears of present time (Bracken, 2003). Expanding on a resilience theory developed by Bhamra et al. (2014), I suggest that the negative manifestations experienced by Israelis, by virtue of their obligation to conscribe to the military, and their exposure to significant adversity from surrounding nations, contributes to their experiences of cultural anxiety. Subsequently, the perpetual anxiety caused by the rapid alternation of normal routine to an emergency state, encourages Israeli citizens to quickly “bounce back” from adversity, and assumes a collective responsibility that is essential to the survival of the state and its inhabitants. This study seeks to broaden research on trauma and resilience and use Israel as a case study to suggest that negative experiences from war have created positive outcomes of national resilience in Israeli society.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the present study is to expand on existing research on collective trauma and national resilience. For this study, I seek to identify whether Israeli existential anxiety is the “trauma” factor that allows for the “vulnerability” component, which motivates society to achieve national resilience in Israel. The following research questions guided the study:

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1. Do most individuals experience negative manifestations from war and terror in Israel?
2. Do individuals who have completed their mandatory military service in Israel consider it to be a resilient society?
3. After experiences of trauma, is collective vulnerability the factor that allows societies to achieve national resilience?

### **Chapter Breakdown**

In order to address these questions, I examine the path to national resilience for Jewish citizens in Israel that have completed their mandatory military service, it makes sense to develop an understanding of cultural trauma and the effect it has society as a collective. In order to conceptualize the traumas experienced by Israeli veterans, it is important to understand theories of conscription, as well as Israel's history. Thus, the first chapter explains the historical evolution of conscription theory, as well as an understanding of the changes of military structure from aristocratic to mass model. Following, I will provide an overview of the Security Services Defense Law, which regulates recruitment into military service for citizens of Israel, requiring both men and women to conscribe as part of their national service. To understand cultural trauma, one must understand its historical origins. Thus, I will conclude the first chapter with a thorough account of Israel's war history, including a brief overview of the major events during the first and second Intifadas.

The second chapter will provide an analysis of existing literature on cultural trauma and national resilience, exploring the two core themes for the project: trauma and resilience. The sphere of trauma research is dominated by negative outcomes as a result

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of negative experience. However, contemporary trauma theorists argue that while traumatic events are likely to result in short term negative reactions, they can also result in long-term positive outcomes (Alexander, 2012; Eyerman, 2001, 2013). Organizational resilience theorist Ran Bhamra (2014) describes traumatic experiences and adaptive capacity as the two factors that can allow for a society to achieve collective resilience. Drawing on Bhamra's theory, I suggest that historical accounts of persecution, as well as contemporary lived experiences of war fuel a collective culture of existential anxiety amongst Jewish Israelis and has shaped Jewish identity both in Israel and in the diaspora through a shared sense of historical persecution. Jewish survival is framed as a cultural marker familiar to the Jewish people of being the chosen people. Existential anxiety is the "trauma" factor that ultimately allows for resilient outcomes.

The third chapter outlines the methodological approach used for the study: Qualitative Grounded Theory. After conducting an extensive research study on trauma and resilience, I conducted 17 semi-structured individual interviews, which were analyzed using qualitative research software platform, NVivo. The third chapter also outlines the procedure for the study, provides an overview of the steps taken in the completion of this study, interview methods, and coding methods used during the coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the fourth chapter, I provide a detailed analysis of how I developed my two core themes, trauma, and resilience, and how negative experiences of trauma allow for positive resilience outcomes. In the fifth and final chapter of this study I provide concluding remarks, as well as a discussion on the importance of the present study, and implications for future research.

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**CHAPTER ONE: THE “PROBLEM”**

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The literature review that follows will provide an understanding of Israel's perpetual conflict, as well as a theoretical analysis of conscription and mass military model theories. This chapter will begin with a brief discussion on the history of conscription, and mass military theories. It will then outline the main tenants of the Security Service Defense Law, tenants of Israel's conscription law. Finally, this section will briefly outline Israel's history of war. All sections of this chapter inclusively, will establish a better understanding of the problem investigated for this project.

### **History of Conscription**

Conscription, also called the "draft", is an obligation that requires citizens to enlist in a national service, most often in the form of military service. Historically, the institution of conscription has existed since pre-modern times, and its origin as a social contract is traced back to the reign of King Hammurabi of the Babylonian Empire in 1700 BC (Postgate, 1994). During this time, a system of conscription under the Code of Hammurabi, called *Ilkum*, required eligible men to serve in the royal army during periods of war. In times of peace the men were required to work in various labour positions provided to them by the state. In return, the men were provided property called *Ilkum* land (Postgate, 1994 p.243).

Modern conscription as the national mobilization of military, also called *levée en masse*, or, *the mass uprising of a civilian population against an invading force* was first introduced as a legal concept in France during the French Revolution in 1789; prior to which, the military was a dynastic institution under the control of the crown. The concept of *levée en masse* was further internationalized during the American Civil War with the Lieber Code, which lead to the development of The Hague Regulations of 1907 and

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Geneva Conventions of 1949 (Postgate, 1994). The Lieber code was introduced to provide protection of civilians and prisoners of war, with rules regarding the private and public property of the enemy. American Political Scientist and legal advocate Francis Lieber lobbied the US government to introduce a legal framework surrounding issues of armed conflict. In 1862 Lieber, a board of lawyers, and military officers, created a “Code of Regulations for the Government of armies in their field, as authorized by the laws and usages of war”, commonly known as the Lieber Code of 1863 (Postgate, 1994 p.245). The Lieber Code included 157 articles restating the main principles of human morality, as well as rules applicable in times of war, ultimately humanizing war through the application of reason.

In 1793, France was at war with Austria, Prussia, Spain, Britain, Belgium, Piedmont, and the Netherlands. Realizing they could no longer rely on volunteers to supplement the army, the French government implemented the levée, a decree requiring all single men between the ages of 18 and 25 to join the army (Burke, 2006). As an effort to overturn the idea of conscription as an arduous service, and increase the manpower of their military, the French Assembly reformed the negative public rhetoric on mandatory military by indoctrinating the idea that conscription is:

“ ... an expression of individual freedom, an internalised social obligation linked to the new ideal of citizenship” (Burke, 2006 p. 114).

The levée was the first modern mandatory mass military force built on democratic as opposed aristocratic ideals, and had become a pillar of liberty to French citizens, unifying the French nation in mobilising its people to fight in defense of the state.

Following the Napoleonic wars, France returned to the aristocratic military model followed by most democratic countries. Prussia was the only country to maintain a

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universal conscription system, which allowed them to rapidly mobilize and train their military, and defeat major powers in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 (Burke, 2006). Further, major countries had difficulty in adopting a mass military model because it didn't follow their democratic ideologies. France and Germany were the first European countries after 1870 that adopted a conscription model, which made military service an essential part of public life as it integrated average individuals into important military roles, united citizens, and created a sense of national identity (Burke, 2006). In Europe, Britain was the only country that refused to adopt a conscription system, and continued to use the aristocratic and voluntary models used in North America. Following low voluntary enlistment during the First World War, both Britain and the United States agreed that the voluntary model was no longer possible, and ultimately resorted to a mass military organizational model to raise an army. Studies displayed that by the mid-1980's consensus among students of military mobilization that the Post-World War period "witnessed a great trend away from semi-trained, primitively equipped, mass conscript armies towards more streamlined, highly professional forces"(Burke, 2006 p.117). Reform of the military structure from aristocratic to mass military established a common purpose for all members of society and was the first step in the democratization of Western military systems. Subsequently reform to the military structure provided an opportunity for the development of volunteer-military structures used in contemporary Western societies (Burke, 2006).

### **Theories of Organizational Change: From an Aristocratic to a Mass Military Model**

Sociological scholars of mobilization models have studied the transitions that lead countries to reform their military organization from aristocratic, to mass military,

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conscription models (Burke, 2006; Postgate, 1994). Historically, the aristocratic organizational model of military was commonly used by European and North American societies, as the elites were the only members of society trusted to not overthrow the government, and to have the aptitude for political and militaristic affairs (Burke, 2006). Sociologist Meyer Kestnbaum argues that the shift in policy “lies at the intersection of three distinct historical processes” (Kestnbaum, 2002, p119). These include: the emergence of national citizenship as an organizing political principle, foundation of state policies to compel citizens to contribute to military service, and the mobilization of citizens for war (Kestnbaum, 2002).

The birth of conscription occurred at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when many states were drawn into wars that threatened their security and independence (Burke, 2006). Political and military elites were compelled to consider allowing popular classes into national politics in order to mobilize a sizable military. Political scientist Barry Posen argues that the relationship between nationalism and war is interconnected and thus, one intensifies the other (Posen, 1993). He continues by suggesting that structural realism, that is, the belief that power is the currency of international politics, causes states to imitate the military practices of the ones they believe to be successful. Subsequently, imitating practices of mass army helped spread nationalism across Europe after the French Revolution (Posen, 1993).

Posen suggests that mass armies and nationalism are interconnected as mass militaries have the manpower to maintain their size, despite casualties, during war (Posen, 1993). Consistent mobilization and training of new recruits allows conscription-based militaries to quickly replace their losses, and maintain their power. Political and

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military elites recognized that indoctrinating egalitarian ideals of nationalism to the popular classes, (i.e., teaching soldiers how to read and providing them material on their shared culture and history), encouraged their training and motivation. The military transformation of the French Revolution encouraged a political campaign to educate and motivate the armies, which created “powerful and emotional bonds between the army and civilian population”(Burke, 2006. p126). Consequentially, reform to the military structure ensures consistent manpower to armies without fear of reducing their prospects for victory (Posen, 1993). With nationalism built into conscription ideals, citizens became representatives of the state, not just subjects of the State’s conflicts. In sum, the shift from aristocratic to mass armies occurs when a country’s elites become divided in their response to the country’s security and independence. This divide forces political and military reform, narrowing the divide between elites and popular members of society, and ultimately established the foundation for the fundamental democratization of Western societies (Burke, 2006).

### **Israel’s Ambivalence and the Politics of Nationhood**

*"The entire people is the army, the entire land is the front"* – David Ben Gurion 1948

Military conscription is as much a tenet of Israeli culture as it indoctrinated into Israel’s law. Jewish Israeli citizens of all generations have always lived in the shadow of war. Those who are killed or injured in war are highly esteemed in Israel, as it is understood that they have sacrificed their lives for the collective’s continuation. Israel has been involved in military conflict since its inception in 1948. The Israeli War of Independence was the first of many armed conflicts Israel has endured, lasting six months, until an agreement was signed between Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria,

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establishing the armistice lines. The 65 years that followed sought many wars, with many casualties, each and every one affecting the country and its' inhabitants on both an individual, and national level. A fundamental issue of Israel's war history has been the tension that has developed between Israel and its Arab neighbours from subjective war narratives (West, 2003). The War of 1948 has left long lasting consequences with the establishment of the State of Israel, and the evolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict herein. Contemporarily known as the "land of milk and honey," Palestine was in fact a barren, malaria-infested, and neglected land (Bregman, 2000). The ancient land, only 10,000 square miles in size, is protected in the south by dunes of the Sinai, as well as in the north by the mountains of the Golan. In the east it is bordered by the Syrian Arabian Desert, and in the west, the Mediterranean Sea. The conflict over land began during the British Mandate for Palestine between 1917-1948 (Bregman, 2000). When the British Mandate terminated, the Jewish State of Israel was created and thousands of Arabs living in Palestine became displaced. Prior to the establishment of Israel, a shared space between the Arabs and Jews was difficult to achieve, as both sides felt as though they had historical rights to the land. Zionists believe that "Eretz Yisrael", or, The Land of Israel, was, as stated in the Torah, promised by God to the people of Abraham, also claiming historical and nationalist ties to the land of Israel. Palestinian Arabs also make religious and historical claims to the land, as they believe that they are descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son. Following the Holocaust, there was a crisis of displaced persons and refugees as many survivors did not want to continue living in Eastern Europe. This made the need for land more concrete and urgent (Bregman, 2000).

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The need to defend Jewish communities of pre-state Israel arose long before the declaration of Israel's Independence in 1948, as there was a strong Jewish presence in Palestine. The earliest Jewish defense organization was known as "Hashomer" (the guard), which protected small Jewish settlements against thieves and criminals looking to steal property (Bregman, 2000). Hashomer continued its role in defense until the period of British Mandate from 1917-1948. In 1920 the Haganah was formed as the first underground Jewish defense organization in the geographical area contemporarily known as Israel (Schiff, 1974). After the United Nations announced partition at the end of 1947, the Arab Higher Committee's spokesperson accurately predicted the following 70 years, stating to the UN that Arabs would drench "the soil of our beloved country [Palestine] with the last drop of our blood" (Palmowski, 2008). The UN partition resolution in November 1947 partitioned Palestine into Jewish and Arab states and established Jerusalem as an international city (Bregman, 2000). Following the end of the British mandate in Palestine in May 1948, Then-Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, declared the State of Israel's Independence in May 1948, and established the National army of Israel, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) (Wallach, 1984, Mitnick, 2012).

The IDF fought the second campaign in the War of Independence, which began with the invasion of Israel by Arab armies on May 15, 1948, and continued until armistice agreements were signed between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria in the beginning of 1949 (Bregman, 2000). The cost of the war to Israel was immeasurable, with nearly one percent of Israel's 650,000-person population killed. Collective trauma of that loss leads to understanding that Israel continues to face an existential threat and also to the narrative that Israeli survival allows for a resilient nation.

Following the War of Independence was the Sinai Campaign, which fought to put

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an end to terrorist incursions into Israel, and was the final step for the IDF to fully recognize itself as a professional army that was capable of large-scale operations.

The 1967 War between Israel and her neighbours led to Israel's seizure of the Gaza Strip from Egypt, Golan Heights from Syria, and the Old City of Jerusalem from Jordan (Schiff, 1974). Egypt's attempt at regaining control of the Sinai Peninsula resulted in the 1968-1970 War of Attrition (Bregman, 2000). In 1982 Egypt negotiated peace with Israel, and the Sinai Peninsula was returned (Bregman, 2000).

“Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine and is therefore a strategy and not a tactic” (Avalon, 1968). The PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) was founded in 1964 as an organization whose primary goal as an organization was to destroy the State of Israel through terror. The first Intifada was the Palestinian uprising in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Jerusalem from 1987-1993 (Beitler, 2004). The coordinating body of the Intifada, the *Unified National Leadership of the Uprising* (UNLU) encouraged Palestinian civilians to partake in lone wolf acts of terror in an effort to compel the Israeli government to give into their demands (Beitler, 2004). These included:

“Force the withdrawal of the IDF from cities, towns and refugee camps; evacuating Ariel Sharon from his house in the Old City of Jerusalem; repealing the Emergency Regulations (such as administrative detention, deportation, the demolition of houses and other collective punishments implemented by the Israelis); releasing detainees; halting the expropriation of land and the establishment of new Jewish settlements on Arab land; abolishing value-added tax; dispersing all the municipal, village and refugee camp councils, and the holding of democratic elections in the West Bank and

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Gaza Strip” (Bregman, 2000: 125).”

Despite growing pressure both nationally and internationally on UNLU to call for an end to violence as many Palestinians expressed concern about the violence, the riots continued. The IDF deployed thousands of reservists to patrol the streets of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Jerusalem in an attempt to subdue them.

In 1988 a new militant fundamentalist group called the *Harakat al Muqawama al Islam*, popularly known as *Hamas*, joined the Intifada. Hamas’s slogan, spelled out in Article 8 of the organization’s 1988 covenant, articulates the terror group’s belief system:

Allah is [our] target, the Prophet is [our] model, the Koran [our] constitution:  
Jihad is [our] path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of [our]  
wishes (Hamas Covenant, 1988).

Hamas took charge of the Intifada as Israelis believed them to be less dangerous than the PLO, allowing them to grow and prosper (Bregman, 2000). The Intifada continued from 1987 until September 1993 when Israeli and Palestinian representatives signed the Oslo Agreement in an attempt at reaching a peace agreement. The agreement obligated Israel to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, and the PLO to recognize the sovereignty of Israel, as well as end all violence initiated by its citizens (Palmowski, 2008).

An unofficial end to the peace-process incepted by the Oslo Accords and continued with failed attempts of renegotiations at Camp David in July 2000, began in September 2000 with the beginning of the Al-Aqsa uprising, also known as the second Intifada (Brym & Araj, 2006). Following the Al-Aqsa uprising, Israel began the

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construction of the West Bank wall, a 708-kilometer separation barrier built to repel Palestinian terror (Bregman, 2000).

In 2005 the Hamas organization won the majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council, which divided the Palestinian Authority into two distinct governing bodies: Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Fatah in the West Bank. Hamas's brutal tactics against Israel has led to three major armed conflicts with Israel: the Gaza War, Operation Pillar of Defense, and Operation Protective Edge. Hamas's motive is to bring international pressure to lift Israel's blockade on the Gaza Strip, and to release Palestinian prisoners from Israel (Petrelli, 2018).

### **Security Defense Service Law**

In 1949 the *Security Defense Service Law* replaced the 1948 Security Service Act, making conscription a routine service for all Israelis. All Jewish Israelis are required to serve in the military, and thus immersed in war. The Israeli Security Service Law is a national law that governs mandatory military conscription for all citizens of Israel, except for those who are granted exemption from service. Approximately a year prior to being drafted, the Israeli Secretary of Defense sends conscripts a *tzav rishon*, or, first calling letter requiring them to undergo intensive physical and mental testing creating a *kaba*, or, qualitative score. The qualitative score is then assessed and used to determine which units the recruit is eligible for. Recruits can be placed in any of the three military branches of the IDF: the army, navy, or air force. Article 24 of the Defense Law extends to cover conscription for non-military branches including: Magav Israeli Border Police, and the Israeli Police Service (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1986).

There have been two major amendments to the act since its implementation in

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1949. However, the 1986 amendment has been used in practice until present day. The law is applicable to both men and women, whether they are Israeli citizens or permanent residents (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1986). All citizens of Israel are bound to the law whether they live in Israel or abroad, even if they have another citizenship, and even if they were born abroad to a parent that was born in Israel. Permanent residents are also required to conscribe, even if they are not citizens of Israel (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1986).

The Defense Service Law states that a 17-year-old may be called for medical examination "for the purpose of determining his fitness for defense service" (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1986, Art. 8). The law also indicates that men are "of military age" between 18 and 54 years of age, and women between 18 and 38 years of age (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1986, Art. 1). Any person, male or female, who has not reported for service, will remain as "designated for defense service" between 18 and 54 years of age. Article 15 of the act stipulates the required length of service for men and women, indicating that service obligations are 36 months for men, and 21 months for women. Both male and female conscripts that become officers must sign a 48-month contractual agreement. Under article 46A, any person that falsifies medical records, or physically hurts themselves in order to avoid conscription, can face up to five years imprisonment. Articles 19, 21, 36, 39, and 40 of the Defense Service Law outline all exemptions from military service. Article 36 grants power to the Israeli Minister of Defense to exempt citizens from service. As well, under article 39, all married women, pregnant women, and mothers, are exempt from service. Article 40 provides the framework for religious exemption and is the only article that can be revoked by the

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Minister of Defense (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1986). Religious exemption is a relevant topic in contemporary Israeli politics because of its very divided outlook.

Introduced in 2002, a controversial law called “Tal Law”, outlined in articles 19 and 21 of the Defense Service Law, has exempted ultra-orthodox Israeli Jews from compulsory conscription. Religious students who provide official paperwork called “Tzav Tal” stating that they are enrolled in a Seminary and that Torah study is their artistry can delay their conscription as long as they continue their studies (Zicherman, 2014). The Tal Law was enacted as an ad hoc provision for five years until a formal act was created, but was extended for two more five-year periods until 2012 when the High Court of Justice ruled that it could no longer be extended due to its constitutional flaws (Zicherman, 2014).

Former Prime Minister David Ben Gurion who exempted 400 religious students from military service in an effort to restore Yeshiva Study, a tradition devastated by the Holocaust, introduced the open-ended deferment policy in 1949. Presently, more than 30,000 religious citizens have taken advantage of the indeterminate deferment (Zicherman & Stern, 2013). Tal Law has been deemed unconstitutional by Israeli judges and politicians, and has been considered unfair by many non-religious Israelis that argue that the military is a social equalizer and that all citizens should share the national burden (Zicherman, 2014). Orthodox Jews, mainly the ultra-orthodox Haredi sect, account for approximately 10 percent of Israel’s population. They argue that Torah study is crucial for the continued survival of the Jewish people and that if religious men are forced to serve in the army they will stray away from the religious path (Zicherman, 2014). On September 12, 2017 Israel’s Supreme Court ruled to strike down amendment numbers 19 and 21 of the Defense Service Law that introduce the framework for military

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arrangements and exemptions for the ultra-orthodox. Court President Miriam Naor stated that “the most severe failure” of the arrangement is its temporary nature and the fact that it did not define any permanent objectives, including eliminating inequality in the application of the military draft and bringing about a real social change” (Israel v. Knesset, 2017). The court ruled that it will give the Knesset (Israel’s Parliament) one year to form a legislative solution that would satisfy the basic principle of equality and would ensure that all Israeli citizens contribute to national service (Israel v. Knesset, 2017).

The Israel Defense Forces Reserve Force is considered to be one of the most integral pillars of the IDF, specifically for the purpose of state security during. In 2008 the Knesset passed a law called the *Reserve Service Law* defining the legal framework surrounding the objectives of the reserves unit, including the rights and duties of each soldier (Reserve Service Law, 2008). Soldiers that have completed their mandatory military service can be called for reserve service including training for a state of emergency, organization of manpower and discipline, operational tasks, natural disasters, and for service in professions determined by a decree . The law also regulates the duration of service in the reserves. All Israelis under the age of 40 who haven’t been granted exemption are eligible for reserve duty, making military relevant in Israeli culture even after completing mandatory service. Women under the age of 40 are exempt from reservist duties after the birth of their first child (Reserve Service Law, 2008). In a period of three years, officers may be obligated to serve up to 84 days; supervisors may serve up to 70 days; and all other positions up to 54 days, although these periods may be extended in a state of emergency by the authorization of the Minister of Defense. The Reserve Service Law introduced a welcomed reform to the constitution of reserve forces as it

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provides adequate pay and limitations of tasks, which ensures reservists are only called for duty if it is absolutely necessary (Reserve Service Law, 2008).

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**CHAPTER 2: TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE**  
**COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES, CULTURAL IDENTITY**

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The scientific study of the psychological aftermath of war has flourished in the last 25 years. Both empirical and clinical literature have provided incontrovertible evidence to support the idea that war imposes a heavy toll on combatants, military personnel, and civilians. Most Israeli citizens have, or will have, contributed to national service through conscription (Bregman, 2000; West, 2003). As such, a high percentage of citizens are at risk of experiencing transient trauma or traumatic disorders. Presently, many psychological and mental health researchers have studied the individual and psychoanalytical influence of trauma. *Trauma* stems from ancient Greek language, meaning: “wound”. Caruth (1996) contextualizes the definition by arguing that the term “trauma” is:

“...a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind’ – a wound inflicted by an emotional shock so powerful that it breaches ‘the mind’s experience of time, self and the world’ and eventually manifests itself in dreams and flashbacks. In this conception, an occurrence is traumatic not simply because it is forceful, but because it is unthinkable, in that it resists simple comprehension” (Caruth, 1995:3).

Historically trauma has been understood to be a wound that becomes more psychologically injurious in the aftermath of its experience, as the repression of memory, also known as a period of latency, can result in harmful manifestations (Caruth, 2016). Individuals that experience trauma often choose to erase the painful memories from their consciousness. Conventional tasks inherent to an individual’s daily routine become arduous as the emotions suppressed from others are intensified within the individual. Eyerman (2013) applies Habermas’s political discourse to conceptualize the severe

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impact trauma can have on an individual:

“...[trauma] resembles crisis at the societal level. A crisis, such as a severe economic depression, is a shocking occurrence which can cause a breakdown in daily routines and expose at the same time the largely taken for granted values that guide them; crises in this sense reveal to a collective the grounds of its collective identity” (Eyerman, 2013: 43).

Individual trauma is the agent that dissociates individuals from a state of equilibrium towards a state of shock. Similarly, traumas experienced by Israelis, has had a profound effect on its society as a collective, as both experience stem from shock (Eyerman, 2013).

### **Collective Trauma**

Conflict from war in Israeli society is far from unfamiliar, and collectively experienced. No lack of empirical evidence exists on the psychological effects of conflict-induced trauma, however, cultural trauma research is still a fairly new phenomenon. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis theory, was deeply interested in the possible application of psychoanalytic concepts to collective phenomena and devoted major works to it between the first and second world wars. In his most sustained discourse of trauma and memory, Freud (1920) provided two examples involving the affect trauma has on a group, deriving from individual trauma theories such as “war neurosis”, contemporarily referred to as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In his later work on the historical development of monotheistic Judaism, Freud suggested parallels between individual and collective trauma by suggesting that the “trauma” of the collective murder of Moses was followed by a period of latency and then the

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reemergence of Mosaic ideas <sup>2</sup>.

Sociologist Kai Erikson was the first to develop a social theory of “collective trauma” in the 1970’s. Erikson (1976) suggested that trauma isn’t exclusive to individuals, and can be experienced by communities. He developed the concept through his work on individual psychological trauma, realizing that trauma is the result of “a continuing pattern of abuse” or “a single searing assault”(Erikson, 1995:184). He describes trauma as “the state or condition produced by a stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behavior”(Erikson, 1995:184). Erikson’s idea of trauma as a deep rooted social dimension provided grounds for his later work on community trauma and how it can effect not just an individual, but a collective of people who have experienced similar devastations. Erikson defines *collective trauma* as:

“The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared ...“I” continue to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. “You” continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But “we” no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body” (Erikson, 1976:154).

In his later work, Erikson (1995) expands on the idea and suggests that collective trauma

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<sup>2</sup> As discussed in: Suleiman, S. R. (2014). *Trauma, memory, vulnerability [special issue]*. Profession, no pagination.

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has the ability to create community. He argues that traumatic experiences often unify individuals that have undergone similar obstacles, as their “estrangement becomes the basis for communality”(186). The theory is not limited to individuals that were present during the event, but to anyone that associated with the “damaged social organism”(188). Collective trauma affects society systemically, as opposed to a numerically, as it is both socially caused and socially sustained. Erikson (1994:232) states: “trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back.” Victims of traumatic events often distance themselves from others that do not share the same lived experiences, finding comfort from the community of individuals that understand their reality. Subsequently, the inclusive nature of collective trauma fosters a fundamentally exclusive network, as only those who have experienced the same or similar events can relate to others within the group, which are characterized by similar features of everyday existence, akin to a “culture”.

Cultural trauma refers to groups and societies where trauma is apparent in all social spheres. The term is most appropriate when the vast majority of individuals within a group are shocked by an event. The reactions experienced by individuals are unique, suggesting that cultural trauma is multi-layered, complex, and reflects heterogeneous worldviews (Arieli-Horowitz, 2009). Cultural trauma theory was developed by means of the shared perspectives and ideologies of social theorists who realized that trauma has both theoretical importance and empirical power (Alexander, 2004). Sociologists Jeffery Alexander, and Ron Eyerman are leading scholars of cultural trauma. Having studied conflict-induced collective reactions to trauma from both the Holocaust, and the Slavery

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of African Americans, they have developed a definition of cultural trauma. Cultural trauma is a “dimension apart” from collective trauma, as it “refers to more abstract and mediated notions of collective identity, including religious and national identity” (Eyerman, 2013: 43). While individual, collective, and cultural trauma theories are all intrinsically linked, cultural trauma is distinct in that it can “undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole” (Smelser, 2004: 38). Cultural trauma occurs when a group of people feels that they have experienced an event that has affected them austerely. These events have such impactful consequences that they can change the future behaviours of the collective (Alexander, 2012). Cultural trauma is dependent upon the society in which it exists, as the society must be vulnerable to the damage, and must be successful at repressing it. Nations that experience trauma as a collective form a collective identity by means of “definable membership” with the group (Smelser, 2004: 43).

“All collective traumas have some bearing on national identity. While in some cases national trauma results in enhancing a sense of unity within a society, there are other cases in which collective traumas have fragmenting affects...Social heritage provides us with an everyday blueprint and a sense of social continuity” (Smelser, 2004:44<sup>3</sup>).

Trauma can shape the identity of a culture, even when many members of this culture weren't directly impacted by the event, as “it is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of it” (Eyerman, 2001: 62). The notion of

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<sup>3</sup> Neil Smelser, as quoted by Neal, Arthur G. 1998 *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe

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trauma implies that it is both community and identity disrupting since the groups that surround those who have experienced the traumatic event are exposed to the effects it has on the individual, providing reason as to why socio-cultural trauma theorists often associate collective trauma to collective memory, and collective (national) identity.

Contemporary trauma literature frames the reflections on trauma and memory in collective terms. It is no longer a question of finding analogies between individual and collective trauma, where the former acts as a template for the latter, but rather of constructing models that start with the collective. Social theorist Ron Eyerman applied and expanded on Erikson's theory of collective trauma through his discourse of African American Identity (Eyerman, 2001). He argues that collective memory forms collective identity. Eyerman states that cultural trauma is: "... not as an institution or even an experience, but a collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people" (Eyerman, 2001: 60). Memory is implicit to the understanding of trauma as burdens of the past can weigh heavily on the future (Eyerman, 2004). Freud characterized the memory of trauma as "a foreign body, which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work" (Smelser, 2004: 33)<sup>4</sup>. This conceptualization provided a foundation to the understanding of trauma as both "an event, plus context" (Smelser, 2004: 34). The context is the residual consciousness of the individual that is shared and passed on to the collective, which, in turn, creates collective

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<sup>4</sup> Neal Smelser, as quoted by: Breuer, J. and Freud, S. (1893). *On The Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume II (1893-1895): Studies on Hysteria 1-17

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memory.

“Collective memory is defined as recollections of a shared past which are passed on through ongoing processes of commemoration, officially sanctioned rituals which remember a group through calling upon a common heritage, with a shared past as a central component. Such processes are as much physical and emotional as they are cognitive in that the past is both embodied and recalled through such cultural practices. ...[Collective] memory unifies the group through time and over space by providing a narrative frame, a collective story, which locates the individual and his and her biography within it, and which, because it can be represented as narrative and as text, attains mobility. The narrative can travel, as individuals travel, and it can be embodied, written down, painted, represented, communicated and received in distant places by isolated individuals, who can then, through them, be remembered and reunited with the collective”(Eyerman, 2004: 161).

Memory is part of an individual's identity and helps account for human behaviour. The memories from an individual's past are carried into the present through interaction and allows an individual to place themselves within a narrative, by conversing with others that also position themselves within similar narratives and experiences (Eyerman, 2001). Traumatic events are not subject to borders, providing fluidity and influence to different social groups, such as religions. National identity is created when members of the collective share their stories. These testimonies can change the identity of a group, and provide context to present behaviours and ideologies.

### **Socio-Constructivist Trauma Theory**

Contemporary social-constructivist Jeffrey Alexander expounds on the foundational theories of cultural trauma, identity, and memory presented above. Alexander (2012) argues that collective trauma is not created from a specific event; rather, it is a “socially mediated attribution” (Alexander, 2012: 13). He suggests that in order for an individual event to migrate into sectors of social significance, it has to be established as a shared value. As Alexander explains, trauma is the interchange between speaker and audience, that is, the traumatized and those who can recognize or deny the trauma.

“...this new scientific concept [of cultural trauma] also illuminates an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action. It is by constructing cultural trauma that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but “take on board” some significant responsibility for it. Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma, and thereby assume such moral responsibility, members of collectives define their solidary relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the sufferings of others” (Alexander, 2012: 15)

Alexander’s theoretical framework focuses on the communicative aspect of the traumatic response, as he expands the moral spectrum of trauma beyond those who would typically support the victim (i.e. family and friends). This process requires agents, mediations, and a community of “carrier groups” (Alexander, 2012:16). Carrier groups are not defined by class status, and are the “collective agents of the social process” that create “meaning

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making” in the public sphere that enhance and perpetuate the success and survival of both the individual and the collective (Alexander, 2012: 16). These agents represent and communicate the pain of the victim, creating a division of “us” from “them”. In order for a carrier group to be successful in gaining attention from the public, agents must use resources available to them to convince the group that they have been traumatized (Alexander, 2012:17). To ensure success in collective representation, a “master narrative” must be formed amongst group members that rationalize the group’s ideologies.

Alexander establishes four intrinsic factors in creating a master narrative:

1. The nature of the pain, which provides understanding of the injury sustained by the group;
2. The nature of the victim, which is the group affected by the traumatizing pain;
3. The relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience, which is the extent to which “members of the audience for trauma representations experience an identity with the immediately victimized group”.
4. Attribution of responsibility, which is who caused the trauma or who were the perpetrators, (Alexander, 2012: 17-19).

In order for a trauma to be cultural, the trauma process, that is, the gap between the event and its representation, must make claims, which are produced by carrier groups and structured through different institutional arenas. These collective actors are broadly conceptualized into categories called “institutional arenas”, such as: religious, aesthetic, mass media, legal, scientific and state bureaucracy (Alexander, 2012: 19-22). Alexander argues that “stratifactional hierarchies” such as governments influence institutional arenas, and have the power to influence the trauma process. As the bearers of memory,

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carrier groups articulate the significance of the traumatic event for the collective, and to the extent they are successful, the occurrence can become a vital part of that group's collective identity. Memories of tragedy and sadness not only inspire Israelis to make lasting change, but drive them by a communal imperative to ensure they won't confront these experiences again.

### **Reconceptualising “National” Resilience**

A seemingly simple concept, resilience, is derived from Latin origin meaning to “spring back or recover quickly after an accident” (Ridley, 2017). However, the diversity and immense size of literature on resilience demonstrates the complexities in constructing a concrete definition for the term. The term resilience has been used across multiple disciplines including: ecology, geography, biology, international relations, politics, climate change, human development, planning and national security (Bhamra, Dani, & Burnard, 2011). Over time, the term resilience is embraced by the behavioral sciences to describe the adjustment and coping capacities of individuals, human communities, and larger societies (Gal, 2014). On an individual level, resilience refers to the coping skills existing within, or developed by an individual, that allows them to subsist when experiencing adverse circumstances, and then regress back to their normal daily lives ex-post-facto (Lewin, 2012). This chapter will discuss resilience through a national, and social context, emphasizing the “collective” and “community” aspects of the term (Gal, 2014: 454).

According to Bhamra et al. (2011), in social systems, resilience is defined as the “capability and ability of an element to return to a pre-disturbance state after disruption” (Bhamra et al., 2011:5385). The authors also define three sequential phases of resilience

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which contextualize the three phases of disaster management:

- Readiness and preparedness
- Response and adaptation and
- Recovery or adjustment

Communities that are considered resilient in nature possess the ability to recover from disruptive events, as they are able to plan, prepare, absorb, and recover from such events when they occur, even when these events are unexpected (Bhamra et al., 2011). It is also assumed that in resilient communities vulnerability and distress are expected and intelligible reactions to conflict, but they regard these factors as transient, with their adverse effects receding over time and ultimately strengthening the community as a whole (Pfefferbaum et al., 2007). Literature on social resilience asserts that vulnerability is caused by a society's determination to achieve resilience (Schott, 2013). However, Bhamra et al. (2011) argue that vulnerability shouldn't be looked at as result of resilience, rather, resilience as being one of two constituents of vulnerability, the other being adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity allows a society to learn from disruption and adapt accordingly, as well as grow as the environment around them changes. A society that is vulnerable is more inclined to achieve resilience through their adaptive capacity.

National resilience in the context of war and terrorism was seldom studied prior to the 9/11 attacks in Washington and New York (Butler & Leskin, 2007). Despite there being previous terror attacks, these events were incomparable to any previous act of terrorism in the developed world, and created a national consciousness of vulnerability and threat (Butler & Leskin, 2007). The purpose of terrorism is to create both fear and instability within society, aimed at “non-combatants with the objective of the deliberation

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of dread” (Stern, 2003: 7). Public attitudes in the face of threat are significant in measuring a country’s ability to be resilient as resilience is just as much dependent on the strength of the people within its society as it is on its leadership and security establishments. This is especially true in countries that have endured consistent threat and terror, as its intention is to achieve political goals through the demoralization of society (Ben Dor et al., 2002). Literature on social resilience notes that a “whole is more than the sum of its parts,” meaning that a resilient collective may also be comprised of non-resilient individuals, or experience less-resilient moments, although resilience as a whole, as a “unit,” will be high (Pfefferbaum et al., 2007). In smaller communities, resilience relies on local support and resources allowing for “prompt collective refunctioning” (Gal, 2014: 454). Williams and Drury (2009) argue that communities exhibit social resilience by:

“...the way people in crowds express and expect solidarity and cohesion and thereby co-ordinate and draw upon collective sources of practical and emotional support adaptively to deal with an emergency or disaster (Williams & Drury, 2009: 294).”

Through small networks of support groups and social bonds, individuals are able to inspire each other to their persevere and not fall victim to coercion. Gal (2014) argues that the conceptual framework provided by Williams and Drury (2009) would only be appropriate in small-scale communities, and may be unrealistic on a national level because of its emphasis on social bonds, and group support networks.

On a larger scale, national resilience is a country’s capacity to endure severe challenges, and its ability to keep its social fabric intact through patriotism, optimism,

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and trust in its political leadership. Moreover, countries displaying national resilience will be curbed by instability in periods of unrest but will promptly return to a state of “business as usual” and normality (Gal, 2014: 454). When discussing an entire nation’s ability to show its resilience, Gal emphasizes Norris et al.’s (2008) mass-behaviour conceptual approach:

“Although we recognize that a community is not merely the sum total (or average) of its members, we recommend that community-level adaptation be understood as “population wellness,” a high prevalence of wellness in the community, defined as high and non-disparate levels of mental and behavioral health, role functioning, and quality of life in constituent populations (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008: 133).”

While Norris et al.’s (2008) focus is on natural disasters, its objective remains consistent with all aspects of social resilience; a nation that is able to quickly recover, or, “bounce back”, both individually and collectively is what allows it to achieve resilience. In times of crisis, individuals, households, businesses, and other organizations must work together to turn into nodes of a national network of resilient communities. Gal (2014) expands on the idea of “population wellness” and suggests that in times of crisis, public reactions must remain normative. Individuals react to the harsh events, protect themselves against them, and then quickly return to their normal daily routines. Positive and optimistic perceptions creates a strong sense of patriotism and commitment within society, in turn creating “demonstrated resilience” (Gal, 2014: 470). Through perpetual preparedness for threats and disruptions, prompt responses, constant reformation of its military and

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security forces, and its consistent ability to grow and recover as a collective, it is evident that Israel continues to be a resilient society, and has been since its inception in 1948.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

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The methods and procedures section that follows will begin by summarizing the rationale for why grounded theory has been chosen as the qualitative method for this study. It will then outline the study design and main tenants of grounded theory, the chosen methodological approach for the current study. Finally, this section will detail participant recruitment and inclusion criteria, demographics and participant stories. The procedure section will outline the proposed sampling method, interview approach, data collection process and data analysis for the current study.

### **Rational for the Present Study**

While there has been extensive qualitative research done on both trauma and resilience theories as separate entities, there has been a gap in literature on their juxtaposition. The present study attempts to expand on Bhamra's (2011) resilience theory by identifying whether existential anxiety is the trauma that creates the "vulnerability" factor that encourages national resilience in Israel.

### **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is the methodological approach that provided the framework for the present study. Grounded theory is a systematic method of qualitative research that seeks to generate new theory to explain phenomenon, and is a well used research methods within the social sciences (J. Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Rather than outlining specific rules, grounded theory provides general principles and methods of inquiry that allow the researcher to generate a theory about a phenomenon of interest (Charmaz, 2006). First conceptualized by Glaser and Strauss in their 1967 publication, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, grounded theory emerged as a reaction against the overwhelming emphasis on empiricism and quantitative

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methodologies used in social science disciplines such as sociology and psychology.

Grounded theory research is an inductive method of theoretical research, in which general explanations of an identified process are deduced through careful analysis of data, generated through participants who have experienced the process under inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2006) uses the framework developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and provides detailed guidance to help researchers navigate the grounded theory research process.

The research process begins with speculative theories regarding aspects of social life. The researcher then identifies an initial sample of people to interview, to collect data that widen understanding of the proposed theory. Once the collection of data has commenced, the researcher analyzes it and begins speculating theories that provide understanding of the phenomena. Throughout the sampling process, emerging data is consistently analyzed and compared with formerly collected data, until saturation is achieved. Saturation occurs when no new ideas arise from emerging data; upon which coding can begin and data analysis can occur (Charmaz, 2006).

The findings of this study propose that the relationship between trauma and resilience is a cascading effect, with trauma likely influencing the experience of vulnerability, and vulnerability likely influencing the experience of resilience. Grounded theory allows for an interpretative understanding of trauma and resilience without presupposing a definitive and simple answer to whether or not trauma is the “vulnerability” factor that allows for national resilience in Israel. The purpose of the project is to derive meaning and interpretations by gathering information on real world experiences, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals.

### **Procedure**

Participation for the study was voluntary. Participants were met upon the arrival of a set date and time at the location of their choosing in the cities of Tel Aviv, and Haifa, Israel. The cities were chosen based on their ease of access for participants living in both central and northern Israel. The interviews took place over a three-week period in December 2017. I made efforts to protect the participants' confidentiality, and to encourage active participation. As such, interview protocols required that other individuals were not directly present during the time of the interview.

All responses were kept anonymous, and each participant was given a pseudonym before being interviewed. Prior to the commencement of the interview, participants were required to provide formal consent by filling out the informed consent form approved by the Carleton University Human Research Ethics Board (CUREB). Participants were assured that there is no penalty for choosing not to participate, and that they could withdraw their participation, or portions of their responses, up to February 15, 2018.

Participants were aware of the potential risks due to the sensitivity in discussing experiences of trauma and were told that if they felt unable to answer any questions, they could choose to either stop the interview or continue with the interview and choose not to answer specific questions. They were also assured that should they choose to withdraw, the data collected from their interview would be destroyed. After being informed of the purpose and potential risks of their participation, and reviewing the Informed Consent Form, participants were permitted to make an informed decision about whether or not they wished to participate in the research. Only participants who chose to sign the informed consent form were interviewed, but participants were not aware of this until

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they made a decision so that they wouldn't feel obligated to participate. All 17 participants chose to sign the consent form. Participants were told that with their consent, they would be audio recorded. 16 participants provided consent to the audio recording. 1 participant who wished to participate did not provide consent to audio recording due to contractual obligations from their employer. The audio recorder is used to ensure accuracy when coding. However, all participants were told that the audio recording could be paused or stopped at any time. All participants were aware of the use of audio recording prior to the interview and were informed via email invitation (see appendix C) and the Informed Consent Form (see appendix A).

The Informed Consent Form outlined to participants how the data obtained from the interview would be used, and that certain comments might be quoted to illustrate points identified through analysis. They were also informed of the pseudonym given to them should they be directly quoted. The digital recording device was locked in a small lockbox when not in use or during transportation. I am the only person who has access to the lockbox's key. Recordings of interviews remained in the internal memory of the digital recorder until the record is fully transcribed. Further, I transcribed the audio record directly from the digital recorder, and the audio record was never transferred from the recorder onto a computer. Once I completed transcribing the interviews, the audio recording was deleted. Since most interviews were conducted in Hebrew language, I translated the interviews into English after they were transcribed in Hebrew.

All transcribed information has been kept in a locked file on my password-protected laptop. All interviews were transcribed in Israel to ensure there wouldn't be a breach in the privacy of the information collected (i.e. theft or loss of the digital

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recorder). Transcriptions were translated from Hebrew to English upon arrival back to Canada in January 2018. Session notes, audio records, and signed consent forms were securely stored in a locked briefcase that only I had access to. In an effort to allow participants the opportunity to direct the content of their responses, and thereby facilitate the emergence of a grounded theory, I deemed it necessary to use a less direct title in the recruitment materials, as well as a semi-structured interview method. Participants were never prompted during the course of the interview to ensure they were purely by their own beliefs and ideologies.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Participants were required to meet the following criteria:

1. Were above the age of consent;
2. Can communicate effectively in either English or Hebrew languages;
3. Have completed their mandatory military service in the Israel Defense Forces;
4. Were willing to discuss their experiences of being conscribed to the IDF (both mandatory service, and when applicable, reserves);
5. Consider themselves to be emotionally stable and have not been diagnosed with a severe mental illness or personality disorder;
6. Were willing to speak candidly about their experiences and are available for a face-to-face interview;
7. Currently reside in Israel.

### **Sampling Strategies**

Snowball sampling is one method of purposive sampling and is commonly used to reach hidden or difficult populations. Snowball sampling can be both an alternative and

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complementary sampling strategy (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Other sampling methods were not feasible for the purpose of the project as I do not reside in the geographical area in which the study took place. Snowball sampling is an informal method of sampling and is used to access potential interviewees, by creating contacts with friends and acquaintances that have access to target populations (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). These contacts become the “first link” of contacts that is developed within each primary contact. An argued limitation of snowball sampling has been an advantage for the project. It has been commonly stated that snowball sampling is subject to selection bias due to the highly specific nature of the target population. Snowball sampling limited the possibility of sampling bias, as, other than meeting inclusion criteria; I had never met most of the participants prior to interviewing them.<sup>5</sup> As well, interviewees are more likely to be responsive when contacted by trusted friends and acquaintances as opposed to the common practice of researchers seeking their own research subjects in unfamiliar territory (Cohen & Arieli, 2011).

Initial participants and informants were identified through personal relationships. Further, participants who successfully completed the interview process were asked to help recruit others by telling potential participants and informants about the study. I shared a recruitment email with participants and requested that they share it with interested individuals. Since nearly each primary contact served in a different division of the IDF for their mandatory military service, and most of the participants kept in touch

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<sup>5</sup> Demographically, more than 60% of the Israeli population meets the age specified in the inclusion criteria for this project. However, this demographic also represents individuals that do not enlist to the IDF for various reasons. As such, the percentage was adjusted to properly represent the percentage of individuals that enlist.

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with friends and acquaintances from their service, it allowed for a comprehensive representation of the targeted population. The snowball sampling method continued until an adequate sample had been recruited, and saturation had been reached. According to Charmaz (2006) categories are saturated when “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (113). Glaser expands on this framework by arguing that saturation is not just observing consistent patterns, rather, when “no new properties of the pattern emerge” (Glaser, 2001: 191). Corbin and Strauss (2008) provide a plausible approach to overcome these barriers and suggests that saturating concepts within a study, as opposed to saturating the sample, is a more appropriate method of achieving completion. If the researcher regards saturation as an analytical process (as opposed to the result of data collection), saturation is more likely to encourage meaning making during textual analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

### **Confidentiality & Ethical Consideration**

The present project was undertaken after review and approval from the Carleton University Human Research Ethics Board (CUREB). The clearance number for the project is: 107914. I am the only person that can identify participants other than the participant or the informant that recruited them. I am also bound by the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, and completed the TCPS 2: CORE online course that outlines the ethical requirements for consent in research involving humans. The theories provided in the course were respected and adhered to throughout the research process to ensure safety for both the participant and the researcher. The identities of all participants are protected by assigned pseudonyms,

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and any identifying information in their narratives was speculation of potential recognition. All participants provided written consent before the interview, and were given full explanations as to the nature of the research and the format the interview would take. All participants were also advised that should they become distressed during the interview process, they could stop the interview. Prior to the commencement of interviews, I contacted METIV Trauma and Crisis Centre in Tel Aviv Israel, and given a contact number to provide to participants should they become distressed during the interview process and want to speak to a professional trauma counsellor.

### **Interview Methods**

I created a semi-structured qualitative interview that is comprised of 26 questions about the participants' experiences throughout the duration of their mandatory military service, as well as overall experiences, and potential traumatic consequences, of living in a country that is always at risk of potential threat (see Appendix C). Interview questions were constructed for one-on-one interviews to allow the interviewee control over the interview process. Each interview lasted between 40-60 minutes and has been audio-recorded. The process of intensive interviewing and using semi-structured interview questions allows the researcher to ask open-ended, and direct questions that will limit the interviewee from feeling restricted when talking about their subjective world (Charmaz, 2006). They provide flexibility to the interviewer when allowing for unanticipated responses and issues to emerge, as researchers can pick up and expand on different themes that arise during the interviews, to increase "analytic incisiveness of the resultant analysis" (Charmaz, 2006: 29). Since the interviews were all conducted face-to-face, it is important that the researcher interprets and memos non-verbal cues through observation

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of body language, and facial expression (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009). Environment is also a factor as it is important that interviews took place in a location chosen by the interviewee, which ensured they were comfortable.

For the purpose of the present project, it has been important to let the interviewee tell their own story and personal experiences without influence of my personal thoughts and experiences of the topic in question. While some questions directly approached trauma, I did not specifically address questions of resilience. Therefore, participant's responses to all interview questions were considered part of the analysis. Open-ended questions seemed to be more likely than others to allow for resiliency responses such as: "What are your views on the future of the state?" and "Would you prefer to live somewhere other than Israel? Why/ Why not?" Once themes began to arise, they were used as a framework to guide future interviews. This allowed me to probe and explore hidden meanings and understanding, creating richer and more textured data that is congruent with the objectives of the study (Ryan et al., 2009).

### **Memo Writing**

Memo writing is imperative for the purpose of the present study as I conducted the interviews during a three-week period in Israel. Collected data had to be as thorough as possible during the interview process to ensure proper interpretation of the data once it was analyzed upon return to Canada. Memo writing is essential because it captures the thoughts and questions raised during the interview, and makes them concrete for later retrieval. They also provide direction for the researcher as the act of writing forces them to think about their data and make connections from an early stage in the research process (Charmaz, 2006: 72).

### **Coding Methods**

Data has been coded through observations of the meaning constructs that are relevant to the study of trauma and national resilience. These meanings were compared and contrasted to look for patterns, differences, and unique meaning structures that created the frame from which the analysis is built (Charmaz, 2006: 45). Qualitative coding is void of preconceived categories or codes. Codes are created through trends found within the data, upon which a theory is created to explain the data. Charmaz discusses the importance of qualitative coding in learning:

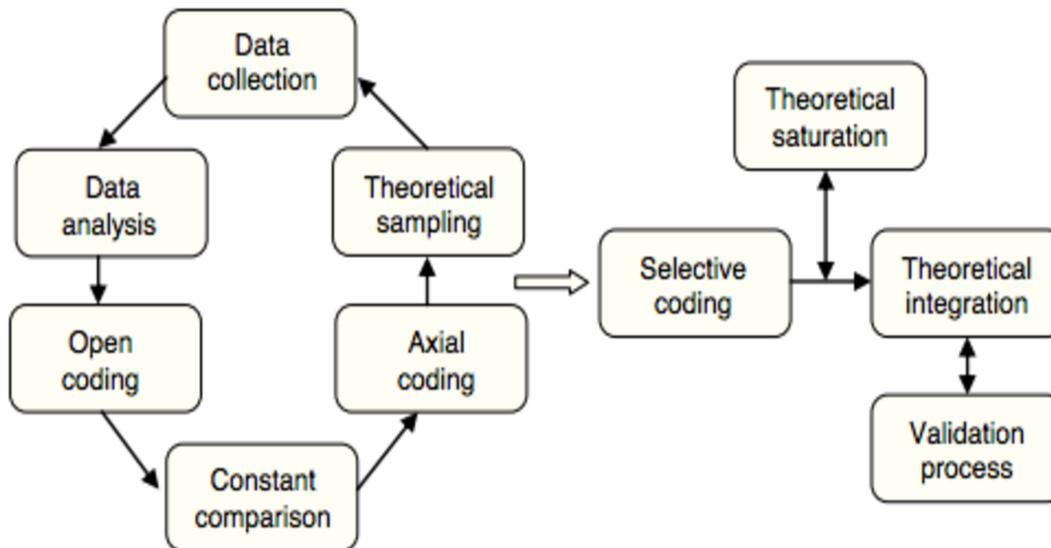
“ Coding furthers our attempts to understand acts and accounts, scenes and sentiments, stories and silences from our research participants' view. We want to know what is happening in the setting, in people's lives, and in lines of our recorded data. Hence, we try to understand our participants' standpoints and situations, as well as their actions within the setting”(Charmaz, 2006: 46).

The examination of language is of fundamental importance when coding because the researcher is the one attributing meaning to their participant's testimonies. Especially when transcripts are translated from one language to another, the researcher must be as detailed as possible to conceptualize the inner meanings and perspectives of their participants' worldviews. Thus, it is important that the researcher carefully analyzes their data during the coding process to ensure that hidden assumptions are examined throughout (Charmaz, 2006: 47).

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Other than 1 participant who did not consent to audio recording, all 16 participants were interviewed and audio-recorded.<sup>6</sup> Note taking was conducted for the 1 participant that could not be audio-recorded. These recordings and notes were then translated from Hebrew to English, and transcribed onto Microsoft Word. After concluding the transcription process, all files were uploaded to NVIVO qualitative analysis software to begin the coding process.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) discuss three distinct phases of coding when using a grounded theory method. These phases were developed as methods of breaking down the data to help a researcher think through the process.



Strauss's grounded theory framework (Roman, Osinski, & Erdmann, 2017)

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<sup>6</sup> The participant could not consent to audio recording because of a confidentiality agreement with their employer.

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Open coding, also referred to as *Focused Coding*, is the first phase of analysis and involves the close examination of the data, followed by assigning definitions into discrete categories that emerge as coherent and meaningful entities (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

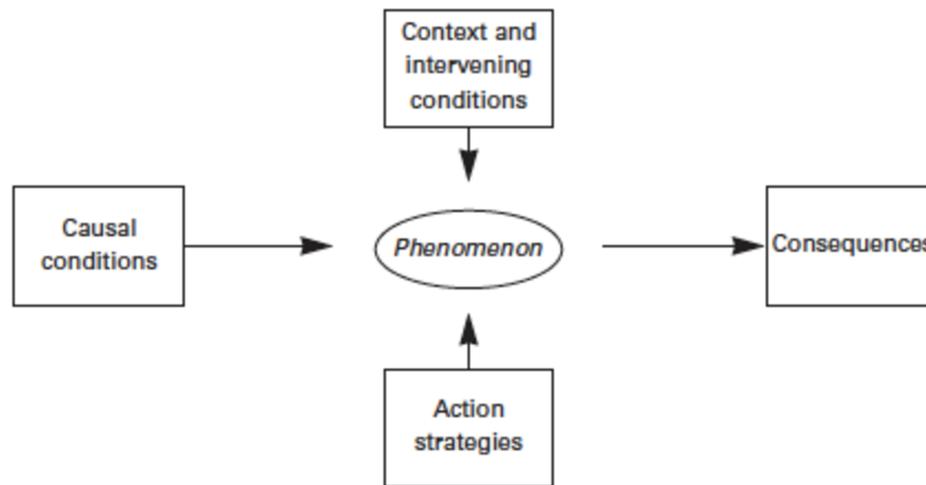
Open coding allows the researcher to be open-minded through a “constant comparative approach” in an attempt to saturate the data. Tentative labels are given to big sections of data, and properties are established for each code. Through the application of knowledge about the context and area of investigation, and constantly comparing codes and data, theory is formed.

The second phase of coding according to Corbin and Strauss (1990) is axial coding. Axial codes are the consequences that contribute to the development of a phenomenon, and require the researcher to ask questions that help make connections between categories and subcategories (Bohm, 2004):

1. What does my data refer to?
2. With what are the actions and interactions in the data actually concerned?(Bohm, 2004: 272)

Through both deductive and inductive thinking, categories and concepts are compared to each other and the relationships amongst them are identified (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

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Coding Paradigm for Social Science Research Questions (Bohm, 2004: 272)

The focus in this phase of analysis is to locate categories within the objective context, identify how these categories have been created or maintained, recognize the strategies through which they exist, and what the consequences of those strategies are (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Selective coding is the final phase of analysis and results in the production of core categories that develop themes that are central to the core objectives of a project (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Core categories are related to other categories developed in the open, and axial coding phases, which are grouped together to help explain the phenomena.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS**

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Using the design and methods detailed in chapter 4, participants' experiences were divided into two core themes that facilitated understanding of the processes of trauma, resilience, and their interconnection. While trauma and resilience have a synergistic, they have been separated for analytical convenience. Each of the participant's stories naturally mapped onto these two core themes, with different participants emphasizing some themes over others (e.g. some participants engaged in a lengthy process of searching for meaning while others reached a resolution quickly). The two core themes are each comprised of 3-5 main themes that were experienced by most or all of the participants. Most of the main themes were divided into 2 sub-themes that represent specific facets of participants' experiences. These sub-themes provide a richer illustration of the unique way in which resilience is an unequivocal response to trauma.

### **Core Theme 1: Trauma**

#### *Lay Trauma Theory*

In order to provide context for participants' narratives, each participant was asked to provide a definition for the word "trauma". Many participants openly shared accounts of specific experiences that occurred to them during their mandatory service that could have resulted in the experience of trauma defined through lay trauma theory. One of the initial interview questions asked participants to provide a definition of what they understand the concept of "trauma" to be. All 17 participants provided a lay trauma theory definition: a psychological outcome from negative events. Participant Liran provided a detailed definition that correlates with psychological trauma. She provided the example of one of her friends who had suffered with post traumatic stress disorder following the tragic death of her father:

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...She went through a traumatic experience and now has to live with it and think about it every single day. It's really a personal experience, or something that happens to someone close to you that affects you. But like, for another example, a terrorist attack. What gave them the trauma could have given many people who were there trauma too but each person is going through that experience in their own way. (Liran)

Liran alleged that traumatic events could also affect a collective, but remained that trauma is very much a personal, and psychological experience. Many participants described trauma as an experience that inevitably follows bad events that result in consequences for the individuals and victim societies (F. Alexander, 2012):

Something that stays in your memory forever and affects you for life. (Liran)

Trauma is hopefully only one specific event in your life that has consequences for the rest of your life. Something that you need counselling for. Something that you can't stop thinking about. (Danielle)

Trauma is something that stays with you for a period of time. It's something that you don't want to happen, that takes you by surprise. It's something that you need counselling for. (Joseph)

Trauma is a difficult experience that leaves marks on your soul. Something that you take with you from a difficult experience. Something incredibly negative. (Shir)

Trauma is an extreme event that attacks you without being prepared for it. A violent experience that is unexpected that causes you to respond in either "flight, fight, or freeze". You are not physically or mentally prepared, and

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seeing that there is nothing you can do about it. (Olga)

Participants described trauma as damage to the psyche. Something that occurs as the result of a severely distressing event, that results in an overwhelming amount of negative emotion making it difficult to cope or come to terms with the specific experience.

Interestingly, while many participants provided stories of specific accounts of severely distressing events from their mandatory or reserves service, none of the participants believed these events to be “traumatic” as per the definitions they provided. Prior to or immediately after providing their definition of trauma, some participants felt compelled to confirm without prompt that they do not, and did not suffer from trauma as a direct result of distressing events occurring throughout the duration of their service:

I didn't suffer from trauma. I would define it as someone who suffers one experience that triggers something in their brain that causes them to suffer from mental health issues. (Amir)

Some participant's interpretation of trauma included feelings of long-term debilitating effects, describing these feelings using the same words:

Something that I would think about everyday and would affect me for the rest of my life. Yes, terrible things happen everyday but that's a factor of war and kind of obvious when you're on the border. We hope nothing bad will happen, but we know there is always a possibility of something terrible happening to you or one of your friends and that's something we just live with, you know? (Lior)

Something that I would think about everyday and would affect me for the rest of my life. I never experienced anything like that. I don't really look back at

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the army and think it was a traumatizing experience. (Niv)

While trauma differs between participants according to their subjective experiences, it is interesting to note that despite some participants detailing negative experiences, only two participants (11%) perceived their exposure to correspond with the definition of trauma they provided. Rather, most participants (89%) described these accounts normatively, interpreting their negative experiences in a way that allows them to be resilient, suggesting that these were standard experiences that are expected as a result of their service.

### *Experiences of War: Loss, & “Trauma”*

Nearly one third (29%) of participants experienced loss of family members, friends, or acquaintances, as a result of mandatory military service. Exposures to different forms of death in combat included the loss of family, friends, and partners. Participants that had experienced loss and suffering provided personal stories. For example, Eliana shared her father’s experience of loss in combat that resulted in continued suffering for her family:

You know, we also have reserves. Especially in infantry or those types of positions, every year you’re called back for a week of training in case there’s a big war and you’re needed. A few years ago during the second Lebanon war my dad was called back to base as a reservist. This experience was really the first time I had ever seen him cry. Him and his friends from the army were all called back to Kfar Giladi in the North. Hezbollah sent a rocket and it killed many of the soldiers that were at that base. My dad was supposed to be there but the day before they told him to go back home but his friends stayed. My

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dad was on the phone with the base at the time and then one of his friends told him he would get right back to him because there was a rocket that was approaching but the rocket landed on the base and everyone was killed. Two days later we had to go to the funeral for all his friends. It could have been his funeral too. These were his friends from the time he had first been enlisted, they would come over for Shabbat dinner all the time; it was a very difficult experience for them.

Reactions of loss in war were communicated in line with how the average person would expect to react to tragic loss of someone close to them: through grief and suffering. These events can lead to psychological reactions of loss and grief, which are considered normal reactions to traumatic experiences. For example, Shlomi stated that the First Lebanon War was the first time he became aware of Israel's war conflict, and his first experience with death and trauma:

My memory was from the age of 10. 1982 was the first Lebanon war. My dad left for a week from the house (he was a taxi driver so he was always driving soldiers to base). My older sisters friend got married a day before the war broke out, and her husband was killed a day after. This was a crazy shock in the house.

Charon recalled the death of his neighbour during the Second Lebanon War, and the affect it had on his family:

He was sent as a reservist to protect the borders and his base was hit with a rocket. It was both shocking and sad. I can't even imagine what his wife went through. To think that two days after you get married your partner dies, I

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can't even imagine what kind of traumatic effect that must have had, well, I can tell you that we didn't see much of the families after that and their entire personalities changed for a long time.

Despite loss in war being an inevitable reality in Israeli society, participants that had experienced death of friends and family members were disillusioned to their experiences. For example, much like all individuals that were raised in Israel, Ori had experienced many wars, with countless casualties, both throughout her childhood and during her military service. However, she was still dismayed that one of her classmates was killed while patrolling one of the extant walls of Jerusalem that divides Israel from the West Bank:

In January of 2016 there was a group of soldiers patrolling the gates in Jerusalem and a soldier was stabbed to death. This soldier was a girl in my class up until the end of high school. Until its something that's close to you, you don't understand its magnitude. You don't really realize that it could literally happen to anyone.

Only two participants in the present study described themselves as victims of trauma. Both of these participants had experienced loss of someone close to them as a result of war. Both participants described their experiences as a tragedy that resulted in negative psychological consequences that affect their lives until present day. Following years of religious persecution in post-colonial Morocco, many Jewish people immigrated to Israel after its foundation in 1948. Joseph left his family and moved to Israel in 1955 at the age of 17. During this time, Israel, early in its inauguration, was bare and had little to provide to newcomers. Joseph conscribed to the IDF and fought as a front line soldier during the

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six-day war. Joseph describes his experiences of loss as having profound effects on his life and often thinks about the friends he lost:

I lost many of my friends during conscription because of the war. It happened a lot during border service as well. I lost many friends. This is the trauma that I had. I did indeed have trauma. We never knew if we were all coming back. The training also killed and harmed people, a lot of what we did was dangerous, and we didn't have the best of the best equipment like we do today. I still think about these people, especially now that I am near the end of my life. Where might they have been?

Tamar also discussed the effect of loss, and its traumatic consequences when recalling the death of her boyfriend.

My boyfriend was killed patrolling the border of Lebanon. I was a high school senior and he was in her first year of service. He was a soldier in the Golan Brigade. Our best friend was next to him when he was killed, but he never talked about it until 5 years ago.

Most people will experience an event that could be defined as traumatic at some point in the durations of their lives. Far from being objective, trauma affects each individual differently. While most participants negated to describe their experiences as per the psychological definition, it is evident that perpetual war has resulted in an environment that affects most Israeli citizens either directly or indirectly. While only some participants had personal stories of loss to share, more than half of the participants (58%) talked about victims of a war-related terror attacks and kidnappings at some point during their interview that are also frequently talked about in Israeli media:

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I want to add that during that time that the state was looking for the kidnapped youth, I travelled to the Kotel and I remember seeing all kinds of people that you would never see, the entire country coming together to cry about these three youth that nobody knows. It is like everyone is your sibling.

(Oren)

People here live lives of trauma and bereavement. Think about all the kidnappings we've suffered through as a country. The poor young soldiers that were just doing what they're told. It doesn't matter who you are, there is always someone in your family or in your friends, or someone you know who knows someone who is in bereavement because of what's happening here.

(Lior)

Regardless of whether individuals living in Israel are directly or indirectly affected by loss from war, it can be stated that Israel is a nation united in foreboding. War is always a relevant subject in all forms of Israeli social life suggesting latent cultural trauma amongst the collective.

### *Denial, Collective Trauma, and National Identity*

The majority of participants (89%) stated that they do not believe they suffer from psychological trauma as an outcome of their experiences of mandatory conscription or war. Approximately 1/3 of participants (35%) disclosed that they had experienced very distressing, or near death experiences at least once in the duration of their service but they did not acknowledge any symptoms of trauma. Rather, denial of trauma amongst this group of participants was evident in the suppression of emotions when discussing their

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negative experiences. Acknowledgment of vulnerability could provide less opportunity for control, which may explain their deliberate denial as a coping mechanism.

Amir discussed his emotional experiences patrolling the Israel-Lebanon border during the second Lebanon war:

The first unit from my base that went in had their commander killed and the signaller operator received a bullet on his side. He lived but he was released from the military because of it. We knew the commander very well because he was our support commander meaning he would come to our unit if our commanding officer wasn't there, and we trained with him in case there were such circumstances. This wasn't a traumatic experience, it was an experience that strengthened us and had an important purpose. It wasn't bad trauma, it was good trauma.

Despite having two members of their battalion seriously wounded and killed, Amir denied any experiences of trauma from this operation and perceived it to be a positive experience that strengthened group morale. Berking, Meier, & Wupperman (2010) suggest that denial, suppression, and avoidance are methods used by individuals (such as military personnel and officers) as a way of coping with negative emotions. Accepting and tolerating negative experiences allows individuals to emotionally distance themselves from distressing events. Cultural factors and group setting can also facilitate denial amongst individuals so that they aren't perceived as weak amongst the group:

The harassment and physical assault we received from Arabs at the border didn't really affect us. Also times were different then and people didn't seek counselling unless they were forced to through the army. (Niv)

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Help seeking amongst individuals within a strong group identity setting isn't inline with the general atmosphere of strength and emotional suppression encouraged within the military. Subsequently, coping mechanisms of avoidance and denial are often seen within military settings as individuals' fear being stigmatized if they don't comply with group norms (Greene-Shortridge, Britt, & Castro, 2007).

Both Eliana and Joseph recalled distressing experiences as officers of large units. Erica, a former IDF firearm instructor and border patrol officer stated:

I never thought that there was the possibility that I could die. We fired, they fired, we never thought that something could happen though, who could touch us? Thank G-d I didn't suffer from that, despite some of the experiences that we had up there. Despite everything, I never felt trauma from these experiences.

Joseph, a paratrooper, also reflected on the general atmosphere within his unit and the unit's determination despite the risks within their field of work:

In order to get this position, you have to volunteer for it. These people knew what they were getting themselves into. We knew the risks of what was coming, and were willing to protect our country and to participate in this attack even though we knew there was a chance we wouldn't make it back home. Many of us didn't.

While suppression, or denial of negative emotions was observed as a common theme during both interviewing and initial coding stages, language used by participants during the interviews became more conspicuous as the data was further analyzed. As seen in the excerpts above, nearly all interviewees used pronouns of "us" and "we" in place of "me" and "I" when recounting their stories. Even though interview questions asked participants

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to detail personal experiences, they often chose to share them through a collective perspective. *Social identity theory* provides an alternative explanation to why participants were deliberate in their denial of trauma. Social identity theory asserts that individual behaviour is defined through social context (e.g a military unit). According to the theory, an individual is assumed to have many identities depending on the various social memberships they have. Tajfel and Turner (1986) describe this as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this.” Israeli citizens have lived under constant war and terror since the birth of the state in 1948. Meaning attached to a specific social context is what allows one identity to be more prominent than another. Thus, I suggest that individual associations with military membership, a social category in which members are devoted to a positive group outcome (i.e. the continuation of the State’s survival), supersedes individual negative emotions from distressing experiences, which ultimately allows the formation of a definable group membership and/or national identity. While experiences of trauma are particular to the individual, the common language used by participants suggests that emotions experienced from distressing events were shared and experienced by the group as one entity. Thus, Israel, a nation that is consistently under threat, and where civilians are also conscripts, experiences trauma as a collective, and has formed a National identity of collective experiences from war. This hypothesis does not negate that militaries are known for discouraging open dialogue about trauma. Rather, it provides an alternate explanation for the collective experiences analyzed for the present project.

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### *Fear, Vulnerability, & Trauma*

Although the physical wounds obtained from war related violence eventually heal, reactions to pain remain. While not all participants experienced war as combatant soldiers, all participants have felt the affects of war related violence by virtue of their nationality. Individuals in the midst of threatening environments often find themselves hypervigilant 24 hours a day, every day, for extended periods of time. Exposure to harm is the vulnerability felt on a traumatic level. Reactions of fear and vulnerability as a result of war are irrefutable. Physically, fear involves inescapable or unprotectable imminent danger. Emotionally, it involves feelings that can undermine one's ability to survive. Experiences of war and conflict create an environment of tension and anxiety amongst Israeli citizens. 64% of participants discussed feelings of fear and vulnerability as a result of their experiences during their mandatory military service, or as a result of the affects of war. For example, Liran discussed her family's routine during times of war, and fearing the possibility of war prior to her enlistment:

I've always just watched what is happening in the country from TV and media outlets. Every war we sit in front of the TV and watch what is going on religiously trying to get any kind of information we possibly can, but also hoping nothing will escalate. My family always joked that when I would enlist there would be war. Its only funny because there's always something going on, so technically you could say there's always "war".

Raphael recalled a distressing event that occurred while he was patrolling a base in the south of Israel, close to a Bedouin village:

I was guarding in the south close to a Bedouin village and you're in the

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middle of the desert and you're not surrounded by people you trust. It was very scary. A group of Bedouins started approaching me and they were armed and at that point I had to call in for backup but I felt like I saw my life flashing before my eyes. I didn't know if I was going to be alive for another 5 minutes.

Respondents such as Raphael detailed concerns to the ever-mounting threats to Israel's security. The presence of rocket proof rooms in houses and neighbourhoods, gas masks, intense security checks in bus stations, and restaurants, as well as yearly war drills for civil society, send a latent message that war and terror are an inherent aspect of social life in Israeli society, and that breach in security is an imminent threat. For example, Shir recalls an experience early in her service that left her feeling vulnerable:

My unit was staying at a hotel in Jaffa, and me and two of the head sergeants and about 20 soldiers were walking outside and suddenly people started screaming things in Arabic and started shooting BB guns. What are you supposed to do in that kind of situation? Even though it wasn't as serious as real guns, it's a realistic description of how much they hate us. This is something people here go through all the time. It's always us against them.

Raphael and Charon also recalled experiences of fear and vulnerability during their service. Charon, an Air Force officer who served during Operation Protective Edge stated:

They would tell us that there's a ceasefire and you'd be on your way home after weeks of not seeing your family and then you'd be on the bus home and suddenly the bus would turn around because Hamas decided to fire more

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rockets so we had to go back to base. This was scary because you never knew what was going to happen. Everyone felt vulnerable because our emotions would go from 100 to 0, excitement of seeing friends and family to “oh fuck, what’s waiting for us”.

Raphael also served during Operation Protective Edge and recalled long periods of uncertainty while on patrol:

We were always on edge, always waiting for the next order. We would take turns having 45minute sleep breaks. It was a very scary time because it had been a long time since we had entered the Gaza strip and we knew Hamas was waiting for us.

Interviewees also discussed experiences as civilians before beginning their service, and recalled how it felt to have to run to a rocket shelter, or hearing rockets falling from nearby:

I remember the Gulf War. We were always scared that there would be rockets falling on us and we wouldn’t have enough time to get to a shelter. These rockets were especially scary because they had gasses in them that could kill us. (Shlomi)

I remember how I felt when the sirens went off, I remember how scared my mom was and how that frightened me and I remember running (to the bomb shelter) very fast hoping we would get there on time. (Eliana)

Tel Aviv residents do not often experience sirens and rockets during war because of the city’s centrally positioned, and coastal location. However, with the mobilisation and strength of Hamas’s army rockets fell as far as Tel Aviv during Operation

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### Protective Edge:

You could hear rockets that would fall on cars and on houses and we would hear through the radio that a rocket was fired towards Tel Aviv and even though you know that the dome will protect us, it still makes all the hairs on your skin stand up. You could see in the south, you would see the rockets fall there and it was really scary. (Ezra)

Nationwide preparations and progressive series of systems that alert the public, provide information tools, and create specific measures for safety under attack, allow for real protection against threat during periods of tension and war. As well, Israel's doctrine of civil defense are concentric circles of increasing protection that include a national system of sirens on the outer circles; and protected space areas, and personal protection kits on the inner circles(Prince-Gibson, 2003). Protected space is a concept that ensures there is always an easy to reach location to run to when the national siren system goes off. In 1992 Israel's Home Front Command implemented a new law that required every new building be equipped with protected spaces. These rooms are built with extra thick concrete walls, and a window and door that are resistant to explosions and gasses(Prince-Gibson, 2003). Personal protection kits include a gas mask and atropine, an injectable stimulant that combat effects of poisonous gases, and are free and available for all civilians and visitors. Israeli citizens are surrounded by precautionary measures, which provide reason for common indications of fear and vulnerability amongst participants. The more people feel that they are likely to be victims of a given risk, the more vulnerable they feel (Shahrabani, Benzion, Rosenboim, & Shavit, 2012). When war is always a possibility, and excessively discussed through social outlets, risk perceptions are

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heightened and individuals feel more vulnerable. Individuals consistently feel compelled to stay informed:

Israeli news is what we all watch because there's always something going on. I never really felt the war, I've always just watched what is happening in the country from TV and media outlets. Every war or terror attack we sit in front of the TV and watch what is going on religiously trying to get any kind of information we possibly can. (Liran)

There's always something going on, so technically you could say there's always "war". The media makes it worse. Even when there's nothing, they have to say there's something. (Charon)

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the state has evoked unequivocal willingness to fight for its existence, as achieving political independence has allowed for the continuation of Jewish life, which was in peril after the Holocaust that resulted in the mass genocide of six million Jewish people. Political sovereignty for the Jewish people posed by the political subordination of Palestinian Arabs enhanced existing adverse worldviews towards Israel and the Jewish people, and strengthened enmity and alienation from its neighbours. Thus, much of the vulnerability defined by the collective can be attributed to the despair over the irreconcilable conflict with the Arabs. Sigal discussed what she believed to be the general perception of Israelis on the Arabs:

We are not surrounded by friends. It's a lot of people who don't like us both outside our borders and within. While we know we're safe, there's always that "what if". What if we get attacked by stronger nations? They're already in Syria, that's only a short distance away.

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Oren, a Haifa native, stated that with the current mounting tensions in Northern Israel, he often wonders what would happen if strikes between Israel and Syria escalated:

They hate each other almost as much as they hate us. You see what is going on in surrounding countries; they are killing each other for literally no reason so what would stop them [Iran] from attacking us and using Syria as their shield? There is no one to discuss peace with in this type of situation.

Olga, born and raised in the southern city of Sderot, described what it was like growing up in a city that is often affected by rocket and mortar attacks due to its close proximity to the Gaza Strip:

I think it's more just something that we have grown up with and has always been a topic of conversation because our neighbours don't want to be our allies. Just like light is light, and water is water, war is war. If our neighbours put as much effort into helping the Palestinians as they do into funding Hamas terror tunnels, we'd all be in a much better place. If we aren't going to be here for ourselves, who will be? You know, the positive in all of this is the fact that we have a place that lots of our friends and family go through similar circumstances, we all understand.

Existential anxiety, an ever-present form of anxiety, is part of Israeli culture much like conflict is part of its history. Israelis have experienced perpetual war since the foundation of the State, and are therefore always fearful of more conflict. A sense of collective vulnerability was observed amongst participants, as many of them assented that the perpetual conflict was a result of Israel's sovereignty, implying there can't be a solution to the conflict until surrounding countries acknowledge Israel's right to exist. The

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combinations of brief repeated wars, and protracted military conflict under conditions of existential threat influences Israeli ethos, and public discourse in innumerable ways.

Collective vulnerability is a response to existential fear and anxiety, and runs counter to the sense of safety, mastery, and assertiveness that has been indoctrinated in Israeli society by virtue of the country's establishment.

### **Core Theme 2: Resilience**

#### *Experiences of War: Resilience, and Growth.*

The impact of traumatic stress following war has adverse effects from what would be expected of individuals and communities that endure devastating events on an ongoing basis. While some individuals or communities may sink into despair, others appear to thrive. This does not suggest that they do not struggle, but rather that these groups of individuals are able to “bounce back” to a stable equilibrium, and learn to grow from their experiences. While suffering and grief are common reactions to trauma, it has been suggested that the implications of negative experience can also lead to positive reactions, and have been studied as a form of resiliency as they promote adaptation and growth (Kallay, 2015). Furthermore, post-traumatic growth for individuals and communities that experience negative life events may report different types of growth that are both positive and negative, but ultimately, in the aftermath of negative events, growth has been conceptualized as a positive reaction that allows an individual or community to be resilient (Kallay, 2015).

Corzine et al. (2017) identified 12 individual, and 5 community related axioms of positive reactions that allow for growth, when measuring for resilience. On an individual level, Corzine et al suggest that connection to other people in stressful and traumatic

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situations promote resiliency. Many participants emphasized their group membership, and contribution to the cause, in helping them maintain strength and composure during stressful situations (Corzine et al., 2017). For example, David believes group membership is the reason he had such a positive military experience overall:

The first unit from my base that went in had their commander killed and the signaller operator received a bullet on his side. He lived but he was released from the military because of it. We knew the commander very well because he was our support commander meaning he would come to our unit if our commanding officer wasn't there, and we trained with him in case there were such circumstances. This wasn't a traumatic experience, it was an experience that strengthened us, proved to us how important it is we contribute to this cause, and very much had an important purpose.

David was noticeably upset when discussing the loss of his commander, but was becalmed when recalling his unit's cohesion of courage and determination after their experience (Corzine et al., 2017). Group cohesion increases military resilience within military units as positive support reduces reaction of negative stressors (Williams & Drury, 2009). He detailed that his association and membership with the group helped keep him determined in the objective and remain resilient to any obstacle he faced:

The feeling of being part of such a big organization, you feel like you have so much strength. You feel as if you could do anything. You and your friends can do whatever you want. To go into Lebanon and to feel secure, is obviously bullshit but you know what to do when you need to in order to protect yourself. (David)

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Social support and friendship was a common theme amongst participants, and was especially evident when analyzing data. 82% of participants stated that social support allowed for positive experiences, and outweighed any negative experiences:

We were like a big family; we all took care of each other. Most of the other people in the battalion were from the Kibbutz, and they helped and did whatever they could to ensure that us newcomers felt accepted and protected, and that our service was good even when times were tough. (Shir)

Social support reduces stress reaction as they foster attachment, guidance, reliable alliance, social integration, and reassurance of worth (Gralinski-Bakker, Hauser, Stott, Billings, & Allen, 2004). Being able to relate to others, offer encouragement during difficult times helps reinforce a person's resilience to negative circumstances.

### *Purpose, Growth, and Resilience*

**Individual.** Within the early stages of interviewing it was interesting to observe that only 2 of 17 participants defined their experiences of war and terror as traumatic. Most participants described their mandatory military service as a positive experience even when having faced traumatic events. Israelis have had high exposure to war and terrorism, which has provided an opportunity for them to confront the trauma, and grow from it. On an individual level, meaning making for individual resilience was also attributed to a sense of purpose, which is defined by:

1. Strong sense of purpose can have a positive impact on resilience;
2. It is important to have a sense of mission, a sense of history and purpose (Corzine et al., 2017).

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65% of participants discussed the importance of conscribing to civil duty, suggesting that conforming to mandatory military service allows individuals to feel as though they have contributed to the continuation of the state's survival. The Holocaust resulted in the extermination of six million Jewish people. After the Holocaust, survivors fleeing Europe sought refuge in developed countries, but many of them were turned away. Israel's establishment was founded on the principle of return, a place of historical significance for Jewish people, where they wouldn't have to fear persecution because of their religion. For example, Joseph discussed what it was like to flee Morocco in 1955, and the high hopes immigrants had after facing hardships for being Jewish:

Times in Morocco were not easy for Jewish people as there was a lot of anti-Semitism. But there were many hopes for our new Jewish state, to be free from that was a dream. I wanted to be part of that.

Participant Shlomi talked about his father, a Holocaust survivor, arriving in Israel following the war:

My dad is a Holocaust survivor from Poland. He came here with nothing but the clothes on his back; there was nothing here but all he cared for was freedom. Despite everything going on in terms of war I. I. being Israeli means a lot to me because of what my father and our ancestors as Jewish people had to go through just to get to a place where we can be ourselves.

The mass immigration from post-Holocaust Europe allowed for nearly seven hundred thousand Jewish immigrants to move to Israel between 1948-1951, instilling pride in ensuing generations to protect the land they received, and ensure that another Holocaust would never exist. Many participants acknowledged the satisfaction in knowing they

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were contributing to the continuation of the State's survival, and fulfilling their duty to help protect its people. Their ability to thrive through adversity, and persevere despite stressful situations displays their ability to withstand and adapt to change as it occurs. For many participants, their enlistment was the first time they had left the house for an extended period of time. Danielle and Ori talked about their experiences leaving home for the first time and the vulnerabilities associated with change in routine:

You know for basically all of us it's the first time we've ever left home, sudden we are to some extent independent, its nerve racking but everyone's in the same boat, we all go through it together.

(Danielle)

My friends and I would have to spend weeks at the base without the ability of going home. Sometimes it was hard, you know, not having those comforts.

(Ori)

In contrast to the vulnerabilities associated with adjustment within a military setting, Danielle and Ori, as well as other participants, often referred to the importance of their contribution and active engagement, suggesting they support their own coping process by facing their vulnerabilities head on, a theory defined as adaptive coping (Simmons & Yoder, 2013):

I loved knowing that I was the first to do what I was doing. I felt as though I was doing what needed to be done, and I felt stronger coming out of it.

(Tamar)

I worked with both reservists and soldiers and I knew that we were contributing and doing something for the greater good for the country. I knew

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that it was a very important role in the army, and one that I should be proud of. I also felt like I was part of something bigger. (Charon)

Some participants shared their pride in serving their state as being their encouragement during difficult times:

I felt like I was serving my country and it's what I needed to do. I feel like my life was dependent on my friends and that my friends' lives were dependent on mine. As a firearms instructor, with consistent training, we were always getting better, safer, and stronger. (Tamar)

At the end of the day we're all doing the same thing, protecting our country. And to see these soldiers who are people my age, who are doing everything they can to ensure that our families, friends, brothers, and sisters are safe and are still able to leave their homes feeling secure was really beautiful. (Amir)

Only a small percentage of conscripts become combatant soldiers, but each role within the military is imperative to its fluidity. Some participants chose to discuss the importance of recognizing that all roles within the military serve a purpose, and are part of the construct that ensures the continuations of the state's survival:

The army provides testing so they know where we're supposed to be. It is part of your duties as a citizen to contribute to the country that has given you so much. It doesn't matter if you're in intelligence or if you're a cook, all positions are important and necessary. Conscriptation is part of your civil duty regardless of your position. Each position is important and significant in its own way. (Niv)

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Olga spent a portion of her military service in the recruitment and sorting unit of the IDF. She said that her familiarity with the many sections of the IDF made her realize that each part of the army is necessary in the operation of a strong army:

I felt like I was helping the state and it contributes to the ideology that we need to fulfill our civil duties in order to keep our state. It's important also to mention that all the jobs in the army are important because they are all an integral component to its effective function. It isn't just the fighters that are giving back, but everyone.

Feeling deeply connected to the Jewish State's survival, participants often mentioned that they felt it was their obligation to serve in Israel's military, and further discussed their perceptions towards individuals who choose to not participate:

The army is part of the Israelis natural progression. It is systematically built into our society and those who don't conform are considered different. Those who don't conform are considered to be those who didn't fulfill all of their civil duties. There is a role for everyone regardless of abilities and inabilities so there shouldn't really be any excuses. (Shir)

When I got to the course, it changed my perspective. My course was very creative, and suddenly I understood what my place was. But it was difficult for me to understand that I wasn't just a small part in something bigger, but that my position is indeed incredibly important and that I am valuable to the army and to the state. (Danielle)

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Despite feelings of pride and deep connection to the destiny of the Jewish people, national service can produce emotions of fear and anxiety for some conscripts. Moreover, the moral imperative and knowledge that the elimination of national service would result in the immediate destruction of the state is a tenet that pervades a sense of pride and purpose for conscripts and reservists. This shared ideology creates a sense of group membership, allowing individuals to achieve both power and resilience, as they know that their contribution helps the country and its citizens (Corzine et al., 2017).

***Community.*** The formidable regional challenges facing Israel have not undermined Israeli resilience, which has successfully met the challenges of terrorism, rockets, and missiles, and hasn't allowed the threat to weaken their stamina. Rather, Israelis have learned to persevere despite the ongoing conflict and reform their vulnerabilities and existential anxiety into endurance that allows them to continue with their daily lives. Community resilience can only be achieved if the majority of individuals within the collective are resilient in themselves. Community and individual resilience are interconnected in that both require a feeling of trust and membership. 94% of participants stated that they had a positive experience during their mandatory military service. 82% of these participants attributed their positive experience to the connections and friendships they made with other conscripts in their units, often stating that their unit was like a second family. For example, Amir, Sigal, and Tamar discussed how important it was for them to have a close network of people that they could depend upon during difficult times. Further, they believe that the army encourages a family-oriented environment, as soldiers are consistently reminded to support and encourage each other:

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I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed it because of the people that I met. I really felt like I had adopted a new family. You know for basically all of us it's the first time we've ever left home, suddenly we are to some extent independent, it's nerve racking but everyone's in the same boat, we all go through it together. I wish I could have stayed. (Amir)

Friendships here are much stronger because the friendships you make are like family to you. (Sigal)

I had an amazing time. I made friends that are like family and it's like my second home. (Tamar)

Since strong social ties promote resilience in communities that face ongoing traumatic threats, it can be argued that the friendships participants made, are, at least in part, the reason that these individuals are able to achieve group resilience (Corzine et al., 2017). While Israeli citizens are required to conscribe to mandatory service, many of them are willing to volunteer for combatant units and devotedly risk their lives to protect their nation. After asking participants if they had any positive experiences from their service, many of them stated that they were constantly encouraged by the overall sense of belonging, or membership they were providing to a greater cause; something participants often referred to as "something bigger":

I felt like I was helping the greater cause, helping the state contributes to the ideology that we need to fulfill our civil duties. (David)

I was proud because I said wow, I'm doing something. I'm contributing to the country and I felt like I was contributing to something bigger. I understood that I was a small screw in a much bigger system, but without the screws, the

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machine can't run. (Ezra)

If I could go back in time I would do exactly what I did because I really enjoyed the structure that was given to us from the army. I felt like I was part of something bigger, and I knew that I had no other choice.

(Niv)

I was part of the greater cause. I conscribed as a youth who didn't only lose her boyfriend but had been to 12 funerals for people who were close to me and my family that were victims of war and terror. During the first Lebanon war we buried 12 friends. Day after day. I started my service with a lot of motivation. (Lior)

Being part of something bigger is defined as “participating in something that is focused on the well being of something other than oneself through shared work with others (Sandow, 2018). Individuals take actions that go beyond their own needs, comforts, desires, gains and losses, and share the burden with other individuals, for the benefit of the public. Israelis selflessly commit to serving their country, a position that requires both mental stability and devotion to the state. Thus, their individual capacity to turn adversity to advantage, by means of their commitment to the nation's sovereignty; Israeli citizens, as a collective, have adopted a socially resilient ideology that resides with them post conscription (Cacioppo, Reis, & Zautra, 2011).

### *Citizenship, and the Centrality of Family in Israeli Culture*

Literature on national resilience suggests that a resilient country cannot be assessed solely by military capacity, but must also be looked at by its psychological-political capacities of resilience (Barnett, 2004; Canetti, Waismel-Manor, Cohen, &

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Rapaport, 2014; Corzine et al., 2017). Despite being a tiny embattled nation that is surrounded by enemies and targeted by global boycotts, Israeli citizens have capitalized on the idea of adversity, creating a culture of pleasure and meaning in order to survive.

A resilient system is an aware, and informed system, where people know what to expect, and are ready regardless of the scenario. Prime Minister Netanyahu has held his position since 2009, and continues to be re-elected by virtue of his perpetual preparedness in the face of war and threat. Polls conducted by Israeli research institute.

Geocartography, and published by Israeli newspaper *Israel Hayom*, state that the Likud National Liberal Movement, commonly known as Likud, is most likely to win the November 2019 elections (Hoffman, 2018). Despite harsh criticism of Israel's current prime minister, participant Joseph emphasized a widely discussed political dilemma facing Israeli voters when he discussed the future of the state:

Economically I think we need to change, everything is expensive and government is corrupt. But from a security perspective I think we are doing all we can and more, and I think that other countries can learn from how efficient and democratic we are. It's very easy to read something in the media and be influenced by what you hear, but you have to see it to really understand its complexity and how we are doing what we can in terms of peace. It is impossible to have peace when your neighbours don't know what peace is.

While trust in leadership is a resilience axiom, politics in Israel are complex in that they involve a magnitude of issues, most of them relating to Israel's economy (Corzine et al., 2017). When it comes to security, the majority of Jewish Israelis trust that Prime Minister

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Benjamin Netanyahu's assertive and militaristic strategies will prevent escalation with surrounding enemies. Amidst periods of high tension, and during the more difficult times of war, civilians return to work, youth continue to attend schools, owners reopen their shops, people return to their daily routines, society appears to acclimatize to the situation, and consequentially returns to normalcy. Prime Minister Netanyahu often addresses the Israeli public during times of war, and encourages national unity amongst Israelis during waves of terrorism, stating:

“The goal of terrorism is to sow fear and the first order in defeating terrorism is to be level-headed and resilient, both nationally and personally. We have known worse times than this and we will also overcome waves of terrorism with determination, responsibility and unity” (Lazaroff, 2015).

High levels of stress and distorted bureaucracy have created a culture amongst Israelis where people are both superstitious and nosey, have incredibly thick skin, and treat each other with “organic” kindness, ultimately referring to each other as “one big family”.

The centrality of family in Israeli culture was a prominent theme amongst participants of this study. Israel is an extremely family oriented society, which derives largely from Jewish traditions of “chutzpah” and “tikkun olam”, and is reinforced by a strong sense of group membership amongst society. Social norms in Israel encourage emotionally expressive, assertive, and direct behaviours, as Israelis are inherently confrontational and often refer to society as “one big family”. Participant Shlomi well articulated the idea of family in Israeli culture by stating:

At a time of need we all come together. Everyone does their part and we become one big family. From one country we all become one, and it really

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has an effect on the people and we know we have each other.

Participant Shir also referred to the essence of family in Israeli culture when talking about her appreciation for Israel:

Of course when something happens, you feel connected to what is going on because it's your country but ultimately, I don't know, I love this country. We are all one family. There are good people, good food, amazing nature, right now it's winter and it's nice out.

The moment one steps into the Israeli social sphere, they quickly notice their circle of personal space decreasing, as Israeli style of communication is loud and direct.

Conversations with strangers on public transit or at a grocery store are common, and often result in unwelcomed advice that can be perceived as intrusive or insulting. Many participants referred to the atmosphere of social inclusivity amongst Israelis, arguing that the blunt social culture forces people to perceive situations for what they are, and is what makes individuals feel responsible for each other, especially during times of need:

It might seem funny but I know that if I fall and break my leg at the central bus station, people will help me because I am a human and they care about me, almost like family. People here really get involved in other people's lives but it's because they care. I care about you and want good for you because you are in Israel and I care about you. (Olga)

On a day-to-day basis people will be aggressive with you. The same Israeli that will cut you in line or cut you off in traffic is the same Israeli that will jump on a grenade to save your life. People care in this country. People who

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don't care don't get angry. People here care about each other and that is why they get angry with each other. They care about each other. (Shir)

Shlomi and Ezra also referred to Israel as being nationally unified during their interviews. They argued that socially, people in Israel are inherently empathetic and rely on each other during difficult times because everyone has been affected by similar adversities:

People come together at times of need. As soon as something happens whether that be war or an intifada or a terrorist attack everyone comes together. There is some kind of story that everyone has. Everyone is able to share stories of where they were at this and this time, and during this and this event. It creates a sense of commonality between the people. People can relate to each other because we all go through it together. (Shlomi)

I think that those ideologies are projected on our generation in terms of resilience and continuation and accepting the shit we have to go through. We're all in the same boat and everyone's gone through the same things. I feel like for many people here the main theme of their life story is how they struggled and still managed to thrive here in Israel, or just in life in general. It's a crucial part of their story. (Ezra)

As a country whose society is largely comprised of generations that have historically, and collectively suffered subjugation, and contemporarily experience consistent stress from conflicts with their neighbours, Israelis feel responsible for the continued survival of the state and its citizens. At times of war people come together and make care packages and hot meals for soldiers on the front lines, and individuals, regardless of religious

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observance, come together to pray for their protection. Nearly one third of the participants described war as a nationally unifying event that compels each citizen to give back and help in any way they can:

They sent our unit food and drinks and it was a really amazing experience because it sort of brought us full circle. At the end of the day we're all doing the same thing, protecting our country. And to see these people, who are doing everything they can to ensure that we stay in good spirits was really beautiful. (Danielle)

Much like parents caring for their children, Israelis care for each other. While their concern for each other's wellbeing is often translated into unnecessary advice and unwarranted aggressiveness, this passion for each other's protection has no limits, and allows society to achieve collective, and national resilience.

### *Existential Anxiety: the Key to a Resilient National Character*

Historical narratives of persecution and maltreatment with contemporary experiences of threat and insecurity have created Israeli existential anxiety. Subsequently, cultural trauma has led to existential anxiety, which is the underlying motive in the formation of a resilient national character in Israel. More than 70% of participants acknowledged the negative emotional impacts associated with living in a country under consistent threat, despite most participants negating any kind of traumatic influence from their experiences. In contrast to these circumstances, Israel continues to emerge as one of the happiest countries in the world, ranking number 11 out of 156 countries in the 2018 UN World Happiness Report for the fifth year in a row. Participants were asked why they think Israel continues to outrank Western countries such as the United States, and many

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of them attributed their satisfaction and overall well-being to having a sense of meaning. Rather than focusing on their social-emotional difficulties, Israelis, as a collective, have adopted a resilient national character that promotes growth, fulfillment, and meaning. Liran discussed finding meaning in simple pleasures when asked about her overall satisfaction of living in Israel:

I guess when something bad surrounds you, every small thing that is good turns out to be a big thing. Any small vacation, or any hike you do because in Israel we have deserts and hikes and forests and fortresses and it's the most beautiful country. Every small thing matters here. I don't know, I don't really think about other things other than what concerns me, I have enough on my head on things to be concerned about.

Participant Ori also attributed his happiness to finding meaning amongst difficult circumstances, exemplifying an embedded resilient national character:

Maybe it's because we are educated to enjoy being ourselves, like some kind of weird national pride we have come to invent or develop in order to survive here. We go through a lot here, and it's strange how people take it all in. As if people put all the shit we go through in the back of their heads and focus on the present, on what's happening right now, amongst all the things Israelis are good at, perseverance should be at the top of the list.

Israelis are committed to displaying normalcy, bouncing back and quickly returning to normal life. They consistently display a living protest against enmity, and insist embracing the positive aspects of life. Participants demonstrated resilience when

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discussing how important it is for them and their families to continue normal routines during times of war:

We have no choice. This is our reality. We've been dealing with it since the times of the bible. We have to live with what we have. We take it for what it is, almost like a constant reminder to just enjoy life in the moment because anything can happen. (Sigal)

What are we supposed to do? Stay home and be scared? Are we expected to sit in the bomb shelter all day and wait for them to throw rockets? Hell no. We are going to do exactly the opposite of what they want and we're going to continue to enjoy life, appreciate what we have, and be proud of our achievements – the same thing we've done for thousands of years. (Eliana)

Resilience, in its generic sense, is a metaphor that characterizes the flexible capacity of any system to respond to traumatic disruptions. Israelis are a flexible system, they continue to push themselves to become more effective following disaster – bending, but never breaking. Complacency is not an option for Israeli society, as their malleability to adapt to new realities encompasses the shared purpose that unites and binds them as a society – survival.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

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The following figure provides a visual representation of the main themes that were derived from an analysis of existing trauma and resilience literature, as well as data collected from interviews conducted for the present study, and analyzed through a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006).

**Figure 1: Overview of Collective Resilience Outcomes Following Cultural Trauma**



### **Implications of the Present Study**

The qualitative and inductive nature of the study served as a main strength for the current project. Although ample research exists on the psychological effects of trauma, relatively little attention has been paid to positive reaction outcomes following military service. Given this relative anonymity, providing former Israel Defense Forces conscripts

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with an opportunity to share their insights and experiences serving in the military and living in an absolute securitized state ultimately provides a stronger understanding of the effect collective purpose and responsibility can have in the development of a resilient society. Furthermore, the grounded theory approach that was used to fill the knowledge gap in the area of study allowed the data to speak for itself. What began as a project that looked to analyze intergenerational trauma, became a study of perseverance and resiliency within Israeli society.

The findings of the present study confirm the complex and intricate collective experiences of Israeli citizens. It highlights the positive outcomes of trauma, an area of research not often looked at. Perceptions of the Middle East are not often reflected in a positive light. Consequently, it was necessary to exemplify the positive aspects of the demographic, and demonstrate how collective purpose can facilitate national resilience. Academic research often perpetuates Israel through negative stereotypes, and thus, it was important to emphasize the adaptive capacity and strength of the Israeli people.

Many practical implications also arise from the present study. To start, the project can serve as an exemplary case study of the possibility for positive outcomes after experiences of incessant and generational trauma. Rather than harboring demoralizing reactions as a result of these negative experiences, Israelis overcome adversity vis-à-vis their basic concern for the country's improvement and survival. Israelis are nurtured with purposeful passion that encourages the community's wellbeing, and is driven by their common commitment to the land, subsequently displayed through complacency when fulfilling their national service. Israeli group membership is manifested through common trust and collective resistance to adversity.

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Following along from this, while substantial research exists on the topics of trauma, vulnerability, and resilience, there is a limitation in finding a core structure for vulnerability determinants. The present study broadened the scope of the research area in suggesting that existential anxiety is the trauma that allows for the vulnerability factor, sequentially leading to resilience. Expanding the framework of traumatic reactions encourages scholars to engage and contribute to the stream of research on trauma and resilience.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

Given that I was only able to travel to Israel and conduct my research over a three week period, a limitation for the present project was that it only reflected one demographic: Jewish Israelis that have completed their mandatory military service. The study did not account for the various other demographics living in Israel. The size of the project was also limited to ensure manageability of collected data, and for cost efficiency. The present study did not encompass individuals who withdrew from the army either prior to, or during, conscription for mental health purposes. Notwithstanding this limitation, the intended outcome of interviewing was to reach saturation, to explore reactions to war and terror for Israeli Jews, and not to generalize findings and apply them to other demographics of Israeli society. Further, while I recognize the negative and sometimes debilitating effects trauma can have on individuals, the purpose of this research was to explore the common “bounce back” nature of Israeli society, as a collective, after devastating experiences. All of the data collected has been analyzed solely based on my own personal interpretation and synthesis of the information.

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Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the meaning created from my observations of individuals is subject to my own perspectives.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Four main suggestions surfaced from the present study as directions for future research. First, in line with the confines of the study, seventeen former IDF conscripts were recruited to participate in individual interviews. Future studies may wish to include a larger sample to gain a broader understanding of traumatic factors, and whether they lead to resilient outcomes. While the intent of the study was to explore how Israelis react to trauma, the sample size was believed to be sufficient to make meaning for the specific demographic. As well, the sample was exclusive to individuals that had completed their mandatory service and, as such, future studies may wish to incorporate soldiers currently fulfilling their mandatory military service, as their reactions may be different as a result of having less time to react and adapt to their experiences.

A second recommendation concerns longitudinal studies. The researcher conducted seventeen interviews over a three-week period in Israel. Future studies may wish to conduct a study over a longer period of time to identify and relate specific events to particular exposure. Observation of changing perspectives and attitudes over time would broaden the scope and therefore encompass more recent and evolving tensions. Considering the time restraints of the current study, this was not possible.

Third, future studies may wish to incorporate focus groups. Although individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, it would have been advantageous to conduct a focus group with individuals that had completed their mandatory military

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service in order to observe how they express their individual experiences amongst the collective. This would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of reactions to collective traumas. Time constraints mitigated this type of study design.

Finally, future research could usefully explore upon constructing a framework of vulnerability determinants for resilient outcomes. One of the major gaps for the present project was finding definitions for what constitutes a vulnerability factor. It is important to broaden the scope in this area, as it will allow future researchers comprehensive axioms upon which they can build their theorem.

### **Conclusion**

By employing a grounded theory approach, one that involved semi-structured interviews and an in-depth review of literature, the current study examined seventeen former conscripts of the Israel Defense forces. Specifically, the present project investigated the outcomes of collective trauma, to construct new theories about how former Jewish Israeli soldiers, all of which have deep-seated experiences with war and terror, manage to be resilient individuals, in turn allowing for a nationally resilient outcome.

Seventeen former IDF conscripts were recruited from various areas across Israel. The present study examined their stories and experiences about living in Israel, and participating in the military, as well as the legislation that surrounds their requirement to conscribe to the IDF, and literature encompassing the themes of collective trauma, and resilience. While initial conceptualizations for the project began as a study on traumatic outcomes as a result of mandatory military service, the grounded theory methodology used for the current study allowed for the data to speak for itself and generate a theory

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which indicated that, despite initial negative reactions to traumatic circumstances, such as loss and bereavement, a strong sense of growth as a result of their service, as well as nationalism and desire to thrive and continue, contributes to the outcomes of a collective purpose for Israeli citizens, which allows for a collectively resilient outcome. Moreover, the findings of the study strongly recommend the need for further research on outcomes of trauma that lead to resilience, as well more comprehensive axioms of the factors that allow for resilient outcomes. Using Israel as a case study would allow for the establishment of a core framework that can be used by other countries affected by war and terror, as the war-torn state has flourished despite adversity and conflict, never allowing scorn and disdain to undermine its tenacity.

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## APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form



Canada's Capital University

**Title:** Culturally Embedded Trauma: Assessing Intergenerational Trauma In Israel

**Date of ethics clearance:** November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**Ethics Clearance for the Collection of Data Expires:** November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018

I \_\_\_\_\_, choose to participate in a study on Intergenerational Trauma in Israel. This study aims to suggest that trauma is embedded within Israeli culture and is experienced differently depending on your generation and experience within society. **The researcher for this study is Corinne Baray, a Masters student in the Department of Legal Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.**

She is working under the supervision of Dr. Dale Spencer in the department of Legal Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.

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This study involves one 45-minute interview that will take place in a location of your choice in Tel Aviv, Israel. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. Once transcribed, the audio recording will be destroyed.

As this project will ask you about your experiences serving in the Israel Defence Forces and potential trauma associated with your experience, there are some potential risks to you when discussing a topic as sensitive as trauma. Should you feel unable to answer any questions, you can choose to either stop the interview, or you can continue with the interview and choose to not answer these specific questions. Metiv Center for the Treatment of Trauma provides clinical support and other intervention mechanisms that heal and empower those exposed to traumatic life experiences and those who have suffered from trauma as a result of their experiences serving in the Israel Defense Forces. Metiv services are offered free of charge and they can be reached by phone: +972-2-6449666 or by email: [Veredn@herzoghospital.org](mailto:Veredn@herzoghospital.org).

I will take precautions to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses anonymous and allowing you to request that certain responses not be included in the final project. Should you feel any distress, please let me know and I will give you contact information for Metiv, a center for the treatment of trauma that provides free counselling services to current and former members of the Israel Defense Forces.

You may withdraw at any time, up to February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, by letting me or my research supervisor know. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you provided will be destroyed.

THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS

All research data, including audio-recordings and my notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept on my password-protected computer, encrypted, and sent to my supervisor prior to my departure from Israel. While in Israel all physical materials, and my password-protected computer, will be kept with me at all times, in my backpack to minimize the possibility of a breach in data. Research data will only be accessible by my supervisor and me.

Once the project is completed, all identifying research data will be destroyed. Data will be destroyed by February 15, 2018. If you would like a copy of the finished research project, please let me know. I will then provide you with an electronic copy.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research. If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A by phone at +1(613)-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)). You can also reach me at [corinnebaray@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:corinnebaray@cmail.carleton.ca). My supervisor can be reached at [dale.spencer@carleton.ca](mailto:dale.spencer@carleton.ca) or +1(613) 520-2600 ext: 8096. Do you have any questions or need clarification?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Carleton University Human Research Ethics Board. The clearance number for this project is: 107914

**Researcher contact information:**

Name : Corinne Baray  
Department: Legal Studies  
Carleton University  
Tel: N/A  
Email: [corinnebaray@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:corinnebaray@cmail.carleton.ca)

**Supervisor contact information:**

Name: Dale Spencer  
Department: Legal Studies  
Carleton University  
Tel: +1(613)520-2600 ext:8096  
Email: [dale.spencer@carleton.ca](mailto:dale.spencer@carleton.ca)

Do you agree to be audio-recorded: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No  
Would you like a copy of your transcripts from this interview? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No  
If Yes, Please provide your E-mail:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B: Interview Questions**

Corinne Baray  
100917312

**Interview Questions**

1. Where were you born?
2. Were you born in Israel? If not, where were you born?
3. How old are you?
4. Do you have any children? Where were they born?
5. What is your familial background? Are you Sephardic or Ashkenazic? Where is your lineage from?
6. What is your profession?
7. Are you partnered/married?
8. Do you have children?
9. Where did you grow up?
10. What are your earliest memories of war? Are these memories from Israel?
11. When were you enlisted?
12. What section of the Israel Defense Forces did you serve for?
13. Have you participated in any wars either while serving your mandatory military service or during military reserves?
14. Tell me about your military experience.
  - a. Did you enjoy it? Are there circumstances you wish you could change?
15. Tell me one of the more prominent experiences you had during your service.
  - a. For example, a story that really stands out to you about your experience.
16. Did you have any negative or traumatizing experiences?
  - a. Perhaps there is a situation you remember that didn't sit well with you? Something you wish you didn't have to do?
17. Did your military service affect your life negatively?
  - a. Did you have to seek counseling after you completed your service? What were some of the emotions you were feeling after completing your service?
18. Can you provide me with a story from your military service?
  - a. It can be either good or bad. A story that stands out to you from your time in the army.
19. Have you had to seek counseling as a result of your military service?
  - a. What kind of counseling? Are you still attending counseling? Did you use the Israel Defense Force's counseling unit?
20. Where do you think the army is going now?
  - a. Do you think it is necessary to have mandatory military conscription? Why or why not?
21. What are your views on the future of the State?
22. Do you believe that other measures can be put in place to replace mandatory military conscription?
23. Do you have any positive experiences from your military service?

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- a. If you do, can you share an example? If you don't, why do you think that is?
24. Do you wish to add any more comments?
25. Do you have any questions for me?

## APPENDIX C: Email Invitation



### Email Invitation

**Subject line:** Invitation to participate in a research project on Culturally Embedded Trauma in Israel.

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Corinne Baray and I am a Masters student in the Department of Legal Studies at Carleton University. I am under the supervision of Dale Spencer, a professor at Carleton University.

I would like you to participate in a study on intergenerational trauma in Israel. This study is interviewing Israeli citizens who have completed their mandatory military service in the Israel Defence Forces. The purpose of this project is to assess whether the common lived experiences of Israelis is perceived differently, depending on generation.

This study involves one 45-minute interview that will take place in a location of your choice in Tel Aviv, Israel. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. Once transcribed, the audio recording will be destroyed.

As this project will ask you about your experiences serving in the Israel Defence Forces and potential trauma associated with your experience, there are some potential risks to you when discussing a topic as sensitive as trauma. Should you feel unable to answer any questions, you can choose to either stop the interview, or you can continue with the interview and choose to not answer specific questions. I can also provide you with contact information for Metiv Center for the Treatment of Trauma, a free of charge counselling service specifically for current and former members of the IDF.

I will take precautions to protect your identity. I will be assigning pseudonyms to all participants, and keeping all responses anonymous. I will also allow all participants to request that certain responses not be included in the final project.

You may withdraw at any time, up to February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, by letting me or my research supervisor know through phone or email. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you provided will be destroyed.

All research data, including audio-recordings and my notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Carleton University. Research data will only be accessible by my supervisor and me.

THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS

This project was reviewed and received ethics review and clearance by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. The clearance number is 107914 and expires on -----.

If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

If you are interested in participating in this study you can email me at [corinnebaray@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:corinnebaray@cmail.carleton.ca).

Thank you for your time,  
Corinne Baray