

Captions :

## ISRAELI, THEY REFUSE TO CARRY WEAPONS

Photographic essay by

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ISRAEL – 2009/2014



Photo 01 - **Yuval, aged 25, and student:** *«I decided to go to prison to protest against the occupation. I've been in military prison three times. I'm happy that I took this step but I'm not sure I'd do it again. I did nothing wrong and yet I was punished. I don't believe I deserved such a punishment. Obviously we used going to prison to highlight the occupation of the Palestinian territories. Let's say it's a good way to carry out the struggle but perhaps there are better ways.»* Tel-Aviv, 2014



Photo 02 - **Tamar, aged 20:** *«I'm a pacifist. In 2008 I chose to go to jail in order to explain that it's possible to question the taboo of military service. The most important thing for me was that people could hear a different voice. I spent three months in prison. For the last month I was in solitary because I didn't want to wear the uniform. As for what's happening now, I think it's even more important to refuse to go into the army. The hate and intolerance shown towards these kinds of decisions are even stronger today than back then. Nationalism and the Right's propaganda have made people lose all hope. My generation has grown up without any contact with Palestinian society. So hates flourishes more easily.»* Tel-Aviv, 2014



Photo 03 - **Kobi, 43, researcher in mathematics :** *«When I was 12 years old I decided I would not do military service. I didn't feel compelled to serve a country which I didn't feel part of. The first time I was called up I said I was gay, depressed and unbalanced. Today I regret having taken the easiest route and not having simply declared that I refused to serve in the army. The atmosphere in Israel is more and more stifling, it's becoming more and more dangerous to protest in Tel Aviv against the occupation of the territories.»* Haifa, 2014



Photo 04 -

**Alex, 22, film projectionist:** *«At the age of 17 I went to the occupied territories to help Palestinians pick olives. It had a major impact on me. One day the settlers stole an entire day's harvest. Their argument was that everything that grows in Israel's land belongs to the Jews. There is no legal recourse to deal with this kind of problem. I realized that the argument that the occupation was justified on security grounds was a lie. I decided not to do my military service. I spent five months in prison for disobedience.»* Tel-Aviv, 2009



Photo 05 -

**Ben, 27, video club assistant:** *«My father spent 40 days in jail for not wanting to serve in the army in Gaza. When it was my turn to go, I told the officer in charge about my mental problems, that I didn't want to carry a weapon and that if I was forced to carry one, I would use it against my superiors. It was one of the most important decisions of my life. When I see all the young people who die for the Zionist cause I can only be happy with my decision. I'd like to feel compassion for these soldiers but, honestly, I can't: when they pull the trigger and shoot at civilians that's unforgivable.»* Tel-Aviv, 2014



Photo 06 -

**Omer, 20, student:** *«The army system works well. It leaves no time for reflection. I think the Israelis have to know the Palestinians' situation to be able to choose whether they want to join the army or not. ? My father is an important general, he was deputy director of [Israeli intelligence agency] Mossad. We were on opposite sides. I spent two months in jail. My case caused a big stir. It was hard, I lost five kilos.»* Tel-Aviv, 2009



Photo 07 -

**Haggai, 26, journalist:** *«When I was 16 I had a teacher who for the first time spoke to us about the conflict in a different way. That same year I took part in a peace convoy to the West Bank to help rebuild Palestinian homes that had been destroyed by the army. In 2001, when we decided to go to jail to protest against the occupation, there were 25 of us. A big trial took place. Witnesses appeared on television. In the law faculty this trial has become an important case, both from a political and philosophical point of view. The army wanted to make an example to scare others, I was sentenced to two years in prison.»* Tel-Aviv, 2009



Photo 08 -

**Neta, 18:** *«I had a very Zionist education. But around the age of 15, looking on the internet I discovered what the occupation of the Palestinian territories was about. Lots of activist friends around me didn't join the army and I asked their advice. They told me not to go to prison. In general the reason they gave was that you can't fight from there. But I chose this solution anyway because I think that people should know: the Israeli army doesn't respect human rights and commits war crimes. »* Haifa, 2009



Photo 09 -

**Giyora Neumann, 55 ans, journalist:** *«In 1971, when I was 17, I was the first to refuse to join the army and to go to jail. At the time I was an activist with Matzpen, a socialist, revolutionary and anti-Zionist political party. We were against the occupation [of the Palestinian territories] from the start [editor's note, in 1967]. I also did it for personal reasons: my family suffered another occupation ... in Poland. My parents supported me even though they were afraid. They understood my position. From a social point of view, because of what people said about their son, they perhaps suffered more as a result of it than me. »* Tel-Aviv, 2009



Photo 10 -

**Naomi, 20, student:** *«I didn't do my military service because I'm against the occupation and against the militarization of Israeli society. It's not just the Palestinians who suffer from the militarization of our society. We have one of the biggest armies in the world even though we're a very small country. The money that's spent on defense is not invested elsewhere, in education for example. It was a problem when I wanted to look for job. I was going to work in a bookshop, but when the employers saw that I hadn't done military service, they changed their minds. »* Tel-Aviv, 2009.



Photo 11 -

**Gal, 19:** *«When I was 13 I remember seeing on the television about the refuseniks who were going to prison for not joining the army. I found them repugnant. The suicide attacks of 2002 to 2003 had an impact on me. Afterwards I read about Palestinian history and I realized the extent of my ignorance. In the end, and above all because of my family, I decided to get myself declared unfit for service on the grounds of psychological problems. I think the most difficult thing for my father is when people ask him about what I'm doing now. If I were a 'normal' boy I'd be in the army.»* Haifa, 2009



Photo 12 -

**Daniel, 24 years, and student:** *«As a socialist, I didn't want to do military service because I'm against imperialism. Moreover, in Israeli society war has always been synonymous with social injustice. No matter what major social problem it is, it gets pushed to the back of public debate if the state decides that the army must attack the Lebanon or Gaza. My parents didn't want a tragedy to happen to their only son. In the end I was declared unfit for service on the grounds of psychological problems.»* Haifa, 2009



Photo 13 -

**Margarida, 23:** *«I arrived in Israel from Brazil with my family when I was 14. I joined the army at 19 and I asked to be [based] near my house. They never listened to me. In the end, I took 60 pills so that they'd understand that it was something serious, and they got rid of me. I dreamed of working at the airport, but that's now impossible.»* Ashkelon, 2009



Photo 14 -

**Avner, 32, historian:** *«I grew up in a kibbutz, in a left-wing Zionist family. All the men in my family are in the army. At the age of 18 I joined up full of confidence, I thought we were the good guys, even if sometimes we made mistakes. But when I discovered the way the Palestinians lived, I thought it was unacceptable that the army, rather than protecting our country, was defending a colonialist project. I and other 13 soldiers sent a letter explaining that we didn't want to be reservists.»* Jerusalem, 2009



Photo 15 -

**Tal Sela, 33, teacher :** «*At the age of 19 I was posted to an elite unit. This specialism required you to take lessons, and I knew straight away that I was going to stay [in the army] a year-and-a-half longer than normal. In 1997 there was a raid in Lebanon. On September 5th, 12 Israeli soldiers were killed by explosives. The army sent my unit to retrieve the bodies. I remain traumatized by the horror of it. Now, I no longer want to be a reservist. I'm involved in the Combatants for Peace movement.* » Tel-Aviv, 2009.



Photo 16 -

**Raz, 19:** «*When I was 15 I knew nothing about the Palestinians. I lived in a kind of bubble. But when I went into the territories for the first time I saw very clearly that the occupation didn't exist for security reasons. I felt strongly that we'd been lied to. In 2008 seven of us refused to join the army. I spent 4 months in jail. I came face to face with the reality of other girls who were in a much more difficult situation than mine both on a family and social level.* » Tel-Aviv, 2009.



Photo 17 -

**Hilla, 23, student:** «*I couldn't see myself being in the army but I wanted to give something to society. I wanted to do civic service. That was a big problem for my parents. We had a serious argument about it. In the end I announced that I was a pacifist and I appeared before a committee. My father supported me and even got involved in this nonsense imposed by the army by being my witness during the interview.* » Haifa, 2009



Photo 18 -

**Uri, 26:** «*When I was at high school I began to understand that what we were being taught at school was only part of the story. I was interested in politics and was against the occupation of the Palestinian territories. At the age of 17, I thought for the first time that I shouldn't join [the army]. That was a shock for my parents. They tried to convince me to join the army but they didn't succeed. In the end I was declared unfit for service on the grounds of psychiatric problems.* » Haifa, 2009.



Photo 19 -

**Isham, 39, journalist:** «My parents are Druze and communists. It was clear from the start that I would not join the army because I could not support Israeli policy. There's a 1957 law that obliges the Druze to join the army. The major Druze families have accepted this. There's an agreement between two elites, the young have no say in it. Israel's aim has always been to divide and rule. The Israeli policy has worked, the young Druze join the army and are led to believe they're privileged, yet their social situation remains pitiful. They do all the bad jobs, in particular at check points. I spent a year and a half in prison for disobedience. » Haifa, 2009.



Photo 20 -

**Gai, 30, playwright:** «I'd been in the army a month when I learnt that my little sister had died in a suicide attack in Jerusalem. I stayed in the army in an attempt to avoid getting completely depressed. But it didn't work. Much later I travelled to France where I worked with Palestinian refugees. It was at that time I decided to be a "missionary" against military service. » Tel-Aviv, 2009



Photo 21 -

**Or, 19:** «Because I grew up in a very Zionist Israeli family, when I was a child I was certain that I'd serve in a combat unit. But when I was at a demonstration against the wall in the West Bank, the Israeli army fired at us. I realised that day that I wouldn't do my military service. I'm going to go to prison so my family understands. » Tel-Aviv, 2009



Photo 22 -

**Efi, 23, a student:** «From your childhood in Israel you're led to believe that the army protects you. An important experience made me understand that this wasn't the case: I went to Bil'in on the West Bank where I saw pacifist demonstrators defend their land. I saw the soldier's fire at them and that shocked me. When growing up in Israel, when you're young, it's impossible to know about this sort of thing.» Tel Aviv, 2009. In 2014 he says: "Today I think that the problem is in fact a complex one. War is a terrible thing and there are people who suffer on both sides. But as it is being attacked I think Israel has the right to defend itself. »