



Military Court Watch

Monitoring the treatment of children in Israeli military detention

Evidence from former Israeli soldiers

2004 - 2023

ANNEXURE D

Date: November 2023

2004**Testimony 1**

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Staff Sergeant
Unit: Armored Corps
Location: Itamar, occupied West Bank
Date: 2004
Title: "Who is my commander here?"

An Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how the military took orders from the civilian security guard inside a settlement.

Interviewer: Did you have any interaction with the settlers at Itamar?

Soldier: Yes, all the time. You sleep inside the settlement. You're sort of guarding their settlement. We did sentry duty at the entrance to the settlement, and also did security shifts inside Itamar. They were very friendly. They see the army as their friend, as the future. Sometimes it seems as if the settlement's civilian security official is actually your commander. In Itamar, it got to the point where we were getting orders from him. Our army commander would say: If the civilian security official tells you something, do as he says. You ask yourself sometimes, who is my commander here? It was very problematic. It seemed as if the settlers and the army were the same force.

2005

Testimony 2

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Armored Corps
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2005
Title: "What is that job really?"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing the Israeli military tactics employed in Palestinian villages in the occupied West Bank.

Soldier: We moved to the Ari'el area, near Nablus. We were in charge of the entire road that crossed the West Bank from west to east, all the way up to the checkpoint at Tapuach Junction. Our designated mission was to prevent acts of terrorism. Simply handle the population. We would enter villages on a daily basis, at least twice or three times a day, to make our presence felt, and ... it was like we were occupying them. Showing we're there, that the area is ours, not theirs.

Interviewer: How is this done?

Soldier: A patrol goes in, or two patrols, two hummers secured by a jeep, and raise hell inside the villages. A whole company may be sent in on foot in two lines like a military parade in the streets, provoking riots, provoking children. The commander is bored and wants to show off to his battalion commander, and he does it at the expense of his subordinates. He wants more and more friction, just to grind the population, make their lives more and more miserable, and to discourage them from throwing stones, to not even think about throwing stones at the main road. Not to mention Molotov cocktails and other things. Practically speaking, it worked. The population was so scared that they shut themselves in. They hardly came out. Earlier I recall a lot of cabs with people on their way to work near the main road. Then it hardly existed any more. The whole village shut itself in. This just shows what a company commander is capable of doing.

Interviewer: What level does this reach? What is he able to do?

Soldier: At first you point your gun at some five-year-old kid, and feel bad afterwards, saying it's not right. Then you get to a point where ... you get so nervous and sick of going into a village and getting stones thrown at you. But it's obvious, you're inside the village, you've just passed the school house, naturally the kids will throw stones at you. Once my driver got out, and without blinking, just grabbed some kid and beat him to a pulp. And that kid was just sitting in the street and looked like some other kid, or wore another kid's shirt, or perhaps he was that kid but that's not the point. He beat him to a pulp. Didn't detain him. Just beat him. And I remember they had this pool hall. There were already the more 'serious' guys, the ones who throw Molotov cocktails. In order to get them out, detain and interrogate them, we'd catch them – my company

commander caught a 12-year-old kid there once, and made him get down on his knees in the middle of the street. Yelled like a madman – it looked like some Vietnam War movie – so that the other guys come out or else he'll do something really bad to them. He'd do something to that kid. I knew it was just a hollow threat, and after all the guy's an officer, and I don't think an officer would do anything, but ...

Interviewer: Actually shackled him?

Soldier: He had a plastic shackle. I remember it was raining. We went in, and as usual stones were thrown at us. My communications man who runs fast caught this kid who supposedly threw stones, shackled him and took him to the company commander. Brought him back to this place in front of that pool hall. The vehicles were parked there. He got him down on his knees and yelled as if ...

Interviewer: In Arabic?

Soldier: No, in Hebrew, very loud so that the kids from that club would come out so we could interrogate them. They didn't come out on their own.

Interviewer: What did he yell at the kid?

Soldier: He yelled at him to shut up and the kid cried of course ... He also peed in his pants, in front of the whole village. He got him on his knees and began to scream in Hebrew, to swear at him: 'Those fucking kids from the club should come out now!' 'Get those whores out!' 'Let him be scared!' 'Look what I can do!' 'I'll show this kid.' Finally the kids didn't come out, but we always had in mind that image of the old Arab with his keffiyah and stick. Regardless if there's shooting or stones, no matter what, he's a kid in the middle of the street. Kids and soldiers both would respect him. So this old guy comes along and somehow convinces my company commander to release the kid. And that's how that episode ended. We got out of there. The next day two Molotov cocktails were thrown at the main road. So we didn't really do our job. And you wonder what that job really is.

Testimony 3

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Reserves
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2005
Title: "The jeep was rocking"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a group of Israeli policemen beat a father and his son in the middle of a road junction.

Soldier: We went up to a post between the settlements of Shilo and Eli, on some hill, I don't remember the name. We were briefed to replace the regulars, it was our first day out in the area. We arrived, we had a quarter of an hour briefing about the site and went up to replace them on duty. It was a pillbox post, located between two villages, on a junction in Road 60. We were briefed not to stop vehicles at the junction because there's no intention to disturb them. We were only supposed to observe from above and make sure that no harm comes to settler cars as they pass. We got there, entered the post, and not even 10 minutes went by before we saw a police jeep coming.

Interviewer: Israeli police?

Soldier: Yes. They parked the jeep in the middle of the junction, I got up and saw this, went downstairs, and two minutes later we heard shouts: 'Help us, army! Soldiers, help us!' All the conscripts went out with three reservists to help them. I went up to observe what was going on and there was this confused kid standing there, and I realized they had caused this tremendous traffic jam, stopping in the middle of the junction without bulletproof vests, without helmets, nothing.

Interviewer: The reservists?

Soldier: The police. They did just the opposite of what we'd been instructed, in every way. They created a traffic jam, and created a real disturbance. As they called us, they grabbed a father, mother and child, the parents around 50, the kid about 17, 18 and began to hit them, the father and the kid. They fought with them for a few minutes, in the meantime the soldiers arrived, flanked and secured them, and they were really fighting. One of the soldiers, I think, went over to join in. After a moment of hitting, they handcuffed the father on the asphalt. It was summer, very hot, I remember this. The kid was handcuffed as well, and the policeman took the kid with his hands tied behind his back and threw him into the jeep. The father was shackled on the side, and the mother was hanging on to the policeman. He pushed her away and the two went into the jeep, and the jeep was seen 'rocking'. You know, it's no lightweight vehicle. The soldier threw the kid into the jeep head first and he had no way of holding on to anything and the jeep rocked. Finally they drove away, the father stayed lying on the asphalt, shackled, I don't know

who released him. The mother came to the post and began to throw stones. In a few seconds several others arrived but dispersed pretty quickly, it didn't turn into a real riot.

Interviewer: Did you manage to talk to the policemen or the soldiers before that? Ask what had happened?

Soldier: No, no one understood what went on. They began hitting, I think they just detained people without any kind of intelligence information. They caused a traffic jam, they were there without a computer, empty headed, nothing, a pistol in their belt, and that's all. I went on the radio, talked with my superiors – company commander, his deputy, battalion commander, his deputy, and even with the brigade commander – and told them I demanded an inquiry, I wanted to know why they did this. I tried to go through the official channels to know why, how they could act against all the rules that had been made clear to us an hour earlier. They acted in total disregard of any law. And that was that. No inquiry, nothing.

Interviewer: Did you try asking after that day?

Soldier: Yes. I was told it was being looked into, and that was that. I asked several times. Even after I left my reserves duty ...

Interviewer: Except for you, how did other reservists see this?

Soldier: They were less upset. Also, they came to secure them, and throughout the incident they were on guard and missed most of the violence. The beatings. They came, surrounded them, and before they got organized I was above, looking down at the whole thing. I saw it all from above. I don't think this was such an extraordinary incident, but to see with your own eyes how this unfolds in a matter of second ...

Testimony 4

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Paratroopers Brigade
Location: Tulkarem, occupied West Bank
Date: 2005
Title: "Neighbor procedure"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes using Palestinian women and children as human shields during arrest operations.

Soldier: 'Neighbor procedure' is used when an arrest mission takes place and usually a neighbor, a resident of the neighboring house, is summoned and required to enter the wanted person's home and call its inhabitants to come outside.

Interviewer: That's what you called it, 'neighbor procedure?'

Soldier: Yes. At the briefings we were simply told to order a neighbor out.

Interviewer: Who gave those briefings?

Soldier: The unit commander. Anyway, in other instances neighbors were required to enter a house after its inhabitants got out, to make sure no one stayed inside. There are many problems with this procedure beyond the fact that there had been a ruling made by the High Court of Justice in November 2002 or a bit earlier against using the procedure. I remember this because it was a short while before I was recruited. The ruling was brought about after a big to-do about some arrest mission where the neighbor was killed – the Palestinians from the wanted man's house had killed their neighbor - so this procedure was outlawed completely. Besides being illegal, at times use was made of women and children for this purpose. Children.

Interviewer: Do you recall a specific instance?

Soldier: Yes. I think it was in Tulkarem. There was a rather complex structure of several multi-story houses. We got all the people out. No one was the wanted person. We feared he was still there, inside. So at first neighbors were used, then some kid. Bilal, I even recall his name. I remember because I got very angry over this. And they kept sending him into that house to check that no one was inside, open all the doors, turn on all the lights, open all the windows.

Interviewer: Who decided to send him in?

Soldier: I don't know – I suppose it was our unit commander – but usually commanders wouldn't assign me to the team carrying out the mission, they knew my views on the subject quite well. I mean, there was some briefing: before an operation where I was squad commander, they used to say, '**'s squad will go here and get a neighbor out. I approached my own squad

commander and said: 'Listen, I don't know the unit commander's view on this, I'm not going to do this. I will not handle this business of 'neighbor procedure', both because I object to it personally, and because it is against the law.

Interviewer: And what were you told?

Soldier: My own squad commander said: 'No problem. Don't do anything you aren't comfortable with.

Interviewer: What did he say about it being against the law?

Soldier: They know it is, and still they – I quote the unit commander – 'I know it's illegal, and I am willing to have that neighbor killed, that mother, that woman, so that none of my men will be killed entering that house.' He cited examples of missions where a wanted man locked himself in, and several times the army tracking dog was sent in and did not detect him, and several times the mother was sent in to open doors and shed did, and every time the dog went in and found nothing. There was a squad there that noticed shed didn't open a certain door on the roof every time, and forced her to open that door. The guy was really there and the next time the dog went up, he killed the army dog. The commander gave this example because in his opinion he had saved the life of one of the combatants and he was willing to risk lives [of Palestinians] over this. Unlike him, the battalion commander told me ... Before my talk with him, I got a copy of the 'neighbor procedure'. At the time it was accepted by the court under a lot of conditions. I got hold of these conditions and studied them beforehand, and told him: 'Here and here and here we don't carry it out properly.' Meaning, soldiers had used children and women, and that means their participation was not always based on their willingness. Sometimes those neighbors were threatened, coerced, etc.

Interviewer: What kinds of threats?

Soldier: 'We'll arrest you, too.' Things like that. No physical violence threats. Arrests, stuff like that., let's say harassment.

Interviewer: You approach someone and say: 'Come with me.' He answers: 'I don't want to?'

Soldier: No one said they wouldn't. When you knock on someone's door in the middle of the night with your gun pointing in his face and shining your light into his eyes and tell him to strip, turn around, check that he is not armed, and then begin to ask him who lives here, who lives there, go here – he will not say he is not willing. But when later the person says: 'I don't know, and this and that,' and you think he's selling you short, I've heard guys answer him: 'Too bad, we'll pick you up, too.' There were all kinds of things like this. And the battalion commander claimed it was legal. He has a law degree. He claimed it's legal and we began to discuss the conditions and stuff, and he said: 'In some instances you're right, and we do have to fix things.' Indeed that night of my discussion with him in Jenin, again children were sent in to do it. So a request was sent out on a radio that this time no one use neighbor procedure at all. I know that a very large-scale action was planned for that day, and right after my discussion with the battalion

commander, all the commanders of all the battalion units were summoned for a talk with him. The first thing he did was to brief them on clarifying 'neighbor procedure' – that permission should be requested, and that women and children should not be used. So on that day, everything still worked out ok. The next night, we entered Jenin again, and again a boy and a woman was used. After a few times, I heard over the radio that no one was supposed to send women or children into such a house, only adult men and only with the permission of the commander on the ground. So those were the changes. Although I know that later there were cases of 'neighbor procedure,' I don't know whether with children or not, but I'm also sure that today this is still done.

Testimony 5

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Brigade
Location: Jenin, occupied West Bank
Date: 2005
Title: "Aspirin"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes the practice of dispensing aspirin to Palestinian detainees for potentially serious medical conditions.

Soldier: Salem is a detention center for security prisoners who do their time there. Conditions there were less favorable than at Megiddo, which is a huge prison. There is checkup time once or twice a week, and whoever is taken to Salem has already undergone a doctor's examination to verify that he can do time at a facility without a doctor. Whoever isn't able goes to Megiddo. There were all sorts of cases that I'm sure – if a doctor had seen them, they never would have entered Salem. Like a cardiac patient facing surgery, or a diabetic.

Interviewer: They went to Megiddo?

Soldier: Yes. But they were at Salem. That's the point. There were three instances I remember: The first was a 15-year-old boy with pain in his balls. You could hear shouts from inside the cell. A sewer runs under Salem and it stinks like hell in the summertime, really bad. Incredible. The inmates yelled for the sergeant on duty to arrive, and after 20 minutes of yelling, a 15-year-old boy was brought out of the prisoners' cell where there's a shaweesh (an inmate who can speak Hebrew and mediates between the wardens and the inmates). He explains that the boy had testicle pains. The medical protocol requires that anyone suffering pain in his testicles must go to the hospital, see a doctor. I was stressed out and tried to speak with the battalion doctor to ask him to make a call. He said he'd be there two days later, and that I should give him an aspirin.

Interviewer: How did you answer this?

Soldier: That aspirin doesn't help testicle pain. He needs to get to the hospital. The doctor said he couldn't do it and would try to get there the next day.

Interviewer: What happened to this boy?

Soldier: He's okay, a doctor came and took him.

Interviewer: You told him to sit in the cell and gave him an aspirin?

Soldier: There was nothing much I could do. I gave him a pill to relieve his pain and it calmed him psychologically. I told him that if it hurts more, he should call me. He didn't.

Interviewer: Did you see him the next day?

Soldier: I don't remember. I think so. Again, I remember he didn't summon me that night. There's a guard post inside the detention center which my own company was supposed to man, I wasn't there on duty as a medic. The detention facility would summon medics from the company as needed, when there was no doctor around. There was not ample medical provision there, not even a first aid kit. I realized he was supposed to undergo hernia surgery before his arrest. I know because a doctor who checked him before his arrest signed it. Maybe the examination was not thorough, but this kid could not stand arrest. Then I realized that a doctor does not always really examine the detainees.

Interviewer: How did you realize this?

Soldier: When the medics were required to examine detainees' ability to withstand custody, we were told that even a medic could do so. At some point I could no longer be there. I had many confrontations with the staff and my company medic and the battalion doctor over this, so I was told not to go there anymore.

Interviewer: How do you know the prisoners' data?

Soldier: I saw their files ... Every person arriving at the detention facility was required to undergo a medical examination. The doctor had to check his medical history in order to verify his capability, as well as anyone who was being released.

Interviewer: What does the file include?

Soldier: Name, data, picture, formal details, crime, length of prison sentence, arrest document.

Interviewer: Who fills it out?

Soldier: In principle, the doctor or medic.

Interviewer: Did you fill such files out?

Soldier: Yes. I wrote in pulse, blood pressure, issues of health, medication, family history.

Interviewer: Who signed the document?

Soldier: I did.

Interviewer: What's written below the signature?

Soldier: The doctor, I think. I'm not sure. I think they said the medic may also do this.

Interviewer: Who did?

Soldier: The doctor, I think.

Interviewer: The doctor approved this?

Soldier: Yes.

Testimony 6

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2005
Title: "Kazabubu Shalaf"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how children would sometimes be humiliated and beaten in the back of a military vehicle.

Soldier: Once I was on the company commander's front command group and we were on a patrol. Suddenly a disturbance broke out. Someone threw stones at us and it seemed strange to me later that we could have got out of there and nothing would have happened, I don't know. It turned into a chase on foot, we ran among the houses, back and forth. Like playing hide-and-seek, only with grenade launchers and stones.

Interviewer: How long did it last? Whom were you chasing?

Soldier: Three quarters of an hour, half an hour, kids 8-12 years old. We caught two.

Interviewer: What did you do with them?

Soldier: We yelled at them ... You threaten them, mainly. Some people got beaten, but with them it wasn't beating, more like raising a threatening hand. What can you do with a kid? The whole idea of chasing rioters is weird. Because the system has no means of handling things that happen there, with the law it tries to enforce. The enforcement system doesn't care, and what are you going to do with a kid who just threw stones at you now, and he's 8 or 12 years old.

Interviewer: Did you ever detain or arrest them?

Soldier: We detained adolescents, say 16, 18 years old. You shackle them, blindfold them, put them at the army post's sentry booth and then take them back. Nothing happens to some of them. Some are harassed.

Interviewer: What kind of harassment?

Soldier: It doesn't happen at a post, it happens while driving, say. Once we arrested someone and while driving, in the APC, someone played 'Kazabubu Shlaf' with him. When I say 'Kazabubu' you have to say your name, and when I say 'Shlaf' you must say your family name. So he began to play the game with him without explaining the rules. He said: 'Kazabubu' and hit him on the head. Not too tough, but it was simply humiliating. Less painful than humiliating. He would hit him and some would yell the answer at him, what he was supposed to

say: 'Say your name!' and the like: 'What's your name?' Shouts like that. Such a game can take about seven minutes ...

2006

Testimony 7

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Reserves
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006
Title: "Mortal fear"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a Palestinian child was terrified when a soldier simply asked him what he was studying.

Soldier: We were in Ari'el where we put up checkpoint without understanding why. In hindsight, several years later, you think: 'What incredible things I did there ...' You put up a checkpoint out of boredom, sit there for a few hours and then continue on. Once I saw kids passing, and one of the guys, a reservist who spoke Arabic, wanted to ask them what they study. He didn't mean it in a bad way. Then I saw how the kid nearly peed in his pants as the guy tried to joke with him, how the two worlds are simply disconnected. The guy was joking and the kid was scared to death.

Testimony 8

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: Paratroopers Brigade
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2005-2006
Title: "Total helplessness"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which she describes how her views about the treatment of Palestinians hardened as her compulsory service progressed.

Soldier: It's a harsh reality. Very very harsh. And the closer it gets to you, the more you realize things. Suddenly things that are on the news just didn't make any sense to you, now pass as normal. And here you live it. I saw combatants abuse detainees, for instance, so many times, and it was highly upsetting.

Interviewer: Was this common practice or a single event?

Soldier: Not common practice. Commanders also knew how to put an end to it. I mean, it's not something they'd encourage. On the whole people got treated ...

Interviewer: When you saw this for the first time, what did you say?

Soldier: It was very weird for me. Incredibly weird. It stressed me out. I was really scared of this situation.

Interviewer: Do you recall a specific situation?

Soldier: I remember one morning, one of the first times I came to the commander's office and saw some five detainees, incredibly scary, and a few soldiers ...

Interviewer: What was scary, the way they looked?

Soldier: No, not the way they looked. The fact that they were actually children, around 14-15 years old. Not older. Blindfolded. And these combatants were not from my own battalion – after all we were a regional brigade, and there were lots of different units – combatants came at those kids, threw stones at them, swore at them. And the kids sat as helpless as a human being can be, their hands shackled in those tight plastic bands that don't let them move, blindfolded, total helplessness. I often found myself feeling very ambivalent, not sure what I was doing, whose side I was on in this whole thing.

Interviewer: Did you say anything to anyone?

Soldier: I often made remarks, and some people responded by saying: 'You're right, this has to be looked into.' Others said: 'After all they do to us, we have the right to treat them anyway we want.' Listen, seeing my own guys coming back, later in their service, but still, coming back from an eight-hour shift at Huwara Checkpoint, when a Palestinian tried to stab one of them, at that point I say, sorry, but screw them. With all due respect. With all my good will.

Testimony 9

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006
Title: "A 12-year-old boy"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes chasing a group of 12-year-old Palestinian boys and how the soldiers did whatever they felt like doing.

Soldier: In Jalis, a situation developed – three solid days of chases. On one of the patrols it grew into a mad, mass riot where we chased some three kids from house to house and yelled: 'Where are they?' at every house.

Interviewer: How old were the kids?

Soldier: I don't know – 12-year-olds. It grew out of some small incident but this was already after three very charged days and it was insane. We didn't end up finding those kids. When it happened and we entered houses, we began to hear some noises in the neighborhood. Shouts and noise. We entered one house where we saw them enter and asked directly: 'Where are they?' We got everyone out of the house and they were not there. We searched the whole house and realized they must have exited from the back. In the meantime you hear a rumble down in the street as we prepare to exit. In order to get out, I stand there and push people like this with my weapon, sideways, and someone above me hits away with my gun-barrel.

Interviewer: What, at people's heads?

Soldier: People's mouths, heads. But this is a way to disperse a crowd. To make way. There were about 20 people just at the exit from the house. They spread out and ran, went down the street and began to throw chairs at us. I actually remember the image of a plastic chair flying overhead, and rocks, too. I feared for my life. Two patrols came and we dispersed everyone. But it all began with a chase of some kids.

Interviewer: Why were you chasing them to begin with?

Soldier: You don't know what happens, you're the sheriff, what do you mean, why? Why did he throw stuff at me? I throw back at him. Really, I think I was acting as a 12-year-old kid, what we did out there. But with weapons. I did whatever I felt like doing.

2007

Testimony 10

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Brigade
Location: Qalqiliya, occupied West Bank
Date: 2007
Title: "Some hours at company headquarters"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how his commanding officer cocked his weapon in the face of a nine-year-old boy suspected of throwing stones.

Soldier: At the entrance to Ma'ale Shomron settlement there is a curve in the road, named 'Curve 90'. It's a sharp curve where cars have to really slow down to take it safely – it's a right angle. It is very close to a village called Azzun, ten minutes from the town of Qalqiliya, and is considered hostile. Lots of popular terrorist action originates there, lots of stone-throwing. It's situated right on the main road to Ma'ale Shomron and many stones and fire bombs are thrown at cars on the road. The villagers are known for their hostility. There isn't usually stone-throwing at the turn, but once there was. It happened as close as 200 meters from the village, a place where cars really have to slow down, and this happened after there was stone-throwing at other spots a number of times. We were alerted to there with our front command jeep. We got to the village, drove up to the houses closest to the curve, and then saw a group of children, 9-10 years old, running away.

So the company commander and I got out of the jeep. We began to chase them. First they ran, went onto the balcony of some house, and then the commander took a stun grenade and hurled it into the balcony. It blew up. I don't think it hurt them or anything, but it made them run out of the balcony. The house was at the outskirts of the village, a neighborhood right next to the road, and they ran off around the house. We saw them run around so we came up from the other side of the house to face them. And we really did. As soon as the kid came up in front of us – he was about two meters away – the company commander cocked his weapon in his face to make him stop. The kid fell on the ground and cried and begged for his life. And our commander, so brilliant of him, decided to arrest those kids. Take them in for a few hours to company HQ, just to scare them. And the kid was just freaking out, certain he was going to be killed, and begged and pleaded for his life. His father and brother came along and said: 'Don't take him! He's just a kid,' and so on and so on. 'We'll take care of everything,' But the commander was adamant: 'No, I want to take him in.' And he actually tore him away from his dad's leg and we put the kid in the jeep. I did nothing at that point.

Interviewer: You took in one boy?

Soldier: Two. Two kids, if I remember right. He decided he wanted to take them in. It was this kind of gray situation, not that terrible, I think. Because those kids really do throw stones and

that's risky – it's not like we actually meant to harm them. I suppose it is a very scarring experience for them, but the situation is complicated. On the way, at the exit from the village, people waited for us; they actually tried to block our way. Lots and lots of stones were hurled at us – rocks – until we finally got out.

Interviewer: Are you sure those were the kids who threw stones?

Soldier: They were kids who saw an army jeep and broke off in a run. So we said: 'Okay, they're running.' That's the thought, and so we began to chase them. How do we know they threw stones? It's hard to tell. We didn't even interrogate these kids afterwards. We made them sit for a number of hours at the post and then returned them to the village.

Interviewer: Blindfolded?

Soldier: No. The fact is that as soon as they got there, we soldiers gave them sweets right away and kidded around with them.

Interviewer: What did the company commander say about this?

Soldier: He didn't see this, didn't know. It's not that black and white. At the end of the day, something has to make these kids stop throwing stones on the road because they can kill. That specific kid who actually lay there on the ground, begging for his life, was actually nine years old. I think of our kids, nine years old, and a kid handling this kind of situation. I mean, a kid has to beg for his life? A loaded gun is pointed at him and he has to plead for mercy? This is something that scars him for life. But I think that if we hadn't entered the village at that point, then stones would be thrown the next day and perhaps the next time someone would be wounded or killed as a result.

Interviewer: Did the stone-throwing cease afterwards?

Soldier: No.

Testimony 11

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Armored Corps
Location: Ramallah, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "Things that can still be changed"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a shackled and blindfolded minor wet himself while shackled and blindfolded at an army base.

Soldier: We had this checkpoint for Palestinians at Ofer Prison, the interrogation facility. We had to check Palestinians coming into the base. We did it by pointing our gun at them, telling them to approach, lift their shirt, regardless of the weather – this is near Ramallah, where it's not warm at all in the winter. If necessary they had to lift their pant legs. Men came through, girls came through – I don't know who we had to check.

Interviewer: Did you ever find a person of interest?

Soldier: No. Not at all. I would talk to them. It was important for me to be the good soldier.

Interviewer: What was the point of taking off their pants?

Soldier: If anything aroused suspicion. Personally I never saw this, but I suppose certain people were amused by this. I'm sure there were such cases: 'What a kick, I can tell him to take off his pants' ... I recall a detainee being brought in, a 16-17-year-old kid who tried to stab a guard at Ofer Prison. He was shackled, blindfolded, and claimed he was beaten all the way there. I told him: 'Sit-down, have a drink of water, eat some fruit.' Everyone laughed at me. 'What do you care?' I don't care what he did, he's a kid. Regardless whether he committed the worst crime, it's not his fault. These things can still be changed. Even the worst 15-year-old settler who beats up Palestinians, I still believe these things can be changed.

Interviewer: Where did he come from?

Soldier: From jail. He was visiting his brother, and I was told he came with a knife, wanting to stab a guard.

Interviewer: So he was brought to your detention facility?

Soldier: No, just brought so we'd keep an eye on him, at our quarters. He sat there shackled and blindfolded for 3-4 hours. He was scared, pissed in his pants, a little fellow, 16 years old. He claimed he'd been beaten up. It's not really our business. I told the Border Police to come pick him up, and they said: 'Don't worry, it's okay ...'

Interviewer: Do you think it was passed on?

Soldier: Yeah, right ... his hitters were put on trial ... No, I'm kidding. These are the little anecdotes. Suppose it's right, and I've totally lost faith. A guy tries to stab a guard, he deserves to sit in jail. He gets beaten to a pulp on the way, and I've seen things like this done: A detainee is brought in, he is tied to a post at the company HQ and anyone passing by slaps him a couple.

Testimony 12

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "Can't tell right from wrong"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how his commanding officer placed a loaded gun in a 14-year-old's mouth and threatened to shoot.

Soldier: We also did such things, you know. Kids would throw stones at us, we'd catch some kid who happened to be there and beat him to a pulp. Even if he didn't throw stones. He would know who did. 'Who is it? Who is it?' Finally he'd tell us who did it. Once we were on patrol, someone threw stones at us, nothing really serious, so we caught some Palestinian kid who had been nearby, we knew he'd seen this, he knew who had thrown stones. Let's say we hit him, to put it mildly, until he told us. He took us. He told us where the kid was, we wouldn't leave him alone until he told us exactly where that kid lived. We went to that person's home. He wasn't there that day. We went back to ***, came out on patrol again at 6 a.m., went straight to the home of that kid. He was about 15 years old.

Interviewer: The kid you caught?

Soldier: No, the kid that he ratted on. The kid who was the regular stone-thrower.

Interviewer: How old was the kid you caught?

Soldier: About 10 years old.

Interviewer: And the one he told on was 15?

Soldier: Something like that. Yes. We went to his house. He hadn't been home the night before. So we came in the morning, knocked on the door, some old woman came out, around 60 or so. She says: 'There's no one here.' You know how it is. We said we didn't care, went in, me and another guy, and at this point you have no more patience for Hebron and Arabs and Jews there. We entered, began to trash the place. There are doors on both sides of the corridor, I open all the doors on one side, my friend on the other side. We found the boy behind the last door on the left. He was totally scared, realized we'd caught him. At first he wanted to escape, then he saw my comrade standing at the door, and gave up. We took him out. We had a commander, never mind his name, who was a bit crazy. He beat the boy to a pulp, really knocked him around. He said: 'Just wait, now we're taking you.' Showed him all kinds of potholes on the way, asked him: 'Want to die? Want to die right here?' and the kid goes: 'No, no ...' You know.

Interviewer: In Arabic?

Soldier: Yes. He spoke Arabic well. So we began to walk, trying to walk behind them. I'll spare you the whole description, some things there were really out of line.

Interviewer: What happened?

Soldier: We walked on and on, the commander showed him holes in the ground: 'You want to die?' 'No, why ...' He was taken into a building under construction. The commander took a stick, broke it on him, boom boom. And the kid didn't cry. I tell you, he was tough. About 15 years old or so. Not big. The commander took a stone, gave it to him and said: 'Throw it at him,' pointing at me. I stare at him. What? 'Throw it now.' Slaps him in the face. 'Man enough? Throw it at him.' Boom, more beatings. The kid thought he was being made to throw the stone at me, so he did, not strongly or anything. The commander said: 'Of course you throw stones at a soldier.' Boom, banged him up even more. I tell you, that guy ... Then people started coming. His whole family came out. And they weren't allowed in. They surely heard all the slaps and hitting. That kid was such a mess, broken apart. Then one of the soldiers said: 'Listen, you're going too far. We don't want to come out of here with a dead body, that are still families around here.' And I tell you, that kid got punched in the face, in the knees, kicked around.

Interviewer: Only from the squad commander?

Soldier: No, there was another soldier who joined in, but not as seriously as the commander. That commander had no mercy. Really. Anyway the kid could no longer stand on his feet and was already crying. He couldn't take it anymore. He cried. The commander shouted: 'Stand up!' Tried to make him stand but he couldn't. He really couldn't. From so much beating he just couldn't stand up. The commander goes: 'Don't put on a show,' and kicks him some more. Then ***, who had a hard time with such things, came in, caught the commander and said: 'Don't touch him anymore. That's it,' The commander goes: 'What's with you, gone leftie?' And he said: 'No, I don't want to see such things being done.' He always stayed away, never liked such things. A sensitive guy, a medic, one of the good guys.

Interviewer: And then what?

Soldier: Then he said: 'I can't stand to see this anymore.' An argument ensued. The commander said: 'I can't believe I take you out on patrols.' Like he was really doing him a favor.

Interviewer: Where were you standing?

Soldier: We were nearby but did nothing. We were sort of indifferent, you know. Well, you only get to thinking about this later, you don't think at first. This was happening every day. These were the little things. And then it becomes a kind of habit. Patrols with beatings happened on a daily basis. We were really going at it.

Interviewer: And then he let the kid go?

Soldier: No. He grabbed him, took him out, and the people saw him, the parents saw him. Took him out? Lifted him by force. The kid hardly got up. I tell you, I have no idea how he managed, after an hour. And the commander goes on: 'What are you carrying on about?' and kicks him some more. Takes him out, others are asking: 'What did you do to him? Look!' Obviously he'd been beaten up. Anyway, he told them: 'Get the hell out of here!' and all hell broke loose.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Soldier: You know, his mother is here and after all it's her kid. 'What, he's only a kid!' His nose was bleeding. He had really been beaten to a pulp. The commander said to his mother: 'Keep away!' Came close, cocked his gun, he already had a bullet in the barrel, or halfway so it wouldn't just fly out. She got scared. He actually stuck the gun-barrel in the kid's mouth. Literally.

Interviewer: In front of his parents?

Soldier: Sure. 'Anyone gets close, I kill him. Don't annoy me. I'll kill him. I have no mercy.' He was really pissed off. Then the father, or not even the father, I don't know exactly who it was, caught her: 'Calm down, leave them alone. Let them go, so they'll let him go.'

Interviewer: All in Arabic?

Soldier: No, they spoke to us in Hebrew. And he wanted us to see this, he was not fool. A good man. The guy who spoke to us? Was a really good man. Things got to a point where you can no longer tell good from bad. That's how it was in our platoon. We thought they were all shits. Anyway, the commander gripped the kid, stuck his gun in his mouth, yelled and all, and the kid was hardly able to walk. We dragged him further, and then he said again: 'One more time this kid lifts a stone, anything, I kill him. No mercy.' It was like the whole way. *** was going on and on at this commander all along: 'You're such a retard, all you're doing to this family is making them produce another suicide bomber, that's what you're doing. You have no mercy. If I were a father and saw you doing this to my kid, I'd seek revenge that very moment.' He went on and on for a whole hour.

Interviewer: If I were a Palestinian, what would I get beaten up for?

Soldier: It was enough for you to give us a look that we didn't like, straight in the eye, and you'd be hit on the spot. We got to such a state and were so sick of being there, you know what I mean.

Testimony 13

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Armored Corps
Location: Ramallah, occupied West Bank
Date: 2007
Title: "Jeans and a red shirt"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how after a stone throwing incident the army would arrest children who most closely resembled the description they were given, even if they were not sure.

Soldier: Once we were driving on Road 443, and a frightened (settler) woman stopped us saying stones were thrown at her. The commander immediately turned around – 'We're entering the village' – and we went to lower Beit Ur village, the whole show, storming in on the jeep, the lookout directs us, we arrive at the house, there were 20 children there. 'Everyone line up.' My commander liked me, but before we got going he said to me: *****, don't be a wimp here,' meaning, don't show any mercy. We get there, face them: 'Stand in line! Who threw stones?' Everyone was scared. Five soldiers, with guns, try to catch those two 13-year-olds who threw stones.

Interviewer: The woman stops next to you and tells you that stones were thrown at her? The lookouts were on to this?

Soldier: No, we saw two children on the road beyond the fence, and later she came and we realized it was them. The lookout said they were identified and that they were on their way back to the village. We didn't know exactly where they were, we got to the house and caught those three kids by their clothes, none of them confessed. We were there for about 20 minutes, they were lined up in front of the house, we were pointing our guns at them and facing a bunch of trembling kids, who'd be pissing their pants in a moment, and the commander yells: 'Who is it?!' and grabs the oldest one. 'Tell me who it is and you won't get into trouble, don't worry, we'll take him and bring him back.'

We picked up three kids there. The mother was crying, the women were all in tears, the kids were shackled, taken into the jeep, scared. I just try to think what they must have felt, what it's like to be taken in an army jeep. I was sitting in the back with one of those kids and the jeep bumps along the road, those roads out there ... I took the driver's helmet because he doesn't need it in front, and placed it on the kid's head. The driver turned around, saw the kid with his helmet, and said: 'What are you doing?! I can't wear it after this!' I got annoyed, I mean, what? If he wears your helmet then it's filthy? 'You'll wash it out for me,' he said. What a buddy ... When he got to company HQ, first he washed out his helmet in soap and water, and only then put it on his head, because it had been on the kid's head for a few minutes. And this is a guy who votes for the Labour party, claims he is a leftie, but this disgusts him. How has this happened to us?

Interviewer: What happened to the children in the end?

Soldier: I think they were brought back two days later. No jail space would be wasted on them.

Interviewer: The kids confessed at some point?

Soldier: No, we got a lookout's identification for them, jeans and a red shirt. One of them escaped me when I shackled them, not too tight, so he released himself and ran. He was not chased. We were not sure it was them, and only on Friday night, back from Bil'in, our commander said: 'They were it, alright,' and everyone applauded. So we weren't sure, we picked up whoever was closest to the description. I thought then that if that's how they're treated, they'll be back two days later, and instead of throwing a stone they'd want to hurl a fire bomb ... They should have been given chocolate and a sandwich and a good talking to. Now I know that wouldn't have helped either. Bringing their mother and saying to her: 'Your kids can get in trouble,' with a smile. This is one of those little incidents that you just take for granted. You choose two who look close to the description, and then you have a soldier washing out his helmet after the kid had it on.

Testimony 14

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Combat Engineering Corps
Location: Ramallah, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "Whoever is slow to run - gets beaten up"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes soldiers beating children with clubs during clashes at Qalandiya checkpoint, in the occupied West Bank.

Soldier: There was this incident where an ambush was put up following a riot at Qalandiya on a Friday, in an abandoned house near the square. Soldiers got out with army clubs and beat people to a pulp. Finally the children who remained on the ground were arrested. The order was to run, make people fall to the ground. There was a 10-12 man team, 4 soldiers lighting up the area. People were made to fall to the ground, and then the soldiers with the clubs would go over to them and beat them. A slower runner was beaten, that was the rule.

Interviewer: What does such a club look like?

Soldier: It's the simplest wooden club, straight, about 30 centimeters long. You stick it in the back of your ceramic bullet proof vest, like a sword on a 'Ninja-turtle,' then you pull it out and pound it down.

Interviewer: You can kill a person.

Soldier: We were told not to use it on people's heads. I don't remember where we were told to hit, but as soon as a person on the ground is beaten with such a club, it's difficult to be particular.

Interviewer: How many times did your platoon do this?

Soldier: I don't know, quite a few. Certainly 4-5 times. Perhaps with different kids ...

Interviewer: What did the company commander expect?

Soldier: That they would learn their lesson. I can only hope that the kids detained on the base or at the police station would not go back to throwing stones, but I can't believe this was the effect.

Testimony 15

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "The guys are bored, they want action"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how soldiers would deliberately cause trouble in a Palestinian village when they were bored by throwing stun grenades into a mosque and using children as human shields.

Soldier: So there's a school there. We'd often provoke riots there. We'd be on patrol, walking in the village, bored, so we'd trash shops, find a detonator, beat someone to a pulp, you know how it is. Search, mess it all up. Say we'd want a riot? We'd go up to the windows of a mosque, smash the panes, throw in a stun grenade, make a big boom, then we'd get a riot.

Interviewer: And the locals were praying at the time?

Soldier: Yes, possibly. Everything goes. It's best, in the middle of prayers. That annoys them the most. You know what it's like. Soldiers are bored. They want action. Some are already waiting for the Palestinians outside, to fire rubber ammo as soon as they come out. Once we came – actually this was not planned – one of our guys went up to the window of the mosque, smashed it, and suddenly a riot broke out. So we came, shot rubber ammo, and they all scurried back inside. So a soldier went up and threw a gas canister inside.

Interviewer: Into the mosque?

Soldier: Sure. Can you imagine what sort of riot broke out there? I tell you, I never saw one like that. In Hebron we were provoking them like crazy. Then the company commander was alerted, the command jeep, because we needed more permission for these riots. The commander arrived, and said: 'Look for this and that, shoot at the knees.' We had a screwed-up company commander, a real Arab-hater, too. We went out and there was this terrific riot, cement blocks were thrown at us from rooftops, everything. I had never seen such a riot in Hebron. You know, they'd get really upset at us when we threw stun grenades into their holiday prayers. So the commander got annoyed, stopped, froze everyone, just when all the Palestinians want to come back from the mosque. He wouldn't let anyone through. Old people want to get home – nothing moves. It's already 11 p.m., they've been standing there for some four hours. People are getting really nervous. He goes: 'Okay, marksmen, up on the roofs. Soon Molotov cocktails will be flying.' We were waiting for this. He says: 'Wait, they're getting annoyed.' He is used to annoying people: 'Give them time, we'll warm them up.' Some begin to push. He picked up stones, threw them at people, said: 'No one gets through.' A car came. He picked up the blocks that had been thrown from the rooftops, and boom boom, smashed the car. 'Get out of here, fuckers!' Smashed the whole thing. Lights, everything. Left nothing whole. Crazy.

Interviewer: How did the riot end?

Soldier: It was a big one. We fired a lot of rubber ammo. A lot. Every time we'd catch Arab kids, hold them like this, with stones, like retards. You know, so that the others would throw stones at them, not at us.

Interviewer: Turn them into human shields?

Soldier: yes.

Interviewer: Did it work?

Soldier: Sometimes. Depends how much you provoke them. With the mosque it was a bit hard, because we were stoned from all directions.

Interviewer: The kids don't want to run away? Don't manage to get away?

Soldier: You know how badly beaten they get? You catch them, push the gun against their body, he can't make a move, he's totally petrified. He only goes: 'No, no, army.' You can tell he's petrified. He sees you're mad, that you couldn't care less about him and you're hitting him really hard the whole time. And all those stones flying around. You grab him like this, you see? We were mean, really. Only later did I begin to think about these things, that we'd lost all sense of mercy.

Testimony 16

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "Getting beaten all the way"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how children get repeatedly beaten after being detained by the army inside a military jeep.

Soldier: At some point a really effective solution was found to stop the stone throwing. Say a kid is caught throwing stones. First thing, if you bring him to his dad, he beats him up like hell.

Interviewer: Did you witness this?

Soldier: Sure. They don't care. That father doesn't care. He sees soldiers bringing his son home, doesn't talk to him. First thing, he punches him in the face, without a word. Doesn't ask: 'What happened? Who did what? Did you ... Didn't you ...' First thing, he punches his face. Then he grabs onto the kid and tries to take him from you. He says: 'Better I beat him up, rather than have the soldier hit him, take him to jail or anything else.' Beats him up. And soldiers, like any human being ... it's really unpleasant, so you begin to pity the kid, I mean his dad beats him with a stick, on and on. So he's left alone. Basically, the point's been made. But if a kid is caught and a patrol is alerted, and the kid is taken into the jeep, they drive to the other end of town and throw the kid out there, and he has to walk all the way across town and also be beaten.

Interviewer: Inside the jeep?

Soldier: In the jeep and on the way. The whole time.

Interviewer: Slaps, kicks? Or what?

Soldier: Both. I've already seen ... We had a guy, from the Caucasus, he was on our patrol, got off the jeep for a moment and someone swore at him. He got off, took off his helmet, hit him in the face with it. Literally split his face open. There were also beatings with sticks. Wood sticks, like the handles of a large hammer or ax.

Interviewer: You had clubs in you vests?

Soldier: We confiscated them from Palestinians. They had them in their shops and stuff. Just the handles without the hammer. No iron, just the wooden stick itself. They would carry them like police clubs. What's the point? The kid gets hit by the patrol, and he's thrown out at the other end of town and on his way back through he has to pass the guard posts, pillboxes. So he gets hit on the way back, too. He has to pass Gross Post and Avraham Avinu settlement and his beaten

there as well. So not only does he have to make it all the way back on his own, he also gets hit again and again.

Testimony 17

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "Did you swear at the soldier?"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a soldier accuses a Palestinian boy of swearing at him so that the boy's father will hit him.

Soldier: When I was a commander at Gross Post (in Hebron), sometimes out of boredom, you know, there are more soldiers there so you sit and chat. I recall once some soldier caught an Arab kid and said: 'You swore at me!' or something like that. His grandfather or father came, some adult, and he told them: 'The kid swore at me. You don't know who you've messed with, I'm a maniac,' begins to curse him, threaten him.

Interviewer: Who?

Soldier: The soldier yelling at the kid and his father. Grabs him like this, holding him by the neck to the wall. So the father says to the kid: 'You swore at the soldier?' Boom, slaps him. The father slaps the kid, you know, paying his dues. 'You swore at the soldier ...' You're looking on and saying to yourself, wow, I don't know. I mean, cases of real humiliation.

Testimony 18

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "They have to be respected"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how they would detain Palestinian boys with dirty hands on suspicion of throwing stones.

Soldier: We'd go on these vendettas.

Interviewer: Against whom?

Soldier: Against those who threw stones at us.

Interviewer: But you don't really know who did?

Soldier: We'd pick up kids, beat them up really hard, kids who were nearby, and they'd tell on them and take us to their homes. You can see them with you gun sights.

Interviewer: At what range?

Soldier: 100 meters, you can already detect the kid. So you go catch him later, you know it was him.

Interviewer: How?

Soldier: By his shirt. Often they change, but I remember we'd catch them, look at the palm of their hand, see how dirty it was, if there's soil, if they'd thrown stones.

Interviewer: Right after the stone throwing?

Soldier: Yes, right away. Some were picked up a day later, when we already weren't sure, but we were told it the right kid, so it was.

Interviewer: ... What about women? What did you do to women?

Soldier: Really, not much. Women are already out of bounds.

Interviewer: Was that the norm?

Soldier: Yes. The limit. Sort of like, they had to be respected. There's this thing that you have to respect women, after all. No matter how sickening they are, you still have to respect them. You know that if you hurt a woman ... Once we caused a serious riot because of this.

Interviewer: You caused a riot?

Soldier: Yes, we made it happen. We said: 'This is it, we need some armed men out of the house.' Someone began an argument, with an old woman, like about 60, when they're already so screwed up, they start arguing. So somehow ... I'll tell you how it was. We caught some kid and the mother came right away to get him. We wouldn't let her. We started arguing with her over him. 'We're not letting you have him. He threw stones.' 'No, no.' She began pushing the soldiers. So one of them slapped her face right away. Boom. That very second the whole family came out of the house. You know how it is, a mother, a woman. When you hurt a woman – nothing can be done. So a whole riot started. The woman slapped his face back, there were beatings, a whole mess ... There were actually lots of incidents like this, come to think of it. A mother comes to pick up her boy, and doesn't get him. He's about to tell on others, she realizes this, she's afraid he'll squeal on others, so she catches him: 'No, why?' 'Move, where is he?' She gets slapped on the hand, and starts fighting with the soldiers. Then someone slaps her face and the whole thing blows up.

Testimony 19

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "Harassment post"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a fellow soldier would beat Palestinian children at a checkpoint and made them sing the Israeli national anthem.

Soldier: The 'Pharmacy' Post (in Hebron) was a real harassment post. One of our guys would catch kids, make them spread their legs against the wall, hit them between the legs with a metal rod and go: 'Sing, repeat after me!' 'No, no way!' They had to shout the Israeli national anthem after him ... And if they didn't sing on beat, they'd get a blow with that rod to their knee. 'Exactly as I say it!' on a regular basis. Always it was a permanent harassment spot. People would be kept locked up inside, old men, and detonators would be thrown in where they were held. Regularly. Just like that. Bullshit. Our battalion was known for these things. The soldiers were already sick of guard duty, so they thought, if I'm going out of my mind, let them go out of their minds, too. You know these things. This nonsense. Listen, you get desperate.

Testimony 20

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2006-2007
Title: "People always exaggerate"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a soldier beat a child at a checkpoint for five minutes because he did not understand what he was supposed to do.

Interviewer: Were there cases where a soldier or a commander went overboard, and there was real violence or abuse?

Soldier: Always. It's not a normal situation to be in, and 19-year-old kids go overboard. There were situations in which they really did, and others where they were even too soft with people.

Interviewer: Do you have examples?

Soldier: Yes. Just walking down the street and hitting kids with a stick in the knee so they trip and fall, that's going overboard. Catching children who cross the checkpoint because they don't understand what they were supposed to do and just walked on – they would just hit them.

Interviewer: How old were these kids?

Soldier: 10-year olds.

Interviewer: Do you have a specific example?

Soldier: Two brothers were walking along the 'Pharmacy' Post, which is a kind of trailer checking post. They just walked through. The metal detector beeped, and the soldiers yelled at them to stop and come back and they didn't hear them, or didn't really want to hear. One of the soldiers there ran, caught a kid, and there's this iron post at the side there.

Interviewer: Looks like a big oven?

Soldier: Exactly.

Interviewer: It's a kind of protective container.

Soldier: Yes. He pushed the kid inside there. Beat him up for five minutes and then let him go.

Interviewer: A 10-year-old kid.

Soldier: Yes. The kid walked away after about 15 minutes. Limping.

2008

Testimony 21

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Tulkarem, occupied West Bank
Date: 2008
Title: "One checkpoint, three lanes"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes dividing a checkpoint into lanes based on race or national identity. Israeli settlers would complain if they had to wait.

Soldier: There was one checkpoint that was divided into three lanes: there's a settlement, a checkpoint, and then Israeli territory. In the middle, there's a Palestinian village, so they just split the checkpoint into three lanes. Three lanes, and the brigade commander ordered that Jews should only wait at the checkpoint for 10 minutes. Because of that we had to have a special lane for them, and everyone else, the Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, had to wait in the other two lanes. I remember that settlers would come, go around the Arabs, and just did it naturally. I went over to a settler and said: 'Why are you going around? There's a line here, sir.' He said: 'You really think I'm going to wait behind an Arab?' He began to raise his voice at me. 'You're going to hear from your brigade commander'.

Testimony 22

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Brigade
Location: Jenin, occupied West Bank
Date: 2008
Title: "It's not right"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes a video clip on a mobile phone taken by another soldier showing shackled children being kicked.

Soldier: In Jalame, Jenin, while in squad commander's training, a driver showed me pictures of two kids they had caught, shackled, and kicked ...

Interviewer: He told you about this?

Soldier: He showed me the video he took on his cell phone. Sitting shackled, and some soldier walks by and – pow – kicks them in the back or something. I felt so ... In hindsight I thought: Why didn't I just tell him to stop? It was only later that I told him that was wrong, and he gave me a piece of his mind, this driver.

Testimony 23

Name: Anonymous
Rank: n/a
Unit: n/a
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2007-2008
Title: "Human advantage"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes a debate in his platoon where most soldiers thought Palestinians should be beaten 'so they'll know what's what'.

Soldier: One night, things were hopping in Idna village, so we were told there's this wild riot, and we should get there fast. Our officer wasn't there. The sergeant, plus a team of six soldiers, mount a secured vehicle, and we go to Idna. At some point it was really crazy there, burning tires, burning garbage bins in the middle of the road. We drive and whole rocks land on the vehicle, thrown from the rooftops. Our hearts were pumping madly.

Interviewer: You entered the village?

Soldier: There were lots of forces there. Us, and the front command jeep with the company commander, battalion commander, his deputy and the command of another three companies, three patrols. The village was swamped with army personnel. We drove the company commander's jeep along quite a main street in the village, next to the mosque, several times. Suddenly we were showered with stones and didn't know what was going on. Everyone stopped suddenly, the sergeant sees the company commander get out of the vehicle and joins him. We jump out without knowing what was going on – I was last. Suddenly I see a shackled and blindfolded boy. The stoning stopped as soon as the company commander gets out of the car. He fired rubber ammo at the stone-throwers and hit this boy. The boy was holding his belly and tried to run or throw another stone, there are several versions of this. This is what I was told afterwards, I didn't see it myself.

The company commander punched him, very fast, made him fall on the ground and the medic and communications man tied him up and blindfolded him. All this happened within 20 seconds from the moment the vehicle stopped until I saw him shackled. He was put in our vehicle and you saw he was filthy from the stones. He asked: 'What did I do? Why me?' I tried to talk to him a bit, gave him some water on the way, and he asked again why he was detained. I told him he had thrown stones, he said he hadn't, and so back and forth a few times. Finally I told him: 'You're lying, shut up.' The sergeant also got annoyed and said: 'Don't talk to him.' Two guys there were excited by their first action in Hebron and had their pictures taken with him.

Interviewer: Did he object?

Soldier: No, he was blindfolded, he didn't know. He asked for water so one of the guys said: 'Water?' and gave him a hard hit on the head. I argued with the guy a bit and with the two guys who were photographed. At some point they talked about hitting his face with their knees. At that point I argued with them and said: 'I swear to you, if a drop of his blood or a hair falls off his head, you won't sleep for three nights, I'll make you miserable.' I took it hard.

Interviewer: How did they respond?

Soldier: They knew I was like that, I never hid it. They laughed at me for being a leftie. 'If we don't show them what's what, they go back to doing this.' I argued with them that the guy was shackled and couldn't do anything. That he was being taken to the Shabak and we'd finished our job. A few weeks later, I heard one of them saying things that sounded different: 'If someone's shackled, why should I touch him?'

Interviewer: So why did they want to abuse him?

Soldier: Because they were caught up in a storm of action, wanted to show the Palestinians who's who, and the adrenalin kicked in. Mine did, too.

Interviewer: You rode on and out of Idna?

Soldier: Yes. Maybe other jeeps picked up more people. We took him for a medical examination and that was that. The argument about whether he should have been beaten up or not continued for some days. It became the business of anyone who was there, and people who joined around, from the platoon. Most said the Palestinians should be beaten up so they'll know what's what, because that's the only way they'll learn. I was really surprised. I knew that's the way minds worked in general, but I thought that *** would be more humane. But there's no humane advantage there at all. Later I heard worse stories about places where guys who wanted to beat up Palestinians were not stopped at all, in other battalions. After a while, still I looked alright, compared to others.

Testimony 24

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Tulkaram, occupied West Bank
Date: 2008
Title: "Gotta keep my spirits up"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how his friend slapped a 14-year old Palestinian boy in the face because he was humming but how he could not report the abuse.

Soldier: There was another instance of a 14-year old, an illegal alien. He was detained, kept on the side, so he stood there and hummed to himself. This annoyed one of the guys. He went up to him and said: 'Something amusing you?' The kid said: 'Yes, gotta keep my spirits up,' 'Spirits up, eh?' and the soldier slapped his face. You're in a dilemma here, because he's your buddy so you're not going to tell on him. I began to say to him: 'What are you doing?' and he said: 'No, they have to learn their lesson.'

Interviewer: You never told anyone?

Soldier: I couldn't.

Testimony 25

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2007-2008
Title: "A kind of routine"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how the army would try to provoke children in Hebron so that they could be arrested.

Soldier: Another episode took place on a patrol in a neighborhood parallel to Harsina neighborhood, north of Givat Ha'avot. We patrolled there and the kids yelled at us. Some of the soldiers, including the officer, were sensitive to this. I argued with them, I told them to just let those kids yell. They said: 'No, if they yell now, tomorrow they'll throw stones. If they feel free, they'll do anything they like and end up shooting at us.' Their proof was that someone who was with us on patrol in another part of the neighborhood had a stone thrown at his neck, and the stone thrower disappeared.

Interviewer: How old were the children?

Soldier: 9-13 years old.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Soldier: We were five soldiers and a commander. We acted as though we were walking on. The commander called his deputy, telling him to take three soldiers and split up – break to the right and go around the children. The first time didn't work. He told them: 'You're such infants, you can't surround them!' He laughed at them. He took someone else and went to surround the kids. At this point, the kids sort of scattered. We tried to provoke them so they'd get closer and we'd be able to detain them.

Suddenly, we hear a noise coming from the direction we had come from and the commander gets on the radio: 'Get over here.' We go to where he is and find out he'd caught one of those kids whose home was really close by. His father had just gotten home. The father claimed the officer had caught the kid and probably made him fall to the ground and dragged him. The father, a huge guy, scary, began to shout in fairly good Hebrew: 'What are you doing taking my kid?' The officer yelled back at him to lower his voice, that's what counted for him. Neighbors came, elderly people, trying to calm things down and explain them to the officer. The father was very worked up and the kid was half crying. The platoon commander, himself not in the greatest shape from the whole ordeal, got annoyed with the father, told one of the elderly guys to shut up, said: 'Lower your voice,' to another.

I tried to help calm things down, too. I spoke with the older man and understood that he'd come to take care of the children. He said he'd tell their parents, beat up his nephew who was there and look to it that everything will work out alright and they'd never do it again. Everyone was so short tempered. Everyone wanted to show that they were in charge of the situation so no one listened to anyone and finally the old man insisted with the officer, spoke to someone and somehow made the officer listen to him. This was an attempt to heat things up and what bothered me most of all was that this became a kind of routine out there. If anyone as much as yelled at us, we'd stop and try to surround them. It happened mainly with that officer.

Interviewer: Is this something that happened repeatedly?

Soldier: Yes. Usually it didn't work. In this case it turned into real chaos. A whole chaos with that family because the mother and grandmother both intervened. We'd try to provoke the children, stop cars, inspect people, check IDs of people so that kids would get closer and we'd surround them. Usually this didn't work, the kids did not react to the provocation.

Testimony 26

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Ramallah, occupied West Bank
Date: 2008
Title: "As soon as you light a Molotov cocktail - you are fair game"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a friend shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian boy as he tried to light a Molotov cocktail although there was no threat.

Soldier: In Ramallah, a friend of mine was on an ambush – there's the Beit El settlement and above it, the Jilazoun refugee camp. Once a night or two, guys at Jilazoun send out kids who throw a Molotov cocktail in the direction of Beit El. None of them ever really reach Beit El. It was always kids throwing, and for a while we would lay ambushes there, and once in a while a Molotov cocktail would be hurled at one of our forces, and they'd be chased. One of my friends was sitting at Beit El in a sort of marksman's post, and a kid came out and threw a Molotov cocktail, and he shot him. The moment they light up the bottle, they're free game.

Interviewer: Did the kid mean to throw it at the force?

Soldier: No, he was the furthest away, he wasn't endangering my friend who shot him with his marksman's rifle.

Interviewer: And he killed him?

Soldier: Yes.

Interviewer: How old was the kid?

Soldier: Young, 16 years old. There was a Molotov cocktail being thrown from Jilazoun to Beit El every night, but not in a way that it even reached the settlement or crossed the fence. They weren't Molotov cocktails being aimed at a person's body or at a vehicle. Nothing. They were stupid kids who felt like protesting.

Interviewer: Do you remember when this happened?

Soldier: July-August 2008. We had lots of X's (Note: An 'X' on the side of a soldier's rifle, indicating the number of people he's killed) at that time. The battalion loved it. There was an ambush around there where a kid coming up with a Molotov cocktail had his leg blown off. They laid an ambush exactly at that spot. Kids came, the soldiers were there, the kids lit a bottle, and they were shot in the leg.

Interviewer: At what range were they standing, when, you say, they were throwing the bottle towards Beit El?

Soldier: A few hundred meters. In an open space between the village and Beit El.

Testimony 27

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Duvdevan Unit
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2008
Title: "The parents get angry and confused, and the children cry and often pee their pants."

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes raiding Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank at night.

Soldier: [In my unit] there was this thing that for the end of your course of training, after you finish up your training, we'd go out on a last activity that is a kind of exercise. They'd tell us: you're going out to train, it's something the battalion [soldiers] do, it's called "mapping". What's its purpose? [Its purpose] is to map the house, that's what they told us. And then they'd tell us: in order for you to be prepared for the serious arrests you are about to perform, 'pressure cooker' arrests and all sorts of things like that, start, practice mapping, the simple activity battalions perform, a routine [activity], and it'll prepare you.

Every team would get a target inside some village and would go map it. Now, this usually means a raid in the middle of the night, sneaking into the village. And in this village, there would be a house you'd get, and this house was by definition uninvolved [Palestinians not involved in fighting]. They would tell us in advance that they are uninvolved, people who aren't actually involved in terrorism, innocents to use a euphemism, but everyone without exception was always a potential threat. You never know who might do something, so in this case too they were a potential threat.

What you do, after we infiltrate the village, is we surround the house completely. As opposed to what we do during arrests - when we try to lure people out of the house by escalating the situation - we use, this time we go knock on the door to the house. Just like that. I had the team commander and I went with him. We went and knocked on the door to the house and the head of the family opens the door. We tell him, "We're here to perform an activity, please go inside, open all doors, turn all the lights on, bring everyone in the family to the living room, we're here to investigate you." Someone [a soldier] is told that he needs to draw the house, he takes a piece of paper and tries to draw the entrances, exits, rooms and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Was it on a page designed for this?

Soldier: No, I recall it being a very crumpled piece of paper, we drew very badly, it was impossible to understand anything from it [later] I'm sure.

Interviewer: Was there any explanation for how to sketch a house, was there a briefing?

Soldier: Not really, and also like, this was the only time we really did it this way, the mapping. It was just training in the end. Live practice.

Interviewer: What do you do with it?

Soldier: I have no idea what happened to the paper. And then after we go inside, somebody scribbles something, I remember it being very embarrassing, that picture. Simultaneously we had to map the family, and this is what always happened again and again when we went into houses, you go into the house, and panic starts. The parents get angry and confused, and the children cry and often pee their pants; you actually see them peeing their pants. Screaming, crying, and you have to get them to quiet down as fast as possible: if it's an arrest - you can't have them waking up the whole area, and in this [mapping] too, we had to silence them.

And, you like find yourself either yelling at children or trying to calm children down, or you order the parents to shut their kids up. It was always a super stressful, super complicated situation. You move them quickly to a spot where they're less likely to be heard, to a side room. But you see, again and again, every time you enter a house, whether it's an arrest or mapping, what it does to the kids.

Interviewer: What tools do you have to cope with that?

Soldier: Your weapon. It's your most powerful means for successfully handling the situation.

2009**Testimony 28**

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Major
Unit: Engineering Corps
Location: Ramallah, occupied West Bank
Date: 2009
Title: "As is done with all detainees"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how three boys are detained near the Wall and threatened.

Soldier: Anyone who touches the fence activates the alerts at the war-room. We got a reference point at Deir Qadis that the fence there was touched. When we got there we saw glass bottle shards. We stood on top of the jeep itself and saw a few kids. We went in, both the company commander's front command jeep and the patrol, and tried to catch them. It was on the outskirts of the village in the area closer to the fence. The patrol came from one direction and the commander from another entrance through Ni'ilin and the kids were detained. These were three children, the oldest 15 years old, one really little one, 7-8 years old, and another one in between the two, age-wise. The commander caught all three and wanted to check things so he made them sit on the road about five-meters from each other, facing the other way. He took one shoe from each of them and began to walk the fence, looking for tracks. Then he saw tracks, one of the shoes matched it, and realized there were their tracks. He went to the little boy and spoke to him in Arabic, scared him until the kid broke out crying and told him. He detained the two older kids, the little one told him what happened.

All these areas are covered with surveillance cameras connected to HQ and lookouts. If the commander wanted to do something extraordinary, he couldn't, he's being filmed. He opened the jeep's two back doors and placed the kid inside. He didn't beat him but he made brutal threats and the kid began to cry. Anyway, after getting the picture he detained the two older boys and continued back to the village. He yelled: 'Go! Get into the village!' and the kid was terrified. The commander threw a stun grenade in his direction and the kid ran off.

Interviewer: "What did you do with the two others?"

Soldier: They were taken the way all detainees are, on to the battalion post, and from there they were sent on. I don't know what happens to them.

Testimony 29

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Salfit, occupied West Bank
Date: 2009
Title: "For no reason at all"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how plastic hand ties are frequently tied too tightly on purpose causing severe pain.

Soldier: We had to take over a school, which is already a big problem – taking over a school and turning it into a detention facility when it’s actually an educational facility. We took over a school and had to arrest anyone in the village who was between the ages of 17 and 50, something like that. It lasted from morning until noon the next day. Anyway, all sorts of people arrived, shackled and blindfolded.

What happened was that when these detainees asked to go to the bathroom, and soldiers took them there, they beat them to a pulp and cursed them for no reason, and there was nothing that would legitimize hitting them. Really terrible things. An Arab was taken to the bathroom to piss, and a soldier slapped him, took him down to the ground while he was shackled and blindfolded. The guy wasn’t rude and did nothing to provoke any hatred or nerves. Just like that, because he is an Arab. He was about 15 years old, hadn’t done a thing.

We arrested many of the people just in order to collect information about them for the Shabak, not because they had done anything. Many stones were thrown along the roads in that village ... In general people at the school were sitting for hours in the sun, they could get water once in a while, but let’s say someone asked for water, five times, a soldier could come to him and slap him just like that. Or let’s say, I saw many soldiers using their knees to hit them, just out of boredom. Because you’re standing around for 10 hours doing nothing, and you’re bored, so you hit them. Perhaps that was the only satisfaction they had.

Interviewer: That whole time, the Palestinians were shackled and blindfolded, in the sun?

Soldier: Yes. I have two phrases that I made up. There are soldiers who know what the point of the [plastic] handcuff is, and then there are others, who think that it is meant as a device to stop blood flow from the wrist to the fingertips.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Soldier: That they think it should be on so tight that no blood can get through.

Interviewer: Why do they do this?

Soldier: The purpose of these handcuffs is to keep the person from freeing his hands, but there's a difference between that and preventing circulation.

Interviewer: Were many people tightly shackled at that school?

Soldier: Yes, lots of hands were shackled tightly, and they were begging to be released just a bit.

Interviewer: And were they?

Soldier: Eventually, after they cried and complained, the company commander ordered them released, and after a while they even had their hands in front instead of behind their backs.

Interviewer: After how long?

Soldier: About seven hours.

Interviewer: They were sitting there with blue hands for seven hours?

Soldier: No, it takes time for hands to turn blue. Not everyone had blue hands, but many people already turned numb.

Interviewer: How many people did you arrest that day?

Soldier: Around 150. Some of them were wearing their sleeping garments, straight out of bed. Some had been allowed to get dressed, but most hadn't. I remember most clearly one 15-year-old whom a commander in the rifleman's company took in, grabbed his ear and put him behind another Arab. The kid was all shaking, I was sure he would piss all over himself out of fear. That's how I recall it.

Interviewer: Which village was that?

Soldier: Hares. It was a brigade operation. Our battalion was in Hares because many stones were being thrown from that village at Israeli roads, so the army decided to collect information and find out who was in charge and organizing things. So this school was taken over to bring in all those people for Shabak interrogation.

Interviewer: The whole battalion went in?

Soldier: Yes.

Interviewer: Did this start in daytime or at night?

Soldier: At night. It was pretty funny; the school janitor was called in at 3 a.m. to open up all the rooms.

Interviewer: And all the guys in the battalion, what did they do?

Soldier: Some went to houses, brought in people to the school, some took up positions, others organized rooms for the company commander, deputy battalion commander ... All the officers who came there, and a room for the Shabak.

Interviewer: And the whole battalion checked every house in the village?

Soldier: I believe so. Whoever was supposed to be arrested, was.

Interviewer: What were the criteria for arresting people?

Soldier: Anyone over 17 years of age. But even 14-year-olds were brought in.

Interviewer: How long did you stay?

Soldier: From 3 a.m. until around 3-4 p.m.

Interviewer: 12 hours. Did you witness more cases of violence against Palestinian detainees?

Soldier: Many reservists took part in this. They really had a ball with those Palestinians – swearing, humiliating them, pulling their hair, ears, kicking and slapping them around. These things were a norm, the whole battalion. The case at the bathroom was extreme but slapping and swearing and humiliating and kneeling them and stuff like that were usual. I know that at the bathroom, there was this 'demons' dance' as it was called. Anyone who brought a Palestinian there – it was catastrophic. Not bleeding beatings – they stayed dry – but still beatings. I know of one case where lots of Palestinians were sitting on a kind of ramp and then two soldiers just went ahead and kicked two detainees. So the officer told them: 'If you do this once more, you'll be in trouble,' and that was it, as if during the whole operation there were only these two cases of bad conduct. That's what those officers must have thought.

Testimony 30

Name: Anonymous
Rank: n/a
Unit: Reserves
Location: Jenin, occupied West Bank
Date: 2009
Title: "Motivate them"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how the army would “bother villagers” in order to discourage their children from throwing stones.

Soldier: After my discharge, I was in reserves and we were on active duty. On one of our missions, someone threw stones, and then got arrested shortly afterwards, nearby. It was a kid from Ya’abad village. Really just a kid. Two, three days later we were supposed to go bother villagers there, go to his parents’ house and say: 'Your kid was arrested because he threw stones. Make sure this never happens again.' And that’s what we did. We came at night, talked to his parents, and his brother who was a Palestinian Authority man. They didn’t even know that he had been arrested. They had no idea where he had been for three days, and that’s what I know.

Interviewer: How old was he, do you remember?

Soldier: I think he was 14-15. There was no point besides this. Our orders read to punish them a bit, motivate them to see to it that their kids wouldn’t ever do it again. That was the reason to enter the village. Wake up everyone around. So the thinking was didactic in that sense. Educate them to educate their kid.

Testimony 31

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Kfir Brigade
Location: Jenin, occupied West Bank
Date: 2009
Title: "Trying to heat up the kids"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how a marksman shoots at young children carrying a bag suspected of containing Molotov cocktails.

Soldier: We were lying in ambush on Mount Eval, in Nablus. We were sitting there in a post that is very high up – there was an approach road and no one drove on it except for our patrols and supplies. Once in a while one of our vehicles would be hit by Molotov cocktails up there. After a few such incidents we were told to lay an ambush. It was a Friday. We came out of the post at noon, and sat at some corner so we could see if anyone approached. There was this tiny Palestinian hamlet there, really small, and we sat to watch whether kids came up there and threw Molotov cocktails. If a kid was about to throw a Molotov cocktail, you're allowed to shoot him.

Interviewer: Shoot to kill?

Soldier: Absolutely. That's procedure. The moment you even see the lighter spark. So we are all out there, gung-ho, thinking we are going to shoot a Molotov cocktail thrower, and the trick was for some jeep to be driving up and down, in an attempt to heat up the kids. The jeep goes by and suddenly we see this group of kids coming out. I think they were holding some bag., I don't remember exactly. We had a marksman, one of my buddies, and he's sitting there with his M24 (marksmen's rifle), aiming at one of the kids, and I realize that this story is over, no one is getting killed. He asks the officer if it's okay to release the safety catch. The officer tells him it's fine, and he does, and we're waiting. There's this moment where you're at the edge of your nerves, like: What's going to happen? And suddenly – boom! – the marksman's rifle lets off a shot. We see kids scatter in all directions, running like hell, and we have no idea what happened because we know he was aiming and we don't know whether the kid was hit or not. We report on the radio, fold up, the platoon commander was grounded or something, and my buddy wasn't really punished.

Interviewer: Did he hit the kid?

Soldier: No ...

Interviewer: You said they were holding a bag. Did they aim at the one holding the bag?

Soldier: That's a spot that Molotov cocktails are often thrown from.

Interviewer: But a Molotov cocktail is a bottle, not a bag.

Soldier: But you always have to assume that that's what's in the bag. You get it?

Interviewer: What ages were these kids?

Soldier: Little – 13, 14, 15.

2010**Testimony 32**

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "Until someone comes to pick them up"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes arresting, shackling and blindfolding children in the occupied West Bank.

Soldier: On your first arrest mission, you're sure it's a big deal, and it's actually bullshit. You enter the Abu Sneina (Hebron) neighbourhood and pick up three children. After that whole briefing, you're there with your bulletproof vest and helmet and stuck with that ridiculous mission of separating women and children. It's all taken so seriously and then what you end up with is a bunch of kids, you blindfold and shackle them and drive them to the police station at Givat Ha'avot. That's it, it goes on for months and you eventually stop thinking there are any terrorists out there, you stop believing there's an enemy, it's always some children or adolescents or some doctor we took out. You never know their names, you never talk with them, they always cry, shit in their pants.

Interviewer: Was there a case of someone shitting in his pants?

Soldier: I remember once. Always that crying. There are those annoying moments when you're on an arrest mission, and there's no room in the police station, so you just take the kid back with you to the army post, blindfold him, put him in a room and wait for the police to come pick him up in the morning. He sits there like a dog ... We did try to be nice and find a mattress for them, some water, sometimes some food, and they'd sit there blindfolded and shackled, left like that until morning. Those were the instructions. That. Or just to leave them in the war-room. That was also standard procedure. Until morning, until someone came to pick them up.

Testimony 33

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: Nachal Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "Shuhada Street, Hebron"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes three settler children hitting an old woman.

Soldier: The Jewish settlers of Hebron constantly curse the Arabs. An Arab who passes by too closely gets cursed: 'May you burn, die'.

On Shuhada Street there's a very short section where Arabs may walk as well, which leads to Tel Rumeida neighbourhood. Once I was sent there and we found three Jewish kids hitting an old Arab woman. Another man from the Jewish settlement happened along and also joined them in yelling at the woman: 'May you die!' When we got there they were mainly yelling, but there had clearly been blows dealt as well. I think they even threw stones at her.

I believe the [policeman] was called but ended up not doing anything. The general atmosphere was that there was no point in summoning the police – the policeman is a local settler from Kiryat Arba who comes to pray with the Hebron settlers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs on Fridays.

Testimony 34

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: Nachal Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "Mapping"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes 'mapping' Palestinian homes in Hebron so they feel the army's presence.

Soldier: During patrols inside the Kasbah we'd do many 'mappings'. Mappings mean going into a house we have no intelligence on. We go in to see what's inside, who lives there. We didn't search for weapons or things like that. The mappings were designed to make the Palestinians feel that we are there all the time.

We go in, walk around, look around. The commander takes a piece of paper and ... makes a drawing of the house, what it looks like inside, and I had a camera. I was told to bring it. They said: 'You take all the people, stand them against the wall and take their picture.' Then [the pictures are] transferred to, I don't know, the General Security Service, the battalion or brigade intelligence unit, so they have information on what the people look like. What the residents look like. I'm a young soldier, I do as they say. I take their pictures, a horrible experience in itself, because taking people's pictures at 3am, I ... it humiliated them, I just can't describe it.

And the interesting thing? I had the pictures for around a month. No one came to get them. No commander asked about them, no intelligence officer took them. I realised it was all for nothing. It was just to be there. It was like a game.

Testimony 35

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "I couldn't care less"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes being indifferent to children soiling themselves in the back of military jeeps.

Interviewer: Did you happen to arrest children?

Soldier: I remember especially adolescents. We once arrested three guys, three or two who were a kind of gang that kept throwing stones at us and they were ... just boys.

Interviewer: What were the grounds for arrest?

Soldier: Either the Shabak wanted to talk to them, or they had thrown stones, or they were suspected of contacts with Hamas.

Interviewer: Earlier you spoke of an incident where a kid shat in his pants during his arrest. Would you like to elaborate?

Soldier: While we took him out of the jeep I remember hearing him shitting his pants ... I also remember some other time when someone pissed in his pants. I just became so indifferent to it, I couldn't care less. He shat in his pants, I heard him do it, I witnessed his embarrassment. I also smelled it. But I didn't care.

Testimony 36

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Brigade
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "That's what they understand"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how Palestinian children need to be “slapped around a bit ... because that’s what they understand”.

Soldier: I happened to be at Gross Square several times when Palestinian children ignited thorns and weeds in the cemeteries and rolled tires and threw stones at the 'Pillbox' Post or towards the Jewish settlement. A patrol would be alerted to catch them, but until the police arrived, the soldiers couldn't just stay with them outside so they would take them inside the ground floor of the post, and they would stay there.

Once they had to stay in there alone for hours, and the stench was terrible. Golani infantrymen who were there before us would piss inside the post on the floor so it really stank. They stayed in there for a few hours without water, without food. Just that stench. It was disgusting. They cried and began to call people on the phone so one of the soldiers from another post was sent to be in there with them, to make sure they didn't make trouble – to sit on the stairs. They were a lot of trouble. They weren't supposed to use the phone but still they did. I didn't want to use force so I called the war-room, and at the time the company commander was sitting with the deputy battalion commander at our company HQ, so the company commander came to the post. He arrived, opened the door and began yelling at them in Arabic and swearing at them, even slapping them around a bit.

Interviewer: How did it all end?

Soldier: They were all quiet, he had scared them. Three hours later they were released. They had sat there for three hours, as a punishment. But they would often either sit there and wait for the police to pick them up and then one of the soldiers would go with them for the inquiry, or the police would come right away.

Interviewer: And that whole story, sitting in the pillbox, was because they rolled tires?

Soldier: Rolled tires, threw stones, burnt grass.

Interviewer: Did the stones ever hit you? Or the pillbox?

Soldier: No.

Interviewer: Were the tires burning?

Soldier: Once a tire was burning, but they're not allowed ... It's like disciplining a child, as soon as you let him do something wrong, he'll keep doing it. They know they shouldn't do this and as soon as they realize no one reacts, they will just go on doing it because they'll think it's okay.

Interviewer: What's the point?

Soldier: No point. If they see no one jumps them, or cares that tires are being rolled, they will do it. Then there will be burning tires, and then stones.

Interviewer: What should be done with such children, according to instructions?

Soldier: Scare them. The police, too, said there was nothing to be done with them at the police station.

Interviewer: And the company commander's approach is routine?

Soldier: The point is he didn't punch them or kick them on the floor or fracture their bones. Just slapped them around. I'm not saying this is right, but that's what they understand.

Interviewer: Do you think that while you were there, this really changed things? Did they throw fewer stones, burn fewer tires?

Soldier: No. They know, somehow, they hear which battalion is due to arrive. They probably fear Golani infantry, because that unit is more violent than Nahal, and then there was the Kfir Brigade ... We are a more 'moral' battalion. Still, it should be clear that we don't just hang around our posts and look around, but act. Show some clout, so they realize there are more soldiers, more patrols. So they'll know they can't approach or make trouble, because they'll be caught.

Interviewer: How is this manifested? Beyond leaving them in the post for several hours?

Soldier: Nothing can be done. The point is these children are afraid they'll be sent to the police station and their parents will have to come and bail them out, and then their dad will beat them up. They're told: 'The police will come soon,' and then they're just released.

Testimony 37

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: n/a
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "Everything's fine"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how his commanding officer beat a child for refusing to pass through an x-ray machine at a checkpoint.

Soldier: Beatings happen all the time, but there was one episode that turned into my own 'main event' while I was out there ... One day we were alerted. The PA system (a sound system for addressing a large public) announced: 'Front command group to the jeep.' We all jumped to our feet, began gearing up, me and the medic, we prepared everything and the company commander opened the door of his office, come out and said: 'Get lost. Only *** and I are going.' He told me to take off my gear and come as I was. He was without a bulletproof vest or anything. Just a uniform and gun. We drove to the 'Pharmacy' Checkpoint. There were two, three kids out there who would not go through the x-ray machine. We stopped the jeep, he got off, took a boy to the alley.

Interviewer: One of the kids who refused?

Soldier: Yes. Then he simply went ahead and did it.

Interviewer: What did he do?

Soldier: First of all he faced the kid, who was this close to the wall. He looked at him for a second, then held him like this, pushed him with his elbow, choking him against the wall. The kid went totally wild, the commander kept screaming at him in Hebrew, not in Arabic. Then he let go, the kid lifted his hands to wipe off his tears, and the commander goes boom at the kid, who lowers his hands to stop wiping his tears, keeping them at his sides. Then the slaps came, more and more slaps ... This was a second phase of hitting and yelling. Then the kid began to really scream, it was frightening, and locals began to gather around the checkpoint, peek into the alley. I remember the commander coming out of the alley and telling them: 'Everything's fine.' He yelled at the kid: 'Stay right here, don't go anyway!' and went out to tell them everything was okay.

He called the squad commander at the checkpoint, stood facing the kid and said: 'This is how they should be treated,' gave the kid another two slaps and let him go. It's an insane story. I remember sitting in the vehicle, looking on and thinking: I've been waiting for this situation for 3 years, from the moment I enlisted, I joined the army to stop such things and here I am, not doing a thing, choosing not to do anything. Am I fine with this? I remember answering myself:

'Yes, I'm fine with this. He's beating an Arab and I'm doing nothing about it. I was conscious of not doing anything because I was really afraid of that company commander. What? Should I jump off the jeep and say to him: 'Stop, it's stupid what you're doing?'

Interviewer: How old was the kid?

Soldier: A teenager. Under 18. Really – 13, 14, 15 years old.

Interviewer: And how long did this last?

Soldier: Something like 10 minutes of hitting, and then the officer got back in the jeep and left.

Testimony 38

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: n/a
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "Desperate shaking"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how his unit took it in turns to shake a boy they had detained in order to make him stop crying.

Soldier: Once there was a stone-throwing incident at Gross Square, so we were alerted and the kid appeared and we were called from HQ, and the lookout instructed us: 'Listen, stop where you are, he's right next to you.'

Interviewer: How old was he?

Soldier: 15 years old. His name was Daoud. We stopped our vehicle, ran out, he was in total shock. We took him to Gross Post, to the Jewish side, and he began to cry, scream, he was just streaming sweat and tears. We had nothing to do with him, suddenly you end up with a crying kid. A second ago he was throwing roof tiles at the army post, and you're dying to beat him to a pulp, and you're alerted out there in that heat. You want to kill him but he's crying. We didn't know what to do, so we put him under watch.

Once someone who was with him went wild, did something to him and left. At some point when I was with him I tried to calm him down because he was tied, blindfolded, and crying, tears and sweat streaming out all over. I began to shake him, then the deputy company commander tried. He grabbed him and began to shake him: 'Shut up, shut up, enough, cut it out!' Then we took him to the police station at Givat Ha'avot and he continued to cry because the policemen didn't take him in for interrogation. He was so annoying, this was insane. In all that mess, while he was crawling on the floor, the communications man took out his Motorola, his two-way radio and boom! – banged him on the head. Not meaning to be cruel, just hearing that unbearable crying for over two hours.

Interviewer: This happened at the police station?

Soldier: Yes.

Interviewer: Somewhere on the side?

Soldier: No. In the lot with all those police vans ... Outside the interrogation room. At some point when I was with him, the communications man photographed me. I didn't want to be in a picture with him, this was a bad situation – you simply don't know what to do with your life. We

were terribly confused. There was anger, too, because you see the stones he'd thrown, you know it could be dangerous. Again, you're constantly experiencing bad moments but the people who do them are such, I don't know ... The screwed-up part is that he was at Givat Ha'avot for a very long time. Whenever someone does something bad, one of the Arabs, you take him to Givat Ha'avot and he disappears from there. He's either taken to some camp or another for 3-4 days, or I don't know. We'd just bring them to the police station and forget about them. After a while they come back. They don't really go anywhere.

Interviewer: You said earlier that the deputy company commander shook him, when you were at Gross Square.

Soldier: We all did. He drove the commander out of his mind. They were such worms at some point, I remember we hated them, I hated them (Palestinians). I was such a racist there, too, I was so angry at them for their filth, their misery, the whole fucking situation. You threw a stone, why did you do that? Why did you have to make me bring you here? Don't do it. We were shaking him out of despair, not necessarily because we were violent. I think we even broke out laughing. Now, too, when I think about it, you're so lost there in that situation. We were shaking him, like saying: 'Enough already! You're driving us mad!' and kept yelling at him: 'Stop it! Stop it!' throwing in some words in Arabic. Any words we knew. All kinds of nonsense like 'fine' and 'what's your name'.

Testimony 39

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant First Class
Unit: Paratroopers
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2010
Title: "I remember the scared look and that sense of helplessness"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes raiding Palestinian home in the occupied West Bank at night.

Soldier: Usually when you enter a home you arrive very late at night, when people are asleep, because really you want to surprise them, if it's to bring in someone who's wanted. You arrive with a pretty large force. This force can really be spread out throughout the village at all kinds of places that are crucial security points so that you can leave with some kind of general backup of other forces that take part in the maneuver.

Ultimately, when you go to some house and then you send in a force that is at least comparable to a platoon, at least about 20 people, and two people spread out to cover every corner of the house, meaning eight people secure the house and the yard so that if anyone runs – they'll be able to stop him. And a second force enters the house. Usually it's led by an officer and he leads the maneuver of breaching the house, and you enter securely with weapons drawn, a bullet in the barrel, and move from room to room to sweep the whole house.

The way it's done is that the first thing you do is gather the family from all the rooms and separate them, the women and the men, and if it's necessary to handcuff some of them – you handcuff them. And the children who are there, it's the most terrifying and traumatic thing for them, maybe for me too, but especially for them. It's waking up children and babies, all kinds of toddlers in the middle of the night, and seeing women in their pajamas, without their hijabs or whatever it is. You know, waking them from sleep, and I remember the scared look and that sense of helplessness.

Separating the men and the women inside the house. [The goal] is first of all to control the house, never mind that you also bring inside a ton of filth with all the boots and mud and it all. And then you start sweeping the rooms in pairs or cells. We make sure there's nobody jumping out at us from some corner, and we take the guy [who was arrested], handcuff him, separate him, blindfold him and put him in the jeep. And if necessary, sometimes, like during compulsory service, I remember that usually there's a Shin Bet officer with you and he does some kind of initial interrogation.

Interviewer: Of the person?

Soldier: The family. He speaks Arabic too and you are mainly supposed to secure him and realize the mission through him. That's basically the situation.

Interviewer: Does anyone explain to the family anything about what you're doing?

Soldier: No.

Interviewer: You mean you enter, do everything you just described without saying anything?

Soldier: You maybe communicate in a very basic way. I don't remember what we said but I think you say: we're going to take someone for an arrest, or something like that. Or the specific name of the person, [you ask] whether he's here, bring him, wake him up or we will. You know, something like this, and it's done very quickly. Besides that, there's no conversation.

And you see how the people who are inside the house are frightened, usually they're a clan, usually several generations, it's multi-generational in there. And you take the person, load him [into the vehicle] and a lot of time we don't have any clue for why this person, what he did. We are excluded at a certain level – he could be a terrorist, or not. I have no idea, I have no understanding of what's happening there. And that's it.

Interviewer: Do you remember the relatives' responses?

Soldiers: I mostly remember the scared looks, even vaguely, maybe I'm trying to repress it. I remember their surprise, their surprised looks, fear, terror, I remember these things to some extent.

Interviewer: Did you search homes?

Soldiers: Yes, during compulsory service. I remember a few incidents when you're searching inside a home and really, you're taking the entire house apart, of course you don't put it back in order. It means going through and taking closets apart, just dismantling them physically and rummaging through all sorts of equipment and leaving a mountain of mess behind you, as though a typhoon had passed through.

2012**Testimony 40**

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2012
Title: "They say to you, 'you're supposed to defend me, not them'"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes blocking Palestinian roads in the occupied West Bank so Israeli settlers could march.

Soldier: I remember there was a procession of settlers and we blocked off a Palestinian road because the road to Yatma goes through Tapuach. We stopped the Palestinians who wanted to drive through at the junction. About 15 cars stood there, and whoever came later was turned away to come from a side road. And then all the kids and youth (the settlers) arrived and just started cursing at them and spitting at the Palestinians who were made to stand on the side. I was shocked that five-year-old kids were screaming curses: 'burn, sons of bitches' - horrible things.

Interviewer: Why don't you say anything to them?

Soldier: We do, but they don't really care. You tell them to get out of there, to keep going, but they know you're not ... And then they say to you, 'you're supposed to defend me, not them', stuff like that.

Interviewer: How long did those vehicles have to wait?

Soldier: It was around 40 minutes.

Interviewer: They just couldn't move?

Soldier: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you remember other cases like that?

Soldier: Yes. There's a field post - there was a conflict over to whom it belonged. It started one day and there was about a month of this. A Palestinian came to work there and then settlers assaulted him, kicked him out of there. Right under Tapuach. From there it grew bigger and bigger. In the end, there was an incident in which they (the army) agreed with this Palestinian that he would come to work there and we came to protect him, and there were tons of settlers. There were scuffles between the settlers and the Palestinians. The settlers ripped their bags of wheat that they had come to plant. Each time they ran and grabbed their things and threw their things out of there.

Interviewer: But if the army is there, why don't they do anything to them?

Soldier: So the army's there, you stand there and break it up, but they just don't care.

Interviewer: As the army you don't have authority over the settlers?

Soldier: The truth is, no. We always used to ask during all kinds of incidents, if the Jew does something, what am I supposed to do to him? And there wasn't, they never provided an answer about what can be done.

Interviewer: A Palestinian attacks a settler - what do you do?

Soldier: Grab him, arrest him. If it's life threatening I can even shoot him, [shoot] in order [to kill].

Interviewer: A settler throws stones at a Palestinian, what do you do?

Soldier: I don't know, everyone has his own judgments. There are no instructions about it.

Interviewer: Are there rules of engagement?

Soldier: For Jews, no.

Interviewer: Use of crowd control measures, is that allowed?

Soldier: No.

Interviewer: Arresting or detaining settlers?

Soldier: Also no. In principle, what you're supposed to do, in this case we would separate, stand in between them. The Jews there, the Arabs working there and we're a line of soldiers standing in the middle. I remember their contact, they tried to push us in order to get to the Palestinians and we stopped them.

Interviewer: And you weren't allowed to do anything about that either?

Soldier: Aside from preventing them from reaching the Palestinians, no.

Interviewer: Were there instructions on what to do with settlers should they attack army or security forces?

Soldier: No. They never talked to us about it. I remember they gave us talks about the complexity. A senior officer in our company was a settler, from the Valley. It really concerned him and he gave us two talks about it, that it's complicated when Jews push us and do things like that. But he never touched on what we should do about it.

Interviewer: It's complicated when settlers attack soldiers?

Soldier: Yes.

2013

Testimony 41

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant First Class
Unit: Reserves, 455 Armored Corps
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2013
Title: "Israel made its presence felt"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how the army "made its presence felt" in a small Bedouin community in the occupied West Bank.

Soldier: Every day at four o'clock, the alert team was taken out for an 'initiation' (an operation initiated by the military). You pick out some area, you go by foot. Sometimes during the 'initiation' you run into the innocent Bedouin population, and that's where the dramas start.

One of the stories I remember most was this one time we arrived at some Bedouin tent that was really out in the middle of nowhere, on the edge of some wadi (A small valley), and inside the tent there was a woman with two children, a little boy and a girl who was about 12. When we got there, the little boy, who it seemed had never seen soldiers before in his life, because where he was living was so far out, got really scared and ran down into the valley, crying, screaming, and then his sister ran out after him, to calm him down.

The mother didn't understand why her kids had started running screaming into the wadi, so she ran after them too. Now, if an adult starts running toward you, you get scared too and immediately aim your weapon at them and arrest them. And this was the picture at that moment: I suddenly found myself aiming a weapon at some mother, arresting her, and she was screaming too, she put her hands up, her kids were running into the wadi, crying, screaming – drama. Somehow the [boy's] sister managed to control her little brother and hid in the wadi with him. [We had a look at the] mother's ID card, searched the tent, walked around a little bit and took off.

What saddened me about it was that they live in these squalid caves, and out of nowhere these soldiers arrive, with uniforms and weapons and bulletproof vests, kids start screaming, arrests, IDs. Well, Israel made its presence felt and we all know that's what's important.

Testimony 42

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant First Class
Unit: Armored Corps Reconnaissance Unit 401st Brigade
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2013
Title: "The kids were very scared of the dogs"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes searching a house for weapons using dogs and a sledgehammer.

Soldier: We went to Nablus for an arrest. We arrived there with an Oketz unit [canine unit] and a breaching unit, in order to find weapons, there was information.

Interviewer: What is a breaching unit?

Soldier: Midron Mushlag [the engineering corps' breaching unit]. So we get there, there was information about weapons in the house, we go inside the house, all of us. When we were inexperienced soldiers, we performed arrests without facemasks on, but once we got it, we started wearing masks. In a way, when you put a facemask on, it makes you anonymous, it's easier for you to do the things the occupation asks you to do. We went inside the house there, we were told to find weapons. First of all, the family looked pretty poor, you see a family with a lot of kids living in one house with the grandmother.

You go inside the house in the middle of the night and say: men in one room, women in another. The men – they were taken to a room and if they made trouble, we'd handcuff them, and if they didn't, they were left to just sit. We were in that house and there was a photograph of a kid who must have been killed in something IDF related, he was 15 or 16, maybe younger. [They] said: some Israel Defense Forces, you killed our child, you killed our child. And then some grandmother who was sitting there said: don't blame them, it's not their fault.

Interviewer: Did she say it in Hebrew?

Soldier: I think she muttered something like that in Hebrew, or maybe I understood from context. But they kind of silenced her. Now the dog with the guy [from the canine unit] came in, the kids were very scared of the dogs [so] they moved the kids farther away from the dogs. This dog was a propellant explosives dog, trained to detect explosives. The dog walked around the house as instructed by his handler, it was wandering around the house sniffing and it didn't find anything, didn't find any indication of a scent or anything. An officer or someone from Midron Mushlag, if I'm not mistaken, walked by and started like banging on the wall, where was he supposed to discover explosives? They just took the walls apart, they just broke walls to search for explosives.

Interviewer: What do you mean broke?

Soldier: With a five [kilogram demolition] hammer.

Interviewer: Did they start pounding the walls, breaking holes and searching?

Soldier: Yes, yes, breaking holes in the walls, pounding on the walls. I'm not even mentioning how the house is in ruins because the rooms have been searched, but the clothes were searched pretty neatly. But walls were broken and nothing was found. The family is shouting, angry, why are you breaking our house, we don't have anything here, I don't have anything here. And that's just the way it was.

Interviewer: What do you mean they broke walls? Do you mean a small part of a wall?

Soldier: Not all the walls in the house. There was one hallway where I remember clearly that they just broke the wall, it was a wall that was at least two meters by a meter and a half. They didn't find anything and like I said, we just left. It didn't seem strange to us because we were given an indication that there was someone with a weapon in the house, so you have to search for weapons in the house. But there were no weapons, just a family, that's it.

Interviewer: Did you arrest anyone from the family?

Soldier: No, nobody was arrested.

Interviewer: And what happens during debriefing, say after such an incident, do you talk about what happened?

Soldier: Nothing, you don't talk about it. What is there to say? Nothing bad happened, nothing happened to the soldiers. There's no need for a debriefing. No, they don't do a debriefing in such cases.

2014**Testimony 43**

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: Nablus Regional Brigade
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2014
Title: "Provocation and reaction"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes the tactic of 'provocation and reaction'.

Soldier: 'Provocation and reaction' is the act of entering a village, making a lot of noise, waiting for the stones to be thrown at you and then you arrest them, saying: 'There, they're throwing stones'.

Lots of vehicles move inside the whole village, barriers. A barrier seems to be the army's legitimate means to stop terrorists. We're talking about Area B [under civilian Palestinian control and Israeli security control], but the army goes in there every day, practically, provoking stone throwings. Just as any Palestinian is suspect, this is the same idea. It could be a kid's first time ever throwing a stone, but as far as the army is concerned, we've caught the stone thrower.

Testimony 44

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal, 932nd Brigade
Location: Al Jalazun refugee camp, occupied West Bank
Date: 2014
Title: "I would also throw stones if they came to take my brother away"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describes making an arrest in the Al Jalazun refugee camp, in the occupied West Bank.

Soldier: We carried out an arrest in Jelazoun. It was a very big arrest. We were with the police. The goal was to take in a guy, who if I'm not mistaken, sold Molotov cocktails, prepared Molotov cocktails. He was defined as dangerous. Jelazoun is a refugee camp and the alleys are all very narrow, sewage in the streets. We're headed to the arrest on foot and there's a big dumpster in the street full of trash, and suddenly a little boy and girl emerge from the dumpster. The boy, who was older than his sister, wasn't over six years old. Filthy, searching through all sorts of canned food.

We arrive at the [site of the] arrest and the company commander's front command squad enters the house. We enter the house. A few mattresses, a very very poor house, and the mother opens the door for us. The company commander pushes the door with her, we enter the house, check the rooms. The company commander finds the kid, he's in bed. The moment he sees us he gets up, tries to escape through the window, and is caught. Within a few seconds, zip ties, he's handcuffed, blindfolded while still in the house, in front of his mother, and is about to be led out. His mother, by the most natural instinct, jumped at the company commander and tried to scratch him. We caught her by the armpit, and forced her back. He [the detainee] was a young guy, 20 something. We take him out, all his brothers wake up, the whole block wakes up, people looking out through the windows. His father isn't at home.

As we're stepping outside, the company commander tells me to guard him, that they're going back in to take his computer, to take all sorts of evidence and search his room. While we're outside, his mother is standing in the entrance to the house, hitting herself, crying, crying, crying, and then she runs up to me, kneels down, hugs my leg and mumbles in Hebrew-Arabic "please, please," all sorts of words. I don't know what she said in Arabic. She pleaded. Her son is blindfolded, standing, I'm holding him, [he] hears her. And I didn't do anything. I stood there like this and ignored her. I completely froze. You arrive there and you say, "I'm going to arrest the bad guys." Suddenly you see the eyes of a mother who [could be] your mother, your friend's mother, your grandmother's mother – crying. She's not a bad person. Maybe she doesn't like me, but from that moment on I understood why she doesn't like me. You won't see an Arab woman on the ground hugging a man's leg. It was very brutal. She didn't let me budge. I looked at her and my soldiers took him aside, and I sort of did this with my leg. I didn't say anything.

Interviewer: What do you feel upon your release?

Soldier: The main feeling I left there with was that I really felt I understood. Somehow I understood them. I said to myself, I would also...

Interviewer: The Palestinians?

Soldier: Yes. I would also come out and throw stones if they were to come take my big brother away in the middle of the night, no doubt about it, no matter what he did. Because he's my brother. And when you and your little sister go looking for food in garbage cans in the middle of night, how far can you get ahead in life? If you have cat carcasses and sewage flowing outside your house? So obviously at the age of 15 you'll go out and throw stones because that's where you vent your... You're educated that they're to blame.

So suddenly [I have] a lot of understanding for the other side, something I didn't have at all prior. And I also really see a difference between those who were there and those who weren't – and it doesn't matter whether they're leftists or rightists – in terms of how they see the situation. Simply, whoever was there understands that there's another side to this matter, and they're not masked, they're human beings. When you block traffic, put up a checkpoint in the evening, setting up a checkpoint as you see families on their way home, and just because someone in their village threw a Molotov cocktail a few days ago, they suffer from it now. It doesn't mean that they did it, doesn't mean that they intend to do it, but they're now suffering from it.

Testimony 45

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2014
Title: "Every night my company ruined the nights of a few such families"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing how the army makes arrests and delivers summonses at night.

Soldier: We had this night of [distributing] summons and arrests and such, some three summonses and an arrest – or more, I don't remember – when we passed through two villages. And then, when we arrived at the second village I tried to recall what happened half an hour ago, or an hour ago at the first village, and I, like, couldn't remember.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Soldier: I didn't remember whom I arrested, whom I summoned and it ate at me. How can I not remember? I just ruined four families' night, or week, or whatever, how can I not remember their faces? You really suppress it, you suppress the whole situation. You wear a mask of sorts, you're the toughest guy in the world. "Army, Geish (the word for 'army' in Arabic)," I would knock on the door, suddenly I was this tough character and it's not me at all.

Interviewer: So how did it become you?

Soldier: I don't know, because that's what I felt was needed for it to succeed. So that we could get out of there quickly, and also the situation that I don't sleep much at night and sort of... You know, you finish at six in the morning, you're already up at eight, and then you're already awake until the next arrest, and then you leave at four in the morning and you're entirely lethargic. You end up half asleep, standing up in somebody's home with your weapon aimed, and then you don't even remember what happened, you're dying to get out of there so you do what needs to be done as quickly as possible. But you enter at three in the morning, [to the home of] a family's and... [a soldier] approaches a Palestinian and talks to him in broken Arabic, the interrogators don't really know Arabic. So how stupid does it sound when some soldier enters, starts threatening you in broken Arabic, but because he has the power, there's nothing you can do. He [the Palestinian] is completely inferior there, and you've got the upper hand.

Interviewer: Why talk? Why break the silence? What's important to you that people know

Soldier: First of all, they should know what's happening. Most people don't really know what it looks like there. And then, when you argue with people about the occupation, they say, "What, you're exaggerating, there's no such word as occupation at all, it's just a word that leftists made up. What occupation? Their lives are great." Yes, but like... You know, how can you say "great

lives" when I speak about summoning? When every night there's a possibility that [the army] will enter your home? Every night my company ruined the nights of a few such families. How can you run your life like that? How can it not be an occupation when the army enters your home once a month?

Testimony 46

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion
Location: Nablus, occupied West Bank
Date: 2014
Title: "Sometimes you knock on the door and sometimes you break down the door"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing how the army gains access to Palestinian homes at night.

Soldier: Usually the house is circled by soldiers who are positioned so that they are supposed to seal off all possible exits or entrances, identify people who are trying to either enter or leave the house. And then sometimes you knock on the door and sometimes you break down the door.

Interviewer: How do you decide whether to break it or knock?

Soldier: There's rarely an operational motivation for it. Often, the motivation is practice, meaning we got a breaching tool for the first time; no one knows how to use it, so it is decided that we break into a house now. Usually, I think with one exception where it was clear to me why a breach was necessary; everything was completely random.

With the breaching equipment we have it usually took longer to breach than to knock, meaning it could take three or four minutes and it makes a lot of noise. That means it wasn't operationally effective. Half of the times we broke the door using these breach mechanisms, by the time the door was broken the people inside the house had already offered to open the door. There was even one time we couldn't break down the door, it was already damaged so that it couldn't be opened and we got stuck, meaning the door got stuck and whoever was inside couldn't open it for us and we couldn't open it from our side, we had to wait to understand how to break it completely.

We had a giant deputy company commander and at some point, we discovered that when he kicked doors that weren't very strong, they fell. For example, say we went to a house, one with a relatively large yard right at the entrance to Balata Refugee Camp, we walked down to the house from [the settlement] Yitzhar, arrived at the yard, gathered around, there was a small gate at the entrance closed with a tiny bolt, the kind you could reach your hand around the door and unlock, it's actually a gate for animals, for a little homestead. Then the Shin Bet [Security Service] officers asked the deputy company commander to break that door and he gave it a serious kick and it fell in entirety. And made a lot of noise, it woke up the people inside the house, we went into the yard, reached the door and when we got to the door they were still busy being excited about how he knocked down the door to the yard, and we managed to just knock on the regular door and wait for it to be opened.

Testimony 47

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Major
Unit: Air Force Defense Command
Location: occupied West Bank
Date: 2014
Title: "It [the mapping] was totally arbitrary; I could choose whatever house I wanted"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing the process of how a Palestinian home was selected to be "mapped".

Soldier: It [the mapping] was totally arbitrary; I could choose whatever house I wanted, like checking the wind, when you lick your finger and put it up to see where the wind is blowing. There was no guidance. I think that at certain times there was a quota [a number of mappings the company was required to perform in a certain timeframe], which was flexible. Nothing would happen if I did one less or two extra or something like that. But there was an impetus to do it.

I think, for the system, it [mapping] serves two purposes. One, it serves gathering intel on buildings and people. Two, it produces fear and terror and this whole business of demonstrating presence, which we were required to do - not only be there, but to be seen. So just like you go into a village so they see you're going into the village and you're not afraid, and to show them you're here, the same effect, in different form, happens when you allow yourself to enter homes every night, or every other night, or every week, even families that didn't do anything and have nothing to do with anything: "Look, we're here."

This isn't something we were told. The [official] line we were told was "We need information, it's for the brigade's intelligence and for the Shin Bet." But the mission of demonstrating a presence – applying to our service there in general – was clear and we were also told that. It wasn't linked to mapping, but it was part of the message from the leadership in these matters.

Interviewer: In your opinion, were these missions beneficial say for the security of the region or the area?

Soldier: No, [it's] horrible. In my opinion.

Interviewer: And what's your opinion as company commander?

Soldier: As a company commander, at a certain point during active duty I started to avoid mapping. I mean that I didn't initiate them anymore and performed them only when we were required to, and even then I argued. I had no problem searching for weapons, and I still don't when it's necessary to do something like this, with arrests – I don't have a problem. It's necessary and that's the way it is. I have a serious problem with mapping, and I did then too. There are young children there and all they'll remember for the rest of their lives is how much

they hate the soldiers because they were at home with their mom and [soldiers] came like in the middle of the night and put them in one room and a soldier stood over them, threatening them with a weapon when they were four years old. And they won't forget it for the rest of their lives, and that's what will lead them in how they think about Israelis – this is it. And there was one mapping that changed everything.

Interviewer: Tell me.

Soldier: It was certainly in Idhna. We went, decided [on the house], entered. The person who opened the door for us was a woman, I think in her thirties, and it turned out that other than her, there were two or three small children in the house. The oldest must have been 10, and I'm exaggerating, three, four, five, six, somewhere around there, just her and the kids. "Where's your husband?" Her husband is a fashion designer, and he's trying to sell his collection in Jordan right now, and she's alone with the kids in the house, and her husband is a fucking fashion designer who's trying to make a living by trying to sell what he's making in Jordan. And there's half a company raiding his house in the middle of the night with small children who are sitting and crying hysterically, with two soldiers standing next to them while the rest are mapping the house. And I just wanted to die. I just wanted to die like.

2015

Testimony 48

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Lieutenant
Unit: Nahal, 932nd Battalion
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2015
Title: "This system needs violence, that's its basis"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing how occupation and repressing the Palestinian civilian population requires violence.

Soldier: You never need a court order when you search a Palestinian's home. You just have to want to do it and then you do it. It's not like when you're an Israeli civilian and a policeman wants to enter your home, he either needs a well-founded suspicion that you're committing a crime, or for someone to be in danger, or a court order stating that he has the authority to search and find evidence.

In Hebron, if you're a Palestinian, I'll enter your house whenever I feel like it, and search for whatever I want and I'll turn your house upside down if I want to. The same applies, for that matter, to a foot patrol that just wants to rest on someone's roof and scout the area. Or, say, every time vehicles are stopped at Abu-Sneina, which is the neighborhood adjacent to the Jewish neighborhood there, so you always put a soldier or two on the roof to scout and see who's arriving from far off, who's throwing stones, where from, and stuff like that. You simply open up their home, tell them 'get out of the way, we're going up to your roof to scout.' You already know that they'll shout and object, [and] you know that it doesn't matter, because you're going to go up to the roof.

Interviewer: What do you do when they start to shout and object?

Soldier: You shout louder and they get it. I mean, they're not dumb, most of them. They know you'll arrest them or you'll hit them, and in the end you'll get on the roof. They won't stop you from going up to the roof.

Interviewer: They understand who has the power.

Soldier: Yes. Listen, that's the craziest thing about Hebron. When you leave, everything just continues. It's not that it's a few months and then it ends, it's really people's lives. As we speak, right now – if anyone were to hear this in the future – it is still happening. I hope it won't happen in the future. These things that I'm telling, they're happening right now. Right now there's a soldier on a roof who argued with the owner of the house, and eventually got on the roof. Many times it's, say, a woman who stayed at home, a housewife, and she's scared to death because of the soldiers entering without her having anyone with her, and they go up to the roof through the house anyway. Wow, I actually never thought about how frightening it must be for these

housewives. So in short, you simply enter the house and they have no... There isn't even any discussion about, like, rights. To have rights, you need a system that enforces law and order, and over there nobody even acknowledges them. The things that we completely take for granted. Like, any person would demand some kind of basic respect from a policeman. The privilege of being innocent until proven guilty – this isn't even part of the lexicon there. Not even close. It's light years away from the discourse there on... Really, like I said, whoever commands that mission at the moment is the village sheriff. He'll do as he pleases.

Interviewer: You are undoubtedly an example of a soldier who thinks, who understands what he's doing. During the arrests you carried out, for example, when you would turn people's homes upside down, what did you feel?

Soldier: I kept myself in the state of mind of a mission. That is to say, I have a mission, there could be weapons here, and I'm like going to prevent the killing of Jews. That's what carried me through. The arrests of drug [dealers] - you simply do it because, what, now you'll go to jail for refusing an order when you're told to arrest some drug dealer? And I also had a very clear responsibility, that I'm not saving the world now, I'm leading my platoon, and I also want to build a good platoon, a platoon with accomplishments, so that they'll also feel that they're doing something during this draining service in Hebron. So every mission beyond patrolling or guarding - you immediately jump on it. You want to carry out arrests, you want to get those missions also in order to show your guys that you get things [to do], and that you're trusted. So anything like that you say: fine, I'll do the drug arrests to practice for arresting terrorists or what they call hostile terrorist activity.

Interviewer: But what do you say to yourself after turning someone's home upside down?

Soldier: I remember that guys came to me, asked to talk to an officer from the post. I went out to talk to them, we had this talk at Tel Rumeida, with the whole view there, and there were all sorts of questions about violence toward Palestinians, and it was actually the more right-wing guys who asked about all sorts of things... I told them at the time, listen, I'm not going to tell you my opinion about Hebron, but as an IDF officer I must carry out certain orders to preserve stateliness. As if stateliness was the loftiest value for me. It's very 'Ben Gurionish,' like, you need statism, and you need unity of command, and at some point the leadership will come to its senses and... but I'll do my part and whatever is needed. And I told them: listen, there's violence here, it's not as if there isn't violence. Like, this system needs violence, that's its basis.

Interviewer: What system?

Soldier: The system of repressing the population there. Otherwise it wouldn't work, because the settlement in Hebron is an island in a huge Palestinian city. I mean, you have to use so much force to maintain the order there, that even if you bring 200 Buddhist monks, they would have to use violence to maintain order and prevent riots on a daily basis. So I told them: listen, if I won't be here, Jews will be murdered, and I don't want Jews to be murdered, so I'm here, and I, like, do it. And even the violence there, I told them, like: 'What should I break the silence about? Some slapping around? About beatings I saw? About stuff like that?' Like, I mean, I thought it was so

obvious. They always say, 'So why didn't you report these things to the Military Police Criminal Investigation Division?' Well, you don't call the transport ministry when traffic lights are working as they should. And that's the feeling, that violence is just a traffic light working as it should, and that's the system and you do what you have to do and...

Interviewer: What you're saying is that these 'slaps' are part of how the system works?

Soldier: Yes, exactly. That's like the norm. It's shitty. It's all sorts of self-deception that keeps you going. It's ridiculous to put on 18-year-old kids the responsibility for what the guys in ties are doing in the Knesset and government ministries. At least, that's my opinion. That's what kept me together during my service in the territories. Later on, when I was released and I suddenly digested all I went through, only then did I understand how... I don't even know what to say about it. How it's a stain that won't be removed from this flag that I was so enthusiastic about, of Zionism and stateliness and, like, the homeland.

Interviewer: That's a difficult moment.

Soldier: Yes, it was very difficult. I had a few very difficult months. I can't continue to cooperate with this abusive treatment of the Palestinian population for some anachronistic fantasy of a Jewish kingdom in Judea and Samaria. Like, that's not what I'm going to do with my life.

Testimony 49

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Lieutenant
Unit: Artillery Corps
Location: Harmala, occupied West Bank
Date: 2015
Title: "They were Arabs and as far as I was concerned they lost all human form"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing conducting a search of a Palestinian home using a dog and turning the house into a mess.

Soldier: Once a [female] dog handler joined us from Oketz (canine special forces) for an arrest in the village of Harmala, opposite Jewish Tekoa, opposite the settlement. We went into the house with the dog handler and I believe it [belonged to] a man of about 40, with a wife and three kids, six years old tops, I think. We began with the dog handler's scan, it was the first time I worked with that kind of dog.

Interviewer: What dog was it?

Soldier: A dog that looks for weaponry and explosives and such. Actually, the way the scan was carried out was that she leads the dog into the house, and really goes over every centimeter with him, and if he sits or something like that, it means that he identified something. So we went through the parents' room at first, and then the living room thereafter, and then we reached the children's room, a room that really reminded me of my little brother's room, with Lion King wallpaper and SpongeBob dolls, just like any other kid.

We wanted to do a very thorough search and the dog handler, too, explained to us that if now the dog identifies something in some area, then our search there should be very, very meticulous, too. We reached the level of taking everything out of the closet and peeled off some of the wallpaper, removed some of the wall-to-wall carpeting from one area, we turned the bed upside down, everything there was left a complete mess, and when we took the father out, his wife was left behind alone in the ruins, in the completely messed-up home, with three little kids, sitting on the sofa, hugging them, and they're all crying. It was a very powerful situation. In the end, by the way, we didn't succeed in finding anything there; the only thing we found was a photo of Yahya Ayyash from Gaza.

Interviewer: The engineer.

Soldier: The engineer, yes, we were pleased because we managed to prove a connection to Hamas.

Interviewer: Just a photo of his hung on the wall?

Soldier: Yes, a small photo, in a sort of golden frame.

Interviewer: And the room that reminded you of your brother's, the one that was completely upside down when you finished with it, how did you feel that moment?

Soldier: I felt terrible about the room, but you become sort of numb to the whole situation, I mean, it didn't happen much that I would stop for a moment and really think now: hey, how would I feel if I were them, and that room reminds me of my kid brother's room, because that's probably something that happens subconsciously. It's some sort of process in which Palestinians lose their humanity in certain situations, as far as I'm concerned. It really hurts me to say these things because I do see myself as a humane person and all, but I think that this situation and the place I was in there, [is] something that corrupts, really corrupts the soul.

A few weeks after arriving in Judea and Samaria, I believe, it was already clear to me that after being discharged I would break the silence, due to the moral conflict I experienced there. On the one hand, as a commander in the army, and yes, as someone who loves the State and believes in the legitimacy of the army. And on the other hand, all the things I carried out — let alone led — in Judea and Samaria, whether it was mappings, arrests, check posts, riots, etc. Things that I was opposed to morally, and that I have a feeling — especially when I think of my home or my family, or just in general — that most people have no idea what's going on there, they don't have a clue. I consider myself a person with worldviews that are a bit contrary and opposed to these things, but like, the very fact that I was in such a situation that corrupted me to a degree which after some time Palestinians didn't really have human faces. They were Arabs, and as far as I was concerned, [they] lost all human form. I think that's one of the main problems of the occupation, and I think that's an excellent reason for those who took part in it to break the silence so that people will really know where they're sending their children.

Testimony 50

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2015
Title: "The occupation is the most anti-democratic thing happening"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing how the occupation "anti-democratic" and "dehumanizing".

Soldier: I arrived on the scene of a riot and was told [by the officer]: Shoot rubber [bullets] at the so-called primary inciter, meaning the guy with the slingshot joking around the most, with everyone behind him.

Interviewer: There's one of those at every demonstration?

Soldier: No, there are usually a few, and the rubber [bullets] are wasted on them.

Interviewer: And what defines him as the primary inciter is that he's holding a slingshot?

Soldier: Right, but also socially. Socially, everybody's behind him, he's the man standing up front, walking.

Interviewer: You can really see it?

Soldier: You know him, he'll also be the primary inciter during the next riot. In short, I remember the first time [the commander] told me to shoot rubber, and I was really nervous. Now that it happens on a daily basis, even me [with] some sort of values and moral background so to speak, at some stage the riots become a game, for both sides. Everybody knows that between 3 and 7 in the afternoon, we all go out to play, they throw stones and we shoot rubber. At a certain stage it was as simple as breathing, that's what I did, and it didn't bother me and I was indifferent to it, and I didn't care about hitting someone with rubber [bullets].

Interviewer: What are the procedures for shooting rubber [bullets]?

Soldier: The procedures for using rubber are, shoot at the knee or lower, from a range of no less than 30 meters, I think. Procedures. But in real life...

Interviewer: What happens in real life?

Soldier: In real life, at a certain stage I went through a process of dehumanization. I don't know, maybe when a stone hit near me, and a guy would curse at me or get on my nerves, then I would allow myself to raise the scope to the stomach area. If his back was to me then to his back. I knew I wasn't aiming at areas like the heart, because I knew the danger of that and I wasn't

becoming a monster, but yes, I raised the scope a bit. And nobody ever measures your range, if I'm about 15 meters from a kid, and he's behind a car, and I'm, say, behind a tree, and he gets on my nerves – I'll shoot rubber at him, I won't count the meters. There are [also] deviations, it happens, it scatters (the bullets scatter upon shooting), and that's some sort of gray area that the soldiers allow themselves to be in. I, too, allowed myself to be in that gray area many times, like shooting above the knee.

Interviewer: Did you shoot [rubber bullets] at someone from 15 meters?

Soldier: Yes.

Interviewer: You're shooting with a Trij (Trijicon – sharpshooter scope)?

Soldier: Yes, I'm shooting with a Trij.

Interviewer: The rubber bullets come in parcels, a sort of tampon (military slang for a nylon package containing three rubber-coated metal bullets, to be shot together). Were there cases in which you disassembled it?

Soldier: I can't distinctly remember doing that. I remember that there was this thing that some guys would do it before riots. But I really don't distinctly remember whether I did it or not.

Interviewer: Did you know that it wasn't allowed?

Soldier: Yes, of course, we knew it wasn't allowed, we knew that it increases the pain and the range, and that was the issue. There were guys who would do it, and guys who said: no, don't do it.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea whether the commanders knew?

Soldier: To assume that the commanders don't know about things seems baseless to me. But many commanders know and keep quiet because they're in favor. Commanders keep quiet about things that soldiers do.

Interviewer: When you say commanders, what do you mean, squad commanders?

Soldier: Squad commanders, platoon commanders, battalion commanders. When it suits them they keep quiet, [like] the three monkeys. I think it began last year, during one of the media storms surrounding Breaking the Silence. I didn't really get into it until a friend of mine told me he was going to give a testimony. I asked him why and we got to talking about Breaking the Silence. I was familiar with some of the organization's work, but never even tried thinking about it. When we began talking about it, I simply understood that the army can't self-inspect, definitely not when it comes to the occupation, so the democratic principles and bounds on which democracy is founded, can become gray areas. And in addition to that there's the occupation itself, which is the most anti-democratic thing happening. And the discourse – after

the army I took part in all sorts of forums that talked about it, and I felt that there were many people who talked about the occupation without understanding. There's also the mentality of an army maintaining an occupation, of the soldiers, which isn't disconnected from the mentality and codes people take with them to the State, thereafter, to their work, to all of Israeli society that isn't the army. And there's an entire nation under occupation, and we must understand what's happening. There are many people who don't know what it looks like.

Testimony 51

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Bislamach Brigade
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2015
Title: "You choose the house randomly"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing night raids on Palestinian homes and the taking of children.

Soldier: We went into the house, we were 15 soldiers, knocking or not knocking on the door, I think we did knock and we'd say, we don't speak Arabic, we tell them to call the whole family, these are relatively large houses but they're pretty rich in this area. We call everyone, I really didn't like it, but it was like a kind of a period, when I really felt we were just entering people's homes and taking the kids, house after house.

What happened was there were a few children there, a few women, an older man and an older woman. There was one man there. I called everyone to go into one place. And then I told my soldiers like: go do a search. Really, they went to turn the house upside down.

In the meantime, this family, I said right, I'll stay with the family and I don't want anyone else staying with them, like so I could see they were fine. I'll like guard them. Then, I'm like, aiming my weapon at them, so they don't startle me or something like that, and they start speaking Arabic to me, and they try to tell me something; the older man is trying to tell me something, and I don't understand Arabic; there's no one who knows Arabic. In the meantime, they [the soldiers] are searching and I say, I don't understand, I don't understand. They [the Palestinians in the house] repeat it again and again and again, trying to tell me something and I like don't understand. And it gets frustrating at some point, and I feel that they, that it's not calm, so I tell them to shut up at some point, and I point my weapon at them, so they shut up.

They [the soldiers] are performing the search and I'm making sure that they stay there. And then after about say 20 minutes or so, most of the soldiers come back and they tell me they haven't found a suspect, and this family is stressed out and all the soldiers are next to them again and it got chaotic and I didn't like that. In the meantime, they [the Palestinians] start up again, the family is really crying and telling me they want - and I don't understand what they want. Then the old man gets up and I tell him to sit and he starts seizing, he was having an epileptic seizure and I realized they wanted to bring him his medicine and I didn't agree, I told them to shut their mouths, shut their mouths, and they tried to explain it to me and I don't understand Arabic and I really got scared, I got goosebumps and he was shaking on the floor, I didn't know what to do.

And the old woman starts crying and ripped her shirt, as though he were dead and she's looking at me like I murdered him, and I was just in shock. I was wondering what I should do and he was choking and his whole family was crying hysterically and I was thinking, I called the Red

Crescent, the ambulance, it took time [for them to arrive]. And you also know it's all checkpoints out there, it's all army out there. It took a little while for the ambulance to arrive and the family is like, I'm not letting them move and he's lying there and the ambulance arrives and by that time he's like not breathing or I don't know what condition he's in, I felt like really, I couldn't understand whether he was dead or alive.

They took him away and I remember them looking at me, and the way we felt during those moments stayed with me for a while, and I was very angry at myself, like all they really wanted was for me to let them bring his medicine and I wouldn't let them, I told them to shut up and that was the decision I made at that moment as the commander. You choose the house randomly anyway.

Interviewer: How did the incident end? Was he taken by the ambulance?

Soldier: The ambulance took him. In the end nothing came out of it, but what did happen was that this family must have experienced pretty serious trauma and if I were a kid, knowing that my family is a pretty normal family that hasn't done anything bad to anyone, and if 20 soldiers were to come into my house and make a huge mess, emptying drawers, and if someone aimed a weapon at me and then I saw my grandfather humiliate himself like that, that's definitely an experience you remember for the rest of your life, it's traumatic and this certainly isn't the only time such a thing happened. It was really painful because it was unnecessary.

Testimony 52

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal 50th Battalion
Location: Ramallah, occupied West Bank
Date: 2015
Title: "It's a question of mood, how the commander shows up"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing night raids on Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank.

Interviewer: Can soldiers decide what the arrest will look like?

Soldier: Really, really. It could look like two completely different pictures. Like, an arrest is an arrest [but] it can be a polite, reasonable thing that happens or it can be a barbaric incident, regardless of the situation.

Interviewer: What are the variables? What would turn it into one or the other?

Soldier: The mood. In riots, in arrests, or various other kinds of entries into homes, it's a question of mood, how the commander shows up, whether he's in a combative mood that day or shows up in a good mood. It changes the picture for everyone taking part in the arrest.

Interviewer: And how does that apply in practice?

Soldier: In the house he can decide to turn everything upside down without us searching for anything. Go into a room: take everything out of the closet.

Interviewer: Are you saying that because it happened?

Soldier: Yes, yes, sure, sure. There was an arrest when we went into a home, we arrived in a very combative mood, right away neutralize the father, get rid of the mother, their son wasn't at home, he probably went to pray or something.

2016

Testimony 53

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal, Reconnaissance Unit
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2016
Title: "And then I arrived in the territories and saw what's actually being done there"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing how he thought the army could not be doing anything wrong but then changing his mind when he served in the occupied West Bank.

Soldier: Those times that they [the settlers in Hebron] come and talk to you and are nice to you and offer you food and drink and invite you over, that's when you feel the hypocrisy issue. On the one hand they offer you food and drink and show you how much they care about you and how grateful they are, but the moment you get in their way, they won't give a damn about you, and they'll push you, "Don't get in my way."

Interviewer: Did you encounter such cases?

Soldier: Yes, near the Tomb [of the Patriarchs] there are many Arab stores that have been closed since the Intifada. Once they were open, and today they're not allowed to open them. And a group of adult settlers, 30, 40 or older, simply set up a plastic table with food and drink. They simply sat opposite an Arab store that was allowed to open, and waited there. At first I didn't understand what the story was there, they're sitting with a plastic table with food and drink, and they offered us food, and were really nice and talked to us. I didn't understand that they were having a demonstration in front of the store. The moment the Palestinian came and opened his store, they began to riot, began to attack. We tried to stop them and they pushed a Givati soldier to the ground. One of the soldiers tried to use his body to stop one of the settlers, whom we had been talking to about three minutes earlier, and we had a really good conversation, and it was nice, and we smiled and talked amicably, and suddenly he [the settler] had an aggressive expression: get out of here, don't get in my way.

Interviewer: What did they want?

Soldier: They simply wanted to cause a commotion about the Palestinian being allowed to open his store there. There were also babies there, and pregnant settler women.

Interviewer: What did you do about it?

Soldier: We tried to stop the riot. After that, the Givati platoon commander sort of quipped: they always do that, bring babies and pregnant women, to make it harder for us to deal with them so that we won't apply too much force. They always use that filthy trick. That's what he said.

Interviewer: So how are you supposed to handle such an incident? You now see the settlers attacking the Palestinian storeowner – what are you supposed to do in such a situation?

Soldier: Listen, when there's an officer [there] and a company commander as well, he naturally wants us to try and stop it, not to let it happen.

Interviewer: In this case how did you try to stop it?

Soldier: We simply blocked them with our bodies, nothing more than that, because ultimately the soldiers are afraid because these settlers come to you all the time and say: I'll submit a complaint about you, you're not allowed to touch me. Stuff like that. And the army says so as well. You're told such things in briefings before heading out for patrols or guard duty. Usually the company commander wants you to try and prevent things like that but tells you: be careful, there are these limitations.

Interviewer: And how do you feel in such a situation?

Soldier: You're mostly angry with them. I come and protect you and risk my life, I do hard work, dirty work, all in order to protect you, and there's this enormous crazy apparatus here with many resources just to protect a handful of people, and they do whatever they want. So you're irritated both by the level of hypocrisy and the fact that they don't give a damn about you.

I went through a process in the army. I came from a place, thinking that we couldn't be doing anything wrong. Like, what, we're the state of Israel, we're doing something bad? It doesn't make sense. And then I arrived to the territories, and saw what's actually being done there. I asked myself if what we're actually doing here is defending civilians, defending the state of Israel. And it didn't feel that way, it simply felt like there are settlers there, and we're defending them, [but] it feels like a completely different entity. They behave differently, they don't feel any belonging to the government and the law, they feel that they belong to this thing called greater Israel and stuff like that, and that's what interests them, and it simply feels wrong. You also see what happens in the territories as far as the Palestinians are concerned, what happens to them.

Interviewer: What happens to them?

Soldier: I now have to leave my home in my neighborhood and pass through a crossing, wait for two hours knowing that I might not pass through. And really, if I have to get to work? I could get up in the morning and wait for two or three hours, and most likely can't get to work, and can't bring money home. When they enter my home in the middle of the night - and it's not a pleasant situation when someone enters your house in the middle of the night - and suddenly your kids start crying and they're scared, and everybody's scared, and they simply turn your house upside down. Little by little you understand that something isn't right there. There isn't really something there that makes you feel that now you're protecting the state of Israel, the security of the state of Israel.

Interviewer: And how can talking about it help?

Soldier: First of all it's the sort of thing that needs time, I think, [until] eventually people will really understand what's going on. It's simply a matter of raising awareness, I'm optimistic about it, I really believe that it will happen someday, that we'll get out of there. But it comes with the simple need to raise awareness, especially soldiers who will speak out about what they experienced there, even if it seems wrong to them, they should speak about these things. So that [people] will understand what's truly happening, and then as a society we can decide if what we're doing there is fine and acceptable for us, or if it's wrong and unacceptable for us. That's the issue.

Testimony 54

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Artillery Corps, Meitar Unit
Location: Tekoa, occupied West Bank
Date: 2016
Title: "The procedure is five or six houses per night"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing how they would "map" 5 or 6 Palestinian homes in a night.

Interviewer: The practice of mapping, how does it happen and how is it performed?

Soldier: You begin by preparing, trying to really understand what's going on in terms of where we are going to be [situated], for how long, which houses, etc. and once the action itself happens, say x number of soldiers, say a platoon, I don't know, 12-13 soldiers get into a kind of...what's that vehicle called?

Interviewer: Safari [armored transport truck]?

Soldier: Safari, yes. We get into the Safari and of course put on our vests, put on all our equipment, assemble for an equipment parade, you have this, you have that, you have this. We personally never wore face coverings. Whoever wanted to [could have], I mean, it wasn't an order by definition. There were a few who thought they were in a movie and wanted to cover their faces, so they wore face masks.

That's it, and like you just arrive in Tekoa, say, and start splitting up into say groups of four, each commander takes four soldiers, you know you have to go to five houses, so you go to the first house, knock on the door and wait for the response: if there's a response – great, like, you begin. No response – you knock harder on the door and yell: IDF, IDF, IDF, open the door. "IDF" in a pretty aggressive tone, that's what I'll say. The goal is obviously for them to open the door.

The instant someone opens the door, immediately the procedure is, I say hello but it isn't really hello, like it isn't: hi, how's it going. It's a kind of: ahalan [hello], wake the kids up, wake up the wife, bring everyone, so we can see everyone, everyone who lives here. They line up, all the people in the house and then there's a soldier who does a good sweep of the rooms to make sure there's nobody in any of the rooms, and then you separate the women and children. Women and children shut in one room with a soldier to guard them, men outside – you search them, leave them outside the building.

After this procedure you just start sweeping, like on paper, like a pad: you count the number of rooms, you count how many doors, you make a general map. There was always someone who drew a map of the house and the way it looks and we search for suspicious things and turn things

upside down and say: now search for something that seems suspicious to you. So we really start lifting things, moving things, I don't know – rugs, beds, taking off sheets, kitchen, drawers you take out to see what there is. Everyone does it more or less according to their own discretion, the discretion of the commander on the ground. I can say that when I wasn't the senior commander of the force, there were situations where there was chaos, and if it's, say, a company commander on the ground, or something like that, who feels like showing he has power, [then] that's what it looks like. The house is a complete mess, and no one ever makes sure to tidy up either: there's no time, no time, on to the next house, on to the next house, thanks, bye, go back to your homes and on to the next house. The procedure is five or six houses per night. Every team. [It] takes times and is no fun at all, especially the part... you wake kids up in the middle of the night. They don't understand your language at all, you try to communicate with them somehow. If there's someone who speaks Arabic it's a bonus.

I don't know, in my personal experience this situation in general is not a positive one. It becomes a kind of routine, I'd say that once a week or two you find yourself mapping, I'm not talking about arrests, which is different. Say you complete the five or six houses for the night, we meet back, go back to the base, joke and continue to morning tasks.

2017

Testimony 55

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: 188 Armored Corps
Location: Zayta, occupied West Bank
Date: 2017
Title: "You disrupt their daily life"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence describing how his orders were to enter a Palestinian village and set up a temporary checkpoint to check IDs and search cars. He was not told what he was looking for.

Soldier: There's a story [which] in my eyes is the weirdest, the most messed up and reflects the reality of ruling over civilians for the sake of ruling. Now, I say 'stop' for a second. The army doesn't do it out of an evil will to control human beings. It's just that in order to maintain that situation (military rule in the territories), it's what has to be done.

We would enter villages, for example we would enter Zayta. Zayta is a small village without many people. We enter the village, the village center, set up a flying checkpoint. Traffic spikes. A few vehicles, we drive up a small hill, provide cover. What we do is check vehicles. What is checking vehicles? To look in the trunk, to check their IDs, and let them drive away. Now, I don't really know what I'm checking [for]. They told me [to] check IDs, but they didn't give the number of a suspect in the village. And even if Ahmed Yassin was there, I wasn't told about it. Nothing. "Check them, check their vehicle.

Now, what exactly am I supposed to check in his vehicle? He's driving in his own village. Even if there were knives there it's, you know, it's like, farmers can also work with them. It's not... They're not even in Israel. So you enter the village, you check them, I don't even know what I'm checking. You cause a traffic jam in a village of about 200-300 residents. You disrupt their daily life. After two hours you just pack up and leave.

Interviewer: So what do you check?

Soldier: Nothing. I don't know what I'm checking at all. As a commander I'm telling you, as the person responsible for the situation, I had no idea what I was doing.

Interviewer: What were you told was the purpose of the mission?

Soldier: Security check.

Interviewer: The purpose of which, was?

Soldier: I don't know, and also on this particular matter I asked for clarifications, I asked to understand what I'm doing. What for? What's the goal? Am I looking for someone? Am I looking for some terrorist?

Interviewer: And how do you understand the purpose of the mission?

Soldier: I think it was just to show them that ours is bigger. In other words, that here we are entering the village and we'll check whomever we want. We'll now enter the village, and everyone will get in line in their cars, and they'll pass through when I tell them to. And that's the gist of it. And as a soldier you don't think about it. The truth is, I only thought about it afterwards. And you know what? I did enter their village, check them, and I didn't have any computer for me to type their ID numbers and check if he, if he's a suspicious person.

Interviewer: Whose a suspicious person?

Soldier: Honestly, listen, I don't even know what to tell you, I'll tell you the truth. I don't know what a suspicious person is inside their own village. It's just people driving around their village. I can pass on [their information] to the operations room, and they'll, like [check], and see if he's a suspicious person or something like that, but generally...

Interviewer: Who would you pass on to the operations room?

Soldier: A young man, a beard would increase the chances, any person who seemed to fit the stereotype of a terrorist, [I would say to myself], "Fine, okay, check his number with the operations room." I, specifically, wouldn't do it as much, but others who were with me did it, like, freely. Not too much though, because ultimately your goal is to get back to the post and chill.

Interviewer: So what do you check with the operations room?

Soldier: Listen, I take the ID, I don't, I don't even check with the operations room. I look at the ID, make a face like someone who's in the know, and hand him back the ID.

Interviewer: And what do you see in the ID?

Soldier: Nothing, there's no point.

Interviewer: So you just look at the ID, return it to him, and ...?

Soldier: Open the trunk, open that," I look in the trunk and make a face like someone who's in the know.

Interviewer: Every vehicle like that?

Soldier: When there were serious checkpoints, yes, pretty much every vehicle.

Interviewer: Did you ever find anything?

Soldiers: No, the truth is, we didn't?

I remember being on the border between Kibbutz Metzger and Qaffin (a Palestinian village in the northern West Bank). And I would think to myself: seriously, they don't have the slightest idea what's happening a meter from their back, like, it's amazing. You step one meter away and you're in a completely different reality, and people don't know about it. While doing patrols, there was this spot where we would stop and make coffee. Suddenly some guys from Metzger came to sit with us, and I said to myself: seriously, they have like no idea. They've been living here all their lives and they don't understand what's going on here at all. There's this reality here, which is sometimes, you know, kind of surreal. Where an 18-year-old boy checks, and de-facto controls the morning of 200 people, adults, children, old women, not so old women. And nobody knows this, people don't understand what's happening right next to them, in the territories. And people [soldiers] who are in the territories do things out of habit, it's their daily routine, it's what they do. And sometimes for soldiers, for me too, it took me some time before what was really problematic about my service hit me. At first I didn't think about all these stories I told you about the deputy battalion commander, and the platoon commander who beat someone, but really that's all nonsense, get it? What's really problematic [is that] you don't understand [what you're doing] because you're doing it as a soldier and not doing it as a thinking human being.

Interviewer: And what's problematic?

Soldier: It's problematic that I, as a 19-20-year-old kid, control the lives of so many people, and that I have disproportional authority. And honestly, I'll tell you the truth, I also have no idea what to do with it. I would check people without knowing why I'm doing it. And this whole situation where people are, every day, under this military rule, and their day-to-day lives are determined by it. That's what's problematic. That's it, at large. That's what bothers me in the conflict, that's what bothers me in the territories. As far as I'm concerned I don't care what they do, what solution there will be, whether we divide Jerusalem or divide Hadera, as long as we don't rule these people.

Testimony 56

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: Civil Administration
Location: Ramallah, occupied West Bank
Date: 2017
Title: "Delete, delete, delete"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes cancelling permits for Palestinian family members to visit relatives in Israeli prisons for protesting conditions.

Soldier: There was a prisoners' strike in one of the prisons. There was this incident where that's it, everyone started to strike, and they (the security establishment) wanted to pressure them to stop this strike because it was getting a bad name all over the world, because people abroad started to find out what was happening in the prison.

Usually our daily schedule was to start at 8 AM and finish work at 5 PM, and on that day, they called everyone into the office after 5 PM and asked us to work on something. They gave us a file with tons and tons of ID numbers and divided it among the different work stations and told us that these were IDs of people who were in the prison and were part of this strike, and they asked us to just go one by one into the IDs and their relatives in the system, and simply delete any prisoner visit by relatives.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Soldier: It means that any relative who wanted to come visit a prisoner who participated in the strike or whatever it was, they asked us to delete the permit, to just cancel it so it doesn't happen, so they couldn't go visit them, in order to pressure them so that they stop doing the strike.

That's what happened and in the moment I didn't think about what I was actually doing. They just told us: you're not leaving the office until you finish with this file, like until there's not a single relative remaining, like so that we cancel their permits.

And then we started to fight among ourselves because the people who'd been there longer, who got it a bit more said: No, we're not going to do that. But I don't think it was for moral reasons but more in terms of, "We want to go to bed, we don't want to stay in the office after working hours and deal with these permits."

So we did all think together about ways to get through it as fast as we could so we could finish it and go to bed, and it really was like one by one, endlessly, going in, canceling. Going in, canceling. And I'm just seeing, mother, father and sisters and cousins, and just delete, delete, delete.

And then like, only when I went to bed, I stopped to think about what I had done in that moment and what it means. I thought that if these guys had got to the point of deciding that they want to go on strike in prison, that means something. It's still prison, right? But I thought that it's just from a moral standpoint a terrible thing to do, it's just done in order to break them, and I think that was the goal, to just make them stop the strike.

I was an instrument in this whole story, I pushed buttons and helped the military break these people morally and physically. And that's why it really kind of scared me because I was 19, and what do I understand about the conflict at all? When I talked about it with the soldiers, about what we'd actually done here, they told me that nothing can be done, it's the IDF and they were, at the end of the day, prisoners, they're criminals and an order is an order, and you have to do [it], and there's nothing to think about beyond that.

Testimony 57

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: n/a
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2017
Title: "The first candle of Hanukkah"

A former Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how his Unit would celebrate Hanukkah with drums close to where Palestinian child detainees were tied and blindfolded.

Soldier: It was Hanukkah, we were lighting the first candle (on the first day of the holiday) at the company, and there were two kids who had been throwing stones on Route 60, on the road, and then they were caught and taken to the base. They were brought in and put outside the company's operations room. It was just before we lit the first candle (on the first night of Hanukkah), in the evening, and they were blindfolded and cuffed at the front, with those tick-tack zip ties. They were about... they looked small, but they were about 14 and 16, something like that. Not more than 16 and not less than 12.

Now, they were sitting like outside the operations room, but inside like this sort of structure that was right next to the center of the company area, where we would all gather and do various company chores, like cleaning and... and that's where we did the first candle lighting. Now, [it's the] first candle lighting, so when you do it at home it's nice and pleasant and you sing and all that, but when you're in the army and it's all guys, then you shout and make noise and use drums for some reason, like 'darbuking' (playing the darbuka drums), which is like a company vibe where you come and sing about the company and about how good the company is and how much the other companies are not as good compared to us, and all sorts of swearwords are put in, to, I don't know, somehow boost the morale.

Anyway, so there are these kids there aged like 13, whose heads are covered, and [next to them] we're singing these songs and beating the drums really loudly. They probably don't understand Hebrew, [but] these swearwords are swearwords that they can understand. Like "sharmutot" [the plural of an Arabic word also used by Israelis meaning "slut"] and words they can understand from Arabic. And how would they know we're not talking about them? They must think they're going to be cooked alive in a second. It's a situation which is ugly.

The next day there was a kind of agreement that it wasn't really okay what happened there. I don't know if everybody [agreed], but it felt to me like a kind of hypocrisy. That they didn't want to say anything [when it was happening] because they didn't want to like disrespect the company 'darbuking', which is something really sacred, but a day later suddenly they do think that it was not so okay. It was a slap in the face, like, for me, because I thought that in our unit we handle the events according to the rules and we're really... And even more than that, we're

good people. And even there a whole company can sing and know that something is not right, and still not say anything. Zero.

So it reminded me of the Stanford prison. The Stanford prison experiment, where you enter a situation, you enter a system... It's like I'm in basic training, on the first day I saw weapons and was scared. I heard shots, I was scared. After a bit of time you get used to it. The habit puts you into this frame of mind that makes these situations possible. And then you lose your benchmark for a situation that is further away.

Interviewer: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you're trying to say that somehow your moral judgment was a bit... like, your conscience somehow...

Soldier: Yes, but it's not like we go crazy or something like that. It's just... it's normal people, it's good people. We just enter a situation like in the Stanford prison. We enter a situation, we enter the social context and behave in the same way. It's not... like behavior according to the rules dictated in society. And I'm saying, like, before the army I would see a weapon, I would be scared. Someone pointed a weapon, I'd be scared. After this, as far as I'm concerned it's a stick, it's not... Like, I'm so used to it. I know how to use it, I know how to clean it, I know everything.

Say we're in training and we're shooting and all that: if someone had shown up, a civilian arriving from outside and watching, for him it would be extreme. But for us it's routine. So that's the reason I kind of think that in that situation nobody said anything, because they knew like – “okay, we're now darbuking, singing for the company, so...,” and we're used to having detainees in that room because we always arrest people and put them there, and we're used to the fact that there is darbuking. That's how it is. But they (the arrested teens) are there. Like, we're doing our job. And it's insensitive, it's lack of awareness mixed with the military context that created this situation.

Testimony 58

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: Homefront Command
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2017
Title: "It causes moral damage to us, it causes real damage to them"

An Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which considers how occupation damages everyone who comes in contact with it - Israelis and Palestinians.

Soldier: Already during the military service and during all these deployments, many times it just felt wrong to me. The human aspect of why do they make us behave this way toward other people, police them, tell them where to go and check them. When I finished my military service I started to think about it more actually from the moral perspective. Maybe even then during the service I thought about it, that they live under military rule that I don't agree with. It's not ours, we shouldn't be there, people are like trying to live their lives and they're not being allowed to.

And I know that because of what I did. It's not like some people abroad might think, that [we] go around killing children. But still, children are arrested and held for a whole day in the middle of a military base, like, how traumatic. And at any moment your house could get broken into, all that stuff. They're human beings and it's not right... It causes moral damage to us, it causes real damage to them, it leaves us stained.

Testimony 59

Name: Anonymous
Rank: Lieutenant
Unit: Civil Administration
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2017
Title: "We'll hurt the whole family"

An Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes a policy of collective punishment of extended families and whole villages.

Interviewer: Can a terrorist's cousin be banned (permit restrictions).?

Soldier: Yes, yes. For instance, often after some kind of terrorist attack, and this is something we would do, you automatically place a ban on the [person's] entire first and second [social] circles. Sometimes on the whole village, depending on how big the thing was. It would happen quite a lot.

Interviewer: What's the idea behind something like that?

Soldier: To show the terrorist that he has something to lose and that his actions have repercussions. That he's not the only one getting hurt – if a terrorist attack is carried out now, we'll hurt the whole family. Like, take responsibility for the actions you undertake, because a lot of people are going to get hurt from this.

Interviewer: How many people is it, for example?

Soldier: Palestinians have large families, so, say, [in] the second circle, more than 50. When it's the whole village, it comes to hundreds of people, lots of people.

Interviewer: How does it work in practice?

Soldier: There's a permit system, [called] 'Philosopher's Stone'(computerized database used by the Civil Administration). There's an option to filter and select people from a certain age range, from a certain area, and then, with the push of a button, you place a ban on all of them.

Interviewer: When you click on the person, does his whole family appear?

Soldier: Yes.

Interviewer: Say you want to see the entire village – you write "Nabi Saleh," it gives you all the people who have a permit in Nabi Saleh and you press "delete", and then everyone's permit is removed?

Soldier: Yes.

Interviewer: Now, how does a person know his permit has been removed?

Soldier: He doesn't know. He's probably going to arrive at the reception window (*see glossary*) to ask for a permit next time, and he'll suddenly find out he has a ban. Or he'll come to the crossing to exit and will be told that his permit has been canceled.

Testimony 60

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal Engineering Unit
Location: Yitzhar, occupied West Bank
Date: 2017
Title: "An actual Jewish riot starts"

An Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how Israeli soldiers have limited authority over Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank

Interviewer: Can you enter to carry out mapping or arrests in a Jewish settlement that's under your jurisdiction?

Soldier: No, no, no. The only activity I ever had in Jewish settlements was in Yitzhar. In Yitzhar, they're, like, wild, they're hard core hilltop youth. Often, when military forces pass through there, just to get to other villages or something like that, an actual Jewish riot starts. One time, Israelis, Jews, injured the operations officer's hand.

Interviewer: Why is a Jew who acts violently treated differently from a Palestinian?

Soldier: Because one's Jewish and one's Arab. Like, he (the Jew) is in a settlement, a settlement is a place where your job is to protect him, only to protect him, you're the gatekeeper of the settlements and you're, like, the angel who guards the area. From your point of view, Jews are the people who bring you food and, like, are nice to you when you're on patrol, and, like, "thank you so much for protecting us." When you get to a situation where they're also throwing stones at you, then it's suddenly a complex situation, it's not that simple, like, it's not that simple to use means (riot dispersal gear) against them. Don't forget that they're, like, "our own," not to be touched. Like, it would make sense to arrest them, but it's more often the police that does this stuff, it's not like some hilltop youth would be brought into military detention. Arab detainees would come sit in the base's security post and you'd have to guard them, Palestinians, but never Jews, like not that, that wouldn't happen.

Interviewer: In the event that you identify a Jew behaving dangerously, what's your authority as a soldier in the field?

Soldier: I don't have the authority to do much. There were no clear procedures for this, but I'm sure that if I was in a situation like that, then first, I would call the company commander, of course, and more forces would come. I wasn't in a situation like that, but if I had been, according to how I was trained and the military training I received, I would try to stop him. I would protect myself, defend myself, if he throws stones at me, then [I would] try and dodge them and try to talk to him.

Interviewer: What would happen if a Palestinian did that?

Soldier: If a Palestinian did that, suspect arrest procedure right away. Cock the weapon toward him, fire in the air if necessary, call forces immediately.

Testimony 61

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Egoz Unit
Location: Occupied West Bank
Date: 2017
Title: "We go back to them every so often, all the time, because nobody writes it down"

An Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how Israeli soldiers repeatedly conduct night raids on the same Palestinian homes.

Soldier: We had an evening of mapping, which means a disgusting evening of mapping. The function [of mapping], on paper, is to map each house and say who lives in it, so the Shin Bet knows about every house, little by little, who lives there, so they have the information. I think it's just some kind of deterrence.

Interviewer: Why is it deterrence?

Soldier: Because when we'd go inside a home, we used to explain to them that we were there for that. There's always one interpreter on the team, they send someone who speaks Arabic with the team, and he explained why we were here. And then they [the family] said: what, why didn't anyone document this? A month ago, they came to us and another time before that. We go back to them every so often, all the time, because nobody writes it down. Or really because there's a very large security body and often things get overlooked.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Soldier: What you do is you go into a house, at first you knock on the door, you don't break in, you knock a lot on the door, trying. Most times they don't open, people are asleep, people don't want to open and stuff like that. And then usually once we take out the breach kit and they start to hear you trying to break in then...

Interviewer: A hydraulic breach kit?

Soldier: Yes, the moment you bring it and start hooking it up, there was also an electrical one that makes noise, then they hear it and come downstairs, open the door before you break down their door. You say, "everyone inside", you stand every person by the window with his ID, holding it by the side of his head and take a picture of every person who lives in the house.

Interviewer: Do they say why these houses specifically?

Soldier: They tell you these are houses the Shin Bet doesn't have any information about.

Interviewer: In terms of the structure of the house and things like that, do you deal with that or only photograph the people?

Soldier: It sounds logical that we were supposed to do that, but I don't remember actually doing that.

2018

Testimony 62

Name: Anonymous
Rank: First Sergeant
Unit: Nahal 932nd Battalion
Location: Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date: 2018
Title: "I just saw the violence"

An Israeli soldier provides a testimony to Breaking the Silence in which he describes how no action was taken against a settler child who punched a Palestinian child.

Soldier: We were once on patrol and I think it was Rosh Hashanah, it was packed there. There's a [Palestinian] boy with only one hand [and he lives] on the path to the Tomb of the Patriarchs from the Jewish neighborhood. And there was a boy, also 14 years old I think, who was talking to Yusuf (the Palestinian boy).

Interviewer: A settler kid?

Soldier: Yes. A settler kid but not at all from Hebron, he was like visiting someone. He suddenly punched Yusuf in the face and I didn't know what had happened, I just saw the violence and we ran to him. But he ran away to Beit Rachel and [Beit] Leah (a Palestinian house in Hebron which was taken over by settlers in 2018) and we didn't enter the house. The police arrived and they didn't either, no one entered Beit Rachel and [Beit] Leah, [only] the settlers did. We knew he was there because he wasn't anywhere else.

Interviewer: Then why didn't you enter?

Soldier: I don't know, I don't know what happened. I was also annoyed there because I saw that Yusuf hadn't done anything. Suddenly I saw a punch to the face, there was blood, my company commander arrives and the police arrive... I think they have a post close to the Tomb of the Patriarchs so it wasn't much time. I see it as like a law, he (the settler boy) did something wrong but I don't think that everyone wanted to catch him.

Interviewer: Why do you think they didn't want to?

Soldier: I think that he was close to the post and close to someone who was with me in the company, and I think that if they had wanted to catch the kid, they could have.

Interviewer: The soldiers?

Soldier: Yes. I saw the boy enter a house, I didn't see the police enter the house. I also saw the boy walking around the next day.

Interviewer: If the situation were reversed, say a 14-year-old Palestinian boy punches a Jewish boy, how do you think the incident would have unfolded based on your experience?

Soldier: You already know... He's automatically arrested. Within a second two soldiers jump on him and...

Interviewer: Arrest him?

Soldier: Yes, of course.