



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Between security and military identities: The case of Israeli security experts

Grassiani, E.

**DOI**

[10.1177/0967010617747202](https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010617747202)

**Publication date**

2018

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Security Dialogue

**License**

CC BY-NC

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Grassiani, E. (2018). Between security and military identities: The case of Israeli security experts. *Security Dialogue*, 49(1-2), 83-95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010617747202>

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.



# Between security and military identities: The case of Israeli security experts

Security Dialogue

2018, Vol. 49(1-2) 83–95

© The Author(s) 2018



Reprints and permissions:

[sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav](http://sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav)

DOI: 10.1177/0967010617747202

[journals.sagepub.com/home/sdi](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/sdi)



**Erella Grassiani**

University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

## Abstract

The relationship between private security professionals and the military in Israel is complex. While there is growing attention to the fact that security and military actors and their activities are becoming increasingly blurred, the Israeli case shows something different. In this ground-up analysis of the relationship between private security practices and the military, I investigate its constant negotiation by private security professionals through their identification with and differentiation from the military, whereby they reconfigure the meaning of military capital. This identity work should be understood, I propose, within the strongly militarist context of Israeli society, where military capital is highly valued. I argue that actors who exit the military system feel the need to demonstrate the added value of their work in the private sector in order for it to gain value in the light of the symbolic capital given to the military. I analyse these processes as leading to a new kind of militarism, which includes security skills and ideas about professionalism. Such an approach sheds new light on the ways in which security actors can actively reconfigure the workings of military capital in and outside the nation-state and produce a different kind of militarism.

## Keywords

Identity work, Israel, military, militarism, security, security professionals

## Introduction

Israeli security professionals identify with military know-how and experience, explicitly creating a connection with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) while simultaneously distancing themselves from that same institution. One Israeli private security trainer told me that one ‘need[s] to re-educate former soldiers if you want them to do security work’ (Interview 1). Other security professionals I interviewed also emphasized the profound difference between doing ‘military’ and ‘security’ work in the Israeli context, often emphasizing the ‘right’ state of mind of former soldiers (as fighters), while pointing to their lack of appropriate technical skills. Such statements are remarkable, as the wider public discourse in Israel tends to make no distinction, portraying the military and other kinds of ‘security’ as closely related.

---

### Corresponding author:

Erella Grassiani, Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, PO Box 15509, Amsterdam, 1001 NA, the Netherlands.

Email: [E.Grassiani@uva.nl](mailto:E.Grassiani@uva.nl)

Yet as in many other national contexts (see e.g. White, 2011), Israeli private security actors are also keen to emphasize their military past. Stressing one's military background and skills (military capital) gives the work of a private security actor a sense of legitimacy and professionalism in the eyes of customers (see, for example, Joachim and Schneiker, 2014). Additionally, as in other 'Western democracies', Israeli companies underline a strong connection with the military as a 'legitimation activity' for an international audience and as a commercial and political tool (Loader and Walker, 2001; White, 2011).<sup>1</sup> During my research on Israeli security professionals, this relationship was confirmed time and again, the idea being that those coming from the ranks – soldiers, officers and generals – 'know "security"' naturally and can capitalize on it as private security agents later on (Grassiani, 2016).

We thus see an ambivalent relationship between the military and security, which reveals an interesting paradox that demands a deeper look into its construction. I will examine this paradox by studying the identity work (Watson, 2008) of security professionals, arguing that while the logics of the military and private security worlds in the Israeli context are often perceived as completely compatible and blurred, security professionals themselves challenge such a view by portraying the relationship as more complex. They differentiate themselves from the military by emphasizing their unique skills as security professionals, while at the same time identifying with it as the institution in which they 'grew up'. I propose that this is related to their positioning in a highly militarized society in which the military plays an important ordering role: they must frame their work in relation to the military; however, as they are no longer part of that sector, their work also needs to reflect a certain uniqueness.

Higate (2015) describes the process of rearticulating public security skills to private ones as 'remilitarization'. While he analyses remilitarization mostly through embodiment, I find the term useful here to understand how Israeli private security professionals emphasize their professional skills and frame themselves as a different kind of (re)militarized actor, and in this way challenge the exclusive 'military' character of the capital needed to gain societal and professional standing. This process reveals the construction of a new kind of militarism that includes security as an important aspect.

My intention is to contribute to the growing corpus of knowledge on plural security provision that examines state and non-state security relations and the blurred boundaries between them by showing how, from a 'ground-up level', this blurriness is simultaneously resisted. In addition, I contribute to existing debates on identity work, which allows us to understand more about the role of security skills and military capital in a militarist society such as Israel, where military (combat) skills and experience are highly appreciated in terms of citizenship and status. Through this work, I offer new insights into how security actors and their practices can manipulate and alter militarist discourse both on a national level and on a personal and professional one.

I use 'security' here as an emic concept.<sup>2</sup> Thus, I use it both in a way similar to that in which it is used by my informants and as a descriptive tool for the field of study. In Hebrew, the terminology used is '*bitakhon*', which means both safety and security and is a core notion within the Israeli militarist discourse, and as such has great meaning for the security professionals I studied. However, I agree with Neocleous and Rigakos (2011), who warn about the ways in which the concept obscures 'exploitation and alienation' (p. 15) and is a dangerous illusion whose tyranny 'is its insistence on the construction of the "other"' (p. 18). 'Security', then, is a deeply political notion with which we should critically engage, both in terms of how our informants use it and in order to understand what such concepts can 'do' in practice.

Furthermore, I use the notion of militarism to indicate the larger context in which identity work takes place. My use of this concept is more in line with feminist thought that takes into account how 'things military' find their way into the everyday (Åhäll, 2016). While some frame militarism

as an ideology (see Eastwood, this issue), I focus on its sociological features (Stavrianakis and Selby, 2013). We can only understand security practices by placing them in their militarist context (see also Wibben, this issue), and hence this work can be understood as a ground-up analysis of the relationship between security and militarism. While militarism, in the Israeli case especially (see e.g. Levy, 2007), is often used to analyse the influence of the military and military ways of thinking on society, I aim to show how this concept can also encapsulate new ideas of (private) security as used by security actors to increase their social standing in a militarist context. We can then observe the emergence of a new kind of militarism, with remilitarized actors as its driving force. This reconfiguration of the content of military capital works, as I will show, both on a national and on a personal and professional level.

I collected the data analysed here over a period of 20 months (2015–2017) in Israel, Kenya and the USA. I interviewed approximately 50 senior male Israeli security professionals who trained guards, police officers and foreign security agents, and/or who worked as security consultants, both in Israel and abroad. It is exactly these actors who have a stake, I argue, in developing a professional identity in the private sphere after they leave the military or intelligence services. I also participated in some 15 security/defence fairs and two multiday security seminars in which the Israeli security system was explained to a mostly foreign audience, which offered me many insights into how professionals understand their relationship to the military and the ways in which they frame their professional skills as worthy within the Israeli context.

The article is structured as follows: I begin by introducing the Israeli military and security sector, after which I discuss the relevant theoretical debates. I then present my empirical material and analysis to show how the identity work of security actors in a militarist context produces a new form of militarism and remilitarized actors.

## **The Israeli military and the security sector**

The military is one of the most influential institutions within Israeli society (Ben-Eliezer, 1998; Kimmerling, 1993; Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari, 2012). It is responsible for the protection of Israel from ‘external’ threats and terrorism, including from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which have been under Israeli occupation since 1967. All Israeli Jews are conscripted into the military, and this active duty, especially in combat units, is repaid with a respected position in the social hierarchy of Israeli society.<sup>3</sup> Military service in Israel is crucial for becoming a ‘good citizen’, according to a republican understanding of citizenship, which implies citizens’ participation in the state’s operations (the military in this case) (Levy, 2007; Levy et al., 2012). This type of citizenship has a distinct gender dimension, as men are accorded a higher status within society than women (Lomsky-Feder and Sasson-Levy, 2018). Not only do men receive a high social status in general (especially after serving as a combat soldier), but military experience also helps in their future careers, whether in a related field (such as security) or elsewhere. While much has been written about the Israeli military (e.g. Ben-Ari, 1998; Cohen, 1997; Grassiani, 2013; Kanaane, 2008; Levy, 2003) and Israeli militarism (e.g. Kimmerling, 1993; Kuntsman and Stein, 2015; Levy, 2007; Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari, 2012), surprisingly little has been written on the booming private security industry in the Israeli context. Exceptions are some works that focus on issues of (private) security (e.g. Grassiani, 2016; Konopinski, 2014; Ochs, 2011), but these often neglect the relationship to the military, with the exception of Sheffer and Barak’s (2013) work on the security network.

As a general rule, the longer one has served in the military, the higher one’s rank and/or the more combat prone one’s unit was, the higher the social status one receives. Importantly, and as Sheffer and Barak (2013) show, the boundaries between the public (military) and the private (security)

spheres are porous and blurred. Former military personnel are employed by old military contacts and continue to use their extensive professional and social networks in their new work environment. Thus, ‘the military serves as a pool that supplies private security’, as one security trainer stated pointedly during a class for foreign ‘students’ (Interview 2).<sup>4</sup>

The deep belief in ‘security’ as an all-encompassing ideology is widespread in Israel, and all forces, public and private, are seen as working towards the same goal: securing Israeli society against terrorism (and other threats) (Ochs, 2011).<sup>5</sup> Israel is thus a compelling case to help us investigate how ideas on security influence militarism through a ground-up analysis of security practices.

Within the Israeli context, going into the private security industry is a logical next step following military service. This industry is booming and diverse and consists, first, of private companies that advise clients, such as factories, ports and electricity companies, within and outside Israel (including the Occupied Territories) (Ronen, 2010). Second, there are companies that work as ‘temp agencies’, delivering personnel to companies that need security staff. These companies do not have in-house security expertise and only provide low-status security work, such as guards at shopping malls. Finally, there are a great number of advisers and consultants who work independently to advise public and private clients on a variety of security issues. A distinction, furthermore, is made between ‘defence’ companies that provide more military-like products (often to militaries and police forces around the world) and the ‘homeland security’ branch of this industry, which is more geared towards national security issues and protection. Both branches operate nationally and internationally, and their services often overlap.

In Israel, private security companies can train their own personnel, but often this training is outsourced to (private or semi-private) security colleges that offer trainings at different levels. The minimal training prepares personnel for ‘simple’ guarding jobs at an office, while the longest and hardest training allows a trainee to work as a guard at an Israeli embassy abroad, for example. Such colleges regularly cater to foreign customers, such as police officers or military staff from the USA, Europe or Africa.<sup>6</sup>

## Military capital

Military capital means that experiences, knowledge and status from the military become status-enhancing within a specific context or field (Bourdieu, 2002). These experiences then become capital that gives value to its carrier in places where the military is highly appreciated. Swed and Butler (2015: 126) explain military capital as the product of a ‘socialization process ... which translates later into work skills, networks, and ethics ... when those veterans become employed’. Henry (2015) uses a similar idea when showing how peacekeepers use their military background and experiences in order to secure work, while at the same time distancing themselves from that background in specific contexts. Israel is an example of a country where the military is very important in providing capital to citizens and where serving in (combat) units is regarded as preparing one for life itself.

As one trainer at a prestigious security college explained, ‘in our courses we get soldiers with experience who “are scratched all over the place [*srutim*]”, formed in the military. We need someone from the military with experience in life’. The trainer emphasized the importance of the ‘life experience’ of former soldiers, of having ‘seen things’ and experienced difficulties, for their work in the private security field (Interview 3). In other words, they can capitalize on their former military experiences. Moreover, it is not only individuals’ professionalism that is judged here in terms of military experience; Israel’s reputation as a nation-state also benefits from the image of its military. As an Israeli security consultant working in Nairobi for many years told me, ‘they [Kenyans] hear “Israel”, they are impressed. We are world-known specialists, because of our experience. We

were born into this situation. Everyone does military service. For us, it is natural' (Interview 4). This was confirmed by a Kenyan security professional during an interview in her office. She had worked with a few Israeli consultants for many years and said that 'they have a "good background"'. One was a brigadier in the IDF.... Israelis are very respected in the world of anti-terrorism' (Interview 5).

In all of these examples, it is clear how important the military background of Israeli security actors is for their private careers, not least in a commercial sense, and for Israel's reputation in itself as a security specialist. At the fairs that I frequented, security professionals flaunted their former military experience as a 'unique selling point' (Grassiani, 2016), and many technologies were sold carrying a 'combat proven' stamp – namely, that they had been successfully used by the IDF in real combat. Here the reputation of the materials is at stake, and their 'military experience' is used to demonstrate their worth.

I also show in this article, however, how private security actors challenge the narrow scope of military capital in Israel by stressing the value of their security skills – both in addition to and as separate from their military heritage. I thus use the concept of military capital to analyse the identity work of security professionals while they negotiate between their military backgrounds and capital and their new private careers in an effort to frame themselves as alternative, accepted and 'better' remilitarized actors (Higate, 2015).

## Plural security and identity work

The main debates to which I contribute are those regarding the 'plural security' field, in which private and public security actors and their cooperation and blurring are investigated, along with scholarship on military and security identity work. The former mostly centres on so-called security assemblages (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2007), nodal frameworks (Shearing and Wood, 2003) or security networks (Dupont, 2014; Krahnemann, 2005), and attempts to make sense of the ways in which different kinds of public and private security actors work together (or not) at an institutional level (Diphorn and Grassiani, 2016). An example from the Israeli case, the above-mentioned work of Sheffer and Barak (2013) on the security network, is one of the rare examples that connects the spheres of the military and private security, showing how closely connected and virtually inseparable they are.

While I recognize the importance of analysing how blurring occurs between different actors and institutions, and of understanding how different 'nodes' or groups work together, this tells us little about how actors (try to) influence such processes themselves. I thus go beyond this network analysis to investigate how professional identities are (re)constructed by private security actors as they reconfigure the workings of military capital 'on the ground'.

The second important debate that I engage with is on military and security identity work and the ways in which actors juggle different identities according to varying rationales. The identity work of individuals includes 'influenc[ing] the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieux in which they live their lives' (Watson, 2008: 129). This idea is extensively used in studies on military identity work (e.g. Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2003; Maringira et al., 2015) that concern themselves with, for example, internal identity work in the military, police or other state institutions. Here, I limit myself to discussion of studies that engage with how past military experience and the accompanying skills of veterans are used or downplayed in other careers, mostly in private security.

Scholarly work on veterans and their 'mobility' into the private security sphere has been mostly discussed in studies on former combatants in African states who are 'demobilized' and subsequently find their way into the private security sector (Christensen, 2017; Maringira, 2015). There is also a body of work that focuses on different security identities that can be 'played' on, often

relating to past military service. Berndtsson (2011), for instance, shows how Swedish private security professionals use or downplay the military background of their employees according to their clients' wishes. Joachim and Schneiker (2014: 248) conducted similar work on this role 'play' and distinguish three different 'characters' that private security (and military) companies draw from dynamically: 'the military, the business manager and the humanitarian'. Focusing on peacekeepers, Henry (2015: 383) shows how military experience is used on the one hand to secure work, but also downplayed on the other in order for individuals to 'present themselves as simple and ordinary citizens of the nation state'.

Kruck and Spencer (2013) focus on the influence of negative media narratives on the self-narratives of private security companies. Whereas private security actors are often portrayed as 'incompetent cowboys, exploiting war profiteers ... and/or dirty mercenaries' in the media, the companies portray themselves as 'technical and military experts, professional businessmen ... and proud patriots' (p. 328), again using military experience strategically. This also occurred among the US and British military contractors studied by Higate (2011), who connects their identity work to issues of national identity and the perceived professional attitudes attached to it.

These studies show how the military background of private security employees becomes simultaneously a form of capital and something to distance oneself from according to the context. With the exception of Higate's work, most of the reasons given for this 'juggling' are commercial by nature, and all are strongly related to the audience that the security actors face – often clients to whom they want to sell their goods.

Israeli private security professionals identify themselves as professionals and experts in ways similar to those outlined in the above-mentioned studies. However, while in the works discussed above the reasons given for different sorts of identity work are mostly commercial (to facilitate customers) or political (to appear more legitimate in the eyes of the public), I argue that Israeli professionals' identity work should be understood in terms of their efforts to claim a space in the militarized 'playing field' of Israeli society. They frame their professional identity by appealing to the unique skill set that sets them positively apart from their military counterparts, while still relying on their military past to provide them with capital and social status. This points, I believe, to a complex relationship vis-à-vis the military, an institution that they were once part of, that has 'readied' them for their current work, and in which members are often defined as 'family' or 'comrades' (see e.g. Ben-Ari, 1998). As private security professionals, however, they engage in a continuous negotiation of the boundaries between both worlds, between feelings of belonging and a need for differentiation. Showing that they have something different from and, importantly, better than what their military counterparts might offer, I argue, is necessary for them to receive their desired societal and professional status in a context where the military has such strong ordering power. This can therefore be seen as a differentiated kind of militarism that includes security beyond its purely military characteristics, as I will outline in the following.

## **Identity work: Between identification and differentiation**

In this section I set out the ways in which security actors reconfigure the workings of military capital to include security skills and construct themselves as remilitarized actors with a prestige similar to that of other military actors.

### *Identification: The possibilities of military capital*

When private security professionals identify with their military past or that of their trainees, practical military skills are not seen as particularly relevant. They rather emphasize specific 'mind-sets'

or 'attitudes', referring to the perceived general experience that soldiers accumulate. Such ideas are based on an 'ideal' type of soldier: a patriotic, efficient and disciplined man; a good person with particular ways of thinking and working, who knows what it means to 'give' for his country. One person speaking at an event for the Israeli private security industry spoke about the traits of a 'security guard' and emphasized that 'military service is very important for the *personality* of a person' (Interview 6, emphasis added). This is a good example of how military skills are often evaluated as 'personality enhancing'. I suggest that this use of military capital is related to a specific idea about good citizenship in a militarized context. An Israeli security manager working in a Kenyan shopping mall spoke passionately about the influence of military experience:

It is different than in the US or other places. In the US, military [service] is not mandatory, but in Israel it is. When I was in the military, I faced different things; you become older sooner. Most Israelis are therefore wiser in life; you have life experience. You experience security as kids; you learn about it from your parents, about looking out for suspicious people. There is the security thought. Afterwards you go into the military. There you become disciplined; you become patriotic. You are experienced even if you are very young. You are born into it. (Interview 7)

In combination with having been brought up in Israel, a place that has experienced much violence and terror, military service is very influential according to these security professionals, but not in the way one would necessarily expect. A security trainer at a security college in central Israel agreed. He emphasized that the most important issue here, also distinguishing it from other security concepts elsewhere, is to have a specific mentality or 'way of thinking' (Interview 3). There is a strong feeling that this is specific to Israeli professionals, who, unlike those in other countries, put their lives on the line. Israelis are thought to be 'raised' in this way and thus socialized to do anything for the security of others.

We thus see how important the military past is for these former servicemen, but interestingly not in terms of military skills. This importance is rather focused on discipline, personality and having a specific mentality, and relates to notions of good citizenship gained by serving in the military and showing commitment to the state's endeavours and values. This points to a 'regular' kind of militarized actor who benefits from military capital in a classical sense, which is also the case in the next example that deals with nostalgia.

After having organized and taught a course on Israeli security in cooperation with a private security college, one trainer conveyed to me over coffee that 'being there [at the college, with other trainers] really reminded [him] of the military' (Interview 2). During the course and while talking to this trainer on other occasions, I noticed that his speech was filled with nostalgia about 'back then', and how being around other Israeli security professionals who spoke 'the same language' seemed to allow him to relive something of the comradeship he had known during his days of military service. I witnessed comparable emotions at security events in Israel, where security professionals who knew each other from their military careers treated one another as 'buddies' and called each other by nicknames that were remnants from those days.

Such feelings of nostalgia for past days in the military, I suggest, are a way for private security professionals to identify with that institution. Standing outside the military establishment, they still have a strong emotional bond to it that goes beyond commercial goals. Nevertheless, they also need to form their own distinct professional identity in order to confirm their new societal position and establish that they have added value in a context that respects the military so highly. In the next subsection, I show how security actors' differentiation from the military points to a new sort of remilitarized actor who challenges the constraints of the classical workings of military capital in Israeli society and as such configures it.

### *Differentiation from the military: Skilled professionals*

One way in which private security professionals distance themselves from the military institution is by using a 'common language' that is not used in the military. One professional spoke of a 'sheet of music' that everyone knows and recognizes (Interview 2); they use a particular terminology concerning procedures, risks and modes of operation. An important concept, for example, is the 'DAPA' or MO (*modus operandi*) of the enemy, a concept that professionals use in all security functions. Another saying I came across time and again was the idea of the fisherman and the hunter. Within this construction, the Israeli security agent is a hunter; he is ready at all times, focused, and will attack when needed. Other security agents, often from other countries such as European and African states, are perceived as fishermen: they will sit and wait for something to happen, and only then spring into action. Using such concepts and sayings creates a sense of community among private security professionals and sets them apart from their military counterparts in terms of language and modes of operation.

Besides language, security professionals place an emphasis on the differences in skills between military and security personnel. As shown earlier, professionals state that a military background is crucial for becoming a security guard or specialist. Nevertheless, actual practical skills are not part of this discourse, and this lies at the heart of the perceived differences.

To illustrate the difference between what soldiers in the military can do and what are important skills for a security guard, one senior security trainer told a group of foreign student-clients about a serious event within the aviation industry. He spoke to the fascinated group about an Israeli carrier that was waiting at an airport in Cyprus in the early 1970s. Even then, there was already strict security on Israeli flights due to multiple hijackings, and the trainer gave the group the profiles of the security guards on duty. One guard had served in the IDF without much combat experience and almost did not pass the guards' training at all. The second guard came from a very prestigious special combat unit and had served as an officer; he had had 'many engagements with the enemy', was very fit and passed his guards' training easily. The security trainer used this example to show how a military background and the supposed associated skills are not necessarily relevant for good security work, because in practice, when terrorists attacked the airplane in Cyprus, the first guard had acted swiftly and with confidence, while the second one, with all his military capital, had failed miserably and blacked out. With this example, the trainer attempted to show that a military background can be important but is not necessarily practical for security work, which can be much more demanding (Interview 3).

Differentiating between the importance of military service and crucial security skills, private security trainers emphasize issues of a practical nature (see also Higate, 2015). One example is the different use of weapons and shooting ranges. In private security work, one needs to know how to use short weapons (such as handguns), while these are hardly ever used by the military and (former) soldiers, who therefore lack such skills. Furthermore, the shooting range is short in the case of private security work, where a threat can be waiting in the middle of a (civilian) crowd, whereas soldiers in the military learn to shoot from a much longer range. Another skill set that private security professionals distinguish as typical for their work relates to their speed of operation: soldiers work slowly and can take cover, while security guards need to act very quickly. As one trainer said while moving quickly through the classroom: 'in security you will be surprised, you have to be ready in a second ... in the military, you initiate, you engage. Different mind-set, [in security work] you are ready, adrenaline' (Interview 3).

From these examples, it becomes clear that these professionals draw a clear distinction between their security skills and their military expertise, emphasizing the superior nature of the former. They frame security work as being more difficult and demanding, pointing to a way of framing

their professionalism as valuable in relation to the military ideal, and work to reconfigure existing military capital to include it.

A further discursive strategy of differentiation between private security and military work that I found is the notion of the lone fighter versus working in a team or group. Security trainers emphasize that in the military soldiers work in groups where everyone has his own role and responsibility, whereas in private security every security guard is on his own and is expected to take complete responsibility. One security professional wrote in his booklet *Israeli Security Concepts* about the 'security warrior' who is 'ready and willing to counter violence and aggression with a greater level of violence and aggression' – one needs to 'prevent and deter' (Machine, 2014: 7). Another security trainer spoke about the 'spirit of the fighter' to indicate the state of mind that a good security guard needs (Interview 8). The ideas of the 'warrior' and the 'fighter' are of course closely related to what we imagine a good soldier to be, but they are used here to emphasize the individual power that a security guard must have and the fact that this requires many more skills than those of a soldier.

The security trainers I spoke to emphasized the specific skills of a security agent as 'one against the rest'. A security agent, they repeated again and again, has to operate as though he were alone, even though most agents also work in a group. As one trainer explained, '[when something happens] everyone engages. Also when you are in a group, you think as if you are the only one! Fight like you are the only one who understands the situation. First fight (then think)'. He continued to explain: 'we fight on 100%, then think about "later". Everything is on you [as a private security officer]. This strategy has helped Israel' (Interview 3). This idea differs from soldiering experiences that are based on the idea of working together as a unit, where everyone gives the other backing. This idea gives the 'lone fighter' or 'security warrior' a very heroic aura of one against all (enemies).

A final issue that came up time and again when security professionals discussed the limitations of the military concerns the different threats that soldiers and security guards can face. One of these was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a very one-dimensional enemy figure, often just called 'the enemy', 'the bad guy' or 'the terrorist'. One trainer even told me that he did not need to know what kind of 'bad guy' it was, be it criminal or terrorist, since the procedures are the same (Interview 1). For security guards the idea of the terrorist is very important, but it seems, especially when communicating Israeli security skills to a wider (foreign) audience, that the same tactics are applicable to all kinds of situations. The enemy is presented as an unproblematic category, supposedly clear to everyone.

To explain the vast disparity between the experiences of threats by soldiers and security guards, the different context in which each work was mentioned. While the soldier, it is said, will find himself in situations of combat during which 'the enemy' is very clearly recognizable, the security guard must deal with much more ambivalent and unclear situations within the civil arena. Most security trainers believe that the main threat for the security guard (at least within Israel) is the terrorist. Such a terrorist could be anyone and will hide among the masses. The difficulty for a security guard as opposed to a soldier is the lack of rules of engagement and the immense risk for civilians: 'when you are in "enemy territory"', one security trainer said, 'the population is different.... When you are a security guard, you have to deal with a civilian population' (Interview 3).<sup>7</sup>

Related to these threats was also the role of the security guard as perceived by 'the enemy'. In the logic of security professionals, a security guard would never be the target of a terrorist or other kind of attacker: as security guards, they protect others who are the target. As one trainer put it, 'the target of a terrorist is everyone but security!' (Interview 3). On the other hand, as a soldier you are the target yourself, as you, supposedly, stand vis-à-vis enemy soldiers aiming to kill you. A final related issue was described by the same trainer, who said that 'the enemy uses all the weapons they

can ... [and] in a civil context have the advantage. Security personnel have much fewer weapons [than soldiers]' (Interview 3).

All of these ideas, which show the urgency and importance of security work, are, I argue, part of an effort to frame private security professionals as offering unique skills and as being worthy of a special space in Israeli society, not only as former military professionals, but as deserving of status in their own right. While their past military experience remains valuable, by emphasizing their unique security skills as additional capital, these actors become remilitarized as they shift from the military into the private security sphere.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have offered insights into the relationship between Israeli private security professionals and the Israeli military. On the one hand, private security professionals speak warmly about the military and the importance of having a military background, while on the other they actively make a distinction between their own profession and the military. In a militarist context that does not make a distinction between public and private security logics. Security professionals, through identity work, (re)negotiate this relationship using (discursive) practices of identification and differentiation in which they frame their worthiness for Israel as a nation under threat by emphasizing their unique, superior skill set beyond their military background. Thus, by emphasizing the importance of military experience, in combination with their professional security skills, they reconfigure the workings of military capital in the Israeli context.

These insights are important as they take us beyond the idea of the blurring of public and private spheres in a plural security landscape to see the ways in which this reality is experienced and reacted on by private security professionals. We see how a different kind of militarism emerges when security skills are negotiated by security professionals as part of the workings of military capital in society. Security can then become a driving force in the construction of a new kind of militarism within militarist societies in which security skills are becoming increasingly important.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the editors of this special issue, Maria Stern and Anna Stavrianakis, for their support and patience. I also want to thank the other authors in this issue for their feedback during the workshop in Gothenburg. Finally, I want to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback.

## Funding

This research was funded by an ERC Starting Grant (337974), titled 'Transforming Citizenship Through Hybrid Governance: The Impacts of Public–Private Security Assemblages'.

## Notes

1. It is important to note that this is actively avoided when dealing with customers who are less 'charmed' by dealing with an Israeli company. In these cases, the 'Israeli connection' is hidden from public view.
2. Anthropologists use the terms 'emic' and 'etic' to distinguish between the way in which research participants use concepts and the way in which the researcher uses them in his or her analysis.
3. Orthodox Jews were exempted from military service for many years but are now gradually being drafted; see Kershner (2017).
4. Such 'students' participating in private security courses are in reality potential clients.
5. In comparison with other countries, the police in Israel have a relatively low status, and accordingly I do not include them here.

6. Many international anti-militarization groups oppose such exchanges. See, for example, *Global Research* (2014) and *Occupy Observations* (2014).
7. The way in which the enemy is portrayed by these professionals is remarkable, as Israeli soldiers have been dealing with civilians and asymmetrical warfare for more than a decade.

## References

- Abrahamsen R and Williams MC (2007) Securing the city: Private security companies and non-state authority in global governance. *International Relations* 21(2): 237–253.
- Åhäll L (2016) The dance of militarisation: A feminist security studies take on ‘the political’. *Critical Studies on Security* 4(2): 154–168.
- Ben-Ari E (1998) *Mastering Soldiers: Conflict, Emotions, and the Enemy in an Israeli Military Unit*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Ben-Eliezer U (1998) *The Making of Israeli Militarism*. Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Berndtsson J (2011) Security professionals for hire: Exploring the many faces of private security expertise. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40(2): 303–320.
- Bourdieu P (2002) The forms of capital. In: Woosley Biggart N (ed.) *Readings in Economic Sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 280–291.
- Christensen MM (2017) Shadow soldiering: Shifting constellations and permeable boundaries in ‘private’ security contracting. *Conflict and Society: Advances in Research* 3(1): 24–41.
- Cohen S (1997) *The Scroll or the Sword? Dilemmas of Religion and Military Service in Israel*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Diphorn T and Grassiani E (2016) Securitizing capital: A processual-relational approach to pluralized security. *Theoretical Criminology* 20(4): 430–446.
- Dupont B (2014) Private security regimes: Conceptualizing the forces that shape the private delivery of security. *Theoretical Criminology* 18(3): 263–281.
- Eastwood J (2018) Rethinking militarism as ideology: The critique of violence after security. *Security Dialogue* 49(1–2): 44–56.
- Global Research* (2014) US police get ‘anti-terror training’ in Israel on privately funded trips. 23 September. Available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/us-police-get-anti-terror-training-in-israel-on-privately-funded-trips/5403801> (accessed 16 November 2017).
- Grassiani E (2013) *Soldiering Under Occupation: Processes of Numbing Among Israeli Soldiers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Grassiani E (2016) Commercialised occupation skills: Israeli security experience as an international brand. In: Lees M and Wittendorp S (eds) *Security/Mobility: Politics of Movement*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 57–73.
- Henry M (2015) Parades, parties and pests: Contradictions of everyday life in peacekeeping economies. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 9(3): 372–390.
- Higate P (2011) ‘Cowboys and professionals’: The politics of identity work in the private and military security company. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40(2): 321–341.
- Higate P (2015) From ‘squaddie’ to ‘bodyguard’: Towards a remilitarized agency? In: Hansson S, Hellberg S and Stern M (eds) *Studying the Agency of Being Governed*. London: Routledge, 150–166.
- Joachim J and Schneiker A (2014) All for one and one in all: Private military security companies as soldiers, business managers and humanitarians. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 27(2): 246–267.
- Kanaane R (2008) *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kershner I (2017) Israel’s military exemption for ultra-Orthodox is ruled unconstitutional. *New York Times*, 12 September. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/middleeast/israel-ultra-orthodox-military.html?mcubz=1> (accessed 17 September 2017).
- Kimmerling B (1993) Patterns of militarism in Israel. *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 34(2): 196–223.

- Konopinski N (2014) Borderline temporalities and security anticipations: Standing guard in Tel Aviv. *Etnofoor* 26(1): 59–80.
- Krahmann E (2005) Security governance and networks: New theoretical perspectives in transatlantic security. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18(1): 15–30.
- Kruck A and Spencer A (2013) Contested stories of commercial security: Self- and media narratives of private military and security companies. *Critical Studies on Security* 1(3): 326–346.
- Kuntsman A and Stein R (2015) *Digital Militarism: Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Levy Y (2003) Social convertibility and militarism: Evaluations of the development of military–society relations in Israel in the early 2000s. *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 31(1): 71–96.
- Levy Y (2007) *Israel's Materialist Militarism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Levy Y, Lomsky-Feder E and Harel N (2012) From 'obligatory militarism' to 'contractual militarism': Competing models of citizenship. *Israel Studies* 12(1): 127–148.
- Loader I and Walker N (2001) Policing as a public good: Reconstituting the connections between policing and the state. *Theoretical Criminology* 5(1): 9–35.
- Lomsky-Feder E and Ben-Ari E (2012) *The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Lomsky-Feder E and Rapoport T (2003) Juggling models of masculinity: Russian-Jewish immigrants in the Israeli army. *Sociological Inquiry* 73(1): 114–137.
- Lomsky-Feder E and Sasson-Levy O (2018) *Women Soldiers and Citizenship in Israel: Gendered Encounters with the State*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Machine G (2014) *Israeli Security Concepts: A Comprehensive Guide for Selecting, Training, and Deploying a Security Team for Installation and Personnel Protection*. Miami, FL: Garret Machine.
- Maringira G (2015) Militarised minds: The lives of ex-combatants in South Africa. *Sociology* 49(1): 72–87.
- Maringira G, Gibson D and Richters A (2015) 'It's in my blood': The military habitus of former Zimbabwean soldiers in exile in South Africa. *Armed Forces & Society* 41(1): 23–42.
- Neocleous M and Rigakos GS (2011) Anti-security: A declaration. In: Neocleous M and Rigakos GS (eds) *Anti-Security*. Ottawa: Red Quill Books, 15–21.
- Occupy Observations (2014) How Israel helped train NYPD, who then attacked Occupy. 28 July. Available at: <http://occupyobservations.blogspot.nl/2014/07/how-israel-helped-train-nypd-who-then.html> (accessed 24 June 2017).
- Ochs J (2011) *Security and Suspicion: An Ethnography of Everyday Life in Israel*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ronen Y (2010) Israel: The use and regulation of private military and security companies in situations of armed conflict. Priv-War Report, Israel, 1 September. Available at: [http://psm.du.edu/media/documents/reports\\_and\\_stats/think\\_tanks/privwar\\_national-report\\_ronen.pdf](http://psm.du.edu/media/documents/reports_and_stats/think_tanks/privwar_national-report_ronen.pdf) (accessed 14 November 2017).
- Shearing C and Wood J (2003) Nodal governance, democracy, and the new 'denizens'. *Journal of Law and Society* 30(3): 400–419.
- Sheffer G and Barak O (2013) *Israel's Security Networks: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stavrianakis A and Selby J (2013) Militarism and international relations in the 21st century. In: Stavrianakis A and Selby J (eds) *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security, Theory*. London: Routledge, 3–18.
- Swed O and Butler JS (2015) Military capital in the Israeli hi-tech industry. *Armed Forces & Society* 41(1): 123–141.
- Watson TJ (2008) Managing identity: Identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances. *Organization* 15(1): 121–143.
- White A (2011) The new political economy of private security. *Theoretical Criminology* 16(1): 85–101.
- Wibben ATR (2018) Why we need to study (US) militarism: A critical feminist lens. *Security Dialogue* 49(1–2): 136–148.

### Interviews cited

1. Independent security trainer and consultant, Kfar Saba, Israel, 22 June 2015.
2. Security trainer during security seminar in various locations in Israel, 9–14 May 2015.
3. Security trainer, IMI College (Israeli Military Industries), during security seminar, undisclosed location, Israel, 9–14 May 2015.
4. Owner of security company and security consultant, Nairobi, Kenya, 21 April 2015.
5. Deputy managing director, Kenyan security company, Nairobi, Kenya, 30 April 2015.
6. Lawyer speaking at the Israeli Security and Defence week, Tel Aviv, 19 May 2015.
7. Security manager, shopping mall, Nairobi, Kenya, 24 April 2015.
8. Krav Maga trainer, IMI College (Israeli Military Industries), during security seminar, undisclosed location, Israel, 9–14 May 2015.

Erella Grassiani is an Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam. Her current research is part of a wider project on privatization and globalization of security with a specific focus on Israel and security mobilities (SECURCIT), and it traces the flows of the (Israeli) security industry worldwide and looks at the ways in which cultural ideas, technologies and consultants move around globally. She is the author of *Soldiering Under Occupation: Processes of Numbing Among Israeli Soldiers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada* (Berghahn Books, 2013). Email: e.grassiani@uva.nl.