Mobility through Self-Defined Expertise

Israeli Security from the Occupation to Kenya

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Civil–Military Entanglements

Anthropological Perspectives

Edited by
Birgitte Refslund Sørensen and Eyal Ben-Ari
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Introduction

On Saturday, 18 July 2016, the Westgate shopping mall, which featured in international headlines after the bloody attack by members of Al Shabaab in 2013, was reopened. A newspaper covering the opening reports: “IRG, Westgate Is the safest mall in Nairobi today. Manager Director Haim Cohen assiduously. ‘Our lives trained the mall’s security force. We know how to recognize danger, we don’t take it seriously,’ Cohen said” (Zirulnick 2015).

This utterance by Cohen is an insightful example of how the many Israeli security professionals abroad frame their work as the experts in the field. However, the...
curity actors use ideas of a specific "Israeli-ness" and "African-ness" to create a space in which a need for "Israeli security expertise" and the special, "superior" characteristics of this knowledge and technologies reinforce each other.

Importantly, I will contextualize this "security mobility" by paying special attention to the intimate relationship between the global and mobile security industry and the fact that Israel is a highly militarized society and a state that has been conducting a military occupation for over fifty years. This causes a civil-military entangling of different scales; the first within Israel, where military and (private) security actors are almost interchangeable as they move in and out of public and commercial positions. On an international scale, as I will show in this chapter, the military knowledge, experience, and militarist logic Israeli security professionals export becomes entangled with the private security industry as part of the global military industrial complex. These civil-military entanglements, furthermore, work in two directions; the military background of security professionals helps them in their commercial efforts, while the global security industry, as part of the military-industrial complex, strengthens the reputation of Israeli military products and, simultaneously, its military engagements.

This work feeds into the work on other kinds of "security circulations" using "Security" as an Enric and Etic Term. "Security," as has also been argued by Neocleous and Rigakos (2011), often hides the many asymmetrical power relations that stand behind it, the human rights violations that are done in its name, and its selective character. "Security" is not neutral and not something necessarily good (for all). "Security," furthermore, Neocleous and Rigakos (2011: 20) write, "alienates us from solutions that are naturally social and forces us to speak the language of state rationality, corporate interest and individual egoism." I largely agree with their statement and hence believe it to be important to explain how I intend to use the term here.

In the Israeli context, security has become an almost sacred concept or a security fetish (Neocleous 2007), which dictates that you can never products abroad as part of a global security market. Israel makes for an interesting and telling case here, as its brand seems to pay off: Israel is successfully selling its products worldwide, using its military experience as capital, and is internationally seen as a major player in the security industry. Besides its successful branding, Israel invests heavily in military technologies that are later sold to foreign parties, and it has a big pool of retired military specialists who are eager to take their knowledge into the private sphere. As mentioned before, these civil-military entanglements, which go from the national to the global, make Israel quite unique and a good case to show the ways security expertise can be framed and how it mobilizes security technologies and knowledge.

I will examine the self-proclaimed expertise of these security professionals and the way they frame their knowledge and skills as authoritative, efficient, and "authentic" vis-à-vis an incompetent "Other." Through this focus I hope to shed light on the ways technologies and ideologies become mobile, and how specific, militarized ways of thinking and acting become entangled with the global security industry and civilian surroundings far away from where they were developed.

I will begin this chapter by briefly explaining my use of the concept of "security," together with my methods, and continue to discuss the social and political context of the phenomenon I am discussing. I will elaborate here on processes of militarization, the Occupation, and the resulting production of a pool of security professionals. I will then go on to look at the ways these professionals become mobile through the construction of a militarized, colonial expert discourse that is infused with logics of "Israeli-ness" and "African-ness," in order to understand more deeply how elements of militarization became entangled within the global security industry.
have enough of it. In her work, Juliana Ochs (2011: 2) shows the ways in which the concept of security has been maintained and the way in which the state and society have internalized ideas of security. Wars have taken place in the region, and there is a sense that any conflict is a war and that the internal processes within the military and within Israeli society, these studies have rarely been outspokenly critical of Israel's occupation, leaving a distinct political point of view outside of their analysis. Here I have chosen to incorporate such a political view and to analyze Israeli society as context for the security industry with distinct colonial dimensions. Zureik et al. (2010) and Zureik (1979; Gregory 2004) point out the ways in which conflict and occupation have shaped the security industry. This frame of analysis will emphasize the significant power differences that exist between Israelis and Palestinians and the way the colonial activities of Israel give way to an array of security technologies and self-proclaimed expertise to be sold elsewhere. Analyzing Israel as such means to critically look at its ongoing military occupation of the Palestinian territories. Rigakos (2011) defines a settler colonialist state as being wrapped up in a settler enterprise, which means it occupies and dispossesses land of a people who were already living on this land, tries to forcibly pacify this local people, and beats down any possible resistance. Israel, when looking at its activities in the Occupied Territories, definitely fits this definition. Israel has maintained a military occupation in Palestinian territory since 1967. While it can be argued that the colonial enterprise of Israel started with the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 and even before, for our purposes I will focus on the occupation and settlement activities outside of the green line, as it is in these Occupied Territories and in the "fight against terror" that most technologies, skillsets, and knowledge have been acquired and developed (see also Graham 2011; Klein 2007).

Since its creation, Israel has fought many wars and has been seen by the international world and in particular by itself as the victim of the aggressive Arab world surrounding it. Always on the defense, Israel constructed an image of itself as a David fighting a Goliath, and used this image to legitimize its growing defense and security industry. This siege mentality that has taken hold of the state and society has only grown in recent decades. Since the first Intifada in the late 1980s and the suicide attacks following the defeat of the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, Israeli society has grown increasingly obsessed with its security and with warding off any threat, real or imagined (Ochs 2011). Israel's internal civil-military relations are crucial here. As stated before, the military itself and processes of militarization play an enormous role in society. Not only are all Jewish Israelis conscripted into the military, but society itself is drenched with "things military," with ideas about the military as the most moral and righteous in the world and about the "good soldier" who, after service, becomes a "good citizen." Children in schools are taught about the military and learn about soldiers protecting them at the "borders" (which are often not recognized physical borders in the Occupied Territories). Much has been written about this militarization...
The occupation of the Palestinian Territories, which was the result of the Six Day War in 1967, is often not called as such in mainstream Israeli media and society. People speak about "the territories" or "Judea and Samaria," referring to the Biblical term for the region. The main message in the mainstream public debate is that Palestinians are a threat to Israel's security and that they should be controlled and separated from the Israelis. Human rights violations that have been the result of this occupation, violence and humiliation at checkpoints and during raids for example (Grassiani 2013), are not problematized within this discourse, if they are raised at all. When one looks at how this occupation materializes, one can't miss it. The security and skills abroad are also products of this militarized society. They export knowledge and technologies developed in military settings into the global civil and commercial realm. I will elaborate on this below.

The Occupation and the Security Industry

The occupation of the Palestinian Territories, which was the result of the Six Day War in 1967, is often not called as such in mainstream Israeli media and society. People speak about "the territories" or "Judea and Samaria," referring to the Biblical term for the region. The main message in the mainstream public debate is that Palestinians are a threat to Israel's security and that they should be controlled and separated from the Israelis. Human rights violations that have been the result of this occupation, violence and humiliation at checkpoints and during raids for example (Grassiani 2013), are not problematized within this discourse, if they are raised at all. When one looks at how this occupation materializes, one can't miss it. The security and skills abroad are also products of this militarized society. They export knowledge and technologies developed in military settings into the global civil and commercial realm. I will elaborate on this below.

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Sheller and Urry (2006: 207) write, “There are places and technologies that enhance the mobility of some peoples and places and heighten the immobility of others, especially as they try to cross borders.” I want to move beyond this focus on the mobility of people while security technologies are seen as countering movement, and focus instead on the very mobility of security expertise and technologies. This mobility, I argue here, is framed through different logics used by members of the Israeli security industry, and I hope to contribute to the mobilities debate by tracing the movement of technology also when not related directly to migration and border security. Here I argue that a discourse of expertise makes the mobility of security technologies, actors, and knowledge possible by making technology attractive or engaging for the client, the “lay” Other who is drenched with notions of colonial security industry and the “undeveloped, undisciplined, black Kenyan” becomes apparent, as Nairobi is a hub for Israeli security activities. Israeli and Kenya have had diplomatic ties since 1963, when then prime minister of Israel Golda Meir met with Kenyatta, Kenya’s prime minister, and they agreed to formalize these ties and to enter in a developmental program. This timing was planned under the heading of diplomatic ties and agricultural and development work, security and military ties are at the heart of it (Melman 2009; Sadeh 2016). Over the years Kenya has become a major trading partner for Israel, and November 2018 it signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Israel and “educating” the needy in Kenya, there is also room for security. 

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Mobility through Self-Defined Expertise

relationships cooled in reaction to the 1973 Yom Kippur war, they were picked up again soon and were formalized in 1988. Security and defense cooperation became especially strong after the attacks on Israeli targets in Mombasa in 2002. An Israeli-owned hotel was attacked, and there was an attempt to shoot an Israeli low-cost airplane out of the sky. Israel worked intensively with Kenya in the aftermath of these attacks as the Israeli intelligence service Mossad was sent to find the perpetrators (“Mossad Hunts Terror Leaders” 2002).

In the more contemporary context of the “fight against terror,” Israel has become a “natural” partner for Kenya in fighting against fundamentalist Islam. Recently (November 2017), Prime Minister Netanyahu undertook a trip to the African continent, including Kenya, bringing many businesspeople with him, among them representatives of big players in the Israeli security industry. While such trips (former Foreign Minister Lieberman already visited the continent twice, in 2009 and in 2014) are planned under the heading of diplomatic ties and agricultural and development work, security and military ties are at the heart of it (b) 2016). Furthermore, PM Netanyahu has pledged to help Kenya with the building of the wall between that country and Somalia (Namunane 2016). Comparisons with the wall in the Occupied Territories are easily made here.

This intense security cooperation was again in the media headlines after the attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, mentioned before, as rumors went around about “Israeli forces” that helped the Kenyans to end the siege. Even though my investigation has not given me any evidence for this involvement, the mythical status of Israel helping out as experts on anti-terrorism persists and is very telling. Over the years Kenya has become a major trading partner for Israel, and in November 2018 it signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Israel aimed toward improving this partnership considerably (Kondo 2018). Much of this trade is agricultural. While Israel advertises the agricultural or economic empowerment projects under MASHAV, Israel’s Agency for Development Cooperation, within this development discourse of “helping” and “educating” the needy in Kenya, there is also room for security. Israel frames itself as an expert, more knowledgeable partner who comes to help its friend in need, and offers training, expertise, and equipment
Below I will indicate how we can analyze such discourse of expertise anthropologically in order to understand its effects on the mobility of these security goods.

**Expertise: Israeli Security Actors in Kenya**

**Thinking about Experts**

Dominic Boyer (2008: 39) defines the expert as “an actor who has developed skills in, semiotic-epistemic competence for, and attentional concern with, some sphere or practical activity.” He starts out from the idea of “the expert” to investigate how the anthropologist should go about investigating him/her. Here, however, I am interested in looking at the way expertise comes into being through the use of distinct discourses. I am less interested in knowing whether someone is or is not a “real” expert, but much as I want to understand the ways expertise is performed and as much as I want to understand “knowing,” but also about “doing.” Expertise is thus not only about “knowing,” but also about “becom(ing)” intimate with culturally valuable things that are relatively inaccessible or illegible to laypeople, and about self-identifying as an expert, or even “acting,” and about “becom[ing] intimate with . . . culturally ing” or even “acting,” and about “becom[ing] intimate with . . . culturally valuable things that are relatively inaccessible or illegible to laypeople” (Carr 2010). Thus the ways in which expertise is embodied and performed, is made up of Israeli “integration” firms that sell complete security systems (such as the Israeli Security Agency, ISA) or worked for private security companies. Interestingly, most told me a common story; after their military service they in fact wanted to get away from things “security,” but they “fell into” this work through circumstances. Of course, as we have already noted before, these circumstances are not random. Men finishing (combat) military duty, especially in the rank of officer or even higher, have a big chance of being recruited into the ISA or to find a job in the security sector straight after their service, using their military capital (Grassiani 2017). We could analyze their military service as an apprenticeship, in which these men have learned not only skills, but also specific codes and jargon that distinguish them from others who are lacking this background (Carr 2010: 20).

However, even though this aspect of their biographies is comparable, a distinction can be made. These security actors can be largely divided into two kinds; employees of Israeli companies who work in Kenya and then leave again, and Israelis who live and work in Kenya and who own or work for a local security company (often Israeli-owned). The first group is made up of Israeli “integrator” firms that sell complete security systems. These companies are registered in Israel and compete in tenders of the Kenyan government, for example, or of electricity/energy companies. Once they receive the job, they come in with Israeli personnel who stay in Kenya for months, sometimes years, to finalize the project. They offer a “turnkey” solution, meaning that they bring in all different aspects of technologies and services to the client, who then only needs to “turn the key” and ignore the “engine.”

An example of such a company is company X. A big contract that was given to this company was for a project at the Jomo Kenyatta International
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Airport in Nairobi (JKIA). An employee of company X whom I had con­
tacted already in Israel invited me to come to their office at the airport. I
took a taxi and undertook the forty-minute to two-hour-long journey (de­
was still messy from construction and setting up new systems. Several
employees were working behind the computer (some Israeli, some not)
and behind them a majestic view could be seen, not only of the tarmac, but
also of Nairobi National Park, where, as the employees told me, you could
see the giraffes walking by while sitting behind your desk. The job that
this Israeli company came to do at JKIA was setting up all security systems
that was offered by the Kenyan Airport Authority with a contract worth
of US$6 million. Besides setting up an elaborate technological advanced
security system, they also assisted with the hiring of local personnel, who
were to man the control room. An Israeli trainer who was flown in from
Israel performed the training of these personnel.

The second group of Israeli security actors is more diverse. Within
this group one can find individual consultants who work with local and
managers at specific sites, such as shopping malls. They work with lo­
cal security companies, train members of the Kenyan police forces, and
provide security consultancy for projects such as the renewed Westgate
shopping mall and the Mombasa port. Often they stay in contact through
an informal network of security professionals and Israelis living abroad.
These consultants typically had lived in Nairobi for years, some even de­
cades. They know the local context well and have had relationships with
the local security industry as well.

An example of such a consultant was A, a relatively young Israeli man
who, after working for several years in a variety of functions for the Israeli
Security Agency (ISA), came to Nairobi. By chance he was asked to manage
the security of one of Nairobi's shopping malls, and hence his consulting
career began. He admitted he was asked because he was Israeli and thus
was marked as a "security expert." It took some time to gain his trust, as he
was quite suspicious, but once we were sitting in his office he opened up
and became clearer by looking beyond those market forces to un­
derstand how its producers frame their expertise and identify as experts.
Their appeal and imagined and performed expertise in light of a supposed
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Israeli-ness: A Zionist, Colonial Logic

Israeli security experts working in Kenya frame their expertise first by emphasizing a specific “Israeli-ness,” which, I argue, consists of two main ideas. The first one is related to the Israeli experience in defense and security and Israel’s vast experience with fighting terror, thus using historical notions of experience and victimhood related to Israel’s past. The second idea with which security professionals explain Israeli presence and their own expertise in Kenya has to do with a specific Israeli style of working, of being able to improvise, get things done, think “outside of the box.” Both ideas are thus part of the way expertise is “performed” and framed to the outside world.

When I asked the employees (both in Israel and in Nairobi) about what makes their systems and work typically Israeli, they answered almost unanimously that it was related to “where we come from,” or “our reality.” Being an Israeli myself, most interviewees looked at me in a way that said something like “seriously… do you know why?” This idea of Israelis being superior in the “security business” because of their vast experience with terror and with many enemies around is taken for granted completely, and it was hard for me to even ask people to verbalize it. When they did, they emphasized a certain reality that “we Israelis” live in, and have lived in for decades. Usually they uttered “unfortunately” afterwards to emphasize it was not out of their hands: Israel was attacked and Israelis could not but defend themselves. Again, the political context of the occupation is absent in these explanations. One consultant in Nairobi told me, “It is about… being ‘smart’—Jews who came to Israel were smart, educated, went through a lot of wars and won most of them. This gave them experience to become experts in security.” In his perception, taking it all the way back to the fight for independence strengthens his argument; as another consultant said, “Israel has been fighting terror for years. If you live in Israel this is what you have to do.” Another added, “We [Israelis] have had bitter experience; that is why we know so much.” The Israeli as a security and anti-terror expert (against his own) surprised many. On the other hand, it is all about the way they work.

One consultant told me the following in a comparison to the way U.S. consultants would work in Kenya: “Israelis say what they want, in the U.S. they are nice… to connect. Israelis show confidence, are assertive, take it or leave it, [they] come from the point of view: ‘we know everything.’ Marketing is not needed.” The person described here is thus confident in his skills and knows that by only mentioning where he comes from, he can sell those skills with ease. “Israeli security experience” becomes an actual brand that sells itself (Grassiani 2017).

Another consultant in Nairobi phrased it as follows: “Israel has experience, we live it, we work hard, [we] are creative, loyal to the working place.” Yet another one told me that there is more “caring” (ekhatiut) and he really felt “part of the company” (adding that he felt this way even though it was not his). It is all about a specific “way of thinking, speed, action, thinking ahead.” Often this style of working is then compared to the way the Other, in this case the Kenyan, is working. One security professional told me, “What a local does in a week I can do in an hour. [To] think ahead, they [Kenyans] can’t do two things at once. [These are] different standards. The question is how to bring people to this standard.”

I will get into this comparison in the next paragraphs, but for now I want to underscore the “educational” argument that is brought to the fore here: this consultant is wondering how one could bring the high (Israeli) security: “you experience security as kids, you learn about it from your parents, about looking out for suspicious people… there is the security thought,” said one consultant. He continued: “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.” Here we see a notion of passiveness that also emphasizes the inevitability of Israel’s situation and its negative relations with its neighbors, experiences with terror and attacks.

This notion, however, is compensated by a more active and related idea that emphasizes a specific Israeli working style and attitude. Closely related to what Tamar Katriel (1986) has called “talking straight, dugri speech,” this style consists of a direct, to-the-point approach, hard work, and an ability to improvise and think outside of the box. In relation to this, Senn and Singer (2009) have written about the “chutzpah” of Israeli entrepreneurs in the “Start-Up” world, which could be defined as a specific confidence, “gall, brazen nerve, effrontery.” The idea is that Israelis are not afraid to say it as it is and, in taking this risk, often get much further (in business) than others. While one might expect elaborate security models to be the thing emphasized by Israelis, this particular daring working style was much more dominant in the way they framed their expertise.

One consultant told me the following in a comparison to the way U.S. consultants would work in Kenya: “Israelis say what they want, in the U.S. they are nice… try to connect. Israelis show confidence, are assertive, take it or leave it, [they] come from the point of view: ‘we know everything.’ Marketing is not needed.” The person described here is thus confident in his skills and knows that by only mentioning where he comes from, he can sell those skills with ease. “Israeli security experience” becomes an actual brand that sells itself (Grassiani 2017).

Another consultant in Nairobi phrased it as follows: “Israel has experience, we live it, we work hard, [we] are creative, loyal to the working place.” Yet another one told me that there is more “caring” (ekhatiut) and he really felt “part of the company” (adding that he felt this way even though it was not his). It is all about a specific “way of thinking, speed, action, thinking ahead.” Often this style of working is then compared to the way the Other, in this case the Kenyan, is working. One security professional told me, “What a local does in a week I can do in an hour. [To] think ahead, they [Kenyans] can’t do two things at once. [These are] different standards. The question is how to bring people to this standard.”

I will get into this comparison in the next paragraphs, but for now I want to underscore the “educational” argument that is brought to the fore here: this consultant is wondering how one could bring the high (Israeli)
standards to the Kenyans in a way that will actually stick. In the same line another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality; this another security professional said to me, "It is all about mentality;
Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed the mobility of Israeli security professionals, together with their technologies and knowledge, through their self-framed works on a local level in Israel, through the security network, and internationally through the involvement of security agents and their military capital in the global security market. By looking at the case of Kenya, a capital in the global security place that is historically connected to Israel and where the Israeli security force needs to frame their expertise through a discourse that is largely characterized by two corresponding logics. This discourse creates a space in which a need for "Israeli security expertise" and its superior characteristics reinforce each other.

The first logic consists of notions of a specific "Israeli-ness" that include a distinct Israeli working style and the "Israeli reality" as backdrop to Israel's knowledge and experience in security. The Israeli security professional is here defined as an expert who comes to the African continent to bring his knowledge to the lay Other. This lay Other comprises the second logic of "African-ness" that includes the "incompetent African" who looks at Israeli superiority in security with awe. This discourse emphasizes Israel's defense grew an experienced security workforce, and is sanitized of any reference to Palestinian suffering or the occupation in general. In order to make these claims, I chose to analyze Israel as a whole, but also the language used by the security professionals, within its militarized social context and that of the military occupation. By doing so, it is possible to recognize the relationships and entanglements between the global security industry and the specific militarized and colonial background the security professionals come from.

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