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### Mobility through Self-Defined Expertise

*Israeli Security from the Occupation to Kenya*

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# Civil–Military Entanglements

*Anthropological Perspectives*

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Edited by  
Birgitte Refslund Sørensen and Eyal Ben-Ari

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## Chapter 9

# Mobility through Self-Defined Expertise

Israeli Security from the Occupation to Kenya

Erella Grassiani

### 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, the Israeli security company hired in 2014, insists that with its overhaul, Westgate is the safest mall in Nairobi today. Managing Director Haim Cohen's team of ex-Israeli commandos has trained the mall's security personnel assiduously. 'Our life is security. The difference is not on the number of guys—we know how to recognize anything suspicious,' Cohen said. '[Before] everyone didn't take it seriously'" (Zirulnick 2015).

This utterance by Cohen is an insightful example of how the many Israeli security professionals abroad frame their work: as the Israeli expert who is all-knowing within this field due to past experience, while the local Kenyans ("everyone" in Cohen's utterance) don't seem to take security very seriously. In this chapter, I will analyze the mobility of Israeli security professionals, who export specific knowledge, skills, and technologies from Israel (and the Occupied Palestinian Territories) to Nairobi, through their self-framing as security experts. I will argue that these professionals self-identify as experts while using different logics or "discourses" that are characterized by nationalist, racist, and colonial features. Israeli secu-

Notes for this chapter begin on page 203.



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 is the existence of a close-knit security network (Sheffer and Barak 2013) 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" or "mobilities" of security workers, such as veterans in Sierra Leone who join foreign private security companies (Christensen 2017), and South African veterans joining private security companies after apartheid was abolished (Singer 2003). In these cases, military expertise is used in order to gain employment after becoming redundant as a result of political and professional changes. While these studies usually focus on lower-level agents, I will look at the ways Israeli veterans who have become businessmen use a self-definition as experts and Israeli security branding (Grassiani 2017) in their private careers.

Israel is often perceived as a security hub; the country has succeeded in many ways in framing itself as *the* place to be when one needs security solutions. This Israeli security brand (Grassiani 2017), which is largely based on military experiences and on stories of Israel's battles in the past and present, is used by Israeli security professionals worldwide. During big security fairs, knowledge, expertise, and technologies belonging to Israel's security industry is celebrated with clients from all over the world, including Asian, African, and European countries and the United States.<sup>1</sup> Instead of looking at whether Israeli security is indeed so superior to that of other countries, I will look into the ways in which security actors define and frame themselves as experts when they sell their knowledge and

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.<sup>2</sup> 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 become entangled within the global security industry.

#### *Using "Security" as an Emic 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 sacrosanct concept or a security fetish (Neocleous 2007), which dictates that you can never



have enough of it. In her work, Juliana Ochs (2011: 2) shows the ways Israelis, who often call the political situation of conflict "the security situation" (or *hamatsav habitchoni*), have internalized ideas of security. Wars are fought in its name and peace is seen as only possible if there first is security (Ochs 2011: 2). Importantly, this security is limited to the Jewish Israeli majority of society.

Here I will use this term through the ways it is used by the people I have studied: the security actors. This emic use of the concept should of course be separated from an etic one, and I will use it while not forgetting that the concept should be seen through a critical lens, as Goldstein (2010) has argued for. I will thus not take the concept of security for granted, but investigate what it means for people who use it and, in this case, sell it and analyze its use by critically examining the contexts in which it is constructed.

### Methods

This chapter is based on fieldwork in Israel and Kenya, consisting of participant observation and interviews and on the analysis of media reports (Kenyan, Israeli, and international). In both places, I have spoken to Israeli security specialists, consultants, and employees. Meeting with security professionals is not always easy as they have a tendency to be very closed and secretive. By using a snowball method, however, I managed to interview quite a few consultants and managers. When I started looking for Israelis working in security in Nairobi, it seemed at first they would be hard to find; however, very soon, with the help of my fellow researchers present in Nairobi, I found some names and stories about Israeli connections, such as the rumor, which proved to be true, of an Israeli security manager at one of Nairobi's many shopping malls. These men (they were all men, almost all between forty-five and sixty years of age), furthermore, all tended to know each other.

The fact that I am Israeli helped tremendously. The moment potential research participants learned this fact, their tone changed and their willingness to help me increased. Language also became important: the interviews I conducted with Israelis were in Hebrew, their mother tongue, which made communication and understanding each other much easier.

### Israeli Militarization, Securitization, and the Occupation

While much work on the Israeli military (e.g., Ben-Ari 1998; Levy 1998) and the "security network" (Sheffer and Barak 2013) have insightfully ana-

lyzed the internal processes within the military and within Israel's 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, Lyon, and Abu-Laban 2010; Zureik 1979; Gregory 2004). 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 settlers' 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 been maintaining 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



(Kimmerling 1993; Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999) and the way military service creates hierarchies and inequalities in society (Levy 1998). Men with an extensive military (combat) background have much more chance of climbing up the career ladder (while using their military skills) than those who have not (including women). This can be seen in commercial companies where former officers and generals continue a military-like style in managing; politicians also come from the ranks and take their military network with them. And last but definitely not least, it is very visible in the (private) security and defense industry, which Israeli generals enter after their (early) retirement. Sheffer and Barak (2013) coined the idea of the security network where military and civil spheres overlap and cannot be separated anymore. This is a crucial point: the entanglement and intense relationship between military and civil elements of society, and the blurring between the public and the private spheres. It lies at the heart of the way the security professionals I describe here self-identify as experts. They are part of this entanglement and take it to a different scale when 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 the walls, fences, cameras, military vehicles, helicopters, planes, military uniforms, weaponry, helmets, turnstiles, and communication equipment that are built, developed, and worn by the Israeli soldiers of the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces). But there is more: often we do not see all the weaponry that is used by the military, such as the Nano technologies and cyber tools that Israel develops and uses in its quest to control the Palestinian occupied population under the pretext of "security" and the defense of Israel. This has also been called a "system of pacification" (Neocleous and Rigakos 2011; see also Halper 2015).

Israel is known as a hub of high-tech development, sometimes even called "Silicon Wadi"; this image is directly connected to the Israeli mili-

tary and intelligence service (Forbes 2015). It is common knowledge, for example, that high tech companies that are looking for skilled workers eagerly recruit people who have served in the prestigious intelligence unit 8200 (Swed and Butler 2015). Military knowledge that has been developed within the context of a military occupation and has produced systems of surveillance, cyber technologies, and weapons are used in civilian context, often outside of Israel. This clearly shows how both realms, military and the civilian/commercial, become entangled with each other; not only through knowledge and technologies that move between them but also, as we shall see below, through actors who come from one realm (the military) and continue to the next (private security) while still intensely using their military networks (Sheffer and Barak 2013). Not only does the military background of these professionals help their role on an international level within the commercial world; the success of Israeli security products on the global security market also helps to legitimize Israel's military activities and occupation. The entanglements thus work in both directions.

Importantly, the Israeli security professionals who take their knowledge and skills abroad are also products of this militarized society. They are former combatants, often having served as professionals in the IDF or in the ISA (Israeli Security Agency), after which they seamlessly enter the private security market (Grassiani 2017). Using their "military capital" (Swed and Butler 2015), former military personnel become successful in the private sector while still working with military actors as well, making the distinctions between both realms, as said before, very blurry and entangled. As I will show here, this entanglement takes on an international flavor when Israeli military skills are used on the global security market.

### **Security Mobility: From Israel to Kenya**

The global mobility of this industry sheds a new light on the way anthropologists have traditionally written about mobility. Mobilities and circulations have caught the interest of anthropologists and other scholars in the last decades; see, for example, the call for a new mobility paradigm by Sheller and Urry (2006). Anthropologists in particular have been working mostly on human migration within this field. Glick Shiller and Salazar (2013), for example, have done extensive work about what they have called regimes of mobility to emphasize how mobility for some means immobility for others and the unequal power relations that are at play.

Interestingly, within these so-called mobility studies, discourses on security are seen as counter-discourses to moving, since security efforts are seen as things that cause immobility or disruption (Salazar 2014). Or as



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. I hope to contribute to the mobilities debate by tracing the movement of security logic and 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 it logical, legitimate, and attractive for the client, the "lay" Other who is in apparent need of it. The discourse that Israeli security actors in Nairobi use, then, is drenched with notions about an expert self who comes to offer his help to the unknowing Other.

Chisholm (2015: 116) alerts us to the "culture of whiteness that pervades the industry" and asks how (post)colonial histories shape the security industry of today. Here I take up this challenge to include the colonial practices of Israel when analyzing the security industry. As Graham (2010) has shown, Israeli military knowledge and technologies are not only transported into other conflicts and wars, they also can be traced back to more civilian and urban spaces as security measures. Israel, when seen as a Western state, not only exports its colonial technologies extensively to other Western countries (such as the United States and Europe), but exports them to the South as well; to "developing" countries that are thought to be in need of Israel's expertise and tools to combat their problems with crime and terror. Within this mobility, racial discourses that differentiate between the "developed, white Israeli expert" and the "undeveloped, amateur, black Kenyan" become apparent, as I will show further on.

### *The Case of Kenya*

Nairobi is a hub for Israeli security activities. Israel 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 their ties and to enter in a developmental program Israel launched to help developing countries (while still in development itself). This timing was not random; as African countries were establishing their independence, Israel was quick to create new relationships with these strategically located states. Already then, security ties were consolidated, with Israel training presidential security details and supporting the formation of the General Security Unit, a notorious paramilitary group (Otenyo 2004). After

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 Liebermann 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 (Melman 2009; Sadeh 2016). In 2011, Israel and Kenya signed a treaty to help each other in times of need against terror attacks, which has been enforced by several visits by officials to and fro.<sup>3</sup> During a meeting in July 2016, Kenyan president Kenyatta was quoted as saying that "As they have done for years, the Prime Minister and the Israeli people continue to extend invaluable support to Kenya; helping us build capacity and bolster internal and regional security" (in Namunane 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.<sup>4</sup> And 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 geared 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



(DPPS 2015). 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, as much as I want to understand the ways expertise is performed and framed. Expertise is thus not only about “knowing,” but also about “doing” 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, but also the language that is used to self-identify as an expert, are equally important to consider here. In her review of anthropological work on expertise, Carr (2010) notes that besides behavior of an individual, expertise also belongs to the domain of the institution, which gives the expert his or her legitimacy. In this light, she continues to describe apprenticeship and the acquiring of a specific “expert register,” which can be used to manifest one’s expertise. As mentioned before, she emphasizes the importance of the way expertise is acted out. Authenticity and its enactment are important here, as experts need such claims vis-à-vis “lay” people in order to establish their position. She finally shows the way expertise and the coding systems that it is made out of come to be naturalized in a way that “erase[s] the debate that inevitably went into producing them [categorical distinctions]” (Carr 2010: 26).

A security actor, then, needs to perform, act, and speak as an expert in order to be accepted as one by those who are not “in the know.” Joachim and Schneider (2014) assert that for clients in the security business, expertise or the image of expertise is of utmost importance. Berndtsson (2012), for example, explored the way a Swedish private security firm constructed its identities vis-à-vis different audiences, at times emphasizing its military competencies and at times its business image or its Swedish-ness. I will now continue to explore the ways Israeli security professionals frame themselves and perform as experts who not only bring specific knowl-

edge, but also define what products and services Kenya is in need of (Leander 2005).

### *Israelis in Kenya*

The expertise of these security professionals is framed largely in complementary ideas about the self and the Other and consists of ideas about “Israeli-ness” and a certain “African-ness.” Making their expertise “logical” and natural, I argue, makes the mobility of their services possible. By analyzing this two-tier discourse, I thus want to see how Israeli security actors, their knowledge, and technologies are framed as “authoritative” and become mobile in order to be sold abroad to a lay Other, and how this Other is portrayed as a proper “receiver.”

I will begin by mapping out the “Kenyan segment” of the Israeli security community. Importantly, all actors I spoke to had a history of military service, after which they either continued into the intelligence services (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 ignite the “engine.”

An example of such a company is company X.<sup>5</sup> A big contract that was given to this company was for a project at the Jomo Kenyatta International



Airport in Nairobi (JKIA). An employee of company X whom I had contacted 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 (depending on Nairobi traffic) and found the company in a new office, which 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 in a new wing at the airport. While we toured the wing, I saw the many cameras that were connected to the huge screens in the control room next to the offices and the access control systems that were installed. The systems they were in the process of setting up were meant to provide a "turn-key" solution for full security coverage. The Israeli company won a tender that was offered by the Kenyan Airport Authority with a contract worth over 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 international clients, but also consultants who are employed as security managers at specific sites, such as shopping malls. They work with local 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 decades. 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. He had been in Nairobi for several years and believed the work of Israelis in Nairobi's security business was crucial, as the Kenyans often could not be trusted to do the job well and to be honest (and thus not corrupt).

The knowledge and the technologies such consultants and companies brings to Kenya can be traced back directly to the "security network" (Sheffer and Barak 2013). They find their origins in the strategies of control and notions on security that are constructed in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and that are used by Israeli security and defense agencies, of which the security actors were part of. Such ideas—about who the enemy is, how the enemy should be "taken out," for example—are also deeply embedded in society. Furthermore, fences, surveillance methods, and models of facility security are copied directly from the systems of control in place in the Occupied Territories (Berda 2011; 2013). Many of the Israeli security professionals I spoke to pride themselves, for example, in the use of Israeli security models that were based on proactive security instead of "just waiting till something happens," emphasizing the difference between these approaches and the inferior "African" ones (or the absence of the latter). Their approach has been developed in Israel in response to the threats of suicide bombers and similar "surprise" attacks Israel has known for decades. These threats, as will also become clear below, are not seen within a context of the occupation, and thus the methods to counter them are also sanitized from any reference to Israel's systems of control; no mention is made of Palestinians and their hardships.

My questions for the interviewees mainly focused on the reasons they were in Kenya and how they explained their success. In the answers to these questions, two logics surfaced: one that emphasized the Israeli characteristics of the business, and another that explained the attraction of their (perceived) expertise by emphasizing "African" needs. I do not in any way perceive these logics as being objective or constant. Instead, I see them as part of the way Israeli security experts perceive their own work abroad and as part of the discourse with which they enact this expertise and mobility. Obviously, the broader context is one of making money, of "capitalizing on expertise," as one of my interviewees insightfully said. But I am interested here in looking beyond those market forces to understand how its producers frame their expertise and identify as experts. Their appeal and imagined and performed expertise in light of a supposed security "vacuum" is, I argue, what makes them mobile.

The expert framing in this case, I pose, is characterized by colonialist and racist ideas, within which the Israeli specialist has something to teach the "incompetent and unaware African." This will become clearer by looking in more detail at the arguments these experts voice. As mentioned before, the discourse of Israeli security professionals is sanitized almost in its entirety from any reference to the military occupation that stands at the basis of their specialty.



### *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 . . . 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 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 will) surfaces here. Following this idea and Israel's successful branding of its expertise, security models that have been developed in Israel in the "fight against terror" are incorporated in the security of local shopping malls in Nairobi, for example. One veteran consultant told me the most important aspect of the "Israeli security model" is "to be a hunter, not a fisher." By this he meant that Israelis do not wait around for something to happen, but act proactively to guard against any attack. Such ideas then find their ways to shopping malls, embassies, and airports.

Related to this historical reasoning is an idea that emphasizes the current reality, the reality of kids growing up while needing to learn about

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, Senor 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."<sup>6</sup> 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" (*ekhpaiut*) 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 takes time. In Israel we live this reality; here, people don't 'have' it (*ein lahem etze*)." In relation to this, he told me about an experiment he did in Kenya to find out what the levels of security were: they tested some sites, and everywhere they managed to get in with a bag and leave it without anyone taking notice. This way of framing expertise in relation to the inabilities of the Other is typical for the way experts distinguish themselves from lay persons (Carr 2010).

### *African-ness: A Racist, Colonialist Logic*

The second part of the expert framing security professionals use emphasizes the expertise vis-à-vis the "Africans" who are in need of Israeli security. Often "Africa" or "Africans" is used when describing these features, without making particular distinctions between the different countries that the vast continent consists of. Amanda Chisholm (2016) asks us to examine the global security industry through a critical "postcolonial lens" to identify colonial and racial patterns in the way security professionals from the West (or North) sell their knowledge to the "South" and thus to emphasize the context within which such relationships come into being. The heritage of being part of a colonizing entity is clearly visible in the discourse of Israeli security professionals in Kenya, as ideas of an inferior (black) Other are central to it. In their explanations of the characteristics of Africa or Kenya that create space for them, as security experts, to work in the security industry, we can see the following two ideas: "African incompetence" and a high regard for Israeli security. Often these explanations are inherently racist, and people speak of black Africans as corrupt and incompetent, as "to claim to be an expert is also a claim to masculine white privilege" (Chisholm 2016: 119) in this context.

Concerning the first idea then, one consultant explained to me, after I asked him about the need for security in Kenya, that "Kenya is fairly peaceful, people are lazy, quiet, are not used to what we are used to. They are not connected to it, they don't have it (*hem lo mehubarim le klum, ein lahem etze*)." Another emphasized how Kenyans do not care about real security, only about money (see the quotation this chapter opened with as well). He said that making money was more important to them, emphasizing the Israeli work ethic: "[The] head of security can't be Kenyan; [he] will take money from you — cheat you out of money." He added, "We fight for our land. I don't have any other country; here [in Kenya] they are not patriotic; it is business, for money — that is African culture." Another in-

interviewee, answering my question about local Kenyan security, enforced the same idea: "[It's] nothing; they want to ride the wave of business in security but they don't know anything." He continued to say that Kenyan security officials would come to him for advice and then they would repeat to others what they had heard from him; this happened even on television shows.

What we can see here is an outspoken distrust of local security skills. Israeli expertise is established against a very dark and pessimistic idea about Kenyan security. The Israeli consultants I spoke to almost unanimously agreed that Kenyans knew close to nothing about security, that they mostly did not care, and that their main concern was to make money off the security business. Only one consultant was somewhat more optimistic, and he said he saw real improvement in the attitude and skills of Kenyans compared with some years ago.

Management skills were also part of a theme that came back as lacking in the local skillset. The dominant idea was that Kenyans (or Africans in general) could not "look ahead" or "see the big picture." They didn't have a "big head" (*rosh gadol*), a distinct military conceptualization of "looking beyond," at the whole context used by Israeli commanders and officers (Ben-Ari 1998; Grassiani 2013). Israeli expertise, in contrast, is highlighted as consisting of all those characteristics, as we saw earlier.

Related to the idea of the bad and sloppy security and management skills of Kenyans, or Africans in general, is a second logic I encountered consistently: the respect Israeli security companies and actors receive from the locals. As one interviewee said, "We know what we are doing; Israelis are respected." "As a consultant, being Israeli works," said another informant; "you are taken more serious in this context." A manager of a big Israeli company that does a lot of work in Kenya talked about the image of authority (*samchut*) that Israel has. Another told me that people are in need of "knowledge, they ask for it, see you as different, also in tenders, when you say you are from Israel they look at you different." Again and again, people emphasized that being Israeli gave them extra standing in business; one security professional even told me they were "seen as gods."

Thus the ways that Israeli security expertise is framed through emphases on "Israeli-ness" and "African-ness" can be seen as two sides of the same coin. This racist discourse shows the white privileged security expert who comes to "Africa" in order to share his knowledge with the lay, black Other. With these different logics distilled from the discourse of these professionals, I have tried to understand how the experts self-identify and what ideas about the Other are part of this expert framing.



## Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed the mobility of Israeli security professionals, together with their technologies and knowledge, through their self-framing as experts. This mobility is part of a civil–military entanglement that 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 place that is historically connected to Israel and where the Israeli security community is relatively extensive, I have attempted to show in what ways they 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 used. This logic is infused with colonialist and racist notions about a certain “African-ness” that includes the “incompetent African” who looks at Israeli superiority in security with awe. This discourse emphasizes Israel’s position as (historical) victim in need of self-defense, posits that years of this 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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## Notes

1. At the HLS/Cyber conference of November 2016, there were people from approximately eighty countries (Azulai 2016).
2. It is estimated that Israel is selling security and military products (including knowledge) to 190 countries (Halper 2015). In 2017, Israel was estimated to close export deals for defense products with the value of 9 billion USD. From <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-s-defense-export-sales-exceed-record-9-billion-1.6052046>, accessed 29 November 2018.
3. See <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000179470/israel-pm-netanyahu-pledges-to-support-kenya-in-war-against-terrorists>, accessed 13 October 2015.
4. See <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Israeli-forces-join-Kenya-battle-to-end-deadly-mall-siege/1056-2002830-t6rln8z/index.html>, accessed 29 November 2018.
5. I have used pseudonyms for the companies and names of employees in order to keep their anonymity (my concern is foremost with my interviewees; anonymizing the companies protects them).
6. See Leo Rosten’s definition (in Guggenheim n.d.).

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