

Sifting people, sorting papers: academic practice and the notion of state security in Israel¹

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The Israeli "revisionist history" of the late 1980s and 1990s has been the subject of much controversy. Revisions of mainstream historical accounts were sparked partly by the release of archival data on the early state period previously unavailable, and partly by the ways historians, aware of theoretical critiques of nationalist histories extant in the contemporary historiographical literature, modified the object of their research to provide more sensitive accounts of power relations and of multivocal historical experiences. The "release" by Israeli institutions of documents that potentially tarnish authoritative nationalist narratives of the state's foundation is unusual among Middle East countries. On the other hand, academic practice and access to data for research in Israel is far from being homogenous. This essay is an attempt to explore the production of knowledge about Palestinians in Israel from the perspective of cultural practice. That is, I seek to understand how academics' use of archives relates to other social, political, and cultural practices encountered in the process of production of knowledge in Israel. While historical texts are meaningful, they become so not only as we compare them to other historical texts, but also as we relate them to the various contexts within which they come to be. This research is based on two theoretical considerations: how "state security" informs social discourse and practices, and how the content of academic work is related to particular sociopolitical practices linked to cultural, social, and political notions of persons through which it is produced and sustained. Through concrete examples drawn from my experience and that of other researchers, I will describe how these discourses and practices can inform the production of academic research on Palestinians within Israeli history and society.

Theoretical approaches that consider how political imagination, social categories, and identities are shaped by state projects were developed mostly in the 1980s and 1990s.² More recently, researchers' attention has begun to focus on how political notions of security expressed by military officials and makers of foreign policy interact with everyday understandings of safety and homeland.³ In a critical study of American foreign policy, political scientist Philip Campbell shows how no-

tions of American identity are not only the result of national pedagogical projects, but also of more diffuse expressions, common to foreign policy, media, and popular culture, of danger posed by "others." While nationalist rhetoric constitutes states as refuges from danger, and thus justifies them as a necessary condition for the survival of a people, Campbell argues that danger as expounded in foreign policy is, paradoxically, "...not a threat to the state's identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility."⁴ As the feeling of danger threatening the nation is perpetuated, state foreign policy is made legitimate or even commonsensical. Similarly, the ethnographic research of anthropologist Catherine Lutz (2001) describes how a rhetoric of [foreign] political danger works into everyday lives in America. Both suggest, then, that contrary to popular belief a homeland is not simply built to prevent danger. Instead, the danger perceived from specific groups of outsiders is part of the very stuff which constitutes and perpetuates a sense of home.

It comes as no surprise that notions of national identity and personal safety in Israel are also closely linked with notions of state security. State security is the reason given for much of Israel's policy of expropriation of land from Palestinians in the Galilee and in parts of the occupied territories. Less obvious is the fact that discourse linked to the notion of state security works to shape categories of people (insiders and outsiders, safe and unsafe), to authorize their access to resources, and to imbue them with credibility. The rhetoric of security, then, helps to constitute both a sense of a common whole, and differences between people within and without. It pervades many dimensions of Israeli public life: political discourse, academic texts, the mass media and popular beliefs.

My concern is with how Israeli notions of state security inform the production of social scientific research and researchers—and more specifically, research pertaining to national "others"—in relation to Israeli notions of state security. I take as a premise the idea that Israeli cultural productions, like those of other countries, should be analyzed in relation to the very mundane practices by which they are constituted.⁵ Here I con-

ceive as cultural productions not only the products of popular culture and the mass media, but also the organization of political and archival documents and academic works.⁶

As my previous research has explored the constitution of selves and the production of histories in Israel/Palestine, I propose here to reexamine these notions as they apply to the constitution of academic social scientific knowledge in the state of Israel. Specifically, I describe some of the social and academic contexts within which various academics work, and link them to the kinds of texts they then produce about Palestinians. Through these descriptions, I trace how notions of state security and of danger inform the constitution of knowledge about national selves and others in the state of Israel. These practices provide insight into how categories of people and types of knowledge about others, state security, and potentially also about policy, are themselves constituted and made meaningful.

Now it is amiss to consider academic knowledge in Israel as the intentional product of conspiracy, as I have sometimes heard it described. While practices by which knowledge is produced are significant, they do not imply that the people involved are simply reproducing national ideologies, which are neither homogenous nor always agreed upon. Instead, the process of academic production is brought into conversation with an existing discourse on state security at a particular historical moment. I suggest here that academic texts are made meaningful not only in themselves, and not only within a wider academic discussion. Rather, they also interact with other meaning-making activities in society at large. The production of academic knowledge, then, is enacted “through the internal logics of cultural practices, intersecting with the entirely interested activity of social agents.”⁷ A closer look at research practices and conditions can help us understand not just how academic texts are constituted, but also how academic practices participate in a wider sociopolitical world.

Officials, Academics, and the Practice of State Security

State officials, it is well known, classify people into administrative categories through censuses and statistics. State statistics are then used to measure seemingly neutral, objective facts of difference between mutually exclusive categories of people. These numbers tend to be taken for granted as people discuss politics—the numbers provide the data according to which the debate proceeds. But in the process what are erased are two problems: that categorization itself constitutes difference, and that difference becomes embodied in people. Indeed administrative categories conceived as fixed, mutually exclusive, and comprehensive come to be taken up beyond administrative records; they start to inform ways

in which officials think and speak about persons, the ways they relate to them, and the ways people themselves come to see and act. As researchers have repeatedly shown, the process of categorization, contested as it might be, is nevertheless something people have to contend with in their everyday lives, in the myriad practices by which difference is constituted.

Academic research practices also bring us to contend with categorical assumptions disseminated by modern states. Through the research, I note the production of two kinds of difference. First, there is the question of accessing administratively controlled “knowledge” or “information.” Then, there is the question of reframing administrative forms of knowledge as the object of other intellectual concerns.

To start with, I focus on the ways in which state officials decide how to allow researchers access to data. I discuss here two types of operations: how administrators decide what data is “sensitive” and therefore should, for reasons of state security, be kept from researchers; then, how they judge whether to allow or deny researchers access to data based on their assessment of who these researchers are perceived to be—that is, based on how they constitute these researchers as persons. While academic researchers often discuss how they got hold of official data or archival documents they use in their work, these discussions have been so far confined to forewords, footnotes, or anecdotal stories. I take the process of accessing documents as a researchable object of study, and focus my analysis on the formal and informal practices by which people are allowed or denied access to documents for academic work related to Palestinians.

These practices can be taken to show that state officials constitute and categorize researchers in relation to understandings of “state security” as persons whose work will be helpful or detrimental to the state. I take “state security” to provide a basis for the constitution of difference between persons in the state of Israel. The concept of state security enters into the way people think of their work. Thus, as in other states, formal laws and procedures govern the way archived documents become accessible to the public. However, data I discuss below suggest that informal practices that occur in the interaction between researchers and archive workers hold an important place in the researchers’ capacity to access documents. I link the problem of accessibility to archivists’ understanding of the product of academic work. I argue that this link is important based on informal discussion with researchers, but also and more importantly on interactions between researchers and archivists. These also suggest, then, that because archivists tend to perceive researchers as producing widely read work with political implications, they often use their authority to control the selective flow of information from state institutions to researchers, and thus, as they

perceive it, from researchers to the general public.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, preoccupation with preservation of historical knowledge was intense in Israel. The state and the army, political parties, unions, kibbutz movements, pre-state military groups, and private individuals had set up dozens of archives. While standard procedures were theoretically to be followed when it came to government institutions, in practice at the time of my study institutional procedures varied widely from institution to institution. Indeed, researchers' access to documents rarely seemed to follow any standard patterns. Not surprisingly, most archivists share the researchers' enthusiasm for documents and history, and the interaction between them is often not simply bureaucratic, as archivists keep up with academic production. This was obvious at a conference on archives and research organized by the Rabin Institute in Tel Aviv in April 2000, and attended by an audience of about two hundred archive employees and academics. This audience interrupted speakers many times to correct dates, facts, or terminology. At the same time, however, the archivists' comments highlighted that they often felt personally engaged in their role as keepers and dispensers of "official" knowledge, and saw access to this knowledge as potentially affecting the security of the state. As conference participants explained, security checks are routinely done on archivists before they obtain their jobs, and many of them were picked precisely because they have worked or done military service in the security branches. Hence the director of the newly formed Rabin archives was proud to announce that the head archivist had been a high-ranking officer in the security services, and that his staff all had a "security background"—meaning that previous experience in the army intelligence made them especially qualified to handle archival data and make decisions concerning its release.

According to a 1998 law, archivists are directed to bar access to research documents which have a "high chance of damaging the state's security." Yet the decisions about what constitutes sensitive material, and how access should be denied, is much under debate among archivists and historians. At the same conference in Tel Aviv, a well established senior historian, recalling his experience working in a small archive in which he had had open access to files, suggested that all documents should be "open," and that the archivist himself would decide which researchers should or should not have access to particular data based on who they were. Such a stance, reflecting common practice in many archives, was opposed by the assistant to the chief archivist of the Israeli state archives. He, in turn, argued for a consistent policy of access: "Once the documents are open, they are open to all. I am not interested to know if the researcher is a tourist from Syria, a historian or student

from Birzeit University [in the Palestinian Authority]."⁸ That statement, contrasted with those of many other archivists in attendance ("but that's dangerous!"), highlighted the novelty of the idea that archival documents could actually be available to all.

How has access to documents actually worked in practice in the last few years? In her dissertation, American anthropologist Rose Haberer mentions that she went to the local council of the Palestinian Israeli village in which she was doing research and asked for a map. The Jewish mayor refused to give her one, explaining that this was privileged information. "There is more than one way to skin a cat," she comments. But she doesn't tell us how she obtained the map that actually appears in her dissertation.

Sociologist Ahmad Sa'adi, who is a Palestinian citizen of Israel, recalls how he gained access to the 1950s documents from the Labor Party archives on which he has been working recently. He was teaching at Beit Berl, the labor party college in a suburb of Tel Aviv, in the late 1990s. First, he had gone to the archivist there and inquired whether there were any documents from Arab citizens in the 1950s. The archivist told him there were no such documents, and for a whole year, he offered him files of minutes of official meetings about Arabs that held little of the micro historical data Sa'adi was seeking. One day, he was in the library when a librarian was moving heavy boxes. He offered to help. As he moved several boxes for her to the archival stacks, he noticed that there were files marked "Arab Affairs." As he and the librarian became friendly, he asked whether he could take a look at the archival boxes. She gave him permission. For the next weeks, he read and copied hundreds of letters from Palestinian citizens to party officials, which he subsequently used in published articles.

In the early 1990s, I asked an archivist in the Israel State Archives how I could look for a village map from the period of the British Mandate. He replied that such maps were not in the British Mandate files I had been researching. Rather, they were to be found in the files of the Israel Land Authority, since this administrative body had used local British maps in the process of surveying land in the early 1950's. Land authorities files, he explained, were open for researchers to use.

The problem was that these files had no titles. They were numbered instead, and the numbers didn't correspond to survey block numbers. The archivist commented that it was almost impossible for researchers to find what they were looking for, since they would have to go through hundreds of numbered files. He recalled that three years previously a woman doing research for her MA had come with specific file numbers, and had gotten exactly what she was looking for. She had obtained the file numbers from the Israel Land Authority,

where she had been working.

When I called the Land Authority office, they explained that they could not give researchers access to maps. Individuals could get access to maps of plots that belonged to them, for a fee, but maps, even from the Mandate period, were not public information.⁹ Ghazi Fallah, an Israeli Palestinian geographer, reported having the same difficulties with that office when he tried to gain access to data concerning state and private lands in several villages in the Galilee. "They thought my work was political and they refused to give me the data," he asserted in 1989. Instead, he visited the local councils of several villages, and was able to use their data to write an article which he subsequently published.

A man who had been director of the Israel Lands Authority's Nazareth office assured me that many academic researchers had come to work in his office, and that I could call his former secretary whom he was sure would let me consult the Mandate maps and registration records for my research. When I called the secretary, however, she explained that this information was not accessible to researchers. Since then, I have spoken to several Jewish researchers affiliated with Israeli universities who have conducted research in the Nazareth land administration files. A dozen years ago, Israeli Jewish geographer Oren Yiftachel was even given keys to the office where files were kept so that he could work at his convenience; however, when his work was assessed as critical of government land policies, officials refused his students access to their files. Researchers like Ghazi Fallah or Ahmed Sa'adi, were marked from the start in their interactions with officials and had to find alternate ways of getting to documents.

In Israel there are policies regulating public access to archives and documents. In fact, laws concerning researchers' access to archival data are a lot more flexible than in France or England. But gaining access to information there is not merely a question of law or policy. It is one of practice, of connection.¹⁰ While theoretically the files of the Land Authority offices are not open for browsing, in practice they can be opened to people who have, or may gain, the trust of administrators—this is done routinely by researchers who manage to use personal connections to gain access to documents. How then do administrators make such decisions? Often, they assess the researchers who come their way within broadly defined categories. Some could casually mention their army services, or call on their army friends. Others might claim connection to Israeli universities, or get introductions from Israeli faculty members or administrators. Ahmad Sa'adi, on the other hand, could be told that "there are no such documents." Similarly, after Oren Yiftachel published articles thought to be critical of government policies, people doing research for him are no longer given broad access to data. Thus archivists

and other officials often appear to take it upon themselves to operate as gatekeepers.

Situating researchers and their projects according to national cultural categories has been an important concern to officials. This becomes especially evident in cases where identities and allegiances are not clearly defined, or when researchers are not "established" within local social and academic networks. Palestinian-American anthropologist Nadia Abu el-Haj told me how difficult it had been for her to interview Israeli officials. Most Israelis who met her without knowing her name just assumed she was Jewish and often included her into a narrative "we" [meaning Jews]. On the other hand, officials whom she interviewed and who knew her name, would assume she held certain political positions, and started out by arguing against them. Like me, she never was able to get hold of a map in the archives. All of the thirty-odd historical maps of Jerusalem she ordered were "off the shelf." When American anthropologist Rebecca Torstrick worked in Acre in the late 1980s, people were often surprised if they found out she wasn't Jewish and several asked if she was going to convert, or marry a Jew. To most it was hard to understand why, otherwise, she would be motivated to do socio-historical research in Israel. When trying to assess me, various administrators asked point blank if I was Jewish, or why I was working on "Arabs." Thus officials offered advice as to what would constitute interesting research, and jotting down their questions and suggestions I realized who they expected me to be, and what they considered to be the proper "object" of my study. Every such discussion was one in which difference and similarity were again constituted along proper lines in a potentially disturbing, borderline area, that of research on the national Other.

Of course, assessment in such a situation is not simply a question of fitting a "person" within a "category," the way census officials would. It is a much more flexible kind of process that reveals how officials and others assumed or produced the differences by which state security is linked to national identities. By and large, the people whom officials in charge of documents tend to trust are Israeli, Jewish, or somehow connected to the establishment. The "others" are Palestinian, or other outsiders to an Israeli Jewish identification, whose perceptions are therefore assumed to be at best suspicious, at worst definitely biased. For officials, it seems, these differences became embodied in the persons of the researchers to whom they related, in the information one might give or keep away from them, and in the potential studies these persons were ultimately expected to produce.¹¹

Thus, in practice, there has been an effort to control access to information by people who, in the eyes of the administrators, might use it to politically questionable

ends. At the same time, people who have been conceived as trustworthy could gain access to confidential and politically sensitive information in very open, informal ways. The assumption is that trustworthy people would not stir up trouble, but rather do civically responsible work. Again, what is at stake is the notion of the security of the state.

The tension inherent in the idea of “state security” is also played out in Israeli historian Benny Morris’s account of access different researchers have to archival data in the military archives. Morris, an Israeli Jewish historian from a well-established family, had spent many years in various Israeli archives researching books on Israeli history. He had made a name for himself as the founder of a movement he called “New History.” In his first book, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, he used newly released archival documents to trace the process by which Palestinians came to be dispossessed of land and home during the 1948 war. Morris’ work, considered very controversial in the mid-1980s when it first came out, gradually came to be accepted by the Israeli Jewish public as it resonated for many with the 1990s peace negotiation process. Largely in relation to his work at the time, the idea that Palestinians didn’t simply “leave” in 1948 but were also made to leave had become a legitimate point of view in Israeli mass culture, and “common knowledge” among Israeli Jews.¹² In a 1998 lecture at Tel Aviv University, Morris explained that the Israeli military archives are not open to everyone in the same way. Some of the researchers were, as he put it, “closer to the dish”—that is, they are allowed access to certain documents which he himself could not get. Shortly afterwards he sued government archives in the supreme court for uniform access practices and standards.

One of Morris’s examples was that of a high officer, Motti Golani, who had retired and gone on to study history at Hebrew University. When Golani wrote his dissertation on the 1956 Sinai campaign in the 1990s, he was given access to a great many classified files. But the dissertation was a somewhat radical reevaluation of decisions made by high officials during the Sinai campaign. When he published a book, then, the Israeli censor’s bureau insisted that he take off the references to specific, numbered files, so that other researchers could not request them. Speaking in 2000 at the Rabin conference on archives, Golani reflected that the privilege of access to these sources was a mistake since it conflated his role in the security services with his role as a historian. He then advocated for a separation between the two domains. Such freely discussed practices and discourse again underline the relative importance of informal access to documents described here at the turn of the millennium in Israel.

For researchers who are part of the Israeli establish-

ment, who are expected to produce work within the range of patriotic consensus in their field, confidential data has on many occasions been wide open. Stories about this preferential access abound among historians. Hence, several anthropologists and historians who were government employees or served as government advisors have had completely open access to official documents, to which they refer in their academic books and articles. Several doctoral theses and academic books have been written by people who themselves have been part of the security establishment, using documents collected by Israeli intelligence services. These works are produced within the comfortable confines of assumed consensus, together with a concern for a “common good”—that is, in the place where state security and dissemination of information are assumed to coincide. The most blatant example I collected was from several historians who had been students of Middle East history in the late 1960s at Hebrew University. One of their professors, they recalled, was a high-ranking officer during the 1967 war. The professor, in the framework of his army work, got hold of Jordanian police records from the West Bank at that time. He brought the records to class, and assigning the students specific research topics, he gave them files to take home. It is also relevant here to add that the students had a good knowledge of Arabic, which most had acquired during their army service in intelligence units—the same sense of concern for the common good, based on mainstream assessments of state security, could be assumed in his classroom. This suggests an enduring relation between the practice of state security and that of academic research, which I continue to explore below within academic practice at Israeli universities.

State Security and the Making of a National Other

“Israel’s security is permanent neither in time nor in place.”¹³

The relation between ideas of state security and the constitution of a national other as object of academic study has gone largely unexamined so far. One reason why this has been the case is that Israeli historians working on the contemporary Middle East have been for the most part members of the Israeli mainstream establishment. Until recently, these historians have tended to assume that their role is to serve both the interests of the state and those of the community, interests which they often conceive as congruent. As historian Joan Wallach Scott pointed out in her study of American historians, “the social practices of the members of a profession are intimately related to the ways they interpret the meaning of their work.”¹⁴ What then are the practices out of which mainstream Middle East

history is constituted in present day Israel? Who are the practitioners, whom do they teach, and how do they produce the object of their studies? Taking the constitution of difference as the problem here complicates the picture because it calls attention to the social status of these historians, as well as to the very conceptions of persons produced and protected by the profession. Thus, here too, otherness is constituted, this time as an object of study in which notions of national security underlie the production of both researcher and object.

At the turn of the millennium, the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at the University of Tel Aviv was a well established department. It graduated 170 students with BA's and 40 with MA's in 1999, more than any other department in the humanities division of the university. Many of the departments' students seemed to think that unlike other degrees in the humanities, this one has practical applications, since—as they saw it—it would provide them with skills for jobs in the various security services or in Israel's foreign ministry. Several of the students I interviewed actually referred to this as the reason why they chose to study in the department over others to which they were admitted.

In fact, many students came into the department with a solid knowledge of literary Arabic, a language they started to learn in high school and continued to improve during their army service in the Intelligence branch. Several of the MA students, some in their 40's and 50's, were employees of the foreign or security ministry, who needed the degree to advance in their career.¹⁵ In 1999, the department started to develop an accelerated MA program specifically designed for intelligence officers, which would be based on the current MA curriculum and taught by the same faculty members.¹⁶ The new MA would be a major part of the officers' training. Middle Eastern Studies here, then, was not simply a field in the humanities; it was conceived by students and administrators alike as a professional course of study. The degree one gained represented specific knowledge, as well as linguistic and analytical skills which could then be practiced in the service of the state.

Knowing this, it doesn't come as a surprise that there was a fluid relation between the security apparatus and many department faculty members. Like their students, many of these experts served in the army intelligence during their military service and were often called in as experts for their army reserve duty; one officially held a part-time position in the department and in military security. As one professor explained to me, he was occasionally asked to produce position papers for the security services by security officers who were once his students at the university.

There was also a strongly cultivated relation between some faculty members and the Israeli Foreign Office.

Two faculty members had served as ambassadors to Arab countries, and the faculty was often represented at official diplomatic functions. In addition, two members of the department were well known to be involved in the intermittent peace negotiations with Syria. In 1998-99, some discussed in classes or lectures their meetings with important political leaders of Middle Eastern countries or their appointments with government officials, or facilitated job interviews with security officials for students they thought had potential. For these scholars there was a logical continuity between academic expertise and government advising. Most members of the department faculty also belonged to the Dayan Center, a policy-oriented institute located at the university whose publications and conferences helped to legitimate state policy to an international public of policy makers. According to its web page,

The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies is an interdisciplinary research center devoted to the study of the modern history and contemporary affairs of the Middle East. The Center seeks to impart an understanding of Middle Eastern past and present to academic and general audiences, in Israel and abroad....The Center's origins lie in the Reuven Shiloah Institute, first established in 1959 under the auspices of the Israel Oriental Society. In 1965, the Shiloah Institute was incorporated into Tel Aviv University. In 1983, the University established the Moshe Dayan Center, which combined the Shiloah Institute and documentation units dealing with the Middle East.¹⁷

The center, as many other academic institutions, has clearly scholarly concerns, described in the website to be "to bring scholarly objectivity to the analysis of subjects that often stir passions." Yet such concerns are also practiced in specific sociopolitical and historical contexts, which must be understood in order to fully comprehend how they are related to Israeli concerns with state security. Interestingly the Shiloah Institute, named after the first head of the Israeli security services who was also among the first generation of Israeli scholars of Middle East history, was originally founded as a branch of the foreign office and later moved to its university location. At the turn of the millennium, the center was endowed by private donors and by the Israeli government. Its structure replicated that of the Israeli foreign office as well: each country of the Middle East was represented by an "expert." Significantly, there were also experts on "Palestinians" and on "Arab Israelis." Some of these were historians who, in keeping with the center's project, had developed contemporary interests as a secondary expertise. For example, a scholar of eighteenth century Iran and one working on the Arab Emirates had both written articles about contemporary Palestinian history and historiography. Together with

other members of the faculty, they contributed articles or lectures at conferences and events organized by the center on subjects related to Palestinian society and history.

There was a strong sense of shared purpose and responsibility emerging from the center. It was assumed that colleagues were working for the good of the country, that their work mattered. Sides were being defined as experts debated the policy questions they defined for themselves: were there signs of greater democracy emerging from Iran? Why were Turkey and Israel the only two democracies in the Middle East? Were Palestinians in Israel “fragmenting,” or “assimilating”? Such questions, asked within the frame of “state security,” tended to be framed within a logical, scientific, evolutionary narrative. According to this narrative, news events and other data constituted as knowledge could be used to index the progress of surrounding people in the Middle East toward a wished-for stability. They constituted ways of defining the place, or more exactly the position of the state of Israel in relation to neighboring states. They were also ways of generating knowledge for the use of the state and the wider public. At the same time, they were situated in the discursive space of academe, since its members were members of the university community who regularly taught courses, published their scholarly work, and participated in international conferences.

Foreign as well as Palestinian Israeli scholars came to lecture at the center, and their names and affiliations were prominently displayed in the Center’s publications, adding to its legitimacy. But all of the center members were Jewish Israelis, and all of them were part of the Israeli mainstream. Indeed, all had access to some classified information. Should they accept an Arab member, a center researcher explained, the center would lose its security clearance. Though their views on particular issues, of course, differed, they did so within the acceptable bonds of mainstream Israeli society. Again, the perceived needs of state security dictated, in a very practical fashion, who insiders and outsiders were, belying the seeming equality and objectivity of academic discourse.

This was articulated for me by one of the Center’s members after he attended a conference at a different university where he saw many of the participants as expressing radical views and therefore placing themselves outside the bonds of Israeli society:

As an academic I like to sit on the fence. There I’m part of the people and have critical distance at the same time. But I always talk to the Israeli public, I don’t cut myself off the way those guys do. Who are they talking to? Only to each other, not to the rest of the society. They have their little group, but they have no impact on anything.¹⁸

To this man, the production of scholarly research about Palestinians was, again, embodied in the familiar, clear-cut dichotomies of difference. The people categorized as outsiders were researchers associated and conflated with Palestinians. Those within the consensus were the purported makers of the Israeli polity: well-established “experts,” their students, their colleagues in the security services, and the “wider Israeli public” to whom they addressed their lectures, newspaper articles, position papers, and media interviews. For him, scholarly, political, and social boundaries were contiguous, and differences between people were clearly and specifically practiced.

A few department members considered the relationship between the Dayan Center and the department as problematic. Their concern was that the department was financially dependent on the Center for many of its programs, and that the Center also had a say in department hiring. These faculty members considered it their duty to clearly separate their work as academics from work they would be called to do as advisors to the government. One of them explained to me in 1999: “I once lectured to the security people, I said: there are two separate drawers: When I leave here I close one of them, and open the other. I don’t mix.”

There was ambivalence also among the students about employment in the security services. Three students discussed with me interviews they had had for jobs in the security services. One described her feelings after such an interview in her last year of BA studies:

There is a general understanding, which I resent, that we come here to “study the enemy.” [One Palestinian man] I interviewed for my MA thesis asked what department I was studying in and when I told him he said “You are...” and I could tell what he was thinking from his look, so I said “No, I don’t work with the security [defense] ministry.” And he was relieved. But listen, it is partially based in fact: people go on to work for security from our department. I got an invitation for an interview. I went, and they told me they had gotten good reports about me. I told them I wanted to continue my studies, so they offered to pay for my MA if I worked for them part time while I studied. I had to commit myself to working for them after the MA. I told them that I didn’t want to commit myself, I’m thinking of going for a PhD. Many of us do this, we delay making a decision about whether or not to work for the security services... I’m sure they got my name from the department, I was a good student—where else could they have gotten it from? Look at who is teaching in the department: how many are working for the security ministry, they always tell us in class.¹⁹

The seamless connection between patriotism and academic expertise, as this student’s ambivalence implies,

has started to be problematized within Israeli society. The “New Historians” works published since the mid-1980s aimed to question national master narratives, and in the process provided a serious critique of establishment historians, undermining their authority. Their critiques were very public in Israel, as the books were reviewed in major newspapers, discussed on TV and radio talk shows²⁰.

In 1998, a major TV retrospective commissioned for Israel’s fiftieth anniversary, *Tekuma* (awakening), presented a controversial version of Israeli history. It spoke plainly of the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948, of the subsequent destruction of Arab villages, and of the military government imposed on most of the Palestinian population of Israel until 1966. This program generated considerable debate among the larger public, as did the new Israeli history textbooks which were slated to be used in the fall of 2000. As a result, the consciousness of being Israeli now often resonates with these debates, and students have brought them into the classroom.

Mainstream historians critiqued these books through conferences and journal articles. Tel Aviv University’s Dayan center, for example, published some of these critiques and its members regularly contributed book reviews in the Israeli mass media in which they discussed the writings of “new historians.” For the first time in 1999, a class was taught in the department, entitled “Historiography of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” examining various perspectives on the topic of revisionist history. One of the students commented, “At least now they feel that they have to teach these books, even if it is to criticize them.” Room was being made for other ways of thinking and being within the mainstream Israeli public. While no one denied or questioned that “state security” was an important concern, there was the beginning of a sense that a blanket notion of security was not the major determinant of how authoritative histories should be written.

My description of access to documents and the production of academic research by people who are part of the Israeli establishment here has been intended to give a sense for the practices and discourses by which “expert” authority is constituted in relation to Israeli notions of state security. I have been concerned with academic research about Palestinians, not as an object in itself, which can be judged within the terms of the documents and texts which have been so hotly discussed in academic circles as well as in the Israeli popular press. Rather, by tracing what the social, cultural, and political contexts of its production can tell us about the discourse itself, I have tried to trace various manifestations of a pervasive, taken-for-granted notion of state security which underlies its everyday practice and assessments.

My concern has not been to establish or reiterate dichotomies between types of research, as revisionist histo-

rians have done, nor to highlight Gramsci’s distinction between state and organic intellectuals, as taken up by Edward Said. Such distinctions, while they are useful to political activism, do not necessarily help us to understand the more complex dynamics by which categories are [most often tacitly] practiced. Instead, I wish to draw attention to state security as an important, enduring, popular notion that organizes categories, and also works to organize scholarly discourse. As an underlying concern in Israeli cultural, social and political practice, I consider it to be a potentially very fruitful locus of further research.

NOTES

¹Special thanks to Henya Rachmiel and to the scholars who contributed their experiences and insights. This article is based on ethnographic research conducted in Israel in 1998-2000.

²See for instance Bernard Cohn, “The Census and Objectification in Southern India” in *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Benedict Anderson, “Census, Survey, Museum,” in *Imagined Communities*. Revised edition (London: Verso, 1991).

³See Philip Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, revised edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) and Catherine Lutz, *Homefront: A Military City and the American 20th Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

⁴Campbell, *Writing Security*, 12.

⁵See for instance Michel de Certeau *The Writing of History*. Trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), and Michel-Rolph Trouillot *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁶See Melani MacAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and US Interests in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2001).

⁷MacAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 8.

⁸Forte, fieldnotes, 2000.

⁹Survey maps from the Mandate period—though not detailed maps of particular villages—are available at the map room of Hebrew University. Current maps and historical information about plot ownership are, in fact, public information available upon payment of a fee at the Israel Land Authority district offices.

¹⁰See Brenda Dannet, *Pulling Strings: Biculturalism in Israeli Bureaucracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

¹¹The same kind of problem with categorization and suspect categories was highlighted in discussions at the conference on archives mentioned above concerning what documents were liable to harm state security. For instance, there was a lively debate concerning whether “sensitive” documents about the treatment of Jews of Middle Eastern origin should be released for research since they were likely to “divide the public.” Here again, a relation was drawn between state security, categories of people, and national unity.

¹²Of course, such an idea was not simply adopted by all, but rather entered the range of acceptable mainstream perspectives. It becomes differently inflected by different social or political actors at different historical moments.

¹³Gibli, head of army security services, 1955; reiterated in a Middle East history course at Tel Aviv University, spring 1999.

¹⁴Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 179.

¹⁵Older students were common in Israeli universities as higher educational degrees led to better job and pension benefits.

¹⁶Two department faculty members who were not connected with the Dayan Center expressed disagreement with the program, and more generally with the goals of the center and its connection to the Middle East history department. At the time, theirs was a minority voice within the department.

¹⁷<http://www.dayan.org/>

¹⁸Forte fieldnotes, 1999.

¹⁹Forte fieldnotes, 1999.

²⁰According to some Israeli academics, a moderately successful academic book in Hebrew is one that sells 3000 copies, the same amount, they believe, as an academic book in the US. The much larger proportion of Israeli readers is explained by the fact that such books are read not only by academics but also by the general public. Because of the much greater exposure books about Israeli and Arab history receive in Israeli mass media, their subject and authors' names are well known even among people who do not read them.