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The Genealogy of Colonial Plunder and Erasure – Israel's Control over Palestinian Archives

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ABSTRACT

The essay discusses one characteristic of colonial archives – how the ruling state plunders/loots the colonized' archives and treasures and controls them in its colonial archives - erasing them from the public sphere by repressive means, censors and restricts their exposure and use, alters their original identity, regulates their contents and subjugates them to colonizer's laws, rules and terminology. It focuses on two archives plundered by Israel in Beirut in 1980s: the Palestine Research Center and archive of Palestinian films. The essay continues my earlier research on Palestinian visual (and other) archives taken as booty or looted by pre-state Jewish military organizations and soldiers or civilians in the first half of the twentieth century, especially during the Nakba (the Palestinian catastrophe, 1948), and later by Israel's military bodies. It analyzes the plunder itself while focusing on the power relations reflected toward the hybrid gazes of the colonizer and the colonized and discusses colonial features of military archives holding and controlling seized materials. While colonial museums have been largely discussed, and also archives holding colonial history, this is one of the first essays to discuss features of colonial archives holding plundered archives/material.

KEYWORDS

Israeli looting/plunder/ seizure of Palestinian archives in Beirut (1980s); mirror image; Zionist/Israeli colonial military archives and mechanism of control; censorship; study restrictions; access prohibition/limitation; Western interpretation; postcolonial archives; Palestine Research Center archive; Palestinian films seized in Beirut; Cultural Arts Section

Introduction

The essay discusses colonial plunder/looting of cultural and historical treasures and archives and their administration and dominance in military colonial archives. It analyzes the genealogy of plunder and deals with the two mechanisms of seizure. The first is the plunder and hybrid gazes toward the act of seizure. The second is repression in the colonizer's military archives and subjugation to the colonizer's regime of truth. It focuses as a case study on two Palestinian archives seized by Israel in Beirut in the Lebanon war (started in 1982): the Palestine Research Center (hereinafter: the Research Center)¹ and archive of Palestinian films in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Ministry of Defense Archive (hereinafter: the IDF Archive). It continues my research over the years on Palestinian archives that were plundered or looted by pre-state Jewish military organizations, soldiers and civilians in the first half of the twentieth century – especially during the Nakba (the Palestinian catastrophe, 1948), and later by Israel's military bodies inside and outside Palestine, and which are ruled by Israeli military archives (Sela 2009, 2013, [2012] 2015, 2017).

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Colonial archives have been researched extensively, especially since they document how colonizers control the colonized through physical means – oppression, ethnic segregation, ethnic cleansing, torture, rape – and/or on a conscious level from the way they form and construct the image of the colonized to fit a Western colonial world view to the way they govern the writing of colonial history for the benefit of the colonizer by various methods (Meiselas 1997; Sela 2000, 2007; Stoler 2002, 2011; McEwan 2003; Elkins 2005, 2015; Dritsas and Haig 2014; Rawlings 2015; Shepard 2015). Ann Laura Stoler, a leading researcher of colonial archives, deals with archival production of knowledge, with the way these archives function as the state’s “cultural artifact of fact production,” and suggests tracking “the production and consumption of ‘these’ facts” (Stoler 2002, 90–91). According to her, colonial archives are not only products of “state machines” but support the production of these states (see also Feldman 2008). “Colonial archives were both sites of the imaginary *and* institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed and reproduce the power of the state.” Reading them from “bottom up,” or “against their grain,” as exposed in research from the last few decades, enables them to be re-read from a different new perspective (Stoler 2002, 99).

The essay focuses on particular types of colonial archives – treasures plundered or looted by force from the colonized, and governed by colonial administrations, discussed by few scholars in the last few years (Caswell 2011; Shepard 2015; Sleiman 2016). As mentioned, I conducted the first study to systematically map visual Palestinian archives and treasures seized by military forces and Jewish/Israeli civilians, many of them during the Nakba and also later already in 2009 and since then continue research on the topic (Sela 2013, [2012] 2015, 2017).

My studies demonstrate how Israel conceals Palestinian treasures not only by physical means (seizing of booty or looting), but also by a strict system of management, control and “knowledge production” – laws, rules, norms, methods and archive procedures such as censorship, restricted study, access prohibition/limitation, control over what is declassified (to whom and to what extent), cataloging and labeling according to Zionist codes and terminology that differ from the original Palestinian terminology, signifying Israeli ownership over the material and more (Sela 2009).² These two types of power, “power to know” and “power over” as Edward Said demonstrates and Caswell (2011) addresses in her research about Iraqi Baath Party Records seized by the US, are inextricably connected.

The archives I discussed in the past, are, among others, the archive of Chalil Rissas³ – father of Palestinian photojournalism (Figure 8 below) – that was looted from his store in Jerusalem; an archive taken as booty from the office of Rashid Al-Haj Ibrahim, Chairman of the National Committee in Haifa (Figure 1); an album plundered from the home of the Nashashibi family in Jerusalem; photographs taken from a dead Arab soldier and leader (Figures 4 and 11 below), and many other archives and images plundered in Palestine, and outside of Palestine, before, during and after the Nakba (for instance, Orient House Archive [2001], Sela 2009, Figure 2). The two archives the essay discusses operated from the mid-1960s/early 1970s until 1982 and were located in Beirut. They preserve extensive research/materials on Palestinian life during the twentieth century, making it possible to expose important chapters in Palestinian history. They depict extensively Palestinian resistance that began in Jordan in the mid-1960s and continued in Lebanon from 1970, as well as displacement, rupture and refugee life in exile. These occupied archives not only reflect blind spots – “colonial violence in the making” and the blocking of knowledge (Stoler 2011,



Figure 1. Unknown photographer, *Members of Al-Najda from Salha Village*, end of 1947 to early 1948. From “Files of Land of Israel Arabs up until April 1948” IDF Archives. The photograph was taken as “military booty,” as defined by the archive, from the office of Rashid Al-Haj Ibrahim, Head of the National Committee, Haifa. According to the archive, “since November 2002 an opinion by the attorney general to allow the use of seized material in archive files” is in effect.

124–125) by the colonial regime, but literally reflect the colonial situation through the eyes of the colonized – the state of “rebellion,” as defined by Memmi ([1974] 2003), in which “the colonized liberation must be carried out through a recovery of self and of autonomous dignity” (172). Moreover, reading these “captured” archives (Budeiri 2016) today through a postcolonial approach not only gives voices to the colonized, to the subaltern, but also “contextualizes their response to engagement with and resistance of colonialism with the specificities of recent history” (Caswell 2011, 238; see also McEwan 2003; Sela, 2009 [2012] 2015).

Palestinian institutions in Beirut

In the 1960s, parallel to the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Association (PLO in 1964) and the growing power of armed Palestinian revolutionary forces, various Palestinian institutions were established in Lebanon for documentation, planning and research – for example, the Institute for Palestinian Studies (1963) and the Research Center (1965). At the same time, there was a revolution in the visual arts field. In 1968, the Palestinian Film Unit, initiated by individual pioneering creators and devoted to documenting the Palestinian struggle, was established in Amman. In the beginning, it dealt with photography, and then with cinema as well. After Black September – clashes between the PLO and the Jordanian Armed Forces (1970) – the Palestine Film Unit was forced to relocate to Lebanon together with other Palestinian forces. There it focused on cinema,

collaborated with the PLO, joining its widespread operations, and changed its name to the Palestinian Cinema Institution (hereinafter: Cinema Institution). Following its significant achievements in Beirut, other groups that dealt with visual aspects (photography, painting and graphics) and especially cinema were established in Palestinian organizations. They were based on an understanding of the power of visual image – non-moving and moving – in mass media, and the benefits to be accrued through their enlistment in the national struggle (Sela 2017). As a result, there was a flowering of enlisted Palestinian cinema that distributed national ideas and became part of a larger worldwide movement, Third Cinema Movement. These creators were looking for a new anti-colonial language and direction and their work served as an alternative to colonial cinema (Buali 2012; Denes 2014; Sela 2017).

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. After the departure of the PLO, the Israeli military apparatus began taking as booty materials and archives from the PLO and other Palestinian institutions. The essay focuses on two of these archives that were evidently taken by the Israeli military in Beirut: The first, the Research Center archive, was returned to the PLO a year later, after being duplicated by Israel (Sela 2009). The second, visual – photographs and films as mentioned above – is still in the IDF Archive. Israel apparently holds additional archives taken from Beirut, as well as earlier archives, and until they are declassified and access is available, it is impossible to know the amount of material Israel has in its possession.

Looted archive 1 – Palestine Research Center

On 28 February 1965, a few months after the establishment of the PLO, the executive committee decided to establish the Palestine Research Center in Beirut. The Research Center, academic in nature, was founded to document and conduct research on Palestinian past and current history, and to publish books and articles devoted to the subject.⁴ Fayiz Sayigh⁵ established the center (1963–1965), and Dr Anis Sayigh, his brother, intensified its operations (1966–1977).⁶ Mahmoud Darwish administered the center for a year (1977–1978) and in its final years, it was managed by Sabri Jiryis (1978–1982).⁷ The center operated until September 1982, at which time IDF soldiers entered West Beirut and seized the archive as booty.

The archive held books, articles, documents, microfilms, as well as manuscripts of important Palestinian personalities, maps – most of them rare, and photographs. A newspaper and journal department documented Palestinian events on a daily basis.⁸ Jiryis established a department that collected materials about Israel and its position toward the Palestinian people. Another department dealt with the international aspects of the Palestinian question as well. Hebrew was also taught. The Center published research, organized events and conferences, employed over 80 researchers, and was as stated at the United Nation website, of 16 July 1982: “one of the centers of research and publishing that made Beirut a beacon of free thought and expression in the Arab world.” Hana Sleiman, who recently published an article about the Research Center, argues that liberation movement archives, like state archives, although essentially “different in their conditions of production, play an equally ubiquitous role in shaping historical narratives” (Sleiman 2016, 44). The Center published the yearly *Al-Watha'iq Al-Filastiniyya* (The Palestinian Documents) and the magazine *Shu'un Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Matters from 1971). The Research Center and the Institute for Palestinian Studies were at that time the main institutions dedicated to the

documentation and preservation of the Palestinian past and present, exposure of the Palestinian narrative before and after 1948, and discussion on contemporary Palestinian issues including Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian struggle. According to the testimony of Sayigh and Jiryis, Israel tried several times to shell the center and eliminate its employees even though they enjoyed diplomatic immunity.

The Research Center archive and library taken as booty by the IDF (1982) were returned to the PLO after a year as part of a prisoner exchange brokered by the French. Israel made copies of the archive materials before sending the crates to the Algeria, where Jiryis viewed them a short while after their return. Jiryis returned to Israel together with Arafat in the 1990s. He re-established a Research Center in East Jerusalem but the Israeli police seized the materials in 2001 when they closed down the Orient House and confiscated its archives.⁹ Thus, Jiryis experienced the confiscation twice – first in Beirut and then in East Jerusalem.

Looted archive 2 – “films seized from the PLO Archive in Beirut”

“Films Seized from the PLO Archive in Beirut” as defined by the IDF Archive, were taken as booty in Beirut in 1982 by Israeli military forces. Discussed in a separate article (Sela 2017), they contain mainly cinematic and photographic documentation of the daily life of Palestinians in refugee camps, military training, battles, civil war, political, cultural, and social events, resistance, parades, interviews with political and military figures, intellectuals and others. There are also a considerable number of films from foreign sources – The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), foreign television and news agencies, and historical material. The documentation contained in these films is occasionally historically and culturally rare and unique, and therefore significant.

The number of existing films is difficult to estimate, but recently, the archive opened in my presence a list of approximately 1200 films or film footage, some appearing several times in various versions. Only a few dozen films have been released to the public and the criteria for opening this material and making it accessible are not clear. Although some of the archive materials are from non-Palestinian entities, many of the existing materials in IDF Archive were filmed by Palestinians and shed light on the documentation of Palestinian visual history and resistance. They make it possible to expose their self-representation, one that is non-Western and not contaminated by colonial aspects (Denes 2014, 222).¹⁰ I was unable to find information in the IDF Archive regarding the identity of the institute/entity from which the films were seized. They are catalogued at the IDF Archive as “PLO Archive,” where in fact no such institution exists.¹¹ I encountered many obstacles in my attempts to discover the archive from which they were plundered - the Cultural Arts Section (Sela 2017).

Colonial features of official military archives governing plundered materials

The politics of looting and control – censorship, erasure and suppression

Omnia El-Shakry who discusses Middle East archives claims that archives reflect the destructive forces exerted on them, “whether shadow or real, intellectual or material”

(El-Shakry 2015, 935). As stated, colonial archives have a significant role in creating and constructing the colonial situation in consciousness – “sites” of “knowledge production” rather than sites for information retrieval (Stoler 2002, 89–107). Israel’s military archives have two types of colonial materials – the first, contains colonial history and depicts its development; the second, holds by force seized/looted Palestinian material and is the core of this essay. In both cases, they are engaged mainly in erasing and omitting the history of the colonized. They manifest the colonial situation and become a mirror of colonial power relations.

Looting of cultural treasures does not end with the physical act of plunder, but continues with colonial administration – the colonial archive controls the accessibility/exposure or withholding of the looted materials, their reading/interpretation (censorship laws and viewing rules and procedures of restrictions), and the exposure of knowledge. Thus, the structure of the archives reflects the desire to dominate consciousness. Therefore, as Stoler suggests, research and supervision of the archive’s knowledge management process is required. The challenge for researchers of colonial archives – those holding the history of colonialism and those holding the treasures of the colonized, is therefore to decipher the distorted history manufactured by the colonizer, and the destructive procedures of storage (Sela [2012] 2015).

My research over the years discusses the regime of knowledge of Israeli colonial archives – civil and military (Sela 2000, 2007, 2009, [2012] 2015, 2017). It shows, among other topics, that since the 1930s, Palestinian archives and images were systematically and deliberately plundered/looted by Jewish/Israeli military entities or by civilians who had internalized the codes of power, and deposited in official Israeli archives. Subsequently, Israel becomes a central source of information about the Palestinians. I address the way archives function under restrictive and oppressive colonial military management, how materials are classified on entry and become restricted, and the archive does not act to return materials to their owners (see also Caswell 2011). As of 22 February 2009, the IDF Archive stated on its website: “Records held by IDF and Defense Establishment Archives were created by security forces and therefore, pursuant to the Archives Law, have restricted access for fifty years from the date of creation.”¹² According to the *Archives’ Regulation Law* (2010), the period of limitation is between 30 and 70 years.¹³

Although not created by Jewish/Israel’s security forces, “captured” archives are subject to the rigid laws created originally for Jewish/Israeli military materials, ignoring their Palestinian ownership and moral and legal rights. Should the archive regard certain materials as having the potential to harm Israeli national security or foreign relations, the material is restricted indefinitely (*The Freedom of Information Law*, 1998). In one of the many legal correspondence I had with the IDF Archive regarding seized Palestinian archives (Sela 2009), and especially with regard to the material plundered in Beirut as described here, I received a letter from the Assistant Attorney General to the Ministry of Defense:

After further review of the subject, it has been found that the photograph requested by your client, Dr Rona Sela, is in the possession of the IDF as archival material, and as such is considered ‘restricted material’ as defined in paragraph 7 (a) to the *Archive Regulations* (Study of archival material deposited in the archive), 1966. We are therefore unable to make the material in question public.¹⁴

With regard to another archive plundered by Israeli Police in 2001, the Orient House archive, the response from the Public Complaints Unit of the Israel Police to my request to open the archive was: "... as a general rule the public has no rights to these documents, since the material is held under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Public Security, that issued an order to close the place" (Advocate Hamutal Sabag, 2 December 2008).

It is not known how many of the plundered archives the IDF Archive holds, how many have restricted access or under what circumstances they were seized, the information in most cases remaining classified. Legal counsel is not always helpful in disclosing this information as described here. The IDF Archive, responsible for all military archives in Israel (such as the Palmach Archive and Haganah History Archive), applies additional laws and regulations that further restrict the study of materials. As demonstrated, based on reports of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and the State Comptroller, the archive is in no hurry to publish material that is no longer restricted,¹⁵ creating obstacles and difficulties for researchers wishing to review them.¹⁶ In addition, the IDF Archive website refers to the laws of the State of Israel as "influencing the work of the archive," thereby giving themselves a wide range of freedom outside of the constitutional framework.¹⁷ In addition, the process of censorship continues to exercise control over who has access to materials or parts thereof. For example, the adoption of discriminatory policies between researchers such as the selective opening of materials, or flexible rules for researchers with an establishment agenda, one of the IDF Archive's main characteristics, especially in relation to Palestinian materials chronicling a different history. Thus, for example, on one of my visits to the archive I came with a Palestinian researcher. The archive created many obstacles in giving him access, especially to Palestinian materials (see also Budeiri 2016). Moreover, various films from the looted film archives in question were opened and closed at different stages. The same applied to aerial photographs of the Palestinian villages pre-1948 (Sela [2012] 2015, 91). This pattern is reinforced by rules, norms and modes of conduct, strategies, built-in policies and laws that regulate archive activities and archiving and cataloging methods. In a meeting of the Israeli Parliament's *Constitution, Law and Justice Committee* relating to the study of confidential material (17 January 2005), one of the security officials said: [The criterion is] "to be one of own. I was editor of *Maarachot* [an official Israeli military magazine]. Within this framework, I got it. If I hadn't been editor of *Maarachot*, I wouldn't have got it."¹⁸ Moreover, the archive decides which researchers it permits to conduct research and places restrictions on various reference materials, or controls the topics/areas that can be investigated.¹⁹ The State Controller wrote: "The need for authorization and conditions for authorization raise concerns of discrimination towards those interested in access to materials, contrary to prevailing standards in scientific research."²⁰

The plundered archives are not only subjugated to knowledge production, sometimes they are also under a risk of physical destruction. With regard to the Orient House archive that was plundered by the Israeli police (Figure 2) and moved from its original building in East Jerusalem (JQ 2001; Sela 2009; Oshrov 2010), and according to the letter I received from the Israel Police Complaints Unit mentioned above (2 December 2008), the archive was moved to containers in Beit-Shemesh. Since the area suffers from extreme climate changes, the material is therefore under the risk of physical devastation (Sela 2009, 8,125).

In the few cases when archives/materials are returned to their owners, the archive's approach is: "copy before returning" to retain as much information as possible about



Figure 2. Amos Ben Gershom, *An Israeli Soldier is Guarding the Orient House after it was Closed by Israeli Police and its Archive was Plundered*, 12 August 2001, Israeli Government Press Office Archie.

the colonized. Moreover, the archive's strategy of duplicating materials that are not its own without the owner's approval is another patronizing strategy indicating that the archive continues to control materials it does not own, expropriates their copyright, and requires

payment from readers for publication of materials. For instance, the IDF duplicated materials it seized from the Research Center and gave them to an unknown Israeli research institution, information that is blacked out.²¹ The State Archivist, Mr Y. Freundlich, in response to one of my query wrote, August 30, 2009: "I have seen the collection ... I have assigned the archive manager the task of returning the material to its owners after it has been scanned."

It is important to note that these colonial rules and regulations embodied in the work of Israeli colonial military archives are not only imposed on plundered archives but also on material of Palestinian importance produced by Jews/Israelis charting colonialism. This is because they too have the potential to crack the colonizer's narrative. Thus, for example, the archival materials describing the massacre of Jewish forces against the Palestinian population in the village Dir-Yassin in the region of Jerusalem in 1948 were documented by Jewish sources, and Meir Pail, a commander at that time, donated them to the IDF Archive. Since then, they are censored, although they were supposed to be declassified after 50 years (1998). Israel continues to renew the security classification. In a petition to the Israeli Supreme court in 2010 to open the material, and thus recognizing the massacre that Israel denies – "three reports, certain documentation and a group of photographs" – the court adopted the state's opinion and argued that they were "especially afraid of the severe visual effect of the material that might in its opinion hurt the State's international relations. This effect is found in various photographs."²²

Recently, I asked to view the classified material of Dir-Yassin; however, the IDF Archive's manager forwarded my request to the Israeli State Archivist. He informed me that:

A special committee [headed by the Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked] to deal with permission to view classified archival material met on 11 September 2016, to discuss among others, your request. The committee asked for clarifications from additional sources and concluded that until they receive these answers and have further discussions on the subject, the material will remain classified.²³

A parallel can be found in colonial archive research documenting colonial systems of management and ways of erasing history also when colonial rule ends. For example, most of the colonial archives in Algeria were transferred to France despite demands to keep them in Algeria for study by local researchers (Shepard 2015, 873). Todd Shepard reviews the long history of suppression and concealment of archives – looting or deliberate hiding, burning or stealing – starting with the Spanish archives in the Philippines destroyed by the Americans in 1898, to the European archives stolen by the Nazis and then by the Russians at the end of the war, or archives seized in Iraq in 2004 by the US (869). Archives describing British colonial rule and its long history of brutality against the indigenous peoples (Elkins 2005) were transferred to Britain after the colonies received independence, remaining under British control – "From India to Kenya, a dark cloud literally hung over Britain's imperial retreat" (Elkins 2015, 852) – and thus defined by Rawlings as "migrated archives" (2015). To this day, they are subject to British sovereignty, which decides what to open and what parts of history to tell. The Government of Kenya, for example, filed a request several times for the return of archives and documents, requests that were denied on the grounds that they were British archives. Furthermore, there were instructions to burn/destroy some of these archives. With regard to materials transferred to Britain, the policy,

until recently, was to forget, to conceal or to censor. These actions were taken in order “not to embarrass the British” since they describe the violation of human rights, torture, rape, illegal detentions and the like (Shepard 2015; see also Rawlings 2015). Some of them disappeared in the 1990s and there is little expectation that they will come to light (Elkins 2015, 856–858). “Gaping holes became an imperial legacy in postcolonial archives,” enabling those responsible to escape the scene of the crime (Elkins 2015, 852–854). Elkins describes the British colonial violence imposed not only on personhood but also on objects:

Evidence was first removed from Kenya, subsequently hidden, and then later disclosed through legal discovery that is of great relevance to how we as historians think about British decolonization and the relationship between the state and the construction of its archives. (Elkins 2015, 859)

A Western interpretation

Knowledge about colonized peoples, categorized as “third world” by the West, is found in many cases in the “metropolitan countries,” in archives of Western knowledge as Aijaz Ahmad shows. They are not examined by indigenous criteria but measured, evaluated and categorized according to criteria of the Western World. Western archives treat them with tactics of silencing, fabrication and false image of the non-Western. Archives of colonized peoples, always established to serve a Western audience and never a native audience, refrain from addressing non-Western practices and contain destructive features (Aijaz 2000, 286–296).

Palestinian archives follow the same Western pattern of structuring, interpretation and destruction imposed on them by Israel’s military and civil archives (Sela 2009, [2012] 2015). Directing them to mainly Zionist audience allows erasure of their Palestinian characteristics, largely expresses the Zionist system of representation and repression. For example, the IDF Archive catalogs the films taken from Beirut as “Films seized from the ‘PLO Archive’ in Beirut,” although in fact there was no such institute. Information regarding their origin – the Cultural Arts Section of the PLO – is not available in the archive, nor it has been researched by Israeli archivists, although it has been more than 30 years since they were seized (Sela 2017).²⁴ Archivists are employed as “gatekeepers” of official Israeli history and the archive’s treatment of materials reflects patronization, destruction and erasure. The many interviews and correspondence with IDF Archive staff did not help in finding the owners of the film archive. Furthermore, the copyright holder is listed as “IDF Spokesman Unit” and not the institute the material was taken from (see, e.g. Figure 3). Hence, not only is the origin of the films erased but they also have new owners and a “new” copyright holder (see also Figure 4, taken from a dead Arab at the Haganah History Archive).

I was also prevented from studying the military archive’s archive – correspondence and information that could shed light on the films’ origins and how they reached the archive – and denied valuable information regarding the material’s Palestinian characteristics. The legal assistance I took in an attempt to facilitate opening the materials, clarifying their origin and identifying their owners, did not help in most instances.²⁵ In addition, although the procedure to receive the status of “accredited researcher”²⁶ is not democratic – a procedure that allows researchers to view confidential material – I filed a request in hopes of tracing the origin of the films. The request was denied a number of times and the whole

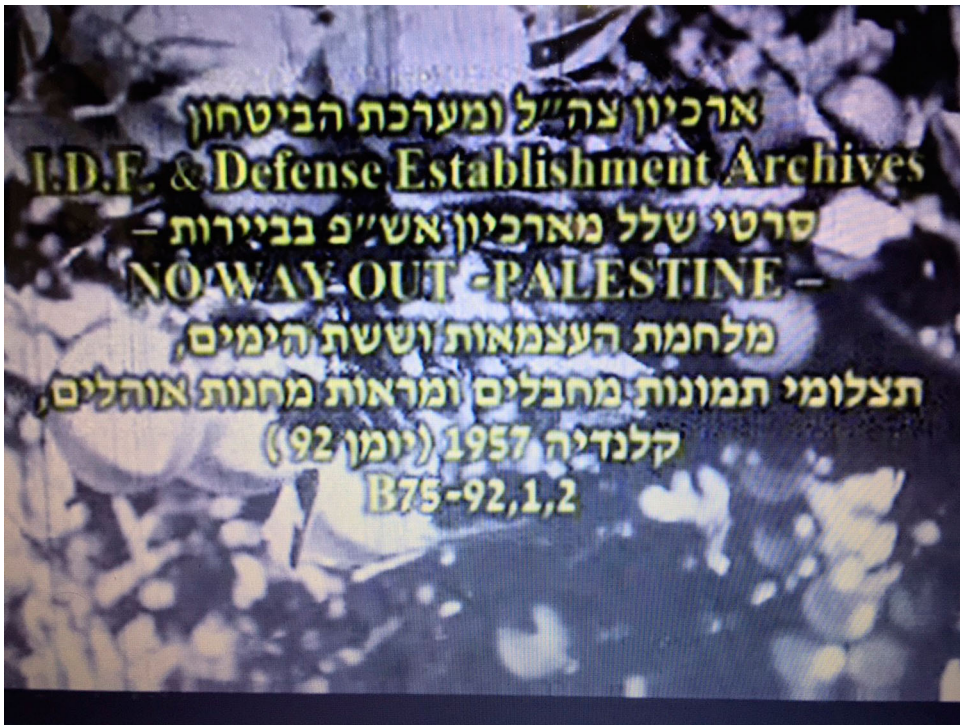


Figure 3. “IDF and Defense Establishment Archive, Films Seized from the ‘PLO Archive’ in Beirut. No Way Out – Palestine War of Independence and Six Day War. Photographs of pictures of terrorists, and scenes from tent camps, Qalandia 1957, (92) B75–92,1,2”.

process, like the archive’s conduct regarding the topic of research, was ambiguous. Finally, I received a response from the archive manager, Ilana Alon, 16 August 2011:

It is not known from where in Lebanon [they were seized – R.S.] nor the exact date. The archive does not know from which PLO body they were taken ... the films were seized during the Shalom HaGalil war in 1982 – brought to Israel by the battalion for the technical collection of seized documents ... the reels were transferred to the IDF Archive by the IDF spokesman in 1985.²⁷

The IDF Archive avoids researching and cataloging the films according to the criteria originally employed by the Palestinians to assemble them, subjecting them to an alien cataloging, deciphering and interpretation system, and treating them as materials of minor cultural importance. For example, they are catalogued according to Zionist terminology and the IDF Archive’s customary system of coding, categorization and classification, with no relation to their Palestinian characteristics/cataloging. The films are classified in the IDF Archive on two separate lists – “Seized by IDF Spokesman Unit” and “Seized and Edited by IDF Spokesman Unit” (Figure 3) – that evidently do not match or consider the material’s original classification. According to a longstanding Zionist tradition, a Palestinian is classified as an enemy and a terrorist. For example, in photographs looted before the 1950s, most of the Palestinian fighters are defined as “Arab gangs” (Figures 5 and 6) – producing a negative connotation. Palestinian settlements are referred to by Hebrew names to erase their Palestinian identity, people expelled from their homes during the

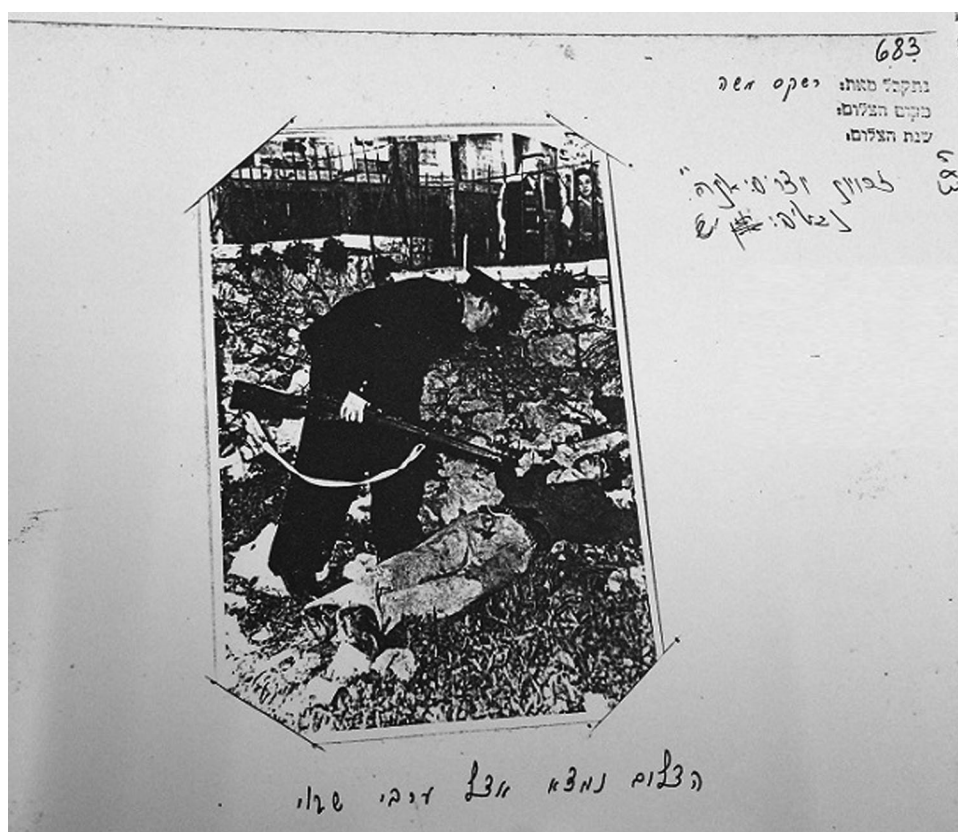


Figure 4. "The photograph was found with an Arab prisoner. Received from Rashkes Moshe. Copy Rights: Haganah History Archive. Negative is existed." According to Rashkes, the photograph was taken from a dead Arab, and not as mentioned in the archive files.

Nakba and want to return are defined as "infiltrators" (Sela 2009, 13–14, 44, 62, 77–79; Bar-Tal 1999; Podeh 2002) and looted photographs are defined at *Bamahane* [Military Magazine] 41, 9 June 1949 as: "imprisoned photographs" (Figure 7, Sela 2009, 89). Sometimes when the text in the photograph does not meet the worldview of the colonizer, it is physically deleted (for instance, by correcting fluid, see Figure 8). Hana Sleiman demonstrates that Israel uses the documents of the Research Center to construct a narrative that depicts the PLO as a terrorist organization and the Israeli army as the liberator of Southern Lebanon (Sleiman 2016, 48–51). Films too reflect the construction of a demonic identity. Every film copy received by a researcher begins with a yellow text written by IDF Archive workers, characterized by Zionist terminology. For example, Telecine 00075–92, 1, 2 is cataloged as "Photographs of pictures of terrorists, and scenes from tent camps"; and Telecine 00084–0 as "Terrorist camp in Kuwait." Clearly, "terrorist" is not a Palestinian definition. Telecine 00102–0 gets the softened description, "Description of IDF attitude and harsh treatment of Palestinians in the territories." Scenes of mistreatment earn the milder term, "harsh." The looting itself is described in the military archives in soft terms that conceal the act of plunder. The images are catalogued as "images received from ..." instead of "images looted/plundered by ..." (see, e.g. Figure 4 above). Seized Palestinian

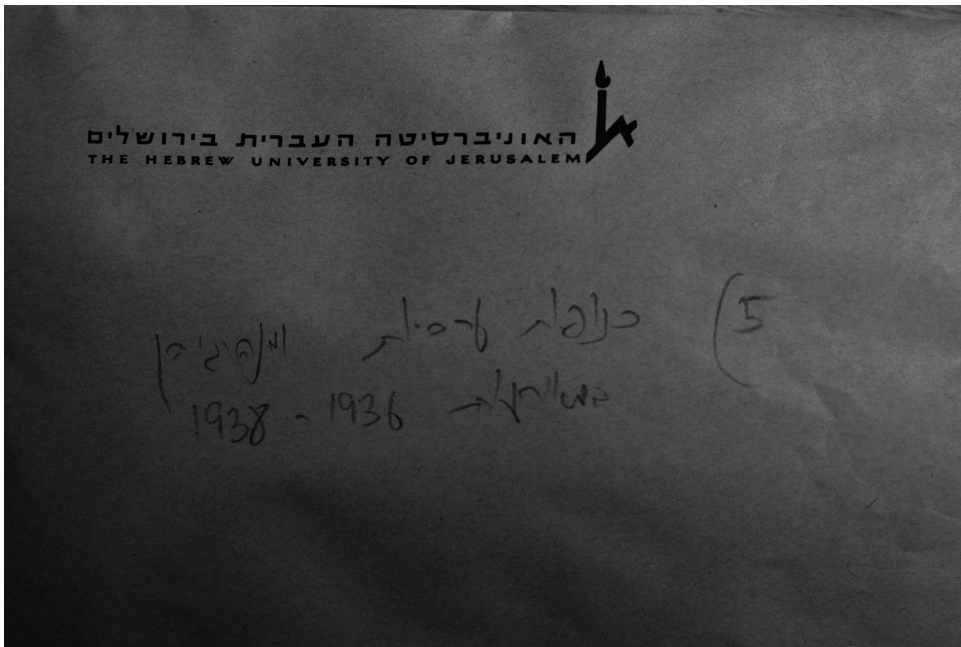


Figure 5. *Untitled*, 1936–1938, The National Library, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Archival envelope with photographs, entitled: “Arab Gangs and their Leaders During the Riots of 1936–1938”.



Figure 6. *Untitled*, 1936–1938, The National Library, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The photograph was taken from the above envelope entitled: “Arab Gangs and their Leaders During the Riots of 1936–1938”.



Figure 7. "Imprisoned photographs," from the article "Pictures and Treasures in Arabs' Lenses," *Bama-hane* 41, 9 June 1949.

materials are shown permanently at the Museum of Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Communication Center, presented by Israel in a biased and inciting manner as material confiscated from terrorists (see, e.g. [Figure 9](#)). However, the same type of material and content, for instance, Israeli key holders displaying national symbols, produced after the 1967 war by Israeli bodies, are perceived in the Israeli consciousness as strengthening national pride (Sela 2007, [Figure 10](#)).



Figure 8. Chalil Rissas, *Demonstration of Palestinian Women's Organization in the Old City of Jerusalem*, undated. Written on the placard: "No to relations and no to negotiations, the mandate will be nullified" and another section was deleted with white-out. Looted photograph from the studio of the photographer. IDF Archives. "Accepted since the mopping up operation of 1967, November 2002 - an opinion by the attorney general to allow the use of seized materials." Courtesy of the Rissas Family.

The archive as a site of resistance

Colonial archives, as demonstrated above, are imagined sites of institutions that create histories using mechanisms of erasure and concealment. Over the years, there have been attempts to challenge the reading of archives and colonial practices, and to build



Figure 9. Seized artifacts at the permanent exhibition, The Museum of the Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Communication Center, Gelilot, Israel. Photographed during a visit, July 2009.

postcolonial/decolonial models (Stoler 2002; McEwan 2003; Sela 2009, [2012] 2015; Steele 2010; Caswell 2011; Weld 2014; Elkins 2015; El-Shakry 2015). The anti-colonialist discourse requires, as Bhabha suggests (1990) “an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it” (75). This process requires reading through the colonial archive’s many overt and covert layers, neutralizing its colonial biases, and exposing information that often contradicts and challenges its official goals, illuminating the blind spots. It alters our knowledge about the past, providing new tools to confront the present, an “archival turn.”

The Palestinian film archive in the IDF Archive was cleansed of its original resistance and Palestinian uprightness, undergoing colonial emasculation. Its objectives and the reason it was established were erased. The IDF Archive closed it for an extended period and when partially opened, presented it as an archive stripped of context and history, its identity and essence altered. It was cataloged according to Western conventions, using the terminology of the colonizer and not the original terminology, and deleting the identities of the films’ main creators. It was presented as an eclectic and unidentified assortment of documentary films comprised of documentary footage with no sequence or connection between them.

This suggests that the role of the postcolonial researcher is to dig into the different layers, to extract information – in many cases disguised, biased and inaccessible, to construct the historical and cultural context, to view it in its original form, to reveal the key figures it served and the creators it sponsored. The researcher must return the colonially



Figure 10. Artifacts produced by Israeli agencies after 1967 war. Shown at the exhibition *Six Days Plus Forty Years*, Petach Tikva Museum of Art, 2007, curator: Rona Sela.

sterilized archive to its initial historical and cultural context (McEwan 2003; Sela 2009, [2012] 2015). “If Western archive has done nothing but silence, misrepresent and fabricate false images of non-Western culture, the task, necessarily, is to restore the authenticity of those culture through their own practices, rituals, and representations” (Aijaz 2000, 296).

El-Shakry also discusses the phenomenon of the absence of materials and documents in Middle East archives. She calls it “History without Documents” that challenges the writing and turns the archive into an “instituting imaginary,” following the traces of the dead, “always incomplete, always unknowable, and always, at least partially, the projection of our own desires.” Therefore, in her opinion, one must reveal what is inaccessible, while having an understanding of the system of “archival imaginaries” (El-Shakry 2015, 921). For El-Shakry, the archive is a metaphor of selective forgetting and what remains is writing the history of what is lost and missing in archival evidence. Researchers in the Middle East are forced to find alternative sources of information – oral histories, correspondence, memoirs and private collections, newspaper clippings, foreign archives and the like (934; see also Stoler 2002; Elkins 2015, 864–865; Weld 2014).

Colonial looting – mirror images and hybrid gazes

As part of my ongoing research on Israel’s looting of Palestinian archives, I initiated a range of peripheral interviews²⁸ – with looters, with victims of looting such as archive managers/

workers (Sela 2009, 82–103; 2013), with witnesses – which shed light on the complexity of power relations reflected through various hybrid gazes. In addition, tracking archival materials – traces, signs, indications of erasure, clues and snippets of looted information and digging into the various layers of the archive,²⁹ illuminates the genealogy of plunder and mechanism of erasure,³⁰ as the archive acts brutally to delete any evidence of looting. For example, to complete the information on Photographs taken from a dead Arab (Figure 4 above), donated by the soldier to the Haganah History Archive, I located and interviewed the soldier who looted the photograph, and also collected information from a book he had written describing the plunder (Rashkes 1962; Sela 2009, 96, 2013). Another example is a photograph “found in the pocket” of Abd AL-Qadir Al-Husayni and donated to the Palmach archive by Uzi Narkis, as shown in the archive records, enabled the discovery of a chain of plunder (Figure 11). It is important to note that the complementary information in original files accessible in the beginning and later closed to researchers – such as when classified material was opened/closed, under what circumstances and by whom, and under what circumstances it was seized – also helped to complete details about the plunder and the stringent methods of managing materials in official military Israeli archives. In addition, the fact that soldiers and citizens who plundered/looted archives donated them to the military archives, helped to chart the process of looting. Although they chose to forward the occupied archives to a military institution with strict



Figure 11. “Palmach Information Center (Palmach Archive). Nahshon Operation. Photograph Description: Gangs commander in the battle over Qastel. In the photograph: Abd AL-Qadir Al-Husayni (the photograph was found in his pocket). Date: 1948. Received from Uzi Narkis, Jerusalem”.

laws and limitations on access and exposure, their privacy as looter was exposed when the archive opened the material and cataloged them as “donators.”

I deal here with the seizure of the Research Center and Cultural Arts Section in order to broaden the discussion on the multifaceted layers in colonial relations addressed by many researchers. Comparing various testimonies of the colonized, the colonizer³¹ and a photographer with regard to these specific cases of plunder, enables crosschecking and questioning of hybrid gazes as reflected here. Sabri Jirvis's – the last director of the Palestine Research Center – who anticipated the seizure, testified:

We prepared for the IDF's entry into the city, and our departure. It was September 1982. The PLO organization was enormous and we weren't able to take anything. A day before the IDF's entry into the city, when it was known that the first Israeli soldiers had entered the adjacent street, I arrived at the Center at night **and took important materials** – mainly manuscripts – memories of Palestinian figures I didn't want lost, political reports and assessments. They remained with me, out of the reach of Israel's soldiers ... that's the real archive. Not what the IDF took. I put the material into two suitcases and kept them in a secure place.

When we were told that Israeli soldiers were in the next street, I sent the workers home, closed the Center, and disappeared. **We worked until the last minute** and then fled. I didn't see the actual seizure. Somebody told me about it. The IDF soldiers thought the building was booby-trapped, so on the first day they came and searched the area. On the second day, they brought trucks and began to load them up. They took everything – apart from Knesset protocols and laws of the State of Israel. There was a board in the meeting room, and they saw Hebrew writing on it – we taught our employees Hebrew – so one of the Israeli soldiers had written, “**You're screwed!**” (emphasis added by the author, [Figure 12](#)).

Jirvis emphasizes Palestinian pride and uprightness (Memmi [1974] 2003) – the fact that he rescued the most important material, not giving Israel the opportunity to control significant knowledge, and that they worked until the last moment. At the same time, he describes the soldiers' attitude: “You're screwed!” The blackboard, a tool of transforming knowledge becomes a vehicle for a public shaming.

Shlomo Arad, an Israeli photo-journalist, then in his thirties, entered Lebanon with the IDF paratroopers. He worked for *Newsweek*, but also as an IDF military photographer, having an independent arrangement with the military magazine *Bamahane*. According to his testimony, apparently related to the Cultural Arts Section:³²

Leading up to the IDF entry into the city – everyone knew the IDF was going to enter western Beirut – a ‘buzz’ started around the ‘PLO Archive.’ Many were interested in the archive and wanted to know where it was, to find and photograph it – foreign and Israeli reporters and photographers, the *Newsweek* editorial staff, and also me, personally ... **I imagined** I could just enter the building, **open files and photograph**. It was **my dream**.

As someone involved in visually documenting the Israeli–Palestinian conflict from a subversive point of view, Arad hoped to see a reflection of Israeli society in the Palestinian archive.

I thought perhaps I would find files on Israel ... when the IDF began to bite into West Beirut, the museum and other parts, we started looking for the archive. In September I went in with the unit that fought and conquered West Beirut. It took a few days until I found it. ([Figure 13](#))

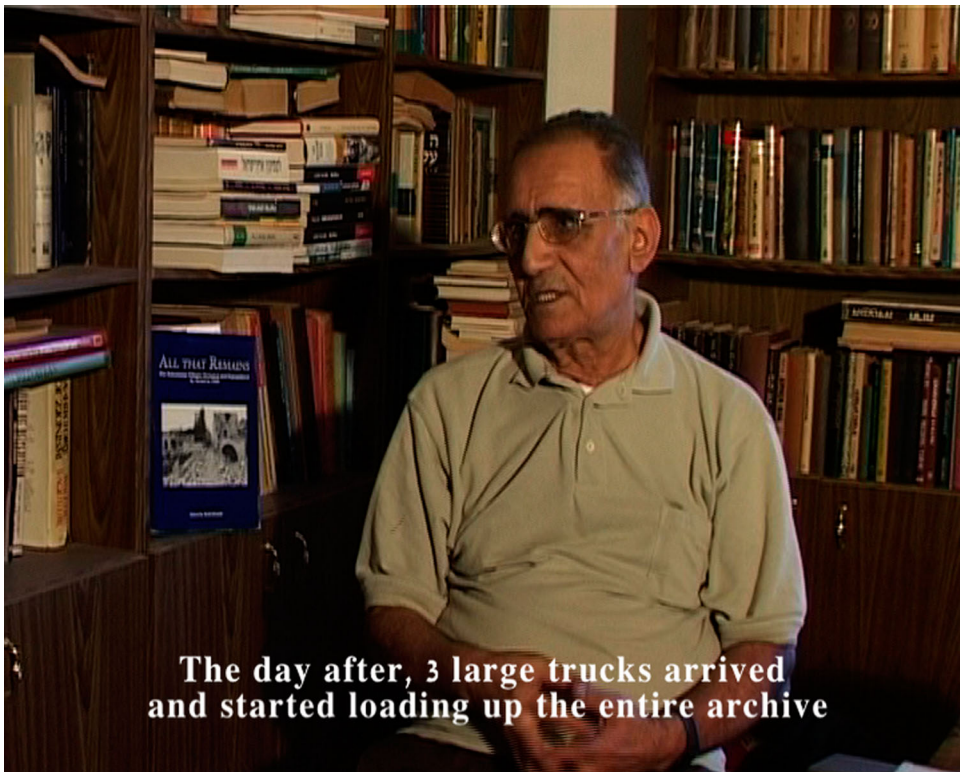


Figure 12. A video interview with Sabri Jiryis, 28 August 2009.

Ultimately, Arad was not given access to the archive and its contents.

When I got there, IDF soldiers had already loaded it. The archive was surrounded by tanks and walls of sand, like a fortress, to prevent access to it. I arrived in the late morning; the weather was good, September – still summer. A chain of soldiers, a slight distance from one another, were passing crates taken from the archive from hand to hand, until they were loaded onto the trucks. There were two trucks standing outside. The army forbade me to take photographs, but after much arguing it was agreed I could photograph the soldiers from the rear. I photographed the human chain but again the army intervened and that particular photograph was censored. They never returned it to me. They only allowed me to publish the image that I gave you, where you can't identify the soldiers or the actual plundering.

Unlike Arad, who was consciously looking for "the archive", an Israeli soldier from para-trooper Regiment 50 who assisted in seizing the Cultural Arts Section described to me his encounter with the colonized archive and the way Israeli soldiers were documented:

We moved around in APC's (armored personnel carriers) and a person from the ISA (Israel Security Agency) directed us to places where materials had to be collected from the PLO's various institutions. We entered the buildings. Some teams worked in parallel. Everything was taken. Often in buildings where the archives were situated, they hid weapons as well. I remember massive Russian crates filled with bombs, Russian Kalashnikovs, rockets, rifles, RPG's, knives. We were scared the buildings were booby-trapped. So we loaded the weapons first. The crates were heavy and it took hours. Then we collected the documents.



Figure 13. Shlomo Arad, Israeli soldiers taking as booty archives in Beirut (including Cultural Arts Section), 1982, courtesy of the photographer.

The soldier, unlike the photographer, did not even know from which institution the material was taken, the importance of the documents or what he was going to see. While Arad searched for the archive actively, the soldier spoke about the confiscated materials and archives in general and in a passive manner:

It was only from you I learned that one of the plundered archives was from the and the other from Cultural Arts Section. I identified the building immediately from a photograph I saw lying on your desk. As a soldier, I didn't know what it was used for.

The soldier, as part of his duty, was forcibly exposed to the Cultural Arts Section items.

When clearing the archive of its contents, we saw pictures of Israeli soldiers taken at Israeli checkpoints, which froze our blood. We were afraid we would see ourselves there. If I'm not mistaken, someone identified himself or someone he knew. We understood we'd been singled out. **They'd been watching us.** War, a foreign country, everything vulnerable. You don't fully understand the codes of the place or what you're doing there. Out of the blue in Beirut you see old pictures of you or your friends photographed at checkpoints in the occupied territories. **It was frightening.** Suddenly we understood **we had been targeted** ... that we'd been marked ... No, we never discussed it among ourselves.

Much younger than Arad, the soldier, totally absorbed by the army by choice, "Poisoned" in Israeli slang, mainly remembers: "Russian Kalashnikovs, rockets, rifles, RPG's." The civil and ethical aspects that such a meeting generates did not enter his consciousness. Hence, perhaps, the encounter with his reflection or people like him in the "enemy" archive was surprising and agitating. But the visual surveillance of the "Israeli soldier" by the "enemy" contains two elements that reinforced the experience – first, it was taken surreptitiously without the soldiers' knowledge, apparently for intelligence purposes, and gave rise to a sense of impending disaster, that until then the soldiers were unaware of: "We understood we had been targeted." Second, people identified themselves in the pictures. They were looking at a personal portrait of themselves, and they sensed the crossing of a threshold that shocked and unnerved them. This feeling was accompanied by emotional turmoil and fear in real time, and then later repressed: "It froze our blood. We were afraid we'd see ourselves there ... we realized they had followed us ... it was frightening ... no we never discussed it among ourselves."

A study of a group of photographs from the Haganah archive looted by Moshe Rashkes, an Israeli commander, from a slain Arab in the battle in Bab Al-Wad (Jerusalem region, 1948, [Figure 4](#) above) reflects the same complexity. An interview with the looter and a book that he published – *Days of Lead* (1962) depicts how they carried the body to the base and the looting of photographs:

He bent over the dead man's head and lifted the upper part of the body to a sitting position. ... it [the body] was slipping from my hands and slowly sliding down; I struggled with all my strength to raise it up again ... The dead body nauseated me, I felt sick to my stomach. I felt I was going to throw up. The body was placed [in the storeroom at the base] ... his head, slightly to the side, was tipped back as if pulled by a hidden weight ... we bent over the body and started rummaging through the pockets of the blood-soaked overalls ... the sight of the blood sticking to my fingers revolted me. I stretched out my hand over the dead man's trousers and began to wipe my fingers on them. (Rashkes 1962, 105–107; Sela 2013)

The images he looted document riots and injured or dead bodies of Jewish soldiers:

Yecheil handed me a photograph. "These are our soldiers" ... "the enemy is distributing it" ... I glanced at it ... **my blood froze.** I felt as if the breath had been squeezed out of me. Paralyzed. Our soldiers – a pile of naked bodies, amputated limbs, I was shaking." (Rashkes 1962, 28–29)

"We thought they were distributed by the Arabs to frighten us, he told me."³³

The indigenous demands ownership over the gaze. Like a mirror image, the soldier saw, maybe for the first time, "us" photographed by "them" – a reflection or testimony to the violent and harsh power he imposed over the colonized, apartheid that Israeli society

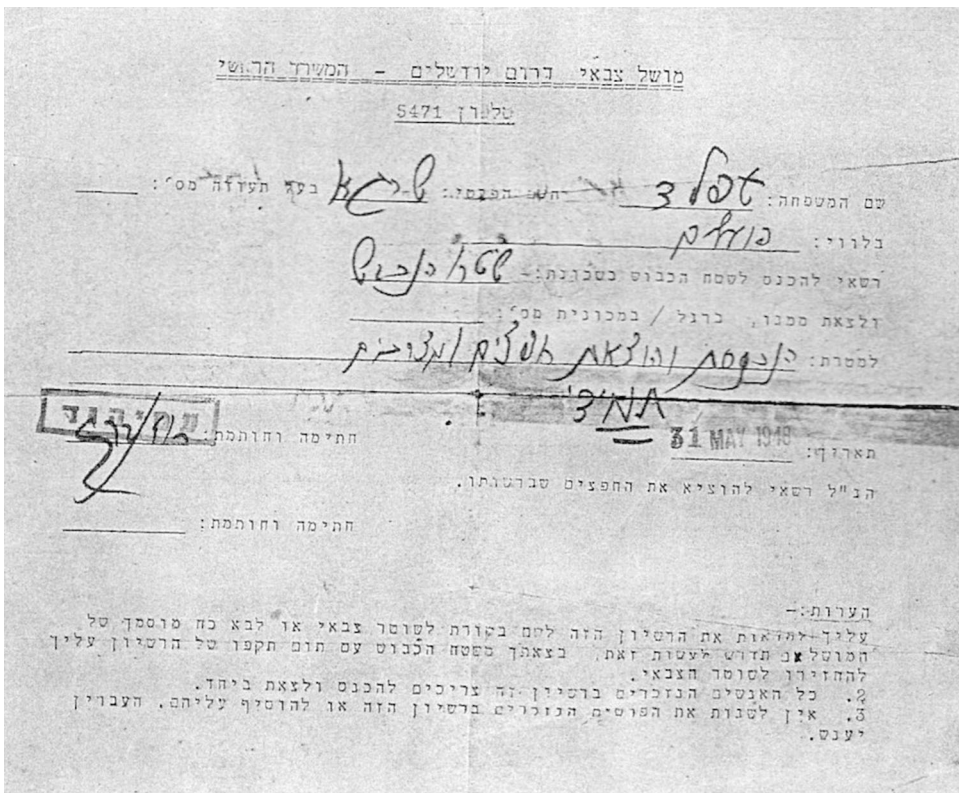


Figure 14. “The Military Governor in South Jerusalem – The Main Office. A permanent authorization to bring and take out products and objects from the occupied area, 31.5.1948”. Courtesy of Shrager Peled.

denies. These type of photographs, exist also in sections documenting colonialism in the colonizer’s archive, but they are masked with Zionist interpretation and terminology or censored/subordinated to colonial rules. Peled-Elhanan shows an equivalent phenomenon in Israeli schoolbooks in relation to the Palestinians. She states that “they command forgetting by being based on a very strict selection of facts” and as such, “they harness the past to the benefit of the present and the future of Israeli policy of expansion” (Peled-Elhanan 2013, 124).

The image of the self that the soldier saw in the colonized archive cracked his viewpoint of denial. As a result, he felt threatened. While the camera serves as an instrument for instance of the state or official bodies to transform knowledge and power, as various researchers demonstrate (for instance, Sekula 1986, Tagg 1988), rebellious organizations, especially since the period of the Third Movement (and mainly in cinema) started to use it to undermine colonial power, reflecting the reversal of power relations (Sela 2017).

Both soldiers, from the 1948 battle and from Beirut 1982, faced the fact that they were exposed. The soldiers describe the fear and anxiety they felt when looking at their *imago*. The mechanism of power that they themselves had created was now turned on them. They wished to observe without being seen, however, the colonized unveiled their gaze, enabling the shadow of the other to fall upon the self (Bhabha 1994, 85). Moreover, the soldiers’ reaction reflects an ambivalence, which is “one of the most significant

discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power” (Bhabha 1994, 86–95). Fanon described ([1967] 2001) the hybrid gazes – the fantasy/longing/curiosity/excitement (of the photographer), and the colonizers’ worry and fear at seeing an image of themselves through the eyes of the colonized, reflecting the power/knowledge relationship. Like the *mirror period* of Lacan. “Every time the subject sees his image and recognizes it, it is always in some way ‘the mental oneness which is inherent in him’ that he acclaims” (Fanon [1967] 2001, 161).

Epilogue

Colonial archives usually hold colonial history while colonial museums treasures plundered from the indigenous. Both institutions, the archive and the museum, have influence over the writing of history, but also over the present and the future (Derrida 1998; Stoler 2002; Anderson [1983] 2006; Small 2011). The Israeli case is unique on two levels. First, colonialism has not yet ended, and is still active and an open wound. Second, in Israel, the treasures of the native are not held by the museums nor are they shown or exposed to the public. They are concealed and restricted in military archives as enemy resources and are subjugated to military rules. They resemble in many aspects, archives devoted to colonial history, but also have some unique characteristics as shown here. However, it is important to note that colonial museums that reflect the imperialistic collecting mania recall, in many ways, colonial archives. For instance, they both have a central role in deleting the past (with regard to museums see for instance, Small 2011; Edwards and Mead 2013). In addition, since the 1970s, there is a tendency to reinterpret imperial history in colonial museums, similar to the colonial archives as discussed here, allowing “other layers of histories – local, regional, community, indigenous, minority – to be expressed” (Sauvage 2010).

Israeli society lives by a dichotomous code of ethics. On the one hand, there is consensus on returning treasures seized by the Nazis to their Jewish owners, and the subject is rarely off the public agenda. On the other hand, this ethical code is not applied to Palestinian treasures taken as booty by Israel.³⁴ Officials are also using the colonial argument that taking and preserving plundered treasures in wartime save them from oblivion as National Library staff, for example, claimed to Amit Gish in reference to Palestinian libraries seized in the 1948 war (Amit 2014, 79). Palestinian libraries not only were not returned to their owners, but the attitude of the Israeli librarians was arrogant as well, and descendants of the owners who came to view them were treated condescendingly. The daughters of Khalil Sakakini tell of their encounter with their father’s books, plundered from their home by librarians of the National Library in 1948. After the 1967 War, when permitted to visit the library, one of the senior librarians said to them,

You have no right to claim anything ... in fact, each book individually and also all the books together are abandoned property ... maybe we looked surprised or even annoyed ... because he repeated and explained that since 1948 all Palestinian property – such as books, houses, fields, villages, towns – had become the property of the State of Israel. (Hanegbi 2002, 121)

Recently, the subject was raised again after Daash, realizing the commercial potential of historic treasures, began selling them to finance part of their activities. Other historical and archeological remains, mainly Christian, were destroyed and their destruction recorded, as



Figure 15. Avraham Vered, *Paratroopers Taking Documents as Booty in Qalquilya*, 1956 IDF Archive, Bamahane Collection.

part of a deliberate cultural war. Consequently, the British Museum began storing in its warehouses archeological treasures smuggled illegally out of Syria “from a desire to preserve the items during the civil war.” But unlike the not-so-distant colonial past of Britain – still holding many treasures it does not legally own, while preventing access to colonial archives describing the horrors that occurred in the colonies (Rawlings 2015, 199) – Neil Macgregor, the director of the museum, relating to the recently smuggled treasure, said (quoted in *Haaretz*, June 6 2015): “We are an important factor in preserving the items that were smuggled from Syria, We did the same thing in Afghanistan, and are now returning to them the findings we had in our possession” (Stern 2015). Official Israel, however, not learning from the colonial past, is entrenched in the colonial situation. Changing the archive into a decolonial/postcolonial site of resistance is therefore one of the challenges facing researchers of Israeli colonial archives today, along with the battle to return pillaged archives to their owners.

Notes

1. The Palestine Research Center archive plundered in 1982; was discussed in Sela 2009 and Sleiman 2016.
2. On the cultural importance of looted material see Montgomery (2011, 325 (Iraqi material)) and Sela (2009, 106–113 (Palestinian material)).
3. This is how the photographer wrote his name in English. The academic transliteration of his name from Arabic to English is Rasas.
4. Information about the Research Center and its directors is taken from Sabri Jiryis (interviews on video, 28 August 2009; 24 July 2010; 7 October 2007); interview with Anis Sayigh, February

- 16, 2010: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmigjelLo1Ea>; http://photography.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/18769/anis-sayigh_a-profile-from-the-archives; (JP 2014; Amour 2011; Salah 1985; Sela 2009; Sleiman 2016), <http://www.alraqamia.com/user/profile/publisher/10> and <http://www.shuun.ps/page-438-en.html>.
5. Fayiz Sayigh (1922 Syria-1980 New York). As a child, he moved with his family to Tiberius and studied in Safed. Completed a first and second degree at the American University of Beirut and a Doctorate in Philosophy at Georgetown University in the US. His doctoral thesis dealt with *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine*.
6. Anis Sayigh (1931 Tiberius-2009 Amman). Educated at Zion College in Jerusalem. He was exiled to Sidon in 1948, completed his Bachelor's degree at the American University in Beirut. He obtained a doctorate degree in Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge University (1964), and founded the Palestinian Encyclopedia.
7. Sabri Jiryis, born in Fassuta, in the Galilee (1938). He studied Law in the late 1950s at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and was expelled by Israel in 1970 for activities defined by the state as hostile. Exiled in Lebanon, he worked for a short period at the Institute for Palestinian Studies and became a member of the Palestinian National Council. He currently lives in Fassuta.
8. The library held more than 20,000 titles, although various sources quote different amounts <http://www.alraqamia.com/user/profile/publisher/10>; (Ihsan 1982; Rubin 1983; JP 2014; Sleiman 2016).
9. Unearthing secret police archives in Guatemala, see Weld (2014).
10. Although Denes refers to films of the Palestinian Cinema Institution and not the PLO Cultural Arts Section – from where the films were seized and as will be described, both archives expose Palestinian self-representation.
11. Therefore, it will be named in the essay “PLO Archive” with quotation marks.
12. “Rules, Orders and Instructions”: <http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/MISC/z-chukim.asp?AR=1>.
13. <http://www.archives.gov.il/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/%D7%97%D7%95%D7%A7-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%9D-1955.pdf>. See also Sela 2009, 30–33. http://www.police.gov.il/meida_laezrach/meida_clali/hofesh_ameda/Pages/chok_hofesh_ameda.aspx.
14. Benny Cohen to (my) Advocate Shlomi Zcharya, 26 November 2008.
15. <http://www.acri.org.il/he/2007>. Information and quotations regarding Israeli laws, regulations and procedures were discussed in Sela (2009, 30–33).
16. <http://www.acri.org.il/he/1940>. These are complaints mentioned by researchers and the Association for Civil rights in Israel regarding IDF Archive operations, see, for example, <http://www.acri.org.il/he/1763>.
17. <http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/MISC/z-chukim.asp?AR=1>. In addition, Section 14a of *The Freedom of Information Law 5758–1998* lists the military agencies exempt from the law's stipulations.
18. <http://www.acri.org.il/he/1940>.
19. Many appeals were made to the court on the matter (Sela 2009, 30–33).
20. State Controller's Report 50b: <http://www.acri.org.il/he/1940>.
21. Itamar Rabinowitz, who managed the Dayan Center, formerly the Shelach Institute, told me that the archive of the Research Center was offered to him, but he refused to accept it. Personal conversation, 17 June 2015.
22. 07/10343, Supreme Court file, 3 May 2010.
23. Personal correspondence with Yaakov Lazowick, State Archivist, 15 February 2016, 26 September 2016.
24. I tried to obtain information in a conversation with Reuven Erlich, from the Intelligence Heritage Center, 22 January 2012 and other military personnel (e.g. endnote 27).
25. During the years, I had a long legal battle with Israeli security archives with regard to plundered/looted Palestinian Archives, including a fight to open and expose the material and return them to their owners. This is described in length, alongside an appendix of legal correspondence I had with the Israeli military archives, and a list of archives that I found that were taken as booty in Sela (2009).

26. <http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/MISC/z-sherut-hoker.asp?AR=1>.
27. I also approached the IDF spokesperson in an attempt to get answers, but to no avail (Letter to me from Major Z. Halevi, 28 March 2012).
28. About testimonies, especially visual testimonies of concealed evidence, see (Huberman 2008). Another example is the Israeli Ministry of Education's attempt to prevent testimonies of Israeli soldiers describing their brutal behavior towards the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. *Breaking the Silence (Shovrim Shtika)* organized these lectures in Israeli schools in recent years without much success. See also The Belfast Project, an oral history collection stored at Boston College that contains interviews with paramilitaries involved in the troubles in Northern Ireland. Participants were promised their interviews would remain sealed until either they gave permission or after their death (George 2013).
29. Elkins demonstrates the same frustrating process of collecting any evidence describing the detention camps in Kenya that the British official colonial government destroyed or classified as confidential. She wrote: "Even the most assiduous purges, however, often fail to clean up all the incriminating evidence (Elkins 2005, xiii). She describes a method of searching evidence in official archives 'fragmented remains', sometimes with no success. This led her to find other sources – written and visual-such as private collections, newspapers oral history, while sometimes information didn't come from files or document but from "cumulative effects of sustained research"(Elkins 2005).
30. Azoulay (2016) addresses equivalent issues raised by Sela (2009).
31. The evidence, some of which is documented on video by the author, was gathered over the last 15 years.
32. An interview with Arad, 10 November 2012.
33. A conversation with Rashkes, 3 March 2009.
34. The double standards of these ethical codes are also discussed with regard to documents of the Baath party taken from Iraq during the US invasion in 2003 and are located in the US. (Montgomery 2011).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Rona Sela is a curator and researcher of visual history and art and a lecturer at Tel Aviv University. Her research focuses on the visual historiography of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, Palestinian photography, colonial Zionist/Israeli photography, colonial Zionist/Israeli archives, human rights violation, plunder and looting of Palestinian archives and their subjugation to repressive colonial mechanisms, and on constructing alternative postcolonial mechanisms and archives. She also researches the development of alternative visual practices connected to civil society systems, asking to replace the old Israeli gatekeepers. They reflect the Palestinian civil struggle over housing, planning, education, budgets and on exposing Palestinian history, narrative and the Arabic language, which were erased intentionally from the public sphere. She has published many books, catalogues and articles on these topics and curated numerous exhibitions. For further information look at <http://www.ronasela.com>.

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