

Introduction

Counting in Jewish

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DELIVERED THROUGH rapid, hip-hop beats and intense lyrics, Hadag Nachash's "The Numbers Song" provides a critical, numerical account of what matters to young Israeli Jews. It begins by counting states ("one or two") in the land that stretches between the sea and the Jordan River and ends with the sacred icon of six million. In between, it offers a more intimate account of the numerical texture of personal experience ("three years and four months is the time I gave to the IDF"; "nine times I have been too close to a terror attack"), while detailing the harsh arithmetic that underwrites everyday life in Israel ("a quarter of a million are unemployed"; "the government cut off 12 percent of child benefits"). Fast-paced and abrasive in content, the song echoes in form the pervasive flow of statistical data in Jewish public spheres, while simultaneously mocking, through its poetics, the overwhelming presence of numbers in Jewish life. However, as critical a reflection on numbers as this song provides, its lyrics also disclose their inescapable grip: "Me too," the chorus admits, "like all Jews, is obsessed with numbers 24/7, twelve months a year."

Hadag Nachash is not alone in its use of numbers as a structuring device for popular narration of Jewish-Israeli culture. In the late Yossi Banai's famous song, "Sfirat Melai" (generally translated as either "stocktaking" or "counting stock"), the famous Israeli singer-actor relied on numbers to tell an insightful story about Jewish life in Israel. Playfully toying with the numerical associations of the Passover song "Who Knows One?," Banai introduces some twists into a familiar numerical tradition. Instead of counting Jewish motifs and teachings alone, as is done in the Haggadah (e.g., the number of the tablets of the covenant or the number of the tribes of Israel), Banai's song weaves together older Jewish numbers with more contemporary ones. Look, he teasingly lays out, at just how many numbers Israel has managed to accumulate in its national and political stockpiles: "One state, two seas, one lake and malaria as well . . . one nation, full of uniqueness, one headache and three pills, six days and seven nights . . . a huge immigration following two thousand years of diaspora . . . one moment of security

and then thirty days of illness, one day of victory, one day of downfall, half-a-dozen veteran major-generals, two ministers without a portfolio . . . five wars . . . three tired soldiers at the post, seventy kids laughing in the bomb-shelter, three prisoners of Zion and another serving his sixth month of a life sentence.” In the chorus that ends each of Banai’s ironic lists, he insistently returns to the text of the traditional song, as if to sarcastically assure his audience that Israel still has “one God in heaven and earth.”

To the extent that building upon traditional Jewish numbers entailed a degree of flexibility on the part of Yossi Banai, it is not surprising that, after his passing, his colleagues playfully continued to riff on his contribution. A few years after Banai’s death, at an event in his honor, the famous actress Tiki Dayan performed “Sfirat Melai,” but dramatically changed one line. Rather than singing “One prisoner in his sixth month of a life sentence,” she shifted the song’s energetic tone and, singing slowly, emphasized each and every word: “One captive in his fifth year.” It was May 2011, and no further context was required; everyone in her audience understood that Dayan was referring to Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier who was abducted in 2006 and had since been held captive in Gaza by Hamas. That this moment created what the daily Ynet news service described as an “intense sadness” among the audience can be easily grasped.² After all, Shalit stood at the center of an affectively loaded media campaign that not only advocated for his release but also encouraged the public to care personally about his return home. That the individual person of Gilad Shalit could be abstracted into a powerful number—an especially significant “one,” listed among the national stock—can also be easily understood. The campaign for his release had largely been organized in numerical terms. From the outset, his captivity was discursively constructed as a temporal experience of waiting, one that foregrounded the amount of time in which he had been held. Live clocks, on webpages or roadsides, could often be seen counting the time passed since his abduction. Commemorations or concerts publicly marked special dates (i.e., “round” numbers such as 1,000 days or five years of captivity).

When Shalit was released in October 2011, numbers again occupied the public imagination, dampening an otherwise euphoric national mood that greeted Shalit upon his return. In keeping with previous prisoner exchanges in the history of Israel, the Shalit deal seemed sorely uneven in terms of numbers. “One Israeli captive for 1,027 Palestinians,” the headlines called out in bitterness and frustration about the obvious lack of numerical reciprocity in this transaction. The release of *so many* Palestinian prisoners, who, as the media continuously reported, were imprisoned because of an association with terrorist groups and actions against Israeli citizens, in exchange for *only one* captive was portrayed as too high and risky a price for a state to pay for any *one* of its citizens. What was, however, being recognized in these bold headlines is the extent to which

Jewish morality extends beyond mere numbers. By staking out positions on the uniquely high value that the Jewish state is assumed to place on the sanctity of life, all sides acknowledged and even celebrated the incommensurable system of calculations that supposedly makes Israel morally exceptional. To paraphrase the title of this introduction, one could say that what was celebrated was the extent to which Jews “count in Jewish.”

As evidenced in this threefold intertextual (or, perhaps, “internumerical”) description, numbers have become normalized in many representational practices in Jewish-Israeli public culture. If we turn our attention to American Jewry, another leading Jewish community that engages us in this volume, we can easily identify a similarly profound cultural investment in quantified forms of knowledge and representation. Take, for example, the 2013 book *And Every Single One Was Someone*—a provocative textual monument of Holocaust memory that consists of 1,250 pages in which the single word “Jew” is printed six million times. If one searches the pages of this book with Amazon’s “Surprise Me!” search option, the reader will always encounter the same structure and content; no surprises here. With no names of victims or places, no dates of births or deaths, this book attempts to both totalize and communicate the enormity of the Holocaust by maintaining the solidity of a numerical icon. In other words, the book presents a graphic minimalism whose emotional and moral, though debated, effects lie precisely in its repetitive, aggregate, and intentionally crude numerical nature.

Beyond the irreplaceable, “sacred” number of six million, many other, more mundane numbers saturate American Jewish public spheres, including the number of people who fast on Yom Kippur, the number of synagogues and Jewish federations, the rate of Jewish intermarriage, and the number of “Birthright Israel” participants. To the extent that these and other numbers have become ubiquitous features of American Jewish public culture, the very engagement of Jews with numbers—sometimes described as an obsession—has also received growing public attention within communal conversations. Take, for example, *Contact*’s special issues dedicated to the numerically related topics of Jewish demography and Jewish social research³ or *Sh’ma*’s special issue on counting Jews.⁴ In the following introductory note, the editors of *Sh’ma* stress the need for such a communal conversation:

Numbers count. And while our people have always been relatively few, how many is too few Jews? Since the days of King David, our numbers have been a source of contention. Today is no different. When does a preoccupation with the number of Arabs, or Ultra-Orthodox or Russian Jews in Israel cross the line separating legitimate political consideration from rank racism or ethnocentrism? . . . This month, *Sh’ma* explores these questions in the context of demography and more: we ask about how, and whether, numbers ought to

determine policy: Who are we as we count ourselves? How do we count on the world's stage as Jews?

Taken together, these different vignettes illustrate myriad ways in and through which Jews rely heavily on numbers in the process of shaping and representing their collective life. Indeed, numerical figures dominate countless communal, public, and institutional domains in which Jews act and speak in the name of Jewish collectivity. Both ideas and ideals about numbers inform public discussions that animate and divide Jewish politics. Essentially, conceptions of numbers underwrite policy and public discourse about such key issues as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the relationship between the Jewish nation-state and the Jewish diaspora, the extent of anti-Semitism in the world, and many others. Additionally, quantified modes of thinking govern the production of knowledge undertaken by Jewish communities, research institutions, and think tanks throughout the world. Such modes also inform grassroots and institutionally mediated cultural productions aimed at Jewish commemoration, preservation, and innovation. But scholars have yet to pursue a critically informed, in-depth investigation of the cultures of enumeration that have permeated modern and contemporary Jewish life. We aim to initiate this investigation in *Taking Stock*.

The Social Life of Jewish Numbers

The chapters in this book began their social lives as papers presented and discussed at “The Social Life of Jewish Numbers” workshop, organized by the co-editors of this volume and held at the University of Michigan’s Frankel Center for Judaic Studies (March 2012). All papers were individually solicited and originally written for the workshop. Our strategy was to invite scholars to both acknowledge and reflect on the pervasive presence of numbers in Jewish life as this presence has emerged within a diverse range of overlapping settings: national, religious, communal, institutional, and scientific in nature. We asked workshop participants to consider what we tentatively called “Jewish numbers” as highly constructed artifacts that emerge, and sometimes endure, through a complex array of performative modalities and social relations, including their production, presentation, consumption, and negotiation. We also asked participants to think through the vast range of practices (i.e., measuring, counting, collecting, comparing, and narrating) that coalesce to shape the ways in which Jewish groups, politics, and institutions immerse themselves in the cultural work of enumeration.

While the analytical potential of the “social life of Jewish numbers” framework was initially exploratory in nature, a few solid premises shaped this collaborative project from the outset. We proposed an expansive approach to numerical cultures. We shared an understanding that numbers matter; that is, they count and are counted upon as anchors of significance and power in multiple ways

and across various contexts. We aimed to move beyond the explicitly politicized rubric of Jewish statistics and to demonstrate instead a richer array of cultural engagements of Jews with numbers. Undoubtedly, the rubric of Jewish statistics might be the first topic to come to mind in connection with such a project, and rightly so. Numerical thinking and demographic consciousness assume prominence in some of the most burning issues that confront Israel as a Zionist, Jewish state. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the contours of the Law of Return (Israel's repatriation law), and the state's conversion policies—all these implicate questions and anxieties regarding Jewish demography. However, while some of the chapters in this volume speak to politicized processes and repercussions of counting Jews, the volume also attempts to move beyond domains usually or more intuitively associated with numbers, such as science making, nation building, and production of the political imagination. By bringing together in one place diverse case studies, the volume articulates unexpected connections among cultures of enumeration that might otherwise appear unrelated. In so doing, the volume encourages a thematic breadth that, we hope, will ultimately enrich our understanding of the hold that numbers have over Jewish public life.

This expansive framework of numerical cultures emerged out of inductive premises. Indeed, we initiated our project based on questions—rather than assumptions and shared agreements—about the roles of numbers in modern and contemporary Jewish life. Going beyond the influential yet abstract and sweeping argument of Alain Badiou that, “we know very well what numbers are for: they serve, strictly speaking, for everything, they provide a norm for All,”⁶ the contributors to this volume ask what numbers are for. Their careful, original analyses in response to this question inquire into the particular, historically situated contexts and culturally contingent manifestations of numbers in order to better understand the modes and effects of their deployment. The chapters emerged not only as a way to demonstrate and analyze what numbers “do” for Jews but also what becomes enumerable for them. The authors ask: How and to what ends do Jews introduce numbers into their public and institutional lives and, ultimately, form relationships with them? What is the nature of these deep relationships that Jews have developed with certain numbers? And what are the modalities and practices that constitute them?

The potential value of asking these questions is even greater in light of the fact that they have rarely been addressed—or even raised—in the interdisciplinary rubric of Jewish studies. Hence, a third motivation for this project derives from an attempt to initiate a scholarly conversation in a field that has thus far been ignored. Whereas a substantial scholarly literature on the modern uses of numbers has both historicized and theorized their varied forms and contexts, within Jewish studies similar research trajectories have hardly been explored. With the exception of a few excellent pieces on Jewish social science, there is

a dearth of literature on Jewish histories and cultures of enumeration. This research lacuna can be explained, at least in part, by the influence that quantitatively based scholarship holds over numerical engagements of Jews. As a consequence of this epistemological bias, counting practices and numbers have been primarily understood, respectively, as a method and an end goal. Acknowledging this limited and, so often, uncritical treatment of numbers in the social scientific study of Jews, *Taking Stock* opens up alternative research agendas, ones that frame numbers and processes of quantification as analytic objects requiring critical investigation in their own right. In identifying this lacuna, and taking a step toward addressing it, the book offers a fresh perspective on the modern Jewish experience. We hope that we may thus encourage more research in this vein—research that would add to our understanding of “what numbers are for.”

Integral to our premises and goals was the attempt to assemble a diverse group of contributors who stand in different relationships to both Jewish studies and critical scholarly engagement with numbers. Since we wanted to create a meta-discussion on Jews and numbers, we had less to gain from social scientists whose scholarly work focuses specifically on counting Jews and quantifying their lives. Instead, we sought to include scholars who work on Jews in areas that seemed to be conducive to productive perspectives on numerical cultures as well as scholars who work on social histories of numbers outside of the academic framework of Jewish studies. In other words, we invited scholars who focus on Jews to think about their work through the prism of numbers and scholars who focus on numbers to think through case studies that emphasize the embeddedness of numbers in Jewish histories. The intentional gap between “scholars of numbers” and “scholars of Jews” helped provoke mutually valuable discussions in unanticipated ways. The broad range of disciplinary orientations (including anthropology, history, science and technology studies, and religious studies) augmented the rich, open, and critical approaches we seek to advance in this volume.

Ongoing conversations at the workshop made apparent that Jews do not only count (a lot) but that they do it, so to speak, “in Jewish.” Building on an analogue with Jonathan Boyarin’s *Thinking in Jewish*, the idea of “counting in Jewish” suggests a grounded understanding of the phenomenology, semiotics, and politics of Jewish counting.⁷ Even if Jews employ in their practices of enumeration what came to be an almost universal, or Western hegemonic arithmetic logic, their counting is particularly Jewish in the sense that it is deeply situated in Jewish historical experiences and cultural sensibilities. The reasons for which, and the cultural formats through which, Jews immerse themselves in counting should be understood within these different Jewish sociocultural matrixes. This grounded approach to counting resonated as the scholarly voices raised in the seminar room at the University of Michigan were oftentimes registered, heard,

and reacted upon “in Jewish.” When workshop participants, most of whom are Jewish scholars, introduced personal narratives, experiences, and perspectives, discussion of numbers was inevitably held or anchored “in Jewish”—a fact that attests to the inescapability and power of the very phenomenon we all gathered to critically explore.

The Promise of Numbers

The difficulty involved in attempting to account for the sheer volume and breadth of studies on numbers surely requires an acknowledgment of the inherent limitations of such an account: it is impossible to exhaustively survey the numerous trajectories and explorations that scholars have undertaken in the study of numbers. Nevertheless, the abundance of scholarship itself seems to disclose the extent to which numbers are a ubiquitous and multidimensional phenomenon. As scholars increasingly attend to numerical matters, both as fresh points of entry into the study of social life and as objects of investigation, they demonstrate numbers’ analytical potential. The following review illustrates this promise of numbers and thus serves as a backdrop against which this volume calls for further investigation of numbers among scholars interested in modern and contemporary Jewish social life.

Unsurprisingly, much academic work on numbers starts with their pervasiveness in contemporary social life. Scholars have detailed the ways in which numbers have been employed in ancient, medieval, and other premodern eras in a variety of contexts of administration and regulation:⁸ for example, in census accounts (mostly for the purpose of taxation and military conscription) and within exchange and kinship relationships.⁹ At the same time, scholars have argued that the modern preoccupation with enumeration is unique and unprecedented, closely associated with the emergence of urban and industrial mass societies, of the modern state (i.e., administrative bureaucracy, professional expertise), and of the social sciences. Part and parcel of this linkage between numbers and modernity is the understanding that numbers dominate, if not “colonize,”¹⁰ modern societies. In particular, scholars have paid attention to the ways in which numbers are so indispensably (almost invisibly or “naturally”) put on display in public, to the fact that modern people inhabit and internalize worlds populated with numbers, and to the fact that numeracy is as central and diffused a skill as literacy. “Obsession,” “passion,” “fetishism,” and “enchantment” are some of the expressions that recur in the vocabulary that defines the nature of the trust that modern people place in numbers.

The ideologies that underwrite the strengths of numbers—that is, their association with “objectivity,” “universality,” “efficiency,” and “synoptic vision”—engage scholars in their attempt to historicize the appeal of numbers. How, why,

and under what conditions, scholars have asked, have numbers become such an object of sustained trust? How and why have numbers come to occupy privileged spaces of influence in their capacities as a language, a mode of knowledge, and a source of action? The answers given to these questions illuminate important political and social work that numbers do for people and polities. At the same time, these answers do not ignore the price that individuals and societies pay for their trust in numbers. Far from concentrating merely on the manipulative potential of numbers, scholars point also to their destructive effects as they make people both calculable objects and calculating subjects. Interestingly, the very features that have made numbers such effective artifacts of modern social life are also considered by scholars to contribute to the abuse of individuals and collectives as people immerse themselves (or are immersed by others) in processes and logics of quantification. Numbers, for example, can be misused in population data systems in ways that threaten human rights,¹¹ can result in structural violence,¹² or, perhaps less dramatically, frustrate their practitioners by oversimplifying a complex lived experience.¹³

While a limited number of studies concern themselves with numbers in their broadest and most diversified applications,¹⁴ or with their most fundamental materializations in social situations,¹⁵ most scholars limit themselves to more confined realms of enumeration, usually financial, political, and religious. Even if numbers, as stated elsewhere,¹⁶ travel and spread easily across various domains, a thematic and more bounded review would do better justice to the literature. What follows lays out the above-mentioned three key thematic clusters that have emerged in the scholarship on numbers. Although these clusters do not necessarily materialize in this volume, I briefly gesture toward some compelling directions they take in the general literature on numbers. In illuminating how this volume fits into a broader scholarly enterprise, I hope that this review may also precipitate similar interest among Jewish studies scholars. Following the brief threefold review of the scholarship on numbers, I will then concisely examine the extant literature of numbers in Jewish contexts.

Accounting, Money, and Financial Numbers

Academic scholarship has recognized the co-constitutive relationships and connections between numbers and money. Numbers have played critical roles in the monetization, industrialization, and capitalization of social life as well as in cultures of auditing and accounting that emerged in concert with these large-scale historical processes.¹⁷ As the anthropologist Caitlin Zaloom summarizes: “From the invention of number-based accounting practices such as double-entry book-keeping, numbers have been a cornerstone of economic calculation, providing the essential tools for rationalized action.”¹⁸ At the same time, exchange of money

provides the immediate context in which mathematical logics and numerical practices have been developed, circulated, and embraced in everyday life.¹⁹ In this vein, one could consider the historical accounts of Patricia Cline Cohen and Michael Zakim on the spread of numeracy and the emergence of capitalism, respectively, in early and nineteenth-century America.²⁰ Or, one could consider the growing ethnographic accounts of how financial institutions represent—and ultimately, live with—numbers.²¹

Scientific Knowledge, Government, and Political Numbers

Numerous studies in the social history of quantification in both the natural and social sciences have shown the degree to which this history is intimately tied to the history of modern power and politics, primarily under the rubric of the modern state.²² As Theodore Porter acknowledges in the opening of *Trust in Numbers*, though his initial intention was to study the modern history of social quantification in relation to academic disciplines, he found himself paying more attention to professions and bureaucracies.²³ Following Michel Foucault's theories of modern forms of power, the intersection of the scientific and the administrative (i.e., the statistical and the political) has been almost universally recognized as the starting point for academic work on science—and numbers—making.²⁴ If numbers, as Foucault and many others suggest, play a mutually constitutive role in the production of “the social,” then, the argument goes, we must also consider how the domain of politics is numerically constituted, and conversely how the domain of numbers is politically constituted.²⁵

There has been a great deal of work on the social histories of the scientific development of quantification.²⁶ These social histories show the processes by which numbers acquired connotations of scientific impartiality, transparency, neutrality, and, ultimately, objectivity.²⁷ Perceived as resistant to biases of conjecture, numbers promise certainty and order within the growing chaos of modern life.²⁸ Ironically, because of their technical, scientific, and de-politicized aura,²⁹ numbers have become a potent discursive tool in politics—a firm anchor with which to ground political debate and decisions.³⁰

Unsurprisingly, much scholarship on the political numbers of the state centers on the national census.³¹ Such an investigation has been applied to the state in its varied instances, including the national,³² the socialist,³³ the postsocialist,³⁴ and the colonial.³⁵ If we apply what Talal Asad has written about national statistics in the colonial state—about its being a “strong language”³⁶—we might say more broadly that numbers seem to possess the power to transform modes of life writ large. In their constitutive and prescriptive capacities, numbers make by way of objectification and classification the realities and abstractions they seemingly describe: they create the “population,” the mass public, the “unified nation,” the

“average, normative” individual, the “crisis,” and the “social problem.”³⁷ In so doing, they also establish understandings, affects, norms, and forms of power that are implicated in shaping the modern experience.

Church, Religion, and Theological Numbers

To the degree that finance, science, and the state—domains most extensively associated in modernity with numbers—are imbued with “sacredness,” it should come as no surprise that numbers can also be associated with explicitly religious spheres. However, scholars display less interest in religious numbers than in financial and political ones. In their call to thicken this line of inquiry, and question the assumption that the field of numbers is inherently disenchanted, Jane Guyer and others argue that “any radical secularization of the study of numbers—as technique alone—is necessarily incomplete for anthropologists.”³⁸ To complete what is often missing in discussions of numbers, Guyer and colleagues remind us of the manifold instances of enumeration within texts and contexts we easily define as “religious,” “spiritual,” or “sacred.” For example, numerology occupies a vibrant place in many religious traditions; both the mathematical and economic imagination originated in devotional and theological contexts; the religions of “The Book” draw on biblical references of calculation and measurement; and the notion of accounting is embedded in religiously informed moral and spiritual frameworks.

This timely call to attend to religious enumeration in its own right might be read as a response to the fact that most scholars who introduce religion to be considered in the study of numbers, do so as part of their broader interest in overtly politicized religious realms. Indeed, case studies are often situated in Christian contexts, an unsurprising bias given the emphasis in the literature on science and state making in Western and colonial contexts. This rubric includes resistance to census taking based on religious belief,³⁹ statistical spectacles in politicized frameworks of religious conversion,⁴⁰ as well as the centrality of numbers in the realization of global Christianity—the mission of saving countless souls.⁴¹

Jews and Numbers

Though few in number, studies of quantification in modern and contemporary Jewish life carry much weight, demonstrating just how much we gain, both empirically and analytically, by exploring the engagement of Jews with numbers. By pointing to the “promise of numbers,” some of the work briefly reviewed here served as a significant springboard for this collaborative project. In particular, this volume departs from important scholarship that explores key historical moments in which Jews have come to be concerned with counting themselves and quantifying their lives. This scholarship sheds light on the ways in which political

numbers have come to structure and reflect national and ideological agendas within Jewish contexts.

In his pioneering work on Jewish social sciences in nineteenth- and twentieth-century central Europe, Mitchell Hart illustrates how and why Jews mobilized statistical language in order to understand and address the “Jewish problem.”⁴² Not only did statistics provide Jewish scientists with a discursive means through which to enter a European scientific community, but it also gave them scientific tools to position themselves in relation to ideological issues they confronted as Jews. Zionists, more than any other ideological group, argues Hart, drew on statistics to reinforce and advocate their political agenda: to prove that Jews were a unified nation or a “folk,” rather than merely a religion, and thus both required and were entitled to national sovereignty.

The institutional intersection of Zionist, national ideologies, and statistical projects has also been explored in relation to developments in prestate Palestine.⁴³ Etan Bloom, for example, argues that the political radicalism of early twentieth-century Zionism lies in its enthusiasm for enumeration, an attitude that represents a clear break from biblical and rabbinical resistance, or at least ambivalence about counting Jews.⁴⁴ By focusing on the undertakings of the prominent social scientist and activist Arthur Ruppin, Bloom demonstrates the centrality of demographic statistics for the legitimation of Zionism as a “modern” political force. Relatedly, Arie Krampf illustrates how statistics entwined in 1930s Palestine with an emergent national economy: an ideologically laden economy which drew on Zionist doctrines about mass immigration and productivization of Jews.⁴⁵ Anat Leibler’s early work demonstrates the mutually constitutive role of the Central Bureau of Statistics and newly emerging political institutes of the state. The first census of the Israeli state, Leibler argues, became a governmental event through which the Zionist state consolidated its selective politics of inclusion.⁴⁶

Statistics also inform the communal dynamics of American Jews. In her suggestive account of the shifting American Jewish public sphere throughout the twentieth century, Lila Corwin Berman demonstrates how Jewish leaders and organizations harnessed the social sciences (sociology in particular) to explain and demystify Jewishness for both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans.⁴⁷ Their moral prescriptions (i.e., about intermarriage, assimilation, and other emotionally laden issues) stemmed from fertile soils of empiricism and sociological reason. As Berman writes: “Rabbis were quick to learn the power of numbers, often citing the same statistics about divorce and religious endogamy that were used in popular magazines. Attempting, it seemed, to tie their own normative authority to the new cultural authority carried by sociology, survey, and statistics, postwar rabbis learned to explain Jewish endogamy in a new language.”⁴⁸ Other sociohistorical accounts of Jewish organizations conform with Berman’s work. In particular, Naomi W. Cohen’s research on the American Jewish Committee, Stuart

Svonkin's book on Jewish antiprejudice organizations, and Shaul Kelner's more recent scholarship on the cultivation of young Jewish leadership, all trace the central role of knowledge processes in the making and remaking of the Jewish professional world over the twentieth century.⁴⁹

Taking Stock

Following the workshop, the notion of *Taking Stock* emerged as a rich framework with which to think through contemporary cultures of enumeration. Needless to say, we do not aim to produce a grand narrative about Jews—or “the Jews”—and numbers; the notion of taking stock is not intended to cover or exhaust all possible relationships Jews have developed with numbers. Rather, it offers a set of lenses into some of the features, contexts, and implications that characterize contemporary instances of Jewish counting. From these examples we can consider social forms, religious traditions, and national sensibilities that shape the collective lives of Jews who live with numbers.

The expression “taking stock” captures two main layers of meaning to analyze how numbers operate in the public life of modern and contemporary Jewish collectives. By drawing on both layers, the chapters in this volume demonstrate different processes and contexts in which numbers create a mechanism of taking stock.

The first and most obvious meaning that resonates with this notion is that of an inventory: the creation of a quantified, itemized representation of amassed goods, materials, and artifacts available “in stock.” Because inventories are intimately linked with the marketplace and are sustained by models of accounting, the term “taking stock” implies an array of economically informed understandings about commodified resources and possessions. In these contexts, inventory technology secures the ongoing cycle of supply and demand by recording and categorizing stocked goods, forecasting future needs, and advancing replenishment, thereby fostering institutional memory, knowledge, and planning.

In line with the notion of inventory, one might say that Jews engage numerically with what they have “in stock”: both their available or amassed human resources (e.g., living and yet-to-be-born Jews) and cultural, material resources (e.g., Jewish objects, artifacts, traditions, and social institutions). Notions of scarcity, surplus, and replenishment reverberate through such engagements. Similarly, one might frame the myriad investments of Jews in numerical representations of their national losses (e.g., the number of Jews killed during the Holocaust and other national tragedies) as an engagement with those absent-yet-present Jews: those who are simultaneously “out of stock” as human resources and “in stock” as iconic, symbolic resources of commemoration.

As Jews produce numbers, they also inescapably construct and objectify the categories of identity that “store” these numbers. By creating a numerically

informed stock, Jews introduce new vocabularies and regimes of value through which a portrait of the Jewish world is drawn. Like the work of inventorying, Jewish cultures of taking stock discussed here govern institutionally mediated memory and planning processes of collective Jewish life. Put simply, through numerical engagements with their histories, contemporary realities, and projected futures, Jews aim to assess “how they are doing.” This intimate connection between inventory and counting helps us recognize not only how Jews, like other modern subjects, are fond of neatly quantified forms of knowledge, but also the ways in which they engage themselves in assessing their collective stock.

In *Keepers of Accounts: The Practice of Inventory in Modern Jewish Life*, Jeffrey Shandler takes Jewish inventories (whether demographic, folkloristic, linguistic, or otherwise) as defining cultural practices of modern Jewish experience.⁵⁰ Through list making of Jewish items, Shandler argues, Jews keep track and take stock of modern Jewish phenomena; more importantly, they also realize their Jewishness in a “modern” fashion. As Jews employ a tool whose features—standardized, modularized, and systematic in nature—are deemed distinctively modern, they also negotiate their encounters with modernity. Two points made by Shandler in his analysis of modern Jewish inventory particularly relate to how this volume considers Jewish enumeration as mechanisms of stocktaking.

Shandler first points out that inventories are performative, discursive, and conceptual projects. As such, they constitute the very categories, items, and elements they register. Books, persons, movies, or jokes become “Jewish” as they are included in “Jewish” lists; their Jewishness is constructivist rather than essential. Something new is made through the practice of inventory: new ways of imagining the collective (as if that collective can assume in real life the unified existence that it takes on paper), new comforts and validations about the existence of such collectible items, and new rubrics to organize relationships among the items. Like the cultural practices of inventory described in Shandler’s analysis, cultural practices of enumeration described in this volume evince creative and constitutive qualities. After all, like inventories, numbers are produced through an invention of organizing rubrics and endorsement of particular assumptions of what should be enumerated and what is measurable. Like inventories, numbers solidify the things they reference and help instantiate the very realities they measure. As will be exemplified throughout this volume, the numbers that emerge out of Jewish instances of enumeration construct these phenomena and categories as worthy of taking stock. One might consider in this regard chapter 2 by Carol Kidron on how the enlistment of names in Yad Vashem’s Shoah Victims’ Names Recovery Project constitutes people as “victims”; chapter 4 by Mitchell Hart on how, in the course of statistical debates about Jewish criminality, the category of “the social” emerged as a powerful explanatory framework against the “racial” framework that loomed large at the time; chapter 5 by Anat Leibler on how Jewish scientific

endeavors of demography in 1940s Palestine created intra-Jewish ethnic divisions despite Zionist ideologies of a “unified” Jewish existence; and, finally, chapter 6 by Michal Kravel-Tovi on how discursive practices regarding growing rates of Jewish intermarriage construct what might otherwise be considered as a thriving reality of American Jewish life in terms of a cultural, even existential, “crisis.”

Shandler’s second point refers to the possible role of inventory as a technique of cultural salvage that, by its very undertaking, redeems dispersed items from potential obliviousness or disappearance. Interestingly, instances of enumeration in this volume are often entangled within, and triggered by, anxieties about crisis. Thus one might consider chapter 7 by Josh Friedman on the institutional, numerically informed salvage of Yiddish books in the wake of declining populations of reader-consumers for whom they were originally intended; chapter 3 by Yael Zerubavel on how numerical commemorative toponyms encode the Jewish-Israeli landscape with memories of historical events that might otherwise be forgotten; finally, one can think of the “census for the Holocaust dead,” as analyzed by Carol Kidron, as an institutional project of counting and collecting that works against the daunting semiotic emptiness of the six million icon. The object of salvage around which this institutionalized culture of enumeration revolves is the number itself.

Beyond the immediate world of inventories, tidy spreadsheets, and dusty stockrooms, colloquial usages of the expression “taking stock” index its rich capacity as a device for reflection and self-understanding. This is the second layer of meaning on which we draw, and it is not unconnected to the first. As Jewish individuals, groups, and institutions engage in numerical calculations in accounting for what “they have,” they also undergo careful processes of appraisal and evaluation that come with such stocktaking. They ask themselves: How are we doing? What have we become? and Where are we heading? In other words, in assessing the sum total and quality of their possessions, in quantifying and inventorying “who they are,” Jews simultaneously grapple with questions about their values, concerns, and prospects as well as their nature as a social and political category.

Although these reflexive processes of collective assessment are informed by logics of bookkeeping and are, therefore, associated with the celebrated notion of precision, several authors in this volume show how the importance of numbers—as mechanisms of stocktaking—might lie elsewhere. Rather than presuming to demonstrate a scientific power, this volume reveals how the central roles that numbers play in processes of stocktaking rely also on their symbolic, discursive, and affective effects. Matters of precision are often simply not at stake. Take, for example, the numerical icon of “the six million” whose social life engages Oren Stier in chapter 1 of this volume. As Stier shows, the iconic power of this figure derives from something beyond actual and presumably precise counting; rather, it stems from the continuous cultural work invested in this number as an

approximation and estimation that quantifies what is, ironically, often perceived as the unquantifiable horrors of the Holocaust. While the exactness of the number cannot be guaranteed, Jews define themselves as a community of memory in relation to this singular statistic. In chapter 3 on numerical commemoration in Israeli public space, Yael Zerubavel shows that numerical toponyms sometimes reference historically questionable events. In spite of this historical contestation—a clear vulnerability of commemorative practice—the numerical semiotic signs persist. In chapter 2 on Yad Vashem’s Shoah Victims’ Names Recovery Project, Carol Kidron demonstrates the filling of the testimony pages in the institution’s database by potential “witnesses” as a moral act of commemoration that outweighs concerns over possible inaccuracies. Another illustrative case presents hyperbolic reckoning on Passover-related undertakings, described and analyzed by Vanessa Ochs in chapter 8 of this volume. As Ochs shows, various forms of numeric exaggeration are deployed in mostly American Jewish discourses so as to project celebratory visions of Jewish well-being and thus facilitate an optimistic account of the collective stock. In this case study, hyperbolic imprecision—not to be mistaken with lies—enables Jews to look collectively in the public mirror and take pleasure (or relief) in what they see. Josh Friedman’s chapter (chapter 7) on the institutional salvage of Yiddish books by the Yiddish Book Center provides another example of how the powerful effects of numbers as central devices of stocktaking are not grounded in any presumption of scientific validity or meticulously achieved accuracy. As Friedman writes, these qualities are almost entirely beside the point. Rather, numerical descriptions regarding how many Yiddish books were actually “saved” or put on display for the public emerge from this chapter as holding out something else; as affectively laden abstractions, they enable creation of the “magic of Yiddish” at the Book Center. Mitchell Hart’s chapter (chapter 4) on Jewish social scientific debates about the causes of the distinct statistical features of Jewish criminality also bears mentioning in this regard. As Hart shows, even when numbers are fully trusted as fundamental tools of precision and objectivity, what matters in the reflexive processes of accounting for deviant behavior among Jews (e.g., why Jews are overrepresented in white-collar crimes) is the explanatory framework and interpretive filter through which numbers are made able to tell their truths.

The Organization of This Volume

The notion of taking stock structures this volume, placing the research chapters into three thematic parts. Each part focuses on cultures of enumeration that unfold in relation to a particular category: the Jewish dead, the Jewish living, and Jewish material artifacts.

The first part, “Counting the Dead: Iconic Numbers and Collective Memory,” examines practices and logics of enumeration in domains of national

commemoration. Opening the volume with this part, allowing the dead to precede the living, speaks not only to the centrality of grief, memory, and commemoration in Jewish life; it also calls attention to the foundational significance of past traumas, losses, and absences in any numerical engagement of Jews with what they have “in stock.” The three chapters that make up this part analyze in different yet related ways the cultural investment in the quantification of national memory.

The part opens with Oren Stier’s study of the processes of iconization that have rendered the figure of six million a sacred symbol and one of the most condensed and accessible icons of Shoah memory. But, as Carol Kidron reveals in the second chapter of this part, this iconic number runs the risk of becoming an empty signifier. Grounded in an ethnographic study of the memory work at the Shoah Victims’ Names Recovery Project, Kidron unpacks Yad Vashem’s attempt to “breathe life” into this iconic number. The interplay between numbers and names also concerns Yael Zerubavel, the third author of this part. Her chapter focuses on the Jewish-Israeli tradition of numerically based place names that have inscribed national commemoration into Israeli-Jewish public spaces.

The second part, “Counting the Living: Putting the ‘Jewish’ in Social Science,” explores numerically informed social-scientific understandings and undertakings that Jews and Jewish institutions have developed to come to terms with Jewish identity, community, state formation, and anti-Semitism. The authors in this part explore frameworks through which Jewish social scientists attend to the social “here and now” and its implications for future understandings, policies, and social arrangements. Drawing on case studies of Jewish social scientists in nineteenth-century Germany, Israel in the 1940s, and the American Jewish community in the 1990s, the three chapters in this part highlight how statistics have shaped key processes through which Jews take stock. Covering such diverse topics as intermarriage, Jewish criminology, and Mizrahi fertility, these chapters demonstrate the power of scientific cultures of enumeration to shape the categories and discourses that enable Jews to regulate their social reality.

This part starts with Mitchell Hart’s historical account of debates over Jews and crime in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany. In the second chapter of this part, Anat Leibler traces the “political demography” of the demographer Roberto Bachi in the decade before the establishment of the state of Israel. In the last chapter in this part, Michal Kravel-Tovi illustrates how American Jewish sociodemographic statistics have been framed by both a rigorous, “dry” scientific language of enumeration and an emotional, “wet” language about the gloomy prospects of American Jewish survival in the context of what, in the 1990s, came to be called the “continuity crisis.”

The third part, “Counting Objects: Material Subjects and the Social Lives of Enumerated Things,” brings to the fore the material connotations so integral to

notions of inventory and stock. The two chapters that comprise this part center on Jewish material cultures that have become objects of counting and tell the story of the quantifying gazes and descriptions that have constituted them as such. These chapters focus on realms of cultural, institutional, and religious production that unfold in and through practices of enumeration.

In the first chapter of this part, Josh Friedman analyzes how the “thin” descriptive power of numbers is elaborated within the institutional dynamics of the Yiddish Book Center and the institution’s efforts to “rescue” the world’s Yiddish books. In the second chapter in this part, Vanessa Ochs employs the concept of hyperbole to describe discursive practices that surround the quantitatively based, public celebration of Passover-related consumption.

In the postscript, Theodore Porter reflects on intersections of scholarship in Jewish studies with historical and cultural interpretations of numbers, measurement, and statistics. He argues that while numbers of things, especially of persons, objects, deaths, and births are almost always at issue, this book offers particularly interesting analyses of numbers, affection, and meaning.

Emerging Themes

In what follows I draw together some conceptual themes that animate this volume in order to reflect on the critical roles that Jewish cultures of enumeration play in collective, public, and institutional processes of stocktaking. As these themes will apply to some chapters more than others, I want to avoid forcing a thematic unity on the clearly diverse directions taken by the authors of this volume. At the same time, I offer these conceptual themes with the hope that they might contribute productive vantage points from which to read the following chapters and also provide possible analytical tools for thinking through other cultures of enumeration, within as well as outside of Jewish contexts.

Enumerated Units and Aggregated Wholes

To the extent that practices of enumeration rely on the grouping of individual items into aggregated wholes, they raise questions about the relationships that unfold—through counting—between the amassed “units” and the emerging whole. Who gets to count, or is counted on, in creating the group, and what forms of exclusion arise in the course of this process as some items are not deemed important enough for inclusion? Is it the coalesced whole or the constitutive “units” that are given precedence over the other? And what is the value of those units as parts of a whole? Several scholars have attended to these questions, largely by pointing to the capacity of numbers to generalize, abstract, and hence flatten and even dehumanize individuals.⁵¹ The notion of taking stock lends itself particularly well to thinking through such effects, as it resonates with possible

commodifying and standardizing connotations about individuals as resources in a stock.

Given particular Jewish sensibilities about Nazi dehumanization and its notorious links to logics of quantification—simply put, the turning of individuals into sheer numbers tattooed on their forearms—it is not surprising that several authors in this volume take this paradigmatic objectification of Jews as their point of departure for the investigation of Jewish cultures of enumeration. Oren Stier (in chapter 1), for example, unpacks the collecting projects of six million items for their inevitable recapitulation of Nazi objectification of Jews, and Yael Zerubavel (in chapter 3) speaks to the disturbing replacement of names of fallen individuals by the numerical, collective representations of death tolls of particular events, an act that brings to mind erasure of personal identities. In drawing these connections, these authors point to the inherent ambivalences that underwrite and complicate any post-Holocaust Jewish undertaking of enumeration.

Indeed, other instances of Jewish enumeration emerge in this volume as double edged in nature; that is, they often entail unsettling relationships between the distinct units that have been counted and the group that is only made coherent through these units' enumeration. These accounts invite us to think more expansively about the strengths and weaknesses entailed in how numbers, as mechanisms of taking stock, amass individual items into aggregated wholes. Two examples of these double-edged dynamics will suffice here. From Carol Kidron's chapter (chapter 2) we learn of a dialectic relationship between the recovery of individual names of Holocaust victims and the recovery of the semiotic power of the symbol of six million. While the representation of the absent individual names, narratives, and faces of each victim is justified as a moral corrective to Nazi dehumanization, Kidron shows how it also, or even primarily, works as a means for the completion and re-invigoration of the empty signifier of six million. Hence, the somewhat bureaucratic, reductionist manner in which individual biographies have been solicited and displayed in Yad Vashem's Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project speaks to the fact that their importance lies more in enlivening and solidifying the whole than in turning numbers into individuals. In Josh Friedman's chapter (chapter 7) on the Yiddish Book Center, enumeration simultaneously enhances and impedes the institutional mission of "saving" both physical Yiddish books and their cultural values and potentials. This institutional endeavor succeeds in impressing and mobilizing its American Jewish public precisely due to the thin, numerical description of Yiddish books, one that elides distinctions among books and renders each of them a "treasure" regardless of the books' biographic trajectory or literary value. At the same time, books are at risk of being looked at as "just numbers," and the institution faces suspicions that it cares more for numbers than for books. "At some moments," writes Friedman, "thin description is too thin."

In many of the cultures of enumeration described in this volume, numbers create egalitarian relationships among the units that constitute the whole regardless of the size and circumstances of that whole: each Jewish criminal, Jewish newborn, intermarried Jew, Jewish victim, memorialized Jewish dead, Jewish Mizrahi woman, or Jewish participant in a Passover ritual “counts” the same and each is potentially “useful” or harmful for the whole as the others gathered together under the same rubric. Within that enumerated whole, they all carry the same value. However, with the framework of taking stock, I want to draw attention to how the size, or more broadly, the assessed circumstances and “shape” of the stock (e.g., how large and secure it is, or, alternatively, how endangered it might be) can, in fact, dictate the value given to each Jew. Such a direction becomes particularly relevant for crisis-laden situations in which people, societies, and institutions so often come to engage in the work of taking stock. In order to better ground my call for such a perspective, it is instructive to read afresh the parable with which Jonathan Boyarin ends his chapter, “Waiting for a Jew”:

Two Jews can afford to be fastidious about the dress, comportment, and erudition of a third. It gives them something to gossip about and identify against. Ten healthy Jews can have a similar luxury: an eleventh means competition for the ritual honors. It’s nine Jews who are the most tolerant, as I learned one forlorn shabbes at Eighth street. It was almost ten o’clock, and there was no minyan. Since everyone seemed content to wait patiently, I assumed that someone else had promised to come, and asked, “Who are we waiting for?”

“A yid,” our oldest member replied without hesitation.

Eventually a Jew came along.⁵²

The tenth Jew—the one who the other Jews at the Eighth Street synagogue in lower Manhattan were waiting for, the one who was fortunate enough to complete the minyan (prayer quorum), is invested with a particular qualitative value. The eleventh Jew will likely be redundant. Taking my cue from this anecdote, I suggest, for example, that in the context of the growing scarcity of living Holocaust survivors, scholars should pay attention to the potential value that might one day not too far in the future be invested in the “last” or “oldest” living victim, or at least in the last victim to be listed in the “census of the dead.” Similarly, we might consider the affective and moral value that could be granted to the Yiddish books attributed to the (supposedly) last elderly native Yiddish-speaking Jew. To go beyond the instances of enumeration discussed in this volume, one can also consider the value placed on the Jewish rituals conducted by the “last Jews in Afghanistan”⁵³ and those in other Jewishly endangered places. As Shaylih Muehlmann suggests in her discussion of “countdown” in the context of ecological crisis in Mexico’s Colorado River delta, the value of items in a countdown might be

distributed unevenly in such a way that those at the bottom (e.g., the last speakers of a language) count more.⁵⁴

Abstractions and Their Concretization

The ability of numbers to facilitate processes of taking stock can be linked to what scholars of quantification have recognized as numbers' dual work of abstraction and concretization. On the one hand, numbers (particularly but not exclusively statistics) are part of a complex abstraction that references a social world lying outside of the numbers themselves; on the other hand, numbers capture in specific ways concepts and constructs that might otherwise remain too abstract and vague. Thus, Holocaust victims were not simply "overwhelmingly many," or "uncountable," but were estimated to be six million. Or, to draw on a very different example, there are not just "so many Haggadot" but (if we want to be precise), there are two million ArtScroll copies. As Silvana Patriarca, in her account of statistics in nineteenth-century Italy, writes: "Applied to society, quantifying procedures, while making comparison easier, give a concrete body to abstract entities and ideas, and make concrete things more abstract."⁵⁵ This interaction between the work of abstraction and that of concretization that numbers perform appears in several chapters in this volume. For example, Michal Kravel-Tovi demonstrates in chapter 6 that the notion of Jewish cultural assimilation in the United States was both abstracted and concretized in the 1990s by grounding it in a certain number (i.e., 52 percent of recent Jews intermarried) that indexed in a tangible manner generalized patterns of reality.

Sometimes, however, the concrete numerical representation captures too much: too many items, too vast a phenomenon, too large a quantity. "At a certain point," writes Engelke, "large numbers simply do not convey anything *because* they are so large."⁵⁶ If some phenomena are described by numbers that are alarmingly too small or too rapidly dwindling, large numbers also create their own challenges. Several chapters in this volume speak to what Engelke describes, or to what might be described, to paraphrase both Joshua Cole's *Power of Large Numbers* and Arjun Appadurai's *Fear of Small Numbers*,⁵⁷ as "the fear of large numbers": namely, the fear of living with numbers that are simply too large, and thus also too abstract and incomprehensible. This fear invites us to explore further relationships between the abstract and concrete nature of numbers and complexities that these relationships might create for numerical processes of taking stock.

Several chapters in this volume depict vulnerabilities implicit in numbers that seem too large. In their size, their power seems unsustainable. These chapters pay attention to aesthetic and performative mechanisms employed in attempts to make numbers more tangible. Numbers, or the actual processes of counting

and collecting, are put on display in Yad Vashem (chapter 2) and at the Yiddish Book Center (chapter 7); in each of these institutional domains, their overwhelming scale is experienced in a visual and sensorial manner. Such mechanisms of putting numbers and counting on display can have their own complications. As Oren Stier writes (in chapter 1) in relation to the Whitwell Middle School paper clips project, “the technical challenge of actually counting to six million objects limits our ability to fully comprehend the victimhood of the Holocaust in a concrete, rather than abstract, manner.”

Affective Temporalities

Numbers seem to inform processes of taking stock because of the ways in which they foreground perceptions of time and forge affective links. The idea that numbers contribute to the social organization of time or to processes embedded in temporal logics should not be foreign to students of quantification. After all, time is a highly calculable feature in human societies.⁵⁸ Political and monetary numbers can be compared across time and allow for planning of future policies, while theological numbers articulate cosmological understandings about the beginning and end of times. Connections between numbers and affection seem less intuitive or familiar, although some scholars recognize how numbers—in spite of their aura of “coldness” and “dryness”—might in fact be processed in affective and sensorial, rather than cognitive and rational, modes.⁵⁹ Interestingly, when we examine some expressions used by scholars to describe relationships that modern subjects and cultures have with numbers, we can easily see that affectively laden discourses, such as “delight,” “fetish,” and “enchantment,” are so often employed.

Many of the chapters collected here point not only to the processes by which numbers carry time and contribute to affective discourses but also to the processes by which these two axes—the temporal and the affective—are interconnected. Numbers bring time into play: they introduce the past into present spaces, through pedagogies and practices of commemoration, while they also fashion arenas of forgetting within the present. Numbers are integral to other processes of integration that revolve around passing down culture and identity from past generations to present and future ones; and they feed imagination of the future as well as planning or correcting its course. Numbers spark intense emotions about temporal possibilities. Sadness, awe, reminiscence, anxiety, hope, and desire unfold within the following chapters. This list of emotions includes affective references to time, such as urgency, pessimism, and optimism.

Due to statistical, demographic exercises of prediction, the protagonist of Anat Leibler’s chapter (chapter 5), Roberto Bachi, can “provide a new way of understanding the present in terms of the future,” while advocating for a sense of urgency in how his understanding should be translated into state-sponsored policy.

Similarly, a sense of urgency created in the aftermath of the 1990s National Jewish Population Survey was anchored in the synergetic workings of scientific and affective discourses. As Michal Kravel-Tovi demonstrates (in chapter 6), the processes of “dampening” numbers accompany a darkening of the future and a push for immediate intervention in the identity work of the contemporary American Jewish community. Vanessa Ochs’s and Josh Friedman’s chapters (chapters 8 and 7) further attest to how affective temporalities work in the American Jewish context. Ochs argues that thanks to hyperbolic numerical descriptions, American Jews can extricate themselves from the pessimistic tone with which they usually envision their future and instead envision an optimistic possibility. Josh Friedman shows the extent to which the formation of a potential Yiddish future relies on an affective economy of desire and anticipation produced by the Yiddish Book Center. Its numbers, in this case, are employed in the creation of possible, promising links between ancestors and future generations.

* * *

This volume opens a wide engagement with numbers in the Jewish past and present. As it takes stock of the rich implications of “counting in Jewish,” it invites others to consider the numbers swirling around in songs and stories, lists, and censuses for their meanings and influence. Both ordinary numbers and powerful iconic ones deserve our attention and analysis for the claims that they make on politics, culture, society, and economy. The contributors to *Taking Stock* point to new directions in answering the underlying question of “what numbers are for.” How Jews count and are counted has much to teach us about modern Jewish experiences.

Notes

I am grateful to Deborah Dash Moore and Mitchell Hart for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter and to Joshua B. Friedman for his thorough editing of it.

1. IDF is an acronym for the Israeli Defense Forces.
2. See <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4013589,00.html>.
3. *Contact: The Journal of Jewish Life Network* / Steinhardt Foundation 5, no. 3 (2003); and *Contact: The Journal of Jewish Life Network* / Steinhardt Foundation 8, no. 4 (2006).
4. *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility*, 41, no. 673 (2010).
5. *Ibid.*, 1.
6. Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 1.
7. See Jonathan Boyarin, *Thinking in Jewish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
8. William Seltzer and Margo Anderson, “The Dark Side of Numbers: The Role of Population Data Systems in Human Rights Abuses,” *Social Research* 68, no. 2 (2001): 481–515; and Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 17.

9. Biblical references to census taking reveal ambivalent attitudes about counting; in particular, we can see an engagement with counting Jews existing alongside the array of prohibitions, restrictions, and punishments associated with the act of counting.

10. Daniel Seabra Lopes, "Making Oneself at Home with Numbers: Financial Reporting from an Ethnographic Perspective," *Social Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (2011): 463.

11. Seltzer and Anderson, "Dark Side."

12. Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 159.

13. Shaylih Muehlmann, "Rhizomes and Other Uncountables," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (2012): 339–352; and Julia Paley, "Making Democracy Count: Opinion Polls and Market Surveys in the Chilean Political Transition," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 135–164.

14. See, for example, Thomas Crump, *The Anthropology of Numbers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

15. For example, Hendrik Vollmer, "How to Do More with Numbers: Elementary Stakes, Framing, Keying, and the Three-Dimensional Character of Numerical Signs," *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 32, no. 6 (2007): 577–600.

16. *Ibid.*, 580.

17. Crump, *Anthropology of Numbers*; and Mariana Kawall and Leal Ferreira, "When $1 + 1 \neq 2$: Making Mathematics in Central Brazil," *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 1 (1997): 132–147.

18. Caitlin Zaloom, "Trading Technologies and Interpretation," *Financial Markets* 30, no. 2 (2003): 2.

19. Jane I. Guyer et al., "Introduction: Numbers as Inventive Frontier," *Anthropological Theory* 10, no. 1–2 (2010): 49.

20. Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999); and Michael Zakim, "Statistics-for-Profit," in *Measuring Everything* [in Hebrew] (Be'er Sheva, Israel: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2010); see also Peter Miller, "Governing by Numbers: Why Calculative Practices Matter," *Social Research* 68, no. 2 (2001): 379–396.

21. Seabra Lopes, "Making Oneself at Home"; Gerhard Anders, "The Normativity of Numbers: World Bank and IMF Conditionality," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 31, no. 2 (2008): 188–202; and Caitlin Zaloom, "Ambiguous Numbers: Trading Technologies and Interpretation in Financial Markets," *American Ethnologist* 30, no. 2 (2003): 1–15.

22. U. Kalpagam, "The Colonial State and Statistical Knowledge," *History of the Human Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2000): 37–55; Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); and Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

23. Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), x.

24. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, ed. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 131–142; and Ian Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers," *Humanities in Society* 5, no. 3–4 (1982): 279–295.

25. Cole, *Power of Large Numbers*; and Nikolas Rose, *Numbers, Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 197–232.

26. Stephen Stigler, *The History of Statistics: The Measurement of Uncertainty before 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1990); Porter, *Rise of Statistical Thinking*; Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Zohreh Bayatrizi, "Counting the Dead and Regulating the Living: Early Modern Statistics and the Formation of the Sociological

Imagination (1662–1897),” *British Journal of Sociology* 60, no. 3 (2009): 603–621; and Theodore M. Porter, “Statistical and Social Facts from Quetelet to Durkheim,” *Sociological Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (1995): 15–26.

27. Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

28. See also Cohen, *Calculating People*, 1.

29. Rose, *Numbers*.

30. Numbers, obviously, foster not only trust but also suspicion—primarily in relationship to the possibility of their manipulation in the service of political interests.

31. William Alonso and Paul Starr, eds., *The Politics of Numbers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987); Margo J. Anderson and Stephen E. Fienberg, *Who Counts? The Politics of Census-Taking in Contemporary America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, eds., *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

32. Anat Leibler and Daniel Breslau, “The Uncounted: Citizenship and Exclusion in the Israeli Census of 1948,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 5 (2005): 880–902; Anat Leibler, “Statisticians’ Ambition: Governmentality, Modernity and National Legibility,” *Israel Studies* 9, no. 2 (2004): 121–149; and Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

33. Susan Greenhalgh, “Planned Births, Unplanned Persons: ‘Population’ in the Making of Chinese Modernity,” *American Ethnologist* 30, no. 2 (2003): 196–215.

34. Alain Blum, “Social History as the History of Measuring Populations: A Post-1987 Renewal,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 2 (2001): 279–294; and Inna Leykin, “‘Population Prescriptions’: State, Morality, and Population Politics in Contemporary Russia” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2013).

35. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006); Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination,” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 314–339; Talal Asad, “Ethnographic Representation, Statistics, and Modern Power,” *Social Research* 61, no. 1 (1994): 55–88; Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Kalpagam, “Colonial State”; Sumit Guha, “The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India c. 1600–1900,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 1 (2003): 148–167; and Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

36. Asad, “Ethnographic Representation,” 78.

37. Curtis, *Politics of Population*; Rose, *Numbers*; and Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

38. Guyer et al., “Introduction,” 40.

39. Cohen, *Calculating People*, 35.

40. Patricia Spyer, “Serial Conversion / Conversion to Seriality: Religion, State, and Number in Aru, Eastern Indonesia,” in *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter van der Veer (New York: Routledge, 1996), 171–198; and Brian Peterson, “Quantifying Conversion: A Note on the Colonial Census and Religious Change in Postwar Southern Mali,” *History in Africa* 29 (2002): 381–392.

41. Matthew Engelke, "Number and the Imagination of Global Christianity; or, Mediation and Immediacy in the Work of Alain Badiou," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (2010): 811–829.

42. Mitchell B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

43. Sometimes people who were central in the institutionalization of Jewish statistics in Europe were also central to its institutionalization in prestate Palestine. Arthur Ruppin is such an individual.

44. Etan Bloom, "Zionist Statistics in Light of Jewish Thought," in *The Limits of Quantification: Critical Perspectives on Measuring and Grading People, Their Behaviours and Achievements* [in Hebrew], ed. Yohai Hakak, Lea Kacen, and Michal Krumer-Nevo (Be'er Sheva, Israel: Bialik Institute, 2012), 132–172.

45. Arie Krampf, "The Metaphysics of the Fact: The Social Measurement in Historical and Comparative Perspective," in *The Limits of Quantification: Critical Perspectives on Measuring and Grading People, Their Behaviours and Achievements* [in Hebrew], ed. Yohai Hakak, Lea Kacen, and Michal Krumer-Nevo (Be'er Sheva, Israel: Bialik Institute, 2012), 103–131.

46. Leibler, "Statisticians' Ambition"; Leibler and Breslau, "Uncounted."

47. Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

48. *Ibid.*, 69.

49. Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906–1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972); Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Shaul Kelner, "In Its Own Image: Independent Philanthropy and the Cultivation of Young Jewish Leadership," in *The New Jewish Leaders: Reshaping the American Jewish Landscape*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2011), 261–321.

50. Jeffrey Shandler, *Keepers of Accounts: The Practice of Inventory in Modern Jewish Life*, vol. 17, *David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs* (Ann Arbor: Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, University of Michigan, 2010).

51. See Cole, *Power of Large Numbers*; Engelke, "Number," 813; Porter, *Trust in Numbers*, 7; and Muehlmann, "Rhizomes."

52. Boyarin, *Thinking in Jewish*, 33.

53. See Jessica Donati and Mirwais Harooni, "Last Jew in Afghanistan Faces Ruin as Kebabs Fail to Sell," Reuters, November 12, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/12/us-afghanistan-jews-idUSBRE9AB0A120131112>.

54. Muehlmann, "Rhizomes."

55. Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood*, 9.

56. Engelke, "Number," 818.

57. Cole, *Power of Large Numbers*; and Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

58. See Crump's chapter on numbers and time in his *Anthropology of Numbers*.

59. See, for example, Zaloom, "Ambiguous Numbers."