

Derek J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military. A History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013) p. 360

by Marcella Simoni

In his *Jews and the Military. A History*, Derek Penslar painted a multi-layered picture of the historical relationship between the Jews and the State in the early modern and modern times through the prism of Jewish engagement in army life and participation in war. The relationship between the Jews and the military is analysed through a comparative framework that mainly refers to the European context but that also includes some extra-European situations; such an organization inevitably excludes an in-depth analysis of each national case. The volume is organized thematically, along a chronological timeline and it also includes stories and memories of individual Jewish soldiers; it brings to light their testimonies through private writings, that the Author has integrated with their service records; at times, this material is enriched by documentation from the Jewish press. Most of the historiography is in English, with some French, Hebrew and a few German texts. Primary sources come from a variety of European and Israeli archives.

Comparative analysis is only one of the strong points of this volume and it represents one of its aims. Others are to revert a narrative that speaks of the historical extraneousness of Jews to the military experience, to understand why the Jewish soldier was “blotted out” of collective memory (p. 2) and why his role has been taken up by the Israeli soldier/hero in current Jewish collective consciousness. In this respect, this volume not only succeeds in rescuing the “Jewish soldier (...) from oblivion”; it also helps deconstruct and rescale a number of assumptions about the relationship between Homeland and Diaspora as well as about the relationship between Jews and military force. If we consider militarism and military force – two of the main keys to read and interpret Israeli society today - does the State of Israel stand in continuity with the Jewish Diaspora, or does it represent a rupture? Mainstream narratives point to the latter direction of course, but this volume seems rather to prove the first point. In this respect, it convincingly deconstructs the idea that the history of the Jews and that of the military have crossed paths only through the coercion of former: the conscription of Jews into the Russian army is the most obvious example of such a narrative which has turned into “a metonym for the collective suffering of the Jewish people and its on-going struggle against assimilation” (p.

28). Secondly, the volume re-assesses the mistaken assumption that Jews have avoided and refused to embrace arms to fight in their countries' wars (thus addressing the question of national loyalty), or to defend themselves *as Jews* in the Diaspora, especially against Nazi-Fascism (thus raising the issue of their weakness and thus inevitable slaughter). In the third place, re-appraising Jews (also) as militaries in the Diaspora necessarily also leads to a rescaling of the role of the Israeli soldier (usually perceived and represented as a hero) among mainstream Western Jewry today, a theme that is discussed especially in the last chapter and in the epilogue of this volume.

From a geographical point of view, chapters two through five concentrate on the Western and Eastern European scenarios, while the last two chapters – as we shall see - open up to extra-European experiences; chapter six examines the role of Jews during the two world wars, while chapter seven looks at the War of 1948 in Palestine/Israel as seen from the US.

In the organization of the book, chapter one - “The Jewish soldier between memory and reality” - is different from the others: it discusses critically and it deconstructs the self-representation of Jews as a “people that shuns the waging of war” (p. 10). Here we also find a discussion of the character of the armed Jew in different historical moments: participating to the defence of towns under siege (in Poland since the 1300s, in the 1648 siege of Prague by the Swedish army), or fighting as mercenaries in the Dutch invasion of Brazil in 1630, and in other contexts. An interesting example is that of a group of Sephardi Jews who in the mid-18th century owned corsairs and operated as privateers licensed by the French Government to attack British ships on high seas. These are just a few examples among the many possible, presented at pp. 24-27. One would have hoped for a more in-depth analysis of each of these (and other) often fascinating cases, but – taken together – they serve the purpose of strengthening the argument of the historical non-extraneousness of Jews to military enterprises/adventures; they also give a first blow to the “remarkably static and homogenous memory” that presents a vacuum between the “military prowess of the Jews in the ancient Land of Israel” and the valour of the Israeli Defence Forces (p. 17). This chapter also contains a swift analysis of the idea of war in Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Talmudic commentaries up to medieval rabbinic speculation on this subject.

Chapter two – “Fighting for Rights: Conscription and Jewish Emancipation” – starts to cover the long 19th century, and in part sets the tone of the volume by presenting here a number of questions that recur through its pages, though addressed differently according to the time and place they refer to. What

elements were at play in the relationship between the State, the military and the Jews? Which laws (secular or religious) would Jews ultimately follow and to whom would they entrust their individual and collective loyalty? To what extent did Jews in Europe adhere to or resist the modernizing project that aimed at including them into the new ideal-type of the citizen soldier that was developing at the end of the 18th century? Could conscription offer a solution to the question of citizenship of Jews altogether? Can we speak of a coherent European experience?

In this chapter the A. investigates Jewish voluntary and/or compulsory inclusion in the army in the late 18th and 19th century, from the moment when state-armies started to appear and thus fight state wars (and, in parallel, non-state armies – revolutionaries' and/or mercenaries' alike – gradually began to disappear), to the support extended by Western Jewry to aggressive colonial militarism at the end of the century (the Anglo-Boer wars - 1880-1881; 1899-1902 - and the Spanish American war – 1898 - not to mention Jewish support/participation to French, German and Italian colonialism in Africa). Chapter two thus starts with the history of “the first state to conscript its Jews” (p. 46) in Europe, the Habsburg Empire, to move on to others: the United Kingdom, France, Prussia and Italy-in-the-making. Inevitably, the A. focuses at greater length on the Habsburg and the French cases, the two main broad models for the Emancipation of the Jews in Europe¹. As it is well known, from a historical point of view, serving in the army represented one of the ultimate tests of national belonging²: even more so between the 18th and 19th centuries, when newly established nation-states and empires determined the inclusion of (religious, national or social) minorities in their national body politic³. For the Jews, such inclusion led to that well-known (and well-studied) process of Emancipation which, in various ways, changed the civil and political status of various Jewish population groups throughout Europe⁴. This chapter adds another piece to the puzzle, examining the question

¹ For a broader comparative history of the Emancipation of the Jews mainly in Europe, see *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, eds. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

² See the long-term comparative analysis by Margaret Levi, *Consent, Dissent and Patriotism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³ *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants: Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Rainer Liedtke and Stephan Wendehorst, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁴ For reasons of space and opportunity, I cannot present here an exhaustive bibliography of studies on the Emancipation of the Jews; for a general and comprehensive study see Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770-1780*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

of Jewish Emancipation through the prism of military service. Indeed, as we can read in the first few pages of the volume, from the 1700s “the position of Jews in European society” was reconceived “by presenting Jews as capable of martial valor and so deserving of civil rights” (p. 11), while “advocates for Jewish rights presented the Jewish soldier as proof that Jews were worthy of emancipation and social acceptance” (p. 1). In a cause-effect relationship this process helped (and was helped by) the emergence of a new ideal type, the citizen-soldier, the one who “fought out of love of king and country and in return became an active, equal member of the body politic” (p. 35). This dynamic can be exemplified through the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “every citizen should be a soldier by duty; no citizen should be a soldier by trade” (p. 49).

Compulsory military service for Jews was established in France only in 1808, twenty years after the 1788 decree of Joseph II ordering Galician Jews to serve as wagoners in the service corps and artillery (p. 46). However, in both cases the fitness of Jews for military service had been at the centre of a debate that revealed a general public anxiety. Not by chance, if Rabbi Moses Schreiber of Bratislava (aka Moses Sofer or Hatam Sofer, commonly known as the father of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism) had classified military service as a form of taxation, thus implicitly urging the Jews to try to buy their way out of it (p. 45); and immediately after the 1788 decree mentioned above, Jews had “fled into remote areas of the province or into the remnants of independent Poland” (p. 46) to evade draft. The French case proved different, both since the very first stages of the Revolution – when Jews volunteered for the Civic and National Guard in Paris, in Bordeaux⁵, in Alsace and Lorraine and elsewhere⁶, and again after 1793, with the republican *levée en masse*, in part also as a reaction to such public anxiety. Moreover, the powerful myth of the people’s army – so well discussed in comparative perspective in the volume edited by Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron⁷ - continued to attract Jews all over Europe into the 19th century – for example in Prussia in 1812 (p. 51-56). Interestingly enough, this chapter does not neglect those Jews who (like many other non Jews) expressed their loyalties by fighting on the rebel side across continents and countries, especially Poland,

⁵ See also Zosa Szajkowski, “The Sephardic Jews of France during the Revolution of 1789,” in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 24, (1955): 137-164.

⁶ See also R. Moulinas, “Les Juifs d’Avignon et du Comitat et la Révolution Française,” in *Annales historiques de la Révolution Française*, 4 (1976): 143-182, and *La Révolution Française et les Juifs. Problèmes et aspirations*, 48 /223, (1976): 121-160.

⁷ Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron (eds), *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Hungary and Italy (pp. 56-61), countries undergoing a process of national resurgence and/or striving for national unification. As chapter three shows, many of these fighters moved from one rebel army to the next (as in the case of Adolph Moses from Breslau, who joined the Red Shirts of Garibaldi in 1861 and later participated to the Polish insurrection against Russia in 1863; p. 87).

Chapter three – “The military as a Jewish occupation” – not only re-introduces Jews in the military sphere, but also discusses their role in state-bureaucracy and administration, with a special focus on France and Italy. The A. opens the chapter with two important references: Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and the study of Pierre Birnbaum on Jews in France during the Third Republic⁸. Their juxtaposition helps deconstruct Arendt’s general argument that - in the transition from the early modern to the modern era - Jews lost their special space in the relationship between state and war, as financiers of the wars that the various sovereigns had waged against one another (p. 83); such influence necessarily started to decline when state bureaucracy (and thus tax collection) took over as the main means to finance wars, state bureaucracy being closed to Jews. Against this thesis Penslar connects to the study of sociologist Pierre Birnbaum who coined the term *Juif d’État* to refer to the presence of Jews in all levels of state bureaucracy in France. As the A. points out, this is not just a descriptive term, but a rather normative one, “evoking French Jews’ intense loyalty to the ideals and institutions of the state” (p. 97); moreover, it is enough to read through chapter four to find a detailed section on the later involvement of Jews (as well as non Jews) in war finance (pp. 145-152), thus disproving Arendt’s idea that Jews had lost their space between state and war.

Focusing on officers and administration, the A. deepens his focus on the French and Italian cases, in comparison with other national contexts, mainly in Europe: the UK, Austria-Hungary and Germany, even though Jewish officers were virtually non-existent here until the First World War. Obviously, because of the timeframe of this chapter, and for the deeper focus on France and Italy, special attention is devoted to the *affaire Dreyfus* in France. Rather than framing the history of Alfred Dreyfus in terms of exceptionalism – the only Jew in the General Staff - the A. used the records of the French military, preserved at the *Service Historique de l’Armée Territoriale*, to reconstruct the lives and careers of many other French Jewish officers (p. 103-120) and of their families; as in the case

⁸ Pierre Birnbaum, *The Jews of the Republic: A History of State Jews from Gambetta to Vichy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

of Dreyfus, their paths – both in terms of their profession and identity – showed an intimate connection with the French Republic.

The A. portrays a similar picture for Italy, venturing into the first decades 20th century: even under Fascism, he claims, “the Italian army remained an attractive and welcoming institution for Jewish officers”; after all, “between 1859 and 1938 Italy produced 58 Jewish generals and admirals, including Giuseppe Ottolenghi, (...) minister of war in 1902” (p. 94) and “Italian-Jewish military officers were a source of pride for Jews throughout Europe” (p. 95). However, one can easily disagree with the sentences that accompany these data, i.e. that “precisely because there were so many Jews in positions of high command, the racial laws of 1938 proved difficult to implement”. No footnote follows this statement that squarely recalls the myth of the good Italian, and the *adagio* that the discrimination and persecution of Italy’s Jews during World War II was not implemented as systematically as in other countries, an argument that has already been demolished by much Italian and foreign historiography in original and in translation⁹. There is no evidence that a high numerical representation in a given sector saved Jews from discrimination/persecution anywhere in Europe, and one would not see why this mechanism should have worked in Italy. Here, Jews were overrepresented numerically not only in the army but also in schools and universities, as well as in the medical professions, or in recreational clubs; this did not spare them from being expelled from all these institutions *and* from the army. As Michele Sarfatti has demonstrated, already in November 1937 Mussolini (as Minister of War, Navy and Airforce) had instructed that no Jew should be admitted to military academies¹⁰. And by the time racial laws came into force in 1938, Italian Jews had been censured, identified, screened and finally expelled, in the military as well as in other sectors¹¹.

Chapters four – “When may we kill our brethren? Jews at war” – and five - “The Jewish soldier of World War I: from Participant to Victim” – complement one

⁹ Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2014); Michael A. Livingston, *Fascists and the Jews of Italy: Mussolini's Race Laws 1938-1943*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71-199.

¹⁰ See Michele Sarfatti, *Gli Ebrei nell'Italia Fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin, Einaudi, 2000), 139, fn 101, available in English as *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy. From Equality to Persecution*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

¹¹ See Marco Mondini, “L'identità negata: materiali di lavoro su ebrei ed esercito dall'età liberale al secondo dopoguerra” in *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione fascista e reintegrazione postbellica*, eds. Ilaria Pavan and Guri Schwarz (Florence: Giuntina, 2001), 141-170.

another. The first presents yet another aspect of Jewish involvement with the military in the long 19th century, i.e. Jewish individual and institutional dilemmas and reactions during the many national wars fought in Europe and on extra-European territory, from the 1848-49 revolutions to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, up to the Anglo-Boer war. Crucial here is the theme of identity and of trans-national (inter-ethnic) solidarity versus patriotism through the various national contexts. Individual and institutional anxiety can be considered one of the keywords to read this chapter and understand individual, collective and institutional Jewish attitudes and behaviors. The sermons of the various rabbis across the Continent (in Belgium, Germany, France and Italy) and the articles published in the Jewish press (p. 129-145) echoed and transmitted such anxiety; the same can be said for the mythological narrations repeated in a slightly different version for each war/national case. Typical was the redemptive story of Jewish enemy soldiers fighting, one of which discovers the other to be also Jewish upon his imminent death, rushing him to medical care and thus saving him.

The long 19th century is analyzed here under one last prism, i.e. that of the involvement of Jews (as well as non-Jews) in war finance as bankers (pp. 145-152). Rather than considering this topic only as the modern version of a century-old stereotype that deepens its roots in medieval blood libels, these pages discuss the actual involvement of Jewish bankers into war finance in this period. There could be numerous examples, even more than those presented in these pages: from the marketing of government bonds in small denominations to be bought by citizens - a method used in France in the 1830s by the Rothschilds and by Joseph Seligman in the US during the Civil War - to the famous \$200 million loan to Japan organized by the New York banker Jacob Schiff just before the Russo-Japanese war, up to Max Warburg dumping his shares in companies trading on the Vienna exchange during the crisis of July and August 1914 (pp. 146-49). This section, which in part can be connected to one of Penslar's previous works¹², is a welcome diversion from issues of anxiety, identity crisis, divided loyalties and from the painful decisions that many Jews across the Continent confronted, caught in the dilemma whether they were part of a collective nation in itself, or if they were nationals of modern states belonging to a different faith.

If chapter four is about "anxiety", the fifth "is about empowerment" (p. 166), focusing on the apparent resolution of the identity dilemmas of many Jews

¹² Derek Penslar, *Shylock's Children. Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

across Europe. Placing the First World War at its center, it looks at the reasons behind the ultimate choice of most European Jewish males, to be proud fighters for the nations they resided in at the beginning of the twentieth century. Each group of national Jews saw a different reason for participating, that could be distinct from that of the non-Jewish population: in France, Jews fought to regain Alsace-Lorraine, exactly as the non Jews did; but for the former this area represented “the cradle of French-Jewish civilization” (p. 170). For German Jews, fighting allowed the “preservation of opportunities gained and the attainment of greater access and acceptance” (p. 171); it also meant having the opportunity to fight the Czarist Empire, thus conceiving their own fighting as a war of liberation of Jews oppressed elsewhere. The perspective and the organization of this chapter remain comparative, but the focus is mainly on German Jewry (p. 169), and on the German-Jewish encounter in the trenches, on the battlefields, and after the war, whether as veterans or mourning the dead.

Particularly interesting is the comparative section on post-war institutional and general attitudes towards veterans, and how the various national associations dealt with Jews within their ranks. By 1920 Germany had seven war survivors’ associations, the largest of which (the socialist-oriented Imperial League of War Wounded and Former Fighters) welcomed Jews (p. 180); less welcoming appeared the other six, Catholic or rightist in orientation. In Germany there was no Jewish veterans’ association like in the UK, France or Poland, and in each country these associations served various social, political and national purposes at the same time. They mirrored how Jews were perceived in the various national contexts, how widespread was popular or institutional anti-Semitism, what image of themselves Jews wanted to project in society at large so as to finally fit in the (wounded) body politic of the nation; finally, where and to what extent had Zionism (in its *Muskuljudentums* version) permeated groups of Jewish former fighters¹³. After all, according to a Zionist perspective (even as it had been presented in the progressive *Ha-Melitz* at the turn of the century) (p. 129), Jews fighting against one another were the living demonstration of the passive acceptance of the political implications of living in the Diaspora, a theme that introduces us to the next two chapters.

Chapter six – “The World Wars as Jewish Wars” - continues the chronological history of the relationship between Jews and the military force into the first

¹³ The bibliography on muscular Judaism as a tool for emancipation and national construction is very vast. See at least Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

decades of the twentieth century until the end of the Second World War. New perspectives are introduced here, i.e. the first all-Jewish military units during the First World War, the internationalist call for mobilization during the Spanish civil war, and Jews fighting during the Second World War under the banners the Allied forces or in the Resistance. In this respect the geographical and conceptual horizon of this chapter is broader than that of the previous ones. After a brief description of the separate Jewish units of the 20th century - the Zion Mule Corps (1915), the Jewish Legion (1917) (which contained some of the would be founders of the *Haganah*) within the British Army and some separate Jewish units in the Red Army (1917) – the chapter moves on to the Spanish Civil War, contextualized as the “next battlefront in the Jewish world wars of the twentieth century” (p. 200) and as a Jewish war (p. 206). According to a variety of sources, between 5,000 to 7,000 Jews fought in the International Brigades in Spain, about one fifth of the total. According to these pages, it is difficult to indicate a precise reason for such a large Jewish mobilization, or at least a possible dominant motive: the internationalist drive, communism, the threat to their world represented by Fascism, deep-seated Jewish sensitivities. For this and other reasons, the Spanish Civil is considered a Jewish war on two levels: in the first place “as part of a global struggle against Nazism and anti-Semitism”; secondly “as a performance of a Jewish virility and heroism that historically had been tied to national patriotism but was now put in the service of international Marxism” (p. 206).

If this chapter’s subject is the participation of Jewish soldiers to the wars of the first half of the twentieth century, its last section focuses extensively on their contribution to the fight against Nazi-Fascism. The count of Jewish soldiers fighting on the various fronts reached one million and a half, one third of which in the Red Army, one third in the US army and the remaining third from Europe (Poland, British, France, in the Resistance). As we read at p. 208, “add to these various types of soldiers and rebels the thousand of Jewish partisans and ghetto rebels in eastern Europe, and the resulting total of Jewish fighters far exceeded the number of Jews killed at Auschwitz”. This essential statement would benefit from some references; however, it serves one of the main purposes of this volume, to deconstruct the narrative of feeble and weak Jews, slaughtered without fighting back. As in the 19th century, also during the Second World War, Jews enlisted in each country for different reasons beyond the minimum common denominator of joining against Nazi-Fascism (and Japan).

From here onwards the perspective on the events that follow (the end of World War two and the War of 1948 in the following chapter) comes from North America. In chapter six various themes emerge: the significance of enlisting

beyond just joining the war effort (seen by some recent historiography as a means of both Americanization and intensification of Jewish ethnic identity, p. 210), the role of apologetic literature of the period for adults and for youth, for example through Canadian and American comic books which strengthened the image of the armed and fighting Jew, and the construction in the US of the Yishuv's image as a fighting establishment, Palestine being the place where "almost from the first day of the war, the entire Yishuv mobilized as one man" (p. 216). In this way it was described in the 1941 yearbook of the Zionist United Palestine Appeal (UPA).

The situation in Palestine was actually different, but these pages are very interesting as they integrate the historiography on the so-called "Bergson group" (gathered around Hillel Kook, aka Peter Bergson) in raising consciousness, recruiting (political) sympathies and funds, and in lobbying on behalf of the future Jewish state. This was a Revisionist enterprise, helped by other groups of émigrés organized in the Revisionist New Zionist Organization of America (NZOA) led, among others, also by Ben-Zion Netanyahu. Thus, a number of Revisionist-inspired initiatives laid the foundations of the support of those American Jews "who had not been lured by the siren of socialism" for the would-be Jewish State. The Bergson group was particularly effective at winning endorsements from national political leaders (p. 221). Historically, the idea of a Jewish army had been a constant in the ideology and rhetoric of Revisionist Zionism; in the wake of World War Two however, it was advocated by Labour leaders of the Yishuv, as well as by the President of the Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizmann. Only in 1944, as it is well known, the British administration in Palestine allowed the creation of a 5000-men strong independent Jewish Brigade, sending them to the European fronts through Italy. In the meantime 30,000 Jews from Palestine had volunteered in the British Army.

The book ends with chapter seven – "1948 as a Jewish World War" (rather than an Israeli-Palestinian war) and is then closed by an Epilogue. The first looks at the War of 1948 through a Diaspora-Homeland framework in various fields, of military relations, of economic contributions and, finally, of the construction of a celebrating narrative which has grown increasingly detached from the original contemporary reporting. The other offers some conclusions as to the theme of rupture versus continuity of the Jewish participation in army life in the Diaspora and Israel.

Chapter seven starts by looking at the voluntary military contribution of many (mainly American) Diaspora Jews to the battles of the War of 1948. In this respect their testimonies, stories and a discussion of their tasks and actions helps re-appraise their standing within an Israeli nationalist narrative that has downplayed their role and successes to highlight those of the indigenous new conscripted citizen-soldier fighting for his/her homeland. Partisans were among the first waves of recruits (GAHAL) in the War of 1948, followed by at least 3,500 volunteers (MACHAL) from the US (1,100), Canada and South Africa (1 per cent of the Jewish population). Others came from Europe too; for France and Britain one in 500 Jews volunteered, many of whom had been fighting in other national armies just a few years before. Of great interest are the biographical profile of the well known Col. David “Mickey” Marcus (among other things, one of the men selected by Ben Gurion’s emissary to the US as a foreign expert that could help build an army out of initial “scruffy militias” - p. 232) for example; and of Major Benjamin Dunkelman, officer of the Canadian army who became Commander of the Seventh Brigade which took part to the conquest of the Galilee. Dunkelman was replaced as military Governor of the city of Nazareth after defying his superiors over the question of expelling the Palestinians population that he had pledged to protect after the city’s surrender (pp. 234-235). These two examples, among the others, reveal the cultural differences and the difficulties of the encounter between Homeland and Diaspora, the existence of an exchange between the two and, therefore, a substantial continuity. From an economic point of view, it was a fruitful encounter, especially if “the final and crucial quarter of the costs of Israel’s War of Independence came from diaspora Jewry” (p. 239), through fund raising but also through the acquisition of arms and other means, both during and after the 1948 war. These pages focus more extensively on US Jewry than on other diasporas; they paint an interesting picture of the deep involvement of many US affluent Jewish families with the Zionist project through the so-called “Sonneborn Institute”, the well known underground network of bourgeois and aristocratic Jews which - in tight cooperation with the *Haganah* - raised millions of dollars to procure weapons and ships for illegal immigration to Palestine, airplanes and equipment for arms manufacture. Similar rings existed in Europe, for example in Marseilles and, as it is well known, in Southern Italy; even though this aspect is not dealt with in the volume, here too less affluent Jews from the North offered their names for the purchase of ships for illegal immigration or their manpower and language skills in the mediation between the *Haganah* and the local authorities. The North American perspective of this chapter tends to sacrifice other examples that could have completed the comparative perspective. Finally, from the point of view of

how the narrative of the 1948 war was constructed in the US, the chapter closes by pointing out how contemporary reporting on the event of the War of 1948 was less concerned with embellishing Zionist victories or denying Zionist expulsions of Palestinians; more disturbing, and thus less present in the press at the time, was another factor, i.e. the participation of American Jews to the war as volunteers.

The Epilogue confirms the political nature of a book that focuses on the Diaspora but ends up speaking about the State of Israel, its culture, and its claim to a strong discontinuity with both a distant and recent past of apparent Jewish weakness and destruction. Such a claim is obviously political; it has found - and continues to find - an echo in mainstream and Zionist historiography and is full part of the national public discourse. Downplaying (if not denying) the historical Jewish involvement with the military and participation in war(s) served (and continues to serve) several historiographical and political purposes: it helps reaffirm the narrative on the regenerative potential that Zionism attributes to itself through nationalism; it presents military strength as the *one* factor that can make the difference between collective survival and destruction in a society daunted by security concerns; finally, it reaffirms the primacy of the army in Israeli society. In this we can maybe find a partial rupture between the State of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. Indeed, if Jews in the various countries always took part to military campaigns and donned military uniforms, militarism was never their horizon; there were exceptions of course, some generals, military academy graduates and some Italian early bird supporters of the Fascist movement, whose militarism one can detect from their articles published in the Journal "La Nostra Bandiera" [Our Flag], just to mention a few examples; however, militarism per se never stood at the center of their lives, as individuals and as a collective. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the State of the Jews.

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