

Introduction

At a Toronto synagogue some years ago I gave a talk on Jewish soldiers in modern armies. I began the talk by asking members of the audience how many of them had served in the military or had close relatives—fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers—who did the same. There were a few elderly veterans of the Second World War, and several who had served in Korea. People spoke of grandfathers who had fought for the German kaiser or the Russian tsar, or of fathers who had flown for the Royal Air Force, or of sons and daughters currently deployed in Afghanistan. After a few minutes of this conversation, an older man stood and announced, in an unmistakably Israeli accent, that he had fought in the Harel Brigade in Israel's War of Independence. The audience broke out in spontaneous applause.

Why did the audience applaud this gentleman and not any of the other veterans present? Was his military service more distinguished than theirs? Had he been braver, stronger, or more resourceful? It does not matter. It was not the man who received the adulation of the audience, but the cause for which he fought. Israel is inseparable from its military, in which many Jews throughout the diaspora continue to take a fierce pride. Israel casts a shadow over the millions of Jews who throughout modern times have served, as conscripts or volunteers, in the armed forces of their homelands.

From the beginnings of conscription in the late 1700s until the end of the Second World War, military service was of enormous concern to Jews throughout the world. Advocates for Jewish rights presented the Jewish soldier as proof that Jews were worthy of emancipation and social acceptance. For Jewish soldiers, as for all who serve, military life could be a torment but could also be thrilling and liberating, the most memorable experience of a young man's life. Two sets of historically

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contiguous events—the Holocaust and establishment of the state of Israel, on the one hand, and the 1967 Middle East war and the anti-Vietnam War movement, on the other—blotted the Jewish soldier out of Jewish collective memory. Europe's betrayal of its Jews made the century and a half of patriotic Jewish military service appear futile and misguided. The Israeli fighter assumed the role formerly held by the diaspora Jewish soldier as the epitome of Jewish masculinity and valor. Israel's lightning victory over its Arab foes in 1967 accelerated the lionization of the Israeli soldier and marginalization of his diaspora counterpart. At the same time, Jewish activists passionately opposed to American involvement in Vietnam condemned the army and wanted nothing to do with it. From the 1970s onward, Jewish historical writing in North America steadfastly neglected Jewish soldiers. Meanwhile, in Israel scholars usually considered the diaspora Jewish soldier to be too inconsequential for serious attention.

The Jewish soldier in the diaspora deserves to be rescued from oblivion and subjected to serious historical study. His presence or absence and the forms he takes throw new light both on the modern state's policies toward Jews and on changing Jewish attitudes toward state power and the use of force.

There is another, perhaps even more important, motive that has compelled me to write this book. It is impossible to understand the origins of Israel's military—one of the hallmarks of the Jewish state—without probing the history of the relationship between Jews and the use of armed force in modern times. The Zionist project aspired to create a new Jewish warrior on the soil of the Jews' ancient biblical homeland. Yet the course of an entire civilization cannot be changed in a generation or two. Intricate mixtures of continuity and rupture with the Jewish past have characterized all aspects of modern Israel—its politics, economics, social structure, and culture. There is no reason to assume that its military should be an exception to this rule.

Before the establishment of the state of Israel Jews had a long history of engagement with military power. Although Jews have frequently seen the military as something to be feared and avoided at all costs, there have been many situations in which Jews have had few qualms, and have even been enthusiastic, about military service and the waging of war. In modern states, Jewish valor was a function of emancipation and social acceptance: when Jews felt themselves to be part of the

body politic, they willingly went forth to defend it. In rabbinic tradition, Jews are the children of Jacob, who is presented as meek and studious in contrast with his aggressive brother Esau. In historical reality, however, Jews have been Jacob and Esau and everything in between. It was not the Zionist project, but modernity as such, that introduced Jews to the ethical dilemmas of the use of force and challenged their historical self-representation as a people who shunned war.

The scope of this book spans Europe, the Middle East, and North America, and a period of some three hundred years, from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. In the 1600s, Jews in eastern and central Europe began to assume roles in urban defense. With the development of mass conscription from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, the military became a fact of life with which most Jewish males in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and North America had to contend. Jews the world over had essential interests in the twentieth century's global conflicts, especially the 1948 Middle East war that secured the existence of the state of Israel. Israel itself is not the main focus of this book, but in the epilogue I discuss the relationship between the long sweep of diaspora Jewry's military involvement and the role of the army in Israeli society.

My sources are mostly printed: newspapers, books and pamphlets, statistical studies, rabbinic sermons, and works of fiction. In key sections, however, I make use of unpublished materials from the French and Austro-Hungarian military archives, the archive of the Israel Defense Force, and the archives of French- and German-Jewish philanthropic organizations that cared for Jewish veterans, war widows, and orphans. There is a vast body of scholarly literature on some of the themes covered in this book (e.g., German Jews in the First World War), which I synthesize, and I also draw upon a variety of useful, though widely scattered, scholarly works on the social history of Jews in the military.¹

This book combines the methodologies of social and cultural history to explore both action and sensibility: how modern Jews came to be soldiers and what their experiences in service were like, as well as what they thought of those experiences and what the Jews back at home thought of their brethren in uniform. My methodology may be holistic, but I do not strive in this work for comprehensive coverage of Jewish conscription, volunteering, and soldiering throughout the

world. A book that attempted such a project would be encyclopedic, whereas my framework is thematic. Each chapter posits a certain aspect of the Jewish encounter with the military and then examines a number of case studies that illustrate the phenomenon. I hope that the book's arguments will stimulate other scholars to think about the relationship between Jews and the military in those places and periods that I lacked the time or expertise to cover.

Despite its thematic structure, the book has a strong narrative component. It tells stories about individual Jewish soldiers, drawing on their service records and private writings, and about Jewish spiritual and lay leaders who saw the Jewish soldier as the embodiment of the struggle for emancipation—or the ultimate proof of emancipation's failure.

Throughout modern history, soldiers have been overwhelmingly male, and conversation about Jewish conscription has been inseparable from notions of masculinity. Classic antisemitic thinking associated Jewish men with physical weakness, cowardice, and an unwillingness to risk their lives for the peoples among whom they lived.² Modern patriotic thinking channeled masculine aggression against the nation's enemies by collapsing distinctions between the intimate sphere of the family (the loved ones whom any head of household would defend when threatened) and the imagined family of the nation.³ Jewish patriotism, in turn, emphasized the historic courage of the Jews to stand up for their faith in the face of ceaseless persecution and their soldierly virility in antiquity, both within the ancient Hebrew homeland and in armies in the Greco-Roman world.

The association between citizenship and military service implicitly excluded women from full membership in the body politic, as they were not subject to conscription.⁴ Women's advocates formulated alternative conceptions of citizenship defined in terms of maternal care for the nation via involvement in philanthropy and other forms of civil society. This alternative notion of citizenship was disseminated from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries by women's peace activist organizations, in which Jewish women were heavily involved.⁵ These organizations were vocal, but their memberships were small, and in general Jewish women's philanthropic activity, like that of Christian bourgeois women, was patriotic and supportive of their countries' war efforts, and manifested in what one scholar has called a "voluntary

ethic of care, which stressed collective community responsibility for the wounded soldiers, the veterans, and their families.”⁶

The place of military history within the historical discipline as a whole has undergone massive shifts over the past 150 years. “In the nineteenth century,” writes David Bell, “history was still preeminently a literary, narrative art, and the past offered no more dramatic or compelling subject than war. Such masters as Ranke, Macaulay, Michelet, and Parkman all gave it a major place in their works, took military science seriously, and put climactic battles at the heart of their stories.”⁷ These pioneer historians were all fervent nationalists. Nationalist historical scholarship is by definition literary, for it invents a nation by constructing a coherent narrative in which the willingness to fight as and for the collective is a paramount indication of national identity.

After World War II, academic historians sloughed off nationalist ideologies and so lost interest in the battlefield. They shunned telling stories in favor of analyzing underlying socioeconomic structures (in the language of the influential *Annales* school, “histoire événementielle” was replaced by the “longue durée”). The military, perceived as an extension of political elites, was neglected in the great wave of social history that began in the 1960s. The annals of war became the specialized province of military historians, whom academic historians have too often associated waspishly with amateur enthusiasts, battlefield tourists, and the popular fare aired on cable television’s history channels. The first sign of war’s return to the study of culture was the late Paul Fussell’s landmark work of 1975, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Since then scores of scholarly books have narrated the experience, commemoration, and collective memory of war. Somewhat more belatedly, the military has become the province of social historians who see in it a crucible of interaction and contestation between state and society.⁸ Some scholarship on ethnic and religious minorities has taken up the theme of conscription as both a blessing and a curse, an opportunity for the improvement of a minority’s social and political status yet also a source of oppression or segregation or, at the opposite extreme, enforced assimilation.⁹

Jewish historians have not ignored these developments altogether, but they have tended to focus their attention in a different direction. David Biale’s provocative book *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (1986) notes medieval Jewish society’s respect for military competence

and the many situations in which access to weapons reflected the Jews' integration into the feudal social order. Yet Biale does not treat the most obvious case of Jewish engagement with military power, as soldiers in modern armies. Modern history is replete with wars, and any one life span of even a half century would be witness to one or more major conflicts in addition to numerous revolutions and rebellions. Yet one would surmise from most Jewish historical writing that before the First World War Jews took up arms only sporadically and in small numbers. (We know far more about Jews as victims of pogroms than as participants in the tsar's army, although the latter vastly outnumbered the former.) A great deal has been written about the Jews in the First World War, but most attention has been paid to the persecution of Jewish civilians along the eastern front and the encounter of Jewish soldiers with antisemitism. The Jewish experience of the Second World War is overwhelmingly associated with the Holocaust and the desperate efforts of some Jews to resist the Nazi behemoth. There are important exceptions to all these generalizations, but for the most part when Jewish historians hear the word "war," they think of the violence it unleashes rather than the power that authorizes and directs it.

Israeli scholars, living in a society in which the army is a dominant institution and armed conflict nearly constant, have been more attuned than their diaspora counterparts to the history of Jewish military involvement. This was but one of many bonds that tied Zionist historical writing to nineteenth-century Europe's great nationalist historians. Zionism's recasting of the Jew as a fighting subject has often been attributed to a yearning, particularly among Jewish men, for physical strength and courage, an association between warrior spirit, self-respect, and the respect of the Gentiles.¹⁰ But above and beyond salving the wounded egos of Jewish males, a fundamental premise of Zionism—one shared by most of its major streams—was a Jewish "return to history," a collective Jewish subjectivity, most commonly embodied in the state. Statecraft and warcraft are closely linked, in theory even more than in practice. The ideal type of the Jewish fighter, a metonym of collective responsibility and dynamism, was common in Zionist literature almost from the movement's beginning.

Classic Zionist historical writing placed at least as much emphasis on the historic martial valor (*gevurah*) of the Jewish people as on its op-

pression in Exile. Historical writing produced in the Yishuv (Palestine's pre-1948 Jewish community), and then in the state of Israel, presented the Jew in Exile as courageous and willing to sacrifice himself on behalf of his faith and community. Activists like the Labour Zionist leader Berl Katznelson praised Jewish rebels in ancient Palestine and medieval Jewish martyrs, who, by preferring death to the defilement of conversion, became symbols of national sacrifice. Zionist and Israeli authors have been less charitable about modern Jewish military service or participation in armed uprisings (except for the ghetto rebellions during the Holocaust). These actions have at times been celebrated as a manifestation of Maccabean spirit but more often dismissed as a vain sacrifice on behalf of an inimical, alien land.¹¹

Zionist ideology usually conceived of diaspora Jewish heroism in terms of martyrdom and passive victimhood in times of persecution. It portrayed the Zionist militias that developed in Palestine in the early twentieth century more in terms of rebirth of the ancient Hebrew warrior spirit than as a continuation of a diaspora heritage. There were some important exceptions to this generalization. Two of the most important works of early Zionist historiography paid considerable attention to Jewish self-defense during the revolutionary tumult of 1848 in central Europe and the early twentieth century in Russia. In 1967 Israel's Ministry of Defense published a slim but useful edited volume on the history of Jews in modern armies.¹² By and large, however, Israeli scholarship has framed discussion about Jews and the military in terms of halakhic norms, not lived experience, and of marginalization rather than integration.¹³

The distance, both physical and cultural, that divides Israeli scholars from Europe and North America encourages the repetition of tried yet not necessarily true assumptions about diaspora Jewish attitudes toward war. Anita Shapira's *Land and Power* (1992), an outstanding study of Zionist concepts of force, offers a few pages on pre- or extra-Zionist history, casually asserting the "age-old Jewish repugnance for the spilling of innocent blood."¹⁴ Ehud Luz's *Wrestling with an Angel* (1998), a thoughtful study of the Zionist ethics of power, claims that premodern Jewry had no warrior ethos and conceived physical sacrifice as "heroic service to humanity as a whole."¹⁵ Both Luz and Shapira argue that early Zionism maintained many of the antimilitarist qualities of traditional Jewish

culture, but they do not consider the contrary possibility that Zionism was influenced as well by modern Jewry's contact, in thought and deed, with the military realm.

Over the past generation, Jewish historians have demonstrated that in any land and at any time Jews took on the colorings of their social milieu, and that Jews were no strangers to fighting, dueling, and criminal activity, including extortion, assault, and homicide. Jews were participants in, and not merely victims of, violent acts. They also fantasized about bloody vengeance against Gentiles even when they did not have the ability or fortitude to act.¹⁶ These findings are far removed from the *Edelkeyt*, or gentility, that Daniel Boyarin believes to have been the hallmark of rabbinic and medieval Judaism, or the fabricated tradition of Jewish nonviolence that the Palestinian writer Emile Habibi, wishing to separate Zionism from Judaism, invoked as the legacy of “the brothers of Heinrich Heine and Maimonides, Bertolt Brecht [*sic!*] and Stefan Zweig, Albert Einstein and the immortal Arab-Jewish poet Shlomo Ben Ovadia.”¹⁷

The emphasis in the research done to date is on the individual and his immediate community, not the state; random or ritualized acts, not the organized instruments of domination; in short, violence, not war. My approach is different in its focus on war and the military as an arm of state power. It draws upon Hannah Arendt's classic essay *On Violence*, which defines war as a manifestation of power, power as collective action legitimized by authority, and authority as “unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey.”¹⁸ Violence, on the other hand, is the province of the individual, gang, or sect, which multiplies its natural strength through the use of lethal implements. “Violence,” Arendt writes, “can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.”¹⁹ Although Jews, like all humans, are always capable of violence, in modern times Jews faced the particular challenge of how to accommodate new forms of state authority that demanded the donation of young bodies for military service.

I am indebted to Arendt for her distinction between violence and war, yet in this book I modify her analytical categories somewhat by distinguishing between two types of violence. The sectarian community that practices violence for ideological reasons, I argue, is not the same as the impassioned or delinquent individual or the criminal gang. The

soldier, a servant of the state, and the fighter, who acts in the name of an underground or insurrectionary group, are both agents of what I call *politicized collective violence*. They both exercise collective power, belong to political communities wielding instruments of domination, and are guided by a political authority, be it the state or a competing body.

I would classify practitioners of modern politicized collective violence via five categories: (1) the citizen-soldier; (2) the uniformed civil servant; (3) the revolutionary; (4) the rebel in extremis; and (5) the indigenized colonial. The first type is globally the most widespread, because conscription is a hallmark of the modern state. Prior to the emancipation of women at the very end of the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, emancipation of any specific social group was conceptually linked with military service, even in countries that did not regularly have a draft, such as the United States or United Kingdom. The second type is the career officer, as opposed to the reserve officer, whose title is more of an honorific and whose command is normally limited to brief periods in times of war or unrest. Traditionally, senior officers have enjoyed the status and privileges accorded to the highest state officials, and although their lives are ostensibly devoted to warcraft, in fact staff officers may well devote most of their career to administrative tasks not unlike those carried out by their plainclothes peers in the civil service. The third type, the revolutionary seeking to overthrow the current regime for a more just and equitable one, entered the stage of history as a civic guardsman in France, then in central Europe, from 1789 to the revolutions of 1848. These bourgeois rebels foreshadowed the decidedly more *déclassé* proletarian revolutionaries in eastern Europe who emerged in the early 1880s. The fourth type, the rebel in extremis, has been known by many names: guerrilla, partisan, freedom fighter, terrorist. These individuals have offered fierce, desperate responses to occupation and oppression, as in eastern Europe under Nazi occupation, and the consequences of their actions have often been suicidal. The fifth and final type is native or native-raised colonial youth, such as Euro-Americans or Afrikaners, who were indigenized yet hostilely counterpoised to the land's aboriginal population.

This fifth type is associated most closely with the Zionist project, with the young men and women, overwhelmingly of European origin, who served in the Yishuv's militias that David Ben-Gurion forged in

1948 into the Israel Defense Force (IDF). It is impossible to appreciate how the Israeli army took form, however, without taking into account the presence of the other types. In Jewish collective memory, there is a strong, even exaggerated, association between the fourth type, the ghetto rebels and partisans during the Holocaust, and the founding of the state of Israel. The Jewish variants of the other types—the soldier, the officer, and the revolutionary fighter—have largely disappeared from public awareness. This book tells their stories and, at the end, depicts their connection with the Zionist project and Israel’s creation.

Modern Jews have been well aware of the beneficent as well as harmful capacities of state power. They have often accepted its legitimacy and seen it as a source of individual and collective benefit. War has inspired Jewish communities and institutions to mobilize resources for the state and for themselves. What’s more, for Jews, as for all people, conscription meant far more than actually waging war. Militaries do fight wars, but much of the time, certainly in the nineteenth century and even in the blood-soaked twentieth, states in the western world have been at peace. The experience of being drafted, going through basic training, serving in a particular unit, and interacting with one’s peers and superiors could have profound effects even on an individual who never came under hostile fire. The military is perhaps the single most powerful institution within the modern state, and the millions of modern Jews who performed military service were molded by forces far beyond the experience of battle.

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The book’s first chapter explores the Jews’ historic self-image as a people that shuns what the Hebrew writer S. Y. Agnon called “the craft of Esau, the waging of war.”²⁰ The notion of Jews as wards of divine and state authority—as “servants of kings, not servants of men” (Bahya ben Asher of Saragossa) or, more starkly, “prisoners of war” (Moses Sofer)—derives from both rabbinic tradition and the specific conditions of Jewish life in medieval Christian and Muslim civilizations. Committed to maintaining their faith and community, Jews had little reason to cross social boundaries or endanger their lives through military service. In modern eastern Europe, particularly the Russian Empire, the grim conditions of Jewish life and the prevalence of reactionary Orthodox Christianity

hardened long-standing feelings of passivity and timorousness in relation to the state. The historical memory of Russian and Polish Jewry is replete with images of harsh military service and tales of fleeing the country in order to avoid it. Like all historical memory, this narrative blends fact with fiction. Eastern European Jews engaged in a variety of paramilitary activities long before conscription into the tsar's army, and once the draft was implemented in the nineteenth century, their experiences were not uniformly miserable. What's more, this narrative did not apply to Jews in central and western Europe. The military experiences and memories of eastern European Jewry may have been dominant, but they were not normative.

Chapter 2 depicts the context in which western and central European armies took form and how Jews were included in them. The issue of military service played a major role in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about the emancipation of the Jews. In the early 1700s, Protestant Hebraists and Enlightenment thinkers reconceived the position of Jews in European society by presenting Jews as capable of martial valor and so deserving of civil rights. In the late eighteenth century, new conceptions of the meliorability of humanity, combined with *raison d'état* considerations by absolutist monarchs, led to the introduction of conscription for all men, including Jews. Proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) paid considerable attention to the issue of military service, especially after the introduction of mass conscription in France during the revolutionary wars. In the German lands, early nineteenth-century advocates of Jewish emancipation urged Jewish youth to volunteer to fight against Napoleonic France.

After 1815, Jews in central and eastern Europe frequently tried to evade military service, but they did not necessarily do so more often than Gentiles. In most places where Jews did not want to serve in the military, few others did. From the mid-1800s onward, patriotic sentiment, and with it a willingness to fight for one's country, became more widespread. During the wars of German and Italian unification, Jews flocked to perform what they believed was their civic duty. Similar developments took place in the United States during the American Civil War.

In the first half of the 1800s, opponents as well as champions of emancipation marshaled arguments from the military realm to make

their case. Since Jewish emancipation was associated with the forces of revolution, conservatives seized on the image of the cowardly and incompetent Jewish soldier as the ultimate proof against the liberal claim of the equality of man. Ignoring the fact that many people besides Jews tried to dodge the draft, antisemites created a new, powerful icon of Jewish malevolence, one whose full significance would not become apparent until the First World War.

Chapter 3 presents the military as a vehicle and symbol of social mobility for Jews in continental Europe. This chapter explores the social background of Jewish military officers, the financial implications of a military career upon marriage and the formation of broader social networks, and the interplay between finance and social capital in a family that could boast of one or more army officers. Here I compare the high rates of Jewish military careerism in France, Italy, and Austria-Hungary with much lower rates in the post-Civil War United States and in the United Kingdom. This disparity suggests that Jewish military careerism was linked not only to levels of emancipation but also to the prestige of a military career in each national culture.

This chapter uses the life stories of Jewish soldiers to throw new light on the relationship between Jews, the military, and the broader societies in which they lived. For example, the hapless Alfred Dreyfus was but one of hundreds of French-Jewish captains and colonels, over whom some twenty Jewish generals served in the military during the period of the Third Republic. The French military's openness to Jewish army officers encourages rethinking of the Dreyfus Affair, as French-Jewish officers encountered support as well as hostility in their confrontations with antisemitism both within and outside the barracks. I also deal here with Jewish involvement in colonial armies, particularly those of French Africa and Indochina. Serving as a colonial officer represented a continuation of a tradition of Jewish service to the state, but it was also a means of gaining social acceptance by allying and identifying oneself with white Christian officers and colonists and against native peoples.

With Chapter 4 the focus of the book moves from peacetime to war, from the military as a livelihood to an instrument of mass death. As Jews began to serve in substantial numbers in the armies of Europe and North America, their patriotic inclinations clashed with their transnational attachments to Jews in the lands against which their country was fighting.

This problem first emerged during the revolutions of 1848, when Jews fought both as rebels and as soldiers in the Habsburg armies, and it was the object of considerable discussion in the European-Jewish press. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 was far more traumatic as it sundered the French- and German-Jewish communities, which had long known close business and familial ties. Rabbinic sermons, fiction, and Jewish apologetic literature displayed a powerful transnationalist sensibility, a feeling of Jewish commonality even in times of war. The willingness of Jews to fight each other was heralded as the ultimate proof of worthiness for equal rights. A similar discourse developed among Jews in the United States during the American Civil War. In North America as well as Europe, Jewish activists took great pride in the military achievements of Jews in the armies of their homeland's rivals. This discourse was enabled by the generally benevolent tone of international relations in the century from Waterloo to the outbreak of World War I, but nonetheless it stands out for its powerful sense of intraethnic attachment and interchangeability, by which the Jew displays loyalty to all states by serving loyally in all armies.

The First World War destabilized this discourse of transnational patriotism, as Jews in the lands of the Entente and Triple Alliance began to depict the enemy in demonic terms, but even here extensive contact was maintained between Jews in enemy armies, and the moral dilemmas of Jews facing each other in the trenches of the western front became the subject of stories, myths, and even jokes. After the war, Jewish veterans the world over formed tight-knit bonds and expressed the utmost solidarity with their German brethren from the early 1930s onward. In other ways, however, Jewish veterans suffered the aftermath of the war as did many other former fighters; in Germany and Austria, for example, they shared in the prevailing fury over war guilt and reparations, and they retained a strong pride in their military service, a pride that they nurtured throughout the years of Nazi persecution.

Chapter 5 continues its predecessor's analysis of Jews in World War I, but from a different angle. It examines the combat experience of Jews in World War I and the toll the war inflicted on hundreds of thousands of Jews who fought as soldiers on all the war's fronts. Although there is a vast literature on Jews in World War I, its focus is on civilian suffering, in particular the persecution of Jews living along the eastern

front. In this chapter, I analyze the war experience of Jews outside the Russian and Ottoman empires, Jews who believed themselves to be fully (or virtually) integrated into the state and its vernacular culture. Jewish sensibilities about the war shared much in common with those of non-Jews of a similar class and educational background. Yet points of intersection were accompanied by points of deflection. The war could be more meaningful for Jews than for most combatants, partly because of the ongoing sense of need to prove one's masculine and civic virtue in the face of antisemitic attacks, and partly because the Triple Alliance was arrayed against Russia, seen by most Ashkenazic Jews as their greatest oppressor in modern times. A specifically Jewish subculture that valorized the war was most prominent in Germany, where Jews, placed under enormous pressures to prove themselves in battle, did not allow themselves to grieve publicly over wounded Jewish soldiers and veterans, but rather commemorated only the Jewish dead, those who had made the ultimate sacrifice for their nation. Jewish veterans were far less likely than their Christian counterparts to lobby for health care, vocational training, and financial assistance for disabled soldiers.

The impact of World War I on Jewish political consciousness varied greatly across and within specific countries. It could heighten Jewish national patriotism and nationalist sensibility, a commitment either to preserve the state or to overthrow it through violent revolution. The book's last two chapters argue that the 1914–1948 period must be seen as one of nearly constant Jewish involvement in global conflicts in the name of causes that explicitly or implicitly served Jewish collective interests. The Jewish Legion that fought in the Middle East in World War I, international Jewish volunteerism in the Spanish Civil War, the global Jewish war effort during World War II, and the massive flow of Jewish money, matériel, and manpower from the diaspora to Palestine in 1948 shared certain common assumptions and operative principles despite the vast ideological differences between liberal patriotism, international communism, and Zionism. In all these conflicts Jews figured not only as refugees or inducted soldiers but also as volunteers, making a free choice to put themselves in harm's way (as in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War and the volunteer Machal forces in 1948) or, if already in uniform or facing imminent induction, choosing to fight

within a Jewish unit (as in the Jewish Legion and the Jewish Brigade, in World War I and II respectively).

There is a substantial literature on Jewish involvement in the two world wars and the Spanish Civil War, and the 1948 war has become a scholarly industry of its own. Scholars have not, however, incorporated the spectrum of Jewish global military activity in the first half of the twentieth century into a comparative framework. Moreover, aside from some popular and autobiographical work, there is little in English on the social history of the Machal, nor on the relationship between these units and the global war that had ended just three years before. By analyzing the 1948 war against the background of earlier conflicts that also attracted international Jewish support, and by taking into account the overlapping sets of collective Jewish interests that motivated those who took part in them, the final chapter seeks to reconceive what is usually seen as a chasm between the Zionist struggle to establish the state of Israel and earlier forms of Jewish military activity.

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The great French-Jewish scholar Marc Bloch famously remarked that the purpose of comparative history is to highlight distinction, not similarity. The generation of 1948, and the social and military institutions they created, were unique in many ways. But they did not emerge from some distant land beyond the borders of modern Jewish civilization. The Zionist enterprise was the child of the diaspora, and even its most distinct features had diaspora counterparts, albeit not exact parallels. Throughout modern times, Jews willingly served in the military when it furthered their individual and collective interests to do so. In societies where the officer corps was prestigious and available to Jews, they sought it out. Jewish religious culture has veered less toward pacifism than toward a calculated and delimited passivity, and few rabbis have provided halakhic justification for shirking service. Although in World War I Jews fought primarily as nationals of their homelands, they also pursued specifically Jewish agendas, particularly in the fight against tsarist Russia and for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Between 1936 and 1948 Jews displayed particular needs, predilections, and interests as they took part in a twelve-year world war on three fronts—Spain, Nazi-occupied Europe, and Palestine. As in all wars, the home and bat-

tlefronts were merged—in the diaspora as well as Israel, even if for the former the distances between the two were vast, and the conditions of daily life were far more secure and comfortable.

I am not a military historian by training or inclination, and I have seen no reason to enter the fray of Israeli scholars who have written abundantly, and often extremely well, on the history and politics of the Zionist militias that became the Israeli army and the IDF itself.²¹ I am intrigued, though, by the work of European historians who have used the military as a lens for more fully understanding a whole variety of issues such as cultural sensibilities, social mobility, gender dynamics, and levels of political agency.²² I have attempted here to do the same for Jews throughout the modern diaspora. I also hope to clarify how Zionists adapted popular ideas about the relationship between national revival and armed struggle and what practical use they made of those ideas.

These are academic questions, but they have contemporary relevance, even urgency. In recent years, Israeli governments have repeatedly presented the state as under existential threat yet possessed of a vast and powerful army that can obliterate its foes; as being the master of its own destiny yet bereft of responsibility for its intractable conflict with the Palestinians. At the same time, diaspora Jewry has been torn between those who decry Israeli militarism and those who have few, if any, complaints against Israeli military action of any kind. One of the distinctive aspects of modernity is the need to justify ideology and action via appeals to history. Accordingly, both the dovish and hawkish camps invoke a Jewish tradition of valorizing and seeking peace, but they do so for different reasons: the former in order to justify concessions to and reconciliation with Israel's enemies, the latter to demonstrate that despite the Jews' love of peace Israel has been backed into a corner and that its survival demands frequent, tough, and bold military action. Both camps read the Jewish textual tradition and interpret the Jews' lived reality selectively, and to their own advantage. This book aims to deconstruct simplistic, ideologically driven notions of the relationship between Jews and military power, and in so doing to present the centrality of the military in Israeli politics and society as a logical, but neither inevitable nor immutable, outcome of modern Jewish history.