

TIKKUN OLAM AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY: JEWISH VOLUNTEERS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR²

Abstract

The number of Jewish volunteers who joined the International Brigades (IB) in order to defend the Spanish Republic against the Nationalist rebels was very high. Their presence among volunteers from each nation was in most cases greatly disproportionate to their representation in the general population of those countries. Many of these volunteers held internationalist views, and the idea of emphasizing their Jewish identity was alien to them. But in fact—as is reflected, for example, in the letters they sent from the Spanish trenches to their friends and relatives or in their memoirs—they also followed the Jewish mandate of *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning “repairing the world,” or showing responsibility for healing and transforming it. Many volunteers attempted to block, with their own bodies if need be, the Nazi and Fascist wave sweeping across Europe, thus defending both universal and Jewish causes. While there is a voluminous bibliography on the IB, less attention has been given to Jewish participation in the Spanish Civil War; and most studies of Jewish participation in the war focus on Jewish-European or on Jewish-North American volunteers. There is a conspicuous absence of historiography about Jewish-Argentines, and very little written on Jewish-Palestinians, in the Iberian conflict. This article looks at volunteers from these two countries and their motivation for taking an active part in the Spanish Civil War.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War, International Brigades, Argentina, Palestine, Naf-tali Botwin Company

The Spanish Civil War acquired an international dimension from the outset. The intervention of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in support of the Nationalist rebels, and the somewhat belated and hesitant backing of the Republican government by the Soviet Union, quickly transformed the Iberian fratricide into an international conflict as well.³ The war provoked heated debates in all Western

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2 I would like to thank the Israel Institute of Washington DC for the support of this research project.

3 For an overview of the war, see, for example, Payne Stanley G., *The Spanish Civil War*, Cambridge University Press 2012; Preston Paul, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge*, London, Harper Perennial, 2012. On the international dimensions, see also Alpert Michael, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, London,

countries. Liberal and left-wing public opinion mobilized on behalf of the Second Spanish Republic and the values it supposedly represented: democracy, progress, and social justice. At the same time, conservative and right-wing forces expressed their sympathy for the “anti-Communist crusade” of the Nationalist rebels, headed by General Francisco Franco.

Support of the Republic was manifested in the campaigns to raise money, food, and medicines to help it in its hour of need. But it was also expressed in the decision of tens of thousands of young people around the world to travel to the Iberian Peninsula and defend the Republic in the Spanish trenches.⁴ Figures for the total number of volunteers range from 35,000 to 60,000, with recent studies pointing to the lower figure. However, it is safe to say that at least 35,000 volunteers arrived in Spain from more than 50 countries. The number of Jewish volunteers who joined the International Brigades (IB) in order to defend the Spanish Republic against the Nationalist rebels was very high. According to most estimates, their number was somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000.⁵ It is difficult to form a more precise estimate since they were scattered among the various national units, often with last names that did not indicate their ethnic origins. One thing is clear, however: the number of Jews among the volunteers from each nation was in most cases greatly disproportionate to their representation in the general population of those countries.

Martin Sugarman offered the following statistics, which are probably somewhat exaggerated. Out of 5,000 Polish volunteers, 2,250, or 45 percent, were Jewish. At the time, Jews represented only 10 percent of the Polish population. In the case of the United States, Sugarman estimates that there were 1,250 Jewish-American volunteers, 38 percent of the total number of Americans enlisted in the IB, when Jews represented only 4 percent of the country's population. The 1,043 Jewish-French volunteers constituted 15 percent of all French volunteers, compared to 0.5 percent of their share in the French population. Between 200-400 Jews left Britain for Spain, that is 11-22 percent of all British volunteers, when Jews made up only 0.5 percent of the population.⁶

MacMillan, 1994.

- 4 There is an extensive bibliography on the International Brigades. See Rodríguez de la Torre Fernando, *Bibliografía de las Brigadas Internacionales y de la participación de extranjeros a favor de la República, 1936-1939*, Albacete, Instituto de Estudios Albacetenses Don Juan Manuel de la Diputación de Albacete, 2006.
- 5 On Jewish volunteers in the Civil War, see Zaagsma Gerben, *A Fresh Out-burst of the 'Old Terror'? Jewish-born Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War*, Ph.d dissertation, European University Institute, 2008; Lustinger Arno, *Schalom Libertad! Juden in Spanischen Bürgerkrieg*, Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1991; Diamant David, *Combattants juifs dans L'Armée Republicaine Espagnole 1936-1939*, Paris, Éditions Renouveau, 1979; Toch Josef, *Jews in the Civil War in Spain, 1936-39*, *Basha'ar* 17.6, 1974, pp. 456-66 [Hebrew]; Prago Albert, *The Botwin Company in Spain, 1937-1939*, *Jewish Currents*, March 1992, pp. 7-11; Sichon G.E., *Les volontaires juifs dans la guerre civile en Espagne: chiffres et enjeux*, *Les Temps Modernes* 44/507, 1988, pp. 46-62; González Isidro, *Los judíos y la Guerra Civil Española*, Madrid, Hebraica Ediciones, 2009.
- 6 Sugarman Martin, *Against Fascism-Jews who served in The International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War*, p. 2, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/spanjews.pdf>, last visited 5 Feb, 2016.

In December 1937, a Jewish company was founded within the Palafox Battalion of the 13th Polish Dumbrowski Brigade. It was named after Naftali Botwin, a Jewish-Polish Communist who was executed by the Pilsudski government in 1925. It immediately became a symbol of the Jewish participation in the Spanish Civil War, although most Jews did not fight within the ranks of this company. Officially designated as a Jewish unit, it included several non-Jewish volunteers as well, mostly Poles, Germans, and Spaniards, and even two Arabs, one of them a Yiddish-speaking baker from Palestine.⁷ The Botwin Company published a front newspaper also called *Botwin*, which highlighted the Jewish contribution to the Republican war effort and the fight against Fascism. An initial idea to name the company Bar Kokhba (the leader of the Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire in the 2nd century) was rejected in favor of Botwin, who was sentenced to death following the shooting of a police officer who had infiltrated the ranks of the Communist Party in Lwow. Botwin became a symbol of revolutionary self-sacrifice for party members, Jews and non-Jews alike.

Many of these volunteers held internationalist views, and the idea of emphasizing their Jewish identity was alien to them. But in fact—as is reflected, for example, in the letters they sent from the Spanish trenches to their friends and relatives or in their memoirs—they also followed the Jewish mandate of *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning “repairing the world,” or showing responsibility for healing and transforming it. Many volunteers attempted to block, with their own bodies if need be, the Nazi and Fascist wave sweeping across Europe, thus defending both universal and Jewish causes. According to Ethel, the wife of Canadian doctor Aaron Magid, Germany’s persecution of the Jews was one of the motives that drove her husband to Spain: “Well, we were hearing all these things from Germany about what was happening to the Jews, and we wanted to fight the fascists, so that is what we did.”⁸

Obviously, it would be erroneous to generalize about Jewish volunteers from different countries and different backgrounds. The decision of each individual was influenced by various factors—political, social, economic, and psychological. Still, the notable presence of Jews in the IB contributed to strengthening anti-Semitic stereotypes held by Spanish Nationalists, who commonly equated Jews and Bolsheviks.⁹

While there is a voluminous bibliography on the IB, less attention has been given to Jewish participation in the Spanish Civil War. Apart from Yiddish mem-

7 See Zaagsma Gerben, *Die Botwin Kompagnie, Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. Dan Diner. Band 1: A–Cl, Stuttgart, Weimar, Metzler, 2011, pp. 393–397, as well as his *Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: A Case Study of the Botwin Company*, M.A. thesis, University of London, 2001; Rothenberg Joshua, *The Jewish Naftali Botwin Company*, *Jewish Frontier* 47/4, 1980, pp. 14–19.

8 Quoted in Petrou Michael, *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2008, p. 38.

9 See, for example, the articles written by Ernesto Giménez Caballero or Juan Pujol in *Domingo* in 1938; Alvarez Chillida Gonzalo, *El antisemitismo en España*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2002, Part IV; Rohr Isabelle, *The Spanish Right and the Jews, 1898–1945: Antisemitism and Opportunism*, Brighton, Sussex University Press, 2008, chap. 3.

oirs and journalism, pioneering studies include David Diamant's *Yidn in Shpanishn Krig*, originally published in 1967, with a French edition in 1979, and Arno Lustiger's *Shalom Libertad! Juden in spanischen Burgerkrieg* (1989). Still, these books and later studies focus on Jewish-European volunteers in the Spanish Civil War or on Jewish-North Americans, and there is a conspicuous absence of historiography about Jewish-Argentines, and very little written on Jewish-Palestinians, in the Iberian conflict. This article looks at volunteers from these two countries and their motivation for taking an active part in the Spanish Civil War.

Echoes of the Spanish Conflict on the Banks of the River Plate

Jewish historiography has ignored Jewish-Argentines who volunteered to fight Fascism on Iberian soil. Much of the existing literature on Jewish experiences in Latin America has focused on Jews as members of Jewish institutions or organized communities, and ignored non-affiliated Jews, as most of these volunteers were. After all, most of them identified with the Argentine Communist Party (PCA). Argentine historiography of reactions to the Spanish conflict in Argentina has shown similar disregard for Jewish-Argentines. This has to do with the fact that many intellectuals in most of Latin America reject ethnicity as an important analytical category, unless it concerns indigenous populations or people of African descent.¹⁰

The Spanish Civil War polarized Argentine society along the same lines that it divided the Spanish one.¹¹ In Argentina, possibly to a greater extent than elsewhere in Latin America, public opinion was tilted in favor of the Republicans, although there were extremely influential elements of society that sympathized with the rebels. This was noticeable in the Argentine governments of presidents Agustín P. Justo and Roberto M. Ortiz, which supported to one degree or another the nationalist rebellion headed by General Franco, believing that this was the best way to serve what they considered to be Argentine "national interests" as well: maintenance of the social order, protection of economic interests, defense of national sovereignty in the face of North American pressure, and a demonstration of independence with regard to foreign affairs. The majority of public

10 On new approaches to the study of Jewish-Latin American experiences, see Lesser Jeffrey and Rein Raanan (eds.), *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2008; Rein Raanan and Aizenberg Edna (guest editors), *Contra la corriente: nuevos estudios sobre los latinoamericanos judíos*, a special issue of *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* (EIAL), 2012; Brodsky Adriana and Rein Raanan (eds.), *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone*, Boston: Brill 2013.

11 For my earlier work on this topic, see Rein Raanan, *Another Front Line: Francoist and Anti-Francoists in Argentina, 1936-1939*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1997, pp. 17-33. See also Mark Falcoff's chapter on Argentina in Falcoff M. and Pike Fredrick B. (eds.), *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939: American Hemispheric Perspectives*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska, 1982; Quijada Mónica, *Aires de república, aires de cruzada: la guerra civil española en Argentina*, Barcelona, Sendai, 1991; Montenegro Silvina, *La Guerra Civil española y la política argentina*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2002; Bocanegra Barbeco Lidia, *La República Argentina: el debate sobre la guerra civil y la inmigración. Ay de los vencidos. El exilio y los países de acogida*, Mateos Abdón (ed.), Ed. Madrid, Eneida, Editorial Eneida, 2009.

opinion, however, was never convinced of the “necessity” of such support, and continued to express dismay at cooperation with Franco, even during the years following the end of the Civil War.

The Argentine government officially adopted a position of neutrality vis-à-vis the Spanish conflict, following the examples of Great Britain, France, and the United States. The idea was to avoid heated public protests, although the regime had nothing to fear regarding its electoral position as elections in those days in Argentina were conducted largely by means of fraud and forgery.¹² In practice, however, the government implemented a series of measures that were to have a significant effect on the Spanish Republic.

Argentine foreign minister Carlos Saavedra Lamas was involved in efforts to resolve the Spanish conflict in such a way as to enhance the international standing of the rebels. Acting as president of the General Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva, Saavedra Lamas was able to abort several attempts to invoke the non-intervention agreement with regard to Italy, Germany, and Portugal.¹³ At home, the Argentine authorities hindered the activities of pro-Republican organizations. In September 1936, all outdoor political rallies and meetings were prohibited in Buenos Aires. Such gatherings were allowed only if they were held indoors and had police authorization. In November, the Senate approved a law banning Communism, which was worded in such a way as to be useful also for impeding activities in support of the Spanish Republic.

On several occasions rallies expressing solidarity with the Republic were dispersed, even when they had previously been cleared by all the relevant authorities. Women collecting money for the Republican cause in the streets of Buenos Aires were detained under various pretexts. The dissemination of pro-Republican publications was also hindered. Sympathizers of Francoist Spain, on the other hand, met with no obstacles, at least until the presidency of Ortiz.

Most of the oppositional political forces were in sympathy with the Republic, including the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), representing the middle class, the largest and most important party in the Argentine political system before the rise of Peronism; the Partido Demócrata Progresista (PDP); the Partido Socialista Argentino (PSA); the Partido Socialista Obrero, a short-lived splinter group of the PSA; and the Argentine trade union confederation Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT). However, it was the Partido Comunista Argentino (PCA)—the oldest Com-

12 Regarding Argentina in the 1930s, see Rapoport Mario et al., *Historia económica, política y social de la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Macchi, 2000, chap. 3; Romero Luis Alberto, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, University Park (Pa.), Pennsylvania State University Press 2002, chap. 3; Rock David, *Argentina, 1930-1946*, Bethell Leslie (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 8, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991, pp. 3-71; Falcoff Mark and Dolkart Ronald H. (eds.), *Prologue to Perón: Argentina in Depression and War, 1930-1943*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975.

13 Pereira J. P. and Cervantes Angel, *Relaciones diplomáticas entre España y América*, Madrid, Editorial Mapfre, 1992, pp. 229-33; Falcoff M., *Argentina*, in Falcoff and Pike (eds.), *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39*, pp. 313-14; Thomas H., *The Spanish Civil War*, 2nd edn, New York, Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 439-40, 681; and Bowers Claude, *My Mission to Spain*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1954, pp. 291, 295.

munist party in Latin America, banned by law from 1930—that played a crucial role in mobilizing support, funds, and volunteers for the Republic. Hundreds of volunteers, mostly Communists, left Argentina to fight in Spain, in spite of the fact that the Spanish embassy in Buenos Aires did not take an active part in the campaign to recruit combatants and that the Argentine government made it difficult for them to go.¹⁴

Victorio Codovilla, leader of the PCA and a rigid Stalinist unconditionally loyal to Moscow, was the Communist International's envoy to Spain during the 1930s. He worked for the Republicans under the alias "Medina," and tried to promote cooperation between Spanish Communists and Socialists. During the first year of the Civil War, Codovilla was the de facto leader of the Partido Comunista de España (PCE). Another important figure in the PCA, Juan José Real, fought with the IB from late 1936 until the defeat of the Republicans, at which point he returned to Argentina where he acted as organizational secretary of the central committee of the party.¹⁵

Between Moisesville and Madrid¹⁶

While many Argentines sympathized with the Republic as part of their struggle for a democratic, pluralist, and socially just Argentina, Jewish-Argentines had additional reasons to support it. On the one hand, they worried about the fate of their relatives back in Europe if yet another tyrannical regime rose to power with the help of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. At the same time, they sought to protect their space in Argentina at a time of growing right-wing Nationalist influence in political, military, and intellectual circles. Their sentiments were elegantly expressed by Samuel Glusberg, under his pen name Enrique Espinoza, in an article entitled "Por qué los judíos deben ayudar al pueblo español," which appeared in the Jewish-Argentine monthly *Judaica*, edited by Salomón Resnick, in July 1937:

First and foremost, as a matter of justice, for this is what it means to be a man and to be Jewish. Then, in self-defense, because the number one enemy of the Jews is the same enemy of the Spanish people. Lastly, be-

14 Castells Andreu, *Las brigadas internacionales de la guerra de España*, Esplugues de Llobregat, Barcelona, Editorial Ariel, 1974, pp. 377-83; Baumman Gino, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos*, San José, Costa Rica, Guayacán, 1997; Bermann Gregorio, *Conciencia de nuestro tiempo*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Hernánde, 1971.

15 On Codovilla's career and his activities in Spain, see Alba Victor, *The Communist Party in Spain*, New Brunswick, N.J., Transaction Book, passim; Bolloten Burnett, *The Spanish Revolution*, Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina Press 1979, pp. 131-4, 304, 332, 342; Gilbert Isidoro, *La FEDE: alistandose para la revolución*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana 2009, passim; Jelfets Lazar, *La Internacional Comunista y América Latina, 1919-1943: diccionario biográfico*, Moscow, Instituto de Latinoamérica de la Academia de Ciencias, 2004. For Codovilla's own account of the Spanish Civil War and its lessons, see his book, *José Díaz, ejemplo de dirigente obrero y popular de la época staliniana*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Anteo, 1942.

16 This section is based on my article, A Trans-National Struggle with National and Ethnic Goals: Jewish-Argentines and Solidarity with the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, JILAR, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2014, pp. 171-182.

cause during centuries of historic coexistence, only the Second Republic hastened to give Jews official recognition ...

Now then, can a Jew who, like the criollo, has himself suffered the extremes to which the feudal and militaristic caste will resort to protect its most despicable privileges, adopt a contemplative attitude to the totalitarian war that is ruthlessly being waged against the Spanish people by the last Bourbon generals in complicity with the dark hordes of the Duce and the Führer? Absolutely not. Jews, in order to be true to themselves, must instantly take the side of the Spanish people in this definitive game of life or death and, as the saying goes, throw in their lot with them. Otherwise, sooner or later, they will suffer the same fate as the German Jews who did not join in time the campaign against Hitler.¹⁷

The Comisión Israelita de Ayuda al Pueblo Español (CIAPE) had 15 branches throughout Argentina. They published pamphlets in Yiddish in which Jews were called to support the beleaguered Spanish Republic and managed to raise no less than 100,000 pesos in the Jewish community.¹⁸ Characterizing the Nationalist rebels as anti-Semites, the CIAPE explained that solidarity, democracy, and idealism were behind Jewish support of the Spanish Republic. Yiddish publications of the Communist Party (PCA) covered the Iberian conflict extensively and, as pointed out by Silvia Schencolevsky-Kroll, they dedicated more space to Spanish events than to anti-Semitic expressions in either Argentina or the rest of Europe.¹⁹ They called on Jewish-Argentines to donate money, food, and medicines, as well as to enlist to fight in Spain. Jewish youngsters, male and female alike, collected aluminum foil, clothing, and contributions for the defense of the Republic. Jewish farmers in the agricultural colonies were asked to donate part of their wheat harvests to the Spanish people.

Leading Jewish-Argentine Communists played a key role in the Comité de Ayuda a la España Republicanan (like Iosif Grigulevich, until his arrest by the Argentine police and later flight to Madrid, following diplomatic mediation), or in the Socorro Rojo (like Elsa "Lola" Rabinovich).

Solidarity with and support of the Spanish Republic was not limited to the Jews of Buenos Aires. Alberto Cohen, born in San Miguel de Tucumán in early 1927 to parents who had been born in Esmirna, remembered the atmosphere of the late 1930s: "Of course, we felt Republicans in spite of everything, and because of that, since we acted in consonance with our ideas, we joined the Socialist Party

17 Espinoza Enrique, *Por qué los judíos deben ayudar al pueblo español*, *Judaica*, July 1937.

18 McGee Deutsch Sandra, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955*, Durham, Duke University Press 2012, pp. 181-182; González Lucas et al., *Voluntarios de Argentina en la Guerra Civil Española*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones del Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini, 2008, p. 47.

19 Schenkolewski-Kroll Silvia, *El Partido Comunista en la Argentina ante Moscú: deberes y realidades, 1930-1941*, *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe (EIAL)*, vol. 10:2, 1999, pp. 91-107.

Youth Movement.”²⁰

Many Jews who had not been involved in politics previously joined the various aid committees. Socialist Rosa Scheiner believed that Argentina was heading towards a Spanish-like confrontation. Like many others, she feared that a rebel victory would strengthen the Nacionalistas in Argentina. Communist Fanny Edelman shared a political commitment with her husband, one that led them both to participate in the Spanish Civil War. This was a transnational struggle, waged on both sides of the Atlantic and intensified by the movements of people and ideas back and forth.

Another Jewish-Argentine woman who became identified with the Republican cause was Berta Singerman. She had begun her career in Yiddish theater, and acquired national and international fame for her performances. At the peak of her career, she appeared before 70,000 people in Córdoba. In her autobiography *Mis dos vidas*, she testified to her love for Spanish poetry and her sympathy for the Republican project of social justice and freedom.²¹ Berta performed, with her sister Paulina, at pro-Republic events and refused to visit Spain once the Nationalist regime was consolidated there.

Sandra McGee Deutsch has emphasized how “the Spanish Civil War made militants out of many young Ashekenazi women ... [and] introduced them to leftist politics.”²² And, indeed, Jewish women aided the Republic either through the CIA-PE or other associations within the framework of the Federación de Organismos de Ayuda a la República Española. This was true both for the Federal Capital and its surroundings, as well as for the provinces. Thus, Jewish girls in Quilmes, Once, and Villa Crespo, as well as in Villa Domínguez, and the by-now-mythological Jewish agricultural colony of Moisesville, raised funds and organized benefit gatherings of various sorts to help the Spanish people.

Perla Wasserman participated in several fundraising events and went with her mother to pro-Republican demonstrations, including the massive one that took place on May 1, 1938, in Avenida de Mayo, with the participation of over 200,000 people. When it was time for “The International,” her mother sang it in Yiddish. The participation in pro-Republican events politicized Wasserman, who in later years became a militant anarchist, joined the Teatro Popular Israelita Argentino (Idische Folks Theater, known as IFT), the Socialist Party, and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

Supporting the Spanish Republic had its price. The police often repressed demonstrations in favor of Spain’s left-wing government. Jewish and non-Jewish pro-Republican sympathizers were victims of a policy that considered such activity a threat to Argentina’s social order. After all, in the eyes of many politicians,

20 Cohen de Chervonagura Elisa Beatriz, *La Comunidad Judía de Tucumán, Hombres y Mujeres, Historias y discursos 1910-2010*, Tucumán, Kehila de Tucumán, Sociedad Union Israelita Tucumana: Universidad Nacional de Tucuman, CONICET, 2010, p. 245

21 Singerman Berta, *Mis dos vidas*, Buenos Aires, Tres Tiempos, 1981.

22 McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation*, p. 182.

state, police, and military officials, as well as journalists, Jews, Communists and pro-Republicans were one and the same. A pro-Republican festival in Moisesville was prohibited in 1939. The Jewish Anarchist theater group of the Bursuk family from Chaco Province, which dedicated part of its revenues to Spanish refugee funds, was also castigated.²³

In regard to mobilization of material support for the Spanish Republic, Argentina was ranked among the first countries of the world, relative to its population. As to the absolute number of volunteers who went to fight in Spain, it was second in Latin America, after Cuba and before Mexico. Recent studies have put the number of Argentine volunteers as 500-600. How many of them were of Jewish origin is not yet clear. The most complete list of volunteers was published by Lucas González, Jerónimo Boragina, Gustavo Dorado, and Ernesto Sommaro, and it includes 540 names of people who fought in the Republican Army, the IB, and the Militias.²⁴ None of these volunteers is identified by the compilers as Jewish, but the list starts with Benzion Abramson, Adelina Abramson, and Paulina Abramson, and ends with Zalman Izraelevich Yaselman, and Hishel Zukerman.

Perusal of the last names of these volunteers, makes clear that over 10 percent of them were of Jewish origin. Obviously, there were also Jews in Argentina, as there were elsewhere, who had inherited or adopted last names that were not typically Jewish. A detailed study of all volunteers and their background is needed and might point to an even greater share of Jewish-Argentines among them than appears in the list. In any event, according to a leading authority on the demography of the Jewish people, the number of Jews in Argentina in 1930 was 191,400 out of a population of almost 12 million, that is, 1.6 percent.²⁵ It is interesting that such a disproportionate representation of Jews among Argentine volunteers has not received attention from scholars.

Several of the Jews we could identify in this list and about whom we have some information were first generation Argentines, born mostly in Eastern Europe (such as Benzi3n Abramson, Baumkoler, Davidoff, Fijtman, Lipovetzky, Prince, Radowitzky, Sosnowski, Steinmetz, and Yaselman). The province of Santa Fe (Etchebehere, Grunfeld, Maguid, Piacenza, and Segal) and the city of Córdoba (Berman,²⁶ Corach, Edelman, Mochkofsky,²⁷ Ostrowski, and Serebrinsky) were surely disproportionately represented among Jewish-Argentine volunteers, while their numbers were also clearly very large among certain professions. This

23 McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation*, p. 183.

24 González L., Boragina J., Dorado G. y Sommaro E., *Voluntarios de Argentina en la Guerra Civil Española*.

25 DellaPergola Sergio, Demographic Trends of Latin American Jewry, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, ed. Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merks, Boston, Allen & Unwin, 1987.

26 For a biography of Berman, see Fitó José Luis, Gregorio Berman: Reformista, pensador y Psiquiatra, *Red Iberoamericana de Historia de la Psiquiatría*, <http://www.investigacion.cchs.csic.es/rihp/Temas6/bermann>. See also Berman's books: *Dialéctica del fascismo*, (Madrid, 1937) and *Conciencia de nuestro tiempo* (Buenos Aires, Editorial Hernández, 1971).

27 Mochkofsky Graciela, *Tío Boris. Un héroe olvidado de la Guerra Civil Española*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2006.

is especially true for Argentine physicians and nurses (such as Berman, Corach, Etchebehere, Fijtmán, Goldstraj, Jungman, Langer, Matkovich, Ostrowsky, Serbrinsky, Sukarte, and Topolevsky), as well as translators (such as the Abramson sisters, Baumkoler, Jouvovsky, Rosen, Steinmetz, and Yaselman). After all, the Argentine Communist Party managed successfully to mobilize support among Jewish students and professors in the universities of Buenos Aires and Córdoba, and as far as translators were concerned, many Jewish-Argentines were bi- and sometimes even tri-lingual. In Republican Spain, where many Russian advisors and East European members of the IB served, being able to speak both Spanish and Russian/Polish/German/Yiddish was certainly an asset.

Among female Argentine volunteers, the Jewish presence was conspicuous. Sara Segal left Moisesville for Spain. Raquel Levenson, who married the Communist leader Juan José Real, joined her husband and although she was pregnant, kept working as a party organizer there. Fanny Edelman (1911-2011) played a leading role in the Comité Argentino de Mujeres Pro Hueérfanos Españoles, which was devoted to helping Spanish children. As described in her memoirs *Banderas, pasiones, camaradas*, while in Spain she dedicated herself to working for the Communist-sponsored Socorro Rojo.²⁸ The Abramson sisters Paulina and Adelina, born in Buenos Aires to Jewish-Russian immigrant parents who returned with their two daughters to Moscow in 1932, left for Spain several months after the outbreak of the Civil War.²⁹ Berta Baumkoler joined her husband in Spain already in 1934. According to her *La lucha es vida*, she did not limit herself to teaching at schools for revolutionary soldiers or organizing dining halls,³⁰ but also guarded Communist headquarters.

The legendary figure of Mika Feldman (1902-1992) has attracted much interest in recent years. Born in Moisesville at the beginning of the 20th century, Micaela Mika Feldman became a dentist and had a long history of revolutionary activity. After a short period in anarchist circles in Rosario, she joined the left wing of the Communist Party in 1923. She became active in the Comité Comunista Femenino, advocating the need for labor laws to protect women workers. It was not long before the radical Feldman was kicked out of the party in late 1925. She was among the founders of the Partido Comunista Obrero, but left this organization as well and decided to go to Patagonia with a mobile clinic.

In her autobiography, *Mi Guerra de España*, she narrates how in the mid-1930s she and her partner Hipólito Etchebehere went to Spain and joined the Troskite Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM). She became famous after taking command of her husband's POUM regiment following his death and gaining the rank of captain. This was possible since Feldman was not part of the Communist-dominated IB, where women were allowed to serve mostly as nurses, pharma-

28 Edelman Fanny, *Banderas, Pasiones, Camaradas*, Buenos Aires, Diple, 1996.

29 See their memoirs: Abramson Paulina and Adelina, *Mosaico roto*, Madrid, Compañía Literaria, 1994.

30 See her memoirs: Baumkoler Berta, *La lucha es vida*, Buenos Aires, Cuadernos Marxistas 2000.

cists, or doctors. The Brigade command did not encourage women to come to Spain as fighters. Still, several women did actively participate in fighting, allegedly sometimes dressed as men.

Most articles on Feldman as well as internet sites devoted to her revolutionary career ignore the fact that she was Jewish. At most they mention that her parents were immigrants from Eastern Europe and that she was born in Moisesville.³¹ Feldman maintained her anti-Francoist position many years after the defeat of the Republic. Indeed, in the post-1939 period, many Argentines, including many Jewish Argentines, sent aid to Spanish refugees and protested against the brutal policies of General Franco.

Jewish Palestine Stands by Republican Spain

Although small in numbers, the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine boasted active democratic parliamentary practices, and the Spanish Civil War became a central issue in public debates from mid-July 1936 onward.³² Right-wing groups showed marked sympathy for Spain's Nationalist rebels, as was reflected in their various publications. A typical example was an article published in the fall of 1936 in *Hayarden*, the mouthpiece of the Revisionist Zionists in Palestine. It was written by Zvi Kullitz, who had published a book about Mussolini eulogizing the Fascist leader.³³ In his article about Spain, Kullitz argued:

There is no doubt that the Spanish revolt is a phenomenon that is natural and necessary to that country. This revolt is aimed at the elimination of the Communist regime that tried to take over one of the most important shores of the Mediterranean Sea ... Franco is not anti-Semitic ... Jews have suffered from the rebels, it is true—but those Jews are Communists ... Not only every honest Spaniard, but every honest Zionist must wish them, the rebels, a complete victory.³⁴

The Spanish Civil War was used by Jewish right-wing propagandists in their campaign against the hegemonic workers' parties. *Hayarden*, for example, published an article under the heading "MAPAI-Intern in Tel Aviv in Aid of the Com-

31 For Feldman's memoirs, see: Feldman Mika, *Mi guerra de España*, Madrid: Plaza y Janés, 1987. For a recent biography of Feldman, see Osorio Elsa, *La Capitana*, Madrid: Siruela 2012.

32 The Jewish population in Palestine in the early 1930s was estimated to be 180,000, as opposed to 840,000 Arabs. By the early 1940s, the number of Jews had more than doubled, constituting about a third of the entire population of Mandatory Palestine. On Palestine and the Spanish Civil War, see Rein Raanan, *Echoes of the Spanish Civil War in Palestine: Zionists, Communists and the Contemporary Press*, *Journal of Contemporary History* 43.1, 2008, pp. 9–23; Yahav Dan, *They Too Were Heroes: Volunteer Fighters from Eretz Israel in the International Brigades in Spain*, Tel-Aviv : Tserik over, 2008 [in Hebrew]; *From Here to Madrid: Volunteers from Palestine in the International Brigades in Spain 1936-1938 (exhibition catalog in Tel Aviv's Eretz Israel Museum)*, Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 2012. See also Eran Torbiner's documentary *Madrid Comes before Hanita* (Israel, 2006; 58 minutes).

33 Kullitz Zvi, *Mussolini, His Personality and His Doctrine* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv, Tevel, 1936.

34 Kullitz Zvi, *Spain* [Hebrew], *Hayarden*, 7 October 1936.

intern [Communist International] in Madrid.”³⁵ The article raged against the fund-raising carried out by the General Federation of Jewish Workers (Histadrut) on behalf of the Spanish workers and the Republican government. Abba Ahimeir, a leading right-wing intellectual, published a short editorial entitled “They Worry about Madrid—We Worry about Jerusalem,” in which he denounced the concern of leftist Jews in Palestine “for the well-being of the Anarcho-Bolshevist government somewhere far off in Spain” as a “sure sign of assimilation” and lack of Jewish patriotism.³⁶ When the first volunteers left Palestine to join the IB, the Revisionist organ published an article mocking “the young Socialists of Palestine [who] are hurrying to Spain’s rescue.” The article described the volunteers as a gang of Bolshevik criminals.

The majority of Jewish public opinion in Palestine, however, was manifestly sympathetic to the Republican cause, which was perceived as a struggle to halt the dark wave of fascism that threatened to engulf all of Europe. The central committee of MAPAI, the dominant party in the Yishuv, issued an appeal to the workers of Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel), calling on them to go “to the aid of Spain, which is wallowing in its own blood in its war—a war of the working class against reaction, against anti-Semitic fascism, against the danger of world slaughter.”³⁷ *Davar*, the Histadrut mouthpiece, which in fact expressed MAPAI’s views, sided unconditionally with the Republic, and published more information on the Civil War than any other Hebrew newspaper. From the outset, *Davar* characterized the nationalist rebellion in Spain as fascist. Franco was described time and again as an ally of Hitler. The paper, which had the largest circulation in contemporary Jewish Palestine, condemned the illusion of neutrality and the appeasement policy adopted by Britain and France, the results of which were now evident in China and Ethiopia.³⁸

The Histadrut took part in the international campaign to help the workers of Spain, with its executive committee calling upon all members of the federation to contribute to the cause of the workers struggling on the Iberian Peninsula, a move that won the appreciation of its Spanish socialist counterpart, the UGT.³⁹ Various workers’ councils organized rallies of solidarity with Republican Spain, and support for the workers of Spain was one of the main themes of the May Day celebrations in Jewish Palestine.⁴⁰

Parties and organizations to the left of MAPAI (such as Hashomer Hatzair [the Young Guard] and Poalei Zion [Workers of Zion]) displayed an even greater moral commitment to the Republican cause. They supported the Popular Front government in Spain, and especially its more revolutionary elements. Sympathy with the

35 Hayarden, 13 November 1936.

36 Hayarden, 27 November 1936.

37 *Davar*, 13 November 1936.

38 See, for example, *Davar*, 21 and 26 August 1936, 3 and 27 January 1937, 23 March 1937, 8 August 1938.

39 *Davar*, 11 September, 12 October, 6 and 13 November, 18 December 1936.

40 See, for example, *Davar*, 15 November 1936; 30 April 1937.

Marxist but anti-Stalinist POUM was sometimes expressed in those Jewish circles.

At the same time, the support given by the Soviet Union to the Spanish Republic was hailed as an expression of international solidarity,⁴¹ while the non-interventionist policy led by Britain and France, was described as complicity with the Fascist powers. The revolutionary experience in Russia was presented as a relevant model for Spain, since both countries lay on the periphery of the European continent and supposedly shared common socio-economic characteristics.⁴²

Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, the left wing of the kibbutz movement, sent the following telegram to the workers of Spain:

From the trenches where we defend Socialist Zionism against the attack of the forces of reaction, we send this fervent, brotherly salutation to the Spanish proletariat, who are paving with their blood the road to the future of Socialism. The need of the hour—immediate united action by the proletariat through all its international organizations to help the workers of Spain.⁴³

A different approach was manifested by the tiny Communist Party of Palestine. The PCP, with its several hundred affiliates, operated outside the law in those days.⁴⁴ Many of its members were detained by the British authorities and sentenced by courts to serve time in prisons, and those born outside Palestine were often deported from the country.⁴⁵ The party's mouthpiece *Kol Ha'am* (Voice of the People) had to be published clandestinely and was distributed by members of the Communist Youth. The PCP took an active stand in favor of the anti-fascist struggle in Spain. Like many Communist parties in the world, the PCP tried to turn its defense of that struggle, which was a popular cause in the Jewish Yishuv, into a means of mobilizing support and sympathy for the party, even in non-Communist circles. The party's organ reflected the position of the Soviet Union (described as a "lighthouse" and "guide" to the working masses) on the Spanish Civil War. Ample space was given to the volunteers who left Palestine and joined the IB to fight against the Francoist forces.⁴⁶

Finally, prominent intellectuals in the Yishuv—mostly associated with the Zionist Left—worked through the Association to Aid the Victims of Fascism and An-

41 On the scope and significance of Soviet aid to the Republic, see Payne Stanley G., *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, New Haven, CT and London, Yale University Press, 2004; Kowalsky Daniel, *La Unión Soviética y la Guerra Civil Española*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2004.

42 See Ya'acov Hazan's article in the biweekly *Hashomer Hatzair*, 15 November 1936.

43 *Hashomer Hatzair*, 1 September 1936.

44 For detailed but biased histories of the party in that period, see the anti-Communist Dothan Shmuel, *Reds — The Communist Party in Palestine* [Hebrew], Kfar-Saba, Shevna ha-sofer, 1991; and the pro-Communist Zahavi Leon, *Apart or Together: Jews and Arabs in Palestine According to the Comintern Documents (1919–1943)* [Hebrew], Jerusalem, Keter, 2005.

45 *Ha'aretz*, 13 August 1938; Arieli Nir, Induced to Volunteer? The Predicament of Jewish Communists in Palestine and the Spanish Civil War, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 46, 2011, pp. 854–870.

46 See *Kol Ha'am*, September 1937, June 1938.

tisemitism (ANTIFA) to enlist support for the struggle against the Francoist forces. Activists in the association—which at the time had counterparts all over the world— included Martin Buber, Yehuda L. Magnes, Akiva Ernest Simon, Shmuel Sambursky, Avigdor Hameiri, Mordechai Avi-Shaul, Alexander Penn, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (then still only a teenager, but already politically involved), and others.⁴⁷ ANTIFA, which had been established in late 1934, sponsored solidarity meetings with the Republic (the British authorities sometimes banned these meetings) and lectures on the situation in Spain. An exhibition with posters, photographs, and brochures about the civil war was shown in many cities and towns—including Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan, Petach Tikva, and Rishon Letzion—mostly in the social clubs of the local workers' councils.⁴⁸ ANTIFA members raised more money for the Spanish Republic than any other political party or association in Jewish Palestine.

Between Hanita and Madrid

Despite these expressions of solidarity with the Republic, almost every group in the Yishuv, including the various gradations of the Zionist Left, opposed the idea of sending youths from Palestine to join the volunteers in the IB.⁴⁹ Those were the days of the rebellion of the Palestinian National Movement—the Arab anti-Jewish riots of 1936-39, which took the lives of hundreds of Arabs, Jews, and British—and the establishment of the “stockade and watchtower” line of Jewish settlements. The usual arguments were that “the Yishuv is fighting for its life no less than the Spanish Republic,” and “Hanita [a frontier kibbutz] comes before Madrid.” The latter expression was coined by Ya’acov Hazan, one of the leading figures of Hashomer Hatza’ir and Hakibbutz Ha’arzi, and later, of MAPAM. Ya’akov Riftin, another leading member of Hashomer Hatza’ir, confessed on one occasion:

We have neither the time nor the ability to deal day in and day out with the events taking place on the Spanish fronts. We too are defending ourselves in the trenches for the third year now. We are losing people every day. And no one knows if we have reached the height of terror or if the worst is still ahead of us.⁵⁰

It seemed as if the contemporary Jewish media in Palestine conspired, therefore, to silence the story of the volunteers who left for Spain, so as not to encourage others to follow them. In the articles and notes published on the IB, the absence

47 Levin Ruth, *The Righteous Were With Spain, 1936–1939* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv, Ofakim, 1987, pp. 49–50.

48 *Derech Hapoel*, 9 July 1937.

49 Poalei Zion was the only Zionist party which considered the possibility of encouraging people to volunteer to fight in Spain, and one of its leaders, Moshe Aram, even went to Spain and met with Jewish volunteers from Palestine. The party expressed at the time support for the POUM. See Bachar Moshe, *Hanita is Preferable to Madrid: The Reaction of the Yishuv in Palestine to the Civil War in Spain* [Hebrew], M.A. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1998, pp. 91–2, 234.

50 *Hashomer Hatza’ir*, 1 September 1938.

of any reference to volunteers from Palestine was conspicuous. Between 180 and 250 volunteers left Palestine for Spain, mostly Communist Party members. Since the entire Jewish community in Palestine at the time numbered no more than 400,000, this was nonetheless a considerable figure.⁵¹ Those volunteers, buoyed by faith and a sense of purpose, set off as pioneers of the anti-fascist struggle.⁵²

Since Britain adhered to the non-intervention agreement, foreign-born Communists were deported to France, from where they left for Spain within a short time. In early 1937, several members of the PCP who had been deported from Palestine established a committee in Paris to help fellow party members who were interested in fighting in Iberia, to cross the border to Spain.⁵³ The first PCP members to volunteer were Chaim Elkon and Nahum Weiss. The two had been deported from Palestine before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. They arrived in Barcelona for the Popular Olympiad, which was scheduled to start on July 19 as a protest against the Olympic Games in Nazi Germany.⁵⁴ Elkon and Weiss were among the first foreign volunteers to fight for the Republic. They died in early August and November 1936, respectively.⁵⁵

It is clear that there were also other motivations propelling adventurous young men to leave for Spain. Most of the volunteers from Palestine were single men in their twenties who had never set foot in Spain before. But those youthful, adventurous reasons were usually not alluded to in interviews with veterans of the IB. Armed with retrospect on all that took place during the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and under the Francoist dictatorship, they preferred to emphasize to themselves and to others only the ideological motivation to fight fascism stemming from their Communist world view and their ethnic identity as Jews.

Most of them were Communists of East European origin, between the ages of 18 and 24. Only a dozen or so were Zionists; two of them, Jecheskel Piekár and David Karon, were members of the Zionist paramilitary organization Hagana (the clandestine military organization created in 1920 that became the backbone of the Israeli army once independence was declared in 1948). Karon and David Dgani were expelled from Kibbutz Kfar Menachem when they decided to go to

51 Yet, throughout the years, the Israeli Communist Party tried to exaggerate the number of volunteers in order to enhance its image. Most works written by members of the Communist Party and its sympathizers claimed that the number of volunteers was between 300 and 500. Israel Centner, who back in 1937 was asked by the communists to write the history of the volunteers from Palestine, was most responsible for the myth of '400 Palestinian volunteers'. See his *From Madrid to Berlin* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv, n.p., 1966.

52 Salman Salzman, one of the veteran Palestinian combatants in the International Brigades, interview with author, Kibbutz Mizrah, 19 January 1994.

53 Rein Raanan and Ofer Inbal, *Becoming Brigadistas: Jewish Volunteers from Palestine in the Spanish Civil War*, *European History Quarterly*, Vol 46, No. 1, January 2016, pp. 92-112.

54 Hashomer Hatzair, 15 July 1936; *Ha'aretz*, 24 July 1936; *Davar*, 10 August 1936. On the Popular Olympiad, see Walters Guy, *How Hitler Stole the Olympic Dream*, London, John Murray, 2007, chap. 6; Pujadas Xavier and Santacana Carles, *The Popular Olympic Games, Barcelona 1936: Olympians and Antifascists*, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 27.2, 1992, pp. 139-48; Martin Paul K., *Spain's Other Olympics*, *History Today* 43, 1992, pp. 6-8.

55 Dothan, *Reds*, p. 244.

Spain, but were re-admitted upon their return to Palestine.⁵⁶ At least 45 of the volunteers were killed in the Iberian battlefields and 14 others during World War Two. The most senior officer among them was Mordechai Milman. Milman served in the Lincoln Brigade and was promoted to the rank of captain. He was killed in the Battle of the Ebro in August 1938.⁵⁷

Several volunteers were well aware of the inseparable aspects of the anti-fascist struggle. In a letter to a friend in 1937, Milman emphasized:

... every front against the Fascists is a Jewish front. The Jews of Palestine are arriving to support Spain in its struggle for freedom; solidarity among the world's anti-fascist forces is the Jewish people's only source of salvation. And wherever the world's freedom fighters assemble, is where we too shall be.⁵⁸

Challenging the commonly-held stereotypes of Jews as cowardly and impotent was important to many of the volunteers. Pinchas Cheifetz was born in Jerusalem in 1900 to an ultra-Orthodox family. He served in the Botwin Company and in March 1938 he was wounded and blinded on the front at Lérida. In a letter sent from a Spanish hospital to his brother, he wrote:

In moments of longing for my eyes, for light, I will remember that I last had my eyesight on the front, during the Spanish people's courageous struggle, where they fought alongside representatives of the international proletariat. I am honored to be one of them, In September, when I left for Spain, I fought in the Jewish company named after Naftali Botwin. This company has bestowed much honor upon the Jewish people and thousands of other Jewish workers are fighting in all the international brigades. There is not a single person in Spain who can accuse the Jews of being cowards. No one in the world will ever again have the right to do so.⁵⁹

Born in Warsaw and having moved with his family to Palestine in 1933, Shmuel Stamler echoed a similar position in a letter to his girlfriend Tova (Gutka) Edelsberg, whom he married so that she would receive citizenship:

A Spanish soldier in our [Botwin] unit told me that before the war he thought of Jews as merchants and swindlers, whereas now he sees Jewish volunteers fighting for freedom just like the Spaniards, and added that he was happy to be fighting alongside Jews.⁶⁰

56 Karon David, *Monologue: The Republic Gave us Everything it had*, *Iton* 77, 1986, pp. 26, 77–8; London Yaron, *The Pasionerim*, *Ha'ir*, 7 October 1983, pp. 18–9 [both in Hebrew].

57 For his biography, see Avi Mordechai -Shaul, *A Hebrew Commander in Embattled Spain*, Tel-Aviv, n.p., 1945 [Hebrew].

58 Quoted in Yahav Dan, *They Too Were Heroes*, p. 152.

59 Pinchas Cheifetz to his brother Haim, 11 June 1938 (copy of the letter in the author's private archive).

60 Shmuel Stamler to Tova Edelsberg, 15 February 1938 (copy of the letter in the author's private archive). Stamler was killed shortly afterwards in the battle of Extramadura. Edelsberg was supposed to join him in Spain yet, under family

Conclusions

Many of the Jewish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, irrespective of their country of origin, held internationalist views, and did not seek to emphasize their ethnic/Jewish identity. Most attempted to stop the Nazi and Fascist threat to Europe. In retrospect, I would argue that the Jewish component of their identity, nonetheless, played a crucial role in their decision to embark for Spain. As Hyman Katz explained in a letter from Spain to his mother, he went to fight against the “persecutors of my people—the Jews—and my class—the oppressed”⁶¹—expressing both a commitment to Communist ideals and an awareness of the threat of Fascism because of its anti-Semitism. However, Colin Shindler might be correct for at least some of them when he maintains:

It may be that many brigadiers felt that their Jewishness was simply one reason among many for their presence in Spain and that to emphasize it was unnecessary. As the years have passed, however, many have realized in retrospect that unacknowledged Jewish reasons for volunteering were important.⁶²

Support for the Republicans in the Spanish fratricidal war attracted more involvement in 1930s’ Argentina than any other political movement. In Jewish Palestine, preoccupied as it was by its dual struggle against the Arab nationalists and the British authorities, no other international issue provoked similar heated debates. In the Argentine case, at least in part, it related to the Spanish origin of many Argentines, as well as the sense that Republican Spain was confronting challenges similar to those facing Argentine society, which at the time was witnessing the growing influence of nationalist groups, the Catholic Church establishment, and military circles. In the case of Palestine, it had much more to do with growing concern about the emergence of anti-Semitic authoritarian regimes all over Europe.

The Jewish presence among Argentine supporters of the Republic was conspicuous. Many Jews were activists in the Argentine labor and leftist movements. This was true for both men and women. In the 1930s many of them considered it vital to contest Fascism in all its forms, within Argentina and without. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the second half of this decade they joined a variety of solidarity movements with the Spanish Republic, which was fighting for its survival against its nationalist enemies, supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. By combating the Fascist cause, they were defending their space in Argentina and struggling for pluralism, democracy, and social justice. For them, as for Jews in many other countries, it was a transnational struggle with national and ethnic goals.

Undoubtedly, the proportion of Jews among the volunteers from each na-

pressure, she remained in Palestine.

61 Katz Hyman and Feller Michael, Letters from the Front in Spain, 1937-1938, *Jewish Currents*, April, 1986, pp. 5-9.

62 Shindler Colin, No Pasaran: The Jews Who Fought in Spain, *The Jewish Quarterly*, 33.3, 1986, pp. 34-41, 34.

tion was in most cases much higher than their share in the general population of those countries. The fact that Jewish-Argentines were overrepresented among Argentine volunteers should therefore come as no surprise. The substantial Jewish presence in the IB was one of the reasons why the Spanish Nationalists commonly equated Jews and Bolsheviks.

In Argentina, even biographies of important Jewish-Argentine Communists, whether they fought in Spain or not, have ignored the ethnic dimension, probably because it did not seem politically correct to highlight this aspect. Such is the case in Graciela Mochkofsky's *Tío Borís* and Alicia Dujovne Ortiz's *El camarada Carlos*.⁶³ I would argue that whether they admitted it or not, many of these activists of the 1930s manifested various Jewish practices in their daily life, such as the use of Yiddish words, their accent, their food and drink habits, or even in their selection of friends. Or they would simply be seen as Jews by fellow Jews or by non-Jews, by ideological rivals, or by party comrades.

In 1930s' Jewish Palestine, the Communists preferred to highlight only the party ideology of the volunteers, and several decades passed before their Jewish commitment was recognized and honored. During a meeting held on September 29, 1986, then Israeli president Chaim Herzog, delivered a speech in honor of the Jewish volunteers who fought in Spain.⁶⁴ In a somewhat anachronistic approach, inevitably influenced by memories of World War Two, Herzog's speech linked the Iberian conflict and the later Jewish Holocaust:

There were people who realized just what a fascist victory in Spain would mean. Courageous men from many nations volunteered to help the Republicans. Among them were Democrats, Socialists, Communists. They united in a common front and fought against the perdition and the Holocaust that was threatening the world.⁶⁵

Emphasizing the high percentage of Jews in the International Brigades, Herzog said: "Typically, there was a relatively high number of Jews among the volunteers—the highest number of any other group. There were even a few hundred from the tiny fledgling community in the Land of Israel." He ended his speech with the following tribute:

In the name of the People of Israel, the principle victims of the Nazis and Fascists, I hereby pay homage to the honor and glory of all those volunteer fighters who used their bodies as a dam against a wave of evil, to all those who gave their lives to this cause, and to those who continued the fight from that day, to those survivors, may they enjoy a good and long life. Here

63 Dujovne Ortiz Alicia, *El Camarada Carlos. Itinerario de un enviado secreto*, Buenos Aires, Aguilar, 2007.

64 *Ma'ariv* and *Davar*, 30 September 1986; Rein Raanan, A Belated Inclusion: Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War and Their Place in the Israeli National Narrative, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 24-49.

65 While a student in London University in 1937 Herzog was involved in a demonstration of solidarity with the Spanish Republic. He went on to have a distinguished war record in the struggle to defeat Nazi Germany.

I salute them as comrades in arms against the Nazis. They are the bearers of the vision of the spirit of mankind, the guardian of the image of humanity, and the defenders of human culture.

By now we have a better idea of the number of Argentine volunteers who fought on Spanish soil, as well as the names of most of them, their place and date of birth, their profession, the political organization that recruited them, and their role during the war. The same goes for the volunteers who left Palestine to fight in Spain. Less is known about the weight of ethnic concerns in their decision to go to Iberia. This article has attempted to raise awareness of the need to discuss the ethnic dimension of the transnational solidarity expressed by many of those volunteers.⁶⁶

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⁶⁶ For a recent contribution on Jewish-Argentines and communism in Argentina, see Daniel Kersfeld, *Rusos y rojos: judíos comunistas en tiempos de la Comintern*, Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2012.

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Ранан Реин

TIKKUN OLAM И ТРАНСНАЦИОНАЛНА СОЛИДАРНОСТ: ЈЕВРЕЈСКИ ВОЛОНТЕРИ У ШПАНСКОМ ГРАЂАНСКОМ РАТУ

Сажетак

Број Јевреја волонтера који су се прикључили Међународним бригадама (МБ) са циљем да бране шпанску републику од националистичких побуњеника је био веома велики. Њихово присуство међу волонтерима других нација је у већини случајева било диспропорционално њиховом броју у тим земљама. Многи од ових волонтера су имали космополитске погледе и идеја истицања њиховог јеврејског идентитета им је била страна. Али, како се показало – нпр. у писмима послатим из шпанских ровова њиховим пријатељима и рођацима или у мемоарима – они су пратили јеврејску наредбу *tikkun olam*, јеврејску фразу која значи „поправљати свет“ или показивање одговорности за побољшање и трансформацију. Многи волонтери су покушали да блокирају, па и својим телима ако је требало, нацистички и фашистички талас који се ширио Европом, и тако бранећи и универзалне и јеврејске идеје. Иако постоји огромна библиографија о МБ, много мања пажња је указана јеврејској партиципацији у Шпанском грађанском рату, а већина студија које постоје се фокусирају на учествовање Јевреја из Европе или Северне Америке. Постоји празнина у историографији о Јеврејима из Аргентине, а врло мало је записано и о Јеврејима из Палестине, који су учествовали у иберијском конфликту. Овај рад говори о волонтерима из ове две земље као и о њиховим мотивацијама да учествују у Шпанском грађанском рату.

Кључне речи: Шпански грађански рат, Међународне бригаде, Аргентина, Палестина, Naftali Botwin компанија

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