MILITARISM AND ISRAELI SOCIETY

Militarism and Israeli Society, edited by Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. vii + 358 pages. Appendix to p. 368. Contributors to p. 370. Index to p. 396. $70.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Zvi Ben-Dor Benite

The space between the military and society in Israel is the arena of a multifaceted and complicated relationship between the military and the civil sectors. As one of the contributors in *Militarism and Israeli Society,* Amir Bar-Or, declares: "Complexity is [a] key feature in civil-military relations in Israel" (p. 259). *Militarism and Israeli Society* is a collective attempt to understand this complexity. From the historian's point of view, the key strength of the book is its understanding of the way the space between Israel's civilian and military spheres changes—in scope and in nature—over time.

The book seeks to contextualize these changes, which have affected previous studies of the military aspects of Israeli society. The editors identify three different phases in the study and perception of the civil-military relationship in Israel. The first is what they term the "traditional approach" phase, which considered Israel to be "a nation in arms" or a "civilianized military in a partially militarized society" (p. 23). They label this approach idealistic. In other words, it uncritically takes such slogans as those above as true reflections of reality. The second, "critical" approach also speaks the language of a "nation in arms," but considers the relationship between the two sectors as a "partnership" whose key pattern was "'control' by Ben-Gurion's Mapai party over the security sector" (p. 23). Finally, what they call the "New Critical approach" holds Israel to be a "garrison state" or a "praetorian state" that is "imbued with 'militaristic' spirit" (p. 23). They reject all these paradigms and

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suggest instead a much more flexible mode of analysis "by thinking in terms of the existence of a highly variegated and changing security network whose members are very deeply involved in all aspects of public life in Israel" (p. 24). This security network consists "of many actors that intermingle very closely and form a highly informal policy network" (p. 25).

At first glance, this approach seems to differ from the nation in arms model only semantically. But in effect, it is different in two key regards. First, the security network that is presented and described in the book's essays is not just the military organization itself, but a much less defined entity, without clearly delineated boundaries. The editors insist that one should change the direction of the interpretive gaze. They reject the standard way of looking at relations between the military and society as a mutual and bidirectional process of give and take. Instead, they postulate a unidirectional model. That is to say, in their view it is the military—read, the security network—that affects the civilian sector through the constant expansion of this undefined security network. Thus, civilian society is becoming increasingly weakened over time. As the editors state, the "result of this process is that in Israel there is very little civilian influence over the military . . . , but, rather the other way around: military values penetrate and influence the most civilian spheres" (p. 25). The essays included in the volume discuss the relationship between the civil sector and the military from different dimensions, using mostly social scientific approaches. With the exception of two, all of the volume's contributors are Israeli scholars, mostly social scientists, focusing on different aspects of military life in Israel. The two "non-Israeli" contributions in the volume offer a comparison of civilian control over the army in Israel and France, and global perspective of the question of military and society since 9/11 focusing on democracies. These help to better understand certain peculiarities of the civil-military question in Israel. Thus, the essay on military and society since 9/11, for instance, points out that unlike the situation in Israel, citizens in Western countries who have abolished conscription "are, in the main, spectators rather than active participants" in their countries' military operations (p. 354), a point that certainly deserves much more attention, perhaps as a dedicated comparative study. The majority of the essays, however, deal with topics such as debate over the defense budget in Israel, the military and the media, land and property, and representations of the army itself and/or its female soldiers. One of the central, if not *the* central, premises of the book is that "Western 'ideal-types' of the civil-military relationship are inapplicable to Israel since they presuppose a predominant civilian sector" (p. 25).

Militarism and Israeli Society makes a convincing case about the security network and the power it exercises in and on Israeli society. The "imagined continuous threats . . . and the incomplete process of state formation in Israel, civilian control of the military and other security agencies [are] indeed weak and problematic" (p. 27). But one cannot explain the power of the Israeli security sector without remembering that, most fundamentally, the Israeli military was and is a power tool of social and ethnic engineering. Thus, instead of thinking about a weak or weakened Israeli civil sector that may or may not be separate from the military sector, one should think of Israeli society as the *product* of its military. The army is still the place where "good Israelis" are produced. Think of the conversion track for non-Jewish soldiers who wish to join the Jewish people. Furthermore, today as in the 1950s, military service is still the main separating factor between the Arabic-speaking Palestinian Druze, Bedouin, and Circassians who do serve and settled Israeli Sunni Muslim and Christian Palestinians who do not.