

Copyright

by

Lior Betzael Sternfeld

2014

**The Dissertation Committee for Lior Betzalel Sternfeld certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**RECLAIMING THEIR PAST: WRITING JEWISH HISTORY IN IRAN DURING  
THE MOHAMMAD REZA PAHLAVI AND EARLY REVOLUTIONARY  
PERIODS**

**Committee:**

---

Kamran Scot Aghaie, Supervisor

---

Yoav Di-Capua

---

Mary Neuburger

---

Cyrus Schayegh

---

Afshin Marashi

**RECLAIMING THEIR PAST: WRITING JEWISH HISTORY IN IRAN DURING  
THE MOHAMMAD REZA PAHLAVI AND EARLY REVOLUTIONARY  
PERIODS**

**by**

**Lior Betzalel Sternfeld, B.A.; M.A.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

The University of Texas at Austin  
August 2014

Dedicated with love to my parents, Zahava and Itzhak Sternfeld

And to my wife, Sharon, and daughters, Shira and Ya'ara.

In the middle of the night/ I go walking in my sleep  
Through the jungle of doubt/ To a river so deep  
I know I'm searching for something/ Something so undefined  
That it can only be seen by the eyes of the blind  
in the middle of the night  
(Billy Joel, "The River of Dreams")

## **Acknowledgments**

No section of this dissertation brought more joy and stress than writing this acknowledgement. This project became possible thanks to so many good people who read, commented, advised, supported, and inspired. The joy, of course, is to acknowledge this kindness and the anxiety stems from the fear of forgetting anyone. I will thus begin with my dissertation committee. I was blessed to have such a brilliant bunch of historians helping me develop this project. First and foremost I thank my adviser Kamran Scot Aghaie. Over the years, I have counted on his good advice and his utter dedication. Kamran was always supportive and encouraging—the ultimate mentor. His perspectives helped me to understand the essence of my project.

I have no words to express my thanks to Yoav Di-Capua for his mentorship and friendship. Yoav has been such a great support for which I will be forever grateful. Deep gratitude goes to Mary Neuburger for providing me with tools to look beyond Iran and the other geographical boundaries that were my comfort zones. I thank Cyrus Schayegh for his eye-opening comments on various versions of this dissertation as well as other articles and papers, and Afshin Marashi who, despite officially joining this committee later, was part of this project all along and is a source of inspiration for me. Last but not least in this category I wish to thank Houchang Esfandiar Chehabi from the bottom of my heart. Houchang offered me the entry into this project and was always there for brilliant advice and encouragement. It seems like every scholar of Iranian studies who wrote a dissertation on any topic at all during the past two decades has received help from Houchang. So I want to thank Houchang for everything.

I want to thank colleagues and mentors that are part of this project in many capacities. I want to thank Haggai Ram who walked me through my baby-historian steps from my days at Ben Gurion University to the end of this project. My gratitude goes to David Menashri; his knowledge and dedication to training the next generation is admirable. Faryar Nikbakht is one of the most informed experts I have met. His kindness and his unparalleled willingness made the research much more joyful. Orit Bashkin has been part of this project all along. Her path-breaking scholarship is second only to her generosity and kindness. Orit read and commented on too many components to count, and I will be always grateful for all her help.

In the process of the research one needs good friends in libraries and archives. I want to thank Carla Darocy and Uri Kolodney of Perry-Castaneda Library at the University of Texas at Austin for their help and support in fulfilling all my research needs. Thanks go to Robin Daugherty, who was formerly at PCL and remains a good friend and a source of help. I want to thank Charlotte Brown of the UCLA Archives for proving such a huge help while I worked there. At the JDC Archive I want to thank Misha Mistel and Linda Levy.

One of the perks of research is traveling. A lot of traveling. I want to thank the foundations and fellowships that funded my research trips: the Iranian Heritage Foundation, the Churchill Scholarship (British Studies Program at UT Austin), the Fred and Ellen Lewis JDC Archive Fellowship, the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies Travel Grants, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies Travel Grants, and the Department of History Dissertation Research Fellowship.

I was fortunate to be part of an extremely friendly and intellectually stimulating environment here at the University of Texas at Austin. The Middle East History cohort at the Department of History is second to none. I want to thank Brian Mann, Christine Baker, Mikiya Koyagi, Chris Rose, Ahmad Agbaria, Shaherzad Ahmadi, Stephanye Hunter, Ellen McCamis, and Goli Bagheri, and all the good people at UT. I want to thank Katie Logan for her wonderful and professional editing. I would also like to extend special thanks to all my teachers at the history department who were part of this project, especially Wm. Roger Louis, Benjamin C. Brower, and Robert H. Abzug. One more thank in the history department goes to Marilyn E. Lehman for all her help in the past five years.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Zahava and Itzhak Sternfeld. They have been my infinite source of energies and encouragement. They taught me all the important things in life, and their selflessness will always be a source of emulation for me.

A few years ago, while sitting in a MESA hotel bar, Kamran told me about a historian that in a rare moment of honesty dedicated his book to “my wife and children without whom this book would have been finished ten years ago.” On a totally unrelated note, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, the love of my life, Sharon. This dissertation would not have been possible without your endless support, love, wisdom, care, and all that you give every day. This dissertation is also dedicated to my amazing daughters whom I love more than anything else on this planet: Shira and Ya’ara.

**RECLAIMING THEIR PAST: WRITING JEWISH HISTORY IN IRAN DURING  
THE MOHAMMAD REZA PAHLAVI AND EARLY REVOLUTIONARY  
PERIODS**

Lior Betzalel Sternfeld, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Kamran Scot Aghaie

**ABSTRACT**

In the mid-twentieth century Jewish society in Iran emerged from political disenfranchisement and social and economic marginalization to become a well assimilated community with thriving institutions and an active participation in nation building. The turning point came in the wake of the Allied Armies' 1941 invasion of Iran and Reza Shah's abdication, which opened unprecedented opportunities for the Jewish community to become an actor in the rebuilding project of a new Iran. Between 1941 and 1979, the Jewish community was institutionally transformed. It was also a period of assimilation and Iranianization. Thus, when faced by the strident patriotism of the 1970s, communal loyalty and identity was poised to be replaced by a new Jewish claim to the right to participate in the struggle for Iranian democracy, and to define the boundaries of a new nationalism



This research argues that the re-socialization process that led to this change was nurtured under Mohammad Reza Shah's nation building project that aimed to create a modern-secular Iranian society that emphasized Iranian civilizational foundations rooted both in ancient Persian culture and Western European civilization. Although this new cultural focus de-emphasized religious affiliations, its driving idea, the Aryan Hypothesis, paradoxically created both opportunities and difficulties for Jews, as many Iranians viewed them as an ethnic minority outside of Aryan-Persian-Shi'i ideals.

This dissertation charts the challenges and achievements of the Jewish communities in Iran from 1941 to the early post-revolutionary period. By mapping structural transformations in the Jewish community, and by positioning its changing institutions and ideologies in the larger social and political climate of Iran, it reassesses both Iranian and Jewish-Iranian historiographies, which have posited Jewish Iranian history as an insular narrative, detached from general trends in Iranian society or other communities in the country. In doing so, it also provides a model by which to reassess the position of other minority communities. Through the use of archives that scholars of Jewish Iranian history have overlooked as well as new interviews, this dissertation brings these histories back into the broader context of national history and writes Jewish Iranian history back into Iranian national historiography.

## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations .....	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Historiographical Review .....	3
Notes on Sources .....	13
Historical Review of Jewish History in Iran .....	17
Dissertation Structure .....	20
Chapter 2: Minorities in the Liberal Age (1941-1953) .....	28
Iran Entering World War II .....	28
Safe Havens: World War II Migrants and Refugees in Iran .....	39
Conclusions .....	57
Chapter 3: Minority Identities and the Iranian Political Sphere .....	59
The Tudeh Party: The Party of Minorities .....	61
Jibhah-i Milli: The Nationalist Option .....	72
Zionist Organizations and Zionism in Iran .....	78
Conclusions .....	83
Chapter 4: Jewish Education for the Benefit of the Nation .....	86
Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) in Iran: "Correcting" Jews in the Orient since 1860 .....	88
ORT: A New Jew is a Laboring Jew .....	91
Otsar Ha'Torah: The Orthodox Jewish Alternative .....	92
Ettefaq: Iraqi-British Education in Tehran .....	93
From Jewish Schools to Iranian Elite Schools .....	97
Approach to Hebrew, Judaism, and Zionism .....	101
Conclusions .....	103
Chapter 5: Too Integrated? The Unintended Cosequences of Jewish Involvement in the Events Preceding the 1978-79 Revolution .....	105
A Generation of Jewish Revolutionaries .....	109

Sapir Charity Hospital, the Revolution, and Ayatullah Taliqani .....	120
"Jews are not Zionists," Said the Imam .....	128
Immediate Aftereffects of the Revolution .....	131
Conclusions .....	135
Chapter 6: What is the Place of Non-Muslims in the Islamic Republic? Post- Revolution Dilemmas .....	138
The Assembly of Experts and the Draft of the First Constitution .....	146
Brothers in Arms: Challenges During Iran-Iraq War .....	151
Conclusions .....	155
Chapter 7: Conclusions .....	157
Moving Towards a New Historiography .....	161
Bibliography .....	163

## **List of Illustrations**

Illustration 1: Polish Refugee 1943.....	57
Illustration 2: Polish Refugees 1942 .....	64
Illustration 3: Iran Piruz Shod .....	84
Illustration 4: Students from Alliance Schools in Tehran .....	86
Illustration 5: Hakham Yedidya Shofet in a Meeting with Mosaddeq .....	88
Illustration 6: A Photo of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Simin Daneshvar's Writing in Kibbutz Ayelet Ha'Shahar Guest Book .....	93
Illustration 7: Ettfaq's Dedication Wall .....	106
Illustration 8: ORT Hairdresser Diploma School .....	109
Illustration 9: Jews in a Demonstration during the Revolution .....	130
Illustration 10: Sapir Hospital Staff after the Revolution .....	133
Illustration 11: Edna Sabet .....	145
Illustration 12: Aziz Daneshrad's Personal Record .....	161
Illustration 13 and 14: Eskin Project in Tehran and the Mural of the Minority Martyrs of the War .....	165

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation tells the story of the development of the Jewish communities in Iran in the twentieth century, and especially since the beginning of the 1940s. When the emissaries of the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee arrived in Tehran in 1941, they reported to the organization's headquarters in NYC that about eighty percent of the Jewish community in Iran were impoverished members of the lower and lower middle classes. Many lived in rural areas or on the outskirts of the big cities. They were generally literate but unable to break professional and social glass ceilings that affected many Iranians in a hierarchical society, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, but which were even more applicable to them. Ten percent, according to this report, belonged to the urban middle class, and 10 percent were well-to-do Iranian industrialists and bankers.<sup>1</sup> By the late 1970s the reports of the same organization offered a radically different picture. This time about 80 percent belonged to the upper middle class, 10 percent to the economic elite and upper class, and only 10 percent belonged to the impoverished lower class. This change occurred in the course of less than four decades, which is especially astounding in a community of 100,000 individuals. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Amnon Netzer added that compared to Jews that came from other Middle Eastern countries, the Iranian Jews were significantly less literate and poorly trained. Amnon Netzer, "Ha'aretz ve'yehudiy'ha," in *Iran*, ed. Haim. Saadoun (Yerushalayim: Misrad ha-hinukh, ha-tarbut vеха-sport, ha-Mazkirut ha-pedagogit, ha-Merkaz le-shiluv moreshet Yahadut ha-Mizrah : Mekhon Ben-Tsevi le-heker kehilot Yisrael ba-Mizrah shel Yad Ben-Tsevi vеха-Universitah ha-'Ivrit, 2005), 9–26.

transformation can be attributed to many factors, however this dissertation seeks to find what roles the state and Iranian society played in creating the condition which allowed this transformation to take place? In addition, what was the place of Jewish institutions in facilitating the socialization process of this period? The story of this transformation involves many communal institutions and practices but is not bound to them; there was also a willingness of the government and the “nation” to include them in the new nation-building project. Was this growth the effect of the new political atmosphere? What enabled Jews to shift between identities, and constantly redefine them? This dissertation examines the developments of the Jewish communities in Iran through several crucial periods and institutions, such as the expansion of the Jewish population following domestic and transregional migrations, the politicization of the Iranian Jewish population, and eventually the institutions that the community established following these transformations. This dissertation also explores diverse trends in the emergent nationalism in Iran and the complexity of national identity.

This dissertation argues that the invasion of the Allied Armies in 1941 created unprecedented opportunities for all of Iranian society. Along with the military occupation came freedoms that had yet to be seen in Iran, in terms of political activism, personal and communal affairs, and removal of harsh regulations that were placed by Reza Shah to facilitate his idea of nation building. Many groups entered into this artificially made vacuum in attempts to take advantage of this opportunity. Iranian Jews, that prior to 1941 were mostly a marginalized religious minority, began a socialization process that mirrored the one that the broader Iranian society had undergone, and this process in

turned changed the traditional structure of loyalties and created a situation in which the Jewish population founds new ways to relate to the broader Iranian national community.

This research differentiates the Iranian case from other Middle Eastern studies analyses by comparing it with the emerging revisionist historiography of the Arab world. It exemplifies how minorities may be part of the national arena, not secluded in ghettos. Despite focusing on the Jewish population of Iran, I see this research as fine-tuning Iranian history. Iran is—to a large extent—a country of minorities, a thing that rarely comes across from reading Iranian national historiography. Although overwhelmingly most of the minorities are ethnic minorities, some of them are both ethnic and religious minorities and are insufficiently treated in the narratives of Iranian history. By writing the story of Iran's Jewry more fully into the Iranian national story, this study will contribute to a better understanding of Iran's unique social tapestry.

## **Historiographical Review**

Three intertwined historiographical problems obscure Iranian Jewish history: first, the writing of Jewish history is a field that has traditionally been characterized by a lachrymose historical narrative. This narrative presents Jewish history as homogenously tragic regardless of geographical or socio-political context. The second, much-amplified approach to Jewish historiography appeared after the Holocaust and related to the eventual dominance of Zionist historiography in the writing of Jewish history. The third, the literature about Iranian Jews and other minorities has been highly problematic and has

not always reflected the complexities that accompany their identity politics and their changing circumstances. In his seminal 1928 article “Ghetto and Emancipation,” Salo Baron called scholars of Jewish history to revisit the lachrymose view of Jewish history.<sup>2</sup> Baron wrote this article amidst scholarly debates about the period of emancipation for the European Jews. He critiqued overestimations of emancipation and the absence of context in other Jewish histories. For example, scholars of Jewish history examined the emancipation period in Europe solely through the prism of the Jewish communities. Baron argued that claiming that at that time Jews did not have rights is ahistorical, as no European subject, Jewish or not, enjoyed citizenship rights. He also criticized these historians for not sufficiently covering neutral or positive aspects (albeit limited) Jews experienced from the ghetto and the social structure in making their way in a given situation. While not claiming in any way that the Jews’ position was ideal, or even overall positive, failing to see the ways in which the communal and social structure simultaneously hurt and benefitted the Jews (vis-à-vis the government and/or regimes) leads to missing the complexity of Jewish life in Europe. The same theoretical and methodological symptoms appear in scholarship concerning Middle Eastern Jewish history as well. These shortcomings stem from many causes, some of which go back to scholars being trained as Jewish researchers studying specifically Jewish History, rather than historians trained to study a particular region or country, who then treated Jews as just another specific minority group (hence preserving the “ghetto approach” which prevented them from seeing the larger picture of Jews as part of broader society). Baron’s

---

<sup>2</sup> Salo Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” *The Menorah Journal* 14, no. 6 (1928): 515–26.



harshest criticism targeted historians “anxious to assist the completion of the process of emancipation with their learning,”<sup>3</sup> which here includes historians who aimed to use the lessons of the Holocaust or otherwise- Zionism, to draw on millennia of Jewish existence in the Middle East. Moreover, excluding the most recent period (especially after the 1940s), in which Middle Eastern Jews lived in a relatively more peaceful and tranquil context than their coreligionists in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Taking into account the structure of relative tolerance that characterized the Ottoman Empire, scholars must carefully revisit the ever-changing nature of the co-existence Jews and Muslims in the Middle East.

Baron wrote his article before the Holocaust, a trauma that introduced a historiographical mold that viewed Jews as passive and insecure subjects of whimsical states and populations. Forever calling into question their status vis-à-vis the majority of the population and the state. According to this approach, Jews lived in a perpetual existential crisis. This essentially European experience was then extended, by historians of Jewish history, everywhere, and to the Jews of the Middle East and Muslim world

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 524–5.

<sup>4</sup> There is a continuous debate about this topic. While Stillman and Rodrigue present the critical approach that find a history of intolerance, to certain degree, Mark R. Cohen compares social and religious influences on the emergence of the myth (Jewish- Islamic harmony) or the counter-myth. Mark R. Cohen, “Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* XXXVIII (1986): 125–37; Norman A Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003); Aron Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

specifically, without sufficient regard for how closely these cases resembled this European experience. Concomitantly, Zionism became the prescribed remedy for all Jewish communities and the ultimate measure for all things past. Long before the realization of political Zionism Baron identified the inevitable historiographical challenges it had already imposed in 1928. He maintained that, “Zionism wished to reject the Diaspora in toto, on the grounds that a “normal life” could not be led by Jewry elsewhere than on its own soil.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Iranian Jewish history was no exception to this trend of writing Jewish history from a narrow Zionist perspective. According to this approach, when Jews in Iran were politically active, they exclusively supported the shah’s government because of its close relations with Israel. Moreover, it was argued that Iranian Jews largely abstained from participating in national political events, such as the 1979 revolution, hence their absence from Iranian national historiography. In fact, Iranian Jewish communities underwent tremendous transformations over the course of the 20th century, ones that both Iranian and non-Iranian scholarship have insufficiently address.

This historiographical reality also applies to 19<sup>th</sup> century Iran. In his important book *Between Foreigners and Shi’is: Nineteenth Century-Iran and Its Jewish Minority*, Daniel Tsadik convincingly asserts that “one can hardly speak of diverse approaches, different schools of historiography, or even major debates among the few scholars who address Iranian Jewry’s recent past.”<sup>6</sup> This is the justification to any new scholarship on

---

<sup>5</sup> Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” 525.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Tsadik, *Between Foreigners and Shi’is : Nineteenth-Century Iran and Its Jewish Minority* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1.

Iranian Jewish history. Tsadik addresses this void in the context of the nineteenth century, and in this work, it is hoped to address the same gap regarding the twentieth century. The most comprehensive book about Iranian Jewry, written in 1960 by Habib Levy, depicts Jewish life in Iran from the pre-Islamic period (1300 BCE) to 1960.<sup>7</sup> Some flaws seem inevitably inherent to such a broad period of focus. Second, Levy was a dentist, and not a professional, trained historian. The book therefore, lacks a strong disciplinary methodology and engagement with the dominant historiographical and theoretical debates of the discipline of history. Levy was also a self-proclaimed Zionist, which creates a potential historiographical issue; as Haggai Ram explains, the Zionist paradigm consistently narrates Jewish Iranian history. Much of the scholarship on Iranian Jewry, with some notable exceptions, was written by Israelis or by Jews of Iranian descent with connections to Israel. Some wrote from their personal experiences, and most did not write from within Iran.<sup>8</sup> While this scholarship provides important information about some aspects of Jewish life in Iran, it provides an incomplete picture by treating the community as an isolated entity within Iranian society. The Zionist perceptions embedded in much of this scholarship presume that “the Jewish state is the only place

---

<sup>7</sup> This book was originally published in Persian as a three-volume comprehensive history of the Jews of Iran, and was translated to English in 1999 in Los Angeles, where Levy lived until his passing. Habib Levy, *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran: The Outset of the Diaspora* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999); Habib Lavi, *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*. (Tihran: Barukhim, 1956).

<sup>8</sup> Haggai Ram, *Iranophobia: The Logic of an Israeli Obsession* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 101.

where non-European Jews could escape a bitter fate.”<sup>9</sup> Zionist-leaning historiographies, in a sense, deny Jews historical agency by portraying them as passive victims for millennia until their encounter with modern Zionism. For example, Meir Ezri, who served as the Israeli ambassador to Iran in the early 1970s, celebrates in his memoir the relations between Iran and Israel and depicts Jewish life in Iran. According to Ezri, however, only the existence of Israel guarantees good treatment of Jews in Iran or healthy relations.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Haim Tsadok, the Jewish Agency’s emissary in Iran in 1969-73, hails the Pahlavi dynasty for succeeding in “modernizing” and “secularizing” Iran, albeit mentioning the harsh price Iranian citizens had to pay.<sup>11</sup> Tsadok overemphasizes the role of his organization and the Zionist movement as a whole, but fails to understand any patriotic feelings of Iranian Jews to a country other than Israel, despite acknowledging the fact that Iran was their homeland for over 2,000 years. This approach ignores things like the common cultural and ethnic traits they shared with other Iranians; thereby failing to understand the possibility that Iranian Jews (like religious minorities in other nations) might have felt an affinity toward the dominant nationalism of the nation in which they lived. This approach contradicts general trends in the study of nationalism by ignoring how modern nationalisms compete (more often than not, successfully) with other religious or ethnic communal identities, even in cases in which the minority groups are not treated by the dominant group as fully equal members of the nation in question.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Meir Ezri, *Mi va-Khem Mi-Kol 'Amo* (Or Yehuda: Hed Arzi: Sifriyat Ma'ariv, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Hayim Tsadok, *Yahadut Iran bi-tekufat ha-shoshelet ha-Pahlavit : Yehude Iran ve-Erets Yisrael (1935-1978)* (Tel Aviv: Meyatseg, 1991), 48–51.

Moreover, leaving Israel aside, Tsadok believes that “the Jews [of Iran] have, at all times and under all different regimes, been subject to murder, robbery, and plunder.”<sup>12</sup>

In recent years Jewish histories of the Middle East have received increasing scholarly attention. A new generation of historians, trained predominantly in the field of Middle East History rather than Jewish Studies or Jewish History, have revisited modern and early modern histories of Middle Eastern Jewish communities, making extensive use of scholarship and knowledge of Middle Eastern societies and not only their Jewish populations.<sup>13</sup> This trend, to a large extent, departs from the way Jewish (and other minorities’) histories have been previously written. Historians such as Daniel Tsadik, David Yeroushalmi, and Mehrdad Amanat have spearheaded a revisionist wave of research on the Jewish communities of Iran in the 19th century.<sup>14</sup> They have all

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13 See also: 13-22, 318-60, 521-24.

<sup>13</sup> Notably in this category are these book that contextualize Jewish local histories with modern Middle Eastern history: Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012); Rami Ginat, *A History of Egyptian Communism: Jews and Their Compatriots in Quest of Revolution* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011); Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, Contraversions 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> David Yeroushalmi, *The Jews of Iran in the Nineteenth Century Aspects of History, Community, and Culture* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), Mehrdad Amanat, *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha’i Faith*, Library of Modern Religion 9 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

challenged common narratives regarding Jewish existence in Shi‘i-dominated Iran (going beyond the practices of impurity and religious tensions) and have revealed the rich and nuanced histories of these communities. These books notably consider Jewish communities of Iran (rather than a single “unified” Jewish community) as part of broader society. Within this context, Tsadik eschews the laboratory-like, supposedly isolated conditions under which this Iranian Jewry has been studied; as he rightly observes, “the Jews did not exist in their own universe, separated from Iranian soil and society.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, Avraham Cohen explores mutual influence. He points out that the basic form of religious schooling was “maktab khanah” or “khanah-i mullah”, thus borrowing from the Iranian-Muslim vernacular. The teacher in these institutions was interchangeably “mullah,” “khalifah,” or “hakham.”<sup>16</sup> This usage of Islamic titles, names, and terms is an indication of the problem of claims about social or cultural isolation of Iranian Jews. The Muslim culture of Iran inspired the Jews in many other ways, as well. Jews had first names that otherwise would be recognized as exclusively Muslim, such as Habib, Abdullah, or even Ruhullah—as was Dr. Sapir’s first name. Moreover, Jews that conducted pilgrimage to Jerusalem add the prefix Hajji, borrowing from the honorific title from Muslims who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The insufficient writing on more recent histories of Jews in Iran and the Zionist – centered historiographies created scholarship that has focused on certain aspects of

---

<sup>15</sup> Tsadik, *Between Foreigners and Shi’is*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> I want to thank Haggai Ram for directing me to this anecdote, and to Avraham Cohen for giving me all his publications to use for this research. Ram, *Iranophobia: The Logic of an Israeli Obsession*, 119 see notes: 36 and 37.

Jewish history in Iran, such as continuous persecution, issues of impurity, and Zionist activism, while ignoring major trends characterizing this population in the 20th century, like Jewish communist participation, Iranian patriotism, and non-traditional interpretations of Zionism. Another obstacle in writing an integrative account of Iranian Jews is that scholarship written on national organizations and other agencies, in which Jews were active or dominant, have tended to focus more on the political legacy of those organizations and less on the social, ethnic or religious tapestry of the people involved.<sup>17</sup>

Iranian Jewish history also relies on two contradictory historiographical narratives. The first sees Iranian historiography entirely through such historical categories as the “Jews of Islam” and lumps together Sunni and Shi‘i communities. By doing so, the methodology wrongly conflates the histories of the Jews in the Arab lands and the radically different recent history of Iranian Jewry. Misperceptions of communal stagnation also distort the nuanced social tapestry of the Jewish population in Iran. While other countries in the region saw their Jewish populations diminishing, especially since the 1940s, Iran witnessed the onset of a period in which Jews thrived more than ever before. Not only did the majority of Jews remain in Iran in the 1940s, but the Jewish community even grew and became more diverse than any other Jewish community of the Middle East outside Palestine during this time. Iran and its Jewish population were part

---

<sup>17</sup> For example see Maziar Behrooz important and illuminating book on the Tudeh party, but again, leaves much of the discussion on the ethnic and religious elements of the party out of the conversation. Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause : The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

of global and trans-regional trajectories of displaced persons that found short- and long-term sanctuaries in countries not their own. The trans-regional nature of the Iranian community, and the fact that the meaning of being Iranian and Jewish changed in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Iran, was the result of encounters with other Jewish communities—including European, Arab, and Sephardi communities—during the years of World War II and after the creation of the State of Israel.

This trans-regional point of view seeks to highlight Iran's role and historical agency in global events. For example, during the war years many Europeans—among them Jews—came to Iran and found there a shelter from the upheavals in Europe. Another significant group of Jews immigrating to Iran in those years came from Iraq. Following an earlier 1914-1918 wave, comprised primarily of Iraqi Jews avoiding conscription into the Ottoman army; the second wave fled Iraq due to persecution and pogroms, most famously the *Farhud* in June 1941. Thousands of Jews came from Iraq to Iran on their way to Israel/Palestine because the Jewish relief organizations operated transition camps there. Jewish immigrants stayed in the transition camps for long periods of time, depending on the efficiency of the agencies' collaboration with the British Mandate government in Palestine. Many of the Iraqi Jews chose to stay in Iran with their relatives who had already settled, mainly in the borderland between Basra and Abadan. Another group of Jewish Iraqi immigrants were those who had gone to Israel but decided to return to Iran.



## Notes on Sources

This study draws on various types of primary evidentiary sources. The first type of source I used extensively for this research consisted of the archives of relief organizations such as the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee (JDC) in New York, the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia (PHS), and the International Red Cross (IRC). The JDC had been involved in Jewish affairs in Iran since the interwar period but intensified its activity to unprecedented levels in 1941. The committee cared for the refugees, facilitated the inner-migration to the major urban centers, established the education system, organized the community, and connected Iranian Jews with the world Jewry. JDC's archives illustrate the astonishingly rapid transformation the community underwent. However, when dealing with such organizations it is important to understand the transnational framework in which it functioned. The JDC was simultaneously invested in helping establish Israel and providing help and support to Jews remaining in Iran. Also, different JDC emissaries wrote the reports I read, and at different times, under very different geo-political circumstances. I contextualize the documents, but there was no single policy executed by all the organization's envoys or one that encompassed all the organization's activity. Finally among the many JDC officials, there were people with varying levels of commitment to Zionism, which affected their interpretations of fact, trends, and events.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> In 1948 significant segments of the American Jewish communities were skeptical regarding Zionism and the State of Israel. They were more interested in promoting universal values and ideals they saw as correlating with Judaism. Caring for distant

The Presbyterian archive provided a glimpse into the missionary world in Iran. Although the missionaries' primary target audience was not the Jews, they reached out to the Jewish population as well, and their institutions, such as schools, colleges, professional training programs, etc. indiscriminately served all the Iranians who wished to enroll. In addition, during WWII the mission in Iran facilitated the rescue operation and treated the refugees and migrants. The same was true for the International Red Cross; this organization was present in Bandar-i Pahlavi as the refugees arrived and stayed there for as long as the Allied forces needed them to be present.

The second type of source I used in conducting this research is state archives and document collections published by these archives. I have worked with documents at the Israeli, British, and American national archives, in addition to collections of documents published by the Iranian National Archive. Those documents depict the international relations aspects of minorities' affairs in Iran.

Another source consisted of Iranian journals and newspapers. These public and communal materials relay what the community activists told their co-religionist, compatriots, and themselves. They also reflect the ideological diversity in those communities. Along with a series of memoirs we get multiple personal and narrower narratives that help us come up with alternative histories to the "big history," which has been told thus far.

The most intriguing source was the oral history component. I have conducted 25 interviews with Iranian Jews that participated in, or witnessed, the events under study

---

communities fitted this definition, even at the cost of possible conflict with the new Israeli leadership.

here. The interviews took place over a period of three years and in different locations: the U.S., England, France, Israel, and Iran. Interviews in France and Iran took place over Skype and in some cases, where I needed to follow up on some of the points, additional Skype, phone or email correspondence occurred. Many of the interviewees brought to my attention events that were historiographically marginalized at the time those events took place. In some cases interviewees provided supporting evidence, such as photos, documents, or old newspaper stories. In each case I juxtapose the oral account with other types of documentary evidence. All the interviews were recorded and stored with the informed consent of the interviewees.

In analyzing these interviews I relied on methodologies developed in the works of Leyla Neyzi. She explains the origins of the field of oral history, which I find very much applicable to the Iranian case, as “it often examines events and experiences not recorded (or differently recorded) by written history, and shows that historical events may be alternately interpreted by individuals who embody the past in the present.”<sup>19</sup> She then explains that oral history practices emerged especially following the Holocaust and in concert with the appearance of trauma studies. In historical writing, oral history is “used as a means of giving voice to the silenced or subaltern, and oral history methodology resembled anthropological fieldwork in providing a bottom-up view of society.”<sup>20</sup> In the context of this research, giving a voice to Jews who were not part of the Iranian-Jewish

---

<sup>19</sup> Leyla Neyzi, “Oral History and Memory Studies in Turkey,” in *Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Oktem, and Philip Robins (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 443.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 443–4.

mainstream narrative gives them agency and bring them back to history; both Iranian and Jewish.

For several reasons, all the interviewees cited in this research are referred to using pseudonyms. First, many of the informants for this study still live in Iranian diaspora communities. Over the years these communities have embraced a certain distinctive identity that reflects their ambiguous relationship with their longtime homeland. Participation in movements or events that led to the 1979 revolution may not be looked upon fondly in their communities. In order to protect their current lives and identities, and reduce the significance of personal rivalries I have changed details that are not essential to the story and to leave only relevant details in the text. Secondly, it has been over thirty-five years since the most recent events took place, in other cases over six decades have passed. Given the distance from Iran and the distance in time, people could be tempted to romanticize their role in the event, or see the interviews as a means to achieve a sense of historical justice. I found that when the informants knew that no real names would be mentioned, they seemed more relaxed and frank, thus reducing the risk of either avoiding difficult topics or glorifying details, and in some cases kept old personal rivalries out of the narrative.

Besides the interviews that I conducted, I made extensive use of the oral history trove that exists in the Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History at UCLA (CIJOH). CIJOH has published numerous collections of articles and selected interviews, which are unique in the field of Iranian Jewish studies. The interviews recorded there are with Iranian Jews from all walks of life, and reveal much of the unwritten modern history of Iranian Jewry.

When using the transcribed interviews, I use the full name of the interviewee as it appears in CIJOH's records.

### **Historical Review of Jewish History in Iran**

Jewish presence in Iran usually dates back to the Assyrian exile in 722 B.C. While being relatively incorporated into the society, Jews routinely suffered harassment from the Zoroastrian clergy. As a result, scholars argue that Jews welcomed the Arab-Muslim conquerors with mixed feelings, hoping it would put an end to the institutional discrimination and persecution, which at that time included forced conversions to Zoroastrianism.<sup>21</sup> The rule of Islam, at least nominally, protected Jews as “People of the Book,” in exchange for additional taxes and maintaining a type of inferior socio-political status vis-à-vis Muslims. For the following millennium Jews were not singled out more than other religious minorities, either positively or negatively. During the Mongolian-Ikhanid period they of course suffered, but it must also be kept in mind that this period was devastating to the entire region of Iran.

A major turning point for Iran and its Jewish population was the establishment of the Safavid dynasty by Shah Isma'il I, who unified Iran and instituted Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion. He did so, at least in part, to distinguish his kingdom from the major

---

<sup>21</sup> Amnon Netzer, “Ha-Kehila Ha-Yehudit Be-Iran,” in *Yehudei Iran: Avaram, Morashtam ve-Zikatam Le-Eretz Ha-Kodesh*, ed. Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Beit Koresh, 1988), 3–4.

Sunni forces bordering Iran (namely the Ottoman Empire).<sup>22</sup> The power behind the Safavid project was formation of “religious unity as a source of solidarity,” wrote Habib Levy, and on these foundations hatred was spread towards anything that was not Shi’i.<sup>23</sup> Very little has been written about Jewish history in the Safavid and early Qajar eras. A number of documents, mostly written in Judeo-Persian, survive from that period and tell about persecution and forced conversions, especially during the reign of Shah Abbas I (r. 1571-1629), Shah Safi I (r. 1629-1642), and Shah Abbas II (1642-1666).<sup>24</sup> Vera Moreen argues that “despite the events described in the Judeo-Persian chronicles just mentioned, the Safavid era cannot be considered a period of total disaster for Iran Jewry. On the contrary, there were numerous Jewish communities throughout the kingdom and most of them thrived under fairly vigorous and autonomous communal structure.”<sup>25</sup>

As Daniel Tsadik shows in his book, the Qajar period brought mixed experiences to the different Jewish communities in Iran rather than one galvanizing event. It means that while some communities endured persecution, others enjoyed a period of relative tranquility. Most importantly, Jews did not live primarily in isolation from the broader

---

<sup>22</sup> Vera B. Moreen, “The Safavid Era,” in *Esther’s Children : A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar (Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 63.

<sup>23</sup> Habib Levy, *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran: The Outset of the Diaspora* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 260.

<sup>24</sup> Moreen, “The Safavid Era,” 64.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Iranian society. Therefore, times of hardships for the Jews tended to be times of hardships for other religious minorities as well.

The nineteenth century brought about significant social transformations to the minority communities. One of the interesting phenomena of that period was a fluidity of religious identity. Vast numbers of Jews voluntarily converted to Islam, Christianity, and Baha'ism. Conversion became socially acceptable despite some negative connotations, and the emergence of Baha'ism in that period attracted many Jews.<sup>26</sup> Under Naser al-Din Shah and Mozaffar al-Din Shah, Jews enjoyed more comprehensive legal protection and advancement. With European Jewry's support, they also opened and expanded the network of Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) and other Jewish educational institutions.<sup>27</sup>

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 introduced a new civil discourse in which minorities became legally equal to Muslim citizens. A parliament formed and after a power struggle with the palace, the governing body wrote and ratified a constitution.

---

<sup>26</sup> Mehrdad Amanat explains the enchantment of Baha'ism as an opportunity to convert to a sort of indigenous religion, without being labeled as a "new convert" (jadid ul-Islam), and preserve family history as part of the individual identity. Mehrdad Amanat, *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha'i Faith*, Library of Modern Religion 9 (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 3–6.

<sup>27</sup> Janet Afary, "From Outcastes to Citizens: Jews in Qajar Iran," in *Esther's Children : A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar (Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 154.

Not without pains, Jews (and other minorities) had representatives on a national level, and the political sphere slowly opened for them.<sup>28</sup>

The next turning point arrived after Reza Khan's ascendance to throne in the 1920's. Reza established the last dynasty to rule over Iran, the Pahlavi dynasty. He led a fierce fight against the religious establishment in his attempt to establish a secular society. In the first years of his rule the Jewish institutions enjoyed unprecedented freedoms. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Reza Shah sought to reform and unify Iran's education systems and he closed Jewish schools. Overall, the Pahlavi period, with its emphasis on a secular society, brought a relief to the Jews of Iran. The periodical recurrences of anti-Jewish attacks tended to be local and isolated.

In addition to education reform, Reza Shah's modernization project included many infrastructural projects like railroads and industry, in which foreign consortiums took part. Germany became one of Iran's major partners, a relationship that led Reza Shah to announce Iran's neutral position when World War II broke out. Nazi propaganda appeared in the public discourse in Iran in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but probably not to the extent Britain and the Soviet Union estimated when they justified a military invasion in August 1941.

## **Dissertation Structure**

This dissertation consists of five core chapters organized in both chronological and thematic order. Chapter One explores the sociological and demographic transformation

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 164–173.



that the Jewish population—and by extension other religious minorities—underwent during the Second World War. This chapter argues that the 1941 invasion, and the subsequent collapse of the rigid state structure, facilitated social mobility and redefinition, along with the reshaping of urban centers in Iran, which was accompanied by the growing visibility of minorities. Agencies operating on behalf of Jews increased their involvement and investments and addressed the needs of the community more efficiently than any state mechanism could do at the time. Moreover, during that period, no state regulation stood in these agencies' way, which made an enormous difference when attending to the needs of the communities. This chapter examines how Iranian history appears in the war historiography, usually in an insufficiently complex or nuanced way, and how the war and its aftermath shaped Iran. Contrary to the stagnant or rather declining analysis of Iranian Jewry (as part of the general Middle Eastern Jewish population), the Jewish population in Iran witnessed its golden age, insofar as it relates to “becoming Iranian citizens.” This chapter incorporates archival work from relief organizations, religious organizations, former Ally countries' archives, memoirs, and Iranian Foreign Office papers.

Chapter Two examines the politicization of the Jews in the WWII period and immediately afterward. Traditional historiography distances Jews from politics in Iran. Only a handful of articles and books suggest any political agency of Jews in contemporary Iran. When mentioned at all, Jewish political activity usually refers to supporting the shah in relation to his intimate relations with Israel. However, this chapter argues that political activism became a means for Iranian Jews to impact their future and place in Iran. Many Jews were adamant supporters and members of the communist Tudeh

party and later on engaged in many other political initiatives (such as student movements and intellectual associations). The Tudeh was the most vocal opponent of fascism in the 1940s. For years the group published articles and editorials denouncing fascist inclinations of nationalist groups in Iranian society, openly opposing the prevailing anti-Semitic climate in Iran. The Tudeh's enduring defense of the Jewish community and message of equality attracted many young Jews from the Iranian middle and lower-middle classes. Their political activism continued well into the 1970s, and Jews were part of a few revolutionary movements, which will be explored in chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Three centralizes the educational institutions and community structures in minorities' strategies for seeking interconnectedness with broader Iranian society. Communal institutions run by Jews, with Jews as their main constituency, sometimes played pivotal roles in advancing the social and economic place of Iranian Jews and encouraging them to leave the virtual ghettos and seek general education that could facilitate a successful career in serving the state and the society, and bringing financial stability. *Alliance Israelite Universelle* and ORT, two of the networks that operated in Iran, as well as in other countries in the region, trained Jews (and later others, as this chapter shows) in useful languages, and equipped their graduates with knowledge and professional skills. Moreover, the communal school system articulated a version of Iranian national identity among those students and encouraged them to define and prioritize the different components of their identity. This chapter argues that regardless of the time they began to operate, community schools, their curriculum, and their self-perception were products of the socialization that happened since 1941. Moreover, these same institutions created and educated the generation that came of age in the late 1960s

and 1970s to participate in various national Iranian activities. This chapter also examines the apparent conflict or tension between Zionism, Judaism, and Iranian nationalism.

Chapter Four argues that the ultimate success of the nation building project, led by the shah, was evident in the decade leading to the revolution, when the Jewish society in Iran finally completed its release from traditional loyalties and viewed itself, first and foremost, as Iranian. This chapter explores the first manifestations of Jewish revolutionary discourse and actions. Jewish students were already active in students' organizations and fostered an inclusive Iranian-Jewish identity. They assumed leadership roles in the movements and strove to end the shah's dictatorship in order to create an Iranian republic. During the protests of the 1970s, while the communist Tudeh party had been outlawed, two Jewish activists were jailed for antimonarchical activity. After serving their time, they turned to political activity within the Jewish community.<sup>29</sup> Loyal to their leftist tendencies and religious identity, they gathered a dozen like-minded comrades and established the most significant Jewish organization of the late 1970s in Iran: jami'ah-i rawshanfikran-i yahudi-yi Iran (The Association of Jewish Iranian Intellectuals). This organization was instrumental in involving Jews in revolutionary events. The existence of this enterprise has appeared only in a handful of scholarly works; the late scholar of Iranian history, Amnon Netzer, wrote about this association briefly in 1981, following a growing curiosity regarding Iranian Jews after the

---

<sup>29</sup> David Menashri, "The Jews in Iran: Between the Shah and Khomeini," in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, ed. Sander Gilman (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 360.

revolution,<sup>30</sup> and David Menashari wrote about it in his article cited above. This chapter takes on the challenge of elaborating on this movement in order to understand and historicize the Jewish involvement in revolutionary movements of the 1970s. Rewriting the history of the left in Iran is essential to understanding the paradigms and worldviews that attracted so many people of minority communities to support and assume leadership positions in these movements. Studying the Jewish experience in the Tudeh party, for example, presents the radical options available to Jews from the 1940s through the 1970s, other than Zionism. Moreover, while contemporaneous movements from around the globe tried to instigate revolutions or instill revolutionary ideas with only limited success, be it American students that protested against the American involvement in Vietnam, or French students against the colonization of Algeria, to name a few, their Iranian counterparts were able to fulfill the mission and start a revolution.

Chapter Five argues that the achievements of Jews in the past 30 years are not to be erased even by a revolution that shortly after its victory was declared Islamic. This chapter discusses post-revolutionary Iran and the new nation-building project the Jews faced following the ultimate success of the revolution. The fruits of those achievements were seen on multiple occasions, despite their rising falling fortunes; an especially interesting one was the Constitution Drafting Committee. The committee had 73

---

<sup>30</sup> Amnon Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-yamenu* (Jerusalem: HUJI Press, 1981); Amnon Netzer, "Yehudei Iran, Yisrael, Ve-ha-republiqah Ha-islamit Shel Iran," *Gesher* 26 (Spring-Summer 1980): 45–57; Amnon Netzer, "Ha-yehudim Ba-republica Ha-islamit Shel Iran: Chronologiya Shel Ke'ev U-metsuka," *Gesher* 611 (1987): 38–47.

members, 4 of them were non-Muslim religious minorities, which while hardly a dominant political force, nevertheless greatly exceeded their proportion in the population. This chapter further examines the Jewish debates regarding the shaping of post-revolutionary Iran. What place did the Jewish leadership seek for Jews in Iran? Did they participate in forming the new constitution? What was the role of the communist legacy and activism, or, conversely, how did alternative Jewish identities (such as Zionism or religionist) propose forming of new communities? This chapter follows the Jewish adjustment and reaction to the rapidly unfolding events from the overthrow of the shah's regime, through redefining the Iranian national identity, to the Iran-Iraq war.

The following story encapsulates the social and political transformations Iranian Jews had experienced in the twentieth century. In 1940 Dr. Ruhollah Sapir, an Iranian Jewish physician, was working in a government hospital in Tehran when he witnessed a life-changing event. He saw a pregnant Jewish patient treated badly and insulted for her faith; as a result, he decided to open his own hospital that would not turn away or discriminate against a patient for any reason. The following year Sapir opened a small clinic in a side room in *Mula Hanina* synagogue on Sirus street in the *Mahallah* (the Jewish quarter). He named the hospital after Cyrus the Great, *Kurush Kabir*, known in the Jewish tradition as the ancient Persian monarch who liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity. The hospital, sustained by Sapir family funds and contributions from other Jewish donors, treated patients for free. Over the years, the hospital admitted growing numbers of patients and subsequently moved to a larger building. Dr. Sapir repeatedly announced to

all that this was not exclusively a Jewish hospital, and indeed many Muslim patients came there to receive free and good medical treatment.

In August of the same year, the World War II allies invaded Iran, in part due to Iran's neutrality, and overthrew Reza Shah Pahlavi. The Iranian monarch and founder of the last dynasty to rule Iran, was exiled, first to Madagascar and then to South Africa, where he died shortly thereafter. His son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was declared the new king, or shah, of Iran. One of the immediate consequences of this invasion was the opening of Iran's gates to an influx of migrants and refugees from all over Europe and the Soviet Union, many Jews among them. With the assistance of some Jewish relief organizations, many of the Jewish refugees were sent to Tehran for treatment and temporary settlement in camps.

Epidemics like Typhus and Cholera spread among the European refugees and Dr. Sapir promptly offered his help in hospitalizing and treating them. In an unfortunate turn of events, Dr. Sapir contracted Typhus himself and died in 1942. His legacy, though, remained very much alive for a long time after his passing. After his death, his hospital was run by the Jewish community and preserved Sapir's legacy, giving good care indiscriminately and free of charge. The sign at the entrance to the hospital captures its philosophy. In two languages, Hebrew and Persian, the guest is welcomed with the biblical verse: "Love your neighbor as yourself" ('Ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocha', 'hamnaw'at ra misl-i khodat dust bidar'). This legacy proved crucial later, when the hospital offered treatment and sanctuary for the revolutionaries in the heat of the events in 1978-79 that eventually led to the overthrow of the shah and the ultimate victory of the revolution.

Involvement in the revolution such as the role played by this hospital could hardly be imagined during the lifetime of Dr. Sapir. Let us now examine the situation in Iran right around the time when Dr. Sapir established this hospital and Iran entered World War II.

## **Chapter 2: Minorities in the Liberal Age (1941-1953)**

### **Iran Entering World War II**

In the late summer of 1939 the Second World War erupted in Europe. Nazi Germany colluded with the USSR to reorganize Europe, and the two powers signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of non-aggression. Winds of war blew all over the world. The Middle East became a war theatre, as well, albeit a peripheral one. Fascist movements allied with Nazi Germany appeared across the Middle East and gave a localized voice to European fascism. Both fascist and anti-fascist movements gained significant support among the publics. The political field was heated, as the propaganda machines of both sides engaged in a mini war through myriad publications, newspapers, and pamphlets. A major turning point in the war came in June 1941, when Germany violated the non-aggression pact and attacked the Soviet Union. This move re-shaped the power balance between the sides around the world and in the Middle East. The USSR switched sides and fought with the Allies against the Axis powers, which included Germany, Italy, and Japan, and needed to open lines of supply of oil, produce, and transportation from Iran. Britain, of course, already had a significant presence in the region. Egypt was under heavy British influence, and especially in the Suez Canal area, the British Mandate was still governing Palestine, Britain had military pacts and presence in Iraq and Jordan, and the British government controlled one of the most important assets in the war: the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, based in Abadan, on the coast of the Persian Gulf.

Reza Shah, the monarch of Iran at the time and the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, maintained neutrality in the war from its earliest moments. Germany traded in increasing volume with Iran and was involved in many projects involving industry and



infrastructure, such as the expansive railroad projects. Losing this contact would have hurt Iran's rapid modernization projects. German consortia conducted many of Reza Shah's most grandiose projects, such as the trans-Iranian railroad. Interestingly, many of the German engineers were in fact German-Jews, who sought sanctuary in Iran.<sup>31</sup> Reza also adhered to the Aryan hypothesis, which—in short—argued that modern Iranians were descendants of ancient Indo-European tribes, thus making them genetically Aryans and genetically closer to Europeans than to Middle Easterners. Iran's neutrality was at odds with Britain's plans following the addition of the USSR to the Allied armies. Iran, so the new allies decided, had to lean towards the Allies and end the neutrality policy. They overthrew Reza Shah, and replaced him with his son, Mohammad Reza. In August 1941 the British and Soviet armies invaded Iran, occupied it with very little resistance, and divided the country into two spheres of influence. The British established their zone mainly in the south, controlling the oil industry, and the Soviets were in the north.

After almost two decades of the iron-fisted rule of Reza Shah, Iranians experienced new freedoms, which, ironically, were contingent upon a military occupation

---

<sup>31</sup> Documents show evidence of German Jewish presence in Iran since the early 1930's. Dr. Curt Eric Neumann, The founder of Iran's biggest pharmaceutical companies as well as Reza Shah's personal physician, was a German Jew. Fariborz L Mokhtari, *In the Lion's Shadow : The Iranian Schindler and His Homeland in the Second World War* (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2011), 69 (n.220); Ahmad Mahrads, "Sarnivisht-i iraniyan-i yahudi tay-yi jang-i jahani-yi duvvum dar urupa," in *Yahudiyani-i Irani Dar Tarikh-i Muasir*, ed. Homa Sarshar, vol. 3 (Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History, 1999), 59–108.

of the country. This occupation, along with the war, contributed to many other developments in Iran at that time as well. Refugees from different war zones came to Iran and found there a safe haven and sanctuary for the wartime. Together with the soldiers and administrators of the occupation, Iran hosted almost a million recent arrivals, most concentrated in the major urban centers. According to existing statistics, in 1941 there were almost 14 million Iranians citizens living in the country;<sup>32</sup> if another million came following the war, then Iran hosted an increase of roughly 7 percent of its population, and this percentage would have been much higher the big cities.

Historiography of World War II presents a very partial picture regarding Iran. As is the case usually, the focus of such historiography is on the Western powers and the European theatre. These narratives relegate Iran to a sub-plot with anecdotes about the Allied occupation and division, or the Tehran conference, which hosted Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt as they strengthened their agreement. Admittedly, there are two main exceptions to this trend: Iranian literature and Polish war historiography. Two Iranian masterpieces, brought this period to the fore: Iraj Pizishkzad's *My Uncle Napoleon* (1973) and Simin Daneshvar's *Savushun* (1969). *My Uncle Napoleon* humorously discusses Iranian anxieties about the British occupation of Tehran. *Savushun* takes place in Iran under the influence of British, Soviet, and American occupation and shows the German presence as well. Another major contribution to the conversation about this period came with the publication of *In the Lion's Shadow*.<sup>33</sup> Fariborz Mokhtari tells the

---

<sup>32</sup> Julian Bharier, "A Note on the Population of Iran, 1900-1966," *Population Studies* 22, no. 2 (July 1, 1968): 273–79, doi:10.2307/2173024.

<sup>33</sup> Mokhtari, *In the Lion's Shadow*.

story of Iranian Abdol Hossein Sardari, who rescued thousands of Jews in Europe and received no recognition, unlike Oscar Schindler, the German industrialist who rescued a smaller number of Jews and began his operation for much less noble and more dubious purposes, but who nevertheless was acknowledged and honored. Mokhtari's point, besides telling a compelling story, was that Sardari could only execute this operation with the silent consent of the Iranian government. Also, Mokhtari argues that the inherent acceptance or tolerance of Jews in Iran allowed Sardari to openly use his diplomatic connections.

Polish war literature also acknowledges the Iranian episode in the Polish story. Memoirs, documents, and scholarly works illuminate different aspects of this history. It is noteworthy that historians of Poland and Polish history can tell much more about this period in Iran than historians of the Middle East.<sup>34</sup> Many of these publications, though,

---

<sup>34</sup> While many of the books about Poland and Polish deportees discuss even briefly the Iranian episode, books on the Middle East in that period tend to focus on Fascist inclinations, or the greater war schemes, and rarely mention these stories. See for example: Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*, First Harvard University Press edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012); Irena Beaupré-Stankiewicz, Danuta Waszczuk-Kamieniecka, and Jadwiga Lewicka-Howells, eds., *Isfahan- City of Polish Children* (Sussex: Association of Former Pupils of Polish Schools, Isfahan and Lebanon, 1989); *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004); Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No*

remain written in Polish and have never been translated. The disconnect between the fields harmed one more than another.

This chapter examines the tremendous changes following Iran's involuntary entrance into WWII. Iran and its minority communities underwent social and political transformations following the deposing of Reza Shah, which in turn led to greater integration of minorities into the modern sectors of Iranian society and increased participation of minorities in the public sphere. This chapter further examines the role of the immigrants and refugees in developing the Iranian middle-class and increasing its cosmopolitan nature, and how their identity was shaped and contested by groups inside the community and the surrounding society. The geo-political impact of World War II in the Middle East made Iran an especially interesting theatre of the war. The role it played for the Allies in terms of war infrastructure and supplies, and the making of Iran into a sanctuary for hundreds of thousands of refugees, forced Iran into a rapid urbanization process that in turn reshaped the political scene for years to come. In addition to the refugees and recent migrants, there were about 500 thousand allied soldiers from the British, Soviet, and American armed forces. Due to these massive, though largely temporary, demographic changes, the Jewish community grew more diverse than ever before.

---

*Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II* (Oxford, UK ; New York: Osprey Pub, 2009).

### **Changing Demography: Jewish Immigration from Iraq**

Jewish migration to Iran started long before WWII and had different attributes. During World War I, many Iraqi Jews who sought to avoid forced conscription into the Ottoman army fled the empire, and many of them went to Iran.<sup>35</sup> Relations between the Jewish communities in the two countries were long established and revolved around Talmudic centers of religious training—Iranian rabbis were trained in the seminaries in Baghdad—as well as commercial ties. Between 1914 and 1918 the first major wave of migrants arriving in Iran settled mainly in Abadan because of the proximity to the Iraqi city of Basra, which had a large concentration of Jews. There, they established community institutions such as a synagogue and a youth club. These institutions facilitated the second wave of immigration between 1941 and 1951.<sup>36</sup> The Jewish community of Iraq was generally affluent, overwhelmingly urban, educated, and very much integrated. They excelled in commerce and in the financial sectors, and at its peak they constituted a third

---

<sup>35</sup> Nir Shohet, *Sipurah Shel Golah : Perakim Be-Toldot Yahadut Bavel Le-Doroteha* (Jerusalem: ha-Agudah le-kidum ha-Mehker veba-Yetsirah, 1981), 121.

<sup>36</sup> For more about the cultural ties between Iran and Iraq, with emphasis on minority communities, see: Houchang Chehabi, “Iran and Iraq: Intersocietal Linkages and Secular Nationalisms,” in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective* (New York; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 191–216; more on the Iraqi-Jewish community in Iran: Arlene Dallalfar, “Iraqi Jews in Iran,” in *Esther’s Children : A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar (Beverly Hills, Calif.: The Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History, 2002), 277–281.

of Baghdad's population.<sup>37</sup> Hence, upon arrival to Iran they practiced their skills and had a profound impact. The influence of the Jewish presence in Abadan was so strong that it is still visible today. For example, one of the most central city squares in Abadan is named *Maydan-i Alfi*, after the Alfi family's department store. The Alfi family came to Abadan from Basra in the early 1940s and subsequently opened this department store, which excelled in the commercial life of the region.

The second wave of immigrants fled Iraq due to outright persecution and pogroms (most famously the *Farhud*).<sup>38</sup> Hayyim's family was part of this wave and arrived to Iran from Iraq: "in 1944 and after the Jewish Agency and other Zionist organizations wanted to create a mass movement from Iraq to Israel, and they operated openly. This created tensions between the Iraqis and the Jewish community. When the time was right for them, especially after 1948 and the establishment of Israel, Iraqi authorities started to persecute anyone they suspected was related to the Zionist movement, and many Jews had to flee. Where would they go? For many of them there was one option, and that was Iran," says Hayyim, whose life story explains much of the connection between the Iranian and Iraqi communities. "We were Iraqis for many generations, maybe four or more, but before that, my family came from Iran. My dad had a Persian passport, which

---

<sup>37</sup> See especially tables 2,5: Abbas Shibliak, *Iraqi Jews: A History of the Mass Exodus* (London: Saqi, 2005), 33–54.

<sup>38</sup> For a fascinating account of the Farhud and occurrences that followed it, see: Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq*, 2012, 112–140; Dallalfar, "Iraqi Jews in Iran"; David Sitton, *Sephardi Communities Today* (Jerusalem: Council of Sephardi and Oriental Communities, 1985), 42–45.

later got us into trouble in Iraq.”<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Hayyim’s father carried a Persian [Iranian] passport as a memento of the long Iranian-Iraqi Jewish connection. Hayyim’s story tells us about a circular movement between Iran and Iraq that had happened for many generations. In the nineteenth century, Iranian Jews migrated to Iraq for many reasons, including seminary studies and the pursuit of business opportunities living among the most flourishing and dominant Jewish community in the Middle East. Passports had just been instituted at that time, and their significance was much less than would be the case in later decades. However, the Jews of Iranian descent kept their Iranian passports and maintained ties with the communities across the border.

The wave of immigrants from Iraq was far from homogeneous. Thousands of Jews came from Iraq to Iran on their way to Israel/Palestine because of the transition camps in Iran operated by the Jewish Agency, the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee (the JDC) and other Jewish relief organizations. Jewish immigrants stayed in the transition camps for long periods of time, sometimes up to two years, depending on the efficiency of the agencies’ collaboration with the British mandate government in Palestine.<sup>40</sup> For some Jews, this was the second migration in their lifetimes. Between 1924 and 1928 Russian Jewish refugees arrived in Iraq, seeking relief from persecution in Europe. Some of them fled to Iran after the 1941 pogroms in Baghdad.<sup>41</sup> Mania Fanahi, for example, was a Russian Jew who migrated to Iraq in the 1920s and then to Iran in the

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Hayyim, 25 June 2013. Hayyim is in his 70s today, and lives in North America.

<sup>40</sup> Documents from JDC Archives show the story of the Iraqi refugees in Iran

<sup>41</sup> Shohet, *Sipurah Shel Golah : Perakim Be-Toldot Yahadut Bavel Le-Doroteha*, 141.

1940s. In Iran she settled and married an Iranian man. She carried a bottle of poison ready to use in case she was forced to return to Iraq.<sup>42</sup> In any case, many Iraqi Jews chose to stay in Iran with their relatives, mainly in the borderland between Basra and Abadan. Another group of the Jewish Iraqi immigrants was made up of Jews who had immigrated to Israel, failed to adjust, and returned to Iran.

One example of this wave is Hayyim's family: "Many Jews left [Iraq] in 1941, but most of them left later, around 1948 as part of an agreement between Israel, Britain, and Iraq. They were free to leave but had to leave all their belongings behind," says Hayyim. The Iraqi and Iranian Jewish communities were intertwined for so long that many Jews of Iranian descent had lived in Iraq for generations:

We stayed in Baghdad until 1952, when we first moved to Israel. My father did not succeed in business and he said: 'I have a Persian passport, and I just want to get out.' He renewed his passport in the Iranian embassy in Istanbul; he then left for Tehran and felt like it was Baghdad. There was already a large Jewish Iraqi community. The first night he went to a hotel, and the next morning he went to the bazaar where he met a Jewish Iraqi. He immediately invited my father to stay with him in his apartment and after a few months we joined him.<sup>43</sup>

Daud also arrived with his family in Iran, but came earlier, following the *Farhud*:

My family moved to Iran in 1942. Most of them were from Baghdad and some were from Basra. We first arrived in Khurramshahr [in the Persian Gulf]. My

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Hayyim, 25 June 2013.



great grandfather (on my mother's side) arrived in the region in the 1920s when it was ruled by Shaykh Khaz'al, and he became friends with him. In Basra we had an import/export business so we knew the area well, and then we settled in Abadan.<sup>44</sup>

The circumstances under which the Iraqi immigrants came to Iran left a profound mark on their behavior, as individuals and as a community. The representation of Iran as a temporary shelter recurred during interviews with the Iraqi migrants to Iran. While they appreciated their situations and flourished in Iran, the gravity of the circumstances under which they arrived in Iran remained evident in their lives, especially among the first-generation migrants and the parents' generation, as Hayyim recounts:

We never felt this is our country. Because we got hurt in our homeland, Iraq, we always lived for the moment. We didn't invest in property, because we saw that in a case of emergency it gets stuck, and may leave us behind or been left behind. Many of us lived lavishly [spent money on parties, travels abroad, tuition to the best schools], and wired every extra penny to London. The Persians were the exact opposite. They didn't care for London or America. They cared only for Iran and kept all their money there.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Daud, 25 June 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Hayyim, 25 June 2013.

This observation of Hayyim is essential to understanding the dominant mindset among the native Iranian Jews. They viewed Iran as the facilitator of their amassing of wealth. Iranian Jews felt deeply for Iran and did not want to leave it, or to invest elsewhere.<sup>46</sup>

By 1951 the Iraqi Jewish population in Iran comprised 15,000 people and was a “minority within a minority.”<sup>47</sup> The Iraqi Jews in Iran developed a hybrid identity that was a result of preserving their Arab culture and language and taking advantage of skills, education, and vocations they brought from Iraq, especially in the commercial realm. There were cultural tensions between the native Jewish Iranians and the Iraqi immigrants. The Iranian Jews addressed the Iraqis as the “Arabs,”<sup>48</sup> and the Iraqis called their Iranian coreligionists the “’Ajams,”<sup>49</sup> as was the long-held tradition. Despite the labeling of Ajams versus Arabs, the distinction was not as clear for individual families. During the interview something interesting happened. To verify a few facts Daud called his father. As I overheard the conversation I realized they used Arabic and Persian interchangeably, pronouncing Arabic words in an Iraqi accent, and the Persian ones in a flawless Persian

---

<sup>46</sup> This view was at the center of an ideological struggle with the Zionist movement in Iran and opened the option to interpret Zionism in different ways. This will be discussed broadly in chapter 3 and 5.

<sup>47</sup> Dallalfar, “Iraqi Jews in Iran,” 277.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> More on cultural aspects of the usage of “Arabs” vs. “Ajam,” see: Chehabi, “Iran and Iraq: Intersocietal Linkages and Secular Nationalisms”; Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, trans. Samuel Thrope (New York, NY: Restless Books, 2013).

accent. This conversation exemplifies the cultural hybridism in which they lived and created. “We had much more in common with the Arabs in Abadan than with the Persian Jews,” says Daud. “We spoke Arabic at home, we shared the same background, the same language, and we bonded on that basis. They [the Arabs] too suffered from the chauvinistic nationalist Persian approach and were ill-treated.”<sup>50</sup> This problematic relationship with the Iranian Jewish community prompted the Iraqis to develop more separate community institutions in the post-war years.

### **Safe Havens: WWII Migrants and Refugees in Iran**

A significant and much larger influx of Christian and Jewish migrants arrived in Iran between 1941 and 1943. In 1939 the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression accord, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.<sup>51</sup> This agreement marks the beginning of WWII in Europe and had tremendous influence on Europe and specifically on Poland, and, as we soon will see, the Middle East. One of this agreement’s clauses divided Poland into two spheres of influence: a German zone and a Soviet zone.

Following the invasion of Poland, the Soviets sought to politically transform the local population; the first step toward “Sovietization” was the expulsion of “Anti-Soviet elements,” such as political opponents, the bourgeoisie, and the economic elite, from the

---

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Daud, 25 June 2013.

<sup>51</sup> More on Molotov-Ribbentrop and its effect on the occupation of Poland, see: Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*, Harvard University Press, First edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 59–93.

Soviet zone.<sup>52</sup> The Russian plan sent nearly 1.7 million people, many of the intellectual and wealthy classes, to Siberia. Overall, the Soviets were suspicious of anyone who amassed wealth or held significant property. Beyond the criteria of “class enemy,” which served as pretext to expel large numbers of the local elites, the Soviets sought to make use of the confiscated lands, produce, and animals.<sup>53</sup> By 1941 almost half of the Polish exiles died in the gulags. In June 1941 Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, in the now infamous Operation Barbarossa, ending the 1939 agreement. Following this invasion, Stalin joined Britain against the Axis countries and the new alliance began planning the invasion of Iran. Together with the British government, the exiled Polish cabinet, based in London, engineered a plan to support the British war effort. The plan allowed the exiled Polish citizens to leave Siberia and settle in Iran and conscripted the healthy and capable men among them into the Polish Anders Army under British

---

<sup>52</sup> NKVD Instructions on “Anti-Soviet Elements” in: *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> Most of the deportees were ethnic Poles, but others included: Ukrainians, Belorussians Lithuanians, and other Polish groups. Among them were some 80,000 Jews from the Soviet territories of Poland and Ukraine. Twenty percent were Jews that fled the Nazi occupied zone *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004), 3–5.

command.<sup>54</sup> This was the background of a highly significant wave of migration that Iran absorbed from 1941 to 1943. Among the Polish refugees were thousands of Jews; notably there were more than 700 Jewish orphans who came to be known in Hebrew as “Yaldei Tehran” (the children of Tehran).<sup>55</sup> One of them was Simon Rosenthal, a Swiss-born Jewish orphan who stayed in Iran and became Simon Farzami, a prominent journalist in one of Iran’s most important newspapers, *Ittila'at*, and editor of the Iranian French news agency *Frans-Pars*.<sup>56</sup>

There were other implications to the sudden entrance of Iran to the war. The deposing of Reza Shah signaled the dawn of what came to be known as the “Liberal Age”

---

<sup>54</sup> Civilians were transferred to many other locations as well. Lebanon, India, territories in Africa, New Zealand, and Mexico were among the other places to welcome Polish refugees. *The Polish Deportees of World War II*.

<sup>55</sup> There is much written on Yalédi Tehran, so this part of the story is familiar to some extent to the general reader. It could be speculated that this story is known because of the role it plays in the greater Zionist story. Most of the orphans were treated by Jewish and Zionist organization and the overwhelming majority of them were transferred to Palestine/Israel shortly after their arrival in Tehran.

<sup>56</sup> Jaleh Pirnazar, “Yahudiyan-i Iran, huvviyyat-i milli va ruznamihnihari,” in *Yahudiyan-i Irani Dar Tarikh-i mu'asir*, ed. Homa Sarshar (Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2000), 33.

in Iran.<sup>57</sup> After almost two decades of iron-fisted rule by Reza Shah (1925-1941), great social, cultural, and political transformations were given the space to flourish. The presence of over one million recent arrivals, including the Allied troops, migrants, and refugees in Iran surely helped the transformation unfold more broadly and quickly.<sup>58</sup>

Immediately after signing the resolution, the British and Soviet armies, along with the governments and relief organizations, started arranging the exodus of Poles from Siberia. Wartime was not easy in Iran. There were food shortages and, once in 1942, bread riots erupted in Tehran, but overall the Iranian people generously welcomed the refugees, which was noted by all of the relief organizations. The Christian and Jewish communities established crucial local relief committees to help their coreligionists settle in and adjust. The International Red Cross, the Polish Red Cross, and the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee were authorized by the British and Soviet authorities to work with the refugees. Implementation of the resolution was conditional, not allowing organizations to only assist the refugees who were co-religionists; that is, the Red Cross

---

<sup>57</sup> Homa Katouzian uses this term and I agree with his description. The opening up of the political sphere suits its definition of Liberal Age. Homa Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics* (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Accurate numbers are extremely difficult to obtain. Every state or organization involved in the treatment of the refugees reported different numbers. It varies from 115,000 as the lowest estimate, reported by the Polish Red Cross to 400,000 reported by the Iranian Foreign ministry. The number of troops is estimated by several accounts as 500,000 from the Soviet, American, and British armies.

could not give assistance only to Christians, and the JDC not only to Jews.<sup>59</sup> Refugees arrived in large numbers and exceeded most of the early estimates of the Allies, the Iranian authorities, and the involved relief organizations. The refugees entered Iran through Bandar-i Pahlavi on the Caspian Sea (known today as Bandar-i Anzali). They were welcomed there usually by British officials. In her memoirs, Irena Beaupré-Stankiewicz describes the horrors of the journey from the Soviet territories to Iran, as well as their arrival at Bandar-i Pahlavi:

The port of Pahlavi was an oasis; it was happiness. That same pitiless sun was not so terrible, because there was the sea and palm-leaf mats supported on poles, which gave us shade. We lived under those mats for two weeks, in quarantine. I remember, after leaving the ship, the sympathy on the faces of the British soldiers in charge of the baths. For our first steps on Persian soil led us towards the baths. We washed away the dirt and lice, the last signs of that inhumane land; our rags were taken away and we received clean clothes. The delight of sea bathing, the pleasure of eating our fill, peace, rest, the wonderful feeling that there was nothing to threaten us: here in Pahlavi we were on the road to restored health, a renewal of soul and body, that road, in the end, led me to Isfahan.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> “Letter to Mr. Pearlstein,” March 8, 1943, 1933/44/712, JDC; There is also documentation of the JDC involvement in Lend-Lease policy, as a circular dealing in regard to the refugees. For example see: “Letter to George T. Washington Esq.,” June 25, 1944, 1933/44/712, JDC.

<sup>60</sup> Beaupré-Stankiewicz, Waszczuk-Kamieniecka, and Lewicka-Howells, *Isfahan- City of Polish Children*, 63.

The Iranians were generally happy to help the refugees, and all noticed their hospitality.<sup>61</sup> Stanisawa Jutrzenka- Trzebiatowska, one of the Polish refugees who came to Iran from the Soviet Union right before Easter 1942, recounted:

Our arrival in Tehran was full of surprises because it was Good Friday prior to Easter. All kinds of cakes, as well as hard-boiled eggs in great baskets had been brought in large quantities to both the enormous barracks and the air-force buildings. These had been vacated to us—homeless and hungry people. As we made our way through the streets of the town, the Persians threw bunches of flowers from balconies into the trucks, accentuating the friendly welcome. It was not surprising, therefore, that there were tears of emotions and joy, discreetly wiped away, in that pleasant, friendly atmosphere.<sup>62</sup>

The Iranian authorities, however, were not always informed regarding the unfolding developments. As early as March 1942, the estimates of the number of refugees needing to be resettled seemed inaccurate. In one week (March 27- April 3) more than 40,000 refugees arrived at Bandar-i Pahlavi.<sup>63</sup> This number, for example, was initially the

---

<sup>61</sup> In many reports on the refugees we can see appreciation for the Iranian hospitality.

While there were tensions between the different groups of the refugees (Ethnic tensions, Anti-Semitic events) the Natives were singled out for their good support.

<sup>62</sup> *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 115.

<sup>63</sup> “makatib-i safir-i inglis dar tihran, vizaratkhanah-i umur-i kharijah, ustandar-i khurasan va nukhust vazir dar khusus-i vurud-i muhajirin-i lahistani az shuravi bih iran,” Mohammad Hosein Salehi Maram, *Asnadi Az Ishghal-i Iran Dar Jang-i Jahani-i Duvvum*



estimated total of all the refugees that were expected to enter Iran. The Jewish community in Tehran quickly established a Jewish relief committee that genuinely reflected the changing tapestry of the local Jewish community. The members were local Iranians like Loghman Nahorai, prominent Iraqi Jews like Sasson A. Kashi, Chaseri Bachash, and Salem Moshy, and even included Ashkenazi representation by Mr. and Mrs. Hirsch Sand.<sup>64</sup>

One of the soldiers/refugees who came to Iran during this time was Roman. Roman was born in Poland in 1924, not far from the German border. In 1940, at the age of 16, he escaped to the Soviet part of Poland and was promptly arrested for not having Soviet citizenship. “I was sent to a Gulag in Siberia because of not having Soviet citizenship, and after a year or so, it was not clear what was going to happen next.”<sup>65</sup> Following the announcement on the establishment of Anders Army, Roman decided to join the army, as a means of rescue:

In 1941 I was a year too old to be counted among the orphans [Yaldei Tehran] and too young to join the Polish army. I arrived to Tashkent and caught the

---

(“makatib-i safir-i inglis dar tihran, vizaratkhanah-i umur-i kharijah, ustandar-i khurasan va nukhust vazir dar khusus-i vurud-i muhajirin-i lahistani az shuravi bih iran,”

Mohammad Hosein Salehi Maram, *Asnadi Az Ishghal-i Iran Dar Jang-i Jahani-i Duvvum* (markaz-i pazhuhish va asnad-i riyasat-i jumhuri, riyasat-i jumhuri 2011), 301.

<sup>64</sup> “Report on Visit to Bagdad and Teheran. Nov 2-9, 1942,” n.d., 1933/44/712, JDC

This report mentions the involvement of wealthy and generous Iraqi Jews, and the Ashkenzi origins of Mr. and Mrs. Hirsch Sand is assumed because of the name.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Roman, 15 July 2013.

typhus; I lost weight but made myself look healthier when it was my turn to appear in front of the military committee. We had to pass two committees: a Polish and a Soviet. Being a Jew did not help me much in the process, and I was rejected twice. The third time I got there they told me: 'Jew, you are lucky. We are leaving for Persia tonight.' When we arrived to the shores of the Caspian Sea we saw stores with food products. We gave military equipment in exchange for foodstuff and flour. I, for example, found a kilo of margarine and ate it all at once. I passed out immediately.<sup>66</sup>

A few days later Roman woke up in Dr. Sapir's hospital in Tehran: "I later learned that they first sent me to a military hospital, but after being bathed by the nurses they noticed I was a Jew [because of the circumcision] and they transferred me to the Jewish hospital. There were many Poles and Jews there." After recovering, Roman joined the Polish Anders Army.<sup>67</sup> The Anders Army had about 115,000 soldiers, 4,500 of whom were Jews. One of this army's most notable alumni is Menachem Begin, who would be Israel's Prime Minister.

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Anders Army relied on Polish refugees to whom Stalin granted amnesty in 1941.

General Andres led the troops under the command of the British Army. Anders Army was meant to fight the new fronts in the Middle East and North Africa but ultimately had almost no part in combat. Interview with Roman, 15 July 2013.



Illustration 1: Polish Refugee. Abolqasem Jala, 1943.<sup>68</sup>

In the middle of 1942, more than 100,000 Polish refugees already lived in Iran, most in Tehran and Isfahan; 13,000 of these were children, primarily orphans.<sup>69</sup> The Polish and the British administrators decided to send them to a place with a better climate and air quality than Siberia, such as Isfahan, to regain their health. The Christian religious establishment provided essential care for the children, and it is possible that Isfahan was chosen because of the well-developed network of Presbyterian and Catholic missionaries that existed there alongside the thriving Christian Armenian community. In a short time

---

<sup>68</sup> Parisa Damandan, *Portrait Photographs from Isfahan: Faces in Transition, 1920-1950* (London : The Hague: Saqi ; Prince Claus Fund Library, 2004), 202.

<sup>69</sup> This number only includes children under the age of fourteen and those who were not part of any boarding or military schools.

“Polish Isfahan” came into being with more than twenty Polish establishments such as schools, Polish scouts, choirs, and churches.<sup>70</sup> The children, it seems, thought of Isfahan as their home. In her diaries Irena Beaupre-Stankiewicz recollects:

We left there [school field trip] at six a.m. and already at about 11 o’clock we welcomed, with a loud and happy shout the sight of the majestic silhouette of Kuh-Sofo. “Oh Isfahan... Oh Isfahan!” We were so happy to come back home. For so long Isfahan had been a home to us, that in the end it truly is our home.<sup>71</sup>

The vast majority of them left Isfahan in 1945, following the end of the war. Given this optimistic view of Isfahan and the sense of security these Polish children had at the time it is understandable how difficult it might have been to leave the city only a few years later. Again, Irena recounts the heartbreaking event of leaving Isfahan, as it was for many of the other children:

I finally left Isfahan on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1945. The last day was not pleasant or happy, merely very sad. My nerves let me down completely, and everything else as well—I had a fever, headache, and physically and mentally worn out [...] in front of the branch office they loaded us onto a lorry in record time, there was not a moment to say goodbye properly in the confusion; we had our last look at Kuh-Sofo, at the blue domes, the green trees of Chahar Bagh, and it was over. Isfahan

---

<sup>70</sup> Beaupré-Stankiewicz, Waszczuk-Kamieniecka, and Lewicka-Howells, *Isfahan- City of Polish Children*, 122–142.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

was behind us, a long (when one is young, everything seems long) three year period of life rich in experiences and attainments.<sup>72</sup>

The British army's trucks transported the majority of refugees from Bandar-e Pahlavi to Tehran. In Tehran they were initially placed in former military camps, which now became refugee camps. Being settled in refugee camps did not deter the new arrivals. Stanislaw Milewski recalled, "I remember that we were warmly greeted by the Persian people with gifts of food, dates, and clothes. We were simply amazed by the sight of smiling people and a bustling city full of open shops and traffic."<sup>73</sup> The plan was to house them in the outskirts of the city, thus allowing the relief organizations and the military commanders better control over the refugees who might morally corrupt the local population with their habits and leisure activities that involved, among other things, consumption of alcohol and dancing.<sup>74</sup> Refugees found ways around these rules, however: "To get outside the camp we needed a pass, often however we managed to get out through the holes in the fence," says Stanislaw Milewski.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, part of the agreement was that the Polish government would maintain only refugees who lived in the refugee camp and provide them with housing, food, clothing, and cash allowance.<sup>76</sup> Only

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>73</sup> The Polish Deportees of World War II, 105.

<sup>74</sup> "Sanad-i shumarah 25/2," Maram, Asnadi Az Ishghal-i Iran Dar Jang-i Jahani-i Duvvum, 303.

<sup>75</sup> The Polish Deportees of World War II, 106.

<sup>76</sup> "Report on Visit to Bagdad and Teheran. Nov 2-9, 1942."

a short time had passed until the refugees started to leave the camps and moved into the cities. After all, following two years in Soviet gulags and a tough journey to Iran, they now had better control of their lives.<sup>77</sup> It is not hard to imagine what such an influx of migrants (in addition to many other foreigners) could do to a city, such as Tehran, which at that time was still, to a large extent, underdeveloped. Given their high—almost aristocratic—social status prior to the forced exile, the Polish refugees expected certain amenities from their new town of residence.

Contemporary writers accounts reveal the Poles' development of a distinct culture, through community centers, libraries, factories, and places of leisure like restaurants, bars, cabarets, and beauty salons. In fact, some of the younger generation adamantly looked for a way out of the refugee camps. In a report written following a visit to the refugee camp in Dawshan-Tappah, an Iranian Jewish community leader vehemently complained about the immorality of some “young women” who became waitresses and bar maids, despite coming from respectable families.<sup>78</sup> The same sense of immorality existed for some time among other Iranian observers; however, shortly afterward, the Iranian urban elites began to adopt some of the leisure activities the Polish refugees had brought with them.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> The hardships of the exile are described in details here: Beaupré-Stankiewicz, Waszczuk-Kamieniecka, and Lewicka-Howells, *Isfahan- City of Polish Children*.

<sup>78</sup> “Report on Visit to Bagdad and Teheran. Nov 2-9, 1942.”

<sup>79</sup> Karimi and Karimi’s article depicts the internal discourse in Iran regarding the influx of the refugees. Such documents, unfortunately, have not been available for this research, therefore Karimi and Karimi’s view is unique and eye-opening. This article dedicates a

The new business and cultural endeavors served not only the Polish refugee community but also a myriad of soldiers and military personnel. In his memoirs 'Abd al-Rahim Ja'fari, a prominent Iranian publisher and intellectual, recalled scenes in which Polish widows and younger women “go around with” American and British soldiers in the areas of cafes and cabarets. He also pointed out the Iranian nationalists’ critical view of the moral depravity of these activities.<sup>80</sup> In downtown wartime Tehran, in a basement that houses a chocolate factory today, was “Polonia”, a bar where Allied service men mingled with Polish girls. Not far from there, behind the British embassy, Polish prostitutes attracted clients in the alley.<sup>81</sup> Cafés, ballets, and theatres surfaced in Tehran from the 1920s, and non-Muslim Iranians, mostly Armenians, overwhelmingly dominated their development. This urban transformation of Tehran as a city connected to the Pahlavi vision of the capital. However, the emergence of cabarets as a phenomenon

---

seven-page discussion to the economic impact of the refugees on Iran. For more see: 'Ali-Reza Karimi and Sayyid-'Ali Karimi, “Lahistaniha-yi muhajir dar iran, Tarikh-i Mu'asir-i Iran,” *Tarikh mu'asir Iran* 3, no. 9 (1999-2000 1379): 15–22.

<sup>80</sup> 'Abd al-Rahim Ja'fari, *Dar justuju-yi subh: khatirat-i 'Abd al-Rahim Ja'fari, bunyanguzar-i mu'assisah-i Intisharat-i Amir Kabir*. (Tihran: Ruzbihan, 2004), 228.

<sup>81</sup> Although most Polish refugees were of high classes, some of them were poor and especially after the arrival in Tehran engaged in prostitution. From other accounts I gather that many of the European prostitutes were Russian rather than Polish.

“Washingtonpost.com: Forgotten Polish Exodus to Persia,” accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/polsirn.htm>.

resulted from the social and cultural transformations following Iran's involvement in WWII.<sup>82</sup>

Joel Sayre, a member of the American forces that participated in the Persian Gulf Command, wrote about the Polish community in Tehran. According to his description, while many Polish men joined the British army and deployed to other theatres of war, the women stayed in Tehran and ran businesses and pursued other opportunities, some of which helped to develop the cosmopolitan environment that characterized the city by the late 1940s. For example, Polish women famously opened a doll factory; others opened successful and popular beauty salons that catered mostly to Iranian women.

In one of these instances, Sayre describes an incident in which an Iranian policeman wanted to confiscate a beauty salon owned by four Polish women because of the questionable legality of the business and the women's migration status. One of the salon's Iranian clients helped the women to understand the basis of the claims. The four women who ran the parlor took advantage of Muslim Iranian law which allows a man to marry up to four women and they all married a young Iranian bachelor and legalized the business immediately. The parlor, according to Sayre, grew more prosperous than ever before.<sup>83</sup> The story exemplifies the cultural fusion or comingling of the period.

After the WWII era, Iranian intellectuals continued to explore the Polish past of the country, or the role played by Iran in the war. In the 1983 film *Lost Requiem*, Khosrow Sinai, an Iranian documentary director traces the legacy of Polish life in Iran

---

<sup>82</sup> Ida Meftahi, "Body National in Motion: The Biopolitics of Dance in the Twentieth-Century Iran" (University of Toronto, 2013), 12.

<sup>83</sup> Joel Sayre, *I Served in the Persian Gulf Command* (Isfahan, 1945), 5–6.



during that period. He adds to our understand of how the Polish women were viewed at the time: “Polish maids were sought by well-to-do Iranian ladies who wanted to learn makeup and Western fashions from their servants, who often had better backgrounds and education than the employers themselves.”<sup>84</sup> This documentary follows the footsteps of the refugees around the country; for example, Sinai visits the Campolo district in Ahvaz—the name is short for Camp Polonia. The documentary depicts “the destiny of Polish people in Iran; how they arrived, how they lived, how they died, how they married, and where they left to... And, now, what has remained from them, and what they remember from Iran and Iranians. And, then: What they don’t remember, what they wanted to forget; what their children know about them, and what they don’t want to know!”<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> “Washingtonpost.com: Forgotten Polish Exodus to Persia.”

<sup>85</sup> Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 4 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 34.



Illustration 2: Polish refugees. Abolqasem Jala, 1942.

By March of 1943 there were approximately 150,000 Polish refugees in Iran, and the influx continued.<sup>86</sup> The JDC envoy reported some 1,800 Jews among the Poles and an unknown number of Jews who were not registered as such on March 8th.<sup>87</sup> The

---

<sup>86</sup> As both Iranian and JDC documents show, the Polish representative in Russia and the Russian forces administering this operation on the Russian side had no clear idea of how many refugees and Polish military personnel were still to cross the border to Iran. In some instances the crews on the Iranian side had to deal with sudden arrival of thousands of refugees a day when they expected none. Karimi and Karimi, “Lahistaniha-yi muhajir dar iran,” 12–13.

<sup>87</sup> “Letter to Mr. Pearlstein.”

JDC contingency in Iran still expected to transfer some 5,000 Jews recently rescued from Nazi occupied Bulgaria and the Balkan states.<sup>88</sup> In fact, the Jewish authorities knew very little in regard to what to expect. In an internal report they wrote:

The presence of 1,800 Jewish refugees in Teheran, 75% of whom are certificated for Palestine, is in itself not a serious problem. The hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees still in Russia- whether they remain there or eventually are evacuated- this is the problem. While there are fairly reliable estimates of the number of Polish refugees still in Russia 200,000-300,000 of whom are preponderant majority is in southern Asiatic Russia (Turkestan).<sup>89</sup>

Most of the Jews were in transition to Palestine as part of a three-way collaboration between the JDC, the Polish Red Cross, and the British government, which issued visas to the Palestine-bound migrants.<sup>90</sup> The rest of the refugees, however, prepared for a long stay in Iran. The terms of their stay were not entirely clear, and their status in their newly imposed homeland was constantly negotiated. Amidst the available solutions for the refugees, a growing number of them decided to work toward making Iran their permanent country of residence.

While accurate numbers are hard to obtain, partial reports from all of the organizations involved are available. For example, in March 1943 word reached JDC

---

<sup>88</sup> "Memorandum," February 11, 1943, 1933/44/712, JDC.

<sup>89</sup> "Report on Visit to Bagdad and Teheran. Nov 2-9, 1942."

<sup>90</sup> "Letter from Henriette K. Buchman to Isaac B. Seligson," April 2, 1943, 1933/44/712, JDC.

headquarters that out of 500 [Polish] Jews surveyed in Tehran “about 50 of the refugees have established themselves and were seeking permission to remain in Persia.”<sup>91</sup> This data suggests that approximately ten percent of the Polish Jewish refugees may have wished to stay in Iran instead of taking advantage of the opportunity to move to Palestine. A similar ratio among non-Jews would have meant that 10,000 to 40,000 refugees may have sought settlement in Iran.

In the 2007 documentary *My Iranian Paradise*, director Katia Forbert Petersen, who is the daughter of a Danish engineer and a Polish refugee, goes back to her childhood community in Tehran.<sup>92</sup> She was born after WWII in Denmark but grew up in Tehran in the environment that was created by these refugees. This film visits her parents’ friends who married Iranians, settled in Tehran, and never left. These immigrants talk about the cultural life they created there and the fact that Iran has been their home and their safe place. Petersen herself left Iran in her twenties after the 1979 revolution. An AP reporter who also visited survivors of this community tells about a meeting with Anna Borkowska, one of the Polish refugees. Especially interesting is the depiction of her living room—a cheap piano on which she played Polish songs, a pile of Polish magazines, and the photos on display present Ayatullah Khomeini, the Polish Pope John

---

<sup>91</sup> “Letter from Harry Viteles to American Joint Distribution Committee,” March 29, 1943, 1933/44/712, JDC.

<sup>92</sup> Katia’s mother arrived to Tehran in 1942, through Bandar-i Pahlavi and joined Anders’ Army. This film depicts beautifully the story of the Polish refugees through the horrors of Siberia, the journey to Iran, the tragedies, and the eventual settling in Iran. *My Iranian Paradise*, Denmark 2007.

Paul II, and portraits of Jesus and Mary. The choice of pictures and images presents the range of identities she (and her personal history) contained.<sup>93</sup>

One more example of the temporary integration of Polish and other European refugees and immigrants comes from *Portrait Photographs from Isfahan*. This album documents the development of studio photography in Isfahan in the twentieth century. Among the hundreds of portraits from the city, about two dozen individual and family portraits stand out. In those photos we see Polish and Russian immigrants in school, scouts, homes, and clubs. The photographer documented Russian prostitutes and captured some of the cultural scene that emerged around the immigrants' presence in Isfahan.<sup>94</sup> It is compelling to argue that finding the Poles, Russians, and other nationals as subjects of photography that took place during wartime in Iran perpetuated their impact on their surrounding and renders the place they occupied in the perception of local Iranians, as being part of the cities' changing views.

In 1945, after the war ended, most of the refugees left Iran. Some returned to Poland, while others planned to begin their lives elsewhere, whether in South Africa, New Zealand, or Latin American countries. A minority decided to stay in Iran and rebuild their lives in the country that rescued them twice: once from the horrors of the Nazis, and a second time, from the hardships and horrors of the Soviet Gulags.

---

<sup>93</sup> "Washingtonpost.com: Forgotten Polish Exodus to Persia."

<sup>94</sup> Parisa Damandan, *Portrait Photographs from Isfahan: Faces in Transition, 1920-1950* (London: The Hague: Saqi; Prince Claus Fund Library, 2004).

## Conclusions

While the 20<sup>th</sup> century is largely perceived as the age in which the minorities in the Middle East diminished (especially after WWII), this chapter demonstrates the radical difference in the Iranian case.<sup>95</sup> Following Iran's involuntarily involvement in the war and the turmoil in other countries in the region, the minority communities changed dramatically. They grew and became more diverse than ever before and they saw increasing involvement of foreign organizations, such as the JDC and different missionary branches. This influx of migrants and refugees changed and facilitated urban transformation, especially in Tehran and Isfahan. The presence of military personnel, and refugees from different regions (in Europe and the Middle East) influenced the minority communities and made long-lasting impacts on them and the rest of Iranian society. Europeans were present in Iran in large numbers during the reign of Reza Shah as well, as they were involved in the infrastructure projects. In this case, however, they were concentrated mostly in remote areas and developed distinctive culture that was visible, as

---

<sup>95</sup> For example see Kedourie's assessment of minorities under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and after its demise and the emergence of the nation-states. . Elie Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 309–316 Also consider the almost complete obliteration of Jewish communities across the Middle East post 1948. The Jewish population in Morocco, numbered at more than 250,000 in the early 1940s is estimated at 3,000-4,000 after 1956. Other countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, and Syria had much smaller number of Jews remained after 1948. .

shown by Hamid Naficy, but did not trickle to the big cities, as happened later with the refugees and the military personnel.

This chapter also elaborated on the role Iran played during the war, usually characterized as a passive one. While major powers did not always consult the Iranian government or the society itself on significant issues—such as allowing a great number of refugees in, or directing resources for war efforts, both Iranian officials and common people usually were welcoming and understanding of the unique circumstances that brought them all to Iran.

### Chapter 3: Minority Identities and the Iranian Political Sphere

This chapter examines the political basis and paradigms in which Jews participated in the public sphere beginning with the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 and carrying the analysis on through the Pahlavi period. I examine three main political organizations in which Jews participated: The communist Tudeh party, which was a political home to Jews as well as other minorities, especially Armenians; the National Front, which invited all Iranians to take part in the ongoing discussion on Iran's national interests and national character; and Zionist movements. This chapter examines Zionism as a possible radical option for Iranian Jews. Many scholars and writers of Jewish-Iranian history, such as Habib Levy, Meir Ezri, Haim Tsadok, and others, have attributed Zionism to Iranian Jews before but without dismantling and questioning the different interpretations and definitions of Zionism.

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 popularized the notion of a public political sphere in Iran in many ways. It created a new notion of citizenship, granted the minorities elected representation, and released them from the nominal dependency on the shah (the Qajars, at the time) to protect their rights and communities. Subsequently, minority communities became increasingly politicized. Electing nominees, conducting selections and election procedures, submitting petitions, and contributing to the definition of Iranian national identity—all came out of the revolution and the accompanying political process. As in many other places, in the Middle East and elsewhere (especially Europe),<sup>96</sup> minorities supported parties, usually with community or radical leftist

---

<sup>96</sup> For references on Jews' support of communist parties in the Middle East see: Bashkin, *New Babylonians*; Sami Michael, *Gevulot Ha-Ruah: Šiḥot 'im Rubīḳ Rozeṇal*, Kay



affiliations that tried to eliminate the role of ethnic or religious identities in articulating the national one.

The constitutional revolution, the last nail in the Qajar coffin, symbolized the lost power of the dynasty and the infiltration of modern political ideas regarding state, citizenship, and nationalism. These notions were to varying degree of European origins, but also took root in nearby nations, like Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt, for that matter. While the revolution empowered Iranian citizens, and for the first time granted representation in a parliamentary system, it was still in most ways an undelivered political promise.

Following this period of opening and experimentation, which was in turn followed by a decade of political strife and instability, in 1921-1925 Reza Khan established his dynasty with clear ideas about the progress and modernization he wished for his country. He removed anything that stood in his way, including political opposition, beginning an iron-fist rule that lasted nearly twenty years. In 1941, after Reza Shah's abdication, the political sphere experienced new freedoms, including freedoms of organization for the communist party, for example, which was deprived of such a right before. The political sphere in Iran diversified into a wide array of ideas ranging from fascist ideologies to communism. Nazi propaganda, which served as a pretext for the Allied occupation, continued to thrive in the margins of the discourse.

---

Adom (Tel-Aviv: ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad, 2000); Ginat, *A History of Egyptian Communism*; Also, about general tendencies of minorities to support leftist political organizations, see: Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

### **The Tudeh Party: The Party of Minorities**

Proto-Communist endeavors appeared in Iran at the turn of the twentieth century, but they were minor and scattered. Most disappeared during the reign of Reza Shah, when governmental suppression left little room for political discourse or activity. Official government mechanisms dictated new codes that nurtured state ideals and banned large parts of the political spectrum. Of all political groups, the Communist factions probably suffered most under this system.

Reza Shah viewed Communism as a major threat to the monarchy and to the social order he tried to instill. Therefore, he forcefully fought any attempt to establish a Communist party or organizations sympathetic to Communism. The foreign political influences that came with the emerging Cold War were also critically important. He also adopted the ‘Aryan Hypothesis’ as official ideology and moved closer to emerging Fascist forces in Europe—first and foremost in Nazi Germany.<sup>97</sup> The Aryan Hypothesis manifested one sort of Iranian nationalism, one that hardly reflected Iran’s highly diverse society. As part of his policies, Reza Shah revoked school licenses from the Armenians, Azeris, and other linguistic minorities under the pretext of the Iranization of the education system, which in effect meant Persianization. The shah’s notion of a non-inclusive, homogeneous Iranian identity was at odds with any potential notions, that might consider

---

<sup>97</sup> The Aryan Hypothesis is a theory proposed by nineteenth century European philologists. Based on the grammatical structure of the Persian language (and combined with other racial attributes), they concluded that the origins of the Iranian people could be traced back to Indo-European tribes that wandered through those terrains and settled on the Iranian Plateau some 5,000 years ago.

Iran's many ethnic and religious minorities integral parts of the nation. Historian David Yaghoubian analyzes the discourse from within the Armenian Iranian community. Yaghoubian exposes the contradictions of Zohrab Saginian, the Armenian representative to the Majlis (the Iranian parliament):

It was paradoxical that Zohrab was himself an Iranian nationalist. He considered himself an Armenian-Iranian, and was beholden and loyal to the Iranian nation. He was supportive of most of Reza Shah's secularizing reforms as well as his policies to modernize and strengthen Iran... For Zohrab, the nation would only be cohesive when the state recognize and celebrate the contributions and loyalty of its diverse population.<sup>98</sup>

Essentially Zorhab's version of nationalism celebrated the multi-ethnicity of Iran and viewed it as a strength rather than as a weakness, as the shah's nationalism implied.

However, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's ascendance to the throne in 1941 radically changed the political situation. The political vacuum created by the elder Shah's departure, combined with the chaos of wartime, and the lack of effective foreign imposition of a singular political ideology, opened the political spectrum to many, and as a result, a wide spectrum of political parties started to appear. Hundreds of new newspapers, political journals, and pamphlets emerged, as well, heralding the beginning of the 'Liberal Age.' This period saw the beginning of one of the most influential parties

---

<sup>98</sup> David N. Yaghoubian, *Ethnicity, Identity, and the Development of Nationalism in Iran* (Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 196.

in Iranian modern history, the Communist Tudeh Party, which translates as “the party of the masses.”

The Soviets in the north and the British in the south occupied the country and divided into two spheres of influence. As time passed, the Nazi and Fascist threats became more urgent, and based on the nominally simple division of liberal versus Fascist, a new political sphere emerged in Iran. These parties also began to reflect the ethnic and religious diversity of the Iranian population. The Tudeh Party appealed to the anti-Fascist forces in Iran. The local intelligentsia and workers’ unions spearheaded the movement, and indeed many of the minority groups found a political home in the Tudeh Party for years to come. In a short time, Jews and Armenians assumed prominent roles in the party. As historian Ervand Abrahamian mentions, minorities’ massive engagement and the party’s even wider popularity among minorities gained the party the reputation of being the party of Armenians, Jews, and Caucasian émigrés.<sup>99</sup> As was the case in many other countries, minorities found a way to become involved in the nation’s political and social life in communist parties, which at least nominally, adhered to universalist ideologies.

One such moment of involvement occurred in 1946 when oil workers in the Abadan refineries called the first large-scale strike with the active support of the Tudeh party. British officials quickly represented the strike as a “Jewish-communist plot to

---

<sup>99</sup> Abrahamian mentions this reputation because the party's opponents cited it to discredit the organization. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 452.

sabotage the AIOC (Anglo-Iranian Oil Company).”<sup>100</sup> This response illustrates the extent of Jewish (or rather minorities’) involvement in the party’s affairs. The two comments above show an interesting nature of the criticism against the Tudeh; from within Iran and from outside. In order to discredit the party they focused on a visible element that was also understood to be controversial, namely the prominent Jewish presence.

The Tudeh Party was one of the oldest political organization with which Jews sympathized and which they actively supported. Iranian Jewish involvement in leftist parties dates back to the pre-WWII era, when a group of Iranian Jews formed an anti-Fascist front. The Tudeh party vocally opposed Fascism and for years published articles and editorials denouncing Fascist inclinations of nationalist groups in Iranian society, openly criticizing the prevailing anti-Semitic climate in Iran.<sup>101</sup> The Tudeh party’s enduring defense of the Jewish community and its message of equality to all, regardless of ethnic or religious identity or social-economic status, attracted many young Jews from the Iranian middle and lower-middle classes.<sup>102</sup> Iraj Farhoumand, a prominent Jewish Tudeh activist, explained that high Jewish participation in the party was connected to

---

<sup>100</sup> Ministry of Fuel and Power, “Anglo-Iranian Oil Company: Malingering Employees and Labour Disputes,” 1944, FO 371/40158, National Archives; Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2013), 22–3.

<sup>101</sup> Faryar Nikbakht, “Yahudiyan Dar nihzatha Va Ahzab-i Siyasi,” in *Terua*, ed. Homa Sarshar (Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 79–81.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

developments in Europe, Iran's proximity to Russia, and the party's inclusiveness.<sup>103</sup> He mentioned the vast Jewish participation in the 1940s and 1950s, and even tells of Jews who were members of the party's central committee.<sup>104</sup> In those decades many Jews became committed communists for many reasons, not merely because of a strong investment in communist ideology. The specific Iranian context is discussed below, but other global trends played a role as well. First, a generational effect, not exclusively Jewish or minority-related, was a global phenomenon and directly connected to World War II. Tony Judt explains that the image of the victorious Red Army in the war and the brave resistance put up by communist parties seduced and convinced this generation to support communism.<sup>105</sup> Many Jews also felt that the Red Army and Communism saved them from the horrors of the Holocaust. Jews in the Middle East knew about the events of the Holocaust at that point, and combined with the local social promise of equality and creating new secular nationalist societies, the glory of the communist ideology was alluring to them. The second reason is more deeply connected to the region, and occurred a few decades earlier in Europe among European Jewish youth. Communist activism and ideology offered young Jews not only a path to enter the local society as patriots like their

---

<sup>103</sup> Abrahamian mentions the border proximity as well as a factor in the Soviet influence. The Soviets gained influence by supporting rebelling groups against the Iranian central government. Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 386.

<sup>104</sup> Iraj Farhoumand, "Iraniyan-i yahudi va hizb-i tudah-i iran," in *Yahudiyān-i Irāni Dar Tarikh-i mu'asir*, ed. Homa Sarshar (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2000), 119–124.

<sup>105</sup> Judt and Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, 98.

Iranian peers, but also the opportunity to rebel against tradition, tight family structure, and religion. Sami Mikhail, a renowned Israeli- Iraqi novelist who grew up in Iraq and then fled to Iran en-route to Israel, counts the youth rebellion against tradition and patriarchal order as a major reason for Jewish Iraqi youth to support communism, or even to join the party, but he also cites the adventure and the realization that communism was an antidote to fascist and ultra-nationalist tendencies that began to spread in the early 1940s.<sup>106</sup>

Pinhas was born in 1931 to an impoverished lower class family in Hamadan. He had eleven siblings, and went to a Jewish school until 6<sup>th</sup> grade. “I don’t remember if I finished 6<sup>th</sup> grade or left in the middle of it,” says Pinhas. He recollects his first encounter with the Tudeh party:

I left school because we were many children in the house and one income was not enough. I had to get out and earn some money. I had a cart from which I sold anything I could find and a regular spot on the street. Across from where I was standing there was a building with a sign *Hizb-i Tudeh*, so one day after work I walked in. Inside there were many people—young and adults—and there was a tennis table. They invited me in, and I played for a while. After I finished they invited me to stay for a lecture. I started to go there on a regular basis. To play ping-pong and listen to lectures. They talked about equality and basic economy and taught us all the Marxist and leftist ideals. Until this day, almost seventy years later, I still play ping-pong and I still believe in all these ideals.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Michael, *Gevulot Ha-Ruah*, 50–121.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Pinhas, 15 May 2014.

The party's club provided an opportunity for people of all walks of life to socialize and become active, in what they deemed as the mission of their generation. Part of the charm was the opportunity to get to know some of the most influential intellectuals of Iran at that time. Interestingly, another part of the appeal apparently relates to the entertainment opportunities offered by playing ping-pong.

Doctrinally speaking, Tudeh was not a typical communist party. Although secular by nature, it applied religious terminology when needed and lacked some of the communist's most recognizable signifiers; the party's bylaws, for example, never mentioned the famed Marxist slogan "workers of the world- unite,"<sup>108</sup> an omission that arguably points at the party's local national goals, which it prioritized over the grander global scheme. Unlike other communist parties, Tudeh appealed to people of all social classes. Indeed many industrialists and those who in other countries might have been considered bourgeoisie joined the party's highest ranks. The Tudeh party did not emerge out of class struggle, and most of the party's supporters in the early years were indifferent to Marxism, to say the least. As historian of the Iranian left, Sepehr Zabih, remarked:

Up to the dual crisis of Azerbaijan [*sic*] and Soviet Union-Iran relations from 1944 to 1947 it was not, organizationally or ideologically, a true communist party. While it generally supported the Soviets the support was given when the Western countries (led by the United States and Great Britain) fighting Nazism were closely aligned with the Soviet Union and were actively involved in an enormous

---

<sup>108</sup> Iraj Farhoumand, "Iraniyan-i yahudi va hizb-i tudah-i iran," in *Yahudiyan-i Irani Dar Tarikh-i mu'asir*, ed. Homa Sarshar (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2000), 111.



war effort to enable the Soviet Union to resist the Nazi invasion, crush the German war machine, and terminate hostilities in Europe. Thus, supporting Soviet policies at that time could not be equated with espousing Marxism-Leninism.<sup>109</sup> Zabih decouples here any kind of support for the Soviet Union during the war years with dogmatic identification with Marxist theories. The Iranian left demonstrated independent thinking in many other instances and, despite self-identifying as a communist party, paid much more attention to local politics, and prioritized Iran's interest over Soviet interest.<sup>110</sup>

Habib was born in Tehran in the early 1930s and currently lives in North America. He is a former activist who joined the party at the age of 16 and remained an

---

<sup>109</sup> Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran: Ideology, Organisation, and the Soviet Connection* (London; Stanford, Calif.: Croom Helm; Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>110</sup> Tudeh Party underwent several splits over crucial dilemmas. There were instances in which lack of leadership caused incompetence in the local Iranian political sphere. At times, Soviet interests seemed to be prioritized over Iranian interests. However, as both Zabih and Behrooz show, prioritization of Soviet interest was the exception and not the rule. Cosroe Chaqueri, on the other hand, suggests much greater involvement of the Soviets in the making and running of the Tudeh party. Chaqueri backed his research with convincing evidence found in the comintern archives, however, the party underwent several splits over the question of foreign involvement. Cosroe Chaqueri, "Did the Soviets Play a Role in Founding the Tudeh Party in Iran?," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 40, no. 3 (July 1, 1999): 497–528.

active member for more than three decades. His political activity landed him in the Shah's prison a half-dozen times before he left Iran. He says: "I knew nothing about Marx or Marxism when I joined the Tudeh. I joined because this was the only place that they did not call me '*Johud*' (a derogatory name for Jews). I learned Marxism in Qasr prison, shortly after I joined the party." Habib's story is by no means unique. Many minorities joined the party to combat the social exclusion they experienced in their larger societies. "We [the Jews] were attracted to Tudeh in order to become more Iranian, and the Armenians also had cultural ties to Russia (the Soviet Union) so they already recognized the political language," concludes Habib.<sup>111</sup>

David Yaghoubian provides several explanations for the Tudeh appeal among Christians and especially Armenian communities. Referring to Ervand Abrahamian's seminal work, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Yaghoubian mentions Tudeh's commitment to reopen Armenian and Assyrian schools after the 1938 decree.<sup>112</sup> The party also championed other minorities' rights (such as adding another Assyrian Majlis deputy), opposed Reza Shah's policies, and led the movement to offer full citizenship and true equality to ethnic and religious minorities.<sup>113</sup>

Possibly, migrants and refugees from the Soviet Union and Nazi-occupied Europe were more susceptible to adopting radical leftist and Communist politics as a reaction to their experiences of the horrors of the Nazis and Fascists. Moreover, the Soviet Red

---

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Habib, 24 June 2013.

<sup>112</sup> In 1938 Reza Shah issued a decree that shut down community and religious schools. The pretext was standardizing school curricula and creating a unified system.

<sup>113</sup> Yaghoubian, *Ethnicity, Identity, and the Development of Nationalism in Iran*, 202.

Army occupied northern Iran; while attending to the refugees, they may have also provided ideological training. We do know, in fact, that the Soviets were involved in the elections of eight to ten Communist representatives to the Majlis from 1942 to 1948.<sup>114</sup>

The opportunities given to minorities, first by the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), and then with the deposing of Reza Shah (1941), helped them to position themselves as leading figures in their communities and beyond. Armenians, thanks to their professional training obtained in community institutions, assumed leadership positions in the workers' unions, which became a natural base of support for Tudeh in the 1940s and 1950s. When the opportunity arose to voice their protest against the prejudiced tendencies in Iranian society, minorities came together behind the party's leadership. Being the leader of almost all the unions gave the impression of Armenian over-representation in the party. Jewish involvement was prevalent in other fields as well. The education they received in community schools, such as Alliance Israelite Universelle and Ettefaq,<sup>115</sup> enabled them to master needed languages, such as Persian, Arabic, French, and English, and to write eloquently in them. These language skills were put to use in several fields, including international commerce and journalism. Many Jews started writing for the Iranian press and, as a result of their high rate of participation in the field and their tendencies to support the Tudeh party as part of the anti-Fascist, anti-racist

---

<sup>114</sup> The Soviets actively supported and funded candidates to the Majlis and intervened in the elections of the Armenian representative as well. See: Ibid., 198; Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 186.

<sup>115</sup> A detailed discussion about the schools will be brought later on.

front, they positioned themselves as practically exclusive in-house journalists of the party.

The importance of minorities in leadership positions was especially apparent in the output of the party's newspaper. The official newspaper, *Mardum*, published anti-racist editorials and op-eds and had Jewish writers among the regular staff. Shumuel Anvar, a Jewish journalist and Tudeh activist, also established and edited a semi-official weekly newspaper, *Nissan*. Prominent Jewish writers including Ibrahim Faiz-Jav and Muhandes Ibrahim Iran-Mehr contributed to both *Nissan* and *Mardum*.<sup>116</sup> *Nissan* consistently defended minorities' rights. During periods when *Mardum* was banned, it presented the views and opinions of the party's leadership. *Nissan* enjoyed wide exposure and was widely distributed.<sup>117</sup> *Shahbaz* also flew the anti-Fascist flag. Established in 1943 by the prominent intellectual, Zabihullah Safa, *Shahbaz* printed the work of Jewish writers and journalists like Rahim Namvar. He also participated in the Tudeh party and succeeded Safa as editor in 1948. By that time the newspaper had gained a reputation of voicing leftist nationalist opinions. This newspaper aligned itself with Jibhah-i Azadi (The Freedom Front)—a coalition of socialist and nationalist parties and organizations led by the Tudeh party. *Shahbaz* rapidly became one of the most popular newspapers of

---

<sup>116</sup> *Nissan* was not officially connected to the Tudeh party. Its status, as semi-official newspaper, stems from Anvar's proximity to the party's leadership and his ability to communicate their messages efficiently when *Mardum* was censored.

<sup>117</sup> Jaleh Pirnazar, "Yahudiyān-i Iran, huvviyyat-i milli va ruznamahnigari," in *Yahudiyan-i Irani Dar Tarikh-i Mu'asir*, ed. Homa Sarshar (Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2000), 25–26.

its time.<sup>118</sup> *Bani-Adam* was another Tudeh newspaper whose readership was primarily in the Jewish community, and while it is hard to assess its popularity or influence, it is nonetheless worth mentioning.<sup>119</sup>

### **Jibhah-i Milli: The Nationalist Option**

All of these newspapers reflected the high involvement of Iranian Jews in the public and political spheres in Iran. Comprised of activist and progressive factions, the newspapers presented a nationalist ideology that focused on issues such as stabilizing the Iranian government, dealing with the British control of Iranian oil and the highly problematic oil concession. After the war years, another Jewish journalist joined the thriving community of new nationalist newspapers and journals. Mushfiq Hamadani was an educated officer in the Iranian army. In the mid-1940s he became the chief editor of the Iranian daily newspaper *Kayhan*, but in 1949 he left the popular newspaper to start his own venture. Hamadani established the independent journal *Kaviyan*, which quickly became the most ardent supporter of the newly emerged political coalition Jibhah-i milli (The National Front).

The National Front (established 1947) was a broad coalition of left-leaning parties along with right-wing parties and strong religious elements. Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq, a veteran of the Iranian political elite, led the secular wing and nationalist cleric Ayatollah Kashani headed the religious segments. The party gained prominence following the 1949 parliamentary elections. It won only a few seats in the Majlis, but even this result

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 26–27.

<sup>119</sup> Pirnazar, “Yahudiyan-I Iran, huvviyyat-i milli va ruznamahnigari.”

demonstrated the front's pivotal and undeniable impact on political discourse. Hamadani made his journal an avenue through which the National Front could reach a wide readership and gain supporters. In 1951 the Iranian Majlis elected Mosaddeq to be prime minister and subsequently passed the law nationalizing the Iranian oil industry, including its main component the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). When the bill became law, the cover of *Kaviyan* celebrated the law and took some pride in helping win the hearts and minds of the people in this achievement of nationalization. Mosaddeq apparently celebrated *Kaviyan*, too. On his famous trip to the United Nations (with some stops in Europe and Egypt) Mosaddeq took only three journalists with his delegation, one of whom was Mushfiq Hamadani.<sup>120</sup> While *Kaviyan* was the most important media outlet for both the National Front and Mosaddeq, it was not the only newspaper in the Jewish community that actively supported Mosaddeq. *Kaviyan* was not bound to the Jewish community but a second newspaper, *Daniel*, was aimed at a Jewish readership. Jewish journalist Yaaqub Orayan published and edited *Daniel* with the express purpose of deepening Jewish support for the National Front in the Jewish communities.

---

<sup>120</sup> Mushfiq Hamadani, *Khatirat-i Nim-i Qarn-i Ruznamahnigari*, n.d., 276.



Illustration 3: Iran piruz shod- Kaviyan sar buland ast- Iran

won and Kaviyan is proud. Kaviyan newspaper front page following the nationalization bill in the majlis.

At the time, the west portrayed the National Front as a fanatical party; as such, the international community dismissed or overlooked many of its social programs. Because of Mosaddeq's political partnership with Abu al-Qasim Kashani, who was arguably anti-Semitic, no one seriously attempted to examine the base of support for Mosaddeq in the Jewish community or even the state of the relationship of Mosaddeq's Iran with Israel in his years as premier. Hamadani's support of Mosaddeq allowed a wider confidence in the Jewish community in Mosaddeq and his political enterprise. In 1952, when Iran slid into a financial crisis because of the British boycott and sanctions following the nationalization of oil production, Iran sold government bonds in order to operate the AIOC. The Jewish community's leadership decided to deploy all the communities' resources in order to facilitate the nationalization. On February 4, 1952 students from three Jewish schools in Tehran and one from Shiraz participated in a demonstration in Tehran in support of Mosaddeq's government. In his memoirs Hakham Yedidia Shofet, the Chief Rabbi of Iran, provides many details about the Jewish support of Mosaddeq:

Jews of Tehran and other cities that supported the nationalization of the oil industry and Dr. Mosaddeq's policy in implementing the national economy plans, purchased government bonds. This support was even in the levels of school students like Alliance and Koresh that also came to support. Many photos of Jewish student demonstrating in support of the government that were taken in Bahman and Esfand 1330 (February and March 1952) appeared in the country's newspapers.<sup>121</sup>

Shofet added that the community institutions decided that every teacher would contribute 200 Riyals from their salary toward an organized purchase of government bonds. At the same time two of the communities' richest men, Morad Aryeh and Hajji Habib Alqaniyan, announced that they would donate 50 million *Riyals* each toward the purchase. "In those days it was dependent upon the people to prevent the country's bankruptcy. For the homeland and maintaining its independence we must act with speed and dedication."<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Goel Cohen, ed., *Bar bal-i khirad: jami'ah-i yahudiyan-i iran va haftad sal rahbari-yi mazhabi, gam bah gam ba Hakham Yedidiya Shofet Dar Kashan, Tehran, va Los Angeles*. (Los Angeles, CA: The Educational Foundation of Hacham Yedidia Shofet, 2010), 372–373.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 373.





Illustration 4: Students from

Alliance school in Tehran walking in support of Mosaddeq's government and the bond purchasing plan (source: *Bar bal-i khirad*. P.372)

Between August 14 and August 19, 1953, the CIA and MI6 tried multiple times to execute a coup d'état. In those days millions of Iranians took to the streets representing the different parties and organizations active in the country with the National Front and Tudeh Party front and center. The Jewish quarter was also the site of such events.

Ardeshir was born in 1944 in the mahallah, the Jewish quarter, in Tehran. Although he was only nine years old when the coup took place, he remembers vividly the days before August 19: "I remember five or six of our next door neighbors, who were Tudehists, working in the mahallah to get the youth involved. Their little brothers went to Alliance with me, and it was very exciting."<sup>123</sup>

Hakham Shofet visited Mosaddeq one more time before his ultimate deposing on August 19, 1953. Before the successful attempt to overthrow him, the CIA and MI6 failed once on August 13, 1953. A day later, on August 14, Hakham Shofet gathered a delegation of Jewish leaders to come and congratulate Mosaddeq for what later appeared

---

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Ardeshir, 17 November 2013.

to be his temporary victory. Shofet conveyed the support of his community and wished Mosaddeq well. On August 19 the coup forces succeeded in overthrowing Mosaddeq, and reinstalled the shah's regime. In the aftermath of the coup Ardeshir went to his classroom in the Alliance school in Tehran and acted in accordance with what he thought was right. "We knew that something big happened. My dad was Mosaddeq's sympathizer, and so I went to class and wrote on the blackboard: "U.S. go home!" The teacher was furious at me, because the school was supported by American donations. This event left its mark on my political consciousness."<sup>124</sup>

This reaction was another instance of the Jewish participation the Iranian public and political spheres. Often, Jewish writers portray this period as the dark years before the dawn of the "Golden Age," mostly because of the major role Ayatollah Kashani had in the National Front, and due to the fact that Mosaddiq severed diplomatic relations with Israel. However, the story of Jewish support of Mosaddiq and other national movements was merely another example of the multiple forms of Jewish integration into the Iranian society at this crucial juncture in Iranian history.

---

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Ardeshir, 17 November 2013.



Illustration 5: Hakham

Yedidya Shofet and a group of Jewish community leader in a meeting with Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq. 26 Mordad 1332/ 14 August 1953 (source: *Bar bal-i khirad*, p.365).

### **Zionist Organizations and Zionism in Iran**

“On the 5<sup>th</sup> of November [1917], the Jews of Iran were informed of the Balfour Declaration by a telegram sent by the Zionists at Petrograd. This telegram was passed on to the religious leader of Tehran by ‘Azizallah Tizabgar.”<sup>125</sup> Thus begins Habib Levy’s description of the first encounter of Iranian Jews with political Zionism in his comprehensive history book. Earlier in the book Levy discusses religious Zionism,

---

<sup>125</sup> Habib Levy, *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran : The Outset of the Diaspora* (Costa Mesa CA: Mazda Publishers in association with the Cultural Foundation of Habib Levy, 1999), 510.

pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and some nineteenth century emigration of Iranian Jews, mostly to Safad and Jerusalem.<sup>126</sup> Levy describes Hebrew classes that began to be taught in the synagogues and associations established to promote Hebrew teaching and a possible massive exodus to the Holy Land. While the movement ostensibly aimed to prepare all the Jews to move to Palestine and establish their new homeland on their ancestral Holy Land, it eventually focused on the Iranian youth and sought to empower them locally, rather than relocate them.<sup>127</sup> Local political leaders established Zionist organizations of many types, such as Ha'khalutz (The Pioneer). As a whole, Iranian Zionism had connections with the World Zionist Organization (whenever the budget allowed, an Iranian representative travelled to participate in meetings). Meir Ezri, who later became the Israeli ambassador to Iran, wrote extensively on his experiences as a Ha'khalutz leader in Iran and the great excitement of his fellow Jews towards Zionist activities.<sup>128</sup> Haim Tsadok echoed some of these sentiments in his account, although he emphasized the difficulties Zionism encountered in the early years because of the nature of the

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 508–509.

<sup>127</sup> It seems like the affiliation to a broader association, and the empowerment that was inherent to learning, and being able to organize, already opened more options for Jews to negotiate their place in the Iranian Society. Sorts of harassment that in the past had been left aside to avoid conflict were taken to the police and authorities when the Zionist organization interfered. Ibid., 516–518.

<sup>128</sup> Ezri, *Mi va-Khem Mi-Kol 'Amo*, 17–51.

community's dispersal throughout the country.<sup>129</sup> Amnon Netzer further explained that "Iranian Jewish youth is not only Zionist (*Hovev tsiyon*), but really is a lover of Zion (*Ohev tsiyon*)."<sup>130</sup>

While we can understand what stopped Iranian Jews from emigrating en-masse before 1948 and the founding of the state of Israel, what then stopped them from doing so later? The Iranian regime was lenient toward Israel and even granted it a de-facto recognition in 1949. Zionist organizations operated openly in Iran and could have arranged certificates to whoever wished for one. So, why, despite what the predominant Zionist narrative tells us, did the overwhelming majority of Jews choose to stay in Iran even in the heyday of Zionism, post-1948? Between 1947 and 1951 about 30 thousand Iranian Jews immigrated to Israel, which make a little less than a third of that community. Even though the Iranian Jewish community was ostensibly hyper-Zionist, only a relatively small proportion chose to fulfill the Zionist aspirations.<sup>131</sup> A theme that has reoccurred in this research is the different interpretations of the term "Zionism" among Jews and other Iranians and also the possible hybrid identities in the social-political atmosphere of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Iran. A young Jew in Tehran could be simultaneously an Iranian patriot, an avowed Tudehi, and a wholehearted Zionist. Others could combine any other components of identity, be it ethnic, multi-religious, or political. No inherent

---

<sup>129</sup> Tsadok, *Yahadut Iran bi-tekufat ha-shoshelet ha-Pahlavit : Yehude Iran ve-Erets Yisrael (1935-1978)*, 30–41.

<sup>130</sup> Amnon Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-Yamenu* (Jerusalem: HUJI Press, 1981), 10.

<sup>131</sup> 30 thousand Iranian Jews came to Israel in those year and another 17 thousand of Iraqi Jews came through Iran at the same time, Ezri, *Mi va-Khem Mi-Kol 'Amo*, 51.

contradiction existed within the different components. Pinhas, who sees himself to this day as both a non-Stalinist socialist and a Zionist, explains: “At the same time [that I went to the Tudeh activities] I went to Ha’khalutz. The three ideals they instilled were Hebrew, hard work, and self-defense. We learned Hebrew with a book titled *Yesodot* (foundations), we worked in the community gardens—mostly behind synagogues—and practiced self-defense.”<sup>132</sup> Ha’khalutz and Tudeh complemented each other, in a way. In the late 1940s and up until 1967 the Iranian left (as did many other movements) viewed Zionism as a postcolonial movement, and considered Israel a legitimate partner in the nascent “Third World.”

To understand the unique place Israel and Zionism occupied in the Iranian worldview, one should consider Iranians who wrote about Israel. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a prominent Iranian thinker, may best convey the transformation of Israel’s representations in the Iranian public sphere. Al-e Ahmad, a one-time member of the Tudeh leadership, gained leftist-internationalist credentials with the publication of *Gharbzadegi* (1962), in which he criticized the tendency of broad segments of Iranian society to blindly mimic the West.<sup>133</sup> *Gharbzadegi* lamented the inevitable loss of Iranian culture and identity to Western models and paradigms. His publication influenced a later generation of Iranian revolutionaries such as Ali Shariati and the current supreme leader, Sayyid Ali Khamenei.

---

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Pinhas, 15 May 2014.

<sup>133</sup> This book appeared in several translations under different titles. Another popular translation of the term is: Westoxification. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984).

Given Al-e Ahmad's remarkable place in both the evolution of the Iranian Left and the development of contemporary political ideologies, one would not expect that he should name Israel as a model society. Yet, Al-e Ahmad, as with many other Iranian intellectuals before 1967, claimed that Israel in its essence was a cultural and political ally.

Two years after the publication of *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad and his wife, Simin Daneshvar, visited Israel. Al-e Ahmad's travelogue, *Safar bih vilayat-i Israil (Journey to the State of Israel*, 1964) attests to the profound impression Israel left on him.<sup>134</sup> The critical thinker wrote about Israel in nothing less than admiring terms. He described in detail a visit to *Yad Va'Shem*, the Holocaust memorial museum and expressed his fascination with the "resurrection" of the Jewish people after the horrors of the Holocaust. Later, he broadly discussed in positive terms the Kibbutz in Israel and the state's socialist ideology.

During their visit, Al-e Ahmad and Daneshvar stayed in Kibbutz Ayelet Ha'Shahar in Northern Israel. He described the Kibbutz for the Iranian reader as follows: "[...] these people in Israel had already laid the foundation for the socialization of the means of agricultural production in a part of the world which had been inspired by the Russian Social-Democratic movement and not by Stalin." Thus, Al-e Ahmad associated Israel with the "correct" side of communist ideology, as the contemporary rift in the Tudeh party also created another communist opposition to Stalin's legacy. Given Al-e Ahmad's public status, this travelogue certainly impacted Iranian perceptions of Israel.

---

<sup>134</sup> The book recently has been published in a new translation, titled: *The Israeli Republic*. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Safar Bih Vilayat-i Izrail* (Tihiran: Intisharat-i ravaq, 1984).

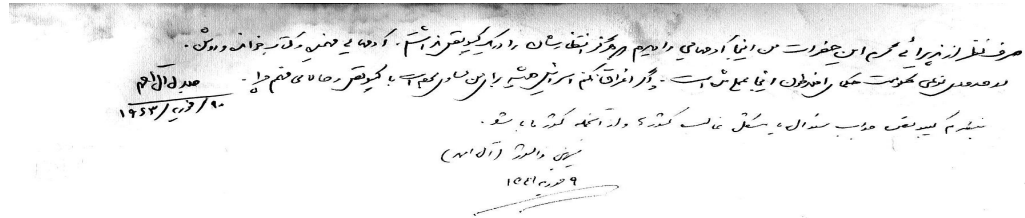


Illustration 6: A photo of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Simin Daneshvar’s writing from Kibbutz Ayelet Ha’Shahar Guest book. Al-e Ahmad: “Regardless of the hospitality, I saw here people I have never expected to meet. Learned people, understanding and open-minded. In a sense, they are implementing Plato. Honestly speaking, I always identified Israel with the Kibbutz, and now I understand why.” Daneshvar: “As I see it the Kibbutz is the answer to the problem of all the countries, including our own.” Thanks to the archive of Kibbutz Ayelet Ha’Shahar and archivist Noa Herman for help in recovering this image.

## Conclusions

The invasion of the Allied Armies in 1941, the deposing of Reza Shah, and the more or less coercive opening of the political and journalistic spheres invited Jews, among others, to take an active part in shaping their country’s new identity. Some of their choices resulted from ill treatment under the majority group of the society in Iran and signs of anti-Semitism, as well as Fascist or even Nazi propaganda. The message of citizenship, Iranian identity, and egalitarian society, convinced many Jews to join left wing parties. Toward the end of the decade, when the struggle for negotiating a better oil concession came to the fore, many Jews gathered behind Mosaddiq and embraced his national project.



Throughout this period the Zionist movement took root in Iran, as well. Members of this movement worked to bring Jews from Iran to Israel, but others worked to teach Hebrew and to strengthen the existing religious sentiment, which could be called a non-nationalistic form of Zionism.

Although many of the political leaders of the Iranian Jewish communities sympathized with the Zionist cause, most Iranian Jews remained indifferent to it. In fact, many joined leftist movements in Iran and eventually assumed leadership positions in them, demonstrating that their political allegiances belonged first and foremost to Iran. Naturally, this situation caused major frustration in Israel, a state whose existence was, and still is, premised on the notion that the destinies of world Jewries and the state of Israel were inexorably intertwined.

The predominant Iranian Jewish interpretation of Zionism differed from the political Zionism espoused by the Israeli establishment at that time. The former did not necessitate the existence of a Jewish state but rather reflected a religious sentiment and an emotional-cum-spiritual attachment to Zion, the biblical name of Jerusalem. This division was not unique to Iranian Jewry. Rather, it was common among Jews across the Middle East. It, however, remained relevant only to Iranians, as the other communities for the most part ceased to exist post 1948-1956, because of the political fallout resulting from the early Arab-Israeli wars. While many Iranian Jews had relatives in Israel and had visited Israel, Israel as a nation was not part of their Jewish identity, and they did not see themselves leaving their beloved homeland for any other country—including Israel. They did maintain the same spiritual relationship to Israel and Jerusalem that potentially expands the definition of Zionism. Overwhelmingly, they did not share the political

interpretation of Zionism with the Zionist movement and Israel and did not tie any meaning of the term to the existence of the modern state of Israel.

## Chapter 4: Jewish Education for the Benefit of the Nation

In 1961, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi wrote of his father:

Reza Shah did more for Persian education than to construct buildings, train teachers, and send people abroad for study. He transformed the whole spirit and philosophy of our educational system. As he saw it, education must first of all serve to create the patriotic devotion [...] He understood that the country's genuine Westernization and modernization required much more than factories and paved streets; of far greater importance were changes in the basic Persian culture and psychology [...] He was energetically reshaping our thinking and action to meet the challenge of the present and the future.<sup>135</sup>

This text reveals the central place education occupied in the Pahlavi nation-building project. Mohammad Reza Shah, just like his father before him, realized that the human components of the nation's infrastructure are as important as the material and industrial ones. However, while Reza Shah pursued a unified curriculum with Persian instruction only, Mohammad Reza allowed communal systems to thrive; private schools could operate freely as long as they met a required standard. This chapter argues that Jewish educational systems were indispensable, both for the Jewish social mobility, and for the

---

<sup>135</sup> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961); David Menashri has written the most comprehensive history of education in Iran to date. His study lays out the philosophy and evolution of the school system in Iran. David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 123.

success of Mohammad Reza Shah's national projects, such as the rapid modernization project, known as the White Revolution (Inqilab-i sifid).<sup>136</sup> This chapter focuses on the educational institutions because of the pivotal role education played in Iran in this period and the significant place it held in the eyes of the Jewish community. Jewish schools shaped the identity of the community and later helped to shape the ways in which non-Jews viewed the community. It also undeniably graduated the leadership of the next generation of Jewish Iranians and instilled the ideas which they, the graduates, carried on into the next phase in the revolution, and promptly thereafter. This chapter explains how the functioning of these schools resulted from the transformations discussed in the previous chapters, and at the same time was pivotal in shaping the generation that came of age in the decade leading up to the revolution.

By the mid-twentieth century several educational networks operated in Iran, each with a specific target crowd or mission. The most prominent among them were Alliance Israelite Universelle, ORT (Obshestvo Remeslenofo zemledelcheskofo Truda, in Russian; The Society for Trades and Agricultural Labor), Ha'khalutz (The Pioneer), Otsar Ha'torah (The Treasure of the Torah), and Ettfaq (Agreement, in Arabic). These schools exemplify the diversity of experience that was offered to Iranian Jews. Let us now explore different backgrounds and missions of these institutions, in order to understand how they became so important.

---

<sup>136</sup> The White Revolution of Iran, on which the shah embarked in 1963. The core of this program was to turn Iran into a global military and economy power. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *The White Revolution* (Teheran: Kayhan Press, 1967).

## **Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) in Iran: “Correction” of Jews in the Orient**

### **Since 1860**

If you believe that a great number of your coreligionists, overcome by twenty centuries of misery, of insults and prohibitions, can find again their dignity as men, win the dignity of citizens; if you believe that one should moralize those who have been corrupted, and not condemn them, enlighten those who have been blinded, and not abandon them, raise those who have been exhausted, and not rest with pitying them... if you believe in all these things, Jews of all the world, come hear our appeal.<sup>137</sup>

This appeal within the Alliance charter reveals the stated moral grounds of enlightened civilization on which this newly established organization claimed to operate. In fact, although AIU would eventually become the biggest network of Jewish institutions in the Middle East the context for the emergence of AIU is the European Enlightenment.

During this period the emancipation movement ended practices of legal discrimination against European Jews and now they wanted to pass this legacy onto their Middle Eastern brethren. AIU was established in France, which is not surprising given that French Jews accomplished their emancipation before their coreligionists elsewhere in Europe, thanks to the French Revolution. However, soon after achieving their civil rights, French Jews were occupied not so much with their European brethren, but rather with their North African ones.

---

<sup>137</sup> “Appel a tous les israelites” brought in: Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, The Modern Jewish Experience (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), xi.

One of the first major encounters between French and Algerian Jews took place promptly after the French conquest of Algeria in 1830. The Jewish elite in France, composed of bankers, intellectuals, and notables, deemed education the main means for regenerating Jews everywhere and creating a new better Jew, a “useful” one.<sup>138</sup> Soon after the conquest, French Jewish leadership tried to reach out to Algerian Jews, but the French government was not interested in assisting. In 1842 things began to change when two Jewish politicians proposed a comprehensive report on Algerian Jews. In a nutshell this report detailed how reforming Jews in Muslim countries might make them intermediaries between the metropolis and the indigenous Arab populations.<sup>139</sup> Establishing AIU schools seemed like the first necessary (and efficient) step to correct their “backwardness.”<sup>140</sup> By 1914 AIU counted 183 institutions with 43,700 students attending them from Morocco to Iran. The teaching language in most of AIU schools was French and it celebrated French culture; in some cases, however, Alliance schools had to adapt to the local regulations and needs of the communities. Another significant attribute of AIU is that, as mentioned above, it aimed to create what it described as “a new useful

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>140</sup> Rodrigue raises the “Jewish Eastern Question” that started to appear around the mid nineteenth century. The continuous exposure of Europeans to North Africa and the Muslim Mediterranean caused the European Jews embarrassment because they feared identification by association with the Middle Eastern Jews. This anxiety prompted the extensive operation of AIU. Aron Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 8–10.

Jew,” one that would be enlightened, educated, productive, and European by virtue of education if not by origin. As such, AIU was at odds with the Zionist movement, because AIU aimed to integrate the Jews into their local societies, while Zionism necessitated migration to Israel/Palestine and establishment of an independent society there. While there were Alliance schools in Ottoman Palestine, the curriculum of the organization left no space for Zionism.<sup>141</sup>

In 1898 Alliance Israelite Universelle opened its first schools in Iran. The first institutions were separate primary schools for boys and girls, both in Tehran. By 1930 there were 16 schools in the major cities with significant Jewish population.<sup>142</sup> At first the teaching language was French, just as in most of the other AIU schools across the region, but in 1933-1934 Reza Shah issued a decree of Iranianization of the schooling system. From that year French ceased to be the principle language and Persian became the main teaching language for the first time. Reza Shah’s decree also nearly eliminated Judaic studies. Avraham Cohen, the historian of Jewish education in Iran, asserts that following this transformation AIU became more relevant to the young Jews’ life in the present, and

---

<sup>141</sup> Avraham Cohen, “Tmurot Mahutiyot Ba’hinikh Ha’yehudi Be’paras,” in *Yehudei Iran: Avaram, Morashtam ve-Zikatam Le-Eretz Ha-Kodesh*, ed. Amnon Netzer (Holon: Beit Koresh, 1988), 71–75.

<sup>142</sup> The schools were in Burujird, Hamadan (2 schools), Isfahan (2 schools), Karmanshah (2 schools), Kashan, Sinih (2 schools), Shiraz (2 schools), Tehran (2 schools), and Yazd (2 schools). Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims*, 17.

to their future as “Persian citizens,” with more emphasis on languages and humanities that relate to their life in Iran.<sup>143</sup>

### **ORT: A New Jew is a Laboring Jew**

By redefining their core mission, Alliance Israelite Universelle fulfilled a pivotal role in the socialization process of Jewish Iranians. But Alliance was not alone in the field of Jewish education in Iran in the twentieth century.

Unlike Alliance, which envisioned creating a new enlightened Jew, well versed in French and intellectually belonging to the European circles, ORT taught Jews useful trades and crafts so they could contribute to the awakening industry and agriculture in Russia.<sup>144</sup> ORT was established in 1880 in Tsarist Russia; within a few years it became a famous establishment among Russian Jews and opened branches throughout Russia and among other Eastern-European Ashkenazi communities. In 1922 ORT began collaboration with the JDC that made it financially stable and turned it from a relatively concentrated network into a global operation.<sup>145</sup> ORT tried to follow the footsteps of Alliance in many ways and in some ways collaborated with AIU schools to complement teaching professions that Alliance teachers could not offer. That was the background for a combined operation in 1942, after the Allies occupied North Africa. ORT and Alliance

---

<sup>143</sup> Cohen, “Tmurot Mahutiyot Ba’hinikh Ha’yehudi Be’paras,” 74.

<sup>144</sup> Leon. Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 1–5.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 216–223.



offered dual programs that eventually cemented ORT status as one more option for Jewish professional education in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>146</sup>

By the early 1940s ORT had independent schools in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and many other Muslim countries, and in 1950 the first ORT school opened in Tehran. In the beginning many of the students were Iraqi and Kurdish Jews awaiting their immigration to Israel. By 1951 new ORT schools in Isfahan and Shiraz attended to over 1,000 students. Just like Alliance, ORT preached for radical social changes in the life of the Iranian Jews. ORT schools taught skills that enabled employment not only in the Jewish community, but rather the general Iranian community.

### **Otsar Ha'Torah: The Orthodox Jewish Alternative**

Otsar Ha'Torah was another foreign network of schools that first appeared in Iran in 1947. While Alliance and ORT were indifferent to the Jewish religion, to say the least, Otsar Ha'Torah appealed to traditional communities among the Iranians, those that previously sent their kids to the Maktabkhanieh (in Persian: school. Frequently used with religious school connotations). The Jewish philanthropist Itzhak Shalom established Otsar Ha'Torah in New York as an Orthodox religious anti-Zionist organization.<sup>147</sup> After WWII Shalom and the JDC decided to introduce Otsar Ha'Torah in Iran to address the needs of the Jewish Ashkenazi refugees in Iran. They appointed Rabbi Meir Levy the

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 304–305.

<sup>147</sup> Many Ultra-Orthodox Jews opposed Zionism as they considered the exile a divine punishment, and only a clear sign from God (the coming of the Messiah) can restore the Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land. Zionism, hence, was categorized as heresy.

director of Otsar Ha'Torah in Iran. Rabbi Levy belonged to *Agudat Israel*, an Ultra-Orthodox party, and he was anti-Zionist and very much anti-Israel.

Otsar Ha'Torah operated in Iran in several capacities and in relation to other educational organizations. In some communities, which demanded Jewish religious education Alliance and ORT outsourced religious studies to Otsar Ha'Torah. Among the more religious communities Otsar Ha'Torah opened independent schools.<sup>148</sup> Otsar Ha'Torah became a somewhat controversial institution, for some communities in Iran saw it as foreign to the Jewish-Iranian nature, and others complained about the low level of teachings in the organization's schools. While it had almost as many students as Alliance schools did by the 1960s, its constituents came mostly from the lower classes of the Jewish population, because Otsar Ha'Torah schools were found in impoverished neighborhoods and far from the urban centers, and most students did not have to pay tuition (an attractive feature to those who wished to get Jewish education and could not afford paying for community and private schools). Nevertheless, it still impacted the Jewish Iranian discourse about Jewish identity and Jewish life in Iran.

### **Ettefaq: Iraqi-British Education in Tehran**

One of the most fascinating educational endeavors in Iran was the Ettefaq School. It was established in 1948 by Mayer Abdallah Basson, a wealthy Baghdadi Jew who had come to Iran only a few years earlier, as part of the migration wave of the 1940s discussed in

---

<sup>148</sup> Cohen, "Tmurot Mahutiyot Ba'hinikh Ha'yehudi Be'paras," 75.

chapter 2.<sup>149</sup> The Iraqi community took pride in the education system left behind in Iraq. It had been fully coordinated with the British Ministry of Education curriculum and exams, and therefore allowed its graduates to pursue academic studies in England. When these Jews arrived in Iran they felt that the Jewish institutions that existed could not meet their expectations, and Mayer Abdallah decided to endow this school and attached complex. In addition to the school, the complex included a synagogue that adhered to the Iraqi Jewish tradition, and an event hall.<sup>150</sup> It housed the Iraqi Youth Club and addressed all the needs of the Iraqi-Jewish community in Tehran.

Interestingly, after completion of the complex the school's board erected a dedication wall near the eastern entrance of the synagogue that reflects the school's mission. The top of the wall features Mayer Abdallah Basson's carved portrait with a short biography in the bottom in Arabic and some Persian mixed into the text. In the middle is carved the endowment charter in Hebrew.

"Mazkeret Netsah," for eternal memory, reads the title of the charter. "This land with all its buildings and equipment were bought with the blessing of the great philanthropist Mayer Abda[allah] Basson and handed it to the Iraqi Israeli Community in Iran with the following conditions." The text of the charter then spells out some of the entailed conditions. For example, the third paragraph emphasizes the importance of the

---

<sup>149</sup> In fact, Basson first arrived in Iran in the 1930s as part of his job as contractor.

However, Tehran became his permanent residency only in the 1940s.

<sup>150</sup> Opening an event hall as part of the school's complex generated revenues that helped the school access cutting edge technology and remain independent of the community budgets.

school's financial independence: "School's expenses will be taken from tuition or revenues from different usage (ventures) of these buildings." This article secures the future of the school for as long as there is a community to use it. The fifth article highlights the school's unique academic program: "The school's curriculum will include Jewish religious studies and Hebrew, along with Persian and Arabic languages and other living languages, in addition of necessary sciences." In fact, Ettefaq's students studied with British textbooks and many of the teachers came from England. English was the principal language, but literature and philosophy were taught in Arabic and other classes, like economy and science were taught in Persian. The next article reads: "It is permissible to build new buildings on school property. All revenues will belong to the school, and so are revenues from other events and weddings that will be conducted in the school." When the school was built in 1947-1948 it had only 10 classrooms that served the needs of the Iraqi community at the time. Basson did not want to limit expansion potential and made it possible to add more space as the need arose, as indeed happened in the 1960s. The final comment clarifies the superior status of Arabic over any other language when the administration needed to turn to the charter for guidance it was to be determined by this article: "The Arabic version of the charter will be superior in the event that any of these conditions need clarification." Even though Ettefaq was a place of many languages it was still an institution of a proud Iraqi community. At the end of the plaque all the members of the Iraqi Jewish committee in Iran signed as witnesses.



Illustration 7: Ettefaq's dedication

wall (source: 7dorim.com)

There were other schools in Iran in addition to these four organizations. Many of them excelled in training students, but these were regular schools operated by the Jewish establishment, that offered not much more than other Iranian schools. AIU, ORT, Otsar Ha'Torah, and Ettefaq offered a different educational experience. They were built nearby Jewish neighborhoods, and rather than complying with requests from the community (for example, of certain Jewish education or more teachings of Hebrew) aspired to transform the community. The only parallel is probably the elite missionary schools across the country.

## **From Jewish Schools to Iranian Elite Schools**

The Jewish educational institutions were established for the benefit of the Jewish population in Iran by international Jewish organizations. Each organization had a different view of its respective mission. They did not share views regarding Israel and Zionism and were anywhere on the spectrum from supportive to indifferent to opponent. One thing we know for sure is that their academic standards were high and they carefully kept it this way. All these institutions wanted Jews to transform themselves and to elevate their status to a level much higher than the one they had in the late 1940s. There was a clear policy of how this operation had to be executed, which was articulated by the JDC and the organizations' leaderships. Schools had to be in the geographical area where needed. That is, if the target crowd was, for example, the poor Jews in the Mahallah, then the school had to be built there.<sup>151</sup> The facility should be of the highest quality possible, with no compromise on the size, cleanliness, and hygiene.

The JDC provided financial and professional support to many of these institutions and decided on many of the necessary amenities. One of the unique features in the Jewish schools was an infirmary with a permanent nurse. These medical resources regularly performed medical check-ups for the students.<sup>152</sup> Raising awareness of hygiene and

---

<sup>151</sup> Stanely Abramowitch, "Letter from Stanely Abramowitch to A.J.D.C Paris, Re: A.I.U Ghetto School," March 23, 1952, g 45-54/4/85/8/ OM.16, JDC.

<sup>152</sup> In this we can see the comprehensive check ups that were conducted in 1954, however earlier and later documents suggest a major involvement of health professionals in the Jewish schools. William M. Schmidt, "Letter from Dr. William M. Schmidt to Dr.

diseases helped combat infant mortality and other common chronic situations among the Mahallah Jews. The emphasis given to such topics in the Jewish institutions gained them immediate positive attention from the Iranian government.

Students attending those schools also had the opportunity to learn languages at the highest levels. In Alliance French teachers taught French, in Ettfaq British teachers taught English, and so was the case with ORT. Many of Ostar Ha'Torah's teachers came from the United States. The schools' cultures advanced the international flavor of the curriculums.

Fruits of this collaborative effort came in a short time for the Jewish community. School graduates passed the university entrance exams, ranking among the highest in the nation, and school reports suggest that government inspectors from the Ministry of Education followed these schools closely. Pursuing academic studies was not the highest priority of all these schools, however. For example, Otsar Ha'Torah prepared students to continue their religious and rabbinical studies in Yeshiva theological seminaries mostly in Tehran.<sup>153</sup> ORT prioritized professional training and diplomas that would enable them to take their places in the Iranian economy as soon as possible. In the ORT girls' school the students could learn several useful trades as in an English-Persian secretarial course that made them highly skilled for well-paying jobs that would ultimately help them climb the social ladder. Boys in ORT schools trained in technological fields like electricity and basic engineering. The historic turn of events played well into the role ORT designed for

---

Herman, Re: School Health Service Med. File #43B7," December 30, 1954, G 45-54/4/85/10/ OM.25, JDC.

<sup>153</sup> "Jewish Schools and Education," 1965, AR 65/74-0110, JDC.

them. By the mid-1960s oil revenues were the basis of the Iranian economy and there was ever-increasing need for more technicians and engineers. Instantaneously, ORT graduates became part of the technical elite and they easily found good wages both in private and state enterprises.<sup>154</sup>



Illustration 8: ORT Hairdresser diploma school, Tehran 1959. (source: JDC Archive)

Alliance schools continued to excel, graduating highly successful students, but then faced another problem. As their graduates moved to upscale neighborhoods, the target crowd changed. Tehran's Mahallah neighborhood, which housed over 20 thousand Jews in the late 1940s, had only 2,500 by the late 1960s. The area of the Mahallah at that

---

<sup>154</sup> Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change*, 310.



time had more Muslim residents than Jews.<sup>155</sup> There were two options for the AIU in the Mahallah: to close down this establishment and reopen a school in one of the northern neighborhoods of Tehran with more Jews,<sup>156</sup> or to continue operating the school with no dramatic changes, attending to the new residents of the area. AIU and JDC chose the latter. The new community of Muslims in the Mahallah also showed great interest in the Jewish school. It appears that they viewed AIU as a vehicle of social mobility in Iran.

Turning to the greater community was apparently the obvious choice. While AIU in the Mahallah faced this challenge out of necessity, Ettefaq School made a conscious choice to become an Iranian elite institution. As mentioned above, Ettefaq addressed the needs of the Iraqi community in Iran, but its high-end facility and academic program attracted many of the Iranian Jews as well. Like many other Jewish schools, Ettefaq had a tuition waiver program for people experiencing economic strain. By offering the same program to Iranian Jews they expanded their potential market.

In 1967 the Ettefaq board turned to Barukh Berukhim, a professor at Tehran University, and offered him the position of school principle.<sup>157</sup> Berukhim agreed but he had a vision in which Ettefaq would transform from a community school to a major educational institution. One of his terms was to double the student population and accept more non-Jewish students. Ettefaq was already undergoing expansion construction and

---

<sup>155</sup> The forecast according to this report is that by the end of 1969 there will be no more than 1,700 Jews in the Mahallah. “Social Welfare,” 1969, 25, AR 65/74-0110, JDC.

<sup>156</sup> Edna Weber, “JDC Program in Iran,” 1974, AR 65/74-0107, JDC.

<sup>157</sup> As far as I could find Berukhim was the first non-Iraqi to man this position.

“Interview with Barukh Berukhim,” September 25, 1998, CIJOH.

indeed by the end of the decade it had almost 2,000 students, with many more on waiting lists. Berukhim brought as many university colleagues as he could to teach at Ettefaq and to prepare students for the university entrance exams. In very little time, Ettefaq ranked first among the schools in Iran.

### **Approaches to Hebrew, Judaism, and Zionism**

As more and more non-Jewish students started to participate in these schools, the attitude toward traditional Jewish education and approaches to Zionism became secondary.

Almost all the Jewish schools in Iran taught Hebrew and Jewish religious studies as optional courses. In some years, especially in the 1960s, due to pressure either from the community or the Jewish Agency, Hebrew and Judaism studies intensified. AIU and ORT had no interest in training their teachers to teach those subjects and had Otsar Ha'Torah teachers to teach them in their schools. Given Otsar Ha'Torah's position on Zionism its presence in the schools provoked disagreements and mixed reactions. The Jewish Agency (JA) blamed the JDC for undermining JA activities, and for being anti-Zionist because "JDC does its best to foster dependency and poverty in Iran."<sup>158</sup> In some of the schools the Zionist organization "Ha'Khalutz" received permission to operate after-school programs.<sup>159</sup> There is no document showing whether this program was part

---

<sup>158</sup> It should be noted that in the late 1940s the JA accused the JDC for the exact same anti-Zionism by investing too much in their life in Iran, instead of convincing them to move to Israel. Merrill A. Rosenberg, "Relation between JDC & JA in Iran," October 16, 1974, AR 65/74-0107, JDC.

<sup>159</sup> Cohen, "Tmurot Mahutiyot Ba'hinukh Ha'yehudi Be'paras," 75.

of a compromise between the JA, JDC, and the Jewish Iranian institutions. Usually there were tensions and allegations by Jewish Agency emissaries or Israeli officials, directed at the leaders of the Jewish community in Iran that they did not actively support Israel and Zionism, or encourage Zionist activity. One JDC report asserts that “Jewish leaders pay lip service” to the Zionist cause but do nothing to bring the assimilation to a halt, and that “thousands of years of living in a Muslim society have taken a toll.” Another report claims: “Emigration to Israel has been desultory for a number of year and is offset by the number of births. There is little impetus to leave, since the Jews enjoy all political and social rights of Iranian citizens.”<sup>160</sup>

Elias Eshaqian, teacher and principal of Alliance schools in Iran for over 25 years, wrote in his memoir: “Iran has been my homeland [vatan] and Jerusalem has been the source of my belief in God and the direction of my prayers [qiblah].”<sup>161</sup> This quotation suggests yet again that many Iranian Jews had different interpretation of Zionism than the one the Jewish Agency and Israel advanced. Eshaqian was a role model for many Iranians and it is clear that his national Iranian identity did not interfere with his religious identity as a Jew. He proudly projected this combined identity throughout his career, which may have inspired and encouraged his students.

---

<sup>160</sup> “Annual Report 1969,” n.d., AR 65/74-0110, JDC.

<sup>161</sup> Ilyas Ishaqyan, *Hamrah Ba Farhang: Gushah'i Az Tarikh-i Mu'assasah-i Alyans Dar Iran/ Khaṭīrat-i Ilyas Ishaqyan* (Los Angeles, CA: Sina Publications, 2008).

## **Conclusions**

In the late nineteenth century, when Jews had limited opportunities, they had to support a self-sustaining system. In terms of training and education, they established Maktabkhanihs for maintaining their religious identities, and training was confined to occupational positions, mostly inside the community. This system changed with the entrance of Alliance Israelite Universelle and series of political events. First and foremost it was the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), then the demise of the Qajar Dynasty and the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty, and lastly, the ascendance to the throne of Mohammad Reza Shah in 1941. These transformations opened up the community to the broader Iranian society. The international institutions that came to serve Iranian Jewry (AIU, ORT, Otsar Ha'Torah) had to go through a localization and adjustment process that made them "more" Iranian.

The programs' initial service to the Jewish communities succeeded by serving both the ideals of the organization and the ultimate goals of the Iranian communities themselves. Iranian Jewish graduates of these programs became "useful" Iranians. They became the new Jewish middle class and moved up the social scale. Eventually, these schools become all-Iranian institutions that other minorities and even Muslims understood as effective vehicles for social mobility. As more non-Jews began attending the schools, they were still funded by Jewish organizations that overwhelmingly cherished the opportunity to facilitate assimilation between Jews and their non-Jewish Iranian compatriots rather than encouraging Jews to be more active Zionist.

The discourse over Zionism, hence, was conducted completely out of context to Iran and its Jewish population. Iranian Jews were products of their own educational

systems. Adopting Zionism as offered to them by the Zionist movement, was for the most part, unacceptable to them. For many of them their Iranian identity grew stronger with each achievement, but it did not come at the expense of the Jewish one, as they rarely withdrew from participating in Jewish institutions, such as schools, synagogues, youth movement, and community centers.

## **Chapter 5: Too Integrated? The Unintended Consequences of Jewish Involvement in the Events Preceding the 1978-79 Revolution**

During the anti-Shah upheavals of 1978, wounded protestors calling for the establishment of an Islamic Republic found sanctuary from the clashes in a rather surprising place: many of them fled to the Sapir Hospital (*Bimaristan-i Sapir*), the Jewish hospital in Tehran. The demonstrations' participants knew that the Jewish hospital would treat them well, unlike the government hospitals. Above all, the facility would not turn them over to the Shah's secret service, SAVAK. This rescue apparatus became widely known thanks to the hospital administration's close collaboration with Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taliqani. Taliqani, who functioned during that time as Khomeini's representative in Iran, was a popular leader of the revolutionary movements. Together, Taliqani and Sapir Hospital staff operated rescue teams for the protestors and played a meaningful role in Iran's most significant twentieth century moment.

This chapter examines the political and social activities of Jewish groups and individuals, like the Sapir Hospital staff, during Iranian Revolution in 1978-79 and the events leading to the revolution from the early 1970s. By this time, Jews were fully integrated into the public sphere, and their identity politics of Judaism and Iranian nationalism played out in interesting ways during this upheaval. Although the Pahlavi period is considered to be the golden age of religious minorities in Iran, Jews overwhelmingly did not appear to support the continuation of the monarchy vis-à-vis the

imminent revolution.<sup>162</sup> In some cases, they openly supported the rebellious factions, in ways that when juxtaposed with traditional history, may seem counterintuitive.

Previous chapters of this project have noted several historiographical gaps, including shedding light onto the inner relatively high diversity among the Jewish minority communities, their running social and communal networks not just to attend to regular constituency but rather to facilitate better integration and assimilation, and taking an active role in shaping inclusive Iranian identity. This chapter addresses yet another historiographic challenge. As the first chapter has argued, minorities overall did not refrain from politics; this chapter narrates their active involvement in the revolution that overthrew the regime that benefitted them the most. This paradoxical outcome demonstrates the unintended success of the Shah's most significant project; that is, the full integration of minorities into Iranian society allowed them to operate freely, regardless of the myopic interests of their communities.

The common narrative holds that the Pahlavi era was the golden era for religious minorities in Iran, including Jews. Iranian nationalism at that time revolved around cultural roots, Persian language and ethnicity, and western-style secularism, which at

---

<sup>162</sup> As seen in previous chapters, Jewish Iranian historiography usually deem the Pahlavi era as a golden age, mostly because of the unrefutable progress Jews made during the reign of Mohammad Reza. This view has been reinforced by many leaders of the community, such as Yusif Kuhin, who was the Jewish representative in the Majlis (1975-1979). See: Yusif Kuhin, *Yusif Kuhin: Guzarish va Khaṭirat-i Fa'aliyat'ha-yi Siyasi va Ijtima'i* (Los Angeles, CA: International Printing, 1993), 303.

least in theory allowed non-Muslim Iranians full membership in the national project.<sup>163</sup> The Jewish community did indeed flourish under the Pahlavi regime. Jews became high-ranking bureaucrats, industrialists and merchants. They amassed wealth and climbed the social ladder, flooding the ranks of universities and professional organizations. The government allowed Jews to practice their faith openly. They also maintained many communal institutions such as schools, synagogues, newspapers, and hospitals. Nevertheless, it was the earlier Constitutional Revolution, as described in chapter 2, that had created a civic basis for participation that enabled the minorities a certain degree of assimilation.

David Menashri, a prominent scholar of Iran and Iranian Jewry, notes, “[Jews] were overrepresented among the country’s student population and university faculty body, among medical doctors and other professionals. Although there were people of low income among them, the vast majority could be defined as middle class, or upper middle class. Some became very rich, taking full advantage of the freedom granted to them to reform programs, and the growing oil income.”<sup>164</sup> In his 1985 research, David Sitton provided similar numbers, that repeatedly appeared later on: “[I]n 1979 two of the eighteen members of the Royal Academy of Sciences, 80 of the 4,000 university lecturers, and 600 of the 10,000 physicians in Iran were Jews [...] the overwhelming

---

<sup>163</sup> Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>164</sup> David Menashri, “The Pahlavi Monarchy and the Islamic Revolution,” in *Esther’s Children : a Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar (Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 395.



majority of Jews were middle class, 10 percent were wealthy and another 10 percent were impoverished... About half of the Jewish children of elementary school age attended Hebrew schools or received lessons in Hebrew. But the ever-growing Jewish intelligentsia took no interest in Jewish affairs and did not long for Zion. Most of them were radical left.”<sup>165</sup> Sitton’s data shows the predominance of Jews in the Iranian public sphere, especially among the intellectual elites. As Chapter One shows, only thirty-seven years earlier the vast majority of the community members had been lower middle class and impoverished, and in less than four decades this reality had changed.

This assimilation led the Jews into political activism that may seem first as counterintuitive. While much has been written about other sectors’ activities during the Islamic Revolution, particularly among students, political dissidents, and clerics, few resources document the activities of the Jewish population and other minorities.<sup>166</sup> As Chapter Three showed, Iranian Jews have been involved in politics in Iran through different parties and championing different goals. Because of the dictatorship ban on any oppositional political activity, Jews remained active in student movements, underground Tudeh activities, and establishment of associations that engaged in politics from alternative approaches, such as community political action societies. As explained before, scholarship about Jewish political insufficiently covered the political participation, especially the oppositional one, so one can scarcely find information about such

---

<sup>165</sup> Sitton, *Sephardi Communities Today*, 184.

<sup>166</sup> Random anecdotal evidence appeared about Armenians protesters against the shah’s regime, but still there is much yet to be studied about political communal organizations affiliated with religious minorities in this era.

participation without going back to the activists themselves, sifting through old publications and memoirs, and reaching out to contemporary observers as well. At the same time, historiography of the 1979 Iranian revolution tends to focus on the clerical-religious nature of the movement, pushing aside other partner participants, hence creating a one-dimensional narrative of the revolution. This research is not attempting to overturn the meta-narrative regarding the Iranian revolution by attributing the event to Jewish involvement; rather it seeks to reveal an angle that current research has left undeveloped.

### **A Generation of Jewish Revolutionaries**

“The word ‘opposition’ had become something students find appealing,” a KGB official memorandum explained during the wave of students’ protest in 1969.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, throughout the 1960s and 1970s students led opposition movements around the globe. These movements, typically leftist with Maoist tendencies, criticized the bipolar Cold War policies, weak proxy governments, and injustice inherent to imperialism and colonialism.

Iranian students, mainly in Europe, became political leftist dissidents and were organized as such since the late 1920s. They had strong ties with socialist and pro-Soviet activists in Iran, and many of them later became leaders of the Tudeh Party.<sup>168</sup> During the

---

<sup>167</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2, 274 (n.7).

<sup>168</sup> Most prominent among them were Taqi Arani and Khalil Maliki, Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 20–22.

reign of Reza Shah they organized conferences, published newspapers in several languages, and generally publicized to the world the shah's oppressive policies inside Iran. In this process the German Communist party supported the Iranian student organizations, a collaboration that encouraged a broad internationalist agenda among the future Tudeh leadership. Following the victory of the Nazi Party in Germany, most of the Iranian students previously based in Germany returned to Iran and tried to reorganize the Communist Party, a goal they achieved in 1941 with the establishment of the Tudeh Party. In 1949 Tudehist student organization was established in Tehran University, which positioned the party as dominant among the Iranian urban intelligentsia. Leaders and political thinkers such as Mihdi Bazargan and Mahmud Taliqani were members of this student body.<sup>169</sup> They participated in protests against Mosaddeq's trial and Richard Nixon's visit later that year, among others.

By the late 1950s Iranian students' organizations appeared again in Western Europe and the United States, expressing similar views to Tudeh and Jibhah-ye Milli (the National Front). The Iranian student confederation in Paris, for example, enjoyed active support of the French Communist Party and the prominent intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>170</sup> Mohammad Reza Shah's response to these confederations highlights their significance. After a huge demonstration against the shah's visit to the American capital, which was organized by Iranian students, the shah avoided visiting countries that had

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 27–28.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 30.

active Iranian confederations and in some instances asked the SAVAK to follow their activities.<sup>171</sup>

These student organizations were part of a global movement and partook in struggles other than their own in the 1960s and 1970s. Iranian student associations participated in the struggles of their host countries' students; however, with the reemergence of the opposition movement in Iran, and especially at Tehran University, they began to sync activities with local Iranian associations in Iran and abroad.<sup>172</sup> At this period, one of the members of the secretariat was a Tehrani Jew, Parviz Ne'eman. Other members, who really illustrate the broad participation, were Abu al-Hasan Banisadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic, and Cosroe Chequeri a historian of the Iranian left and the Armenian-Iranian community.<sup>173</sup>

In the 1970s, along with increased assimilation, Jews were immensely active in student organizations and other opposition movements. Jews sympathized with their compatriots, setting aside their community's alleged inherent support of the monarchy. This mindset of assimilation (and perhaps the feeling that it had arrived to its ultimate stage) could have stemmed from instilling the liberal nationalist ideals those organizations expressed and promoted. Also, it seems like these organizations, with the apparent religious and ethnic diversity allowed them to envision a multi-cultural society, in which they, the minorities, would have a central role. The result was growing

---

<sup>171</sup> Abbas Milani, *The Shah*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 287.

<sup>172</sup> It was preceded by forming an inclusive governing elected body that represented the different factions. Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, 43–49.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 86.

involvement in existing organizations, such as the Student Confederations and the Tudeh Party, and establishment of new organizations. The generation of Jews that came of age during the Shah's White Revolution (post 1963) was already acquainted with socialist theories and politics and expressed its views loudly and clearly as the rest of Iranian society prepared for a revolution.

The connections between the associations in Iran and abroad were very strong. Not only did Iranian students collaborate on operations in Iran and communicating activities to Western outlets, but many of them returned to Iran and became involved in the local chapters once they graduated from institutions in the West. Mihrdad, for example, studied in Europe, and was part of the European confederation. He returned to Iran from Europe at the time when the opposition inside Iran became more active and more explicit:

When I returned to Iran in 1975, I met an old friend who suggested to set up an organization for the younger generation, rather than the old attachment to synagogues. So we established an organization called: "Council of Advancement of Jewish Social and Cultural Activism" and it became very successful. We held our first events in a hotel, not a community center and it became an attraction for the newer generation. We had very interesting events and lectures, which were not religious or pro-Israel. It was more general on informative basis. We had intellectuals coming from the politically active community. Our events were full. Soon, the room given to us was not enough. It was the place for the young up and

coming Jews to meet each other [...] it had become a big community. We were both Jews and part of the wider community.<sup>174</sup>

This group's worldview was holistic, that is they wanted to engage in every aspect of Jewish Iranian social life. The newly established council provided cultural and educational activities to as many Jews as it could find and recruit. Among other operations it ran a summer camp, which aimed to bring together Jews from all over Iran (and especially Tehran), regardless of socio-economic status:

We organized the camp for 14-16 years old. We mixed Jews from South Tehran, the Mahallah, with Jews from North Tehran, and said there is a dress code: jeans and a T-shirt, and we provide the T-shirt, so there was no room for show off. For three summers successively, in 76-78, there were 1,000 kids going to this camp, and all the parents wanted their kids to come to this camp to get to know the others, because the ties within the community became looser and looser and they thought that this is it. Our success was that about third [of the campers] came from poor families of Tehran and we did not charge them anything, and charged the others double.

This way the group addressed issues that received wide attention in Iran at that time, such as economic inequality, and in their community found a popular and working solution. While disparity was a much greater concern in the general public, having treated this issue inside the community must have been seen as a message of success to their leftist ideals.

---

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Mihrdad, 22 January 2013.

The ultimate goal of this council was to connect Jews to broader social movements in Iran and bring them closer to political action. In its deeds the council laid the foundation for a far-reaching organization later that decade, when the revolutionary events started to take place. During the protests of the 1970's, while the Tudeh party's activity had been outlawed, two Jewish activists, Harun Parviz Yesha'ya and 'Aziz Daneshrad, were jailed for anti-monarchial activity. After serving their time, they turned to political activity within the Jewish community.<sup>175</sup> Loyal to their leftist tendencies and religious identity, they gathered a dozen like-minded comrades and established the most significant Jewish organization in late 1970's Iran: *Jami'ah-i rawshanfikran-i kalimi-yi Iran* (The Association of Jewish Iranian Intellectuals-AJII). Habib was a close friend with Yesha'ya and Danseshrad from their days in the Tudeh. He was also one of AJII founders: "We established our office in an apartment on Firdawsi Street. There were four of us, and we did not know where exactly we were heading."<sup>176</sup> They did not have a well-thought plan, but they wanted to politicize the community and connect between Jewish values and ideas and the political program of the Tudeh Party. This organization's significance is threefold. First, it organized the Jews under a Jewish ethnic banner to engage in revolutionary activity. Second, in 1978 it challenged the old-guard leadership of the community, which mostly identified with the shah's regime and had connections

---

<sup>175</sup> David Menashri, "The Jews in Iran: Between the Shah and Khomeini," in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, ed. Sander Gilman (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 360.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Habib, 24 June 2013.

with Zionist organizations, and gained control of the Jewish establishment.<sup>177</sup> And third, its weekly publication *Tamuz*, named after the Hebrew month of July, quickly became a

---

<sup>177</sup> Yusif Kuhin provides another account of the events, which is interesting given Kuhin's own affiliation with the "old guards" and his political position: "By the spring of 1979, the legal term of the Jewish Association leadership was also coming to an end. The Jewish University Students Organizations, the youth and graduate societies had submitted a unified list of candidates among which were the names of only two members of the present Association. The rest of the Association members, those who were known as the "National Fund Group" had produced their own list. After several meetings, seminars and other activities, finally the candidates of the former group won the majority, and the Community was faced by a new Association. In the new Association, Engineer Aziz Daneshrad who had been a member of the Association in the past was elected as the Chairman. The reason for the defeat of the 'National Fund Group' in a few words was that these gentlemen preferred connections over qualifications when recruiting their colleagues; instead of selecting experts and knowledgeable people they were after people who would obediently follow the head of the Fund. Also, by concentrating all the financial affairs and by controlling all the funds, they intended to ensure the obedience of all active organizations for themselves. The organizations on the other hand, and in particular the University Students and the youth, would not acquiesce anyway, and demanded that the National Fund disperse each organization's respective expenses without conditions, according to their bylaws, without interfering with the leadership and the activities of the organizations." For the block quotations from this memoirs I used



highly circulated magazine that aspired to be a bridge between the Jewish community and the Iranian people. As mentioned before, there were overlaps in some of the individuals' affiliations, and so the "association" actively welcomed people with different political and organizational affiliations and became the main venue for leftist Jewish activists.

In an article celebrating the third anniversary of AJII, a *Tamuz* editorial outlined the organization's contribution to Jewish involvement in the revolution: "From the beginning of the year 1357 [1978] a group of the Iranian Jews has participated in the great movement against imperialism and dictatorship. From the very beginning we tried to collaborate with the revolutionaries, especially the Muslim clerics in different levels, and we have done this work ever since. And at last in the month of Shahrivar 1357 [August 1978] a Jewish group joined the protest for the first time under an Iranian-Jewish banner, and this group, in the month of Azar 1357 [November 1978], met with the late Ayatullah Taliqani, and announced the[ir] common goals [...]"<sup>178</sup> This quote shows that AJII was a much more sophisticated incarnation of the previous attempt. In November 1978 these groups believed that the revolution was about to happen and that the shah would soon be overthrown, but it can still be regarded as a bold policy to approach for collaboration with a revolutionary figure, such as Taliqani and give publicity to such support.

---

translations by Faryar Nikbakht with Aziz Kuhin's permission. Kuhin, *Yusif Kuhin: Guzarish va Khaṭīrat-i Fa' 'aliyat'ha-yi Siyasi va Ijtima'i*, 302.

<sup>178</sup> "Fa'aliyyat-i Sah Salah-i Jami'ah-i Rawshanfikran-i Kalimi-yi Iran," *Tamuz*, September 25, 1981.

Indeed, AJII was formed to show Jewish discontent with the monarchial regime. The organization was established in March 1978, as revolutionary events were already unfolding. The group immediately began collaborating with other rebelling factions, including Muslim-Iranian activists (most notably with Ayatullah Taliqani): “We formed this group in order to show the rest of the people in Iran that we Jews were not woven from a different fabric of society than other Iranians, but that we also supported [the new government’s professed] goals for democracy and freedom,” says Sa’id Banayan, one of the association’s founding fathers.<sup>179</sup> AJII became the most vocal supporter of the revolution among the Jewish community. Hushang, a prominent figure in AJII and the Jewish community during the revolution, added: “AJII was the most important Jewish organization during the revolution. At the core of it were left-leaning intellectuals and students, and later many other Jews joined in.”<sup>180</sup> Initially, the Jewish community did not welcome the new AJII leadership and tried to prevent them from gaining influence in the *Anjuman*, the traditional community organization. However, after the elections for the *Anjuman*’s council in March 1978, the new AJII leadership succeeded in establishing a

---

<sup>179</sup> I would like to thank Karmel Melamed for referring me to this interview and contributing from his own knowledge to this research; Karmel Melamed, “Escape, Exile, Rebirth: Iranian Jewish Diaspora Alive and Well in Los Angeles | Jewish Journal,” accessed June 22, 2011, [http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/escape\\_exile\\_rebirth\\_iranian\\_jewish\\_diaspora\\_alive\\_and\\_well\\_in\\_los\\_angeles/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/escape_exile_rebirth_iranian_jewish_diaspora_alive_and_well_in_los_angeles/).

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Hushang, 15 May 2011.

“revolutionary” committee to run Jewish affairs.<sup>181</sup> Some AJII members had served time in the shah’s prisons during previous turmoil where they had become acquainted with other political dissidents who were later involved in the revolutionary movements. The most significant relationship was with Khomeini’s close ally, the popular thinker and a chief ideologist of the revolution, Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taliqani.<sup>182</sup>

The AJII saw indifference, separatism, and corruption as the main obstacles to advancement within the Jewish community. In order to win the hearts and minds of Jews, the association invested in many activities that correlated with their ideals. The association sponsored activities with Muslim activists during the revolution and established a lecture series hosted in local synagogues that featured presentations from secular Muslim advocates of the revolution and high-ranking clerics who were deeply involved in the revolution.<sup>183</sup> For example, Hidayatullah Matin-Daftari, one of the National Front’s leaders, came to talk about the importance for the Jews to integrate into the revolution and participate in building a new Iranian society.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> In any case, a few months later, in the summer of 1978 they failed to be reelected. Amnon Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-yamenu* (Jerusalem: HUJI Press, 1981), 21.

<sup>182</sup> Read more about Taliqani and his pivotal role in the revolution in: Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 216–272.

<sup>183</sup> Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-yamenu*, 22; Editorial, “Fa’aliyyat-i sah salah-i jami’ah-i rawshanfikran-i kalimi-yi iran,” *Tamuz* (Tehran, 25 September 1981), 6.

<sup>184</sup> Amnon Netzer, “Yehudei Iran, Yisrael, Ve-ha-republiqah Ha-islamit Shel Iran,” *Gesher* 26 (Spring-Summer 1980), 48.

The official AJII bylaws reflect hybrid identities that were, in many ways, unique to Iran. The bylaws involved sentiments of nationalism, radical socialism, all mixed with Muslim and Jewish religiosity. Some of the articles in the AJII bylaws expressed this approach with a call for political action and Iranian social solidarity. Article Three, for example, reads: “[We encourage] active participation in the social life of the Iranian people, and the creation of a Jewish society that will struggle shoulder to shoulder with our Iranian brothers for the ultimate victory of the revolution and the building of a free and progressive Iran.” Article 4, for example, presents the utopian vision of creating a new society: “efforts to preserve the fruits of the revolution of the Iranian people in regards of the social and personal rights and including those of the Iranian Jews in the Islamic Republic of Iran.” Article 5 comes to distinguish between Jews and Zionism, since during the revolution there were factions that intentionally conflated the two: “war against imperialism, and any form of colonialism, including Zionism, and revealing the relationship between Zionism and world’s imperialism. War against any sort of racial discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism.” Article 6 talks once again about the revolutionary utopia: “adopting to the new reality in Iran, by enjoying all the opportunities to have better conditions to religious and cultural life and welfare of the Iranian Jews.”<sup>185</sup> These bylaws articles efficiently reflected the mindset of the leftist movements in Iran during the revolution. They envisioned a sort of a model society in which universal values of solidarity would yield a just and open society, and in which the Jews would be equal partner citizens.

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 49.

AJII clearly envisaged a utopian republic of endless opportunities, possible only through disposing of the monarchy and establishing the Iranian republic. The vision of a republic that emphasized fraternity, solidarity—particularly with Palestinians—and freedom for minorities comprises the cultural identity that AJII members aspire to create. This cultural identity is primarily Iranian but expands to include the Arab Middle East and Third-World countries. By positioning the organization as anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist AJII became relevant not only to the Iranian context, but even to the broader Middle East.



Illustration 9: Jews in the Demonstrations during the Revolution (source: *Tamuz*).

### **Sapir Charity Hospital, the Revolution, and Ayatullah Taliqani**

AJII pulled members from a variety of political endeavors; state employees, merchants, industrialist, community activists, and Sapir Hospital staff too. Some of the senior officials in the hospital were involved to some extent in AJII, sympathized with its causes, and assisted the revolutionaries for various reasons. These facilitators included, Gad Naim, who was part of AJII leadership and a senior administrator in Sapir

hospital,<sup>186</sup> Doctor Manuchihr Aliyasi, who was also among the hospital's senior staff and AJII sympathizer,<sup>187</sup> and Harun Parviz Yesha'ya, who was among the founders of AJII and *Tamuz* and became the hospital director after the revolution.<sup>188</sup>

On 8 September 1978, mass demonstrations erupted in Tehran. The shah sent the army to shoot live ammunition at the crowd of protesters. This event became known as “Black Friday” and coincided with the active involvement of the hospital in events. “That Friday the head nurse, Ms. Farangis Hasidim, called me and told me that they are bringing many casualties to the hospital,” recalls Dr. Jalali, one of the senior officials in Sapir Hospital at that time. “I drove to the hospital but the *Zhalah* [avenue] was blocked, so I went by foot and there was shooting [...] since I was friendly with the ambulance services people, almost ninety percent of the injured people came to Sapir hospital, where we treated all of them in our four surgery rooms.” At this point Dr. Jalali indicates the growing involvement of Ayatullah Taliqani and his personal relationship with him, which proved to be essential later on: “Five months prior to the revolution (Following ‘Black Friday’) I had a building next to my office, I dedicated it to ‘Taliqani Support Group,’ (in Persian: *Guruh-i imdad-i Taliqani*) [...]. after ‘Black Friday’ he called me and told me

---

<sup>186</sup> “Ma Yahudiyān Mizrakhi Hastim va Fiqh Ghani Darim,” accessed July 7, 2011, [http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay\\_36\\_mizrakhi.htm](http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay_36_mizrakhi.htm).

<sup>187</sup> “Doktor Manuchehr Aliyasi,” accessed July 7, 2011, [http://www.7dorim.com/tasavir/Namayandeh\\_Eliasi.asp](http://www.7dorim.com/tasavir/Namayandeh_Eliasi.asp).

<sup>188</sup> Interview with Dr. Jalali, 15 May 2011.

how he appreciated all the humanitarian work we did there. And yes, everybody knew about it.”<sup>189</sup>

Guruh-i imdad-i Taliqani became an important apparatus of first response to the wounded protestors in the big cities, especially Tehran. According to the Iranian press there were two first response groups reporting to Taliqani. They had a relatively large staff of volunteering physicians, nurses, ambulances, and other staff, and their contribution to the continuity of the protests cannot be overrated.<sup>190</sup>

The acquaintance of Taliqani with Jewish leaders in Tehran extends beyond his friendship with Dr. Jalali. Upon Taliqani’s release from prison, a group of prominent Jewish figures went to visit him and stayed in close contact with him until his death in 1979. Taliqani became one of the foremost advocates for minority rights in post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>191</sup> Although Jalali was politically affiliated with AJII, some of the doctors were not. The story of the hospital is mostly a humanitarian one.

---

<sup>189</sup> Interview with Dr. Jalali, 15 May 2011. Yusif Kuhin remembered the day very similarly. Given that Kuhin was at odds with Dr. Jalali, I believe it validates the account. Kuhin, *Yusif Kuhin: Guzarish va Khatirat-i Fa ‘‘aliyat’ha-yi Siyasi va Ijtima ‘i*, 312.

<sup>190</sup> “T‘zam-i ekip-i pizashki-yi Ayatollah Taliqani,” *Kayhan* (Tehran, 24 April 1979).

<sup>191</sup> Goel Cohen, *Az kargaran ta kar-afarini* (Geneva: Sina Publications, 2011), 190–191.



Illustration 10: Sapir

Hospital's Staff after the Revolution (source: *Tamuz*).

On 11 December 1978, one of the largest demonstrations against the shah took place in Tehran. Newspapers called it a “demonstration of millions” and it set a milestone in the struggle against the shah’s regime. Jewish participation set records as well; according to some sources, five thousand Jews participated in these protests.<sup>192</sup> Other estimates were much higher. Hushang, a long-time leftist activist in the Jewish community and AJII, helped organize the massive Jewish appearance that day: “According to press reports close to twelve thousand Jews participated in these protests that day,” He says. “The Jewish religious leaders marched in the front row and the rest of the Jews followed them, showing great solidarity with our Iranian compatriots.”<sup>193</sup> The religious leadership sided with the young radical group, and in a sense “legitimized”

<sup>192</sup> Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-Yamenu*, 22.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Hushang, 15 May 2011.



them. “From the first days of the revolution we had considerable support from religious leaders. Hakham Yedidya Shofet, Hakham Uriel Davidi, Rabbi David Shofet, Hakham Yosef Hamadani Cohen, and others attended and supported [...] other key figures were Parviz Yesha’ya, ‘Aziz Daneshrad, Ya‘qub Barkhurdar, Hushang Melamed, Dr. Manuchihr Aliyasi, and Ms. Farangis Hasidim, all played a major role” Hushang says.<sup>194</sup> According to him the activities of AJII helped to reduce tensions between the Muslim majority and the Jewish minority. However, not all of the religious leaders that joined that day did so wholeheartedly. “It was my assignment to convince Hakham Shofet to join us, to get him in the picture,” said Mirdad. “He was sympathetic to the cause but felt heavy hearted. He was reluctant to come and we told him that it for the sake and safety of the community. We even found rabbinic writing and Halacha ruling that say that if they community requires you to so such and such you do it not because this is your belief but because the decision would be for the good of the community. So he said he would come out.”<sup>195</sup> Shofet, then, participated despite early reservations, which makes him a unique case in this story. Loyalty to both the Shah and to the community meant a great deal to him. He came out that day and afterward not because he looked to facilitate integration of the community into the broader society but rather to seek protection for the community in a rapidly changing reality.

Habib’s memories of this demonstration help us to understand the profound impact it had on the participants: “We met by Darvazah-i dawlat synagogue in south Tehran and joined the main demonstration from there [...] our signs and chants were:

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Mirdad, 22 January 2013.

Yahudi- musalman hambastigi-i mubarak (Jewish- Muslims Blessed Solidarity). It was so exciting, I could not stop crying,” says Habib. Hakham Shofet’s recollections of this day express the same sentiment:

In every place we live we must respect the majority’s opinion and to approve and respect their leadership [not necessarily the elected or ruling leadership]. Because of this rule, in those days, with respect to these people, we joined them in marching for the Tasu’a in 19 Azar Mah 1357 (9 December 1978) Muhandis Daneshrad and other members of the Jewish Community (Anjuman) board were on my side [...] It was constructive and inspiring. Many of the Muslims that led this great march and were responsible of it, welcomed us warmly, among them were many Shi’i clerics.<sup>196</sup>

This memory of Shofet is interesting especially because of the fact that he did not openly oppose the Shah. There are multiple accounts of Shofet positively commenting on the Shah’s period as unprecedented for the Iranian Jews, and his fear of the unclear future. In an interview one of the people that made Shofet join the march said that he would do it for the sake of the community, but he should know that every Saturday when he is offering prayers for the health of the Shah- he means it.

Muslim protestors greeted the Jewish group by chanting: “Jewish Brother, Welcome, Welcome” (Baradar-i yahudi khush amadi, khush amadi).<sup>197</sup> When they passed

---

<sup>196</sup> Cohen, *Bar Bal-i Khirad: Jami’ah-i Yahudiyān-i Iran va Haftad Sal Rahbari-yi Mazhabi, Gam Bah Gam Ba Hakham Yedidiya Shofet Dar Kashan, Tehran, va Los Angeles.*, 390.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

by *Madrasah-i 'Alavi*<sup>198</sup> they chanted: *Rahbari-yi Khomeini asas-i vahdat-i milli* (Khomeini's Leadership is the Basis of National Unity). "That day," Habib says "we all had tears of happiness. We were all in support of democracy, and freedom, and the revolution."<sup>199</sup>

Despite the national unity presentation of the demonstration, given past experiences, it was obvious that the protest was not about to end peacefully. Sapir Hospital's personnel were well prepared for the events of Tasu'a and 'Ashura day. "That morning they called me from Madrasah-i 'Alavi and asked to keep all the staff and doctors for the day. I received seventy or eighty percent of the injured from all over the city. All of them went either to Sapir, Kurush-i Kabir as it was called back then, or the Imperial Medical Center, this situation lasted for seventy-two hours," recalls Dr. Jalali.

In its second issue, *Tamuz* published a two-page story titled "Sapir Hospital during the Revolution" (*Bimaristan-i Sapir dar jarayan-i inqilab*) that described the services provided by Sapir Hospital to the revolutionaries: "In the turbulent months of our revolution, Kurush-i Kabir hospital, which after the revolution was renamed after Dr. Sapir, became one of the places that, through taking personal risks for the sake of the revolution, treated and facilitated the revolution."<sup>200</sup> The article cites anecdotes from senior hospital officials, such as the head nurse, Farangis Hasidim, who, speaking about

---

<sup>198</sup> A girls' school in Tehran. Was known to be an opposition supporting institution.

Upon his return from exile Khomeini first resided there.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Habib, 24 June 2013.

<sup>200</sup> M. Shehpar, "Bimaristan-i Sapir dar jarayan-i inqilab," *Tamuz* (Tehran, 11 July 1979), 1.

the events of Black Friday and 'Ashura, said, "This day unfolded in unexpected ways. I went to see a rebel that arrived with a bullet injury in his leg, and he was bleeding. I immediately took him to the surgery room. I had not finished treating him, when another patient came in, and every minute more and more injured arrived. For many hours the hospital looked like the frontlines of a war zone."<sup>201</sup> The hospital staff also had to cope with the shah's security officers that came to search for rebels in hiding: "One day we heard great noise from the hospital's back yard and I saw myriad of people in uniform and plain clothes (i.e. secret police) looking for rebels [...] for twenty-four hours guards circled the hospital, but we did not hand them anyone."<sup>202</sup> "During the *Tasu'a* and 'Ashura the entire hospital staff stayed in the hospital for more than twenty-four hours. The hospital's ambulances cruised the streets to pick wounded protesters and bring them to the hospital to get treatment."<sup>203</sup>

Following these events, in late 1978 a delegation of the Jewish community went to Paris to meet the leader of the revolution, Ayatullah Ruhullah Khomeini. The tacit purpose of this trip was to ensure that Jews would not be regarded as enemies of the revolution but rather as its supporters. This meeting was the first of many between the Jewish leadership and Khomeini.<sup>204</sup> Shortly after, the hospital received its first recognition from Khomeini: "For this reason (the humanitarian help) Imam Khomeini,

---

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-Yamenu*, 22.

before his return to Iran, had sent a letter of gratitude to the director of the hospital, recognizing his help and support for the wounded revolutionaries,” said Dr. Moreh-Sedegh, one of the hospital’s leaders. In an interview he described the assistance given to the revolutionaries, and confirmed, once again, the story of the shah’s army siege in 1978.<sup>205</sup> Receiving Khomeini’s recognition is not a small feat. In many ways it secured the future of the Jews under the leadership of the revolution.

### **“Jews are not Zionists,” Said the Imam**

Throughout the revolutionary events there was a continuing attempt by both revolutionary factions and the Jews to draw a clear distinction between Jews and Zionists. This would be a theme ushered in well into the early revolutionary period, but even from the time of the protest there were multiple occasions where revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries provided explanations and ways to tell the difference.

On September 1978, a few days before the escalation of “Black Friday,” Yusif Kuhin, then the Jewish representative in the Majlis, accompanied by another member of the parliament Ahmad Bani-Ahmad met the Grand Ayatullah Muhammad Kazim Shari’atmadari. The purpose of this meeting was to have the respected Ayatollah stopping the incitement against Jews, which was becoming a problem in some of the provinces in Iran.

At 1:30 in the afternoon of that September 1<sup>st</sup>, Bani-Ahmad called me and said,

“Cohen! Put on your clothes and come to me immediately. Bring your documents

---

<sup>205</sup> “Nishani az vahdat-i milli dar bimaristan-i duktur sapir,” accessed 9 July 2011,

[http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay\\_34\\_farsi\\_bimarestan\\_sepir.htm](http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay_34_farsi_bimarestan_sepir.htm).

with you.” Those days, Bani-Ahmad was in danger, because he was seriously opposing the Shah’s regime. I took the address of his secret location, which was the home of one of his fellow Azeris, and took off immediately. Outside the house, a group of tough Azerbaijanis were standing and I could tell they were armed. I asked Bani-Ahmad what was going on. ”We want to go visit His Eminence Ayatullah Shari’atmadari,” he answered. In any case, all the issues were humbly reported to him on that day in Qum. The Ayatollah was inclined to proclaim that the lives of Jews were protected unless if they were agents of Israel. Bani-Ahmad recommended that “even though this is correct but mentioning it will cause the malefactors to take the life of any Jew they want and then claim that he had been an Israeli agent. It would be better if His Eminence issued a general, unconditional and unambiguous command.” Many reporters and correspondents from major international news agencies were constantly on the alert at Shari’at-madari’s house with their cameras, because that location was the epicenter of Iranian politics, which was of interest to the whole world. That evening, the Iranian radio and television broadcasted this proclamation of the great Source of Emulation of Iranian Muslims:

“Reports are reaching us that a series of written threats against religious minorities who are recognized by the Constitution and respected by the Iranian Nation, have begun under the name of the Clergy and the banner of Islam. Iranian minorities, have all the liberties and the rights imaginable for the people of Iran. On the other hand, according to the ruling of Islamic commandments, personal rights of all the people of the world and even the human rights of our enemies

have been recognized. Religious Minorities, which have been identified in the Constitution, have been shoulder to shoulder with the struggle of the Iranian nation as far as I remember. They accompanied the people in every step of the momentous events of the Constitutional evolution. I shall never accept the smallest threat or intimidation against them under the name of Islam. In fact I consider such actions as an anti-Iranian and anti Islamic conspiracy. We must know that irresponsible people with missions of sabotage are on the prowl and are hoping to spread the seeds of hate and disunity.”<sup>206</sup>

Such a proclamation from a prominent religious leader like Ayatollah Shari’at-madari was a major achievement for the Jewish leadership and in fact, was crucial at the moment, when Israel was brought up more often as part of the anti-shah slogans, and some Iranians could not tell the difference between Jews, Zionists, and Israelis.

Later that month, during the events of “Black Friday” it was rumored that the shah deployed Israeli soldiers to confront the protestors. This rumor, of course, had no basis but it was promptly became an issue demanding attention on behalf of the Jewish leadership.

In the 2013 documentary *Before the Revolution- the Untold Story of the Israeli Community in Iran*, Nissim Levy, one of the Israeli Embassy’s security officers, recalls

---

<sup>206</sup> Kuhin, *Yusif Kuhin: Guzarish va Khaṭirat-i Fa‘‘aliyat’ha-yi Siyasi va Ijtima‘i*, 310–

311.

that as he drove through the streets of Tehran right before the ultimate victory of the revolution he saw graffiti that read: “Kill Every Israeli- But Do Not Harm the Jews.”<sup>207</sup>

### **Immediate Aftereffects of the Revolution**

Shortly after the ‘*Ashura*’ events the revolution took a dramatic turn when on January 15, 1979 Mohammad Reza Pahlavi left Iran for good. “*Shah raft*” (the Shah left) announced the newspapers the next day, and less than a month later they announced that the Imam has arrived (Imam amad). All major minority groups came to the airport to welcome Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini back to Iran. The Jewish delegation coordinated their participation another prominent leader of the revolutionary movement, Ayatollah Bihishti. “Bihishti knew Yesha’ya from the time they were in jail together and helped to bring the Jewish community on board of the welcome ceremony.” This acquaintance facilitated bringing the Jewish representatives into the reception plans.<sup>208</sup>

After the installation of the new regime the hospital encountered controversy. “One night after the revolution they called me to tell that a group of people from the regime came and changed the name of the hospital to ‘Khusraw Golisurkhi Hospital.’ A member of the left, Golisurkhi had been executed by the shah.<sup>209</sup> It took us a long time,

---

<sup>207</sup> Dan Shadur, *Beofre the Revolution- the Untold Story of the Israeli Community in Iran*, Israel 2013.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Mehrdad, 22 January 2013.

<sup>209</sup> Golesorkhi was identified with some of the guerilla movements. Read more about him in: Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 69–70.



together with Parviz Yesha'ya to change it back to 'Dr. Sapir Hospital.'"<sup>210</sup> Simin, Dr. Sapir's niece, explained how they petitioned the government to have the name changed to Dr. Sapir: "I collected evidence from people that got treatment in the hospital, collected newspaper stories, letters from clerics about the hospital during the revolution, and gave it to them in a big box. After a short discussion they pronounced him a Shahid, a martyr of the revolution, and ordered to have the name changed to Dr. Sapir Hospital."<sup>211</sup> This episode of the name change became significant as the Jewish community retained management of the hospital and the government acknowledged the role the hospital had played during the revolution.

Politics continued to play out in the Jewish community after the revolution. The cooperation between the hospital and the AJII was reaffirmed in early 1982. AJII held weekly meetings open to the public, which often included a guest lecture, either on revolutionary topics or Jewish topics during the Jewish high holidays. In January 1982, the executive board of Sapir Hospital came to participate in the weekly meeting. The next day's issue of *Tamuz* reported on the visit, depicting the recent history of the hospital and their plans for the future. Dr. Mansur Sharim, the director of the hospital told the paper that, as always, Sapir Hospital continued to serve the Iranian people regardless of their faith.<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Dr. Jalali, 15 May 2011.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Simin, 27 March 2011.

<sup>212</sup> "Mas'ulin-i Bimaristan-i Doktor Sapir dar jalasat-i haftagi-yi Jami'ah-yi Rawshanfikran-yi Yahudi-yi Iran," *Tamuz* (Tehran, 28 January 1982), 7.

Jews were active, as seen, in all-Iranian organizations—such as the Tudeh—and of course in sectarian explicitly Jewish frames, such as the AJII. However, Jews participated even in almost exclusively Muslim organizations, such as the Mujahidin-i Khalq (The People’s Mujahidin of Iran). The *Mujahidin-i Khalq* was established by prominent clerics and highly religious non-clerics that were the intellectual elites of the nationalist opposition factions. Ayatullah Mahmud Taliqani and Mihdi Bazargan (the future prime minister) were among its prominent members. This organization employed a fascinating combination of Marxist and Islamist discourse in articulation of a revolutionary ideology.<sup>213</sup> The Mujahidin was one of the key opposition organizations in the 1970s until the revolution.<sup>214</sup>

One of the Jewish activists in *Mujahidin-i Khalq* was Edna Sabet. Sabet was born in 1955 to a Jewish Kermanshahi family that lived in Tehran. Her family belonged to the

---

<sup>213</sup> The Mujahidin-i khalq had gone through several organizational changes from its beginning to its modern day (or even post 1977) structure. The movement was part of the Liberation Front of Iran and its ideology and activity were inspired by numerous political movement that preceded its appearance. Bazargan and Taliqani were influenced by the Jibhah-yi Milli of Mosaddeq. More on the ideology and genealogy of the movement see: H. E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1990), 210–213.

<sup>214</sup> Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran: Ideology, Organisation, and the Soviet Connection* (London; Stanford, Calif.: Croom Helm; Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 69–119.

middle class in the city and many of her family members were American educated engineers and industrialists. During her college years, in Ariyamihr Technical University in Tehran, Edna became politically active and joined an underground organization, Paykar. She promptly became a member of its central committee in Tehran. In Paykar she met Ghulam Husayn Salim Aruni, with whom she married later.<sup>215</sup> Aruni was Muslim and became attracted to the Mujahidin-i Khalq.<sup>216</sup> Soon he joined the organization and Edna followed suit. They were both prominent activists in the movement and their story was widely circulated among the Tehran groups.

The institution of the interim revolutionary government prevented the Mujahidin from participating in the April 1979 elections. As a result, the group turned against the newly forming Islamic Republic government. Iran's new revolutionary guards arrested (and even executed without trial) the Mujahidin members who only a short time before had fought with them against the shah's oppressive regime. In 1981 Sabet's husband, Ghulam Husayn Salim Aruni, was captured, arrested, prosecuted, and executed in the infamous Ayatullah Khomeini's court. Edna Sabet was arrested a few months later. Evidence later showed that Sabet never faced court on any charges. She was tortured in prison but remained resilient and confident. She was executed on February 12, 1982,

---

<sup>215</sup> As Mihرداد said in the interview, this generation sought to break the boundaries of the community, and many of them dated and became involved and got married with partners outside the community, mostly Muslims. Interview with Mihرداد, 22 January 2013.

<sup>216</sup> "Ms. Edna Sabet - Iran Human Rights Memorial," accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.iranrights.org/english/memorial-case--4056.php>.

when she was only 27 years old. A fellow comrade from her days in the Mujahidin said: “She was everything the new Islamic regime feared: A brave woman, a Jew, a leftist fighting uncompromisingly against the very core of the Islamic Republic.”<sup>217</sup> Edna Sabet was one of the Jews that were members in an almost- exclusively Muslim organization. Despite her tragic ending Sabet’s story illustrates yet another facet of the complex identities and allegiances that characterized many of her generation. Her affiliation with the Mujahidin and the story of Sapir Hospital during the revolution exemplifies the breaking of the traditional frameworks of this communities’ assimilation. These instances show yet again that in the late 1970s most of the Jews favored their countrymen’s interests over their own good or narrow communal benefits.



Illustration 11: Edna Sabet (source: Iran Human Rights Memorial

Website)

## **Conclusions**

The same events, wars, philosophies, and ideologies that shaped revolutionaries elsewhere in the world inspired the generation that came of age in the 1970s in Iran. It was the time where American students demonstrated against the war in Vietnam, Sartre and Foucault incited European students and supported various goals of Third-World identities. At the same time that many countries experienced their first moments of

---

<sup>217</sup> Email correspondence with Parvin, 7/16/12.

independence, the Iranian students' local project was struggle against the American-backed monarchy in Iran, and instituting a functioning socialist republic instead. This kind of republic, obviously, would be founded upon ideals of egalitarian society where religious or ethnic affiliations play no part. The promise, thus, was creating an Iranian multi-ethnic-religious society.

The involvement of the Jews can be explained in a level of assimilation that they reached in this crucial moment. Whereas the generation of the parents in the late 1960s and early 1970s spent their own youths paved the way to leave the ghettos and the Jewish traditional life, and pursue education and careers in private and public sectors, their children did not feel they had to fight for their status as a marginal minority, but rather for a better society for Iran. The Jewish identity at that point served as another component and possible affiliation in the greater social tapestry of minorities in Iran.

Jewish participants in the Students movements, both in Iran and abroad, belonged at that point to the nationalist bourgeoisie, whether they recognized it or not. Their assimilation efforts were fruitful, and Jewish culture and identity were just additional labels they carried and perhaps rooted them deeper into the Iranian soil. In this context we can see the establishment of AJII, initiatives such as the ones involved Sapir Hospital during the revolution, or the participation of Jews in Muslim revolutionary movements. These all represent the entire spectrum of national belonging. From AJII by professing Iranian nationalism as Jews, to Sapir Hospital in this case- as partnership through humanitarian assistance (again, even when some of the collaborators evidently supported the shah), and Edna Sabet's instance as assimilation through adopting of all the identifiers of Iranian and Islamic symbolism and rhetoric.

The large participation in the demonstrations may suggest that the majority of the Jewish population, while not taking active role in the events leading to the revolution, once realizing its inevitable victory embraced the opportunities and bless it might bring to the community and its future in its homeland.

## **Chapter 6: What is the Place of Non-Muslims in the Islamic Republic? Post-Revolution Dilemmas**

“Revolutionary crises are not total breakpoints in history that suddenly make anything at all possible if only it is envisaged by willful revolutionaries,” wrote Theda Skocpol, referring to popular revolutions and the sobering moment after the revolution itself when utopian visions face reality.<sup>218</sup> The Iranian revolution definitely experienced such a moment. Even though the nascent regime and elites aspired to replace the old corrupt order with a new idealized one, the transformation was difficult at some points and impossible at others.<sup>219</sup> The removal of the Pahlavi dynasty and the establishment of the interim government opened the Iranian political sphere and heralded an attempt to create a new society, established on the same ideas as the revolution: equal society, freedoms,

---

<sup>218</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 171.

<sup>219</sup> Trita Parsi beautifully exemplifies the gaps between the harsh rhetoric of the revolutionary government and its eventual deeds, both domestically and internationally. Although Iran was the most vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause, this rhetoric was seldom followed up by actions. Also, despite calling the U.S. and Israel “Big Satan” and “Small Satan” respectively, Iran continued to deal with both when the regime considered it beneficial for its long term policies. Moreover, Parsi shows that Israel and pro-Israel lobbyists in the U.S. persistently pled policy makers to ignore the Iranian rhetoric and to evaluate only its actions. Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

rights, and democracy. However, chaotic struggles between rebelling parties ushered in this transitional period.

It was obvious that the fighting factions, from communists and Marxists to nationalists (various offshoots of the National Front) and religious Islamists, would soon face a struggle over the character of the revolution, and, ultimately, the character of Iranian society. After the revolution the Iranian nation found itself once again defining its boundaries and identity. Jews had to find yet a new way to deal with changing national ideals, which were now defined by the new revolutionary elite.

Unlike under the Pahlavi regime the inter-communal relations in the post-revolutionary society were in disarray. Different parties inside the Jewish community encouraged their peers toward different political allegiances, while a myriad of ideologies continued to thrive among the Jews, such as socialism and religiosity. Many opted to temporarily leave the country until things returned to normal; Zionist agencies helped those who wished to move to Israel, and Jewish organizations assisted with migration to the U.S.). The political activists that steered the community during the upheavals made the first calls. While they remained the spokespersons for their organizations they had to understand how to navigate in the new political order.

The post-revolutionary journey began for the Jews shortly after the shah left the country. On 13 February 1979, upon Khomeini's return to Iran, the Jewish leadership showed support en masse for the revolution and welcomed the country's new leader.<sup>220</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> David Menashri, "The Pahlavi Monarchy and the Islamic Revolution," in *Esther's Children : a Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar (Beverly Hills, CA: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 396.



AJII members were involved in the movement so deeply that they attended some historical milestones of the revolution. For example, on February 27, 1979 the keys of the former Israeli embassy on Kakh Street were given to the PLO representative, Hani al-Hassan. AJII members were there to welcome al-Hassan and later that day, in a reception in the prime minister's office, they delivered a written statement in support of the PLO and against Israel and Zionism.<sup>221</sup> The Palestinian struggle against Israel occupied a fair amount of space in their rhetoric at that time, a move that drew a clear distinction between the AJII and any representation of Israel. They identified the Palestinian struggle as one of the issues the Iranian regime should support strongly and emphasized their stance on this matter.

Another way for AJII to position itself in opposition to Israel was to show that Zionism had long forgotten and abandoned any kind of Jewish ideals. AJII's official newspaper, *Tamuz*, continued its correlation between radical socialism and Jewish religiosity. On November 22, 1979, *Tamuz* published an expanded interview with Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.<sup>222</sup> Ovadia Yosef was the Chief Rabbi of the Mizrahi or Sephardic Jews. He was born in Baghdad in 1920 and served as a Chief Rabbi in Egypt and then in Israel. He was known for his relatively progressive rulings, and in many cases advanced the

---

<sup>221</sup> Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-Yamenu*, 22.

<sup>222</sup> Ovadia Yosef was born in Baghdad under the name Abdallah Yosef. After his tenure as Israel's Chief Sephardi Rabbi we established and became the spiritual leader of Shas party- the main political organization of Sephardi religious Jews in Israel. As the spiritual leader of Shas he issued a religious ruling in support of Prime Minister Rabin and his peace negotiations with the Palestinians. He passed away in Jerusalem in 2013.

Mizrahi cause by opposing the line he was expected to follow, namely Zionism. In this interview Ovadia repeated his most recent ruling at that time, that “in order to prevent bloodshed [Israel] is allowed to retrieve occupied territories.”<sup>223</sup> The significance of such a ruling stems from the Zionist and (to some extent) Jewish theological understanding that the territories occupied in 1967 are part of the “forefathers’ land” that modern-days Jews inherited through birthright.<sup>224</sup> Menachem Begin, the right wing leader, headed the Israeli government, and his official stance was that the territories gained in 1967 had the same legal status as those that belonged to Israel after 1948. Yosef’s ruling, therefore, illustrates both pragmatism (by leaving the ultra-Zionist camp) and religious tolerance (by agreeing to give up parts of the holy land)—two qualities AJII was happy to emphasize.

Initially, AJII was well coordinated with the new regime. Yet any hope for Iranian Jewish-Muslim rapprochement was quickly snuffed out. Just a few months after the revolution, on 9 May 1979 one of the Jewish community’s philanthropists and leaders, Hajji Habib Elqanian, was executed after being accused of spying for Israel and acting against Islam and the revolution. Many Iranian Jews suspected that the revolutionary court and the new government had framed Elqanian, and they feared a new era of persecution against Iran’s Jewish population. Many Jewish supporters of the revolution felt betrayed by their Muslim compatriots. Three days later, a small delegation, led by Hakham Yedidya Shofet, traveled to Qom to meet with Ayatollah Khomeini. Iranian

---

<sup>223</sup> Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-Yamenu*, 24.

<sup>224</sup> Israel is the only the place where we can speak on systematic overlapping of Judaism and Zionism.

media widely reported the meeting, which successfully established ground rules regarding the relationship between the Muslim majority and the Jewish minority. Khomeini distinguished between Judaism and Zionism, allegedly ending the widespread speculation that all the Jews were undercover Zionist agents. In his proclamation, Khomeini acknowledged the deep roots of the Jewish community in Iran, underscored the elements of monotheism present in both Judaism and Islam, and distinguished between Zionism and Judaism: “We know that the Iranian Jews are not Zionist. We [and the Jews] together are against Zionism [...] they [the Zionists] are not Jews! They are politicians that claim to work in the name of Judaism, but they hate Jews [...] the Jews, as the other communities, are part of Iran, and Islam treats them all fairly.”<sup>225</sup>

A detailed article in the nationally distributed newspaper *Ittila'at* reported that a Jewish delegation came to meet the Imam in Qom, citing the mutual proclamations of the Jewish leaders and Khomeini. Dr. Jalali was also among those leaders “We consider the Jewish community to be non-Zionist,” heralded the title of the article. The following day, Elqanian’s execution and the meeting of the Jewish leaders with Khomeini were still in the headlines of the newspapers. *Ittila'at*’s editorial on May 14 discussed the harm Zionists were doing to the Iranian Jews. “The Zionists are shedding crocodile tears over the Iranian Jews,” the headline of the article announced. “The truth is that the Muslim community in Iran has never had a dispute with its Jewish brothers, and their collaboration during our protest and revolution against the dictatorial regime, is one example of this.” In addition, the author singled out Israel as having double standards,

---

<sup>225</sup> Editorial, “Imam: hisab-i jami’ah-i yahud ghayr az jami’ah-i sahyunist ast, *Ittila'at* (Tehran, 14 May 1979), 5.

pretending to care for the Jews while profiting politically when they suffer.<sup>226</sup> Another story related to Elqanian's execution might illustrate the complex identity of those juggling Iranian, Jewish, and Communist affiliations. Shortly after Elqanian's execution Professor Amnon Netzer met Hakham Yedidya Shofet and asked him who was caring for Elqanian's corpse and funeral arrangements. Shofet replied that since many of the community feared the consequences the only one that came to care and said Kadish over the body (a highly religious burial ceremony) was an AJII leader, the communist 'Aziz Daneshrad.<sup>227</sup>

This confusion between Zionism and Judaism ignited a sort of fascination in the early post-revolutionary public conversation. The need of the broad public to understand the difference between the two was great. Mehrdad, one of the AJII founding members recalls:

During the first 3-4 months after, on state television whenever they had a [talk show] program they tried to bring one of the members of *Jami'ah-yi Rawshanfikran*. We were in half of the programs, which was way too much. The first event was in Pessah [Passover] after the revolution they wanted to compare Pessah to the Iranian New Year, that was few days earlier, and to know how Jews celebrate it at home [...] while it was not taken over by the Islamists there was a very big reception of the fact that Jews were part of the movement."<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>226</sup> Editorial, "Sahyunism barayi yahudiyan-i irani ashk-i timsah mirizad," *Ittela'at* (Tehran, 14 May 1979), 3.

<sup>227</sup> Netzer, *Yehude Iran Be-Yamenu*, 26.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Mehrdad, 22 January 2013.

This recollection attests to the increased interest of Iranians in the Jewish Iranian culture, and demonstrates acceptance of Iranian Jews as a piece of the new Iranian puzzle.

Another instance developed rather differently. A few months later, on June 29, 1979, another talk show hosted two prominent Jewish leaders that were known to be in the circles of Jami'ah-yi Rawshanfikran: Rabbi David Shofet and 'Aziz Daneshrad. The show invited the two to speak about Zionism. Shofet, who was the son of Hakham Yedidia Shofet and the first Iranian Rabbi to be ordained in the U.S., intended to talk about religious Zionism. Shortly after the show aired, *Tamuz* provided an account of the televised roundtable: "On Friday 8/4/1358 the second television roundtable debate about Zionism took place. Rav David Shofet and Mr. Muhandis 'Aziz Daneshrad provided valuable observations on differences between Judaism and Zionism."<sup>229</sup>

In the program Shofet explained that the name Zion stems from a name of a mountain in southeast Jerusalem that is a holy place for Jews because it was the location of the temple. He provided the biblical context and quoted from the biblical scrolls of Ezra and Nehemiah that contextualize the Babylonian exile and Zion. Furthermore, he explained that the Jewish religion requires no action by humans in regards to the creation of a Jewish center in Zion. Shofet pointed out that the religious Jewish vision of the Messiah's return includes not only Jews, but all humanity.<sup>230</sup> Ishaq, a member of the Jewish community in Tehran and active in the religious establishment, who remembers the debate vividly, added: "[T]he interviewer asked Rav Shofet if it is true that all the Jews are Zionists, he waited a second and answered: Jerusalem, Zion, for me is like

---

<sup>229</sup> "Darbarih-yi Mizgard Tilivizyuni," *Tamuz*, July 4, 1979.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

Mecca for you! Jerusalem is the place to which I make pilgrimage, a place I address my prayers to. If this is what you may call Zionist- then I am a Zionist.”<sup>231</sup>

Yet again one can see the fluidity of the term Zionism. While the conventional wisdom defines the term as political Zionism as professed by Israel, we see here (as we saw in other chapters, especially in chapter 4), that the definitions of the term yield several interpretations. The one here espouses religious sentiments to Jerusalem and the word Zionism, completely detached from the political context.

Later in the discussion, the host asked ‘Aziz Daneshrad about political Zionism. Daneshrad explained that Zionism emerged in Europe alongside European classic nationalism and as a solution to tragedies such as the pogroms in Tzarist Russia. Daneshrad explained: “[T]he Zionist movement suggested that the liberation for Jews is impossible with their compatriots, but that they all have to go and gather in one land (then Palestine was chosen), and establish a state.”<sup>232</sup> This message resonates clearly with Jami’ah-yi Rawshanfikran’s priorities: to have an influence on shaping post-revolutionary Iran, to act for equality, unity, and to construct a democratic society with their Iranian compatriots.<sup>233</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> Interview with Ishaq, 3 October 2012.

<sup>232</sup> “Darbarih-yi Mizgard Tilivizyuni.”

<sup>233</sup> Later, Daneshrad explained the connections between Zionism and world imperialism: “The truth is that Zionism is part of the system of world imperialism that works to secure global capitalism through the means of Zionist capitalists. As a result Zionism today is both colonialist and servant of the American imperialism.” Ibid.

### **The Assembly of Experts and the Draft of the First Constitution**

AJII's efforts to be part of the rebuilding process came to partial fruition when Daneshrad was appointed to the Assembly of Experts and the constitution drafting committee, representing the Jewish religious minority. In July 1979 general elections for the committee took place, and the committee subsequently began its work. Four out of seventy-three representatives were elected on behalf of minorities filling the quota of one representative for every recognized religious minority (with the exception of one representative for both Assyrians and Chaldeans). In addition to Daneshrad, Sargon Bayt-i Ushanakugtappeh represented the Assyrian and Chaldean communities, Hara'i Khalatian represented the Armenians, Rustam Shahzadi from the Zoroastrian community.<sup>234</sup> Daneshrad was a longtime political activist and the head of the Jewish community at that time. He was also well connected with some of the revolution's leaders and had been appointed the Jewish representative to the Majlis. During the meetings of this assembly Daneshrad tried to change the precedents for minorities' representation in the parliament. The Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911) established that every recognized religious minority would receive seats in the parliament according to population size, one representative for every 100,000 people. Jews and Zoroastrians received one representative each, the Armenians had two, and a single seat represented

---

<sup>234</sup> "Dabirkhanih-i Majlis-i Khibrigan-i Rahbari: Khibrigan-i Tadvin-i Qanun-i Assasi," accessed June 15, 2014, <http://www.majleskhobregan.ir/fa/tadvinGhanon.html>.

both Assyrians and Chaldeans.<sup>235</sup> This measure intended to assure minorities that the government would never disenfranchise any recognized minority group.

Minorities' representation in the new constitution remained a conversation among Jews in Iran during the work of the committee. *Tamuz*, thus, became the venue of debates among the Jewish leadership regarding the direction and reactions to the new constitution. The different opinions were brought forth in columns and op-eds by Daneshrad and others who were involved in it. Shortly after the constitutional assembly first convened, on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1979, Daneshrad published his lengthy proposals for amending the constitution. In particular, he identified articles he thought should do more to emphasize equality for the religious and ethnic minorities. The article "Nazariyat-i Jami'iah Rawshanfikran Yahudi Iran Dar Barayi Qanun-i Asasi" (AJII's Observation of the Constitution) details the historic situation of minorities in Iran and religious minorities in particular before predicting the effects of the coming constitution. Daneshrad tried in this article to articulate the argument for the Jews, and began with historic background and the dominant Iranian identity of the Jews and their complete integration: "Iranian Jews trace back to the eighth century B.C when groups of them were brought by the Assyrian government... bigger groups were brought by the Babylonian government and they settled in different Iranian cities. These groups effected social transformations that took place during the centuries and have been transformed by the

---

<sup>235</sup> Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy & the Origins of Feminism*, The History and Society of the Modern Middle East (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).



different communities in Iran.”<sup>236</sup> He later presented the articles in-dispute of the constitution and his proposal for revisions. In many instances the corrections merely stressed the equality of all citizens regardless of their faith, race, social, and economic status before the law. However, Daneshrad’s egalitarian vision for the government received attention in this article too:

In article 50 of the constitution it is written that Zoroastrians and Jews of the country will have one representative elected, and Christians will elect two representatives. This proposition is drawn from years of tyranny and strangulation and the being of the country dependent upon identification of the religious minorities and the national majority... AJII believes that every Iranian, of any religion or ethnicity or race, must have the right to vote for every competent Iranian of any ethnicity and race. This right must be implemented by mutual understanding between all ethnic groups and followers of all the religions in the country.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>236</sup> Aziz Daneshrad, “Nazariyat-i Jami’iah Rawshanfikran Yahudi Iran Dar Barayi Qanun-i Asasi,” *Tamuz*, July 4, 1979.

<sup>237</sup> It has later become Article 64 of the constitution, in its final form. Article 64 in the constitution reads: “There are to be two hundred seventy members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly which, keeping in view the human, political, geographic and other similar factors, may increase by not more than twenty for each ten-year period from the date of the national referendum of the year 1368 of the solar Islamic calendar. The Zoroastrians and Jews will each elect one representative; Assyrian and Chaldean Christians will jointly elect one representative; and Armenian Christians in the north and

The Jewish revolutionaries envisioned a democratic republic for the new Iranian nation, one that needed no protected quotas of representations. Hoping to have a democratic society, which eliminated religious or ethnic distinctions, Daneshrad suggested ridding the minorities of special representation and allowing full and equal participation by all citizens in the general parties. Mihrdad, who advised Daneshrad in his capacity of a legal scholar, recalls:

We went to [Mihdi] Bazargan and told him we do not want the secured member in parliament. He told us that we [the Jewish community] are too small, and that we will never be represented. So we said that we want to have equal rights; if we are good enough we will be elected and have more than one representative in the parliament, but we do not want to be disenfranchised otherwise, having one member representing us.<sup>238</sup>

This conversation between the Jewish leaders and the sitting prime minister indicates that the latter had more doubts regarding the direction of the revolution, or the possible shortcomings of major amendments to the proposed constitution. While the Jewish

---

those in the south of the country will each elect one representative. The limits of the election constituencies and the number of representatives will be determined by the law.”

Daneshrad refers in his article in Tamuz to that constitutional article. Ibid.; *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran: Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1980); See also the protocols of the Constitutional Assembly regarding this article: Sayyid Javvad Vari’i, *Mabani va Mustanidat Qanun-i Asasi Bih Rivayat Qanunguzar* (Qum: Intisharat-i Dabirkhanah-i Majlis-i Khibrigan-i Rahbari, 1385), 389–393.

<sup>238</sup> Interview with Mihrdad, 22 January 2013.

leadership was optimistic about Jews' chances to remain represented in the framework of existing parties, without quotas, Bazargan was more skeptic, and more aware to the dominant factions in the post-revolutionary provisional government.

Because of these debates, in the assembly's debates Daneshrad did not broach this topic again. He continued to participate in debates regarding Article 64, which has been revised twice for matters not directly related to minorities. However, Daneshrad did not limit himself to dealing with minorities' issues exclusively and his political and ideological background served him well in discussion on social and economic issues. Daneshrad argued and fought to establish the state's social responsibilities towards the workers and the poor, and protection of national and cultural assets as well.<sup>239</sup> During the debates on Article 14, which makes the recognition of religious minorities official, the deputy from Baluchistan, Molavi Abdol-Aziz argued against Iran's recognition of Israel's and American's (nominally enemies of Iran) official religions, while not recognizing his Sunni Islam. Daneshrad asserted that "the Israeli government is a government of no religion and its foundation is not based on religion but on the politics of usurpation which is hated by all believing Jews."<sup>240</sup>

---

<sup>239</sup> See for example debates over Article 43, under the section: "Economy and Financial Affairs." Vari'i, *Mabani va Mustanidat Qanun-i Asasi Bih Rivayat Qanunguzar*, 311–324.

<sup>240</sup> Sanasarian also shows that during the period of the constitutional assembly both Ayatullah Muntaziri and Ayatullah Taliqani made clear in their Friday's sermons that Jews are integral part of Iranian society, and any criticism should be directed at Israel and Zionism and not Iranian Jews. Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge;



Illustration 12: Aziz Daneshrad's personal record (source:

Majlis-i khubrigan website)

## Brothers in Arms: Challenges during Iran-Iraq War

With the outbreak of the war with Iraq in August 1980 the post-revolution took another turn. Now the war became a galvanizing experience and put to test the loyalty or the citizenry of the minority groups. Radical yet popular factions of the regime began treating Jews suspiciously and suggested that Iranian Jews were serving as agents for Israel. To prove their loyalty the Jewish establishment engaged in two activities almost obsessively: supporting the Iranian war effort against Iraq, and criticizing Israel while espousing a strong pro-Palestinian stance.

Iranian Jews expressed pro-Palestinian sympathies by attacking Zionism as a whole, providing critical analysis of Israeli society (mostly through *Tamuz*), and aligning with the Islamic Republic's official policy. For example, the Jewish community organized demonstrations against Israeli air raids in Lebanon in the early 1980s and more

---

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 63–64; Vari'i, *Mabani va Mustanidat*

*Qanun-i Asasi Bih Rivayat Qanunguzar*, 232–235.

vehemently against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The critical analysis came in the form of interviews such as the one mentioned above with Rabbi Ovadia Yosef or in writing about Israel's most recent population crisis as the number of Jews leaving Israel was greater than the number of Jews immigrating to the country. The *Tamuz* article on the issue was titled: "Reverse Migration from Israel: The Zionists are in Complete Deadlock."<sup>241</sup> The article analyses the identity crisis that ended the trend of Jewish migration to Israel. As for the alignment with IRI official policy regarding the Palestinian struggle, on Ruz-i Quds 1981 (Jerusalem Day) AJII published an announcement condemning Israel and endorsing the Palestinian people and the Iranian leadership in this campaign. The language used in this article is astonishing: "Zionists employ Nazi-style attacks on defenseless people," reads one sentence. The article also indicates the disconnection between world Jewry and Israel and Zionism. The announcement ends with "Hail to the Heroic Palestinian People" and "Victorious Common Struggle of Muslims, Christians, and Jews against Imperialism and Zionism."<sup>242</sup>

The second part of this AJII strategy was the unequivocal support within Iran in the war effort against Iraq. During the Iran-Iraq war, AJII committed once again to connecting the Jewish community, especially the younger generation, to the ideals of the revolution. They published articles encouraging the community's youth to engage in political activity or to join the combating forces. Relying on the blood covenant

---

<sup>241</sup> "Muhajirat Ma'akus Az Israil: Sahyunist'ha Dar bayn-i Bast-i Kamil," *Tamuz*, November 19, 1981.

<sup>242</sup> "Bimunasibat-i Ruz-i Quds: I'ilmia Jami'ah-yi Rawshanfikran-i Yahudi Iran," *Tamuz*, July 29, 1981.

established during the revolution, several authors called on young Jews to help in the new struggle: “[...] Jewish Iranian youth, before and after 22 Bahman 1357, joined their [Muslim] compatriots in the struggle against the shah’s regime, and in this way sacrificed [members] for the revolution. After the victory of the Islamic revolution and the stabilizing of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Jewish youth has to go again to the field and participate with its Muslim brothers and sisters in the holy war against Iraq.”<sup>243</sup> Official numbers of Jews that joined the army are difficult to obtain, but judging by the articles in *Tamuz* and other unofficial sources, a growing number of Jews volunteered to join the army. On the home front, Sapir Hospital, once again, was recognized for the efficient first response it provided to wounded soldiers and civilians during the war.<sup>244</sup>

Naturally, Jewish and other minority soldiers died in the war as well, and the revolutionary government erected a mural in their memory. The enormous mural shows the faces of five of the martyrs and presents a quote of Khomeini: “Religious minorities have special respect in Islam and essentially they are in one line with the Muslims in serving the country.” Irony, however, may have played a role in the location of the mural. The mural sits at a visible intersection of Vali-asr Avenue and Mirdamad Street in North Tehran, across the road from a famous business and residence complex buildings, the Eskin project. The shah built the entire complex through the Israeli contractor company

---

<sup>243</sup> Editorial, “Nasl-i javan-i kalimi-yi Iran bidar shudah ast,” *Tamuz* (Tehran, 6 May 1982), 3.

<sup>244</sup> Approximately 15 Jews were killed in the war with Iraq. “Iran’s Jews Feel Very Much at Home | The National,” accessed June 20, 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/irans-jews-feel-very-much-at-home>.

*Solel Boneh*. The site is thus reminiscent to the flourishing relations between Israel and pre-revolutionary Iran.<sup>245</sup>

Despite becoming bitter enemies, Iran and Israel continued to pursue—to a large extent—the same geopolitical policies that they had pursued before the revolution. The countries negotiated military connections and large-scale arm deals with active involvement of the United States. Israel continued this relationship partly because the country believed that Khomeini’s revolution would not last long. Iranian Jews who migrated to Israel and the U.S. successfully convinced policy makers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem that this revolution contradicted Iranian national DNA and therefore would not take root in Iran’s culture.<sup>246</sup>

The nation-building project of post-revolutionary Iran challenged the minority groups. Soon after the revolution some believe that the revolution ceased to be “Iranian” and became “Islamic” instead. The spaces or positions minorities aspired to claim had to be found in the midst of post-revolution chaos, due to domestic tensions between competing factions and external concerns, with the war taking place. The actions of AJII in regards to the war coincided with the policies it professed before the revolution. That is, to assimilate to any form of society would be shaped after the success of the revolution, be it an Iranian republican society or Islamic state.

---

<sup>245</sup> The building of the complex began in 1972 and ended in 1979, just after the revolution. Neta Feniger and Rachel Kallus, “Israeli Planning in the Shah’s Iran: A Forgotten Episode,” *Planning Perspective*, forthcoming.

<sup>246</sup> See Trita Parsi’s excellent account of this period: Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.*, 91–126.

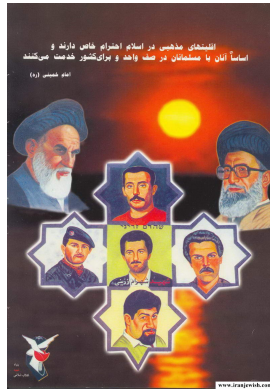


Illustration 13 and

14: Eskan project in Tehran and the Mural for the Minority Martyrs of the War (source: Jewish Community in Iran website)

## Conclusions

Building the post-revolutionary society entailed certain challenges no one had foreseen; the Islamic movements that got the upper hand, did so despite earlier convictions that post-revolutionary Iran would become an inclusive society based on social justice and indifference to religious or ethnic identities, or pre-revolutionary social status. The new nation-building project privileged religion over political ideology and pushed religious minorities to the social periphery again, thus reversing the minorities' achievements in the past three decades.<sup>247</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> The story with some of the ethnic minorities was different. Many of the post-revolutionary clerical elite were Azeris, that flourished in the new society. Among them one can find the current Supreme Leader, Sayyid 'Ali Khamenei and the Prime Minister during the war with Iraq, Mir Husayn Musavi.



However, the reality was that the place minorities had already obtained in public life and the public sphere was not easily taken by any government. Moreover, the post-revolutionary government encouraged this participation by reserving seats in the committee that was trusted to create the founding document of the new Iran, the constitution. As this chapter showed, when discussing the character of the society, government-social affairs, and the economy, the religious identities played a small role, if any.

When the war with Iraq erupted it was perceived as a galvanizing moment for the post-revolutionary government as well as for Iranian society. The Jewish leadership instantaneously showed solidarity and called the Jewish youth to join the army and support the war effort. This was another manifestation of strong national identity, which does not contradict the religious affiliation.

The subject that remained most problematic for Jews was the association with Zionism in the broader Iranian consciousness. While alternative interpretations for Zionism, as a concept, were put forth by Iranian Jews it was still a shadow hanging over their loyalty to Iran and put it in question. Even in their hour of crisis, most of the Iranian Jews did not leave for Israel, and the overwhelming majority of those who left, decided on the United States rather than Israel. Another fact that is always worth considering is that even today, Iran still has the biggest Jewish community in the Middle East outside Israel.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

It is rare in history that interests of global super powers, local political elites, and minority groups converge to serve all three communities equally. When coming to describing that moment of the Allied armies invasion in August 1941, however, this converging of interests fits best. The Allies needed to remove Reza Shah to confront whatever Nazi influence existed in Iran, and to access transportation routes and much needed oil between central Asia and the Persian Gulf freely. The then crown prince, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, wanted to preserve the dynasty his father established and to resist public demands among the Iranian political elite to restore the Qajar monarchy or even to turn Iran into a republic. The minorities, while not fully aware to the possibilities of the hour, that would include unprecedented political and personal freedoms, happily overturned some of the policies instituted by Reza Shah, such as the Iranianization of the minorities' schools.

The Iran the Allied Armies left in 1945-6 was utterly different than the one they had occupied only a few years earlier. By the mid 1940s Mohammad Reza Shah had already lifted many of the bans on political organizations and freedoms of press, and a massive urbanization process swept the country. This dissertation examined the social transformations Jewish individuals and institutions in Iran experienced during this period. The political and social changes influenced Jews just like their non-Jewish compatriots. They took advantage of the freedoms offered, but more than that, they took advantage of their improving legal status and the changes in the ethos of Mohammad Reza Shah's nation-building.

This ethos detached religious or ethnic affiliation from the politics of national belonging and removed many of the official and social obstacles that prevented Jews from fully integrating until that point. As Jews began their integration into the general society, they also started building new allegiances. Now they were not only connected “vertically” to the shah and the government, but also “horizontally” with their fellow Iranians.

Besides political activism and urbanization, the main vehicle for grander amendments was the educational system. Jewish schools provided first and foremost for Jewish communities, but by the 1960s Jews’ educational and professional success encouraged non-Jews to take the same route and increasingly enroll in the Jewish schools. Once again, these developments opened up the Jewish institutions to broader collaborations and deepened the connection between Jewish and non-Jewish Iranians. As this connection progressed, religious affiliations weakened. The shah disconnected Islam from the nation, forcing secularization and westernization. He emphasized pre-Islamic elements in the Iranian culture and connections between the country and the West. Jews adapted this process to challenge the older (and more religious) guards of the Jewish establishment and their communities began to politicize.

The radical politicization became evident as Jews participated in the oppositional student movements, the underground Tudeh organizations, and internal Jewish organizations, such as afterschool activities in a socialist oriented camp and the Association of Jewish Iranian Intellectuals (AJII). AJII was instrumental in creating the hybrid identity that played out so clearly in the events leading to the revolution in 1979.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 encompassed all strata of Iranian society, regardless of education, religion, vocation, and economic class, excluding only the political elite. The Jewish community was mostly divided in its support of the revolution. On the one hand, they possessed a great deal of freedoms under Pahlavi. On the other hand, many of them participated in professional unions and truly sympathized with their fellow revolutionaries. The AJII led the way among Jewish revolutionary sympathizers. This revolution became a watershed moment in the Jewish history of Iran. For the first time Jews acted in an organized way to support a national cause that exceeded the narrow goals of the community. Not all of those who aided the revolution did so on ideological grounds. Many accounts indicate that participants acted in the name of universal humanitarian values and personal relationships.

This episode in Iranian history suggests unintended consequences of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's nation building project. This project aimed to create a unified nation that would make Iranian national identity stronger than any communal belonging, and indeed, as can be seen from much of the evidence, many of the participants did rank their Iranian identity and national identity higher than any other component of identity. When the time arrived they prioritized standing shoulder to shoulder with their compatriots rather than advancing myopic community needs or goals. Jewish groups' contribution to the revolution remained somewhat obscured, however, partly because key Jewish leaders did not want to attract too much attention to the seemingly vulnerable community in Iran. Nevertheless, they played a part in the Islamic Revolution and thus Iranian history.

In the post-revolutionary period Jews adjusted once again to a new Nation Building project, now better equipped with a higher social status that eased the effect of the new government's Islamicization policies.

The same ideals and allegiances that led many Jews to participate in the revolution drove them to actively shape the new Iran after the 1979 revolution. Jews faced many challenges after the turmoil but held on to their achievements of the previous decades. The Jewish leadership felt responsibility to support the new regime and to influence policy changes from within the government. The writing of the new constitution, and Jewish support of the 1980 war with Iraq, highlighted the stakes of this responsibility

Spend ten minutes with an Iranian Jew and he will not hesitate to tell you that Jewish existence in Iran goes back 2,700 years before the Islamic republic appeared. Jews want to preserve this status in their homeland. "Jews here have great Iranian roots – they love Iran. Personally, I would stay in Iran no matter what. I speak in English, I pray in Hebrew, but my thinking is Persian," says Siamak Moreh-Sedegh, the Jewish deputy in the Majlis and a prominent leader among the 25 to 35 thousand Jews still living in Iran.<sup>248</sup> This sentence demonstrates the deeply rooted connection Iranian Jews feel to their country, after a World War, expansive social developments, and even more than three

---

<sup>248</sup> Charles London, *Far from Zion: In Search of a Global Jewish Community*, 1st ed. (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 192–226; "In Ahmadinejad's Iran, Jews Still Find a Space - CSMonitor.com," accessed August 12, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0427/p01s03-wome.html>.

decades after the revolution.

### **Moving Towards a New Historiography**

“The Iranian Jews are the most researched non-Muslim religious minorities in Iran,” asserts Eliz Sanasarian.<sup>249</sup> While his claim may be empirically correct, my research finds that the majority of scholarship within this historical genre limits itself to a single meta-narrative that describes the Jewish minority as an isolated community with very limited interactions. However, as this dissertation proves, the studies of the Iranian community have not considered the Jews’ environment and broader society, major social changes and trends that transformed the Jewish community and Iranian society as a whole. The historiographical solution is to conduct research that does not confine itself to isolated analysis of the Jewish community in Iran, but rather explores the different groups that together comprise the Iranian society. This study, rather than examining only Jewish life and inner-communal interaction, allows a critical gaze of the Iranian general society.

To carry out this kind of research, scholars must continue to locate new sources. The type of sources that revealed much of the structure was of the relief organizations’ archives. Involvement of so many organizations in the re-shaping of the society introduced many new forces from within the Jewish community and uncovered the ways Jewish institutions operated in collaboration with non-Jewish institutions.

Ultimately, this project opens a space for revisiting histories of other religious and ethnic minorities currently excluded from the Iranian national story. The most similar, I

---

<sup>249</sup> Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44.

believe, would be the situation of the Christian minorities which developed alongside the Jewish development timeline. Christians too had institutions, such as the missionary schools, hospitals, youth movements, and transnational connection with Western advocates. There is place to examine more closely informal educational organizations, both Jewish and Christian, such as youth clubs, youth movements, and earlier forms of student organizations, in addition to the formal one examined here. This future analysis will contribute to understanding of Iran as an hybrid, multi-cultural, and inclusive society. Doing this work will demonstrate that the Iranian society is much larger than the sum of its parts.

## **Bibliography**

### **Interviews**

Interview with Ardeshir (pseudonym), 17 November 2013.

“Interview with Barukh Berukhim (pseudonym),” September 25, 1998. CIJOH.

Interview with Daud (pseudonym), 25 June 2013.

Interview with Dr. Jalali (pseudonym), 15 May 2011.

Interview with Habib (pseudonym), 24 June 2013.

Interview with Hayyim (pseudonym), 25 June 2013.

Interview with Hushang (pseudonym), 24 May 2011.

Interview with Ishaq (pseudonym), 3 October 2012.

Interview with Mihرداد (pseudonym), 22 January 2013.

Interview with Pinhas (pseudonym), 15 May 2014.

Interview with Roman (pseudonym), 15 July 2013.

Interview with Simin (pseudonym), 27 March 2011.

### **ARCHIVES:**

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, New York City.

Center for Jewish Iranian Oral History, Los Angeles.

Foreign Office Records, National Archives, London.

Israeli State Archive, Jerusalem.

The International Red Cross Archive, Geneva.

The National Archives, London.



The Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

## **NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS:**

Ittila'at

Kaviyan

Kayhan

Nissan

Tamuz

## **Published Materials in Persian**

Al-e Ahmad, Jalal. *Safar Bih Vilayat-I Izrail*. Tihiran: Intisharat-i ravaq, 1984.

“Bimunasibat-I Ruz-I Quds: I’ilmiya Jamehe-Ye Ruwshanfikran-I Yahudi Iran.” *Tamuz*, July 29, 1981.

Cohen, Goel. *Az Kargaran Ta Kar Afrini*. Geneva: Sina Publications, 2011.

— — —. , ed. *Bar Bal-I Khirad: Jami’ah-I Yahudiyān-I Iran va Haftad Sal Rahbari-Yi Mazhabi, Gam Bah Gam Ba Hakham Yedidiya Shofet Dar Kashan, Tehran, va Los Angeles*. Los Angeles, CA: The Educational Foundation of Hacham Yedidia Shofet, 2010.

“Dabirkhanīh Majlis Khabargān Rahbari: Khabragān-i Tadvīn Qanun-i Assasi.”

Accessed June 15, 2014. <http://www.majleskhobregan.ir/fa/tadvinGhanon.html>.

Daneshrad, Aziz. “Nazariyat-i Jami’iah Rawshanfikran Yahudi Iran Dar Barayi Qanun-i Asasi.” *Tamuz*. July 4, 1979.

“Darbarih-yi Mizgard Tilivizyuni.” *Tamuz*. July 4, 1979.

“Doktor Manuchehr Aliyasi.” Accessed July 7, 2011.

[http://www.7dorim.com/tasavir/Namayandeh\\_Elasi.asp](http://www.7dorim.com/tasavir/Namayandeh_Elasi.asp).

“E’ezam-i Akip Pezashki Ayatollah Taleqni.” *Keyhan*. April 24, 1979.

Editorial. “Fe’aliyat-i 3 Saleh-ye Jame’eh-ye Rushanfikran Kalimi-i Iran.” *Tamuz*.

September 25, 1981.

— — —. “Imam: Hisab-i Jami’ah-i Yahud Ghayr Az Jami’ah-i Sahyunist Ast.” *Ittila’at*.

May 14, 1979.

— — —. “Nasl-i Javan-i Kalimi-yi Iran Bidar Shudah Ast.” *Tamuz*. May 6, 1982.

— — —. “Sahyunism Barayi Yahudiyan-i Irani Ashk-i Timsah Mirizad.” *Ittila’at*. May 14, 1979.

“Fa’aliyyat-i Sah Salah-i Jami’ah-i Rawshanfikran-i Kalimi-yi Iran.” *Tamuz*, September 25, 1981.

Farhoumand, Iraj. “Iraniyan-i Yahudi va Hizb-i Tudah-i Iran.” In *Yahudiyan-i Irani Dar Tarikh-i Mu’asir*, edited by Homa Sarshar, 107–34. Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2000.

Hamedani, Mushfiq. *Khaterat Nim-i Qarn Rooznamehnegari*, n.d.

Ishaqyan, Ilyas. *Hamrah Ba Farhang: Gushah'i Az Tarikh-i Mu'assasah-i Alyans Dar Iran/ Khātirat-i Ilyas Ishaqyan*. Los Angeles, CA: Sina Publications, 2008.

Ja`fari, `Abd al-Rahim. *Dar justuju-yi subh: khatirat-i `Abd al-Rahim Ja`fari, bunyanguzar-i mu'assisah-i Intisharat-i Amir Kabir*. Tihran: Ruzbihan, 2004.

Karimi, `Ali-Reza, and Sayyid-`Ali Karimi. “Lehastani’ha-ye Muhajer Dar Iran.” *Tarikh Mu’asir Iran* 3, no. 9 (1999-2000 1379): 7–40.

Kuhin, Yusif. *Yusif Kuhin: Guzarish va Khatirat-i Fa‘‘aliyat'ha-yi Siyasi va Ijtima‘i*. Los Angeles, CA: International Printing, 1993.

“Ma Yahudiyān Mizrakhi Hastim va Fiqh Ghani Darim.” Accessed July 7, 2011.

[http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay\\_36\\_mizrakhi.htm](http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay_36_mizrakhi.htm).

Mahrad, Ahmad. “Sarnivisht-i Irāniyān-i Yahudi Tay-yi Jang-i Jahāni-yi Duvvum Dar Urupa.” In *Yahudiyān-i Irāni Dar Tarikh-i Muasir*, edited by Homa Sarshar, 3:59–108. Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History, 1999.

Maram, Mohammad Hosein Salehi. *Asnadi Az Ishghal-i Iran Dar Jang-i Jahāni-i Duvvum*. “makatib-i safir-i inglis dar tihran, vizaratkhanah-i umur-i kharijah, ustandar-i khurasan va nukhust vazir dar khusus-i vurud-i muhajirin-i lahistani az shuravi bih iran,” Mohammad Hosein Salehi Maram, *Asnadi Az Ishghal-i Iran Dar Jang-i Jahāni-i Duvvum* (Markaz pazhuhash va asnad riyasat jamhuri markaz-i pazhuhish va asnad-i riyasat-i jumhuri, 2011).

“Mas’ulin-i Bimaristan-i Doktor Sapir Dar Jalasat-i Haftagi-yi Jami‘ah-yi

Rawshanfikran-ye Yahudi-yi Iran,” *Tamuz*. January 28, 1982.

“Muhajirat Ma’akus Az Israil: Sahyunist’ha Dar Bayn-i Bast-i Kamil.” *Tamuz*, November 19, 1981.

Nikbakht, Faryar. “Yahudiyān Dar Nihzatha va Ahzab-i Siyasi.” In *Terua*, edited by Homa Sarshar, 69–91. Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 1996.

“Nishani Az Vahdat-i Milli Dar Bimaristan-i Duktur Sapir.” Accessed July 9, 2011.

[http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay\\_34\\_farsi\\_bimarestan\\_sepir.htm](http://www.iranjewish.com/Essay/Essay_34_farsi_bimarestan_sepir.htm).

Pirnazar, Jaleh. "Yahudiyan-i Iran, Huvviyyat-i Milli va Ruznamahnigari." In *Yahudiyan-i Irani Dar Tarikh-i Mu'asir*, edited by Homa Sarshar, 13–46. Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2000.

Shehpar, M. "Bimaristan-i Sapir Dar Jarayan-i Inqelab." *Tamuz*. July 11, 1979.

Vari'i, Sayyid Javad. *Mabani va Mustanidat Qanun-i Asasi Bih Rivayat Qanunguzar*. Qum: Intisharat-i Dabirkhanah-i Majlis-i Khibrigan-i Rahbari, 1385.

### **Published Materials in Hebrew**

Cohen, Avraham. "Tmurot Mahutiyot Ba'hinikh Ha'yehudi Be'paras." In *Yehudei Iran: Avaram, Morashtam ve-Zikatam Le-Eretz Ha-Kodesh*, edited by Amnon Netzer, 68–76. Holon: Beit Koresh, 1988.

Ezri, Meir. *Mi va-Khem Mi-Kol 'Amo*. Or Yehuda: Hed Arzi: Sifriyat Ma'ariv, 2001.

Michael, Sami. *Gevulot Ha-Ruah: Šiḥot 'im Rubik Rozenṭal*. Kay Adom. Tel-Aviv: ha-Kibuts ha-me'uḥad, 2000.

Netzer, Amnon. "Ha-Kehila Ha-Yehudit Be-Iran." In *Yehudei Iran: Avaram, Morashtam ve-Zikatam Le-Eretz Ha-Kodesh*, edited by Amnon Netzer, 3–20. Jerusalem: Beit Koresh, 1988.

— — —. "Ha'arets ve'yehudiy'ha." In *Iran*, edited by Haim. Saadoun, 9–26. Yerushalayim: Misrad ha-hinukh, ha-tarbut veba-sport, ha-Mazkirut ha-pedagogit, ha-Merkaz le-shiluv moreshet Yahadut ha-Mizrah : Mekhon Ben-Tsevi le-heker kehilot Yisrael ba-Mizrah shel Yad Ben-Tsevi veba-Universitah ha-Ivrit, 2005.

— — —. *Yehude Iran Be-Yamenu*. Jerusalem: HUJI Press, 1981.

— — —. “Yehudei Iran, Yisrael, ve-Ha-Republiqah Ha-Islamit Shel Iran.” *Gesher* 26  
(Spring-Summer 1980): 45–57.

Shohet, Nir. *Sipurah Shel Golah : Perakim Be-Toldot Yahadut Bavel Le-Doroteha*.

Jerusalem: ha-Agudah le-kidum ha-Mehker vecha-Yetsirah, 1981.

Tsadok, Hayim. *Yahadut Iran bi-tekufat ha-shoshelet ha-Pahlavit : Yehude Iran ve-Erets  
Yisrael (1935-1978)*. [Tel Aviv]: Meyatseg, 1991.

### **Published Materials in English**

Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran between Two Revolutions*. New Jersey: Princeton University  
Press, 1982.

— — —. *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. New  
York, NY: The New Press, 2013.

Abramowitch, Stanely. “Letter from Stanely Abramowitch to A.J.D.C Paris, Re: A.I.U  
Ghetto School,” March 23, 1952. G 45-54/4/85/8/ OM.16. JDC.

Afary, Janet. “From Outcastes to Citizens: Jews in Qajar Iran.” In *Esther’s Children : A  
Portrait of Iranian Jews*, edited by Houman Sarshar, 137–74. Beverly Hills  
Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2002.

— — —. *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy,  
Social Democracy & the Origins of Feminism*. The History and Society of the  
Modern Middle East. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Al-e Ahmad, Jalal. *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*. Translated by Hamid Algar.  
Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984.

- — —. *The Israeli Republic*. Translated by Samuel Thrope. New York, NY: Restless Books, 2013.
- Amanat, Mehrdad. *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha'i Faith*. Library of Modern Religion 9. London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Baron, Salo. "Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?" *The Menorah Journal* 14, no. 6 (1928): 515–26.
- Bashkin, Orit. *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq*. Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Beaupré-Stankiewicz, Irena, Danuta Waszczuk-Kamieniecka, and Jadwiga Lewicka-Howells, eds. *Isfahan- City of Polish Children*. Sussex: Association of Former Pupils of Polish Schools, Isfahan and Lebanon, 1989.
- Behrooz, Maziar. *Rebels with a Cause : The Failure of the Left in Iran*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999.
- Beinin, Joel. *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*. Contraversions 11. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Bharier, Julian. "A Note on the Population of Iran, 1900-1966." *Population Studies* 22, no. 2 (July 1, 1968): 273–79. doi:10.2307/2173024.
- Chaqueri, Cosroe. "Did the Soviets Play a Role in Founding the Tudeh Party in Iran?" *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 40, no. 3 (July 1, 1999): 497–528. doi:10.2307/20171142.

- Chehabi, H. E. *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Chehabi, Houchang. "Iran and Iraq: Intersocietal Linkages and Secular Nationalisms." In *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. New York; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Cohen, Mark R. "Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History." *Jerusalem Quarterly* XXXVIII (1986): 125–37.
- Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Tehran: Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1980.
- Dabashi, Hamid. *Theology of Discontent*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.
- Dallalfar, Arlene. "Iraqi Jews in Iran." In *Esther's Children : A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, edited by Houman Sarshar, 277–81. Beverly Hills Calif.: The Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History, 2002.
- Damandan, Parisa. *Portrait Photographs from Isfahan: Faces in Transition, 1920-1950*. London : The Hague: Saqi ; Prince Claus Fund Library, 2004.
- Feniger, Neta, and Rachel Kallus. "Israeli Planning in the Shah's Iran: A Forgotten Episode." *Planning Perspective*, forthcoming.
- Ginat, Rami. *A History of Egyptian Communism: Jews and Their Compatriots in Quest of Revolution*. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011.
- Homa Katouzian. *Iranian History and Politics*. Routledge, 2012.
- <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203222553>.

“Iran’s Jews Feel Very Much at Home | The National.” Accessed June 20, 2014.

<http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/irans-jews-feel-very-much-at-home>.

Judt, Tony, and Timothy Snyder. *Thinking the Twentieth Century*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012.

Kedourie, Elie. *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004.

Kochanski, Halik. *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*. First Harvard University Press edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Koskodan, Kenneth K. *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland’s Forces in World War II*. Oxford, UK ; New York: Osprey Pub, 2009.

Levy, Habib. *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran : The Outset of the Diaspora*. Costa Mesa CA: Mazda Publishers in association with the Cultural Foundation of Habib Levy, 1999.

Matin-Asgari, Afshin. *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2002.

Meftahi, Ida. “Body National in Motion: The Biopolitics of Dance in the Twentieth-Century Iran.” University of Toronto, 2013.

Melamed, Karmel. “Escape, Exile, Rebirth: Iranian Jewish Diaspora Alive and Well in Los Angeles | Jewish Journal.” Accessed June 22, 2011.  
[http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/escape\\_exile\\_rebirth\\_iranian\\_jewish\\_diaspora\\_alive\\_and\\_well\\_in\\_los\\_angeles/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/escape_exile_rebirth_iranian_jewish_diaspora_alive_and_well_in_los_angeles/).



“Memorandum,” February 11, 1943. 1933/44/712. JDC.

Menashri, David. *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

— — —. “The Jews in Iran: Between the Shah and Khomeini.” In *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, edited by Sander Gilman. New York: New York University Press, 1991.

— — —. “The Pahlavi Monarchy and the Islamic Revolution.” In *Esther’s Children : A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, edited by Houman Sarshar. Beverly Hills Calif.; Philadelphia: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2002.

Milani, Abbas. *The Shah*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Mokhtari, Fariborz L. *In the Lion’s Shadow : The Iranian Schindler and His Homeland in the Second World War*. Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2011.

Moreen, Vera B. “The Safavid Era.” In *Esther’s Children : A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, edited by Houman Sarshar, 61–74. Beverly Hills Calif.: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History; Jewish Publication Society, 2002.

“Ms. Edna Sabet - Iran Human Rights Memorial.” Accessed November 13, 2013.

<http://www.iranrights.org/english/memorial-case--4056.php>.

Naficy, Hamid. *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*. Vol. 4. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Neyzi, Leyla. “Oral History and Memory Studies in Turkey.” In *Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Celia Kerslake, Kerem Oktem, and Philip Robins, 443–59. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

- Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Mission for My Country*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.
- — —. *The White Revolution*. Teheran: Kayhan Press, 1967.
- Parsi, Trita. *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Ram, Haggai. *Iranophobia: The Logic of an Israeli Obsession*. Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Rodrigue, Aron. *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*. The Modern Jewish Experience. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- — —. *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003.
- Sanasarian, Eliz. *Religious Minorities in Iran*. Cambridge ;New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Sayre, Joel. *I Served in the Persian Gulf Command*. Isfahan, 1945.
- Shapiro, Leon. *The History of ORT : A Jewish Movement for Social Change*. New York: Schocken Books, 1980.
- Shiblak, Abbas. *Iraqi Jews: A History of the Mass Exodus*. London: Saqi, 2005.
- Sitton, David. *Sephardi Communities Today*. Jerusalem: Council of Sephardi and Oriental Communities, 1985.
- Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Stillman, Norman A. *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003.

- Suri, Jeremi. *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004.
- Tsadik, Daniel. *Between Foreigners and Shi'is : Nineteenth-Century Iran and Its Jewish Minority*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- “Washingtonpost.com: Forgotten Polish Exodus to Persia.” Accessed November 19, 2013. <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/polsirn.htm>.
- Yaghoubian, David N. *Ethnicity, Identity, and the Development of Nationalism in Iran*. Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2014.
- Zabih, Sepehr. *The Left in Contemporary Iran: Ideology, Organisation, and the Soviet Connection*. London; Stanford, Calif.: Croom Helm ; Hoover Institution Press, 1986.
- — —. *The Left in Contemporary Iran: Ideology, Organisation, and the Soviet Connection*. London; Stanford, Calif.: Croom Helm; Hoover Institution Press, 1986.
-