

The Jews of Baghdad and Zionism: 1920-1948

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Trinity Term

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of
Masters of Philosophy in Modern Middle Eastern Studies

Faculty of Oriental Studies
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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of friends and faculty in Oxford, Jerusalem and New York.

I would first like to thank my interviewees who provided me with an invaluable foundation of knowledge. I owe a special thanks to Dr. Avi Shlaim for allowing me to use his highly regarded name throughout my time in Israel. I also appreciate the time he took to look over Chapter Four.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Walter Armbrust, for staying on my case about submitting draft chapters. His comments were helpful in strengthening and polishing my work, and his expertise in nationalism and Egypt filled my margins with thought-provoking comparisons and a broader perspective.

I owe Mr. Ronald Nettler a great deal of thanks for suggesting that I take my interest in contemporary Arab-Jewish relations back in time to ground myself in a particular historical context.

I thank Dr. Philip Robins for reading a draft of Chapter Three. I have found him to be a role model as an academician and his supportive feedback meant a lot to me.

I want to thank the staff at the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York, especially Leo Greenbaum, as well as Sima at the American Jewish Committee's Blaustein Library and Archives. Ya'akov at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Israel was instrumental in locating many relevant materials, including unpublished manuscripts that were illuminating sources.

I am most grateful to Danny Priel, my good friend at Magdalen College, who read over large amounts of material in Hebrew for me. Without his help, I would simply not have been able to use many of the Hebrew texts that proved invaluable.

Out of all of my fellow postgraduate students in Modern Middle Eastern Studies at Oxford, Ben White stands out as the most brilliant of them all. Over the course of the thesis, I paraphrase a few of his thoughts and want to thank him for his insightful contributions.

I alone take full responsibility for all of the ideas expressed and the errors I may have made in this thesis.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Marshall Scholarships Commemoration Commission for funding my postgraduate studies over the past three years in the United Kingdom.

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Introduction

The Jewish community in Baghdad virtually disappeared with the mass exodus of 120,000 Iraqi Jews to Israel between 1949-1951. This Jewish community lived in Iraq for approximately 2,500 years and my thesis looks closely at the years between 1920-1948 in order to gain as much insight as possible into the complex set of economic, political and religious factors that coalesce to form the lived experience of Baghdadi Jews during this period. It is my contention that during this time, an historic and thus far irreversible break in Arab-Jewish relations occurred, and that Baghdad is a crucial arena to observe this shift as it unfolds. This thesis is a study of the impact of anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism and anti-imperial 'Britishism' on the Baghdadi Jewish community.

Aside from the obvious hatred sown by the conflict between Palestinians and Jews in Palestine, the relationship between Muslim, Christian and Jewish Arabs more generally was destructively altered by the Zionist project. This thesis aims to contribute to a body of literature that illuminates what went wrong in relations between Arabs and Jews in the modern Middle East. It is framed by the contemporary question of whether or not Zionism alone accounts for the deep-seated hostility towards Jews that is currently so widespread in the Arab-Muslim world. This question is of relevance to Zionist historiography, which is notably narrow in its interest in the subject. And it is also of interest to the uninformed public, which tends to hold an opinion—either that Arabs pathologically hate Jews or that Zionists are to blame for all of the troubles in the region.

I approach this subject as a critic of Zionism, assuming that most of 'what went wrong' could be understood to be the fault of Zionism. It was the Zionists, after all, who

constructed the discourse whereby a Jew and an Arab could not be the same person, and where a Jew was a Zionist, if not a potential Zionist. But I also approach this subject as a Jew who is sensitive to the impact of centuries of persecution on the creation of Zionism in the Eastern European context. The relationship between Zionism and anti-Jewish sentiments is investigated throughout much of the thesis. There is no doubt that modern political Zionism cannot be explained without a proper understanding of the anti-Semitic European context from which it grew. However, there has been remarkably little research on Zionism in Middle Eastern countries, and even less on the spread of European anti-Semitism to the Middle East. And thus, the question of the extent of anti-Jewish sentiments and actions in Middle Eastern countries in the colonial period has not yet been subjected to analysis in terms of the development of the Zionist movement. I seek to investigate whether anti-Jewish protests, legislation and acts of violence can be legitimately essentialized as nothing more than anti-Zionist expressions. I also touch upon more general issues that emerge from the conflict between competing nationalist movements—Arab nationalism and Jewish nationalism, which is Zionism.

The central challenge of this work is to write about Baghdadi Jews without undue influence of either one of the two dominant narratives that lurks behind almost all that has been written on the subject. These are the anti-Zionist and the anti-Semitist narratives. My goal is to expose them both, to tell this history through a critical analysis of each, which will ultimately lead me to arrive at a much messier, far less satisfying, picture that I believe more accurately represents the lived experience of Baghdadi Jews during this period. Following in the footsteps of Palestinian scholar Abbas Shibliak, I also attempt to

bring the colonial context, and the anti-British sentiment that evolved in Iraq, back into the story, to represent a third major narrative that frames this work.

I choose to focus on the city of Baghdad as a case study because it provides me with a window into an investigation of colonialism, Arab nationalism, anti-Semitism and Zionism—all superimposed on one another and shaping the experience of a 90,000 strong Jewish community. Baghdad's was one of the two largest communities of Oriental Jews that relocated to Israel, and therefore an important piece of the puzzle of Arab-Jewish relations in the region. The Jews were one-third of the population of the city of Baghdad—just as they are in New York City today. And this thesis focuses exclusively on the Baghdadi Jews, who were approximately three-quarters of the Iraqi Jews in the period under investigation.¹

Some of Baghdad's Jews were amongst the wealthiest Jews in the world, thanks to their multi-lingual and unusually modern education system, led by the French Jewish-backed schools of the *Alliance Universelle Israelite*. The Jews were the international bankers and traders of Baghdad. They were successful, in large part, due to the emigration of some of their brethren to places like Bombay, Shanghai, Rangun and Manchester during the nineteenth century. This created a global network that gave Iraqi Jews a competitive edge, even over the British settlers in the area. With the reforms of 1839 and 1856, Jews and Christians in some parts of the Ottoman Empire began to live with a sense of civil equality that they had never before experienced as *dhimmis* under Muslim rule. The European colonial context entrenched a revolutionary form of religious

¹ The two other major Jewish communities, about which little has been written, were Basra and Mosul. A groundbreaking study on Basra's Jews by Israeli scholar David Sagiv is forthcoming and the history of the Kurdish Jews in Mosul is beyond the scope of this thesis.

equality in the region. More significantly for Muslim-Jewish relations in Iraq, the Jews would immediately benefit economically from British rule in ways that would transform many from *dhimmis* to elites in a relatively short time. This was one of the seeds of hostility sown by the British, since the Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'i, felt themselves to be on the short-end of British favoritism. This factor is essential in explaining some of the Jew-hatred that emerged in the coming years.

There was a small Zionist movement in Baghdad in the 1920s. The first Baghdadi Zionist, Aharon Sassoon, nicknamed *Ha-Moreh* (the teacher), had small groups of young people over his house to read from newspapers and magazines in Hebrew. A small Zionist Association was founded in 1921, with British permission, and was allowed to function with semi-legal status until 1929, when all Zionist activity became illegal following the anti-Zionist sentiments that grew with the Wailing Wall incident in Palestine. Jewish elites took pains, both within the community and in their correspondence with the outside world, to distance themselves from Zionism and warn of its potential dangers to their position. Their voice proved prophetic in predicting the dangers Zionism would bring to Jewish communities in the Arab world.

Baghdad became one of the centers of Arab nationalism in the late-twenties and thirties. From 1929, one of the central features of pan-Arab expression was solidarity and sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs. This rhetoric increasingly blurred the lines between Jews and Zionists, in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of Baghdadi Jews were non-Zionists. Countless attempts were made by Jewish community leaders in Baghdadi newspapers and in public statements to distance the Jews from the Zionists, and in some cases, even to financially support the Palestinian Arab struggle against the

Jewish Zionists. One feature of Baghdadi political life that accelerated and deepened the antagonism towards Jews was that from 1932-1939, Fritz Grobba served as Germany's representative to Iraq, helping to usher in a virulent form of anti-Semitism. A wide range of activities saw the categorical spread of Nazi propaganda into Iraqi schools, newspapers, radio and political parties. There is unfortunately a dearth of non-Arabic sources which shed light on the nature of the attitude of ordinary Baghdadis to the anti-Jewish ideological component of Nazism. The Germans being powerful and anti-British, and with a recent history of training Ottoman soldiers, from which most of the new generation of Iraqi leaders had sprung, found a receptive audience in the Iraqi people for their anti-British ideas. Whether or not Nazi anti-Semitism seeped into the hearts and minds of average Iraqis along with the convenient alliance against the British is a subject in need of further scholarly exploration. The exiled Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husayni played a key role in strengthening the alliance with the Nazis in Baghdad through the late-thirties and into the early-forties. It is unclear if this relationship was primarily pro-German or specifically pro-Nazi. This is but one example of the complex interplay between Zionism and the question about the presence of racist Jew-hatred. Baghdad in the mid-1930s was not an easy place to neatly separate these two matters.

Jews were essentially pro-British as a means to maintain their political and social rights, newly experienced since the end of their *dhimmitude* with the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. They benefited from special economic privileges under British tutelage that planted some of the seeds in Iraqi political consciousness that turned against them, especially when boosted by Nazi rhetoric and their religious link with the Zionist enemy.

Bearing this picture in mind, one can view with greater sympathy and contextual understanding the fact that Jews in Baghdad came to be scapegoated for the actions of the Zionists in Palestine and the British in Iraq. Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism both grew stronger, one based on reports from Palestine and the other from German-sponsored programs. And in spite of both of these trends, economically, the Jewish community continued to maintain a near monopoly on many of the businesses in Baghdad. Perhaps their prosperity and their continued lack of interest in Zionism meant that the vast majority of Jews at this time had no intention of leaving the country. What is unclear, and may never be known, is whether or not their lack of support for Zionism would have changed had the anti-Zionist political discourse of the time not been so harsh and ubiquitous. The Jews opted, as most of them had since the end of World War One, for apoliticism. They were keenly aware of their vulnerable position in the state, and hoped that focusing on education, work and family would keep them safe.

It was this 'silent Jewish majority' that was particularly shocked by the *farhud* of June 1-2, 1941. It was an anti-Jewish riot that featured the murder of approximately 180 Jews carried out by radical nationalists in Baghdad, joined by the Iraqi masses who sought to gain looted property, and allowed by the British, who did not mind the Jewish community paying a small price for greater British legitimacy with the return of the regent. This was a critical time in the history of Iraqi nationalism, as their nine year-old independence seemed reversed with the re-occupation by the British and the return of the regent.

In the period of 1941-1948, the vast majority of the Jews rode the wave of economic opportunity that came with the wartime economy. Urged by the community's

leaders to see the *farhud* as a one-time event and to focus on re-integration into Baghdadi life, they enjoyed some of their most prosperous times and were generally protected by the Iraqi authorities.

A small number of young people in Baghdad, in an overt rebellion against their parents and the conservative leadership of the community, joined in one of the two underground movements, Zionism and communism. The *farhud* led directly to the decision by the Zionist Movement to send emissaries of the *Mossad L'Aliyah Bet*, the illegal Zionist underground, to Iraq—usually in the guise of British soldiers, to set up an underground Zionist movement in Iraq. According to the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion made a decision that the reservoir of potential bodies needed to turn the Zionist dream into a reality was being burned in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. There was no alternative but to turn the Oriental Jews into Zionists. And so, the Zionist Movement exerted major resources on Jews living in Arab countries only once the tragedy taking place in Europe began to be exposed and it was clear that they needed a new source of immigration. The One Million Plan was launched in 1944, envisioning the mass exodus of Jews from Middle Eastern countries to Palestine. The community in Baghdad was a vital component of this plan. Even at its height in 1948, however, there were only two thousand Zionists in all of Iraq.

Nearly all writings on this topic, and all of the interviews with the leading contributors to this field conducted in researching this thesis, exist in a particular context—an Israeli Zionist one. And the natures of both Israel and of Zionism are publicly contested in conceptual space. Authors frequently use history to battle for memory, for the authentic narrative. And in modern Israel, with its wide array of

Ashkenazi-Sephardi, religious-secular, Zionist-post-Zionist discourses, historical cases such as the one upon which I am focused, become tools in a much larger conversation about the history of the state and the relative guilt or innocence of various groups. Some even use their interpretation as a means to lash out against the state or the mainstream narrative for dealing with certain groups and communities unfairly.

The extreme pro-Zionist camp features former Zionist emissaries in Iraq, Shlomo Hillel, Mordechai Bibi and director of the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Israel, Mordechai Ben-Porat. They argue that Iraqi Jews were in perilous danger, that a Holocaust would have come in a matter of years and that the Zionists saved them from death at the hands of Iraqis. They tend to exaggerate the level of support for Zionism and ignore the facts that display a relatively peaceful co-existence between Jews and Muslims in Baghdad.

To their 'left' are the critical Zionist historians, Esther Meir-Glitzenstein and Nissim Kazzaz, both of whom have written books that show that Baghdadi Jews were never Zionists. Meir-Glitzenstein focuses on the change of policy in the *yishuv*² to 'Zionize' these Jews in the 1940s, while Kazzaz concentrates on the history of the community itself. Both of them suggest that Zionism was partially responsible for the deterioration of the Baghdadi Jewish community. Their books were scathed by the aforementioned Zionist establishment for revealing the lack of a Zionist movement in Baghdad before Jews from Palestine established the underground.

The far left side of the spectrum in contemporary Israeli discourse, who are variously referred to as non-Zionists and post-Zionists, is represented by Nissim Rejwan

² The *yishuv* is the Hebrew word for the collective of Zionist settlers living in Palestine before May of 1948.

and Sassoon Somekh, novelists Sami Michael and Shimon Balas, and scholars Ella Shohat and Yehouda Shenhav. Several of them were communists when they lived in Baghdad and all were and are vocal critics of Zionism.

The thesis does not investigate the post-May 1948 situation of Baghdadi Jews. It is clear that Jews were systematically and brutally persecuted by the Iraqi authorities in the weeks and months following the emergence of Israel. Jews were assumed to be Zionists, imagined to be a fifth column and scapegoated for the military defeat of the Arabs by the Jews in Palestine. Life was unbearable for Jews by this time and those who had never sympathized with the Zionists and who wanted to stay in Baghdad felt compelled to leave. I avoid engaging in the debate over the speculation that Zionist emissaries were involved in a series of bombings in 1950-1 in order to instill fear in Baghdadi Jews to encourage their emigration to Israel. This debate is avoided, not because of a predilection one way or another, but rather due to the absolute lack of scholarly evidence used by either side. The question of my thesis is whether or not the Iraqi Jews themselves could have acted in a way that would have enabled them to continue to live safely in Iraq. And if they could not prevent their departure, as my thesis will show, then should the mass flight be explained primarily in terms of the intervention of the Zionist movement, the exclusive politics and narrow-mindedness of Nazi-inspired Iraqi nationalists, or of Jewish economic privilege under British tutelage and the hostility and envy that came with it? The thesis focuses on the 1920-1948 period, and argues that all of these served as factors in the eventual exodus, but that the growth of the Zionists in Palestine played the largest role in the demise of Arab-Jewish relations.

Chapter One: Historical Background

Jews under Islam, the Ottoman Empire and the Transition to British Colonial Rule

For much of the 2,500 year history of Iraqi Jews, the Jews lived amidst an overwhelming Muslim majority. In order to gain insight into the historical backdrop leading up to the period around which this paper focuses, this chapter highlights the *dhimmi* status in Islamic state systems, provides an overview of the experience of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and describes the pivotal transition to modernity experienced by many Baghdadi Jews as a result of the European presence in the region. The Jews of Baghdad sought and received a degree of British protection in the 1920s. This was a decision for which they would later be held responsible.

1.1 The Dhimmis

According to traditional Islam, there are three categories of human beings: Muslims, ‘protected people’ (*ahl al-dhimmah*) and pagans. Generally speaking, the ‘protected people’, or the ‘people of the book,’ as they are sometimes called, have been the Jews and Christians. In reality, however, the category has at various times extended to include Zoroastrians and even Hindus in India. Whereas the pagans cannot be accommodated in any way, the *dhimmis*, on account of the fact that they believe in God, the final Day of Judgment and the prophets, attain the status of people deserving respect and tolerance from an Islamic point of view. While only Muslims are full members of the community, *dhimmis* earn the right to live by their own religious teachings and practices, and to oversee their own courts for matters of personal status, in exchange for

following a number of laws that apply only to them. These include the payment of a special tax, the *jizya*, and prohibitions against bearing arms, giving evidence against Muslims in court, and marrying a Muslim woman.³ According to one scholar, “Islamic law, as interpreted by the state’s religious scholars, established the political subordination of non-Muslims to Muslims.”⁴

Judaism and Christianity are, according to mainstream Islam, “earlier and imperfect versions of the Islamic faith.”⁵ But because they contain parts of God’s true revelation, however perverted and partial they may be, Islam showed a level of openness to co-existence with *dhimmis* that was not granted to polytheists. The system expected *dhimmis* to accept the superiority of Islam and to demonstrate this acceptance through signs of social differentiation.⁶ In addition to those mentioned above, non-Muslims were often forced to wear clothing that marked them. In fact, ninth century Baghdad was the origin of the enforcement of yellow stars to be worn by all Jews. *Dhimmis* could ride donkeys or mules, but never horses or camels. They were forbidden to build new houses of worship and could not have homes taller than those of Muslims. “In reality, however, the application of these restrictions varied widely over time and place. Many Muslim states, for a variety of practical reasons, chose to ignore them to a greater or lesser degree.” However, even in the most liberal of Muslim regimes, *dhimmis* lived with a fundamental insecurity, vulnerable to the potential in the system to enforce stringencies directed at non-Muslims.⁷

³ Hourani 1947: 18.

⁴ Masters 2001: 7.

⁵ Levy 1992: 15.

⁶ Masters 2001: 19; Courbage & Fargues 1997: 22-23.

⁷ Levy 1992: 15-16.

Elie Kedourie, one of the preeminent scholars of the modern Middle East and an Iraqi Jew himself, wrote: “Islam has generally looked upon Jews as a subject community docile and unwarlike, to be treated with contemptuous tolerance, and whom it is quite unthinkable to consider as political equals.”⁸ While this may be true, Hourani notes that in practice, “The intolerance of orthodox Islam was directed more against the Shi’is and the sects on the fringes of Islam than against Christians and Jews.”⁹ While it may be true that branches of Islam deemed heretical by the mainstream were judged harshly, *dhimmi* status ensured that Christians and Jews living under Muslim rule always felt socially and politically different. And this sentiment, difficult to capture without resorting to particularly contemporary vocabulary, served as an important backdrop to the decision that many of them made to embrace European-style modernity more quickly than their Muslim neighbors.

1.2 The Ottoman Empire

For four hundred years preceding the occupation of Iraq by the British, the Jews in Baghdad were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, and thus lived with *dhimmi* status in a Muslim state. Whereas Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen had no Christians, other places such as present-day Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Egypt had both Christians and Jews.

As *dhimmis*, the non-Muslim subjects of the two sultans and of the various semiautonomous viceroys and regional rulers enjoyed a status that, on the one hand, combined a position of defined inferiority with certain legal and social

⁸ E. Kedourie 1974: 222.

⁹ Hourani 1947: 18.

disabilities and, on the other hand, guaranteed their lives, their property, and the right to worship as they chose.¹⁰

The most positive elements of the status of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were the economic opportunities and the internal community autonomy built into the *millet* system. “The *millet* system made it possible for the Christians and Jews to maintain something of their communal life and social position. They played a great part in commerce, finance, and certain crafts.” This institutionalized an important place for *dhimmis* in the life of the towns. “Yet their position was always precarious. In a State where everything depended on the caprice of the ruler and nobody’s life or property was safe, the Christians and Jews were even more helpless than others.” In describing the relationship of the *millets* to one another, Hourani adds that the various Christian groups and the Jews lived in separate, close-knit communities. “Each was a ‘world’, sufficient to its members and exacting their ultimate loyalty. The worlds touched but did not mingle with each other; each looked at the rest with suspicion and even hatred.”¹¹ This Islamic social framework, with varying degrees of prosperity and hardship, held until 1917. The period of the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was generally difficult for non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, as the Sublime Porte weakened on the world stage and the non-Muslims paid a heavy price, fiscally and otherwise. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, virtually every one was poor in the Ottoman Empire. “However, the Jews had to bear the burden of social isolation, inferiority, and general opprobrium.” European travelers at this time frequently referred to the “the overall

¹⁰ Stillman 1991: 4.

¹¹ Hourani 1947: 21-22.

debasement of the Jews living in Islamic lands.”¹² A small number of Jews managed to attain wealth during these difficult times.¹³

But even at its most harsh, “[when] compared with contemporary Christian Europe, the Ottoman Empire afforded its religious minorities an unequaled degree of tolerance.”¹⁴ This view is corroborated by Avraham El-Kabir, a member of a prominent Baghdadi Jewish family: “Jews in Moslem countries led, for many centuries, a more peaceful life than in most countries of the Christian world, though it must be admitted, they were never treated on terms of equality.”¹⁵ Hourani concludes his ground-breaking work by writing that “a thousand years of unchallenged Moslem domination have partly obscured” the essential doctrine of respect for *ahl al-kitab*. He continues:

The toleration which the present-day Moslem professes for Christians and Jews is too often not that of a humble believer for those who he recognizes as serious seekers of the same truth, but the contemptuous toleration of the strong for the weak.¹⁶

According to Levy, the Ottoman Empire was the most tolerant Muslim state in history, due both to the fact that it followed the liberal Hanafi school of jurisprudence, and also to the pragmatic nature of the Ottoman system.¹⁷ Within this Empire, Jews cherished

the unprecedented measure of freedom that they enjoyed. They were generally free to settle wherever they wished; they could engage in almost every occupation and

¹² Stillman 1991: 4-5.

¹³ These were Jews engaged in professions seen as ‘reprehensible’ according to Islam, e.g. silversmithing, goldsmithing, money lending, tax farming, collecting customs duties. Some of these wealthy Jews were also intermediaries between European companies and the local population. “This state of affairs was perfectly in keeping with current Islamic sentiment that *dhimmis* were eminently suited to the disagreeable though necessary task of having extended intercourse with foreign infidels” (Stillman 1991: 5-6).

¹⁴ Levy 1992: 15.

¹⁵ A. El-Kabir 1964a: 41.

¹⁶ Hourani 1947: 124.

¹⁷ Levy 1992: 16.

profession; they were able to travel freely for their business or for any other purpose; and they were free to practice their religion, to establish their own educational and social institutions and to organize their community life with minimal interference on the part of the authorities.¹⁸

It seems that Jews generally fared relatively better than the Christians under the Ottoman *millet* system. While more Christians served in elite government posts, this made them more vulnerable to persecution by Muslims. Additionally, some sources indicate that the behavior of Christians aroused popular hatred in a way that the Jews did not, owing to an attitude of arrogance.¹⁹ On the other hand, the Christians had the special advantage of earning protection due to their religious link with Europe. “European powers...regarded it as their sacred political and religious duty to assist Christians and Christianity in Muslim countries.”²⁰ This of course was one thousand years, in some cases, after the Christian populations of many parts of the region were permanently changed by the spread of Islam.²¹

1.3 The Jews of Iraq During the Ottoman Empire

With this foundation established, the focus now shifts more specifically to the Jews of Baghdad during Ottoman rule. A traveler’s report from early in the seventeenth century written by a Portuguese man, Pedro Texeira, observes that there were 200-300 Jewish homes in Baghdad out of a total of 20,000-30,000. He adds that ten to twelve of the Jewish families claimed descent from the first exile (circa 586 BCE). Some of the

¹⁸ Levy 1992: 19.

¹⁹ Hirschberg 1969: 132.

²⁰ Ibid.: 151.

²¹ For more on the Islamization of the Middle East and North Africa, particularly the question of whether or not large numbers of Christians were forcibly converted, see Courage & Fargues 1997.

families were well to-do, but most were very poor.²² Between the years 1750-1831, twelve different pashas ruled Iraq, “and their attitudes to the Jews were by no means uniform.” Sulaiman the Great (1780-1802) is reported to have been the most generous to the Jewish community, while Daud Pasha (1817-1831) is recorded as the most anti-Jewish pasha of the period.²³ Leading member of the Baghdadi community, David Sassoon wrote that in 1824, “there were 1,500 Jewish families in Baghdad, in whose hands the whole commerce of the city was concentrated.”²⁴ The majority of them were relatively well-off, with some being wealthy and a small number being poor. “Most Jews were active in trade, in buying and selling and in forming business connections which sometimes extended to neighboring countries like Turkey, Persia, Syria, Yemen and India.”²⁵ Others were craftsmen, such as goldsmiths and dyers.²⁶ Only a very few worked as government officials. According to Hayyim Cohen, a leading Israeli historian of Iraqi Jews, few Jews worked in clerical occupations because they were not literate in Turkish.²⁷ Baghdadi Jews tended to live in their own neighborhoods, but this was a matter of choice and convenience, as they were not forced into ghettos like the Jews of Eastern Europe. They were headed by the *nasi*, always a wealthy Jew representing the notables and lay leaders of the community. He functioned largely as the chief banker or the minister of finance on behalf of the community to the Pashas or *walis* of Baghdad.²⁸

²² Coke 1927: 201.

²³ Rejwan 1985: 167.

²⁴ Sassoon 1932: 127.

²⁵ From Babylon to Saddam: 6.

²⁶ Crafts became an even more popular sector for Jewish labor as the nineteenth century went on (Cohen 1973: 89).

²⁷ Cohen 1966b: 206.

²⁸ Avraham El-Kabir describes his impression of nineteenth century life for Baghdadi Jews in his memoirs. He describes a closed community, with practically no interaction with non-Jews and little knowledge of anything to do with Islam or Christianity. There was also limited interaction with the government, as taxes were not paid directly, but through the representative of the Jewish community. “As a community Jews

1.4 *Tanzimat*

The Ottoman Empire was in decline in the nineteenth century, with unprecedented poverty, largely due to military expenditures and administrative inefficiencies. A period of reform known as the *tanzimat* swept through the Empire, that was of particular significance to the Empire's non-Muslim subjects. For hundreds of years Jews and Christians had lived as second-class citizens,²⁹ an inferiority that was legally enshrined in the Islamic state system. They had to pay special taxes, wear distinctive dress and footwear and live in special quarters.

A series of revolts by the Empire's non-Turkish and non-Muslim subjects catalyzed sweeping reforms that would enable the Empire to survive intact for another century. In adapting to the changing political realities, reform-minded Turkish foreign minister Mustafa Rashid Pasha had the boy Sultan Abdulmejid issue decrees that changed the status of Jews and Christians living in the Ottoman lands. In the Noble Decree (*khatt-i sheriff*) of 1839 and the Imperial Decree (*khatt-i humayun*) of 1856, full civil equality was granted to non-Muslims for the first time.³⁰ On the specific issue of taxes, the *khatt-i humayun* eliminated the poll tax (*jizya*), but replaced it with the military substitution tax (*bedel-i askeri*). This had to be paid by Christians and Jews who did not wish to serve in the military since, having been granted civil equality, they were officially liable to serve.

exercised their religion without any form of restriction and did not feel any strain in doing so when proclaiming it" (A. El-Kabir 1964a: 36).

²⁹ While referring to *dhimmi*s as 'second-class citizens' may seem anachronistic and thus problematic, *dhimmi*s were, in spite of their acceptance of the system, socially and politically disadvantaged compared to their Muslim neighbors. The terminology also helps to convey the drama of the transition for these groups with the Ottoman reforms and subsequent European influences on civil equality.

³⁰ It is clear that these reforms aimed to gain European, especially British support at a time when the Ottomans were threatened by Muhammad Ali's successes in Egypt. The *Khatt-i Humayun* was literally drafted by the ambassadors of England, France and Austria and served as the Ottoman Empire's entrance ticket to the European Concert of Powers, while theoretically guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the Empire. The subject of European influence in the Middle East will be discussed below. See Stillman 1991: 9.

Most non-Muslims welcomed this substitute since they had no desire to serve in the Ottoman military.³¹

The reforms took decades to implement even in Istanbul, and were often ignored in the peripheral provinces. But their very existence signaled a sea change in the position of Jews and Christians living in Muslim-ruled lands. Their transition from *millet* to minority was underway.

Norman Stillman provides a key historical perspective on the effects of the *tanzimat* on non-Muslim Ottomans:

The Khatt-i Humayun may have eliminated the decidedly inferior classification of dhimmi with its civil disabilities, but it did not erase the legal and social differentiation of Ottoman subjects according to ethnoreligious communities. Confessional particularism was maintained and codified by the recognition of the *millets*, or religious communities, as fundamental corporate entities in society. The important difference now was that, from the standpoint of civil law, these entities were all equal.³²

Seen in this light, the period of reform in the Ottoman Empire referred to as the *tanzimat* was the catalyst for advancement in the status of non-Muslims, but it did not grant them full equality in practice. For this, Jews and Christians would have to wait for the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and the arrival of European powers.

1.5 Changes in the Baghdadi Jewish Community

The *tanzimat*, while not primarily concerned with improvements in the status of Jews in the Ottoman Empire, did have the effect of sending ripples around the Jewish communities of the region. How these changes affected the Jews vastly differed from

³¹ The *bedel-i askeri* was abolished in 1909, when Jews were required to serve in the army like every one else (Cohen 1973: 23).

³² Stillman 1991: 9-10.

place to place. There was a noticeable but moderate change in the plight of the Baghdadi Jews. On one extreme, Morocco, home to the largest Jewish population in the Arab world and Morocco's only non-Muslims, saw no reform at all. Moroccan authorities had been particularly oppressive towards Jews for centuries.³³ On the other extreme, the most profoundly transformed Jewish community of the Empire was the Algerian one, gaining full-fledged French citizenship in 1870.

For the Jews of Baghdad, the most important change during the nineteenth century was the reorganization of the *millets*, with newly appointed lay and religious governing bodies for the Jewish community on both a national and provincial basis. The first Chief Rabbi (*hakham bashi*), was appointed in 1849 in Baghdad, replacing the traditional *nasi*, the exilarch of the community. Jews also felt more secure, having new educational and employment opportunities and, in some cases, moving from a more traditional to a more modern way of life.

As a result of the positive attitude displayed by the Turkish governors who ruled in Baghdad the Jews felt more secure so much so that a few began to leave the Jewish quarters in Baghdad, moving to mixed neighborhoods, and from Baghdad to cities and villages where no Jews had lived before.³⁴

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had an immediate effect on Jewish demographics and work. A large number of Jews moved south to Basra to take advantage of opportunities for foreign trade.³⁵ This would be the beginning of a rise to Jewish predominance in commerce and trade, a monopoly that even the British settlers in Iraq

³³ “The highly ritualized degradation of Moroccan Jews included compulsory ghettoization in most towns, having to wear black garments, walking barefoot through the streets of the imperial cities and before mosques everywhere, being pressed frequently into onerous corvee labor even on holidays and Sabbaths, being pelted with pebbles by children, and suffering other public humiliations” (Stillman 1991:14).

³⁴ Cohen 1973: 24.

³⁵ Cohen 1966a: 205.

would not be able to penetrate. This too was the period of nearly fifty years, beginning with the 1869-1872 reign of Midhat Pasha as *wali* that “Iraqi Jewry experienced practically no disabilities.”³⁶

During this time, many Jewish community institutions and associations were founded. *Shomre Miswah*, the society for promoting religious life in Baghdad, was established in 1868. It aimed to improve the standard of education for the poor. The society for the upkeep of the Jewish hospital, the *Hebrath Meyassede Beth ha-Refuah*, as well as *Ajzakhana*, providing medicine to poor members of community were both created. Other organizations included *Ozere Dallim*, offering general relief to the Jewish poor, *Zekhuth ha-Rabbim*, which cared for the blind, and *Hebrath Tomkhe Tora*, supporting poor Torah scholars so that they could study full-time.³⁷

1.6 The European Link: Schools and Modern Education in Baghdad

*Dhimmi*s were always more likely to know and to be interested in learning foreign languages. Due to their language skills, they “had acted for centuries as intermediaries between the dominant Islamic society and European consular and mercantile interests.” For some in the Ottoman Empire, Spanish or Italian turned out to be the most useful language. In Iraq, those who did business in India were enabled by their knowledge of English.³⁸ “As the nineteenth century progressed, many Arabic-speaking Jews and

³⁶ Cohen 1966a: 204.

³⁷ Sassoon 1932: 173-175.

³⁸ Jews in Iraq began to immigrate to India at end of the eighteenth century. These business and governmental opportunities would turn out to be useful during the British Mandate in Iraq. There were approximately 6,000 Iraqi Jews in India by the end of the 1930s (Rejwan 1985: 184).

Christians began to consider a knowledge of Western languages as a requisite entry ticket into the modern world with all the benefits it might confer.”³⁹

Various European organizations, especially the *Alliance Universelle Israelite*, introduced a new kind of school to Baghdadi Jews. Even though the French never influenced political developments in Iraq the way the British would, it was French-language schools that had the most transformative effect on Baghdadi Jews.⁴⁰ An organization of French Jews, founded in Paris in 1860, the *Alliance* had as their main goal “working everywhere for the emancipation and moral progress of Jews” as well as “lending effective assistance to those who suffer because of their being Jews.”⁴¹ The first such school opened in Baghdad in 1864,⁴² but by century’s end, there were one hundred *Alliance* schools with 26,000 students across the Ottoman Empire.

The Alliance educational network, which in addition to the schools had established vocational apprenticeship programs in many places, produced cadres of Western-educated and skilled Oriental Jews who now possessed a distinct advantage of opportunity over the largely uneducated Muslim masses as their region was drawn ineluctably into the modern world economic system. Together with the rapidly evolving native Christians who benefited from

³⁹ Stillman 1991: 18. Albert Hourani provides an illuminating regional context for this phenomenon. “The increase of trade with Europe and America led to the rise of a new class of minority-population: the Levantine bourgeoisie of the big towns, Syrian Christian, Armenian, Greek and Jewish, very different in mentality from the Christians of the villages and the old towns, and much more distant than they from the majority. Often very rich and very powerful in the economic and financial spheres, they were slavishly imitative of Europe, at least on the surface, and more often than not despised the Oriental life around them. Often they had no loyalties at all, certainly no political loyalty to the State in which they were living. They tended to attach themselves to one or other of the foreign Governments with interests in the Near East, to imitate the French or English way of life and serve foreign Governments with a feverish and brittle devotion” (Hourani 1947: 25).

⁴⁰ According to one prominent Israeli professor of Iraqi origin, the transformation from a religious to a secular community was experienced by approximately 10% of the population of the Jewish community. The main two factors were the study of French and English in schools, as well as the Arabization of their identities, with the move from Judeo-Arabic to a more mainstream Arabic (Interview with Sassoon Somekh, Tel Aviv, 18 December 2003).

⁴¹ Stillman 1991: 23. For more on *Alliance*, see Graetz 1996; Rodrigue 1993.

⁴² For detailed information about where Iraqi Jews went to school, what they studied, how many had a traditional as opposed to a modern education, see Cohen 1973: 113-125. In the early thirties, there were 7,192 students in Jewish schools (Sassoon 1932: 171-172).

missionary schools, they came to have a new and unparalleled mobility and achieved a place in the economic life of Muslim world that was far out of proportion to their numbers or their social status in the general population. Non-Muslims also came to have a disproportionate role in the newly developing liberal professions for which a modern education was essential. They also acted as agents of modernity.⁴³

It was not uncommon for graduates of *Alliance* schools to be able to work comfortably in French, English, Arabic and Hebrew. *Alliance* graduates became a class of clerks and accountants, professions that would serve the future British colonial administration quite usefully.⁴⁴

One of the key factors influencing the growth and influence of the *Alliance* schools was the overall support they received from the Ottoman authorities, especially Midhat Pasha, during his years as *wali*. “In spite of their strong French orientation, the *Alliance* schools were set up as local community institutions, and, unlike other European schools, they did not request the protection of foreign powers.” Levy continues: “Their curricula stressed modernity and Ottoman patriotism and they were seen, therefore, by the Ottoman authorities as complementing the work of the state schools.”⁴⁵ There is no doubt that the *Alliance* schools could not have functioned as a central feature in Baghdadi Jewish life without the supportive attitude of the Ottoman authorities.⁴⁶

There was a tremendous amount of resistance to the establishment of *Alliance* schools from the mainstream Jewish community in Baghdad. A commonly held view was that exposure to modern European education would cause a break from traditional

⁴³ Stillman 1991: 25.

⁴⁴ Rejwan 1985: 187.

⁴⁵ Levy 1992: 113-114.

⁴⁶ Levy adds that *Alliance* graduates went on to form something of a movement called Alliancists that spread across the Ottoman Empire, challenging conservative rabbinical authorities and by World War One, controlling the majority of Jewish community institutions (115).

Judaism and a loss of respect for Jewish practices. They had heard about the growing secularism amongst French Jews that came from critical study of Judaism, and sought to prevent this from happening in Iraq.⁴⁷ In fact, a major change did occur amongst Iraqi Jews, largely as a result of the *Alliance* schools. For the first time, many Baghdadi Jews ignored traditional religious restrictions by working, traveling and using electricity on the Sabbath. Some began to eat non-Kosher meat. For Jews in Iraqi Kurdistan and other small towns, tradition was upheld and the commandments followed, Cohen argues, “mainly because modern education was slower in reaching these Jews.”⁴⁸ In other words, an inverse correlation seemed to exist between the level of exposure to modern European ideas and the maintenance of traditional Jewish practices for Iraqi Jews.

Rabbi Simeon Agasi wrote in 1913 about the decline in traditional morals that he had witnessed amongst Baghdadi Jews. He discussed the “serious transgressions” which “our forefathers never even considered” such as the “public desecration of the Sabbath.” He wrote: “Not only that, but the riffraff in our midst has developed a craving for forbidden food, seeking to fill their bellies with unkosher carrion and all the rest of the prohibited viands in Gentile restaurants.” Agasi mentioned that adultery and homosexuality, both prevalent amongst the Iraqis, had spread into the Jewish community as well, in addition to the wearing of immodest clothing. He was especially ashamed that prominent members of the community had abandoned their traditional ways, serving as poor role models for the youth. And then he named the *Alliance* schools specifically as the source of all this ‘evil.’

This sort of evil which has infected us is the fault of the
Alliance schools, those bitter grapes, that have been

⁴⁷ Hirschberg 1969: 216.

⁴⁸ Cohen 1966a: 207.

established in our city. All of the teachers in those schools are deceitful individuals who have shaken off the yoke and do all sorts of evil and abomination.⁴⁹

This rabbi's sentiments powerfully expressed the outrage felt by a portion of the Jewish community at the changes that can broadly be seen as the process of modernization accelerated by the *Alliance* schools. Though only 5-10% of Iraqi Jews received a Western education, the impact on the broader community appears to have been substantial.

The effects of European Jewish organizations, such as the *Alliance*, on Baghdadi Jews was to further “the alienation of Middle Eastern Jews from both their non-Jewish neighbors and from their own indigenous traditions.”⁵⁰ An increasingly modernized Jewish community, exposed more quickly and overwhelmingly to European languages and ideas, co-existed with a Muslim population that resisted such acculturation. “The imbalance in the rate of acceptance of the ‘new’ by individuals in the different religious communities sowed the seeds of social disruption.”⁵¹ The effect of this resistance on Muslim Iraqis would prove detrimental to their welfare as the dependence of Middle Easterners on European economies intensified.⁵² Stillman captures the moment powerfully when he writes:

Thus, at the very time that Jews and Christians in most parts of the Islamic world were experiencing a growing sense of liberation from the restrictions and disabilities of the past,⁵³ coupled with expanding horizons of opportunity, the Muslim majority—with the exception of the small

⁴⁹ Stillman 1991: 243-244.

⁵⁰ Dshen & Zenner 1982: 29.

⁵¹ Masters 2001: 7.

⁵² According to a 1910 report, there were four clearly defined socio-economic groups amongst Baghdadi Jews: 5% were rich--mostly merchants and bankers; 30% were middle class—traders and retail dealers; 60% were poor and 5% were beggars (Rejwan 1985: 195).

⁵³ The Constitution of 23 July 1908 granted equal rights of citizenship to non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

modernizing elite—was feeling itself increasingly on the defensive, with its traditions, its social order, and its very independence in danger. The very same forces that represented benevolence to most Jews and Christians were perceived by most Muslims as quite the opposite. The budding optimism of the minorities stood in marked contrast to the dismay and pessimism of the majority. The forces of modernization had the effect of widening the gap that already existed in Islamic society between believer and unbeliever.⁵⁴

Thousands of young Jews in Baghdad received a first-class French-style education, leading to an open-mindedness about the outside world, and foreign language skills that would prove advantageous under European colonial rule. The expanding international Baghdadi Jewish network in India, Manchester and Vienna, found many Jews in a strategically superior position than other groups in Iraq during the years leading up to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the occupation by the British.⁵⁵

In his classic Minorities in the Arab World, Albert Hourani outlines the influence of European involvement on the experiences of minorities in the Middle East. Europeans first became involved in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, taking advantage of the weakening of the Empire. The unequal treatment of Christians in the Ottoman Empire was one of the major reasons for foreign intervention and for the intra-European squabbling that would take place. One immediate result of the European intervention was the emergence of many nationalist movements, leading directly to the establishment of Christian states hostile to the Empire, such as Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. The reforms of 1839 and 1856 were carried out under European supervision, and delivered formal equality of civic rights to Jews and Christians. Many Jews and Christians soon became citizens of European countries,

⁵⁴ Stillman 1991: 45.

⁵⁵ E. Kedourie 1974: 265.

ensuring that this wave of European intervention in the Empire directly benefited their lives. France formalized its role as protector of many Christian groups in the Empire, and other European powers subsequently became patrons of other communities. “The activities of the European Powers improved the situation of the religious minorities, but also drew upon them the hatred of the Government and the majority.” And with hindsight, the more important consequence seems to be that “they were regarded as potential traitors, sources of weakness and instruments of European policy: in general as dangers to the Empire and to the Islamic community.”⁵⁶ European involvement in the Middle East thus drove a wedge between the Muslims and non-Muslims, reversing the Ottoman social order. The politically inferior *dhimmi*s in some cases became the economically privileged minorities.

Non-Muslims tended to view the process of modernization as a tool to advance themselves, after hundreds of years as institutionalized second-class subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Muslims, on the other hand, were hostile and defensive against Western cultural influences.⁵⁷ Whereas Muslims were reluctant to abandon their traditional way of life, non-Muslims more enthusiastically welcomed Westernization, with French language and culture at the forefront of their new hopes.

In the West they discovered a world to which they could (or imagined that they could) be more than marginal...For the most part the attitude of Christians and Jews towards Europe was one of uncritical acceptance; they wished to immerse themselves in the West and forget, if that were possible, their long night of subjection to Islam.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Hourani 1947: 23-24.

⁵⁷ Stillman 1991: 18.

⁵⁸ Hourani 1947: 25.

And for the non-Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, the new states that would emerge from the European scramble in the Middle East carried opportunities for unprecedented equality, and even economic superiority, in their native lands.

1.7 British Occupation and the Mandate

Jews in Baghdad had been serving British interests long before the arrival of British soldiers in Iraq during World War I. In fact, a list of employees in the British consulate in Baghdad and of other British companies in the city in the early nineteenth century includes twenty-eight Christians, fourteen Jews, and four Muslims.⁵⁹ With *dhimmi* status replaced by European-inspired minority protection, the Jewish community was ecstatic about the British military occupation of the cities of Mesopotamia. A Jewish notable at the time wrote that Chief Rabbi Ezra Dangoor made the seventeenth day of the Hebrew month of *Adar*—the day the British army entered Baghdad—a festive holiday.⁶⁰ Jews were immediately and fiercely loyal to the British occupiers, owing both to their trade relations and to their hopes for greater freedoms and political participation.⁶¹

The Baghdadi Jewish community petitioned the civil commissioner of Baghdad in 1918 one week after the armistice had gone into effect, requesting to become British subjects and expressing opposition to the creation of local Arab government. The document, dated 18 November 1918 and signed by fifty-six leading members of the community, recognizes the intent of the Allied Powers “to promote indigenous government and encourage the establishment of an autonomous administration”, but warns that however commendable the aim might be, “its immediate execution is coupled

⁵⁹ Stillman 1991: 6.

⁶⁰ Sassoon 1932: 178.

⁶¹ Masters 2001: 193.

with such difficulties as render it hardly recommendable.” In addition to claiming that local rulers would be unprepared for the task in an administrative sense, they express their fear that

A local government in accord with the desire of the local majority cannot but bear a very strong theocratical character due to the dominance of religious feelings which are unconciliabile with the idea of giving to alien confessions any sort of privilege or rights.

They clarify that they seek “free opportunity for economic and educational development” and remind the civil commissioner of the half-century of business links between Jews and the British Empire, asking again for the protection of His Majesty.⁶² In analyzing this document, Iraqi-American Jew Carole Basri writes: “In short, the Baghdad Jews were scared of local Muslim rule.”⁶³ Two other times, in both 1919 and 1920, the Iraqi Jews appealed to Sir Percy Cox, the British High Commissioner, not to allow an Arab government to come to power, arguing that such an authority would automatically be prejudiced against Jews.⁶⁴ It is not difficult to see how the Jews played a part here in setting themselves up for future hostility when the Iraqi population would eventually turn against the British.

In direct contradiction to the evidence, Abbas Shiblak questions the claims in British sources that Iraqi Jews sought their protection. He writes: “It is wrong to assume, however, that Iraqi Jews as a community asked for direct British rule.” For Shiblak, Jews acted like any minority, and sought support from their local authorities, just as they did during Ottoman rule.⁶⁵

⁶² Stillman 1991: 256-257.

⁶³ Basri 2003: 9.

⁶⁴ Stillman 1991: 55.

⁶⁵ Shiblak 1986: 36.

Elie Kedourie offers a third view, based on his analysis of statements by Cox and other leading British officials at the time:

The British occupation, the mandate that followed, and generally the preponderating British influence were all commonly thought, by both Jews and non-Jews, to offer further buttresses to the position of the community. This was largely an illusion, since British commitment to the sharifian regime, and later on the desire to liquidate the mandate, took precedence over every other consideration... Jewish support for the British administration should thus be disregarded as both self-interested and uncertain.⁶⁶

In the end, Muslim nationalists petitioned the British to appoint a Muslim king, and the British consented, accompanied by a promise from Shi'i sheikhs to uphold the honor and property of non-Muslims. Twenty leading Jewish dignitaries went ahead and signed the agreement on Arab rule, and a provisional government was established in October of 1920, with the three Mesopotamian *vilayets* of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul taking on the name Iraq. In August of 1921, Faysal, the son of Husayn of Hijaz, was crowned King of Iraq under the British Mandate.

Most historians suggest that the mandatory period was the high-point for the Baghdadi Jewish community in terms of their freedom, equality and economic opportunity. Indeed Hayyim Cohen remarks that “during the entire mandatory period, the Iraqi Jews enjoyed complete equality with the Muslims.”⁶⁷ Jews were represented in all aspects of society, including government. The first Iraqi minister of Finance was a Jewish man named Sassoon Heskell.⁶⁸ The son of a notable at the time wrote that “by

⁶⁶ E. Kedourie 1989: 24.

⁶⁷ Cohen 1973: 25.

⁶⁸ He is considered one of the three most prominent men in Baghdad at the time, along with Abdul Rahman al-Naqib and Talib Pasha. For more on Heskell, see Rejwan 1985: 215.

1925 almost every government department was staffed by Jews.”⁶⁹ The two other highly prominent Jews in Iraqi public life were Menahem Daniel, who represented the community in the Iraqi Senate from 1925-32 and Da’ud Samra, who was a member of the High Court of Appeal from 1923-46. The Baghdad Chamber of Commerce was set up in 1926, with an administrative council composed of one member representing the banks, three representing British merchants, one for Persian merchants, five for Jewish merchants and four for Muslim merchants.⁷⁰ An expanded middle class was the defining characteristic of the period of the British mandate for the Iraqi Jews.

The period of the British occupation and Mandate, which began in 1914 in southern Iraq, in 1917 in the center, and in 1918 in the north, and ended when Iraq received its independence in 1932, changed matters considerably for the Jews. With the development of commerce, the Jews, with their knowledge of European languages, their contacts with relatives in Europe and the Far East, and the loyalty to British rule, became more active in foreign trade and in the wholesale business. Many of them became rich when they were appointed as army contractors, providing for the thousands of Indian and British soldiers encamped in the country. This also accounted for a larger number of Jewish clerks in commercial companies and in the British administration...They had a large share in commercial companies, in the banks, in the administration of the railroad, in the Basra port and in the Iraqi oil companies.⁷¹

As mentioned above, the relative openness of non-Muslims to Western cultures, and the language skills they attained in schools, made Christians and Jews disproportionately useful to Britain and France, and to companies from Europe. “This considerably affected their social structure and also aroused the envy and hatred of an increasingly important

⁶⁹ Y. El-Kabir 1967: 150.

⁷⁰ S. Kedourie 1978: 2.

⁷¹ Cohen 1973: 91. Cohen also writes that the wealth attained by some Jews in Iraq was never on a scale that would be considered wealthy in Western countries, and was not even as much as that achieved by some Egyptian Jews.

section of the majority.”⁷² Whereas Jews and Christians in the Middle East had been subjected to inferior treatment as *dhimmis*, European imperialism in the region granted them a form of preferential treatment that turned the Muslim population into the lower stratum of society. This economic or class perspective sheds important light on subsequent chapters that focus on the hostility directed towards Jews. One of the reasons Jews came to be scapegoated was their economic privilege under the British colonial system.

Many sources indicate that the Jews of Iraq were the most well-organized and best educated of any single group in Iraq at the time of the mandate. Additionally, they had unparalleled international networks through immigration to India, England and the Far East that ensured both a business edge and a global scope that distinguished them. One prominent non-Zionist Israeli who spent the first part of his life in Baghdad writes: “The Jews of Baghdad in the first two decades of this century occupied a clear and acknowledged position of superiority in the Mesopotamian economy.” And about the change in political context that would come with the World War, Rejwan adds:

The Jews, then, had much to gain from the new vistas opened up to them with the coming of the British. They welcomed the change, which besides giving them a feeling of security following three years of harsh and arbitrary rule, also granted them equality of opportunity and far better facilities for trade and commerce. It was understandable, therefore, that when the British started talking about such unheard-of novelties as transferring power to ‘the Arabs’ these Jews began to worry.⁷³

When the British entered Baghdad in 1917, the Jews were the most numerous group, with approximately 80,000 Jews out of an urban population of 202,000. There were

⁷² Hourani 1947: 26.

⁷³ Rejwan 1985: 210-211.

approximately 12,000 Christians, 8,000 Kurds, and 800 Persians with the combination of Sunnis, Shiites and Turks numbering 101,400.⁷⁴

But what did this numerical and economic superiority mean about the status of the Jews? For Sylvia Kedourie, the Jewish position in Baghdad remained critical: “It is important to emphasize here that in spite of their numbers and economic importance, in spite of a modern constitution granting equality to all citizens, the position of the Jews remained that of a minority within Islam.”⁷⁵ This statement is slightly baffling in light of the clearly established educational and employment opportunities available to most Jews in the context of sweeping reforms throughout the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. “As far as the law was concerned, from the sixties of the 19th century the Jews had equal rights with the other Iraqis.”⁷⁶ Crucially for Cohen, it was only when Jews came to be seen as a national and not as a religious minority that they suffered from persecution by the state.⁷⁷ He notes that while Christians, Sabians and Yazidis were not harmed in Iraq because they were religious minorities, Muslim Kurds and Christian Assyrians were subject to harsh treatment both by the Government and by the masses because they were perceived as a threat to the state.⁷⁸

A tremendous amount of pressure was put on the Iraqi authorities to conform to a European standard of protection of minority groups in order to gain admission to the League of Nations. While the Constitution of 1925 established most of these principles, the 1932 declaration issued by the Iraqi Government, in Chapter One, considered all of

⁷⁴ Rejwan 1985: 210-211.

⁷⁵ S. Kedourie 1978: 4.

⁷⁶ Cohen 1973: 42.

⁷⁷ Iraqi Jews did not petition the League of Nations in 1932 for national minority rights, as the Assyrians, Kurds and Armenians did.

⁷⁸ Much more will be said in subsequent chapters about the Jews and Zionism, the link in this context between Jew as religious minority and Jew as national minority, to which Cohen refers.

the following to be fundamental laws in Iraq: the full protection of life and liberty; the free exercise of any creed, religion or belief; equality before the law and of civil and political rights; freedom in the use of any language; the right to maintain separate institutions and educational establishments and to have personal status questions settled in accordance with particular customs and laws of the community; the full protection for religious establishments of religious minorities and the right to administer their own endowments; and finally, adequate share for minorities in public funds for educational, religious and charitable purposes.⁷⁹

Wide-ranging measures enshrined in Iraqi constitutional documents thus ensured the protection of religious minority communities. The wealth and economic niche of the Jewish community was largely created by the benefits of the British presence. Iraqi Jews experienced an historic transition as they moved from the *dhimmi*s of the Ottoman system to the privileged servants of the British occupier. Modernity had been ushered in by the efforts of French Jewish liberals through the schools of the *Alliance*. The complex factors that would come to shape the Iraqi Jewish experience in the 1930s and 1940s could hardly have been imagined at this point in time.

⁷⁹ Hourani 1947: 92. Note also that Law No. 77 in 1931 provided for the creation of the office of President of the Israelite Community, as well as a general, spiritual, and lay councils, all assisted by committees. Stillman makes the case that in spite of the fact that the constitution of 1924, drafted by British civil servants, guaranteed equality of all Iraqis before the law, it also declared Iraq to be an Islamic state, distinguished Jews and Christians as distinct minorities, with their own community councils, and by reserving eight seats in parliament for minority representation, ultimately further isolated them and emphasized the Islamic character of the state (Stillman 1991:56-57).

Chapter Two: Zionism in Baghdad in the 1920s

The Origins of an Unpopular Movement

This thesis revolves around Zionism in Baghdad between the beginning of the British Mandate in 1920 and the creation of Israel in 1948. This chapter will describe the history of Zionist activities in Baghdad from the initial connections of Iraqi Jews to the Holy Land until 1935. It will also introduce the anti-Zionist Iraqi political context to an extent sufficient to outline the dominant choice by Jewish notables to distance themselves from Zionism.

2.1 Iraqi Jewish Links with Palestine Before Modern Political Zionism

Scholars disagree over the precise definition of Zionist activity. Those who wish to emphasize the historic links between Jews and the Biblical Land of Israel often highlight the travels of particular rabbis, the purchasing of small plots of land or burial sites or other signs of connection. They blur the line between the yearning for a 'return to Zion' at the heart of many Jewish prayers and the modern political movement founded by Theodor Herzl which brought hundreds of thousands of Jews in a very short period of time to settle in Palestine. Others, determined to prove that Iraqi Jews were never Zionists, minimize the connections, refuse to label them Zionist in nature, and emphasize the small fraction of individuals actually involved in such activities.

In his survey of Baghdadi Jewish history, Sassoon tells of a man named Jacob Elyashar who functioned as a messenger of the Jewish community in Hebron to the Jews

of the East in 1763.⁸⁰ He then describes that at the end of the eighteenth century, Jews of Baghdad dedicated Torah scrolls in memory of deceased members of their families to the synagogues in Hebron.⁸¹ And perhaps more significantly, the first noted Baghdadi migration to Palestine: “In the year 1856,⁸² a new movement impelled by real love for Zion and Palestine, arose among the Jews in Baghdad, which resulted in many of them leaving their native city and immigrating into Palestine.”⁸³ And the importance of the ‘Holy Land’ to Baghdadi Jews is emphasized in Sassoon’s discussion of the *Slat li-Kbiri*, the Great Synagogue in Baghdad. Near the entrance a stone is inscribed with the words ‘Even me-Erez Yisrael’ (a stone from the Land of Israel), and the custom of congregants is to touch and kiss the stone upon entering and leaving the synagogue. Hakham Joseph Hayyim brought this stone back from Palestine in 1868, along with sacks of Palestinian earth that were then spread around the floor of the synagogue.⁸⁴

In his history of Iraqi Jews, Nissim Rejwan clarifies that the first activities that he deems to be ‘Zionist’ in nature after World War One are by no means the first connections between Iraqi Jews and the Holy Land. He mentions that emissaries from the four cities holy to the Jews since Biblical times-- Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias and Safed--would periodically travel to cities in the region, including Baghdad, and sell burial plots as well as raise money for the Palestinian Jewish communities. But in Rejwan’s view, “neither the purchasing of burial plots nor contributions to charity organizations, nor still the emigration of *yeshiva* students and their families, could be described as

⁸⁰ Sassoon 1932: 120.

⁸¹ Ibid.: 129.

⁸² Rejwan writes that this first instance of Iraqi Jewish resettlement in Palestine took place in 1854. He elaborates that this group was religious in nature, believing that their move would help to bring the Messiah more quickly. He notes that the group settled in Jerusalem and Hebron (Rejwan 1985: 201).

⁸³ Sassoon 1932: 146.

⁸⁴ Ibid.: 167.

constituting Zionist activity in any acceptable sense of the term.”⁸⁵ These links were not part of a grand design to establish a national home for the Jews, as Zionism would come to represent.

2.2 The Question of Zionism In Baghdad Prior to 1920

In spite of his movement’s general antipathy towards Zionist ideas at the turn of the century, Yom Tov Semah, the headmaster of the Baghdad school of the *Alliance Universelle Israelite* from 1901-1914, was the first man responsible for spreading Zionist ideas in Iraq. He hosted young students at his house to read together from Hebrew publications like *ha-Sefirah* and told them stories about Theodor Herzl, with whom he had a personal relationship. One of the young men whom Semah educated was Aharon Sassoon ben Eliahu Nahum, who would later be known as ‘the teacher.’ Sassoon emerged as the pioneer of Zionist activities in Iraq. Influenced by newspapers from around the world promoting the Jewish cause and urging Jews not to assimilate, Sassoon began to feel closely connected to the Land of Israel and sought to make contact with the Zionist Movement.⁸⁶

Baghdadi Jews first heard about Zionism through the Hebrew press around the turn of the century. A few individuals, both in Basra and in Baghdad, took the initiative to correspond with the World Zionist Organization, headquartered in Berlin, in the years preceding World War One. The first Zionist society in Iraq, consisting of ten members, was founded in Basra in 1913 by a lawyer named E. Issayick and a photographer, J.J. Aaron. They started a modern Hebrew school which immediately attracted two hundred

⁸⁵ Rejwan 1985: 201.

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 200-202.

students. But the school faced difficulties both from the local *Alliance* school director and from the chief rabbi of Basra, causing it to close down within a year.⁸⁷

Initial Zionist organizing in Baghdad came slightly later than that in Basra. In May 1914, Menaschi Hekim, Rafael Horesh and Maurice Fattal sent 18.75 francs to the Zionist secretariat along with a letter expressing their interest in learning more about the movement. One month later, they received the requested pamphlets, in addition to an instruction that due to disorganization of the Ottoman Zionist Society in Constantinople, these few Baghdadi Jewish Zionists should not start their own society until permission was received from Berlin to do so.⁸⁸ Though apparently disheartened by the movement's lack of encouragement for their enthusiasm, the outbreak of World War One and the disruption of postal services temporarily shelved the Zionist issue in Baghdad.

In 1917, the Balfour Declaration gave the Zionists a major boost in their efforts to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. The reaction amongst Baghdadi Jews, however, tended to be apathy. In a letter sent to the Colonial Office, Sir Arnold Wilson reported:

The announcement aroused no interest in Mesopotamia, nor did it leave a ripple on the surface of local political thought in Baghdad, where there had been for many centuries a large Jewish population whose relations with Arabs had caused them far less concern than the attitude of their Turkish rulers. I discussed the declaration at the time with several members of the Jewish community, with whom we are on friendly terms. They remarked that Palestine was a poor country and Jerusalem a bad town to live in. Compared with Palestine, Mesopotamia was Paradise. This is the Garden of Eden, said one; it is from this country that Adam was driven forth—give us a good government and we will make this country flourish. For us Mesopotamia is a home, a national home to which the Jews of Bombay and Persia and Turkey will be glad to come. Here shall be

⁸⁷ Stillman 1991:84-85. An in-depth study of the Jewish community in Basra has been done by Israeli scholar David Sagiv, but has yet to be published.

⁸⁸ Rejwan 1985: 202.

liberty and opportunity. In Palestine, there may be liberty but there will be no opportunity.⁸⁹

Jewish notable Avraham El-Kabir, in his unpublished memoirs, confirms that Baghdadi Jews were skeptical and apprehensive about the Balfour Declaration. They thought it may complicate their plight in the Middle East and felt that they did not need a new home.⁹⁰ As Moshe Gat writes: “For the Jews of Iraq, however, the Balfour Declaration remained a pipe-dream, with little hope of realization. Palestine had nothing to offer them economically. In comparison, Iraq seemed a paradise on earth.”⁹¹

Already during this time some prominent members of Jewish communities around the region were articulating an anti-Zionist message. They warned of the trouble that Zionism would bring to the Middle East and the harm it would do to relations between Jews and their Arab neighbors. As Jacques Bigart, secretary of the *Alliance* schools, wrote to a correspondent in Salonica in May 1918:

Palestine has fewer than 100,000 Jews and 500,000 Arabs...It is allowable, under these conditions, to have the majority governed by a small minority?...Having regard to the Arab awakening to which the Entente gives support, and which tomorrow perhaps will play an important role in the Asiatic provinces of Turkey, is there not a great danger in confronting it with a politico-national ‘Judaism’ the followers of which are recruited *abroad*?⁹²

It is difficult to know how sympathetic Baghdadi Jews were to Zionism on the heels of World War One. While there was scant organized activity, there is reason to believe that Zionism was more popular in Baghdad than the handful of activists would indicate.

Following a trip to Palestine in 1919, Aharon Sassoon wrote to the chairman of the

⁸⁹ Shiblak 1986: 42-43.

⁹⁰ A. El-Kabir 1964a: 50-51.

⁹¹ Gat 1997: 13.

⁹² E. Kedourie 1974: 77.

Council of Deputies in Jaffa, explaining that the national idea was taking root amongst Iraqi Jews and that they were in need of leadership and direction from the Zionist Movement. His group aimed to expand access to modern Hebrew, help Jews interested in settling in Palestine to raise the necessary funds, and establish a Zionist Association. The first recorded fundraising by Iraqi Jews for the Jewish National Fund(JNF) in Palestine in 1919.⁹³ On the other hand, some Baghdadi Jews in September 1919 sent telegrams to *al-Iraq* and *al-Nahda* stating their opposition to British support for Zionism and expressing solidarity with Arab opposition to the Balfour Declaration.⁹⁴

Rejwan casts doubt on the possibility of making educated statements about ordinary Baghdadi Jews in relation to Zionism. He raises the essential question: How did Iraqi Jews perceive Zionism at this time?

Nothing like an answer to this question can be gleaned from the letters and the other written literature of the period. Apart from what some students of the subject have called ‘Messianic Zionism’, which Jews everywhere bore in their hearts throughout the ages, and which on one sense also included the idea of actually settling in Eretz Yisrael, we have no evidence as to whether Iraqi Jews in any significant sense, or numbers, were at this point in their history really aware of the political-national objectives of the movement with which they so readily sympathized. Nor, for that matter, do we know anything about the extent to which the new movement, in whatever sense it was perceived, actually entered the consciousness of these Jews.⁹⁵

The existence of a historical link between Jews and Zion is clear. The degree of sympathy for the Zionist Movement at this time is not. Rejwan implies that the lack of scholarly evidence about the average Baghdadi Jew’s view of Zionism in the 1920s

⁹³ Rejwan 1985: 204.

⁹⁴ Shiblak 1986: 48.

⁹⁵ Rejwan 1985: 203.

enables writers with various political agenda to project that which supports their arguments.

2.3 The Baghdadi Zionist Movement

This section traces the activities of the small number of leading Zionists in Baghdad in the 1920s, and to a lesser extent, into the 1930s. While their actions are covered in some detail, this is not to suggest an unrealistic amount of influence or strength.⁹⁶ Which Jews did what in relation to Zionism and how they talked about it with one another and in external correspondence reveals essential background information that will enable the thesis to address the experiences of Baghdadi Jews during the interwar period with more subtlety in subsequent chapters.

According to one of the foremost scholars in the field, “Until the 40s, Zionism was so marginal in Iraqi Jewish history. It was so not important and it influenced them so little.”⁹⁷ Meir-Glitzstein writes in her forthcoming book, “Nevertheless, some Zionist activity, with an emphasis on Hebrew-Zionist education, took place in the 1920s and 1930s in most Islamic countries. In Iraq it encompassed a few dozen members, most of them in Baghdad.”⁹⁸ Nissim Kazzaz argues that a distinction must be drawn between the Jewish community, which saw Zionism, knowing very little about it, as the continuation of their religious yearnings for Zion, and their leadership, which saw Iraq as a better place to live than Palestine and declared their loyalty to the nation-building project from 1921.

⁹⁶ In *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World*, Bruce Masters overstates the importance of Zionism to the Jewish elites and misleads the reader into thinking that Baghdadi Jews at this time recast their identities in nationalist terms (Masters 2001: 193).

⁹⁷ Interview with Esther Meir-Glitzstein, 19 December 2003, Be'er Sheva, Israel.

⁹⁸ This book was being published at the time of submission. References to it will be according to a typed manuscript Dr. Meir-Glitzstein gave to me (Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 2, p. 1).

For the leadership, a cost-benefit analysis led them to side with Iraq over Zionism, sensing early that one could not be sympathetic to both.⁹⁹ According to Abbas Shiblak, in spite of the assistance to Zionist emissaries provided by the British and senior Iraqi officials, “Iraqi Jews seemed largely indifferent and often hostile” and only one man, Aharon Sassoon, was responsible for the majority of Zionist activity.¹⁰⁰

Beginning in 1920, Aharon Sassoon, the newly appointed Jewish Agency representative in Baghdad, coordinated the granting of visas to Jews wishing to visit Palestine. Additionally, fundraising for Zionist organizations in Palestine like the JNF and *Keren Hayesod* became substantial.¹⁰¹ The first Zionist association in Baghdad was founded, masked as a Jewish literary society¹⁰² with the ostensible aim of improving Jewish-Muslim relations in Baghdad. Sassoon distributed a Zionist weekly, *Ha-olam*, to fifty Iraqis and increased the amount of land purchases by Iraqi Jews in Palestine. A library opened full of Hebrew books and twelve lectures were given by November 1920. Membership quickly grew to seven hundred and a weekly called *Yeshurun* was published in both Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic, but ceased publication after its fifth issue due to technical difficulties.

At this time, some members of the Jewish Literary Society sought to compete with non-Zionists for representation in the governing body of the Jewish community. Salman Hayya was the only one of them who got elected. However, their greater political activism drove a wedge in the Jewish community, and gradually those who

⁹⁹ Kazzaz 1991: 223.

¹⁰⁰ Shiblak 1986: 42.

¹⁰¹ 16,343 pounds sterling was raised for the Jewish National Fund in 1920-1921 alone. Most of this came from the donation of one man, Ezra Sassoon Suheik. Between 1920-3, Suheik gave 36,500 pounds sterling to establish Kfar Yehezkel in Palestine (Stillman 1991: 86).

¹⁰² It was called the *Jam'iyya Isra'iliyya Adabiyya* (Rejwan 1985: 204-205). See also Cohen 1969: 38.

promoted the Zionist line became more popular. The new executive committee on 22 February 1921 applied for a license from the British High Commissioner to establish the first openly Zionist organization in Iraq, and the request was granted by Sir Percy Cox two weeks later. The *Jam'iyya al-Sahyuniyya li-Bilad al-Rafidain* (Mesopotamian Zionist Committee) functioned legally from March 1921-July 1922, with full government permission, and though its permit was not renewed, the authorities allowed the group to function with semi-legal status until 1929.¹⁰³ There is reason to believe that early Zionist activities excited the Jewish masses.¹⁰⁴

At first, the Zionists enjoyed considerable sympathy from the poorer Jewish masses, who demonstrated their support in vocal public gatherings that offended Arab public opinion and frightened members of the Jewish upper class.¹⁰⁵

Pressure from Arab public opinion and the Jewish elite's fear of Zionism would frame the Zionist question in Baghdad throughout the period under consideration. Even in the years of greatest Zionist activity, the Zionists found it necessary to act in covert and subtle manners, always careful not to offend, not to bring too much attention to themselves.

The 1922 Iraqi Law of Associations required all existing groups to register with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In his report on the meeting between himself and Minister Abdul Muhsin al-Sa'dun, Aharon Sassoon wrote to Chaim Weizmann, explaining that the minister expressed his fondness for the Jews and sympathies with the Zionists after so much Jewish suffering, but that Zionism was deeply unpopular in Iraq

¹⁰³ Cohen 1973: 25.

¹⁰⁴ One leading scholar asserts that 1100-1200 Iraqi Jews came to Palestine between 1919-1923. This was 1.2% of the community at the time, the highest percentage of any Jewish community moving to Palestine during those five years with the exception of Yemen (Cohen 1969: 113-114).

¹⁰⁵ Stillman 1991: 86.

and thus he could not allow the existence of a Zionist association in such a hostile environment. Sassoon struck a deal with al-Sa'dun whereby the Mesopotamian Zionist Committee was allowed to continue its activities without an official license and that the new law would not be enacted against them so long as the Zionists did not push for official recognition.¹⁰⁶

Zionist activities increased throughout the mid-20s, in spite of the government's ambiguous position about the existence of organized Zionist groups in Iraq. Aharon Sassoon claimed that in 1924, counting all of the branches of the Zionist Federation of Mesopotamia, there were one thousand members.¹⁰⁷ In a 4 June 1925 report on the work of the Zionists in Baghdad between 1923-1925, the author reported that efforts to spread Zionist ideas were slow due "to the political situation in our country, for we cannot carry out public propaganda activities, nor publish in any newspaper—even in the paper which we own—anything that has a Zionist appearance." The report stated that even some known Zionists tended to avoid their offices out of fear and that all Zionist activities were carried out secretly. In spite of these conditions, Zionism continued to grow. And the report concluded: "Of course, if the situation had been helpful to us, the number of our members would have risen to the tens of thousands." In fact, there were only three hundred members. The optimism is nonetheless revealing for Zionist leaders clearly felt that the dominant political culture pressured Jews into keeping their distance from Zionism.

When he was threatened with expulsion from his teaching post at another Jewish school due to his Zionist activities, Aharon Sassoon decided to start his own school in

¹⁰⁶ Rejwan 1985: 206.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen 1969: 49-51.

May 1924. At the time of the report a year later, there were already 350 students studying in Modern Hebrew at Sassoon's *Pardes Yeladim* School. Another leading Zionist, Solomon Shina, published *al-Misbah* from 1924-1929 with a clear Zionist leaning. The sense of ascendancy is clear in the report, stating that intra-communal quarreling over the Zionist question was beginning to tip in favor of the Zionists, including the replacement of the anti-Zionist Chief Rabbi with one more sympathetic to their cause. Three Zionists were also elected to the City Council and one of the two elected representatives of the Jews in the parliament was a Zionist. The report mentioned that 150 individuals as well as forty-one families settled in Palestine between 1923-1925.¹⁰⁸

A letter written by *al-Misbah* editor Solomon Shina to the World Zionist Organization dated 30 July 1924 portrays a leading Zionist figure frustrated with the lack of support amongst his Jewish brethren. He wrote: "Owing to the poor education acquired by our brothers, here, no act of national feelings is manifested by them." And conveying the religious, rather than political relationship of most Baghdadi Jews to the Holy Land, he continued: "To most of them, love of motherland is to be recited in prayers only and reconstruction of the temple is to be achieved by the Almighty." He accused Jewish leaders of failing to support *al-misbah* because "they want to put out national feelings and prevent them from taking root in our midst."¹⁰⁹ Shina was appealing to the WZO for moral and financial support in the face of general Iraqi and specifically Jewish antipathy to the Zionist cause.

¹⁰⁸ Central Zionist Archives (CZA), Jerusalem, Z 4/272 and translated in Stillman 1991: 334-336.

¹⁰⁹ CZA: Z 4/2470 and translated in Stillman 1991: 337-339.

In addition to their frustrations with the domestic situation, Baghdadi Zionists were offended by what they perceived to be an *Ashkenazi* bias within the Zionist Movement.¹¹⁰ In a letter dated 22 April 1925 from The Mesopotamian Zionist Committee in Baghdad to the Zionist Executive in London, Iraqi Zionists complained about the lack of representation in the Jewish Agency, asking pointedly: “Is your attitude towards the *Sephardim* different than towards the *Ashkenazim*?” The letter scoffs at the report that a *Sephardi* Congress had to be held before delegates from *Sephardi* countries were nominated, pointing out the double standard at play since no similar *Ashkenazi* Congress was held. If they did not have their request for greater representation met, they threatened: “we shall be compelled to sever our connections with the Zionist Organization and to work for Palestine independently.”¹¹¹

For several more years, the Zionists continued to spread their ideas, with particular success among the younger generation. Hebrew speaking gatherings, social functions, the singing of Hebrew songs and lectures and discussions all occurred. But the year 1929 proved a critical turning point in Baghdadi Zionist history, as events in Palestine heated up with major riots following an incident at the Wailing Wall in August. Accounts in particularly nationalist newspapers inflamed public opinion and convinced the British authorities to clamp down on Zionist activities. Their unpopular status as European occupier of Iraq was only made worse by their support for Zionism in Palestine. Aharon Sassoon had been called to the Ministry of Interior on 8 September

¹¹⁰ Indeed the Zionists were not interested in Jews from Islamic countries until news of the Holocaust spread and Zionist leaders realized they would need an alternative source of immigration. By the late 1930s, the 750,000 Middle Eastern Jews were only 4% of World Jewry and seen as largely irrelevant to the Zionist project. This issue will be addressed in Chapter Four of this thesis, as is explored in Meir-Glitzstein 2004; Shenhav 1999; Shohat 1988.

¹¹¹ CZA: Z 4/2470 and reproduced in Stillman 1991: 340-341.

1928 and advised “to put an end to all Zionist work in Baghdad”, especially immigration to Palestine, fundraising for the JNF and the spread of Zionist ideas at his school.

Sassoon argued that his work was not obtrusive; that the JNF was a charitable institution, and that his work was being carried out with permission from the High Commissioner.

Though he successfully postponed the stoppage, on 12 December 1929, Sassoon was ordered by Central Police “to sign a declaration according to which he obligated himself to stop collecting funds for the Jewish National Fund and to refrain from organizing a Zionist Society.”¹¹² And thus open Zionist activity came to an end in Baghdad in 1929.¹¹³

Clandestine activities continued until 1935, when Sassoon was deported and went to Palestine.¹¹⁴ During these years, Zionist ideas were spread through a network of Jewish teachers from Palestine who exposed their students to socialist Zionism under the auspices of a group called *Ahi’ever*.¹¹⁵ Some of the students who were taught by *Ahi’ever* teachers decided to move to Palestine and form agricultural settlements.¹¹⁶ The group split in two over the issue of whether or not to hold a Zionist march in Baghdad

¹¹² Report from Sassoon to the Main Office of Jewish National Fund in Jerusalem on the year 1929. The letter is reprinted in Stillman 1991: 342-344.

¹¹³ While the organized movement came to a standstill in 1929 in Baghdad, the Mosul-based community, far from the pressures of state authorities, witnessed an increasingly strong desire to leave for Palestine. Jews in Iraqi Kurdistan immigrated to Palestine in much larger numbers than their co-religionists in Baghdad. Threatened by the 1933 massacre of Assyrians and threats against Kurdish Muslims, and pushed by poor economic opportunities, 2,500 Kurdish Jews moved to Palestine in the year 1934 alone. This brought the number of Kurdish Jews in Palestine by that time to over 8,000, since they had been coming for religious or ‘messianic’ reasons since the nineteenth century (Ben-Zvi 1955: 59).

¹¹⁴ It is noteworthy that the actual number of Iraqi Jews who moved to Palestine between 1924-1931 (3,290) and between 1932-1938 (2,927) was very similar (Shiblak 1986: 44).

¹¹⁵ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: Introduction, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ It is clear that a sizeable number of Jews traveled to Palestine during these years from a letter dated 28 February 1935 from (Sgd.) S.H. Humphrys: “As regards the issue of Iraqi passports to Iraqi Jews wishing to go to Palestine either as visitors or as immigrants, Mr. Vere informs me that he knows of no case in which the recipient of a Palestinian immigration certificate has been refused a passport. Any such case would almost certainly be brought to his notice. The number of applicants made to him for travelers’ visas by Jewish holders of Iraqi passports is sufficiently large to cast the gravest doubts on the assertion that difficulties are placed in the way of Iraqi Jews wishing to obtain Iraqi passports for the purpose of traveling to Palestine” (Public Records Office (PRO), London, CO 733/275/4).

during the summer of 1934. The more audacious group, now under the name *Shemesh*, carried out its own activities. Iraqi authorities quickly disbanded both groups. Many other Jewish groups engaged in Zionist activity during the early 1930s, including the Young Men's Hebrew Association, the Society for Distribution of Products from Eretz Yisrael, Hebrew Book Distributors, the Hebrew Youth Association and the Maccabee Sports Organization.¹¹⁷

Reflecting on the Baghdadi Jewish experience with Zionism, Esther Meir-Glitzstein notes that a group of young people from the lower-middle class saw in Zionism an opportunity to challenge the conservative, traditional structure of the Jewish community. Educated Jews tended to distance themselves from Zionism as economic opportunities and access to civil services opened up to them. "The Jewish problem in the national sense did not yet exist in Iraq, and the Jews did not need a Zionist solution." And crucially, Meir-Glitzstein notes, "The local Zionist activists were motivated not by the distress of exile but by love of Zion."¹¹⁸ The clampdown by the Iraqi authorities culminating in the deportation of Aharon Sassoon in 1935 ended Zionist activities in Baghdad until the arrival of the Zionist Underground from Palestine in 1942.

2.4 Anti-Zionism in Baghdad

With the outbreak of Arab nationalism as the dominant political ideology in Baghdad following World War One, nationalist newspapers warned Baghdadi Jews to stay away from Zionism, which fast became one of the chief enemies of Arab nationalism. Support for Zionism was seen as a betrayal of the Arab cause. Early

¹¹⁷ Rejwan 1985: 226.

¹¹⁸ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: Introduction, p. 6.

meetings between British officials and Zionist emissaries, such as Dr. Ariel Bension, serving as representative of *Keren Hayesod* in the region, made it clear that Zionists were to keep a low profile so as not to upset relations between Jews and non-Jews in Baghdad.

Within an atmosphere full of hostility towards the Zionist concept, the Zionists in Baghdad managed to conduct their activities on a small scale with little danger to their constituents. Most Jews, however, chose to heed the warnings coming out of the press and their own leadership by distancing themselves from the Zionists. It was not until February of 1928 that a full-fledged outbreak of anti-Zionist rage spilled onto the streets of Baghdad. The catalyst was a visit by a prominent British Zionist, Alfred Mond, in Iraq on business, but rumored to be attempting to ‘Zionize’ Iraq. As Jewish notable Avraham El-Kabir notes in his memoirs, Mond’s visit precipitated widespread rioting and shouts of ‘death to the Jews.’ El-Kabir writes that threats were not taken seriously and no one was injured. The atmosphere was not poisoned the way it would be in the future.¹¹⁹ The British authorities reacted strongly, by closing down some newspapers, expelling particularly outspoken students and harassing members of the Protest Committee on Palestine.¹²⁰

As mentioned earlier, the British changed their approach to the Zionist issue in Baghdad following the riots of 1929.¹²¹ From then on, the British actively worked against Zionism in Baghdad, blocking the entrance of newspapers from Palestine and the

¹¹⁹ A. El-Kabir 1964b: 44.

¹²⁰ Cohen 1973: 26.

¹²¹ There was a dispute related to Jewish prayer at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Palestinians rioted, killing 129 Jews and injuring over three hundred, mostly unarmed, in Hebron and Safed. The local police and British troops suppressed the riots, resulting in the killing of more than one hundred Palestinian Arabs. The Iraqi press claimed Arab casualty figures to be in the thousands, and *al-Watan* falsely reported that a Jew threw a bomb into a mosque, killing seventy people. The next day, 10,000 Iraqis gathered in Baghdad’s Haydar Khana Mosque, with prayers recited for the victims of Zionism and British aggression (Stillman 1991: 94-95).

Jewish world, and expelling teachers in Jewish schools who had come from Palestine. Their contradictory reactions in Baghdad—first punishing anti-Zionists, and then stopping Zionist activities-- reflected the quagmire into which they found themselves in Palestine—overseeing a land with two competing national claims, both of which were justified, in part, by British promises. It was in 1929 that the conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Zionists first appeared to have serious implications for Jewish-Arab relations throughout the region.

Both the pro-government *At-Taqaddum* Party and the opposition *Ash-Sha'b* Party were in agreement in reflecting popular anti-Zionism.¹²² When Faisal emerged as the king of independent Iraq in 1932, he did not appear to be particularly concerned with Zionism, assuming an agreement with the Jews would be reached. His own ambition for a pan-Arab federation made Zionism seem to him like a temporary issue, since Jews would become a minority within the large Arab state in the near future.¹²³ Indeed King Faisal's views led some Jews to believe that public support for Zionism would be no problem in the new Iraq.¹²⁴

In one of the clearest articulations of popular anti-Zionist sentiment at the time, Iraqi journalist Amin Ahmad, in an article in *al-Hedaye* published in June of 1933, accused some Iraqi Jews of being involved in Zionist activities. He began:

Is it not a joke of the times that parasitic elements are infringing upon the rights of a nation that has enveloped them with its benevolence, which has given them a part of its glory, and which has pulled them out of humility and poverty?

¹²² Rejwan 1985: 225.

¹²³ Simon 1986: 66.

¹²⁴ Kazzaz 1991: 232-233.

He passionately affirmed the project of nation-building in Iraq and called on Iraqis to speak out against the Zionist activities they knew to be taking place and undermining the Iraqi nation. Referring to the invitation to welcome British Zionist Alfred Mond to Baghdad, he wrote: “The people are taking account of this flagrant aggression against the Iraqi nation; namely the Jews wanting to make Iraq the source of death for Arabs and Muslims.” To make his point clear, he said: “Perhaps they [the Jews] do not know that it is pleasing to Iraq to die for the Palestinian cause.” He then revealed a sense of humiliation as an Iraqi that Zionist agitation was taking place in Iraq, a place all Arabs viewed with respect and admiration.¹²⁵

Much more will be said about anti-Zionism as a framework for understanding the increase in hostility directed at Baghdadi Jews in the 1930s in the next chapter. But first, it is essential to discuss the reaction of Jewish notables in Baghdad to the Zionist movement within the anti-Zionist Iraqi political atmosphere.

2.5 The Iraqi Orientation and Jewish Distance from Zionism

The leadership of the Jewish community took the position that support for Zionism would threaten the position of Baghdadi Jews. Recognizing that Zionism was viewed from the point of view of local nationalist sentiment as anathema to its aims, the Jewish elite sought to publicly distance themselves from Zionism while instructing the Jewish masses to do the same. They preferred to promote integration into Iraqi society, and they were confident that Iraq would offer Jews prosperity and security.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Stillman 1991: 345-347.

¹²⁶ It is worth emphasizing the economic prosperity experienced by many Jews under British rule. “The period from 1920, when the state was established, to 1932, when independence was won, was characterized by the growing economic and cultural integration of the Jews into Iraqi society. Jews who grew up in the

Indeed British authorities specifically instructed Jewish communal leaders to keep a low profile, recognizing that Zionism had the potential to stir up hostility and tension. The most thoughtful reflection by a leading Jewish personality about Zionism was a letter written by Menahem Salih Daniel to the secretary of the Zionist Organization in London dated 8 September 1922. In it, Daniel criticized the Jewish masses for their “wild outburst of popular feelings towards Zionism”, arguing that they had a “Messianic” hope in the new movement, and that “Zionism was going to end the worries of life.” He was keenly aware of the political context that made this attitude self-defeating for Iraqi Jews.

The Jews are already acting with culpable indifference about public and political affairs, and if they espouse so publicly and tactlessly as they have done lately, a cause which is regarded by the Arabs not only as foreign but as actually hostile, I have no doubt that they will succeed in making of themselves a totally alien element in this country and as such they will have great difficulty in defending a position, which, as explained above, is on other grounds already too enviable.¹²⁷

Elie Kedourie viewed Daniel’s letter as correctly foreseeing the danger Zionism posed to the Baghdadi Jewish position, particularly in light of their “indifference about public and political affairs.”¹²⁸ In Iraq, unlike in its European context, Daniel wrote, “the Zionist Movement is not an entirely idealistic subject.” He acknowledged that he too was sympathetic to the ideas of the movement. “There is no-one who regrets more than I do that I have to decline your request [for Zionist activity in Iraq]....” His position was based on political calculation. Fully aware of the privileged position of the Jew in the

1930s experienced no discrimination and pressed for even greater integration. Iraq’s liberal policies, their own internal autonomy and personal and economic security appeared to promise a rosy future. They had no thoughts of emigrating from this paradise” (Gat 1997: 16).

¹²⁷ For the full text of Daniel’s letter, see Cohen 1969: 237-240 or Stillman 1991: 331-333.

¹²⁸ E. Kedourie 1974: 267.

socio-economic structure of Iraq under the British Mandate, Daniel wrote that the Jew was “being regarded by the waking-up Muslim as a very lucky person, from whom the country should expect full return for its lavish favours.” As a result, “the Jew cannot maintain himself unless he gives proof of an unimpeachable loyalty to his country.” Any support for Zionism, however mild, would be perceived as “a betrayal of the Arab cause.”

The Jewish leadership reflected Daniel’s position throughout the 1920s, viewing the increasing Arab national consciousness as the context within which to distance themselves from Jewish nationalism. When the 1929 riots in Palestine triggered a burst of anti-Zionist rhetoric in the Iraqi press, leaders from Jewish communities all over Iraq rushed to issue statements “in which Zionism was condemned and loyalty to the Kingdom of Iraq pledged.”¹²⁹ Kedourie notes, rather wryly, “This of course could not be the end of the matter.” Akram Zu’aytar, in charge of Palestinian Arab propaganda was visiting Baghdad from Nablus and asked for stronger condemnations of Zionism. And so a telegram was sent by Jewish literary and professional personalities expressing solidarity with the Arab character of Palestine and the struggle in its defense against Zionists.¹³⁰ There is a principle from the Talmud, *dina demalkhuta dina* (the law of the kingdom is the law) that Jewish intellectuals in Iraq employed in objecting to Zionist activities. According to their interpretation, the anti-Zionist Iraqi political context compelled Jews not to side with Zionism.¹³¹

Kazzaz notes that the strong opposition of the Jewish leadership and intelligentsia in Baghdad to the Zionist idea was the view held only by a small minority of Jews. Most Jews, less politicized and unaware of the potential implications of support for Zionism,

¹²⁹ Rejwan 1985: 225.

¹³⁰ E. Kedourie 1989: 28-29.

¹³¹ Kazzaz 1991: 233.

took a more ambivalent position.¹³² He also distinguishes between anti-Zionism and non-Zionism, showing that there was no hostility toward Zionism per se even among the leadership.¹³³ Cohen argues that while most leaders publicly distanced themselves from Zionism, many were not actually anti-Zionist, and some of them even gave money to Zionist causes.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, throughout the 1930s, the Jewish leadership took pains to align itself with Iraqi nationalism and Arab patriotism, though their efforts were usually viewed with suspicion.¹³⁵

In publicly pronouncing their opposition to Zionism, Jewish community leaders probably spoke with their British overlords in mind just as much as they spoke to the Iraqi public. Because the problem in Palestine was costing Britain tremendous political capital, the Jews wished to be perceived as apolitical and grateful. Unlike Arab nationalist leaders, Jewish leaders had no choice to appeal to mass popular support as an alternative source of legitimacy. Their only recourse was to British favor. While Arab nationalist leaders could slander Britain while appealing to their common people, Jewish leaders depended upon colonial support. And since Britain was the main enemy of Arab nationalism as the imperial power, and because Britain was seen as a supporter of Zionism, nationalists had a hard time believing that Jewish leaders could be sincere in their criticisms of Zionism.

¹³² Kazzaz 1991: 229.

¹³³ Ibid.: 231.

¹³⁴ Cohen 1969: 122.

¹³⁵ Kazzaz 1988.

Chapter Three: Iraqi Politics and the Jews, 1934-1941

Cornered by Nazism, Zionism and Arab Nationalism?

A complex set of domestic, regional and international factors coalesced to undermine the status of the Jews in the early years of the Iraqi state. Events in Palestine galvanized widespread pan-Arabist support for Palestinian Arabs and Nazi German influences on Iraqi politics, media and education established strong links with a fiercely anti-Jewish state. Arab nationalism, now a mass movement in response to Western colonial domination, made the position of minorities in independent Iraq far more vulnerable than had been hoped for by the League of Nations. And after the death of Faysal in 1933, Arab nationalism in Iraq was significantly more exclusive. Mainstream politics marginalized Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians and Jews. It was at this time that “the Jews [living in Arab countries] found themselves torn among the conflicting forces of Zionism, Arab nationalism, and European colonialism, while they were also being pulled by apolitical economic aspirations.”¹³⁶ The prevailing anti-British and pro-Palestinian sentiments in Iraq silenced Jews into an apolitical submission. Beyond this, the realities of their economic ties to Britain, their religious associational ties to Zionism and their scapegoating by the Nazis combined to make the Jews in Baghdad particularly vulnerable.

Perhaps most critically was that as a result of “the disturbances in Palestine and of the Nazi war against the Jews the distinction between Jew and Zionist disappeared in

¹³⁶ Stillman 1991: 53.

Arab nationalist discourse.”¹³⁷ As the first Arab country to gain its independence from the mandate, Iraq quickly became the site for the ingathering of Arab nationalist leaders. With the death of King Faysal I as a moderating voice of tolerance, the rhetoric of Arab nationalism became far less inclusive of minority communities.

This chapter discusses anti-Jewish sentiments that manifested in a particular political context: that of Baghdad between 1934-1941. At times, the term anti-Semitism will be used to describe certain views and incidents. As Moshe Behar discusses, however, Jewish history has largely been written over the past fifty years with a Zionist tendency that places the European Jewish experience of persecution at the center of analysis. In doing so, terminology such as ‘pogroms’, ‘anti-Semitism’, ‘victims’, and ‘anti-Jewish measures’ “has been generalized to, and superimposed on, African and Asian Jewish history in order to subordinate it to European Jewish history.”¹³⁸ The goal of this chapter is to identify and contextualize hostility towards Jews in Baghdad. In so doing, I hope to avoid overusing the term ‘anti-Semitic’ in its specifically European sense, and thereby misleading the reader into wrongful conclusions about the nature of the Baghdadi Jewish experience.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ E. Kedourie 1989: 30.

¹³⁸ Behar 2001: 189.

¹³⁹ In *Semites and anti-Semites*, Bernard Lewis distinguishes between three types of prejudice towards Jews, only one of which he deems anti-Semitism. There is hostility towards Jews as an economically privileged minority and hostility based on opposition to Zionist ideology. But anti-Semitism is “the special and peculiar hatred of the Jews, which derives its unique power from the historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and the role assigned by Christians to the Jews in their writings and beliefs, more especially popular beliefs, concerning the genesis of their faith” (Lewis 1986: 22). To be sure, every form of ethnic hatred is socially constructed in particular circumstances, and anti-Semitism is but example of a wider phenomenon, thus undermining Lewis’s persistent attempts to create an exceptionalist typology for Jew-hatred. The quote is used here to display the intrinsic connection between anti-Semitism as is classically understood and the Christian European context, in order to cast doubt on those who would argue that there was a particularly venomous Arab, Muslim form of Jew-hatred in 1930s Iraq. While this chapter makes the case that hostility towards Jews was the result of a number of factors, the term anti-Semitism with all that it stirs up in the modern reader, is unhelpful and misleading.

3.1 Anti-Jewish Policies and Incidents

While Jews in Baghdad suffered through a pogrom in 1291 and the harsh rule of Da'ud Pasha and his religious advisor Mullah Mohammed from 1817-1831, they generally lived freely and autonomously for twelve centuries. Sporadic anti-Christian and anti-Jewish riots occurred during the late Ottoman period with tension over the privileged position of Christians and Jews in relation to Western powers.¹⁴⁰ Explicitly anti-Semitic writings first appeared in the Middle East during the nineteenth century with translations of European tracts written by Westernized Christian intellectuals in Syria and Egypt. Palestinian nationalists began to cite the infamous forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, including Sadiq Pasha al-Qadiri in Baghdad in 1924.¹⁴¹ On 15 October 1908, Jews in Baghdad accused of being sympathetic to the Young Turks were attacked by a mob.¹⁴² According to the report by the British consul-general: "The crowd attacked nearly every Jew who was seen and no-one seems to have interfered with them for many hours."¹⁴³ This quote seems to support the assertion that a generalized European-style hatred of Jews existed in Baghdad.

With the Zionist Movement's rise to relative prominence in the 1920s, a rise in anti-Jewish rhetoric was seen in some Arab nationalist writings. Baghdadi Jews responded forcefully in their own newspaper, *al-Misbah*, attacking one prominent Iraqi poet for daring to slander Jews, and al-Qadiri for his bigoted writings. The pressure of the Jewish community compelled him to publish a second version of his memoirs with a

¹⁴⁰ PRO: FO 195/624.

¹⁴¹ It was first translated into Arabic by Lebanese Maronite priest Antun Yamin under the name *Mu'amarat al-Yahudiyya 'ala 'l-Shu'ub*.

¹⁴² Rhetoric about equality, liberty and fraternity emanating from the Young Turks Movement generally appealed to non-Muslim inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire (Rejwan 1985: 193).

¹⁴³ Quoted in E. Kedourie 1974: 141.

note that his anti-Jewish comments from the first edition had been referring to the Jews of Russia who led the Bolshevik Revolution. While the response of the Jewish community was strong during those years, the influence of Nazi ideas and the growth in the intensity of anti-Zionist fervor weakened the resolve of the Jews in Baghdad.¹⁴⁴

According to one report, ever since Iraq gained its independence in 1932, “the agitations in the press and in the cafes increased to the point where a Jew would not venture into the streets by himself after dark.”¹⁴⁵ Arab nationalism was on the rise, and its proponents considered Zionism to be one of their main enemies.¹⁴⁶ From a legal standpoint, nothing changed in terms of treatment of Jews during the years 1934-1941. “But the attitude of the government and the Arab masses deteriorated.”¹⁴⁷ A turning point was reached in 1934. Until then, Iraqi Jews were never discriminated against or physically harmed due to their Jewishness. Dozens of civil servants from the Ministry of Economics and Transport were dismissed from their posts in September of 1934. Jews responded with a general strike and commerce was paralyzed for three days.¹⁴⁸ A report from the Baghdad *Alliance* school on 3 Oct 1934 stated: “I am pained to inform you that for the last few months a movement of hostility against the Jews has been taking shape around us and is becoming more accentuated from day to day.” The report also indicated that three Jewish newspapers from Paris and London were forbidden from entering

¹⁴⁴ Kazzaz 1987: 59.

¹⁴⁵ Hausknecht 1943: 56.

¹⁴⁶ Palestine became the symbolic heart of Arab nationalism during this period and since the Zionists were the enemies of Arab Palestine, they quickly joined the British, who happened to be intimately tied both to their gains in Palestine and to Jewish economic opportunity in Baghdad, as enemies of Arab nationalism. The Kurds, Shi'i and Assyrians all posed different sorts of challenges to the Iraqi state, but all were different in form and less exploited for political capital than the Zionist 'takeover' in Palestine.

¹⁴⁷ Cohen 1973: 27

¹⁴⁸ Kazzaz 1987: 60.

Iraq.¹⁴⁹ One of them, The Jewish Chronicle, published an article on 19 October 1934 saying that

as a Result of the growing wave of anti-Semitism, both official and subterranean, the Iraqi Jewish population is now living in a state of perpetual fear. Incitement and even violence proceeds unchecked, either by the police or the higher authorities. Under the cloak of ‘anti-Zionism’ the anti-Semites are conducting a furious agitation against what they term ‘unpatriotic’ Jews.¹⁵⁰

Leading advocate of Iraqi Jewish refugees Carole Basri claims that six hundred Jewish clerks were forced from their government jobs between 1934-6, and Jews were discriminated against by being forced to deposit fifty pounds sterling in order to be permitted to travel abroad.¹⁵¹ In 1935, state secondary schools were advised to accept only a limited number of Jews. On the other hand, a new government in Iraq, led by Yassin Pasha Al-Hashimi, decided to lift the ban on eleven Jewish publications that had been recently restricted.¹⁵² And three Jewish officials who had been dismissed from the Ministry of Economics were re-instated, with other cases under reconsideration.¹⁵³

Following the failure of Nuri al-Said’s attempt at mediation, the Arab Revolt in Palestine in 1936 marked the beginning of physical attacks against Jews in Baghdad. Over the next three years, ten Jews were murdered and eight bombs were thrown at locations where Jews were gathered, injuring six others.¹⁵⁴ The first two Jews were murdered on 16 September 1936, and the next day, declared Palestine Day, witnessed

¹⁴⁹ Archives of *Alliance Universelle Israelite*, Paris, Irak I.C.3 and quoted in Stillman 1991: 369.

¹⁵⁰ PRO: CO 733/275/4.

¹⁵¹ She attributes these actions to the impact of Nazi ideas in Iraq (Basri 2003: 9).

¹⁵² *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* Bulletin 94 dated 22 April 1935. As described in a telegram from British Embassy in Baghdad, No. 48 on 20 Feb 1935, Nuri al-Said clarified that “Government aim is to stop entry of Zionist but not of Jewish publications.”

¹⁵³ *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 March 1935. However, firing of Jewish civil servants on an even larger scale occurred again in February 1936, included 300 officials, many of whom had a high rank (Kazzaz 1987: 60).

¹⁵⁴ Gat 1997: 18.

another Jew shot and killed. On the holy day of Yom Kippur, a bomb was thrown into a synagogue that miraculously did not detonate. Leaders in the community were asked to publish further statements in the press distancing Baghdadi Jews from Zionism. A few days after the head of the Jewish community published one such statement, another Jew was killed. In protest, Baghdadi Jewish merchants chose to stay at home from 7-9 October and as a result, business in the city virtually stood still.¹⁵⁵ The government was forced to intervene, threatening to impose financial penalties for those merchants who continued to remain at home. A few days later, however, two more Jews were murdered. At this point, the “events caused fear among the Jews and convinced them to shut themselves in their homes at night.”¹⁵⁶ After reporting on several more incidents of murder and street fights between Muslims and Jews, American *Charge d’Affaires* in Baghdad, James S. Moose, Jr. stated, “there is no indication that the present situation will develop into any serious conflict between the two communities.”¹⁵⁷

Significantly, a change in government from the Pan-Arabist to the much more Iraqi nationalist Bakr Sidqi came on 29 October 1936. This transition brought a tremendous amount of relief to the situation of the Jews.¹⁵⁸ Several Jewish intellectuals

¹⁵⁵ Such was the extent of the near monopoly on commercial life in Baghdad occupied by the Jews. Jewish propensity for small business could only partially be explained by British favoritism during the colonial period since that mostly manifested in civil servant jobs and in big business international connections that took advantage of the links within the British Empire. The roots of this pattern of Jewish urban commercial activity go back to the many centuries of Jewish life under Islam (and indeed Christianity) when Jews largely worked in professions considered to be ‘unclean’ by the dominant religions and therefore forbidden to their adherents.

¹⁵⁶ Kazzaz 1987: 61.

¹⁵⁷ United States National Archives, Department of State RG 59 980G.4016 Jews/12 and quoted in Stillman 1991: 386-388.

¹⁵⁸ Zionism was an enemy of Arab nationalism for its threat to the ‘Arab land’ of Palestine, but it was of much less concern to Iraqi nationalists, who found groups within Iraq that threatened the infant Iraqi national identity, such as the Assyrians, to be far more menacing. Sidqi was complicit in the massacre of Assyrians in 1933. He and other Iraqi nationalist leaders were generally less hostile to the Baghdadi Jewish community than pan-Arabists who frequently employed rhetoric about Palestine and Zionist exploitation that sometimes slipped into general insurgency against Jews.

were members of the *al-Ahali* group that helped bring about the coup and now served as members of the coalition government.¹⁵⁹ Things seemed brighter for the Jews for eight months, until June 1937 when the *al-Ahali* group left the government. During the period of the Sidqi government, the Jews were promised greater security and fair treatment, in an official communiqué issued by the Ministry of Interior stating that “events in Palestine...should not affect the Jews of Iraq and that any attempt at disorder would be severely repressed.”¹⁶⁰ However, the government that came to power after Sidqi was assassinated, presumably for his alliances with Kurds and Turks, was much more inclined to focus on the Arabs of Palestine, and much more tolerant of anti-Jewish manifestations in Iraq that arose over the following year. The strongest Jewish condemnation of Zionism was issued in 1938 by thirty-three Iraqi Jewish leaders in a cable addressed to the League of Nations.¹⁶¹ One such notable, Ezra Haddad, wrote a column in *al-Akhbar* under the headline “The Jews of Iraq and the distress of Palestine” in July 1938, in which he spoke out against Zionism and in favor of the Arab homeland. Eighteen Jewish doctors and intellectuals published a statement for Palestine Day which said: “We support with all our limbs and feelings the protection of Palestine and its remaining Arab and strong.”¹⁶² But none of these efforts seemed to keep Jews safe from verbal and physical harassment.

It is worth bearing in mind that even according to a mainstream Zionist historian like Moshe Gat, “The nationalists, who operated against the Jews, constituted a small minority of the Iraqi Arab population. The great majority of the people maintained their

¹⁵⁹ Formed in 1931 and espousing liberal principles based on the French Revolution, the *al-Ahali* group was the leading voice of opposition to the government. Their ideas threatened pan-Arabists and from 1934, were socialist in nature, with an emphasis on democratic and land reform and the concept of *sha'biya* (populism) (Shikara 1987: 114-115; Khadduri 1960: 63-64, 69-70).

¹⁶⁰ Stillman 1991: 102-103.

¹⁶¹ Basri 2003: 10-11.

¹⁶² Kazzaz 1987: 62

contacts with the Jews.” Gat is aware that “The Iraqi regime never expressed open or official support for nationalist ideology. The reverse was true: it endeavored to prevent attacks on the Jewish community and took various steps to provide the necessary protection for Jewish quarters.”¹⁶³ As Nissim Kazzaz confirms, “The Arab masses did not hate the Jews, so that in the absence of inciters from outside, the Jews were able to live in peace, although not entirely without fear.”¹⁶⁴ Such inciters did come—in the Nazis and some Arab nationalists—and they shook the confidence of Iraqi Jews, undermining their belief in integration and equal rights. One British government document reports that the Iraqi Ministry of Interior feared that

before long, a demand might arise for the expulsion of all the Jews in Iraq...Nobody had been able to prevent Hitler from carrying out his drastic anti-Jewish measures in Germany. The Arab countries as victims of Jewish territorial ambitions would have far stronger justification than the European...It was not entirely fantastic to visualize the 90,000 Jews of Iraq being escorted across the Euphrates and told to run the gauntlet of the desert to this Palestine of theirs...it might not be made for three, four or even five years; but sooner or later it was bound to happen unless there was a radical change.¹⁶⁵

The situation of the Iraq Jews worsened between 1935-1941, precisely the years that there was no Zionist activity of any sort in Iraq. Strenuous efforts by local Jews to distance themselves from Zionism were to no avail. The anti-Jewish trend was the result of the interplay in the Iraqi context between the simultaneous growths of Arab nationalism, world Zionism and Nazism.¹⁶⁶ And all of this took place on the heels of the

¹⁶³ Gat 1997: 18-19.

¹⁶⁴ Kazzaz 1987: 60.

¹⁶⁵ PRO: FO 406/76.

¹⁶⁶ Kazzaz 1991: 236-237.

special relationship throughout the 1920s between the British colonial administration, on the one hand, and the Christian and Jewish minorities, on the other.

3.2 Iraqi and Pan-Arab Nationalist Politics

An overview of Iraqi political development is now provided in order to properly situate the anti-Jewish incidents and climate described above, as well as to establish a foundation from which to discuss the role of Nazi Germany and of events in Palestine on Iraqi Jews during this period.

Opposition to the British in Iraq has its origins in the correspondence of 1915-6 between Sharif Husayn and Sir Henry McMahon with the latter accepting the idea of a post-war Arab state to embrace all Arab territories in Asia. Arab nationalism was given a further boost by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 signed between Great Britain and France. Along with the replacing of wartime restrictions and the return of Iraqis from abroad, as well as prospects for security and development in Iraq, Sykes-Picot helped to boost a particularly Iraqi form of nationalism.¹⁶⁷ Iraqi nationalism grew exponentially during the first half of 1919, with complete independence for Iraq as its goal. The victorious powers decided at San Remo, however, to offer Britain the Mandate for Iraq, dashing nationalist hopes for independence. It is worth pointing out that there were signs that this early form of Iraqi nationalism was religiously inclusive. One pamphlet distributed in coffeehouses frequented by non-Muslims was specifically addressed to Christian and Jewish Iraqis:

It is to be made clear to you, our brothers, that we in this country are partners in happiness and misery. We are brothers, and our ancestors lived in friendship and mutual

¹⁶⁷ Longrigg 1953: 115.

help. Do not consider in any way that the demonstrations carried out by the citizens affect any of your rights...We have no other object than to claim from the present government the fulfillment of its pledges to the Iraqi nation which it has published many times in the newspapers. We therefore invite you to take part with us in everything that is good for the nation...We again invite you in the name of the fatherland and patriotism to unite, in order to form a single land to work for the realization of our principles and our future happiness whereby you will render us thankful to you.¹⁶⁸

Shortly after King Faysal I was installed, he delivered a speech in which he said: "There is no meaning in the words 'Jews, Moslems and Christians' in the terminology of patriotism. There is simply a country called Iraq, and all are Iraqis."¹⁶⁹ Faysal was committed to the notion of a Confederation of Arab States centered on Iraq, but he was also strongly tied to British interests. The signing of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Alliance in 1930 revealed a fundamental political division between proponents of such an alliance such as Nuri al-Sa'id, founder of the *al-'Ahd* Party and opponents such as Yasin al-Hashimi, founder of *al-Ikha al-Watani*. The latter would fuse with Ja'far Abu al-Timman's *al-Watani* Party and then the alliance was dissolved altogether in 1933 after the formation of the Rashid Ali government.¹⁷⁰ Faysal's unexpected death in 1933 postponed the pressing need for new political parties a year after Iraq gained her independence, and none would be formed officially until 1946.

Faysal turned out to have been instrumental in imbuing the infant Iraqi state with tolerance and respect for Iraq's non-Muslim citizens. He was a restraining influence, but once he was gone radical xenophobic forms of nationalism began to assert themselves.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Stillman 1991: 259 and 'Abd al-Muhsin 1983: 269-270. Abbas Shibliak also asserts that leading nationalists frequently called upon Jews and Christians to unite with their Arab brethren, considering Jews to be an integral part of the nation (Shibliak 1986: 46-47).

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Schechtman 1950: 3.

¹⁷⁰ Hamdi 1987: 25-26.

“Arab nationalism found a convenient outlet in a policy of persecution of these minorities from the moment it was felt that the latter could no longer count on British protection.”¹⁷¹ The army¹⁷² asserted itself as the most potent force in Iraqi politics from its inception. After massacring four hundred Assyrians in Simel in 1933¹⁷³ and suppressing tribal insurrections of Yazidis and Barzani Kurds in 1935-6, the army made itself the power behind the Iraqi state.¹⁷⁴

Unlike the Assyrians, Kurds and Armenians, Iraqi Jews chose not to petition the League of Nations for national minority rights.¹⁷⁵ In this letter dated 21 October 1931 from the director of the *Alliance* schools in Baghdad to the secretary-general of *Alliance*, Mr. Sassoon writes:

In the present state of Iraq politics our co-religionists here have no interest whatever, in claiming national minority rights...At the time of the Arab revolts in Palestine [in 1929] the Jews of Baghdad in mass made national declarations affirming their fusion with the local population and the absence among them of all separatistic sentiments, and it was this that saved us from the furious hatred of Chauvinistic trouble makers. A claim for special rights would make the Jews a foreign organism in this country... Our interest lies in the direction of exerting all our efforts to justify and to maintain the good will of the authorities.

In the first major work of scholarship on the subject of minorities in the Arab world, Albert Hourani describes how Arab nationalism was first directed against the Turks and

¹⁷¹ Schechtman 1950: 4-5.

¹⁷² The Iraqi army was virtually entirely made up of Muslims. Jews were excluded from service and a small fraction of Christians served in minor capacities (Hamdi 1987: 24).

¹⁷³ Widely viewed to be extremely pro-British and dependent upon British protection, the vulnerable community of Assyrian Christians suffered a massacre at the hands of the Iraqi army while Faysal was in London, presumably to protest his ties with Britain. The climate that enabled this to happen was surely influenced heavily by *al-Ikha*, who themselves felt politically marginalized. See Khadduri 1960: 42; Longrigg 1953: 197-200, 231-237; Hourani 1947: 99-102; Stafford 1935.

¹⁷⁴ Shikara 1987: 110-111.

¹⁷⁵ A fascinating study, beyond the scope of this thesis, would be a comparison of how groups that petitioned for national rights fared at the hands of Iraqi nationalists in subsequent years compared to those that didn't. And prior to that, what was the comparative experience of the groups under British colonial rule.

came to focus on the Western powers who came to control the countries in the region. And it regarded “with suspicion those minorities which have sided with the Western Powers and profited from their presence.” He says about the Iraqi case, “this suspicion has been directed mainly against the Assyrians, and led to the incidents of 1933.” In other words, Assyrians more than Jews or Kurds, faced hostility from the Arab Muslims in the early Iraqi nation-state. He does continue, however, saying that “in all the Arab countries there has been a rising wave of hostility to the Jews because of Zionist policy in Palestine, and it is a hostility which has affected even the Oriental Jews who are not Zionists.”¹⁷⁶ Iraqi nationalism had no place for culturally autonomous minority groups, especially those with privileged economic positions and status vis-à-vis the imperial power. Due to the Jewish community’s numerical weakness and its reliance on Britain for protection, it had no choice but to seek accommodation with the conservative monarchial nationalism, which, for much of the period under investigation, earned them the wrath of more hawkish nationalists, especially in light of the unfolding situation in Palestine and the influence of Nazi ideas.

Jews felt that they had no choice but to sit back and watch Iraq come into being, focusing on their businesses and educational and employment opportunities.¹⁷⁷ Iraqi Jews tended to be uninvolved politically, feeling marginalized by Arab nationalist politics and excluded in the political parties. Virulent anti-British sentiments¹⁷⁸ and passionate sympathy for Palestine Arabs, as well as threats against Jews in the nationalist press

¹⁷⁶ Hourani 1947: 34-35.

¹⁷⁷ Rejwan 1985: 213.

¹⁷⁸ Baghdadi Jews felt these anti-British sentiments to be directly threatening due to the precarious balance of power that maintained Jewish economic privilege and physical security. The Jews had cast their lot with the British from the outset, and worried that the tide towards anti-British vehemence could not bode well for their status in Iraq, bound to be punished for their alliance with the hated former colonial authority.

convinced most Jews that an apolitical profile safely on the sidelines of public life was their only prudent course. By the time the British mandate over the kingdom of Iraq ended in 1932, there simply was no viable place for either Jews or Christians in Iraqi politics.¹⁷⁹ Hourani confirms that Arab nationalism was hardly distinguishable from Islamism from its early stages “and that a very large part of the Arabic-speaking Christians regarded the movement with fear as no more than a scarcely disguised religious movement.”¹⁸⁰ This was even more true for the Jews, who also had to contend with the hatred directed at them by the Nazis in Iraq and the suspicion of them as a result of Zionist activities by other Jews in Palestine.

King Ghazi took over for his father in 1933. Initially, he rode a wave of popularity as a result of his close identification with the more radical nationalists, who were in the ascendancy following the army’s massacre in response to the Assyrian revolt. Though officially obligated to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, Ghazi was uninterested in promoting British interests and became dependent on the advice of a small number of anti-British officials. Ghazi lost control of the political system and Iraq fell victim to competing alliances by rival politicians in collaboration with factions of the army and tribal system.¹⁸¹ This was a period when Iraqi politics became increasingly authoritarian and rival groups concluded that governments could only change through military coups.¹⁸²

Bakr Sidqi, a Kurd and Hikmat Sulayman, closely tied to the Turks, faced a litany of criticism from pan-Arabists who accused them of keeping in close contact with the

¹⁷⁹ Stillman 1991: 57.

¹⁸⁰ Hourani 1947: 30.

¹⁸¹ Shikara 1987: 107-108.

¹⁸² There were seven coups between 1936-1941.

British Ambassador and not being sufficiently in favor of pan-Arab principles.¹⁸³ Indeed this was the beginning of a short period in which Iraqi nationalist ideas, as opposed to pan-Arabist ones, were more prevalent in government circles than those which preceded or would follow them. Sidqi and Sulayman responded to the perception that they were not pan-Arabists by distancing themselves from policies of *al-Ahali*, banishing and embarrassing their leaders, and incorporating elements of the rival *al-Istiqlal* into the government. They also issued strong condemnations of British imperialism and vehemently opposed the recommendations of the Peel Report of July 1937 to partition Palestine into two states. These moves temporarily enhanced the popularity of their regime, but pan-Arabists continued to confront them, especially for allying with Kurds and Turks instead of Arabs, and Sidqi was eventually assassinated on 11 August 1937.¹⁸⁴

Pan-Arabism was the chief political rival to the more narrowly defined Iraqi nationalist aims.¹⁸⁵ “The Arab nationalists perceived Iraq as being the most likely and promising state to play the role of an ‘Arab Prussia’ in the pursuit of Arab unity.” And as a result, “Syrians and Palestinians played a leading role in disseminating pan-Arab ideology in Iraqi educational institutions, national clubs and societies.”¹⁸⁶ The two groups that most consistently supported pan-Arab activities were *al-Muthanna* Club, founded in 1935, and the Palestine Defense Committee, founded in 1936. As far as Iraqi

¹⁸³ Khadduri 1960: 109; Longrigg 1953: 250. Sidqi expelled many Arabs from the Iraqi army and replaced them with fellow Kurds (Shikara 1987: 112-113).

¹⁸⁴ Shikara 1987: 116-117.

¹⁸⁵ In the competition for popular support, the radical nationalists could always outbid the conservative nationalist monarchy by making more ‘nationalist’ noises: specifically, anti-British (and by extension pro-German) noises. An easy way for them to do this was to attack the British-backed Zionist project, and by extension the Iraqi Jewish community. The radical nationalists derived no strength from the British: their only strength came from their popularity. The conservative nationalists got much of their strength from the British, *but* they also needed popular support. They had little leeway for populist anti-British rhetoric since Britain was their ally; however, they *could* seek to outdo the radicals by being vehemently anti-Zionist, thereby inflaming the situation further—and allowing an atmosphere of general anti-Semitism to develop.

¹⁸⁶ Shikara 1987: 118.

education policy, Britain either did not try or were unable to prevent schools from becoming vessels for the spread of pan-Arabism, largely under the leadership of Sati al-Husri's, Iraq's most influential educator from 1921-41. A Syrian Arab of mainly Ottoman background, al-Husri's influences ranged from the *al-Futuwwa* youth organization to political parties, as well as individual intellectuals and army officers. Al-Husri was very impressed by both Mussolini and Hitler and played a major role in convincing the government to apply fascist ideas to Iraqi youth education.

Sami Shawkat, the Director General of Education, was another central figure in the spread of pan-Arabism throughout the educational system. Moved by the militaristic attributes of European fascist states, he aspired to refashion Arab nationalism in totalitarian terms. Shawkat lashed out against "the foreigner and enemy", describing him as "he who intrigues against Arab unity, even though he may hold ninety-nine Iraqi identity cards."¹⁸⁷ Shawkat's pan-Arabism was laced with anti-Jewish opinions, as taken from a selection of his articles and speeches distributed in a pamphlet entitled *These Are the Goals Every One of Us Believes*. Shawkat suggests that Jews be taken out of the family of Semitic peoples because they wander and disconnect themselves from their roots. Speaking of the Jews in one of his speeches, he says that they left their

heritage and became an enemy to the tree from which they grew. They took advantage of the wealth and financial power that God has given them throughout the world in order to harm the group to which they belong.¹⁸⁸

This sort of rhetoric, when combined with Jewish economic privileges under the British, provided for hostile mix. Shawkat was heavily assisted by Akram Zu'aytar, a Palestinian from Nablus to whom he gave the post of 'National Guidance' in the Ministry of

¹⁸⁷ Shikara 1987: 121.

¹⁸⁸ Kazzaz 1987: 57.

Education and who helped turn the ministry into “a factory to manufacture fighters for the cause of Arab unity.”¹⁸⁹ Shawkat’s brand of Arab nationalism was influenced heavily by Nazi Germany. Though this connection was likely inspired by the alliance against the British, its anti-Jewish undertones felt exclusive and threatening to the majority of Jews, pro-Iraqi integrationists.

The words of Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, one of the prominent army officers heavily influenced by the Pan-Arabist trend, introduce two other important themes found in pan-Arabist writings: Islam and hostility to Britain. For al-Sabbagh, “Islam and Arab nationalism were inextricably bound together” because both were needed to fight against foreign domination. Though a supporter of the Iraqi anti-Zionist military campaign in Palestine in 1936 under the command of Fawzi al-Qawuqji, his main enemy was Britain:

There is no more murderous wolf for the Arabs and no deadlier foe of Islam than Britain. As for the Arabs, they have been torn apart into small countries, communities and tribes that fight each other...If Arabs seeking freedom rise up in Palestine, Egypt, Aden, the seven Shaykhdoms and Iraq, the guillotine is sharpened for them and bombers are loaded with fire. Three hundred and fifty million Muslims are still groaning under the yoke of British imperialism.¹⁹⁰

The extent of anti-British feeling was revealed during the winter of 1938, when both medical and secondary school students rioted in the streets of Baghdad, smashing windows, looting and throwing stones. The Ministry of Education responded by closing down any class in which the majority of students participated and expelling them.¹⁹¹

The Jews, widely perceived as undeserving beneficiaries of the Iraqi link with Britain, and made vulnerable by the external sources of hatred and hostility from

¹⁸⁹ E Kedourie 1989: 29-31.

¹⁹⁰ Shikara 1987: 123.

¹⁹¹ Simon 1986: 110.

Germany and Palestine, were highly uncomfortable with the pan-Arabist trend led by Rashid Ali al-Gaylani. With Syria and Palestine under foreign control, Iraq naturally became the hotbed of Arab nationalist activity and the government employed large numbers of Syrian and Palestinian schoolteachers in exile to propagate pan-Arab ideals. Prime Minister Nuri al-Said briefly tried to tip the balance back in the pro-British direction and distance Iraq from the Axis Powers, but al-Gaylani, in power from 31 March 1940 moved from cautious neutrality to a pro-German position.¹⁹² The years 1939-1940 saw relatively little anti-Jewish abuse as the government took pains to clamp down on such activities.¹⁹³ The events surrounding the unprecedented violence against Jews in June 1941 are covered in the next chapter.

3.3 Palestine, Anti-Zionism and Hostility Towards Baghdadi Jews

Since its European inception, modern political Zionism has been intricately linked with anti-Semitism. As Palestinian scholar Abbas Shiblak writes: “The development of Zionism was a response to the anti-Semitism that spread through Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century.”¹⁹⁴ Bernard Lewis correctly points out that while the conflict between Zionists and Palestinian Arabs did indeed sow the seeds of hatred towards Jews throughout the region, the reason is based on the fact that Zionists happen to be

¹⁹² Al-Gaylani tried to get arms from Britain, but when they wanted to ensure that these weapons would not end up in the hands of Palestinian Arabs and the Iraqi Government couldn't ensure this, al-Gaylani was compelled to purchase weapons from Germany (Shikara 1987: 170). The period at the beginning of World War Two in Iraqi politics is far too complicated and intricate to address in this paper. For present purposes, it is noteworthy that internal divisions between pro-German and pro-British elements caused several changes of government and led to a crisis in Iraqi-British relations that led to military confrontation and British re-occupation.

¹⁹³ In spite of al-Gaylani's seeming pro-German tendencies, prominent Iraqi Jew Avraham El-Kabir reports in his memoirs that “Rasheed Ali and several of his colleagues were known to be friendly to the Jews with whom many had some personal connections” (A. El-Kabir 1961: 147). Additionally, El-Kabir was asked by al-Gaylani to make key decisions at the time of the government's standoff with Britain and the two met personally on several occasions.

¹⁹⁴ Shiblak 1986: 39.

predominantly Jews. Lewis fails to mention that it was the Zionists who conflated a future Israeli state and Jewish identity, successfully linking the two to such an extent that the conflation was internalized across the Arab world. In Lewis's words: "In its origin this is a political conflict—not a matter of prejudice or bias, or intercommunal or interethnic hostility, but a specific and material conflict between two groups of people both claiming the same place." Lewis goes on to say that "conveniently accessible Jewish minorities in Arab countries" would thus be the victims of a European "ready-made system of themes, images, and vocabulary for attacks on Jews."¹⁹⁵ Jews lived comfortably in Iraq until the growth of the Zionist Movement in Palestine caused a degree of backlash against Jews living in Arab countries. According to Avraham El-Kabir:

Anti-semitism is a most contagious disease and soon after the Balfour Declaration the Arab leaders followed, clandestinely at first and openly afterwards, an anti-Zionist policy which soon developed into an anti-Jewish movement. The line of demarcation between a Jew and a Zionist was so thin that the movement soon took the form of the standard anti-semitism as applied in many countries of Europe from whom Arabs learnt the theories and practices of this scourge to human dignity which Pharaoh and Haman initiated many thousands years ago on the same lines.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Lewis 1984: 189. While Lewis is often sharply criticized by the academic left for what might be called the 'exceptionalism of anti-Semitism,' his point here stands. Anti-Semitism is not outside of social science. Jew-hatred should not be a specific form of hostility that cannot be discussed in comparative terms. It is not any more or any less 'rational' than other forms of ethnic hatred. And this is why I generally agree with the assault on Lewis's work in this area. However, the fact that Jews in Arab countries were victims of hostility that employed rhetoric and imagery that had been imported from European anti-Semitism is beyond dispute.

¹⁹⁶ A. El-Kabir 1961: 137. It is noteworthy that neither El-Kabir nor any of the scholars on the topic who write in English or Hebrew critically assess the view of Arabs at this time on the history of anti-Semitism and the supposed link between Zionism and primal hatred of Jews. This is undoubtedly due to a lack of access to Arabic source material.

Though the evidence suggests that a blurring of the line between Jew and Zionist did take place during this period, it was not until the mid-1930s that it manifested in specifically anti-Jewish activities.¹⁹⁷ In fact, the huge crowd that gathered in the Haider Khana Mosque on 13 September 1929 heard a litany of anti-Zionist and anti-British speeches, but many references were made to the distinction between Iraqi Jews and Zionists.¹⁹⁸ Iraqi governments not only chose to refrain from supporting the anti-Zionist movement in Palestine, but they actively sought to restrain pro-Palestinian activities taking place in Iraq. Leaders were weary of causing a rift with the British and always explained to their British overlord the occasional need to bow to public pressure to make minor concessions for the sake of regime survival. In the case of Hikmat Sulayman's government, an attitude of hostility to pan-Arabism and suppression of Arab nationalists such as Fauzi al-Qawuqji and Sa'id Haji Thabit was embraced by Iraqi Jews and denounced by Arab nationalists throughout the region. To be sure,

there was a limit to the extent to which the Sulaymani government could deviate from the nationalist line, and events in Palestine were always bound to have repercussions in Iraq. It was thus a matter of dire political expediency for the government to maintain an overt interest in the Palestinian problem.¹⁹⁹

By going to Palestine to mediate in 1936, Nuri al-Said had sought to 'Arabize' the Palestine Question to boost his own image as a champion of Arab nationalism. Allowing al-Qawuqji's uprising was viewed by the Iraqi Government as an outlet for pro-

¹⁹⁷ E. Kedourie 1989: 28.

¹⁹⁸ Simon 1986: 67; Shiblak 1986: 48.

¹⁹⁹ Tarbush 1982: 138-139. This helps to explain the fact that Nuri al-Sa'id, one of the most pro-British Iraqi political figures, was the key decision-maker behind the dispatch of an Iraqi army unit to Palestine to participate in the Arab Revolt of 1936 (Longrigg 1953: 248).

Palestinian sentiments that would otherwise manifest in violent anti-British or anti-Jewish outbursts in Iraq.²⁰⁰

The successes of al-Husri, Shawkat and Fadil al-Jamali assisted by hundreds of Syrian and Palestinian schoolteachers, galvanized Iraq's youth around the Palestine issue as early as 1928, when demonstrations against the visit by Alfred Mond exploded into the first massive anti-Zionist agitation in Baghdad. The government's hesitation to either support or condemn pro-Palestinian activities too much took place in the context of Britain's failure to resolve the Palestine issue, the most tense arena in Iraqi-British relations during the 1937-1941 period.²⁰¹ And the Jewish community in Baghdad was the victim of fear and insecurity as a direct consequence of the Palestine issue. A letter from British official Edmonds in Baghdad dated 15 November 1937 astutely indicated that

the most serious aspect of the Palestine problem is that the communities concerned are not local entities but have racial and religious affinities all over the world and, in particular, that any exacerbation of the situation there reacts immediately not only on the government and Arab majority in Iraq but on the tranquility of the large Jewish community resident here as well.²⁰²

Particularly after Zionist reprisals against Palestinians in July 1938, Iraqi Jews witnessed a strong public outcry that often felt threatening to them. In addition to an increase in anti-Zionist and anti-British rhetoric at public gatherings and in the press, *fatwas* were issued ordering all Arabs to support the Palestinians in *jihad* against the foreign infidel.²⁰³

It is interesting to note that the unprecedented frequency of anti-Jewish events in the mid to late-1930s did not convince Iraqi Jews to become Zionists. The leaders of the

²⁰⁰ Shikara 1987: 130, 137.

²⁰¹ Longrigg 1953: 272-273.

²⁰² PRO: FO 406/75.

²⁰³ Shikara 1987: 143-144.

community “became even more aware of the risks that the Zionist activity in Palestine might bring to the Jews in Iraq” and Jews followed the lead of their public anti-Zionist pronouncements.²⁰⁴ Jews lived in a complex political reality within which they felt victimized and threatened by the confluence of Palestinian, anti-British and pro-Nazi ideas.

There was probably no more prominent a figure in Palestinian and pan-Arab politics in the Iraqi context than the exiled Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, who arrived in Baghdad on 16 October 1939.²⁰⁵ A fierce opponent of British mandatory policy and financially backed by Italians and Germans, al-Husayni was the “principal architect of the wartime alliance between German Nazism, Italian fascism, and Arab nationalism.”²⁰⁶ While he wielded a great deal of influence over a small number of influential radical political leaders, al-Husayni was *persona non grata* for many Iraqis, particularly the Shiites and Kurds, for their view that he was an outsider who would bring destruction to Iraq as he had to his own country.²⁰⁷

The Mufti acted on behalf of an inter-Arab committee²⁰⁸ when he proposed in August 1940 to offer Nazi Germany Arab support in exchange for German aid in

²⁰⁴ Behar 2001: 201.

²⁰⁵ The Mufti organized a congress in Bludan, Syria, which was a critical moment in increasing the importance of the Palestine issue in Arab politics (E. Kedourie 1981: 107).

²⁰⁶ Lewis 1986: 146-147.

²⁰⁷ Shikara 1987: 166. Though he had only 5,000 to 6,000 followers, the Mufti installed a mini-government in Baghdad. “By 1941 his influence was such that he could place Palestinians in the Iraqi bureaucracy, adding more teachers and other professionals to those Palestinians already working in Iraq. It was said that he controlled hirings, firings, and promotions in Iraqi government departments, that he could have passports issued on demand to his followers, and that he could authorize the importation of personal effects such as automobiles into Iraq duty free. He controlled newspapers and propaganda mechanisms, some mutually with German influence and money, which were not interfered with. He created clubs and societies throughout the country” (Simon 1986: 140).

²⁰⁸ This Committee became the policy-making body under the Rashid Ali regime between April-May 1941 (Khadduri 1960: 164).

fulfilling Arab aspirations.²⁰⁹ In one clause revealing his violently anti-Jewish attitude, he wrote:

Germany and Italy recognize the right of the Arab countries to solve the question of the Jewish elements which exist in Palestine and in the other Arab countries, as required by the national and ethnic interests of the Arabs, and as the Jewish question was solved in Germany and Italy.²¹⁰

With the presence of many Syrian and Palestinian schoolteachers and accompanying pan-Arab pro-Palestinian sentiments, anti-Zionist rage escalated significantly. Increasingly, it took on an anti-Jewish tone that was at least in part the result of Nazi-transmitted ideas through the educational system and army and further entrenched by Jewish ties to Britain in a fiercely anti-British political culture.

3.4 The Influence of Nazi Germany on Iraqi Politics and Education

There is reason to believe that the growth in world Zionism and the pan-Arab support for the Palestinian Arabs would not have led to a specifically anti-Jewish trend in Baghdad had it not been for the influence of Germany during the 1930s. Jewish notable Yehezkel El-Kabir quipped that Hitler was the reason relations between Jews and other Iraqis broke down.²¹¹ It was only one year after Iraq gained its independence that the Nazis came to power in Germany. Immediately, they set out on an extensive propaganda campaign in the Middle East to spread vitriolic anti-British and anti-French ideas, exploiting the grievances already existing in the region.²¹²

²⁰⁹ The Mufti was a key figure in Arab-German relations, meeting directly with Hitler on 28 November 1941 and stressing the common enemies of both Arabs and Germans: the British, the Jews and the Bolsheviks (Hirszowicz 1966: 214-218).

²¹⁰ Lewis 1984: 190.

²¹¹ In fact, he goes so far as to say that “The Jews were then obliged to flee the country to go to Israel. If it was not for Hitler they would certainly never have emigrated” (Y. El-Kabir 1967: 170).

²¹² Khadduri 1960: 168.

Support for Nazi Germany, which was widespread in Iraq, was predicated on the notion that an enemy of an enemy is often a friend.²¹³ But this alliance of convenience was boosted by the fact that fascist and Nazi models of political, social and economic development appealed to some Arab nationalists who were disillusioned with Western style liberal democracies, which had brought them nothing but imperialism and humiliation. The Germans had the advantage of not having been a colonizer or occupier of territory in the Middle East. There was thus no legacy of betrayal and no responsibility for the artificial territorial divisions of the region.²¹⁴ For many Arab nationalists, German unification in the years leading up to 1871 served as a powerful model. Ultimately, Nazism's main effect on Arab nationalism was making it more militant in character.²¹⁵ And the hostilities developing between two sets of powers in Europe meant that many Iraqis were prepared to demand greater concessions from the British, or to happily co-operate with the Germans if it would help them to achieve their national goals.²¹⁶

Dr. Fritz Grobba arrived in Baghdad in October 1932²¹⁷ to head the German Legation. He was the architect of German influence in Iraqi political circles, distributing propaganda and advancing German interests. For a time, he was ably assisted by Dr. Julius Jordan, the Inspector of Antiquities and an ardent Nazi. Grobba purchased the

²¹³ Minimal research has been done on the question of ordinary Arabs' ideological affinity to Nazism. Charges have frequently been made by the Zionist camp that alliances between Arab nationalists and Germans extended into the ideological sphere. While the information found in conducting this research was insufficient to draw any substantive conclusions on the matter, Israel Gershoni's pioneering work has shown that the Egyptian masses were not sympathetic to Nazism (Gershoni 2001).

²¹⁴ Simon 1986: 26.

²¹⁵ Shikara 1987: 118.

²¹⁶ Ibid.: 165.

²¹⁷ He was forced to leave on 6 September 1939 after the British declared war on Germany and Iraq severed its diplomatic relations with Germany. He came back on 11 May 1941 and left eighteen days later along with Rashid Ali's group (Kazzaz 1987: 52).

newspaper *al-Alam al-Arabi* and used it to publish some of Hitler's speeches and the translated text of *Mein Kampf*.²¹⁸ He worked very closely with *al-Muthanna*, enabling he and a few of his German colleagues to have access to large numbers of Iraqis.

Grobba was very shrewd, forming political alliances, using his charm and fluency in many languages. When the Chief Rabbi in Jerusalem called for a boycott of German goods, Grobba arranged a meeting with Chief Rabbi Khadduri in Baghdad, asking him to influence Jewish merchants not to participate in the boycott and to urge the head of the Chamber of Commerce to use his influence on his Jewish friends to stop the boycott. Grobba's efforts successfully ended the boycott before it had much impact in Iraq.²¹⁹

For their part, the British were convinced that Germany was subsidizing many instances of anti-British, anti-Jewish and pro-Palestinian activities. For example, one particular British foreign office document accuses Germany of stirring up Arab feeling against the Jews, and its embassy in Baghdad of supporting the 1936 revolt. In its summary of German propaganda activities, the British accuse the Germans of seeking "To maintain among the Iraqi people the hatred and dislike for Jews and induce the government to promulgate laws which limited Jewish activities, to nationalize transport and to establish new Arab banks to circumvent financial control by Jews."²²⁰ On the other hand, Grobba frequently reflected his country's concern not to upset Britain

²¹⁸ None of the sources consulted contained examples of translations of *Mein Kampf* in the Iraqi press. It would have been interesting to see which selections were translated and whether or not they were censored for ideas that placed Arabs and Jews in the same category vis-à-vis the Aryan race. I got no indication from my research as to how ordinary Baghdadis might have reacted to Hitler's ideas, preventing me from understanding the level of ideological affinity between them and the Nazis.

²¹⁹ Kazzaz 1987: 63.

²²⁰ PRO: FO 371/23202/E/2914 and quoted in Hamdi 1987: 66. According to the 1938 annual report from Iraq, the British suspected that there was a German hand behind several of the attacks on Jews and pressured Iraqi authorities to clamp down on anti-Jewish activities, getting a guarantee from Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tawfiq al-Suwayidi (PRO: FO 371/23214).

unnecessarily over matters in the Middle East.²²¹ Grobba's influence waned with the fall of the Hikmat-Bakr regime, as the Midfa'i government restricted his activities.

There were many instances of Iraqis being invited to Germany, including one report which states that Grobba's men arranged for fifty Iraqi young people and army officers to visit Iraq and be treated like royalty.

These came back to Iraq fanatical friends of the 'new Germany' convinced of the invincible strength of the Nazi army and air force, and firm in their belief that the only possible future for 'a Greater Arabia' lay in collaboration with the 'Greater Germany' which Hitler had created.²²²

The Reich Youth Leader, Baldur von Schirach, stopped in Baghdad on his way back from Tehran in 1937 and suggested to King Ghazi that he should focus more energy on *al-Futuwwa* to make it into a major Arab nationalist youth movement.²²³ Von Schirach also invited a delegation of *al-Futuwwa* to Nuremberg to attend the parade of the Nazi Party convention in September 1938. Thirty members went, were welcomed by Hitler and spent two weeks touring Germany as guests of the Hitler Youth.²²⁴

Of course, the situation in Palestine and the British failure to resolve it provided fertile ground for Nazi propaganda. Germany did indeed become much more interested in Palestine during the second half of 1937, exploiting the issue to the fullest as a means to win Arab world support for the Nazis. "German propaganda made the Arabs believe that in the event of their victory, Germany would support them to achieve their

²²¹ Nicosia 1985: 102, 181.

²²² Schechtman 1950: 6.

²²³ Based on a desire to copy the youth movements of the fascists, *al-Futuwwa* was the Iraqi state youth military organization. It was intended to provide military training and disciplinary education to high school students. Founders of *al-Futuwwa*, such as Sati al-Husri and Sami Shawkat, were known for extreme anti-Jewish and nationalist views. Before 1939, membership was voluntary, but from then on all high school students and teachers, as well as students in higher education were forced to join. Jewish students and teachers were included and some Jews saw this as an expression of equal rights (Kazzaz 1987: 55-56).

²²⁴ Khadduri 1960: 173.

independence.²²⁵ With British support for Jewish immigration to Palestine, Iraqis especially came to admire Germany's anti-Jewish policy.²²⁶

British authorities had great difficulty preventing pro-German activities from taking place in Iraq as key men in the Iraqi Government were often directly involved. The British failed in their attempts to fire German teachers working in Iraq since Fasil al-Jamali and Sami Shawkat supported them and arranged for some Iraqi students to study and participate in conferences of the Hitler Youth. One of Grobba's best friends in Baghdad was Rustum Haydar, who had been very close to King Faysal I and served many years in prominent positions in the government. It was Haydar, who, upon returning from a visit to Germany in 1937, arranged for Hitler's speeches to be translated into Arabic.

According to Nissim Kazzaz, Grobba and his men undoubtedly increased the hatred of Iraqis towards Jews, especially the youth. Jews could feel hostility from Muslims and Christians in day-to-day interactions in ways that they had never before experienced. Physical attacks against Jews began in the mid-1930s and peaked with the *farhud* in 1941. What he calls a 'national anti-Semitism' developed in the 1940s. Its chief proponents were the very same people who had been infested with Nazi propaganda during this period.²²⁷ Carole Basri claims that from 1939, the Iraqi public school system taught children to praise Hitler and support the eradication of European Jewry. They learned that Iraqi Jews were an enemy from within, a fifth column and anti-Semitism in

²²⁵ Hamdi 1987: 46-47. In the end, Hitler balked at militarily supporting Iraq during their conflict with the British and proved unconvinced by the Mufti's plea to save the Arab national movement and his warning that the anti-British movement throughout the Middle East would die without major German assistance during the war (Shikara 1987: 192, 197).

²²⁶ Simon 1986: 34.

²²⁷ Kazzaz 1987: 53-55.

Iraq was thus institutionalized by a Nazi-inspired education system.²²⁸ Evidence in English available to support this claim is scant. There are no particularly abhorrent speeches made by Iraqi nationalists or newspaper articles that reflect a Nazi-like racist hatred of Jews. There has been a tendency in particularly Zionist historiography to conflate pro-Nazi and pro-German. In fact, there is a fundamental difference between the strategic alliance between Iraq and Germany and the virulent form of anti-Semitism prevalent in Germany and only implicit in Baghdad.

In her insightful book on the German influence in Iraq during the interwar period, Reeva Simon describes Iraq as the only country to become actively pro-German at this time. She highlights Iraq's decision to reject liberalism and embrace "state-indoctrinated nationalism and militarism." Though Iraq faced the limitations of its treaty with Britain, it simultaneously created "a cultural identity that was inimical to British interests and values."²²⁹

It was not uncommon in the colonized world for nationalist anti-imperial movements to express hostility towards a minority community that 'collaborated' with the imperial power, as the Jews (and Christians) did with the British. However, the reasons that the Baghdadi Jews were not ultimately able to sustain their existence were due to the presence of an anti-Semitic sponsor and of external Zionism as a source of popular hostility to Jews. While there may have been a moderate degree of anti-Jewish

²²⁸ Basri 2003: 10.

²²⁹ On why liberalism was rejected in Iraq, Simon writes: "Britain, which represented liberalism, had imposed liberal institutions on Iraq by its policy of government with an 'Arab façade.' All of the external trappings of a constitutional monarchy on the British model existed in Iraq after 1921. But Britain was the occupier. As such, Britain used nonliberal methods to maintain control. The British tampered with elections, deported the political opposition, played factions off against one another, and fostered reactionary elements of Iraqi society—the oligarchs against which the second wave of officers revolted in 1958. To the Iraqis, this so-called liberal process was a sham, a mechanism for control of power but not for the promotion of individual liberty. Thus, liberalism appeared to be hypocrisy" (Simon 1986: 169).

sentiment in Baghdad before the Balfour Declaration, it was probably no more intense than anti-Assyrian, anti-Chaldean, or anti-Kurdish sentiments. During the 1930s, this social phenomenon was transformed by a nationalist ideology and then by Nazi anti-Semitism into a political phenomenon. No other group in Iraq was affected by either Palestine or by the Nazis as the Jews were. Other groups were similarly privileged by the British. It was the combination of national, regional and indeed internationally imported forces that enabled anti-Jewish ideas to become so powerful, as exhibited by the *farhud* of June 1941.

Chapter Four: 1941-1948

The *Farhud*, the War Economy, Communists and Zionists

An unprecedented jolt to the Jewish community came in the form of a murderous anti-Jewish riot on 1-2 June 1941, in the context of a political transition with the fall of the Rashid Ali coup and the re-entry of the British regent. This pogrom, known as the *farhud*,²³⁰ catalyzed some wealthy Jews to seek refuge in Iran or India, and a few others to immigrate to Palestine. The Jewish leadership, wishing to remain in Baghdad, interpreted the events in a manner that sought to allay the fears of Jews and encourage them to stay. The wartime economy brought the Jews great economic prosperity which helped most Jews to think of the *farhud* as a onetime ordeal. Many young people rebelled against the Jewish leadership, choosing to take part in one of two radical movements—Zionism and Communism. A Zionist underground functioned from 1942, attempting, largely unsuccessfully, to ‘Zionize’ the Iraqi Jews since the *yishuv* was in need of labor with news of the Nazi Holocaust.²³¹ Some Jews sided with the Iraqi Communist Party, seeking freedom in a political party that did not discriminate on the basis of religion and promised an egalitarian and socialist Iraq. The vast majority of Jews were apolitical, but a variety of forces beyond their control undermined their position in Iraq by the late-1940s.

²³⁰ “*Farhud* denotes a breakdown of law and order in which life and property are in peril” (Cohen 1966b: 2).

²³¹ At this stage in Zionist history, leaders in the *yishuv* were preoccupied with the need for labor. Jewish bodies around the world represented labor and thus all efforts were geared towards immigration, rooted in programs of indoctrination to inculcate a spirit that romanticized labor as the symbol of the ‘new Jew.’ It was not until the millions of European Jewish deaths became public that Zionist leaders turned their attention to the Jews of the Middle East as a potential source of labor.

4.1 The *Farhud*

In April 1941, the four army officers known as the Golden Square launched a coup, forcing the regent and Nuri al-Said into exile in Transjordan. The four officers appointed Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, known to be extremely anti-British and sympathetic to the Nazis, as the new prime minister.²³² Ignoring the advice of the man in charge of British forces in the Middle East, Churchill decided to conquer Iraq in April and May of 1941.²³³ The British had maintained a degree of influence in Iraqi politics in the previous nine years, but by re-conquering the cities with their army, it was as though they were reversing Iraqi independence. During their confrontation with the Iraqi army, sectarian incidents directed at the Jewish population occurred in the streets, with ten Jews killed in the village of Sandur.²³⁴ In spite of the absence of state-sponsored anti-Jewish activities, rumors spread that the government planned to exterminate the Iraqi Jews. Fear of Muslim hatred towards Jews mounted.²³⁵ Rashid Ali fled Baghdad on 29 May as the British moved towards the city. One key pro-Nazi minister, Yunus al-Sab'awi, did not leave.²³⁶ He was, however, arrested by the Committee for Internal Security and exiled to Iran that day, and his armed youth groups were disbanded. Jews thought that the danger

²³² He had previously served as prime minister between March 1940-January 1941 and had to resign when he opposed the decision to break relations with Italy in June 1940, upon their entry into the war.

²³³ For more on this British military intervention, see 'Wavell and Iraq' in Kedourie 1974: 273-282. See also Tripp 2000: 103-107; Khadduri 1960: 212-243; Hirszowicz 1966: 154.

²³⁴ The Communist Party wrote a private letter to Rashid Ali dated 7 May 1941 describing its disgust with anti-Jewish activities, seeing the Jews as victims of both British and German imperialism. The letter did, however, mention the existence of Jewish traitors in alliance with Britain. The communists supported Rashid Ali, drawing the ire of the Jewish community for being in bed with the Nazis. (Batatu 1978: 454, 461).

²³⁵ Tsimhoni 1996: 106.

²³⁶ Sab'awi approached the head of the Jewish community, Sassoon Kadoorie, and told him that Jews should not leave their homes or use their telephones for the following three days, raising the question about the possibility that that the *farhud* was premeditated. See Cohen 1973: 28; Cohen 1966b: 9-10; Stillman 1991: 118; Simon 1986: 159.

was lifted, and felt joyous, as news spread of the impending return of an anti-German government.

Between the flight of Rashid Ali and the re-entry of the regent, the *farhud* took place on 1-2 June, the two days of the Jewish holy festival *Shavuot*. The number of Jews estimated to have been killed ranges from 135-180.²³⁷ Hundreds more were injured, 586 businesses were looted, and 911 buildings housing 12,000 people were pillaged.²³⁸ Some evidence suggests that in all the events of the *farhud* and its aftermath, an even greater number of Muslims were killed than Jews.²³⁹

Jews left their homes dressed in their finest clothes to celebrate their religious festival²⁴⁰ in order to greet the regent at the airport. The joy exhibited by some Jews at the re-entry of the regent, widely regarded as an enemy of Iraqis, is often cited as the provocation for anti-Jewish behavior.²⁴¹ It began when soldiers attacked a group of Jews on their way home. Unaware of these morning attacks, Jews throughout the city went to visit family and friends in the afternoon, only to be victims of killing on a much larger scale. In the evening, a bus full of Jews was stopped, with the passengers pulled out and slaughtered, some being run over by the bus itself. At night, soldiers, policemen and

²³⁷ See Ben-Porat 1998: 28; Tsimhoni 1992: 223; Simon 1986: 158; Rejwan 1985: 223; Hamdi 1987: 165.

²³⁸ Stillman 1991: 119. At this time, there were somewhere between 80,000-90,000 Jews in Baghdad.

²³⁹ E. Kedourie 1974: 298; Rejwan 1985: 223. This would undermine the Zionist reading of this history that depends upon a particularly virulent and exclusively anti-Jewish hatred as the only explanation for the *farhud*. In addition to several recorded instances of Muslims risking and even losing their lives in defense of Jewish neighbors, the leader of the Shi'i in Baghdad, Abu al-Hasan al-Musawi, refused to issue a *fatwa* against the Jews and ordered the Shi'i not to participate in the massacre (Giladi 1990: 85).

²⁴⁰ One Baghdadi Jew who was there reports that the vast majority of Muslims misunderstood the significance of the religious clothes, presuming them to be in celebration of the regent's return, thus stirring up even more hostility towards the Jews (Rejwan 1985: 222).

²⁴¹ Rumors of Jewish collaboration with the British were widespread before the collapse of the al-Gaylani government, given credibility by the fact that Jewish military units from Palestine fought for the British in putting down the Iraqi nationalists in April-May (Shiblak 1986: 51).

armed youth groups attacked Jewish sections of Baghdad.²⁴² “They murdered, raped, wounded, plundered and set houses on fire.”²⁴³ The next day saw much more looting than killing, as Iraqis traveled from far and wide to participate in the rioting. Whereas the first day’s events featured murderous anti-Jewish violence, the second day was mostly the unarmed peasant’s quest for loot in a state of anarchy in the capital city.²⁴⁴ When the rioting was eventually quelled in the evening of the second day with the shooting deaths of one hundred non-Jews, it was largely these out-of-town peasants, unarmed and not responsible for the murder of Jews, who were the victims.

The Iraqi government decided to set up a committee of enquiry on 7 June 1941 to examine the facts and to determine who to blame for the *farhud*. The commission’s report²⁴⁵ accused the army and police officers of being responsible for the massacre and highlighted the importance of Nazi propaganda in poisoning the political atmosphere and inciting violence against Jews.²⁴⁶ The committee found that the *farhud* could have ended on the first day if any of three people had given the order to shoot at the looters.²⁴⁷ Coming to their conclusions very quickly and pressured to accuse elements who were not connected to Britain so as to alleviate the charge of British negligence or willful passivity, the commissioners identified six primary causes for the disturbances. They included: propaganda from the Nazis, the Mufti, Palestinian and Syrian teachers, radio

²⁴² Tzvi Yehuda asserts that the attacks were organized by Muslim religious and nationalist circles, stirring up the participants by accusing the Jews of breaking the rules of *ahl al-dhimma* in a Muslim country. He writes that the commission of inquiry made the *farhud* sound spontaneous in order to absolve the new British-backed government of any responsibility (Moreh & Yehuda 1992: 20).

²⁴³ Cohen 1973: 30.

²⁴⁴ For more detailed descriptions of the *farhud*, see Cohen 1966b: 10-12; Moreh & Yehuda 1992: 21-22.

²⁴⁵ For the full text of the report of the Iraqi Commission of Inquiry, see Stillman 1991: 405-417.

²⁴⁶ Gat 1997: 21.

²⁴⁷ Hisam al-Din Jum’a, Director General of Police; Khalid al-Zahawi, *Mutasarrif of Baghdad*; Hamid Ra’fat, Commander of 1st Division stationed in Baghdad --all three of whom were members of the Committee for Internal Security—were publicly executed on 13 July 1941 (Cohen 1966b: 15-16; Shibliak 1986: 50-51).

broadcasts, as well as the activities of *al-Futuwwa*. Rejwan is critical of the report for failing to mention that the *farhud* took place after the pro-Nazi regime was toppled and “in full view, so to speak, of the British, the Regent and the loyalist army and police commanders.”²⁴⁸

The question of who bears responsibility for the *farhud* is of some scholarly controversy. The British, the Germans, the Iraqi nationalists, the Palestinians and the Zionists are all blamed by one scholar or another. The Iraqi Jews themselves tended to believe that it was committed by extreme nationalists with Nazi-influenced ideas. In a different but related argument, one Iraqi historian believes that “those elements who regretted the collapse of the Rashid Ali regime gave free vent to their feelings by making the Jewish community in Baghdad the scapegoat for their failure.” On the question of whether or not the rioting could be explained solely in terms of the vacuum of power, he continues by saying “Perhaps the absence of a responsible Government encouraged extremist elements to take advantage of the situation, although it is doubtful whether any Government could have been wholly successful in preventing the rioting.”²⁴⁹

Kedourie makes a similar point, put slightly differently, when he says “It was thus as supporters of the British that the Jews of Baghdad were murdered and looted.”²⁵⁰ Jewish identification with the ‘hated’ British was doubtless intricately related to the *farhud* and is the main reason why Shiblak says that “it is simplistic to see the *farhud* as a fundamentally anti-Jewish act.”²⁵¹ According to Reeva Simon, Jews were killed because

²⁴⁸ Rejwan 1985: 223.

²⁴⁹ Khadduri 1960: 245.

²⁵⁰ E. Kedourie 1974: 307-308.

²⁵¹ Shiblak 1986: 53.

they were the ‘internal enemy’ of the Iraqi people through their alliance with the much-maligned British, who had just defeated the Iraqi forces.²⁵²

As to whether or not the British played any direct role in planning or enabling the *farhud*, there is no evidence to suggest that they instigated it. Clearly the regent could have stopped it sooner than he did, considering that his orders to shoot at the looters did end the *farhud* immediately in the evening of June 2nd.²⁵³ It seems that the British chose not to enter Baghdad, though they knew about the *farhud*, because they didn’t want to be seen as occupiers. They wished to create the façade that the regent had returned without British military assistance.²⁵⁴ And they feared armed confrontation with the nationalist masses.²⁵⁵ The Zionist historians add that it was Britain’s priority to avoid risking further hatred from the Iraqi population, even if in this case the price was Jewish lives.²⁵⁶ In any case, the *farhud* became a convenient distraction for the British, taking the spotlight off their unpopular return.²⁵⁷

The regent did not give the orders to fire on the crowd of looters until a tremendous amount of murder and destruction had taken place. Cohen argues that he feared further antagonizing the fiercely anti-British Iraqi army and had to wait for the arrival of Kurdish soldiers from the north who were loyal to him.²⁵⁸ Kedourie sees a

²⁵² Simon 1986: 158.

²⁵³ Cohen 1966b: 15. Elie Kedourie blames Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the British Ambassador in Baghdad, for being in the vicinity of the violence and doing nothing to stop it (Kedourie 1989: 32).

²⁵⁴ Stillman 1991: 118-119.

²⁵⁵ Tsimhoni 1992: 223.

²⁵⁶ This way of thinking is an example of the post-Holocaust Zionist narrative at work, which presupposes that the whole world is against the Jews and cannot be trusted: then, now and always. The same could be said of British failure to intervene in Libya in November 1945 and Aden in December 1947-- both of which cases they were the sole authority (Cohen 1966b: 14). Tsimhoni makes the more audacious claim that British non-intervention in the *farhud* should be compared to their failure to act sooner to liberate Nazi concentration camps (Tsimhoni 2001: 574).

²⁵⁷ Simon 1986: 160.

²⁵⁸ Cohen 1966b: 14.

failure of all high officials—Iraqi and British—to face their responsibilities.²⁵⁹ Again, the Zionist perspective is that the order to shoot did not come until the regent feared that the Jew-only massacre could turn into general anarchy.²⁶⁰

German archival material now open to the public does not support the claim that Germans planned the *farhud*.²⁶¹ But the perceived British-Jewish alliance, after years of anti-Jewish Nazi propaganda, now playing out in the context of a major geo-political battle between Germany and Britain, display a Nazi link to the *farhud*. “It is fairly certain that most of those who took part in the slaughter of the Jews were young men influenced by Nazi propaganda.”²⁶² While this included the murderous soldiers and policemen, the looters were illiterate and thus unexposed to Nazi ideas through books and newspapers. For Cohen, this proves that the Iraqi masses did not particularly hate the Jews and that only a small, educated elite was influenced by Nazi propaganda.²⁶³ Since a dominant theme in Nazi propaganda in Baghdad was the common British enemy and pro-British sympathies of the Jews, the anti-Jewish sentiment in Iraq leading to the *farhud* must be understood to be rooted, not in their Zionist brethren, but in their British patron.²⁶⁴

In her forthcoming book, Esther Meir-Glitzstein writes:

²⁵⁹ Kedourie 1974: 300.

²⁶⁰ Tsimhoni 1996: 107. A similar explanation is given by Hayyim Cohen for why Arshad al-Umari of the Committee for Internal Security did not act sooner. Only the threat of massive looting of non-Jewish property convinced him to end the rioting (Cohen 1966b: 16).

²⁶¹ Tsimhoni 2001: 586.

²⁶² Cohen 1966b: 12.

²⁶³ He concludes this from the fact that the *farhud* did not occur elsewhere, since the educated and the Palestinian and Syrian propagandists were essentially only in Baghdad (Cohen 1966b: 12-13). In early 1941, three small pro-Nazi groups formed in Iraq all under the leadership of Yunus al-Sab’awi, minister in Rashid Ali’s govt of April-May 1941—*Kata’ib ash-Shabab* (Youth Troops), *Haras al-Hadid* (The Iron Guard) and *Quwat al-Sab’awi al-Wataniyah* (The Sab’awi National Force). They played an active part in the *farhud* (Cohen 1966b: 7).

²⁶⁴ E. Kedourie 1974: 307; Moreh & Yehuda 1992: 16.

The *farhud* revealed the dark, menacing side of the Iraqi national movement, with its fascist and anti-Semitic tendencies. The Iraqi nationalists considered the Jews an ethnic and national minority, identified them with British colonialism and Zionism, and therefore regarded them as treasonous aliens who did not belong in Iraq.²⁶⁵

The *farhud* can only be understood as the result of an array of factors indigenous to the local context: the military confrontation between the Iraqis and the British, the German propaganda, the extreme Iraqi nationalists, the re-occupation by the British, the perception of the strong link between the Jews and the British, and the public Jewish joy over the defeat of the pro-German forces.²⁶⁶ All of these factors, buttressed by the association of the Zionist enemy with local Jews, contributed to the massacre committed against the Jewish community.

Contemporary Israeli scholars are engaged in a fierce debate over memory. How the *farhud* is remembered in Zionist historiography reveals much more about recent Jewish history and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than it does about the *farhud* itself as an historical event. Nevertheless, because so much of the scholarly work on the *farhud* has been written in the context of the debates between the ‘Zionist establishment’ and the anti-Zionist/non-Zionist/post-Zionist critics, this factor must be briefly considered.

Zionist writers have tended to tell the story of Iraqi Jewry in a *farhud*-centered manner, focusing on victimhood and persecution to imply the eventual necessity of the mass exodus to Israel. As I hope has been made clear, it is highly misleading to co-opt the events surrounding the *farhud* and to place them, as many Zionist historians do, at the

²⁶⁵ Meir-Glitzenstein 2004: chap. 12, p. 1. Tzvi Yehuda, representing the Zionist establishment view, believes that whether or not the Iraqi government was pro-British or pro-Nazi, they felt the same way about the Jews—they were a minority with ties to colonialism and Zionism, and they were best excluded from Iraq (Moreh & Yehuda 1992: 26).

²⁶⁶ Behar 2001: 207.

center of a narrative which describes Arab Muslim hatred of Jews in primordial terms, and as proof of a holocaust that never was, due to the heroic efforts of the Zionists to 'save' the Iraqi Jews. The *farhud* is used as "the proof of Arab anti-Jewish feeling."²⁶⁷ The story told at Or Yehuda, the headquarters of Iraqi Jewish life in Israel, is an exaggerated and sensationalist one. In their museum exhibition, the *farhud* is presented as part of the Holocaust. Just as the Holocaust has become the main feature in modern European Jewish identity, so the *farhud* is placed at the center of the Iraqi Jewish experience.²⁶⁸

Shmuel Moreh, one of the leading advocates of the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or Yehuda, writes a typical Zionist interpretation of the *farhud*.

The *Farhud* demonstrated clearly that the Jews all over the world shared the same fate and that the holocaust of the Jews of Europe hit them as well. The *Farhud* makes the Jews realize the fact that there was no chance that they could live peacefully and that their fate was closely linked with Zionism and the Jewish state in the process of making in Palestine. The Jews of Iraq therefore understood that the only solution was the Zionist movement, self-defense and unity. This saved them from another holocaust following the establishment of the state of Israel. When the gates of Aliya opened, the whole community emigrated to Israel, in the same way that the Shoah in Europe brought about the establishment of the state of Israel.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Behar 2001: 207. Israeli post-Zionist scholar Moshe Behar includes Cohen, E. Kedourie, Gat, Ester Meir-Glitzstein and Kazzaz as Zionist commentators on Iraqi Jews and mentions Shiblak and Giladi as notable exceptions.

²⁶⁸ Critics of what they regard to be a perversion of history include Moshe Behar, Yehouda Shenhav and Sassoon Somekh. "The invocation of the Holocaust analogy is not accidental. It reflects the deep desire of the *Mizrahim* (Jews from Eastern countries), to be admitted to the Israeli civil religion in which the Holocaust plays a crucial role" (Shenhav 2002b: 30). Esther Meir-Glitzstein said a similar thing: "if you want to be a part [of Israeli society], you also need a little Shoah [holocaust]" (Interview with Esther Meir-Glitzstein). Sassoon Somekh's new book, *Baghdad Yesterday* was favorably reviewed by former Iraqi communist Sami Michael for refusing to bow to the mainstream Zionist narrative about this time in Iraqi Jewish history (Michael 2004). Additionally, two novels-- Sami Michael's *Sufa Bein HadeKalim* (Palm Trees in the Storm) and Elie Amir's *Mafri'ah Hayonim* (Farewell, Baghdad) capture the atmosphere at the time of the *farhud*.

²⁶⁹ Moreh & Yehuda 1992: 209-210. In a more recent piece, Moreh partially blames the *farhud* on the Palestinians, who he said were leading participants in the violence. He accuses them of being ungrateful to

Moreh, a professor of Arabic literature and winner of the prestigious Israel Prize, takes this event in Iraqi history well out of context and describes the *farhud* in terms of subsequent history through a Zionist lens. Other less extreme Zionist scholars also discuss the *farhud* as starting a process that undermines the feeling of security for Iraqi Jews. The claim is made that the fear of another *farhud* played a role in the decision of many to leave for Israel in 1951.²⁷⁰

In the immediate aftermath of the *farhud*, a desire to emigrate was expressed by many. Shock and fear were unprecedented.²⁷¹ Some Jews thought about emigrating, but most of those with the financial means, preferred India, Iran and Britain over Palestine.²⁷² Over 1,000 visa applications to India alone were submitted by Iraqi Jews.²⁷³ A small number of Iraqi Jews did indeed emigrate to Palestine, but many of them returned to Iraq quite quickly due to the combination of the economic recovery of the Iraqi Jewish community and general disillusionment with life in Palestine.²⁷⁴

host Arab countries and trying to avenge their losses to Zionist and British authorities by massacring Jews (Moreh 2003: 10).

²⁷⁰ Tsimhoni 2001: 580.

²⁷¹ On 3 February 1943, Zionist emissary Enzo Sereni wrote: "In the course of these two days in June 1941, the dream of Arab assimilation was shattered, and the belief of the Jews that they could live normal lives in the Iraqi diaspora came to an end. The desire to flee grew. Had all the roads not been closed, had some door been opened—all of Iraqi Jewry would have fled, even those who for many years had believed in and avowed their Iraqi loyalty" (CZA: S/25/5289). For the thoughts of some of the Jewish leaders, see Kazzaz 1987: 66.

²⁷² A move to Palestine would have brought Iraqi Jews into contact with a hostile Arab majority and was no place to chase the Zionist dream (Gat 2002: 77; Tsimhoni 1992: 230).

²⁷³ Stillman 1991: 119. Estimating based on average number per household, 6,000-8,000 Jews sought refuge in India by August. The British government of India only allowed a small number to immigrate because they were aware that if all were permitted to come, many more would try (Tsimhoni 2001: 576).

²⁷⁴ Gat 1997: 24.

The niche the Jews filled in the commercial life²⁷⁵ of Baghdad had been the lifeline of the community through difficult times in the 1930s. Once again, in the post-*farhud* period, boosted by a prosperous war economy, the Jews of Iraq experienced unprecedented financial success.²⁷⁶ “More than any other factor, the economic changes which occurred during the war helped to obliterate the trauma of June.”²⁷⁷ Jewish schools were expanded and new residential quarters built as government discrimination disappeared. Under the leadership of Nuri al-Said from October 1941, the Iraqi government took steps to boost the confidence of the Jews, acting against pro-Nazi political elements, including exile and execution.

4.2 Leaders vs. Youth

While the *farhud* may have made many Jews feel more like Jews, and less like Iraqis, the leadership of the community stressed the importance of re-integration into life in Iraq. Hakham Sassoon Khadduri said:

We must strengthen our bonds with the Arabs. We have lived here for thousands of years and intend to live here another thousands of years. We should be taking an interest in the safety and political stability of Iraq. The pogrom was just a passing episode...all that talk of emigration from Iraq is sheer nonsense.²⁷⁸

Jewish communal leaders knew that there was no alternative to a pro-integration line.

Embracing Zionism would have endangered the Jewish community far more for it would

²⁷⁵ Note that in spite of the tendency to lump all Iraqi Jews together as businesspeople, according to data collected upon arrival to Israel in 1950-1 on occupations back in Iraq, 48% were in crafts and services, 28% in commerce, and 24% clerical workers or members of free professions (Cohen 1973: 92).

²⁷⁶ Using their language skills and their international contacts, Iraqi Jews were able to work for the British and the Americans. “1941-1947 were the most prosperous times for the Jews of Iraq...This erased the affect of the *farhud* and the anti-Jewish disturbances from their mind” (Interview with Sassoon Somekh). See also Shiblak 1986: 53; Rejwan 1985: 233; Cohen 1973: 32; Habas 1963: 187.

²⁷⁷ Gat 1997: 23.

²⁷⁸ Quoted in Tsimhoni 2001: 580.

have been seen as anti-Iraqi. But they also did not try to fight actively against Zionism, due to the idea from two thousand year-old religious prayers of the ‘love for Zion’ they knew to be in the hearts of most Jews. “The leaders chose to maintain the image of a loyal, apolitical religious community that dealt discreetly with problems that arose.”²⁷⁹ They tried to assure the community that the *farhud*, while incredibly tragic and shocking, was the product of specific local conditions that would not be repeated and that the central government, now restored, would protect them as it had throughout the period of extreme nationalist and Nazi propaganda.²⁸⁰

The history of this period is written almost exclusively about the Jewish leaders and the youths who rebelled against them and embraced communism or Zionism. The vast majority of Jews were of course neither leaders nor young political activists in the underground. Kazzaz seems to suggest that the people followed their leaders up until 1941. When posed with this question, leading scholar Esther Meir-Glitzenstein responded:

I think that the common Jew in the community was not interested. I think that they were involved in a process of modernization. This was the most important issue in the eyes of the common Jewish person—to improve the economic situation, to send his children to a modern school, to hope that his children will work in the middle-class occupations.²⁸¹

In recent years, a number of personal memoirs of Baghdadi Jews have been written and received a lot of press in Israel. Sassoon Somekh’s Baghdad Yesterday, Salim Fatal’s In the Alleys of Baghdad and Nissim Rejwan’s forthcoming The Last Jews in Baghdad are only the most prominent examples of a trend that will slowly bring about the

²⁷⁹ Meir-Glitzenstein 2004: chap. 6, p. 2. See also Kazzaz 1991: 172–176; Cohen 1969: 157–159.

²⁸⁰ Gat 2002: 77.

²⁸¹ Interview with Esther Meir-Glitzenstein.

incorporation of mainstream voices from this time in Baghdadi Jewish history into scholarly works. And because all three of them were communists in Iraq, a shift is also bound to take place that moves the Israeli public towards a more critical reading of the traditional Zionist reading of this history.

The *farhud* caused Jewish leaders to lose authority over their community. From 1941, many young people chose to ignore their leaders and join in one of the movements that would come to threaten the stability of the Jewish community.²⁸² The illegal and underground activities of the communists and Zionists directly contradicted the principle of the Jewish leadership, *dina demalkhuta dina* (the law of the state is the law).²⁸³ These teenagers were humiliated by the *farhud*, and saw their parents as passive and weak.²⁸⁴ Unlike the leadership that took the *farhud* to be a one-time massacre, many young people feared such incidents would recur if Jews remained unable to defend themselves.

A group of teenage Jews formed the *shabab al-Inqad* (Youth for Salvation), in September 1941. The primary goal of this group was self-defense, but they were also interested in making contact with Palestine and exploring the possibility of emigration. Shaul Avigor, the head of the Zionist underground, who arrived in Baghdad in March 1942, sought to investigate the potential of the group to work on behalf of the *yishuv* in Palestine, concluding that they were sufficiently well-organized to do just that.²⁸⁵

Young people were attracted to Zionism, not only for nationalistic reasons, but also for personal self-fulfillment, as well as opportunities for women's liberation that

²⁸² Interview with Nissim Kazzaz, 19 December 2003, Omer, Israel. See also Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 12, p. 1.

²⁸³ Kazzaz 1988.

²⁸⁴ Gat 2002: 79.

²⁸⁵ Gat 1997: 25-26; Rejwan 1985: 227.

were highly unusual in a society with traditionally defined gender roles.²⁸⁶ Other youths joined the communists because their vision of socialist equality enabled them to remain committed Iraqis, with no need to seek an external solution to their plight.

The two movements shared many similarities. They were both underground, began with small power bases and gradually became national in scope. Each one was a political movement with a socialist ideology. And both were influenced by outside ideas, and thus were non-Iraqi in origin. Both groups followed Iraqi politics very closely. And both were competing to attract young Jews. But whereas Zionism focused on the Jewish problem, communism was concerned with the unjust distribution of wealth, and sought to reorganize Iraqi politics in a socialist image. Zionists shared this image, but were only concerned about it being implemented in Palestine for a Jewish state.²⁸⁷ Communist Jewish youngsters tended to be more affluent and more socially integrated than their Zionist peers. Communism was significantly more dangerous because it was a threat to the regime and significantly more frowned upon by the Jewish leadership.²⁸⁸ At its height in 1948, there were approximately two thousand young people active in the Zionist movement, as opposed to some 250 Jews in the Communist Party in 1947.²⁸⁹

4.3 Communism

Communism in Iraq had its origins in Baghdad's first Marxist study circle in 1924 and roots in the radical element of *al-Ahali*. The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was originally called the Committee for Combating Colonialism and Exploitation. The party

²⁸⁶ Rejwan 1985: 230. For more about Hebrew instruction for girls, see Habas 1963: 189-192. Note that this intersection between women's liberation and national liberation movements frequently took place around the region, though this case was a fairly early example of this trend.

²⁸⁷ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 6, p. 11.

²⁸⁸ Shiblak 1986: 61; Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 12, p. 4.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Ester Meir-Glitzstein; Interview with Sassoon Somekh.

was founded in 1934, but was unable to gain strength until the Russian victories against Germany in 1942.²⁹⁰ From 1943, the party began to distance itself from its former support for Rashid Ali.²⁹¹ This was part of a broader change in Iraqi politics in 1941, with a shift from pan-Arab nationalist to specifically pro-Iraqi and communist ideas.²⁹² As Hana Batatu, the leading scholar on Iraqi communism writes, “In the forties communism became a factor in the life of Iraq. It did not implant itself in the visible citadels of power but in the hearts and minds of youth.”²⁹³ Previously beset by internal dispute and suppression by the authorities, Fahd turned the party into a political force between 1941-7.²⁹⁴ The first Central Committee was formed in 1944, and comprised two Muslims, two Jews, two Christians, one Shi’i and one Sabian.²⁹⁵ Brutal persecution of the communists began in late 1946, following the failure of political reform, the rise of a far-right government and major communist demonstrations in June.²⁹⁶

The communists in Iraq were fiercely anti-Zionist, believing the movement to be colonialist and racist. They were thus shocked when the Soviets dramatically changed their position, backing the UN Partition Plan in 1947, reversing their long-standing support for Arab-Jewish co-existence in a single, democratic state.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁰ Behar 2001: 211; Moreh & Yehuda 1992: 129-130; Batatu 1978: 393; Gabbay 1978: 51.

²⁹¹ Moreh & Yehuda 1992: 138.

²⁹² Simon 1986: 163; Khadduri 1960: 252-253. Also, the restored confidence of the Jews related to the emphasis, once again, on local and social issues as opposed to Palestine (Shiblak 1986: 55).

²⁹³ Batatu 1978: 465.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 485.

²⁹⁵ Gabbay 1978: 54.

²⁹⁶ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 6, p. 12.

²⁹⁷ The Iraqi Communist Party responded to news of the partition plan: “The partition of Palestine is an old imperialist project which rests on the presupposed impossibility of an understanding between Jews and Arabs...Partition is bound to lead to the subordination of the Arab majority to the Zionist minority in the proposed Jewish state.” They officially changed course on 6 July 1948 when they began to support “the establishment of an independent democratic Arab state in the Arab part of Palestine” (Batatu 1978: 597-598).

Iraqi Jews played no part in the founding of the ICP²⁹⁸ and did not join until 1941. The ICP was not led by a Jew until Fahd's arrest in 1947 and few were in positions of influence in the central committees. They were, however, disproportionately represented in the women's organization of the party and in Baghdad.²⁹⁹ Batatu notes that the trend for Jews to join the ranks of the ICP can be primarily attributed to their growing insecurity in the wake of the Zionist gains in Palestine and their corresponding exclusion from Iraqi nationalist politics.³⁰⁰ These Jews actively fought against Zionism, regarding it "as the lackey of imperialism and western capitalism, acting against the interests of Jews and Arabs."³⁰¹

In February 1947, when ICP head Fahd was imprisoned, a Jew by the name of Yahuda Siddiq directed the affairs of the party. But his leadership would not last long. "In Iraq in any season and, a fortiori, in the critical forties—even if the Palestine problem had not been maturing to a climax—it was scarcely in the interest of the party to have a Jew at the helm."³⁰² Fahd thus ordered Malik Saif to take over. But Siddiq largely ignored this request, continuing to oversee many aspects of the party. Siddiq's dubious and ineffective leadership raised questions for some about possible Zionist links. Batatu claims there is no evidence to support this charge.

²⁹⁸ Unlike in Egypt, where Joseph Rosenthal was the founding father of communism in 1920 and Lebanon, where Rosenthal directly inspired Fu'ad al-Shamali (Batatu 1978: 324, 382; Shiblak 1986: 59).

²⁹⁹ 90,000 out of Iraq's 120,000 Jews were living in Baghdad, and this would have made Jews approximately one-third of the capital city's population. For figures on the religious and ethnic breakdown in the ICP, which show Jews slightly over-represented in the ICP, see Batatu 1978: Table A-28, A-29.

³⁰⁰ Batatu 1978: 650-651.

³⁰¹ Gat 1997: 24.

³⁰² Batatu 1978: 542-543. Another Jew, Shlomo Dallal, ran the ICP from 2 Dec 1948-19 Feb 1949. His careless trouble-making led many, including Batatu, to wonder about Dallal's connections to Zionism (571). Leading Israeli commentator Sassoon Somekh calls this claim 'ridiculous and spiteful' (Somekh August 2003).

The most effective Jewish leaders with communist ideas broke off and formed the Anti-Zionist League (AZL) in 1945.³⁰³ This organization had a lifespan of only six months, when the authorities discovered that it was not essentially an anti-Zionist organization, but actually a communist one.³⁰⁴ It was an important outlet for some Jews to publicly and virulently distance themselves from the Zionists and to assert their Iraqi identity.³⁰⁵ The AZL's daily newspaper, *al-Usbah*, had a circulation of 6,000,³⁰⁶ proving that its appeal was broader than that of any other Jewish political organization at the time.³⁰⁷ When the group was disbanded and several of its leaders hanged, they were convicted, in a tragic irony, as Zionists. These were the Jews most committed to integration, to democratization in the Arab world and to the defeat of Zionism for its imperialist and divisive effects on the region. And because their political activism was in line with communist ideas, and thus threatening to the state, they were condemned. And because they were Jews, they were killed as Zionists.³⁰⁸

In the broader Iraqi political context, 1947-8 was a time of political activism and dissatisfaction from many quarters. Salih Jabr, the first Shi'i prime minister, was a moderate nationalist and very concerned about Anglo-Iraqi relations at a time when

³⁰³ Both Zionist and non-Zionist sources confirm that the AZL was an extension of the ICP.

³⁰⁴ For organizations similar to the AZL established in Egypt in the 1940s, see Beinin 1990: 56-63.

³⁰⁵ Shiblak 1986: 60. Zionist emissaries saw the communists, especially the AZL, as the primary obstacle in the way of greater Jewish involvement in the Zionist underground (86). These communists forgot about their Jewishness and were more bothered by the exploited/exploiter dichotomy than about Muslims and Jews. "When you see the world in this manner, you are a different person. First of all, overnight you become a modern person. You belong to the twentieth century, or to Europe, if you wish, because of these terminologies. If you are a Zionist, even a modern Zionist, to me in Iraq—you are still living in Medieval terminologies—Jew and non-Jew. You are the enemy of your neighbor—the goy" (Interview with Sassoon Somekh).

³⁰⁶ Giladi 1990: 74.

³⁰⁷ In spite of the AZL's strength and appeal, sociopolitical and regional structures would come to have far more power in determining the fate of non-Zionist Arabized Jews than their own political action (Behar 2001: 214).

³⁰⁸ Behar 2001: 212-213. The AZL leaders were simultaneously being fatally threatened by Zionist leaders if they did not stop their activities (Shiblak 1986: 63).

negotiations for a new treaty to replace that of 1930 were underway. The Portsmouth Treaty, signed 10 January 1948 by Jabr and Ernest Bevin, caused unprecedented public outcry from both communist left and ultra-nationalist right. Neither side wished for Iraq to be under British tutelage.³⁰⁹ The signing of this treaty would ultimately force Jabr's resignation, but not before *al-wathba*, the anti-British street uprising that brought together a cross-section of Iraqi society.³¹⁰ Khadduri argues that *al-wathba* was ultimately an expression of "public lack of confidence in the ruling oligarchy" and not a specific critique of the Portsmouth Treaty. He said that the Bevin-Jabr agreement "was condemned even before it was scrutinized."³¹¹ Iraqis were angry about Britain's role in Palestine, about the failure of their government to carry out economic reforms and about rising prices and the bread shortage.³¹²

4.4 The Zionist Underground³¹³

The 1940s saw unprecedented, though still modest, Zionist activity in Baghdad. The *yishuv's* change of policy in 1942-3 to include Oriental Jews in their immigration plans was coupled with the intention to exploit the *farhud* in sowing doubts in the minds of many Baghdadi Jews about their future in Iraq. A Zionist underground movement

³⁰⁹ Khadduri 1960: 265.

³¹⁰ In fact, the participation of many Jews particularly angered the regime since they had been protecting Jewish leaders and neighborhoods from the anti-Zionist passions of the masses (Rejwan 1985: 236-237). *Al-Wathba* demonstrations "showed that the Jews were an important and active element in the Communist Party; they supported the struggle against the government" (Kazzaz 1988). Shamran Olwan, a Jewish youth, was killed during *al-wathba* and was lauded as a martyr and a hero even in the right-wing nationalist press (Shiblak 1986: 56; Giladi 1990: 73-74).

³¹¹ Khadduri 1960: 269-270.

³¹² Gat 2002: 81. For more on *al-wathba*, see Batatu 1978: 545-566.

³¹³ Speaking about Ben-Porat 1998; Bibi 1988; Hillel 1988, preeminent political scientist Avraham Sela says that "The problem is that when you read these books, you really get the impression that everybody was in the *machteret* (underground). You know! Because obviously these people were active in the underground movement" (Interview with Avraham Sela, 22 December 2003, Jerusalem). In fact, at its height in 1948, only 2,000 Iraqi Jews out of 120,000 (<2%) were members of the movement.

organized in Palestine functioned in Iraq from 1942. Most Jews were neither Zionists nor anti-Zionists. “Instead, they were simply indifferent non-Zionists who were hoping to make sense of their daily lives in the political borderzone between Arab and Jewish nationalisms.”³¹⁴ The British Criminal Investigation Department in 1944 concluded that Iraqi Jews were non-Zionists, and that if and when their insecurity led them to decide to emigrate, Palestine would probably not be where they would go.³¹⁵

Esther Meir-Glitzstein has done the best work on Zionism in Iraq from the standpoint of the *yishuv*. She and others have shown that *yishuv* leaders were well aware that Zionism endangered Arab Jews.³¹⁶ They convey the sense that Zionist leaders feared doomsday scenarios of an inevitable Holocaust if the Jews were not ‘saved’.³¹⁷ The *yishuv* was in need of more bodies for labor and with news of the Holocaust in Europe, came to realize that immigration of Jews living in the Arab world would be necessary.³¹⁸ Eliyahu Dobkin, the head of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency said on 12 July 1943: “We can sum up our job *vis-a-vis* these Jews in one phrase: Zionist conquest of these exiles in order to liquidate them and transfer them to Palestine.”³¹⁹ And thus, Ben-Gurion’s one million plan, though it would not be implemented until the 1950s,

³¹⁴ Behar 2001: 210. He goes on to say that unlike in Europe, no ‘Jewish question’ existed for Jews in the Middle East and thus national Jewish consciousness did not develop, making Jews “non-Zionists almost by default” (221).

³¹⁵ PRO: FO 624/38/502.

³¹⁶ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 2 pp. 13-14; Shohat 1999: 12. Meir also raises the question, beyond the scope of this paper, about the Zionist movement’s priorities in relation to Diaspora Jewry. Which was more important to the *yishuv*: protecting the lives and property of the Iraqi Jews or winning them over to Zionism? (Meir 2004: chap. 6, p. 6)

³¹⁷ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 2, p. 14; Ben-Porat 1998: 42. A common sentiment was that “the Arabs were not better than the Nazis. If it could happen in Europe, of course it was the same, it was expected to happen also in Iraq. It was not questionable. They were so sure of it. They repeat it over and over again” (Interview with Esther Meir-Glitzstein). Even though Meir-Glitzstein points out that these fears never materialized, it should be noted that Iraqi Jews did come to be increasingly used as political hostages by the Iraqi state, with even ‘moderate’ leaders such as Nuri al-Said threatening that their safety was contingent upon the fair treatment of Palestinians (E. Kedourie 1989: 35-36; Giladi 1990: 86).

³¹⁸ Behar 2001: 222; Tsimhoni 1992: 228.

³¹⁹ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 2, p. 8. See also Shenhav 2003.

was announced in June 1944 and placed the Jews of Arab lands at the center of the Zionist project.³²⁰ The movement contained what might be called a Zionist Orientalism,³²¹ having internalized the cultural hierarchy of European colonial movements, which underpinned the encounter between Zionist emissaries and Arab Jews.³²²

Capitalizing on the post-*farhud* insecurity as well as the capacity for Zionists from Palestine to cross into Iraq disguised as British soldiers, the *yishuv* sent its first emissaries to Iraq in 1942.³²³ Nonetheless, their activities endangered themselves as well as those Iraqi Jews who aided and supported them.³²⁴ Its first major attempt to organize took place under the auspices of Enzo Sereni, Shmariyahu Gutman and Ezra Kadoori, who were in charge of Zionist indoctrination, illegal immigration and self-defense, respectively.³²⁵ Kadoori's self-defense group, known as *Shura*, was the most successful, encompassing most of the 500 members of the movement after the first year.³²⁶

The emissaries faced the overwhelming task of turning Iraqi Jews into Zionists. As Esther Meir-Glitzstein explains:

They wanted to lead the people, to change them, to make them into new Jews, like what were in Eretz Yisrael, and to take them to the kibbutz, and to change them, to erase all the Arabic signs, to change them into a new person. And

³²⁰ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 2, p. 15; Shenhav 2003; Shenhav 2002b: 29; Tsimhoni 1992: 254-255

³²¹ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 2, p. 16; Shenhav 2003; Meir-Glitzstein 2001: 28; Behar 2001: 210, 222; Tsimhoni 1992: 251.

³²² As a result of the hegemonic Zionist discourse, the term Arab Jew has virtually been erased. In the Zionist context, these Jews are called *Mizrachim* or sometimes *Sephardim*. Shohat and Shenhav are two contemporary scholars who seek to bring the term 'Arab Jews' back into usage.

³²³ Tsimhoni 1992: 240; E. Kedourie 1989: 36-37; Rejwan 1985: 227. Solel Boneh was a Jewish construction company hired to build and maintain oil-refining facilities next to Abadan. 450 members of a battalion went there for a three year stay under British control. Many of them served as Zionist emissaries (Shenhav 2003; Shenhav 2002a: 523-524).

³²⁴ On secrecy in the underground, see Habas 1963: 176-177; Kimche 1954: 61.

³²⁵ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 4, p. 27; Giladi 1992: 110-113; Rejwan 1985: 228-232; Y. Meir 1973: 59; Cohen 1969: 169-171; Habas 1963: 225.

³²⁶ Tsimhoni 1992: 248

then to make them like the Ashkenazim who were killed in the Holocaust. It stained them. They had to be the same person. And that's why the Zionist movement was so important because this was the task of the Zionist movement—to build this new person and to lead the community, or to lead as many people as possible to be Zionist and then to come to Israel. They needed them.³²⁷

One of the major stumbling blocks for the emissaries was that since many Baghdadis were merchants, they looked down upon manual labor, the essence of *yishuv* survival. Enzo Sereni wrote that “since they do not understand the Zionist and moral value of labour—and actually hold physical labour in contempt—the major problem facing us in educating Iraqi Jews is labour-oriented education.”³²⁸

The underground was set up without the permission of the Baghdadi Jewish leadership. However, there are no cases reported of Sassoon Kadoorie or anyone else undermining or interfering with their work.³²⁹ It seems as though some community dignitaries, through unofficial channels, even offered their cash assistance in lessening the severity of interrogations and police brutality.³³⁰ As has been stated, the overwhelming majority of Jews were non-Zionists. Judged in terms of level of emigration to Palestine, only sixty-five Iraqi Jews left for Palestine between 1946-8.³³¹ Frustration and a sense of failure fill the reports of the Zionist emissaries in Iraq.³³² Sereni observed “they feel national and human dignity but they have no Zionist thinking, or even a Zionist

³²⁷ Interview with Esther Meir-Glitzstein.

³²⁸ Tsimhoni 1992: 243; Habas 1963: 187.

³²⁹ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 6, p. 1.

³³⁰ Meir-Glitzstein 2004: chap. 6, p. 5.

³³¹ Cohen 1969: 109-112. And many of these report being tricked by Zionist agents. There were more Baghdadi Jews in India than in Palestine in 1948 (Shiblak 1986: 45).

³³² Tsimhoni 1992: 248-249; Stillman 1991: 459; Shiblak 1986: 54; Habas 1963: 187; Cohen 1969: 159. On the numbers of Iraqi Jews who joined the Zionist underground movement in Basra, Baghdad and Mosul combined: 1942-300; 1944-550; 1945—700; 1946-1000; 1948—2000 (Tsimhoni 1992: 259; Rejwan 1985: 229; Y. Meir 1973: 106-107; Cohen 1969: 184-185).

instinct.”³³³ There is some suggestion that the emissaries were critical of what they perceived to be naiveté and self-deception about the safety and future of the community, misled by economic fortune and living as though the *farhud* had never happened.³³⁴

This was a time when anti-Jewish rioting was taking place around the region. Major anti-Jewish riots on 2 November 1945 in Cairo and elsewhere did not come to Iraq.³³⁵ However, the creation of the Arab League and the general mood around the issue of Palestine did lead the Iraqi authorities to publicly threaten the Jews.³³⁶ The leader of the Shi’a in Iraq issued a *fatwa* forbidding the sale of land to Jews in all Arab countries.³³⁷ Beginning in 1947, a new measure took hold where Jews had to deposit 1,500 Iraqi dinars, virtually identical to 1,500 pounds sterling, in order to travel anywhere. This had the effect of interfering with university students and patients in need of medical treatment.³³⁸

News of the UN Partition Plan in 1947 put even more pressure on Iraqi Jews, as Chief Rabbi Kadoorie once again issued a statement rejecting Zionism and supporting Arabs in Palestine.³³⁹ Jews were encouraged by their leaders to participate in the mass

³³³ Tsimhoni 1992: 242.

³³⁴ Gat 1997: 29.

³³⁵ Stillman 1991: 142-149; Rejwan 1985: 233-234.

³³⁶ Rejwan 1985: 235. Because this is a theme most often discussed by the Zionist historians, the fact that Rejwan has been a lifelong anti-Zionist, and lived through this period in Baghdad, strengthens the case that anti-Jewish hostility at the time was indeed tangible. In his recent memoirs, fellow non-Zionist Somekh says that when his poetry was published in the Iraqi press, the editors would frequently give him a pseudonym because they didn’t want to use his obviously Jewish name (Ha’aretz 10 Sept 1999). For more on hostility towards Jews, see Hourani 1947: 104.

³³⁷ Describing his first impressions of the underground in July 1946 upon his arrival in Baghdad as a Zionist emissary wrote: “what I found there was a tightly knit, passionately motivated, clandestine movement of about two thousand people, most of them young men and women” (Hillel 1988: 17). By July 1947, the lack of resources from the yishuv and the relative lack of enthusiasm for Zionism amongst the Iraqi Jews led him to write: “In short, by the end of the year I was utterly drained and ready to return home at the first opportunity” (34-35).

³³⁸ Rejwan 1985: 236.

³³⁹ YIVO Archives, American Jewish Committee Record Group 347.7.1 FAD-1, Box 49, Folder Iraq 1945-1950.

demonstrations against the U.N. decision.³⁴⁰ The final blurring of the line between Jew and Zionist had taken place as demonstrators shouted ‘death to the Jews’ and a synagogue in Baghdad was burned down on 27 April 1948.³⁴¹ Iraqi Jews feared for their survival on the eve of the Declaration of Independence of Israel. They remained in their homes, afraid to leave for work because a pogrom worse than the *farhud* might have awaited them.³⁴² The Zionists, unable to win over more than a handful of Iraqi Jews had long before sown the seeds of anti-Jewish pressures. And when joined by Iraqi nationalism, buttressed by years of Nazi propaganda, the security of Iraqi Judaism was no longer sustainable.

It seems as though the Jews in Baghdad lived prosperously when the British controlled the local political scene, and found themselves cornered by a combination of local and external factors, when their British protector was absent. None of the factors alone—Zionism, Nazi propaganda nor privilege under the British—would have undermined the position of Baghdadi Jews. But built one on top of the other, they served as a sufficient push factor to make the job of the Israeli emissaries in 1949-1951 relatively easy. The hostility met by the Jewish link with Britain was turned into a more serious anti-Jewish charge with the Nazi-inspired nationalist climate of the 1930s and given a final blow with the creation of Israel, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the humiliating defeat of the Arab armies. Baghdadi Jews departed en masse for the only country that would accept them at the time. They didn’t become

³⁴⁰ Habas 1963: 228. The research director at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or Yehuda was one of those schoolchildren who remembers going out to shout against the U.N. decision. He was at that time active in the Zionist underground and even went to meetings of the ICP (Interview with Tzvi Yehuda, 18 December 2003, Or Yehuda, Israel).

³⁴¹ Giladi 1990: 86; Cohen 1973: 33.

³⁴² Gat 1997: 30. See also Brewer 1948. For anti-Jewish measures carried out from May 1948 onwards, see Rejwan 1985: 238-242. The underground became more and more central in Baghdadi Jewish life leading up to the mass exodus (Hillel 1988: 110-111).

Zionists. They followed the only open road. Baghdadi Jews do not have a great deal of agency in this story, as the primary actors who affected their lives were Zionists and Arab nationalists. But their narrative illuminates a great deal about Jewish identity, Arab and Jewish nationalism, and the impact of Zionism on relations between Jews and their neighbors in modern Middle Eastern history.

Conclusion

The story of Baghdadi Jews between 1920-1948 can only be told comprehensively by sufficiently attending to all of the major themes addressed in this thesis. But while other factors contributed to undermine the security and comfort of the one-third Jewish minority, it was the combination of Zionism in Palestine and German-influenced nationalism in Baghdad that conspired to marginalize, frighten and ultimately push the Baghdadi Jews out of Iraq.

Jews and Christians, having lived for centuries as *dhimmi*s were enthusiastic recipients of European educations and political ideas. Their language skills enabled them to reap employment opportunities when the British ruled Baghdad. Jewish global business networks developed in the framework of the British Empire to allow a visible minority of Jews to quickly become some of the wealthiest Baghdadis. As hatred towards the British colonial administration mounted, the Jewish reliance on British support became isolating and dangerous.

A small but visible Zionist movement developed in Baghdad during the 1920s under the leadership of ‘the teacher.’ From the outset, all major community figures and the vast majority of Jews distanced themselves from the Zionists, aware of the danger that it could pose to Jewish security. Arab nationalism viewed European colonialism and Zionism as its chief enemies during its formative years. And with major powers France and Britain tainted by their colonial exploits, many in Baghdad looked to Germany for guidance. A multi-dimensional relationship between Berlin and Baghdad served to militarize Arab nationalism and provide it with a totalitarian dress, while some of the

virulent anti-Semitic rhetoric of Nazi Germany seems to have seeped into the hearts and minds of the Baghdadi masses through newspapers, radio, schools and the army. It is difficult to gauge from the sources consulted for this thesis what exactly the meaning of Nazism was to its Iraqi actors. Pro-German they were; pro-Nazi the Zionists have worked hard to make them out to be with relatively little recorded evidence of Nazi-like anti-Semitism. But Baghdadi Jews, who had never felt at home in Arab nationalist circles, and who had distanced themselves from Zionism, did indeed become the victims of open hostility, culminating in the *farhud* of June 1941. While the *farhud* would not have occurred without the power vacuum in Baghdad with the fall of the Rashid 'Ali coup, it nonetheless shocked the largely pro-integrationist Jewish community. The trauma was not to last for the vast majority of Jews, who capitalized on the wartime economy and preferred not to dwell on the horrors of the *farhud*. The Zionist underground was able to build up a sizeable movement through the 1940s, though the predominant theme in their correspondence with the *yishuv* was frustration at the lack of enthusiasm for their ideas amongst the local population. An even smaller number of Jews became active in the Iraqi Communist Party in search of an alternative response to the religious hostility in the country.

Though all of these themes are important to understanding the Baghdadi Jewish experience between 1920-1948, I have used Zionism as the focal point of this thesis because Zionism was the root cause of the breakdown in Arab-Jewish relations in the modern period. Zionism was not the only factor. Colonialism, Nazi propaganda and the rise of an exclusive radical Arab nationalism all isolated the Jews for one reason or another. The Jewish community in Baghdad between the two World Wars experienced

all of these major forces as they tried to educate themselves, succeed in their professions and stay out of trouble. It is probably for this reason that the vast majority of Baghdadi Jews were antipathetic to the Zionists. In an environment full of anti-Zionist rage on behalf of an emergent Arab nation, and in the context of anti-Jewish Nazi rhetoric and the unpopularity of their close economic ties with Britain, most Jews chose either to remain apolitical or to speak out actively against Zionism.

However, the combination of Zionism and Nazi-tinged Arab nationalism prevented the Baghdadi Jews from living in genuine comfort. The force of the Zionist-Arab conflict grew to acquire regional centrality, and it was no great surprise that the Jews of Arab countries were amongst the ‘victims’ of this conflict, squeezed out of their native lands, only to be poorly treated by the nascent state of Israel.

But Nazi-transmitted anti-Jewish propaganda in the newspapers and in the schools would never have made a significant impression on the Baghdadi masses without the ready-made hostility towards Jews that came from their religious association with Zionists. It was because of Zionism that Jewish-Muslim relations could never be like Christian-Muslim relations in Baghdad. Whereas many Christians experienced the same socio-economic benefits of British favoritism and even similar exclusion from nationalist circles, the Jews were guilty by association since their co-religionists were engaging in a daily campaign that was widely perceived to be anti-Arab and anti-Muslim in nature. And it was the Zionists who willfully constructed the dichotomy of ‘Arab’ and ‘Jew’, sowing the seeds of regional conflict that placed ‘Arab-Jews’ in no-man’s land. When the Arab nationalists reproduced this dichotomy and took the Zionists at their word, blurring

the line between Jews and Zionists, the ‘Arab-Jews’, much to the joy of Zionist leaders, were forced into the arms, however reluctantly, of the Zionist state.

If Israel had not been created, the Jews living in Middle Eastern countries would have continued to live in relative security, as any other minority. And if Zionism had been an ideology adopted by the Copts, the Egyptian Copts, even ‘anti-Zionist’ Copts, would have been similarly scapegoated and reluctantly pushed to the new state for the Copts in Palestine.³⁴³

The story of Baghdadi Jews is not, as the Zionist narrative would have it, just one of many examples of gentile hatred of Jews. And if the Zionists can be said to have ‘saved’ the Iraqi Jews, as contemporary Zionist historians would have it, then they only needed saving in the first place because of the growth of Zionism and the stirring it aroused around the Arab world. Although Zionism was the solution to a problem for European Jews, it was the creation of a problem for the Arab world.

The ultimate triumph of the Zionists is that Jews have since been assumed to be Zionists. Ironically, this achievement has been the source of a great deal of anti-Jewish violence over the decades. This is what makes the history of the Arab-Jewish communities so critical. They were Jews. They were almost exclusively non-Zionists. And their collective identity, as Jewish non-Zionists, has been swept into the dustbin of history. And worse, their history has been largely stolen from them and reified in the image of contemporary Zionists to maintain and re-create sharp and hostile distinctions between Arabs and Jews. And the silenced protagonists, the 750,000 Jewish emigrants out of the Arab world and into Israel, as poorly as they were treated by the Euro-centric state, have since had their Arabness stripped away from them and their Zionism affirmed

³⁴³ Behar 2001: 225.

as if organic. Even non-Zionist Iraqi-Israelis boast of the importance of their children serving in the army and defending the state.

In investigating in some detail the story of the Baghdadi Jewish community during the 1920-1948 period, my hope was to shed light upon issues in modern Jewish identity, nationalism, colonialism and ethnic discrimination. By using Zionism as the key conceptual device around which to tell their story, I have implied that Zionism was the most important and unique factor in undermining the security of Baghdadi Jews. While Jewish economic privilege under British rule may have caused envy, neither it nor the other themes explored in this thesis would have been sufficient to push the vast majority of the community out of the country.

Zionist historians emphasize the fact that a pattern emerged all over the Middle East, where each country's Jews made their way to Israel. Whether those Jews had been advocates of Zionism or vocal critics, loyal citizens of their state or French nationals, most eventually left the Arab world. But this was not, as Zionist historians would have it, proof of a European-style racist Jew hatred rampant in the region. It was one of the tragic consequences of the Zionist campaign to divide the region between Jews and Arabs.

Baghdadi Jews lived in a complex political reality within which they felt victimized and threatened by the confluence of pro-Palestinian, anti-British and pro-German ideas. They would by no means have been in paradise were it not for the existence of Zionism. However, the growth of Zionism and the emergence of Israel signaled the death of Jewish life in Baghdad and throughout the Arab world.

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