

**THOSE WHO REMAINED:
THE JEWS OF IRAQ SINCE 1951**

by

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To my wife Ruth, whose faith in me made this project possible

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the history of Jews in Iraq from 1951 to 1973 and their associations in diaspora thereafter. Iraqi Jews trace their community back 2500 years to the Babylonian exile and Jews played prominent roles in modern Iraqi politics, society, and culture until 1950-1951, when most Iraqi Jews left following a period of anti-Jewish hostility. The history of the remaining Jewish community after 1951 is an important case study of Jews in the Middle East (sometimes referred to as Sephardi or Mizrahi Jews) during a period when many such communities faced violence and displacement amidst the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their history also provides unique insights into changes in Iraq's political culture under the various revolutionary regimes that followed the 1958 revolution. This dissertation shows that Jews in Iraq after 1951 successfully re-established a communal and social presence until the Israeli victory in the Six Day War of June 1967 prompted renewed anti-Jewish hostility. However, this dissertation argues that it was the Ba'th Party coup in July 1968 that led to the depopulation of the remaining Jewish community as the party manipulated anti-Israeli sentiment in its effort to consolidate power in Iraq, unleashing a deadly campaign of terror on innocent Jews.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Last Chapter of an Ancient History

*Out of the blue, a notorious decision was made for us to get out
From your country...but no, from our country
You seized unlawfully all we possessed
Left us on the gallows with our bodies dangling
Robbed the souls of our elites,
Sanctioned injustice and murder,
Leaving us to live thin lives stretched tight on the wheel of misfortune,
Our only sin was our faith, just our faith.
-Emile Cohen "I am the Iraqi, I am"*

The Jewish community in Iraq claims a lineage dating back to the biblical exile in 587 B.C.E.—a heritage celebrated by Iraqi Jews including Emile Cohen, the author of the poem quoted above. Written in 2009 and published in *The Scribe: The Journal of Babylonian Jewry* in 2012, Cohen's poem declares in its opening stanzas, "we are a people more ancient than time, with a history as glorious as the land of Iraq itself."¹ The "glorious" history to which Cohen refers includes the writing of the Babylonian Talmud in the sixth century and the composition of some of the Arab world's most famous modern music in the early twentieth century.² That history was cut short, however, in the mid-twentieth century—first by a mass emigration of ninety-five percent of Iraq's Jews who fled persecution in Iraq during the early 1950s, and later by the departure of most remaining Jews amidst Ba'th Party terror between 1968 and 1973.

Historical scholarship on Jews in Iraq treat the airlift campaign that carried 105,400 of Iraq's 130,000 Jews to Israel in 1950-1951 as the endpoint of Iraqi Jewish history. It sees the Jews who stayed in Iraq until the early 1970s as an inconsequential remnant who simply delayed the inevitable. However, the Jews that lived in Iraq between these two emigrations did not see their eventual departure as inevitable and their experiences prove varied and complex—mingling reticence and wariness with hope and optimism. This dissertation covers the last chapter of Jews' ancient presence in the region. It tells the story of the approximately 7,800 Jews who remained in Iraq after more than 120,000 Jews (ninety-five percent of the Iraqi Jewish community) had left in the early 1950s. There were many positive developments in Iraq and the Jewish community during

¹ Emile Cohen, "I am the Iraqi, I am," *The Scribe*, accessed June 6, 2019, <http://www.thescribe.info/>.

² Nissim Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq: 3000 Years of History and Culture*, (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1986).

the 1950s and 1960s that gave Jews hope for a bright future. After 1951 Iraq's remaining Jews participated in the culture, society, and economy of Iraq and their diaspora stands as a testament to that heritage. Thiers, however, is also a story of lost opportunity, as political violence in the late 1960s ultimately bought persecution that surpassed their worst fears. The persecution they faced provide insight into the social and political processes that brought their community to an end and, by extension, the social and political issues that continue to trouble Iraq. The relevance of this history to Iraqi and Middle Eastern history is matched by its importance for Jewish studies and studies of antisemitism as well as wider disciplines that seek to understand the social, cultural, and political challenges facing diverse societies.

The Middle East today is a region beset with political conflicts that often take on ethnic and religious dimensions. Increasingly, such conflicts have proven especially problematic for minority communities including Jews, Christians, Kurds, Persians, and Yazidis. Many of these ethnic and religious minorities that coexisted with majority populations for most of the region's history have faced persecution and even dislocation during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as national political struggles turned violent. While scholars have rightly criticized the tendency of minority studies to essentialize ethno-religious divides and ignore the agency of minority communities, recent scholarship reconsiders the value of studying minorities as historical actors adapting to the limitations and opportunities presented by different historical circumstances.³ This dissertation examines the history of Jewish communal and social life in Iraq during the tumultuous period since the mid-twentieth century. By doing so, it illuminates how that turmoil affected Jewish family units, communal organization, and social life. Examining the history of Iraqi Jews contributes to our understanding of sectarian relations in the Middle East, Iraq's role in Arab world politics, and the role of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the political culture of Arab States.

The flight of Jews from Arab countries since Israel's establishment in 1948 is one of the most significant examples of minority displacement in the twentieth century. This dissertation builds on recent scholarship examining the migration of 850,000 Jews from the Arab world amidst the birth of the Arab-Israeli conflict by exploring the unique experience of Jews who stayed in Iraq after 1951 and the historical events that led to their eventual departure. Joel Beinin's seminal work on Egyptian Jewry examines the cultural construction of Arab and Jewish ethnicity in Egypt and

³ Paul Rowe, *Routledge Handbook of Minorities in the Middle East*, (London; New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2019.)

in diaspora after their dispersion in the mid-late 1950s.⁴ Esther Meir studies the cultural clash between Iraqi Jews in Baghdad and Zionist emissaries from Palestine while Yehuda Shenhav explores Zionist emissaries' reconstructions of Arab Jews in southern Iraq as "Mizrahim" based on critical reading of Zionist sources.⁵ More recently, scholars including Orit Bashkin have begun consulting Arabic sources to examine ethnic constructions of Arab and Jew in Arab social contexts.⁶ Iraqi Jews prove a particularly fruitful case study of Jews in an Arab country because Iraqi Jews experienced the highest levels of social and political integration of any Arab Jewish community in the twentieth century but also faced brutal persecution in latter half of the century.

1.2 Ancient Heritage of Iraqi Jews

Iraqi Jews claim a lineage dating back to the biblical exile and boast an ancient history in Mesopotamia that predates Arab-Islamic conquest by more than a millennium. Jewish communities throughout premodern history operated under systems of semi-autonomous administration beginning with the rule of the Exilarch from the third century CE onward. The Exilarch headed courts that handled legal matters in the Jewish community and was responsible for collecting taxes from the Empire's Jewish subjects.⁷ Despite their unique communal identity and semi-autonomous self-governance, the fate of the region's Jews was most often bound up with that of the broader society. Jewish scholars participated in the cultural productivity of the famous "House of Wisdom" ran by the Islamic Abbasid Empire in the tenth century and in the fourteenth century, Jews in Baghdad suffered the devastation of the Mongol conquests alongside Muslim and Christian residents of the Abbasid capital.

The longstanding Jewish presence and their participation in successive political and social contexts features prominently in a poem written by Iraqi Jewish émigré Emile Cohen in 2009 and published in an Iraqi Jewish newsletter called "The Scribe" entitled "*I am the Iraqi, I am.*"⁸ Cohen left Iraq to study in Britain in 1959, intending to return after graduation but after a regime change in Iraq in 1963, Jews in Iraq faced suspicions of disloyalty and the new government withdrew

⁴ Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵ Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, (London: Routledge, 2004); Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

⁶ Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁷ Rejwan, Nissim. *The Jews of Iraq: 3000 Years of History and Culture*. (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1986), 48.

⁸ Cohen, Emile, "The Scribe," <http://www.thescribe.info/>. Accessed 6/6/2019.

Cohen's passport. The title and theme of Cohen's poem play off of an anonymous poem circulated on the internet which took the form of a conversation between an Iraqi stripped of his citizenship and Saddam Hussein, who seizes his passport. In the poem, the narrator speaks for all Iraqis when he asks Hussein

By what right do you ask who I am? are you the Iraqi or I?

Playing off this theme, Cohen put himself and all of Iraqi/Babylonian Jewry in conversation with Iraqi society, addresses the same question and reminding his audience (in this case, all of Iraqi society) of Iraqi Jews' ancient origins in the land dating back to the biblical exile of 589 B.C.E.

*You ask me who I am.
I am the Iraqi, I am.*

*In all the yesteryears I was there, but today here I am.
Twenty-six centuries ago,
But after the Destruction I left the land of Canaan (modern Israel/Palestine)
To Babylon as a Captive of War. (modern Iraq)
Before the tolling of church bells, before religions took different venues, before the
Quran's revelation to Mohammed,
Before the calling to prayer from every minaret,*

*For we are a people more ancient than time,
With a history as glorious as the land of Iraq itself.*

After several stanzas commemorating the biblical origin story of Babylonian Jewry and their choice to remain in Babylon and contribute to its prosperity, it continues with characterizations of Jewish life in Mesopotamia throughout the premodern period.

*But alas rulers appeared from various countries,
Some tyrannical, others peace-loving
The righteous and the unjust,*

*Persians and Sassanid,
Greeks and Romans,
Turks and Ottomans.*

*We supported every ruler even if he were a pagan,
We did not wage war, nor did we threaten revolt
Making obedience as the demeanour of humans.*

*We were the first Iraqis to acknowledge Ali as the great Caliph
Living peacefully under the protection of the Muslims,
We paid our tribute without complaints or evasion
Grief and happiness, we tasted both*

Nights of despair and nights of hopes.

*When the Mongol appeared and our blood flowed free
Side by side your loved ones and ours perished,
Everything in Iraq laid as waste,
The river Tigris turning crimson as our wine's rich hue,
Your people and ours bound together by slaughter*

In the first half of the poem, the narrator speaks as the voice of Babylonian Jewry from its Biblical origins into the present, characterizing its relationship to the land and the people in it. The Jews appear resilient, enduring multiple rulers “some tyrannical, others peace loving.” The narrator speaks admirably of Muslim rule and the protection it extended to the Jews.

In the last stanza of this excerpt, the narrator speaks of the shared fate the inhabitants of the land who, together, suffered the Mongol invasions that laid waste to Baghdad's vast Islamic Civilization, Jews and non-Jews alike “bound together by slaughter.” In the centuries that followed the Mongol destruction of Baghdad, Mesopotamian society rebuilt a modest civilization and Jews also re-established a substantial presence there, but Baghdad and the region never again served as an imperial capital, nor did it regain its former glory. Beginning in 1533, the Ottoman Empire ruled the territory of present-day Iraq from its capital in Istanbul, but the region remained a frontier battle zone for empires and tribal alliances until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War One.

1.3 Imperial Rivalries and Modernizing Reforms

From the sixteenth century onward, two factors defined the emerging politics of this Ottoman hinterland and the place of Jews and other minorities within it. The first was a political rivalry between Sunni and Shia Islamic Empires and the second was the modernizing reforms that the Ottoman Empire carried out in the nineteenth century.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Baghdad became the focus of an imperial sectarian rivalry between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shia Safavid Empire in neighboring Iran. This rivalry began when the Safavid Empire came to power in Iran, on the Ottoman Empire's eastern border and established Shia Islam as the state religion and conquered Baghdad. The Ottoman Empire, eager to protect its dominance in the Islamic world, championed Sunni Islam and began a centuries long contest for control of Baghdad, which sat on the frontier between the

two empires. This contest between Safavid Shiism and Ottoman Sunnism turned a sectarian religious divide into a political rift. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Tribal leaders in southern Iraq converted to Shia Islam and established political bases around the Shia pilgrimage cities of Karbala and Najaf, rivaling the Ottoman governor in Baghdad.⁹ This added an internal geographic dimension to the region's political rivalry between Sunni and Shia leadership that pitted Shia tribes in the south against the Sunni-dominated Ottoman administration in Baghdad. While Jews and other non-Muslims stood outside the emerging Sunni-Shia political rivalry, they lived, thereafter, in a region in which the political contest between Sunni and Shia became an inescapable part of Iraqi politics pitting an entrenched Sunni Arab ruling class against a marginalized Shia majority population concentrated in the southern hinterlands and the southern cities of Karbala, Najaf, and the port city of Basra near the Gulf. This political contest was not always apparent, and the Jews in the cosmopolitan city of Baghdad lived among Sunni and Shia Muslims often unaware as to which sect their Muslim neighbors belonged. Sunni-Shia intermarriage was not uncommon and tensions between Sunni and Shia did not continue constantly but could arise in response to political crises as was the case with other sectarian identities including Christian and Jewish.

While Shia tribal leaders in the south sought to rival the empire's provincial leadership in Baghdad, the Ottoman government in Istanbul instituted reforms known as the Tanzimat (1839-1876) designed to centralize Ottoman rule and reassert imperial control throughout the empire. These reforms remade the Ottoman domain in the fashion of a modern state reformulating land ownership, taxation, and political organization while secularizing government administration. They also abolished the old laws governing non-Muslim subjects as subservient protected classes, extending legal equality to all Ottoman subjects. By this time, many Christian and Jewish entrepreneurs had established lucrative commercial relationships with European capitalists and thus, their legal equality lent them an upper hand in the region's growing trade with Europe.¹⁰ These Jews began to form an emerging class of secular communal leaders whose wealth and philanthropy lent them influence in the Jewish community equal, in some respects, to the Chief Rabbi who, beginning with the Tanzimat reforms, headed the official religious leadership of the

⁹ Nakash, Yitzak. *The Shi'is of Iraq*. (Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Masters, Bruce. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*. Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

community.¹¹ Some of these Jews sponsored Jewish schools in Iraq that combined traditional subjects like Arabic and Turkish, with European languages. These schools, along with an Alliance school opened by European Jews in 1864, produced Jewish graduates prepared to engage in the emerging business and political sector now unrestricted to them after the legal equality granted them by the Tanzimat reforms.¹² Although the vast majority of Iraq's Jews remained poor and attained only a minimal and primarily religious education, the emerging Jewish commercial elite proved a visible presence in the region by the twentieth century. At this point, Jews in Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul, which would later become Iraq numbered over 120,000. While Jews lived throughout the country, the largest centers of Jewish population were found in the Kurdish north and in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, where they comprised nearly a third of the urban population. Centered in the old city neighborhoods of the Tigris river's eastern bank, Iraqi Jews were the lifeblood of Baghdad. Jews owned most of the banks, movie theatres, and pharmacies along Rashid Street—Baghdad's main thoroughfare—constituting such a central part of the city's businesses that the whole of the city closed for business on Saturdays, following the lead of the Jews who closed their shops for shabbat. By the dawn of the twentieth century, Jews were at the forefront of Baghdad's modernizing economy and global trade.

1.4 Jews in British Iraq

The creation of Iraq introduced a new era of political, social, and cultural interactions for those within the borders of the new country. Upon its establishment in 1920 by the British, Iraq's population included a Shia Arab majority concentrated in the south who would, thereafter, constitute a base of potential opposition to the national government in Baghdad. A Sunni Arab minority primarily occupying the central provinces around Baghdad and accounting for the majority of the political elite favored under the Ottoman Empire and, subsequently, the British administration in Baghdad. Ethnic Kurds including Sunni, Shia, and non-Muslims populated the northern provinces, where the new border cut them off politically from their Kurdish brethren in neighboring Syria, Turkey, and Iraq—a Kurdish community with unrealized expectations of an independent state that would constitute a perennial problem for the central government in Baghdad by perennially pursuing autonomy under its own political leadership. Iraq also included several

¹¹ Nissim Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq: 3000 Years of History and Culture*. 179.

¹² *Ibid.*, 181.

minority communities including Christians, Jews, Turkmens, Persians, and others.¹³ Iraqi Jews comprised three percent of the national population and consisted of two culturally and linguistically distinct communities. The Kurdish Jews of the north and the Jews of Iraq's Arab provinces constituted culturally and linguistically distinct communities that scarcely interacted. Kurdish Jews tended to be less affluent, more tribal, and had no modernized middle class as did the Arab Jewish community in central and southern Iraq.

The British, who created Iraq and ruled it until 1932, installed a monarchy and ensured that politicians amicable to British interests populated the institutions of the constitutional government. A political rift developed between the entrenched political establishment and their allies, on the one hand, and myriad opposition groups on the other. The political and social affiliations of Iraq's Jewish community spanned the spectrum of Iraqi society from pro-establishment to opposition. In 1920, some Iraqi Jews petitioned in vain for British citizenship, fearing their lot in an independent Muslim majority state.¹⁴ The British also tapped the western-educated Christian and Jewish elites for service in the government bureaucracy in numbers far out of proportion with even their Sunni Arab lackeys and more so the Shia, who held only a few token positions in the new government. While these Jewish civil servants and many other wealthy Jews supported the British led government, other educated Jews joined opposition groups such as the Communist Party, the Liberal al-Ahali Group, and other anti-British movements. Some Jews among the Iraqi intelligentsia even wrote for Arab Nationalist newspapers during the 1920s and early 1930s, identifying as "Arab Jews" and advocating for Arab solidarity in resistance to British and French colonialism in the Arab states of the former Ottoman Empire.¹⁵

The opposition movements in which many Jewish intellectuals and activists participated were laboratories of various twentieth century political ideologies running the gamut from liberal democracy and democratic socialism to communism and fascist-inspired ethno-nationalism. Despite their incompatible differences, all these groups shared their opposition to the political establishment in Iraq and British involvement in Iraqi politics. Specifically, Iraqis in opposition challenged the 1930 treaty signed between Britain and Iraq, which maintained much of the

¹³ Marr, Phebe. *The Modern History of Iraq*. (Philadelphia, PA: Westview, 2012), 8-18.

¹⁴ Rejwan, Nissim. *The Last Jews in Baghdad: Remembering a Lost Homeland*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 69.

¹⁵ Bashkin. *New Babylonians*, 69.

former's influence in Iraq after independence in 1932. More generally they loathed the pro-British cadre of Sunni Arab elites that populated the parliament led by Iraq's first Prime-Minister Nuri al-Said, who served perennially as Prime-Minister or President in Iraq throughout the British Mandate government and the Monarchy, making himself the face and symbol of the Sunni-Arab dominated pro-British elite.

1.5 Vulnerable Minorities in a Fragile Nation

During the first decade of Iraqi independence, from 1932 to 1942, Iraq's fragile unity faced challenges, real and imagined, from Iraq's Christian and Jewish minorities whom some on the political right suspected of loyalty to the imperial British. In 1933, a violent incident resulted involving the newly settled Assyrian Christians in northern Iraq, who had made claims to autonomy based on their previous status as a self-governing minority prior to Iraq's establishment. Compounding this challenge to Iraqi unity was the presence of Assyrian military units recruited and trained by the British, who saw the emerging national Iraqi Army as a threat. A battle ensued between the two in August 1933, after which soldiers in the national Army summarily killed Assyrian soldiers who had been taken prisoner, then massacred 315 unarmed Assyrian villagers.¹⁶ Irregular forces in northern Iraq also targeted several Assyrian villages, murdering about one hundred civilians. The Massacre of Assyrians proved controversial in Iraq, horrifying many in the state and the opposition alike, while proving widely popular among Iraqis distrustful of minority communities with connections to British imperialism.

Iraqi Jews proved equally susceptible to charges of disloyalty to Iraq and collusion with the British given the visible presence of elite Jews serving in the mandate government and civil service where their knowledge of the English language was in high demand. The rivalry between Nazi Germany and Great Britain exacerbated the problem as Hitler's defiance of the British evoked growing sympathies with the Nazi Party among those in Iraq's nationalist right. The German ambassador sought to further Iraqi support for Germany by spreading Nazi propaganda in Iraq, including antisemitic literature and broadcasting.¹⁷ The escalating conflict in British Mandate Palestine between Zionists and Palestinians further inflamed the situation. The Palestinian plight engendered broad sympathy among Iraqis, who identified with their Arab brethren's shared

¹⁶ Marr, Phebe. *The Modern History of Iraq*, 39.

¹⁷

experience of British imperial domination and adopted staunchly anti-Zionist attitudes. Unfortunately, anti-Zionist Iraqis did not always distinguish between the Zionist movement in Palestine and Jews living elsewhere, leading to anti-Jewish attitudes as well. Noah Haiduc-Dale notes that among Arabs in Palestine, anti-Jewish sentiments and actions served as a form of protest against Zionism.¹⁸ Anti-Jewishness likewise served a nationalist function for many in Iraq and other Arab countries, where Zionism operated as a stand-in for the imperialism opposed throughout the Arab world. This led to anti-Jewish attitudes even though scholarship has shown that the vast majority Iraq's Jews during the 1930s were not Zionists and Jewish leaders made public statements in support of the Palestinian cause.¹⁹

The link, in Iraqi popular imagination, of the Zionist movement with Jews in general increased as a result of regional developments in Middle East the 1930s. After the first Palestinian uprising (1933-1939) against British Mandate rule, the British exiled the Mufti of Jerusalem to Iraq. The Mufti was a Muslim religious leader and instigator of the uprising friendly to the Nazi regime in Germany who then took up residence in Baghdad. The Mufti, who enjoyed a hero's status among many Arabs sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, also spread anti-British and anti-Zionist propaganda laced with a heavy dose of Nazi inspired antisemitism. The growing conflation of Jews with Zionism and imperialism led, in the 1930s, to discriminatory legislation also drawing from the Nazi playbook such as the requirement for Jewish businesses to include a Muslim business partner and revoking import licenses of Jewish traders, whose commerce accounted for most of Iraq's foreign trade. Jewish merchants managed to accommodate these new restrictions and keep Iraq's commerce running smoothly, hopeful that the measures would prove temporary.

Eight years after the Assyrian Massacre, Iraqi Jews faced their own tragedy when conflicts between the pro-British establishment and anti-British opposition came to a head in 1939. That year, conflicts between pro-British and pro-Germany factions within the government ended in a military coup replacing Nuri al-Said with the prominent opposition figure Rashid Ali al-Khaylani. Khaylani enjoyed widespread popularity for his opposition to the British treaty and Nuri al-Said's status quo politics. It was a chaotic period thick with high hopes but also tension and suspicion, especially in the Iraqi capital. The British, unwilling to risk a pro-German Iraqi regime during

¹⁸ Haiduc-Hale, "Balancing Identities: Minorities and Arab Nationalism." In *The Routledge Handbook on Minorities in the Middle East*, edited by Paul S. Rowe. (Routledge, 2018).

¹⁹ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*; Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*.

World War Two, invaded and occupied Iraq in April 1941. Their defeat of the Iraqi Army prompted Khaylani and his entourage to flee the city on May 30, leaving a political vacuum in their wake.²⁰ The next day, June 1, defeated Iraqi Army soldiers encountered a processions of Jews marching in celebration of their holiday of Shavout, which commemorates the receiving of the Torah. Soldiers mistook the procession for a Jewish celebration of the British victory and attacked them on a bridge in the center of the city. From there, soldiers targeted Jewish storefronts and residences in the commercial center and the old Jewish neighborhoods in central Baghdad. In the chaos, civilians and some police officers joined the attacks and looted Jewish homes. The political vacuum and participation of some police officers in the violence prevented a unified police response, giving the impression of lawlessness and prompting widespread looting and violence by residents of nearby slums which lasted into the next day. On the afternoon of June 2, the British army finally occupied the city. They suppressed the riots, putting an end to the looting and the attacks on Jews.²¹

The Jewish community reeled from this unexpected outbreak of communal violence. The event became known as the *Farhud*, an Arabic word unique to the Iraqi dialect indicating an outbreak of popular violence. The two-day incident claimed at least 180 Jewish lives with some estimates running far higher.²² Most of the violence occurred in the poor Jewish neighborhoods of the old city but the sense of insecurity permeated the entire Jewish community.²³ Jews had been attacked by their fellow citizens, but many also came under the protection of their neighbors for whom friendship, tribal notions of social responsibility, and Islamic principles protecting Jews overcame xenophobic nationalism.²⁴ There are even reports of pro-Nazi nationalists aiding Jewish families.²⁵ Despite the support some Jews received from friends and neighbors, the devastating event introduced a new sense of physical insecurity among the Jewish community.

²⁰ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 112.

²¹ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 112-118.

²² Most scholars cite the number 180 published first by the Iraqi state but some Iraqi Jews claim that the initial estimates made by Jewish community leadership of two thousand are more accurate than official accounts.

²³ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 117.

²⁴ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 101.

²⁵ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 125.

1.6 Divided Country and Divided Community

The failed Khaylani coup of 1941 sharpened growing political divides in Iraq, entrenching the pro-British establishment and dividing opposition more sharply between ethnic nationalists, liberals, and a growing radical left. Meanwhile, the *Farhud* intensified divisions within the Jewish community. These conflicts proved especially potent in Baghdad, the center of both Iraqi national politics and of Jewish life in Iraq's Arab provinces. Although many Jews briefly considered leaving Iraq after the traumatic events of the *Farhud*, few ultimately emigrated. According to historian Esther Meir, hundreds left for Iran, Beirut, Israel, and India but many of these returned within a few years when they heard that the political situation in Iraq had stabilized and the economy was prospering.²⁶ Nevertheless, the *Farhud* changed the Jewish community. Jewish leaders and Jews in the established business class faced a dilemma—their collaboration with the British and the Iraqi Monarchy had put them on the side of a regime with a thin base of support among the population. The hostility of the growing extremist right toward Jews increased the latter's dependence on the regime, and the leadership chose to ignore the dilemma. Jews in parliament never voted against the status quo or came out explicitly in defense of Jews. Instead, they and the communal leadership relied on quiet diplomacy to advocate for Iraqi Jews rather than public activity.²⁷

The reinstated regime also faced a dilemma after 1941. The popularity of the Kaylani coup demonstrated the estrangement of the monarchy from much of the Iraqi populace and the installment of the old elite under British occupation only heightened opposition. To appease discontent, the state issued new permits to several heretofore illegal political parties. This spurred party politics representing diverse political ideas and approaches, but two parties quickly grew to predominate the partisan field that reflected the main ideological divisions in Iraq during the 1940s. The *Istiqlal* Party prioritized the goal of Arab regional unity and many among its ranks espoused a more narrowly ethnic nationalism. Although led by a Shia, its membership weighed heavily toward Iraq's favored Sunni Arab minority and its platform included heavy doses of xenophobia toward Shias and non-Muslim or non-Arab groups imagined to hold dual loyalties—Christians and Jews with Britain and other western Imperialists, Shia with neighboring Iran, and Kurds with

²⁶ Esther Meir, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 14.

²⁷ Meir, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 14-15.

their fellow Kurds in neighboring countries.²⁸ The National Democratic Party (NDP), on the other hand, was composed mainly of Shia and minorities, especially from the growing urban middle class. While every bit as anti-Imperial and anti-establishment as the Istiqlal party, The NDP advocated liberal government, land reform, and end of monopolies, and redistribution of wealth for all Iraqis while embracing pluralistic notions of the Iraqi nation. Thus, the NDP attracted many Jewish intellectuals, authors, and activists and engendered hopes among many Jews that their future in Iraq looked bright.

Many Jewish youth eschewed these mainstream parties, seeking more radical solutions to Iraq's problems. The most popular option was the illegal Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). After the Khaylani movement's failure, many Iraqis turned their attention to the ICP as an alternative mode of pursuing radical political change in Iraq. Its utopian, class-based ideology also promised to unite the dispossessed from across Iraq's ethnic and religious divides. Throughout the 1940s, the ICP's ranks swelled as it staged regular street protests against the regime's unpopular policies, especially wealth inequalities and the British connection.²⁹ For Jewish youth, the ICP offered a path to political engagement welcome to Jews when Arab Nationalist parties were becoming increasingly narrow in their ethnic nationalism. It also offered disgruntled Jewish youth an alternative to trusting the old communal leadership to advocate for the Jewish community—an approach that the *Farhud* had undermined.

A less popular, but equally consequential option pursued by some Jewish youth was the Zionist movement. Zionist organizations in Iraq dated back to the early 1920s but, as Zionism held little appeal among Iraqi Jews, it lacked size or significance until after the *Farhud*. By the 1940s, the Zionist leadership in Palestine, heretofore uninterested in Jews outside of Europe, faced the dilemma of how to populate Palestine given the large-scale annihilation of European Jews in World War Two. The *Farhud* drew its attention to Middle Eastern Jewry as a population of Jews in need of refuge and an alternative source of immigration to Palestine.³⁰ In 1942, the Zionist leaders in Palestine sent a handful of emissaries to Iraq to recruit and lead Zionist youth and membership in the Iraqi Zionist movement grew from only a few hundred in 1942 to approximately

²⁸ Orit Bashkin uses the term xenophobic in its broad sense, not necessarily indicating a fear of foreigners or immigrants only, but peoples seen as potentially disloyal because of an ethnic or other identity shared with a foreign enemy.

²⁹ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 140.

³⁰ Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, chapter 2.

two thousand by 1948.³¹ However, Zionism still held little appeal for most Iraqi Jews. Zionist agents complained bitterly about the Iraqi Jews' lack of interest in emigrating to Palestine. A Zionist emissary in Iraq, Shlomo Hillel, opined in May 1947 of Iraqi Jews:

They are perfectly satisfied with their status here, because the comfortable economic conditions here blind them completely, and no attention is paid to the frightful manifestations of hatred around them, which essentially are placing all of the Jews here at the mouth of a volcano, so to speak, that could erupt at any moment... as those days (of the *Farhud*) become more distant, the Jews hurriedly wipe the matter out of their memories and its results out of their thoughts.³²

Recruitment for emigration to Palestine yielded little fruit but by 1948 the movement did attract two thousand Jewish youth who rejected the oligarchic communal leadership and prepared self-defense forces to protect the Jews in Iraq in case of future attacks.³³ By this time, the Iraqi government had outlawed Zionism and the movement operated underground. Despite the enormity of the trauma Jews' suffered in the *Farhud*, most Iraqi Jews, placed their faith in the restored Iraqi state to protect Jews and their rights. Even Jews who sought their own alternative means of protection through the Zionist movement's self-armament program did not necessarily seek to leave Iraq.

Despite the ongoing desire of most Iraqi Jews to remain in Iraq, a campaign of state and popular persecution of Iraqi Jews precipitated the departure of ninety-five percent of them from the country by the mid-1950s. Two events in 1948 set this campaign of government persecution of Jews in motion. The first was an uprising in January when thousands of Iraqis took to the street protesting Prime Minister Nuri al-Said's renewal of the unpopular Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. While the demonstrations were broad-based, the Iraqi Communist Party, whose leadership included many Jewish activists and intellectuals, emerged as the primary leaders of the uprisings, which came to be known as the *Wathba*. The ensuing crackdown included the indiscriminate arrest of many Jews suspected of communist activity, two of whom the state executed alongside other communist leaders for sedition in the spring of 1949.³⁴

The second event that precipitated the anti-Jewish persecution in 1948 was Israel's declaration of independence in May and the Arab-Israeli war that ensued in the following months.

³¹ Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 87.

³² Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 36.

³³ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 139-40; Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 112.

³⁴ Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 201.

These regional developments brought a surge of anti-Zionist sentiments that outstripped even anti-British sentiments in nationalist public discourse. This anti-Zionist frenzy proved problematic for Iraq's Jews in October 1949 when the Iraqi police discovered the underground Zionist movement and arrested a hundred Jews in connection with it. When Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedouri refused to advocate for the imprisoned Zionists, the Zionist movement organized more than one hundred and fifty Jews to demonstrate in front of the house of Rabbi Khedouri, demanding he secure the release of the prisoners. Some of the demonstrators broke into the rabbi's home, destroyed furniture, and dragged him into the street, leading to the arrest of forty more Jews and the resignation of Rabbi Khedouri.³⁵

The Iraqi government had deemed emigration illegal for Jews since the U.N. vote to partition Palestine in November 1947, but the rising insecurity Jews experienced throughout this period exacerbated an already growing flow of Jews illegally fleeing Iraq. This posed a public relations problem for a government already under fire. In an attempt to appear in control of the situation, the government passed Law Number One of 1950, which allowed a one-year window in which Jews could register for legal emigration, thinking that only a few thousand poor Jews would leave. Much to their dismay, 105,400 of Iraq's 130,000 Jews registered to leave by the end of the registration period, including many from Iraq's important class of Jewish merchants and business owners. Zionist emissaries then negotiated with the Iraqi government to carry out an airlift campaign they named Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, after the biblical prophets who led Jewish exiles that returned to Jerusalem from Babylon (today's Iraq) in the eighth century B.C.E. Between 1950 and 1951 this airlift transported all 105,400 denationalized Jews to Israel. The Iraqi government seized all of their assets under Law Number Twelve of 1951, which parliament passed after most emigrants had already registered. Illegal emigration brought the total number of Jews who left Iraq to more than 115,000, rapidly reducing the number of Jews in the country from roughly 130,000 to approximately 14,600.³⁶ The conclusion of the airlift campaign marks the end of the Iraqi Jewish community in present historical scholarship, but the Jews who remained in Iraq after 1951 lived a history all their own amidst the radically changing social and political landscape in Iraq. What follows is the first historical analysis of that history.

³⁵ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 204.

³⁶ The sources and methods for these estimates discussed in chapter 1 and in figure 3.

1.7 Iraqi Political Culture and the Jewish Question

This dissertation covers a period in Iraqi history for which political sources are scarce and so the experiences of Iraq's Jewish community offer a window into a period of Iraqi history that is otherwise difficult to research. Furthermore, the Jewish lens proves particularly insightful as anti-Israeli posturing proved a central theme of Iraqi political culture, rendering the question of Jewish identity and loyalty central to competing political ideologies. The impact of such political questions on Iraqi Jews thus, provides insight into Iraq's evolving political culture through the end of the monarchy, the revolutionary decade, and the onset of Ba'th Party rule in Iraq.

To examine the history of Jews in Iraq 1951 to present, this study draws from archival sources as well as the testimony of dozens of Iraqi Jews recorded in oral histories, diaries, and memoirs. Some oral testimonies are recorded in an edited volume called *Iraq's Last Jews* by Journalist Tamar Morad, and Iraqi Jews Dennis Shasha and Robert Shasha, the latter two of whom conducted the interviews therein.³⁷ Portions of this dissertation draw on these testimonies which cover daily life and habits, communal life and conflict, and Jews' experiences of social and political lives of Iraqi Jews. Other oral histories appear in the ongoing Sephardi Jews project headed by religious studies scholar Henry Green. These oral histories likewise cover communal, social, and political topics, painting a vivid picture of Iraqi Jews' personal experiences of their country and community's history. Transcripts and videos of these interviews were generously provided through Dr. Henry Green. Both the Morad book and the *Sephardi Voices* project conduct and present their interviews from a humanist perspective, eliciting a variety of memories and perspectives and are presented in a way that allow the testimonies to express diverse and contradictory views and memories rather than conforming to an ideological agenda. Thus, they prove useful for examining multiple and contradictory experiences and views among Iraqi Jews. I have also interviewed or personally corresponded with more than thirty Iraqi Jewish men and women who lived in Iraq at different times and hailed from a variety of locations, class backgrounds, professions, and a wide range of social, political, and religious perspectives. Together these testimonies provide vivid details of Iraqi Jews' lives in Iraq ranging from the mundane to the dramatic. I analyze these testimonies alongside Iraqi newspapers, articles, and political speeches to elucidate the ways that Jews' lives intersected with the Iraqi public sphere

³⁷ Tamar Morad, Dennis Shasha and Robert Shasha, eds., *Iraq's Last Jews: Stories of Daily Life, Upheaval, and Escape from Modern Babylon* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

and how Jews shaped their daily familial, communal, social, and political lives as interactions with a public sphere whose attitude toward them included dramatically shifting attitudes.

For additional insight into Jewish communal life and leadership, I rely on a little-known published volume by Gourji C. Bekhor entitled *Fascinating Life and Sensational Death: The Conditions in Iraq Before and After the Six Day War*.³⁸ This unique volume compiled by an Iraqi Jew who left after the Six Day War commemorates Iraqi Jews' modern life in Iraq and seeks to document their suffering under state persecution after the Six Day War. Unlike the Morad book and the Sephardi Voices project, the language in which Bekhor presents his facts is not that of an academic researcher. Instead, he seeks to provide an idealized community and portray Israel as an unproblematic advocate for Iraqi Jews. Despite its bias, Bekhor's book transmits a great deal of useful factual information and perspectives that, when interpreted critically and weighed against other sources and perspectives, supplements other oral and documentary evidence.

I also utilize the Iraqi Jewish Archive (IJA). This collection features documents that U.S. Military and State Department personnel salvaged from the flooded basement of Saddam Hussein's security services headquarters in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion, which are now digitized and available online. I examine correspondence between Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedouri and other community leaders and state officials regarding matters ranging from Jewish properties, citizenship status, and persecution. These documents aid in understanding the role of Jewish communal leadership in Jews' relationship to Iraqi state and society from 1951 to 1973.

In addition to the press, oral histories, and the state and communal documents in the IJA, I draw from several other sources in my analysis. Iraqi Jews invited me to membership in online forums where Iraqi Jews in diaspora share articles, pictures, and a variety of other information about life in Iraq that augment the perspective gained in my oral history interviews. I also draw from published and archived records of foreign sources that monitored and responded to events in Iraq. These include U.S., British, and other foreign diplomatic correspondence, reports by the American Joint Distribution Committee, and U.N. reports. These non-Iraqi sources provide outside perspective on events occurring in Iraq while also illuminating the global context of Iraqi politics and rhetoric.

³⁸ Gourji C. Bekhor, *Fascinating Life and Sensational Death: The Conditions in Iraq Before and After the Six Day War* (Israel: Peli PrintingWorks Ltd., 1990), 106.

Describing the place of Iraqi Jews in their broader social and political context involves navigating a minefield of contested terms whose meanings have changed over time. For instance, many Jewish intellectuals in the Arab world adopted the term “Arab Jew” during the early twentieth century as they joined emerging Arab nationalist movements, but most Jews from Arab countries have since rejected the term as the word Arab became entangled with anti-Israeli (and often antisemitic) politics in the Arab world. Therefore, when distinguishing between Arabic speaking Jews in Iraq and their Kurdish speaking counterparts, there are no neutral terms to employ. This dissertation uses the terms Baghdadi Jews, Iraqi Jews, and Arab Jews as deemed appropriate for each individual context, referring to Iraqi and Baghdadi Jews when talking about all Jews in the country or city. It uses the term Arab Jews when necessary to distinguish them from non-Arab Jews in Iraq such as Kurdish Jews or to refer to Jews in Arab countries writ large. The use of the term Arab Jews herein is not intended as a political statement about these Jews’ political identity in the present, but merely to show the ways in which Jewish and Arab identities overlapped in some historical contexts. Many Jews with Middle Eastern heritage today use the terms Mizrahi or Sephardi to distinguish themselves from Jews of European origin commonly referred to as Ashkenazi) but this is a more recent development, which will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation and its use is avoided otherwise to avoid imposing anachronistic terms on the past.

This dissertation also employs various terms to describe attitudes, actions, and ideologies hostile to Jews, Zionism, and Israel. The term “antisemitism,” while often used as a blanket term for any hostility toward Jews, originated as a term used by secular Europeans articulating a new ethnic or secular hatred of Jews stripped of traditional anti-Jewish ideas or behaviors based on religious difference.³⁹ In contrast, hostility toward Jews in the modern Arab World sprang from a variety of motivations including anti-Imperialism, anti-Zionism, and sectarianism. Antisemitic concepts and images that some Arabs borrowed from Europe functioned differently in their Arab context. Historian Peter Wein shows that many Arab Nationalists “flirted with antisemitic imagery and rhetoric,” to bolster anti-Imperial and anti-Zionist agendas without fully understanding or embracing the racial ideologies undergirding western concepts of antisemitism.⁴⁰ Therefore, this dissertation uses the term “antisemitism” only when referring to racial ideologies, and uses the

³⁹ Hess, Jonathan M. (Winter 2000). "Johann David Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary: Orientalism and the Emergence of Racial Antisemitism in Eighteenth-Century Germany". *Jewish Social Studies*. 6 (2): 56–101.

⁴⁰ Peter Wein, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian, and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932-1941* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), 69.

term “anti-Jewish” when referring to sentiments or actions by Iraqis not motivated by racial ideology but nonetheless hostile toward Jews. It also employs the terms “anti-Imperial,” “anti-Zionist,” and “anti-Israeli,” to distinguish between these different political attitudes and the way they translated, at times, into anti-Jewish acts or attitudes. This is not meant to diminish, in any way, the offensiveness of rhetoric and actions that I label “anti-Jewish” or their devastating effects for Iraqi Jews. Rather, the purpose is to clarify the different forms of and motivations for discrimination and persecution of Jews. Making these distinctions aids the broader project of understanding Jews’ place in Iraqi society.

1.8 Those Who Remained

This dissertation traces the changing political and social environment in which Iraqi Jews in Baghdad shaped their familial, communal, social, and political lives after the mass emigration of 1951. The only attention that Jews in Iraq after 1951 have received to date in existing historical scholarship are brief mentions of the Ba’th Party’s public hanging of Jews that occurred in January 1969.⁴¹ Most sources mention that event merely as an example of Ba’th Party brutality without investigating the reasons for the incident. Middle East Studies scholar Kanan Makiya, for example, attempted to explain the event in his book *Republic of Fear*, by characterizing it as a bid for popularity and a tactic used to implicate the Iraqi public in its state terror.⁴² His explanation, however, relies on the assumption that persecution of Jews would be popular in Iraqi society without asking why the Iraqi public responded to it as it did. Most importantly, this analysis incorrectly assumes that the Jews of Iraq since the partition of Palestine constituted a pariah community within Iraq. In fact, as this dissertation shows, assumptions that remaining Jews after 1951 languished in obscurity, rejected by Iraqi society, and awaiting their eventual departure from Iraq, are incorrect. This dissertation seeks to uncover the resilience, revival, and struggles of Jews who lived in Iraq between 1951 and 1973 and the unique diaspora community they formed thereafter based on their unique experiences in that period. It is organized into five distinct chronological periods that highlight changes in Iraq that disrupted norms of the communal and

⁴¹Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 139.

⁴² Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

social lives of Iraqi Jews and the ways in which they adapted to these changes, often establishing new norms to accommodate changing political and social realities.

Chapter Two, REMAKING IRAQI JEWISH LIFE AFTER THE MASS EMIGRATION, 1951-1958, will provide a social history of the Baghdadi Jewish community from the mass emigration of Jews from Iraq in 1951 through the end of the Iraqi Monarchy in 1958. The Jewish community in Iraq after 1951 significantly differed from the one that preceded it in terms of its demographic and class makeup, its geographic distribution, and its relationship to Iraqi state and society. This chapter describes the remarkable success of Iraqi Jews in forging new communal and social lives amidst the new rhythms and realities shaping their everyday life, after the mass emigration as public attention turned away from the anti-Jewish conspiracy theories that accompanied the mass emigration.

Chapter Three, JEWISH REVIVAL IN THE REVOLUTIONARY DECADE, 1958-1968, examines Jewish responses to Iraqi political changes in the turbulent period after the overthrow of the Monarchy. It shows that Jews' ability to build successful communal and social lives varied with changes in the policies and ideologies of successive regimes. The changes in government under the Iraqi Republic resulted from rivalries between parties but also from contests to define the concept of the Iraqi nation itself. This chapter shows how successive regimes and their ideological differences brought substantive changes to Iraqi Jews' interactions with the state but had minimal effect on their social and communal lives.

Chapter Four, THE SIX DAY WAR AND THE JEWS IN IRAQ, 1967-1968, will show how the responses of Iraq's Arab Nationalist leadership to the Arab Israeli War in 1967 dramatically disrupted the social and communal lives of Iraq's Jews. The Arif government, which had hitherto imposed minimal restrictions on Jews, employed dramatic policies against Jews as it sought to appease demands for action by a public suspicious of Iraq's Jews.

Chapter Five, BA'TH VIOLENCE IN THE WAKE OF THE SIX DAY WAR, 1968-1973, examines the first five years of Ba'th party rule in Iraq. It argues that the Ba'th party transformed post-Six Day War persecution of Jews from state efforts to pacify enflamed anti-Zionist sentiments in Iraq into deadly persecution aimed at manipulating anti-Israel sentiments for its own gain. Thus, it shows that while Iraqi Jews remember the War as the turning point that led to the departure of most of Iraq's remaining Jews by 1973, this outcome was not apparent or inevitable until the Ba'th party coup thirteen months later. It was the Ba'th Party's targeting of Jews in its deadly anti-spy

campaigns that led most Jews to abandon hope of a future in Iraq and choose the dangerous option of escape through Iraq's northern mountains into Iran.

Chapter Six, A DIASPORA ALL THEIR OWN: IRAQI JEWS, 1973-PRESENT demonstrates that the unique experiences of Jews who lived in Iraq between 1951 and 1973 formed the basis for a distinct global community of Iraqi Jews that this study calls the "Frank Iny diaspora." It examines the interactions of these Iraqi Jews with larger overlapping Jewish, Arab, and Iraqi diasporas. These multiple diasporic affiliations each present unique social, cultural, and political dynamics, inviting specific types of interactions with each and limiting other types of interactions. The strongest bond, this chapter argues, is found among Iraqi Jews that shared the unique communal life centered around the Frank Iny school and the Menachim Daniel sports center from 1951 to 1973—a cluster of organizations and relationships that brought together a close-knit community of Baghdadi Jews. Ultimately, this chapter argues that, because places change over time, diasporic identity is based not only on dispersion from a common place of origin. It also rests on shared experiences in that place of origin which can be particular to a specific historical period.

CHAPTER 2. THE NEW NORMAL: REMAKING IRAQI JEWISH LIFE 1951-1958

2.1 Introduction

“When the times are good, people don’t want to leave... when the times are bad, people always wish they had left when the times were good. We were all gamblers.”

-Edwin Shuker in “Remember Baghdad”

“I want to leave!” screamed fifteen-year-old Saeed Herdoon to his parents after walking home to the only house that remained occupied on his family’s street. It was the end of 1951, and most residents in their Baghdad neighborhood of Betaween had been Jewish only months ago. Herdoon’s parents were among those who stayed in Iraq after operation Ezra and Nehemiah had airlifted most of Iraq’s Jews from the country, and he resented their decision, feeling that his future lay elsewhere. Reflecting on the experience more than fifty years later, an elderly Herdoon recalled his despair; “I felt like I had witnessed the end of the world.”⁴³

The departure of more than eighty-five percent of Iraq’s Jewish community, nearly one-third of Baghdad’s population and as much as three percent of the national population, ruptured the history of this country and community. The emigration of Jews from Iraq for example, caused the loss of a large segment of the country’s business owners, including the majority of those engaged in overseas commerce. It took Iraq years to build new networks of overseas trade after the departure of its Jewish merchant class.⁴⁴ However, no one felt the absence of the departed Jews more than their co-religionists who remained and while 1951 is often treated as the endpoint of Iraqi Jewish history, it was also the beginning of a new community.

The Jewish community that remained in Iraq following the mass emigration differed from the one that preceded it not only in its size but also in the shape of its communal life, the relationship of Jews to their fellow Iraqis, and their relationship to the state. Nonetheless, these Jews maintained hopes for a continuing Jewish communal presence in Baghdad as part of Iraq’s future. These hopes were not disappointed, as even after 1951, Iraqi state and society could and did make space for a vibrant Jewish communal presence in Iraq. Under these conditions the community reconstructed their social lives in ways that accounted for new limitations and

⁴³ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 155.

⁴⁴ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 67.

opportunities they faced. These new patterns of daily life formed the basis on which the remaining Jews in Iraq interacted communally as Jews and socially as Iraqis in the years that followed. This chapter explores the social and communal lives that Jews constructed amidst their radically transformed community and the social and political changes that followed.

2.2 Uncertain Future in Post-Jewish Iraq

While those who fled to Israel left their ancient homeland, the several thousand who remained in Iraq experienced a dramatic dislocation from their community—losing most of their neighbors, teachers, butchers, rabbis, business partners, and friends. The story of Saeed Herdoon's reaction to his family's decision to stay illustrates how painful this rupture proved for many Jews on a personal level. Decisions to leave Iraq or remain proved difficult and those who remained faced life in a city very different from the Baghdad of their youth. What drove these decisions to part from their community and remain in a country that had recently brought them so much hardship and what was the result?

The decisions of families to stay or go often came down to very practical concerns. Many families including Saeed Herdoon's stayed because their fathers owned businesses that they did not wish to liquidate.⁴⁵ Others remained because of the difficulty of the emigration process. Albert Nissan, age five in 1951, stayed in Iraq with his mother and siblings after the death of their father because the prospect of a single mother emigrating with three small children seemed too difficult.⁴⁶ Other families stayed behind because of elderly family members who were too frail to make the journey.⁴⁷ Property ownership proved another common draw. While many Jews had sold their houses and other assets expecting to transfer their wealth to Israel, others hesitated to sell their properties both for sentimental reasons and because the sudden sale of most Jewish real estate in 1950 and 1951 decreased the prices of sale.⁴⁸ Some of Baghdad's wealthier Jews owned numerous family properties which they found difficult to give up.⁴⁹ Sometimes families split up, as in the case of Salim Dallal, a lawyer who stayed behind to manage the appropriation of properties of his

⁴⁵ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155.

⁴⁶ Albert Nissan, discussion with author, August 17, 2004.

⁴⁷ Linda Menuhin, email to author, September 29, 2017.

⁴⁸ Michael Fischbach, *Jewish Property Claims against Arab Countries* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2008), 55.

⁴⁹ Lisette Shashoua, email to author, September 28, 2017.

mother's wealthy family who owned many of the schools and other properties used by the Jewish community.⁵⁰ Practical attachments to businesses and assets mingled with more ephemeral attachment to homeland as in the case of the Daly family, whose father's professional position proved influential in the decision to stay but whose son also recalls his father's more principled assertions of love for his country, and his assertion that "this is our home."⁵¹

Not all of the roughly ten thousand Jews who remained after the conclusion of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah stayed in Iraq long. Many of them planned to emigrate but temporarily delayed their departure for practical reasons. Sami Kattan, for instance, was a college student in 1951 and although his family left he was preparing for his completion exams and didn't want to leave until he had secured his degree.⁵² Between 1951 and 1955 many of these Jews left Iraq for destinations other than Israel including England, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia, and Hong Kong.⁵³ However, it is remarkable that, despite the ease with which Jews could leave the country by the end of 1951 when the government reissued passports to the remaining Jews, thousands of Jews opted to remain.⁵⁴

It is worth dwelling, at this point, on the problem of ascertaining precise numbers for the Iraqi Jewish population. An Iraqi census in 1947 put the number of Jews in the country at 118,000 but historian Abbas Shibliak points out that the accuracy of this census was widely questioned, and unofficial estimates tend to be much higher.⁵⁵ The son of the Chief Rabbi, for example, estimated the population of Iraqi Jews at 150,000 in a 1950 report.⁵⁶ Prime Minister Nuri al-Said put forth the same estimate in January 1949 when, in a conversation with the British ambassador about Palestinian refugees, he threatened that if Israel did not agree to a solution to the refugee crisis soon, he could deport 150,000 Iraqi Jews in retaliation.⁵⁷ How either men came by this number is unknown but assuming that the census number was low and both Sassoon and Said had reasons to favor an exaggerated number, the actual population of Iraqi Jews before the mass emigration is likely somewhere in between these two estimates. Indeed, most sources published in the decades

⁵⁰ Janet Dallal, email to author, September 29, 2017.

⁵¹ David Daly, discussion with author, August 15, 2017.

⁵² Sami Kattan discussion with author, September 19, 2016.

⁵³ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 106.

⁵⁴ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 106.

⁵⁵ Abbas Shibliak, *The Lure of Zion: The Case of The Iraqi Jews* (Al-Saqi Books, 1986), 18.

⁵⁶ Shibliak, *The Lure of Zion*, 18.

⁵⁷ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 199.

since put the total population of Jews in Iraq before the mass exodus between 125,000 and 135,000 with the most commonly cited number being 130,000.

The population of Iraqi Jews after 1951 is equally difficult to determine. In the absence of any surviving census records, different Iraqi Jewish sources often repeat the same estimates of six thousand to ten thousand without any way of verifying their accuracy. While Zionist emissary Mordechai ben Porat could accurately cite that the airlift campaign he helped to organize carried 105,400 Jews from Iraq to Israel, his precise-sounding estimate that 14,600 Jews remained in Iraq thereafter relies on uncertain estimates. Ben Porat arrived at this number by adding to the 105,400 documented migrants to an estimated 15,000 who escaped by other means and subtracting that total from an unverified pre-emigration population of 135,000.⁵⁸ Thus, his estimate for the number of Jews remaining in Iraq relies on unverified estimates and is quite higher than estimates originating from Jews that lived in the community after 1951.

One way to find out how closely these estimates reflect reality is by comparing them to the number of Iraqi Jews registered as deceased each year in surviving death records of the Jewish community. If we consider the death rate among Jews in Iraq as relatively constant, then it can be assumed that changes in the number of deceased Jews from one year to the next reflects a roughly proportional change in the size of the overall Iraqi Jewish community. For instance, in 1949 (before the beginning of the mass exodus) the Chief Rabbi's office recorded 476 deaths in the Jewish community whereas the total deaths by 1952 totaled only 62—a eighty-seven percent decrease in recorded deaths in that three-year period. If we assume that this decrease reflects a proportional decrease in the overall population of Jews, then this calculation can at least reveal whether the available estimates accurately reflect the proportion of decrease in the Jewish population. Thus, if Ben Porat's population estimate of 135,000 Jews before the mass emigration is correct and we also accept his number of 15,000 Jews escaping Iraq illegally during this period, then the decrease his numbers suggest from 135,000 to 14,600 Jews in Iraq between 1949 and 1951 is likely accurate within a 2% margin of error because it posits an eighty-nine percent decrease in the Jewish population—two percent greater than what the death records suggest. The more common estimate of 130,000 Jews before the mass emigration is likely more accurate, reducing the discrepancy to only one percent. More importantly, this shows that the estimate of 150,000 Jews in Iraq quoted

⁵⁸ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 106.

by both Prime Minister Nuri al-Said and the Chief Rabbi's son Sha'ul Sassoon is almost certainly inflated by roughly twenty thousand.

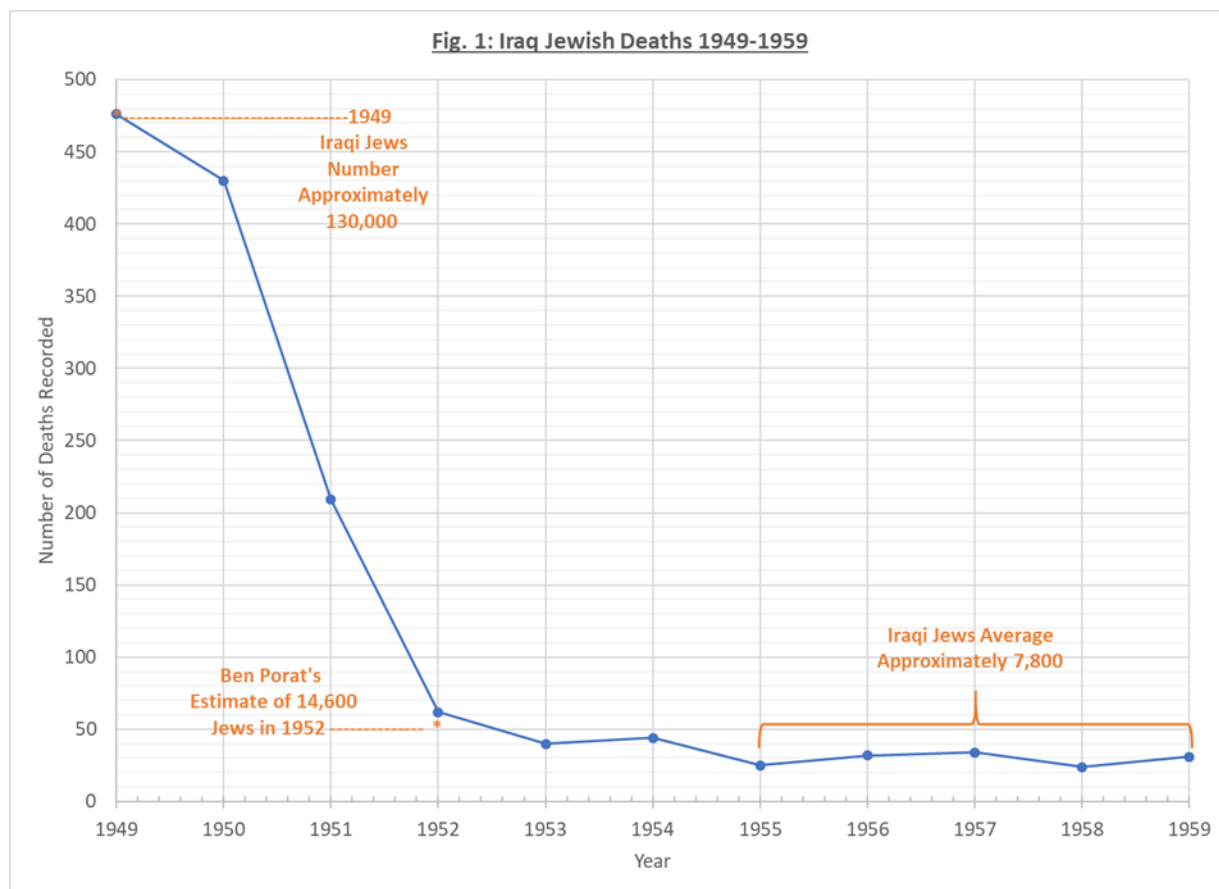


Figure 1: Iraq Jewish Deaths 1949-1959

More important than establishing the precise population at any given time, the community death registry can serve as an indicator of population fluctuations, showing the timing and extent of Jewish emigrations. For instance, the eighty-seven percent decrease from 1949 to 1952 supports the accuracy of Ben Porat's estimate of 14,600 Jews remaining in 1952 based on a 1949 population between 125,000 and 135,000. It also suggests that estimates numbering the remaining Jews between six and ten thousand after the mass emigration do not reflect the 1952 population but rather, the Jewish population following another decrease in the three years after the mass exodus until the population stabilized during the mid-1950s. As figure 1 shows, the population decline represented by declining numbers of recorded deaths levels off by 1955 and the number of deaths recorded from 1955-1959 averaged 29.2, a ninety-four percent decrease from 1949. Based on a

1949 estimate of 130,000 these fluctuations would put the Jewish population at 7,800 during the mid to late 1950s. Thus, it can be estimated that of the Jews that remained in Iraq after the end of the Ezra and Nehemiah campaign, nearly half of those left Iraq by 1955. Most of these were likely Jews who planned to leave with the rest of the community but, for various reasons, delayed their departure and left with a passport after their purposes for staying were complete. Many, however, like Sami Kattan, changed their mind and decided to remain in Iraq.

Among the reasons to stay in 1950 and 1951 included the fact that Law Number Twelve of 1951 remained in effect, meaning that to leave Iraq permanently meant surrendering one's earthly possessions to the Iraqi state. While these financial factors cannot be discounted, the improving social conditions for Jews in Iraq was likely a more important factor, especially when coupled with reports of the dismal conditions among their compatriots in the receiving camps of Israel, where cold, wet conditions and lack of basic living amenities coupled with the racism of some Ashkenazi Jews against Middle Eastern Jews made life miserable for the recent immigrants. The news reaching Jews still in Baghdad about conditions in Israel was so grim that one Iraqi Jew recalls sitting on his family's packed suitcases the day of their scheduled departure when his father announced that he was cancelling his plans to uproot the family.⁵⁹

Remaining in Baghdad provided not only better living conditions but, in many cases, a chance to aid family members already in Israel. When Sami Kattan finished his college completion exams he decided to stay in Iraq where he worked as an accountant and sent money and clothing to his parents in Israel for sixteen years until their death in 1967. Since Iraq allowed no contact with anyone living in Israel, this endeavor required some special measures. Kattan, like many other Jews in Baghdad, mailed packages of clothing and blankets to a friend in Iran who then forwarded the supplies on to Israel on his behalf along with the letters from Kattan, which always had to be general enough not to reveal the true destination of the receiver. Sending money was made easier for Kattan by opening a bank account in England, from which friends there could send money to his parents who, like most other Iraqi Jews there, had seen all their monetary wealth seized by the Iraqi state upon their emigration.

The improving conditions in Iraq during this period is reflected in the recollection of another Iraqi Jew, Linda Masri Hakim, that after the end of the Ezra and Nehemiah campaign

⁵⁹ Anonymous, interview by author, September 13, 2016.

“everyone forgot about the Taksin (the partition of Palestine) and life returned to normal.”⁶⁰ However, her characterization is accurate only insofar as she recalls—with the benefit of decades of retrospect—that life ultimately improved during the 1950s and should not be taken to mean that conditions improved overnight or that “normal” meant that life in Baghdad after 1951 differed little from Jews’ daily existence in previous decades. Indeed, as she was only four years old at the end of the mass emigration, she may base this characterization more on her parents or others than her own experience. In reality, Jews attempting to carry on with their lives in the year following their co-religionists’ departure did so in a drastically changed Jewish community.

They also did so amidst ongoing communal and generational tensions over the confrontation between the Zionist youth and Chief Rabbi that came to a head in the lead-up to the mass emigration. Even after the conclusion of operation Ezra and Nehemiah, when no organized Zionist movement remained in Iraq, the issue of Zionism and the Jewish leadership’s disavowing of imprisoned Zionists remained a sensitive issue. After the mass emigration, as before, it was mainly youth who found Zionism attractive and even for those less ideologically committed, many youths shared the Zionist’s resentment of the entrenched communal leadership and their abandonment of the Jewish youth whom the state targeted in its anti-Zionist campaigns. The grandson of former Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedouri found himself defending his grandfather against schoolmates who resented their parents’ decision to stay and who derided the elderly rabbi as anti-Zionist.⁶¹ Even today, the legacy of Rabbi Khedouri and the communal leadership remains contested. In a 1999 issue of *The Scribe*, a newsletter about Iraqi Jewry published in diaspora, one Iraqi Jew claimed that the Chief Rabbi and the administrative counsel, rather than pursuing the community’s best interest, “were all concerned about the positions that they were holding.”⁶² While it would be a mistake to romanticize the Jewish leadership, simply dismissing them as self-interested also misses the point that they were attempting to lead a community of Jews through uncertain times, trusting in the state to protect them and their interests—a strategy which had served the community well for centuries.

It is important to note, as Orit Bashkin and Esther Mier do, that Zionism remained a minority opinion in an Iraqi Jewish community that, by and large, did not wish to leave Iraq. Such

⁶⁰ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 193.

⁶¹ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 179.

⁶² Ramzi Loya, “Reply to Issue 71 of The Scribe,” *The Scribe*, issue 71. 1999, <http://www.thescribe.info/>.

context is necessary for understanding the fact that, as the author of the *Scribe* article put it, Rabbi Khedouri, after the 1941 Farhud, “did not want the Jews to leave Iraq and of course he never made efforts to help them leave at any point of time.”⁶³ This statement, however, assumes that Jews wanted to leave when, in reality, very few did.⁶⁴ Thus, it is more accurate to say that The Chief Rabbi, proud of his community’s history in the region and committed to continuing that history, tried to reassure a shaken Jewish community that they need not abandon their home because the restored government they supported would protect them from such atrocities happening again. Khedouri was not alone in this, as many among the Jewish leadership such as prominent Baghdadi businessman and philanthropist Ezra Menahim Daniel, who remained in Iraq after 1951, also decried Zionism and asserted the patriotism of Iraqi Jews, encouraging his fellow Jews to stay. Indeed, the vast majority of Jews remained in Iraq after those tragic events. Furthermore, the support of the Chief Rabbi and other Jewish leaders for the government was not unconditional and was trumped by his Iraqi patriotism which sometimes meant opposing policies they saw as detrimental to the Iraqi nation, as with Rabbi Khedouri’s participation in the 1948 *Wathba* against the unpopular Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.⁶⁵ What’s inescapable is that Rabbi Khedouri and his cohort of community leaders led the community through periods of divisive politics in the Jewish community and Iraq at large.

Decisions of Jews who stayed often revolved, likewise, around practical calculations that weighed their desire to remain in Iraq against mounting insecurity and the departure of so many of their family and friends. Either decision was difficult and the outcome of either was unclear. Furthermore, the first few years following the mass emigration was a period of flux in which many remaining Jews continued wrestling with the decision to stay long-term or finish getting their affairs in order then seek resettlement in Europe or North America. The uncertainty strained families, as many youths like Saeed Herdoon, whatever their ideological leanings, watched most of their friend’s leave, feeling that their future also lie outside Iraq

⁶³ Loya, “Reply to Issue 71 of The Scribe.”

⁶⁴ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*; Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*.

⁶⁵ Sassoon, *Qa'id wa mujtama'ik*.

2.3 Landscapes of Absence

The sudden departure of most of Iraq's Jews made its mark on urban landscapes throughout Iraq—leaving residences, businesses, and sometimes entire neighborhoods vacant. Thus, the absence of the departed Jews was not only felt in the grief of remaining Jews and other Iraqis who lost family, friends, coworkers, butchers, rabbis, and other significant relationships. The mass emigration also imprinted landscapes of absence in towns and cities across the country.

Among the results of the mass emigration was the relative absence of Jews outside of Baghdad. The Iraqi capital had a long history as the locus of Jewish life in the region but vibrant Jewish communities also flourished throughout much of the country, most notably, in the Kurdish north, where 25,000 Jews constituted a distinct community with a linguistic, regional, and cultural identity distinct from the Arabic speaking Jews in the rest of the country.⁶⁶ Zakho in the Kurdish north, for example, lost its entire Jewish population of 1,850, and the residents today have little memory of them.⁶⁷ Throughout Iraq's majority Arab provinces, Arab-speaking Jewish communities of various sizes thrived in many of its cities and villages. The mass emigration depopulated virtually every community outside of the capital except for the port city of Basra near the Gulf.⁶⁸

Isaac Sassoon was only five years old in 1951, when the mass emigration occurred. This emigration left his family one of only two Jewish families remaining in the small city of Samawa—a majority Shia city midway between Baghdad and Basra. His life outside of the Iraqi capital was one devoid of any sense of Jewish identity. He grew up so assimilated among his Shia Muslim schoolmates that when he transferred to the Frank Iny Jewish school in Baghdad his senior year, his classmates there thought he was a Muslim. This was, in part, due to the secularity of his family, which attended the Torat Synagogue in Samawa only on Yom Kippor, leaving it empty most Saturdays until it finally closed for good in 1957.⁶⁹ However, many of his Jewish peers in Baghdad lived in similarly secular families, but their social circles were primarily Jewish, whereas Sasson's Jewish socialization ended with his immediate family.

⁶⁶ Ariel Sabar, *My Father's Paradise: A Son's Search for His Family's Past* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2009), 15.

⁶⁷ Sabar, *My Father's Paradise*, 94.

⁶⁸ Sabar, *My Father's Paradise*, 94.

⁶⁹ Isaac Sasson, phone conversation with author, November 22, 2017.

Unlike Samawa, most other Jewish communities outside of the capital left no remnant. One notable exception to the emptying of Jewish communities outside of Baghdad was the city of Basra, Iraq's primary trade hub, located on the Shatt al-Arab, where the Tigris and Euphrates combined into one large river before emptying into the gulf. Here, a handful of Jewish merchants lived with their families and continued to run import-export companies, a trade for which the city and its Jews had long been known. However, these remaining Basran Jews nonetheless found themselves tied to Baghdad as a Jewish center more strongly than before, even traveling 280 miles to the capital to purchase kosher meat. Thus, the vast reduction in Jewish presence outside of Baghdad transformed the Iraqi Jewish community from a multi-polar collective of Jewish communities totaling 130,000 to a Baghdad-centric minority numbering less than ten thousand.

While the erasure of Jewish communities outside of Baghdad rendered the Iraqi capital the pivotal center of Iraqi Jewish life, the Baghdadi Jewish community was itself transformed in size, demographic makeup, and institutional life by the mass emigration. The state nationalized some of the communal holdings endowed to the community by Jewish philanthropists. The most prominent example was the 49,000-square meter Mier Elias hospital, which had served as a visible Jewish philanthropic endeavor serving Iraqis of all religions. The state paid a nominal sum of 220,000 Dinars to the community for the "purchase" of the hospital.⁷⁰ While the hospital served the Iraqi public, the few institutions that remained after 1951 existed primarily to serve the Jewish community and these were few in number. The number of operating synagogues in Baghdad alone fell from ninety-three to seven, and only four of those opened each week for Shabbat, the others functioning only on high holidays. Of the more than sixty Jewish schools that operated in Baghdad in 1950, only two remained: the Menachim Daniel and Frank Iny Schools, both in Baghdad.⁷¹ While Rabbi Khedouri managed to negotiate to keep all communal held properties in Baghdad from the country wide state sequester of Jewish communal properties, most of these buildings now lie vacant, leaving the community leadership struggling to maintain them with limited resources.

⁷⁰ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 106.

⁷¹ Morris Fine and Miton Himmelfarb, *American Jewish Yearbook*, 69-108, (New York: The American Jewish Committee), 518; Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 153.

The emptying of residences left an even more drastic mark on the landscape. The emigration of all lower-class Jews left the Jewish neighborhoods of Baghdad's old city completely uninhabited. The winding alleys and mudbrick residences of these ancient Jewish quarters comprised the "City of Rooftops" described by famed novelist Sami Michael, where "Families lived so crowded together that there was little to separate adults from children."⁷² In this labyrinth of interconnected residences, the dirt paved alleyways were so narrow that daring youths could leap across them from one flat rooftop to the next. Below them, throngs of pedestrians milled about, and vendors pushed their carts through the mud to the fruit market or the fabric bazaar where they sold their wares and produce. Foreboding windowless facades separated domestic space from the frenzy of activity in the narrow lanes outside and, in the case of larger homes, protected an inner courtyard. This cluster of ancient neighborhoods hugged the east bank of the Tigris River, which drew a frenzy of activity most days of the year. Barges brought goods from Mosul in the north. Men paddled round reed-constructed rafts full of all sorts of goods from one bank to the other. Except for the occasional diesel or gas-powered craft, most of the pastimes that took place on the river or its banks preserved long held traditions. Adults and children swam its waters regularly, cooling themselves from the heat, and sailboats occasionally clipped by.⁷³ On the banks, families gathered for picnics, often grilling fish from the river in the distinctive Iraqi style of Masgouf, suspending the fish on sticks in a circle around the fire.⁷⁴

One block over from the Tigris' east bank ran Rashid Street, extending along the river the length of the old city to Tahrir Square at the South end, which connected it to the city's main bridge. Rashid Street was the commercial, retail, and financial hub of Baghdad where Jews, Muslims, and Christians ran businesses in the various storefronts crammed along its wide boulevard. In fact, Jews owned most of these businesses and held a virtual monopoly on financial and foreign trade firms until 1950, after which their absence left the way for many Shia to fill the void in the business sector, forming the backbone of an emerging Shia middle class.⁷⁵

⁷² Sami Michael, *Victoria* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

⁷³ Maurice Shohet, interview by author, September 11, 2016.

⁷⁴ Isaac Sasson, phone conversation with author, November 22, 2017.

⁷⁵ Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 67; Niran Bassoon email May 29, 2019.



Figure 2: Abandoned Former Jewish Residences in the Old City, Present Day.

For centuries, the compact neighborhoods of the old city were home to virtually all of Baghdad's Jews [see Figure 3]. Affluent Jews lived in opulent homes with vast courtyards where extended families intermingled and where women often spent most of their lives, following traditions that segregated them from the male dominated streets and cafes outside. These large dwellings dotted the otherwise veritable slums like "oases of affluence in a wilderness of indigence," mirroring the similarly multi-class Christian, Sunni Muslim, Shia Muslim, and mixed Muslim neighborhoods of the old city.⁷⁶ During the 1920s and 1930s, however, many affluent Jews left these cramped Jewish quarters for new residential developments to the southeast. The first of these was Bab-al Sharqi, or "The East Gate." This exclusively Jewish neighborhood lay beyond the southeastern border of the demolished old city wall, flanked to the north by the Muslim neighborhood of Bab-al-Shaykh and to the southwest by the Tigris river.⁷⁷ The oldest Jewish neighborhood outside of the old city, Bab al-Sharqi, was the transition

⁷⁶ Michael, *Victoria*, 14.

⁷⁷ Doris Zilkha, interview by author, September 20, 2016.

between old and new. Its eastern streets were home to small houses and three or four-story tenement buildings for lower-middle class families. Its northwest streets housed shopping centers off Tahrir Square, through which the neighborhood's residents passed on their way to and from Rashid Street or, on the rare occasion, across the bridge to the city's smaller half on the western side of the river where almost no Jews lived or worked.

Along the Tigris to the south of bab al-Sharqi sat the modern neighborhood of Betaween, home to Meir Twig Synagogue, where Jews that registered for emigration in 1950 and 1951 signed the documentation that revoked their citizenship and committed them to emigration. It was there that most observant Jews spent Shabbat in the years following the mass emigration. Between residences were larger, primarily single-family houses set on larger streets than that of bab-al-Sharqi and home to many middle-class families, ninety percent of them Jewish according to Saeed Herdoon.⁷⁸ While his estimation may be a generous one, Jews were clearly in the majority. The same was true of Alwiyah to the south.

In these modern suburban style developments, renowned Iraqi Jewish author Naim Kattan writes in his memoir, "the streets took shape one after another. They were broad, bordered with eucalyptus, paved and clean."⁷⁹ Some families chose modern European designs for their houses, forsaking courtyards for front yards with adorned with roses, jasmine, and fruit trees. Other homes preserved more traditional forms but, new or old, all homes retained the flat roof, where Baghdadis slept away the hot summer nights under the star-lit sky.⁸⁰ South of Alwiyah, the Tigris deviated from its southeast trajectory, turning abruptly to the west and then curling back on itself to the south, forming a large peninsula which was home to Karada, Baghdad's newest residential development. Still sparsely developed at the time, a few Jews lived there in 1951, including the Chief Rabbi, Sassoon Khedouri who relocated there.

⁷⁸ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155.

⁷⁹ Kattan, Na'im, and Sheila Fischman. *Farewell, Babylon: Coming of Age in Jewish Baghdad*. (Boston: David R. Godine, 2007), 20.

⁸⁰ Kattan, *Farewell Babylon*, 20.



Figure 3: Baghdad Map, 1970

The Jews that remained after 1951 were almost exclusively from the middle and upper classes as virtually every poor Jew had registered for emigration and left by August 1951. These class dynamics of the mass emigration determined the geography of the community that remained after 1951, emptying the poor Jewish neighborhoods of the old city where Jews had lived for centuries. These ancient centers of Baghdadi Jewish life, first impoverished by the flight of affluent Jews to the suburbs then emptied altogether by the flight of poor Jews in 1950 and 1951, became state housing for Palestinian refugees resettling in the Iraqi capital in the early 1950s.⁸¹ Outside of the old city, the neighborhoods of Bab al-Sharqi, Betaween, and Alwiyah, each of them majority (or in the case of Bab al-Sharqi, exclusively) Jewish since their establishment, were sparsely inhabited by the remaining Jewish families like that of Saeed Herdoon.

This was the Baghdad in which Iraqi Jews now lived. Integrated as they had been in Iraqi society, the Jewish community had nevertheless formed the locus of social interaction for most Baghdadi Jews and this ancient Jewish community was now largely absent from the east bank of the Tigris. A large minority of Jews that emigrated sold their homes in the months prior—often at drastically reduced rates due to the number of homes going on the market in 1950—and Muslim or Christian families soon inhabited most of these homes.⁸² Homes still owned by departing Jews became state property after the signing of Law Number Twelve in March 1951 and were sold at auction throughout the 1950s.⁸³ In 1954, the government discovered some Jews retained properties with fake rental agreements signed out to sympathetic non-Jewish friends and took possession of these houses, assigning them to military officers.⁸⁴

In 1952, landscapes of absence marked Iraq's cities and villages, testifying to the sudden and nearly complete departure of Iraqi Jews from the country. These vacancies testified to an uncomfortable fact; that Iraq had driven most of its 2,500-year-old Jewish community to flee for the refuge of its sworn enemy, Israel. While anti-Jewish Iraqis may have welcomed the Jews' departure, it proved a complicated reality even for them, as the operation which rid Iraq of so many Jews transported them to Israel, in fulfillment of Zionist ideology—the ingathering of Jews to the new Jewish state, which Iraq and its Arab counterparts vowed to destroy. No matter. These landscapes of absence were easily enough erased as new non-Jewish owners filled the empty

⁸¹ Kattan, *Baghdad, Yesterday*, 18.

⁸² Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 101.

⁸³ Sami Kattan, discussion with author, September 19, 2016.

⁸⁴ Sami Kattan, discussion with author, September 19, 2016.

Jewish residences and the government appropriated all Jewish hospitals, schools, and synagogues outside of Baghdad and Basra, leaving those in the capital under the administration of the communal leadership. In Baghdad—in many ways a Jewish city up until 1950—most of the vacant Jewish residences in the old city along the Tigris’ east bank soon housed Palestinian Refugees—a stark reflection of the de-facto population exchange between Arab countries and the new Israeli state. The few Jews living in Baghdad like Saeed Herdoon constituted a living exception. As Iraq put its Jewish history behind it, filling empty houses and renaming formerly Jewish institutions, these remaining Jews faced the task of normalizing their existence in a city that no longer boasted a large Jewish presence.

2.4 Jews in the Public Sphere

Jews living in Iraq between 1951 and 1954 had to contend not only with a disrupted communal life, ongoing communal tensions, and landscapes of absence but also with ongoing hostility in the public sphere. Through 1952, the upheavals of 1948 to 1951 continued to generate public discourse on the Jews that cast them as both representative of the Israeli state and suspected of collusion with it against Iraq and its Arab allies. As before the conclusion of Ezra and Nehemiah such questions centered on the accusations that Jews were implicated in espionage for Israel.

Iraq’s right-wing press had renewed the charge of espionage after the Government arrested a number of Zionist agents in May of 1951 and announced on Baghdad Radio on June 24 the discovery of weapons stockpiles in two Baghdad synagogues and in the homes of two of the arrested Zionists, claiming that the stockpiles also included maps and military documents proving espionage activity for Israel.⁸⁵ The Iraqi government, embarrassed by the unexpected outcome of its scheme to bring illegal Jewish emigration under control, may have sought to justify its policies which effectively led to the expulsion of most Iraqi Jews but the espionage charges and resulting trial should also be understood as a continuation of the government policy begun after 1948 to avoid any popular unrest by demonstrating that the state would take care of Iraq’s “Jewish Problem.”⁸⁶ British foreign officers in Iraq worried that the government may have the opposite goal in mind. In a memo to London dated June 24 they compared the incident to the Reichstag fire in Germany, which the Nazis used as evidence of Jewish terrorism and justification for antisemitic

⁸⁵ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 482-3.

⁸⁶ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 194.

violence and said, “I trust we will not see an outbreak of pogroms.”⁸⁷ Their fears proved unfounded, however, as no violence against Jews accompanied the state’s targeted arrests of accused Zionists.

The arrest of the alleged Zionist agents did, however, increase the hostile rhetoric in the media, prompting Iraq’s right-wing press to call for the expulsion of the remaining Jews. An extreme example came from a far right-wing nationalist paper called “*al-Ara*,” which alleged that evidence had been found of a “fiendish master plan prepared with infinite care and skill by the Zionist underground to launch a night attack on Baghdad with scores of vehicles specially armed and equipped to blow up all strategic centers in the capital.”⁸⁸ The following day, the same paper admitted that Iraq’s remaining Jewish community “included good citizens” but nonetheless concluded that allowing the remaining community to stay was too risky for the nation’s safety, asserting that “everybody knows that all Jews regarded Jerusalem as their true home.”⁸⁹ This supposed loyalty to Israel, in the author’s opinion, was sufficient to justify treating all Jews as suspect, although the newspaper offered no evidence for their claim, appealing instead to Iraqi assumptions that Jews’ Zionist leanings was somehow known to all.

While it is true that Iraq’s small Zionist movement conducted espionage for Israel during the 1940s, the remaining Zionist agents at the time of the arrests in the summer of 1951 focused their efforts on carrying out the airlift to Israel. Furthermore, the weapons in the Zionists’ possession consisted of small arms and grenades collected for self-defense after the Farhud of 1941 and not the type of armaments necessary to destroy any strategic centers in Baghdad, as the article in *al-Ara* claimed.⁹⁰ In fact, the only bombings that did occur in Baghdad at the time targeted not strategic government sites, but sites where Jews congregated. Two such bombings occurred in the months following the March 4 passage of Law Number One of 1950, the first was a grenade thrown at a café frequented by Jews that injured a number of people on April 8th.⁹¹ The second bombing occurred in June 1950. Four more bombings between January and June of 1951 targeted the Mesouda Shemtob synagogue where Jews gathered to depart on their assigned Ezra and Nehemiah flights, the U.S. Information Office frequented by many Jews, and two Jewish businesses; the building of the Lawee Bros Co. and the Stanley Shashoua building.⁹²

⁸⁷ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 484.

⁸⁸ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 486.

⁸⁹ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 486.

⁹⁰ Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 188.

⁹¹ Shiblak, *The Lure of Zion*, 119.

⁹² Shiblak, *The Lure of Zion*, 119.

The aforementioned arrest of an alleged Zionist spy ring occurred just three weeks after the bombing of the Stanley Shashoua building and the charges brought forth against the accused included responsibility for five of the bombings that targeted Jewish sites in 1950 and 1951 (the bombing in June 1950 was never mentioned in the trial). According to the prosecution and the press, Zionist agents bombed Jewish targets to “induce panic” as well as to “sully Iraq’s image in the world.”⁹³ These widely publicized trials served the Iraqi government’s claims that it was the interference of Zionists that caused the emigration of Iraqi Jews and not persecution by the Iraqi state—a narrative still common among Iraqi and other Arab leaders regarding the flight of Jews. The legitimacy of the charges was strongly questioned by Jewish international groups that petitioned the British government to intervene on behalf of the condemned, claiming that the confessions of the defendants were extracted under torture.⁹⁴ In the estimation of British observers, the evidence against the defendants was “detailed and circumstantial” but the British government, hesitant to further trouble its rocky relations with Iraqi leadership claimed it had “no locus standi” to intervene.⁹⁵ Thus, Iraq executed Yusef Basri and Shalom Saleh Shalom on January 1952.

The question of who carried out the bombings and why remains controversial to this day. The state’s evidence implicating the accused Zionists was circumstantial, and there were numerous right-wing elements in Iraq—some of them within the state—that also wanted to motivate Jews to leave.⁹⁶ At any rate, the actual role of the bombings in the Jews’ decision to register for emigration is often overstated. For instance, Abbas Shiblak claims, in *The Lure of Zion*, that some of the bombings were followed by an increase in registration for emigration.⁹⁷ However, historian Esther Meir shows in her book *Zionism in an Arab Country* that most of the Jews who opted for emigration had already registered prior to the four bombings in 1951 and therefore they cannot be blamed for the migration of most of the community.⁹⁸ As Orit Bashkin demonstrates, Iraqi and Zionist sources show that the mass emigration began before the bombings, precipitated by the state’s targeting of Jews in the anti-Communist and anti-Zionist campaigns of 1948-49 and the role of Israel and Zionist emissaries in negotiating with Iraq for the emigration of Jews.⁹⁹ Despite

⁹³ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 490.

⁹⁴ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 545.

⁹⁵ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 1,3; Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 563.

⁹⁶ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 208.

⁹⁷ Shiblak, *The Lure of Zion*, 123.

⁹⁸ Meir-Glitzstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 257.

⁹⁹ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 208.

this scholarly consensus, the notion of Zionist conspiracy behind the Jewish emigration remained popular because it exonerated the Iraqi state and public of driving the Jewish community out and kept the focus on Zionism as the common enemy.

While the bombings may not have precipitated the mass emigration, the investigations and trials of the accused and the execution of Basri and Shalom generated press coverage that kept the public's attention focused on the Jews and their potential disloyalty. In October, the court handed down the verdict on the case, the details of which were published in the daily socialist newspaper *al-Umma* as "Execution by hanging until dead for the two Jewish Criminals," thus emphasizing their Jewish identity.¹⁰⁰ An opinion piece in *al-Umma* published the outcome of the case under the more inflammatory title of "the fate of the Jews accused of forming Zionist Terrorist organizations in Iraq."¹⁰¹ While most newspapers stopped short of explicitly questioning the loyalty of all Iraq's remaining Jews as *al-'Ara'* did, they all reported the outcomes of the investigations and court proceedings using the terms spies, Zionists, and Jews interchangeably, conflating Iraq's Jews with alleged activities of the condemned. Throughout the trials of Basri and Shalom, *al-Umma* reported on the evidence and charges against the defendants referring to them as "the accused Jews"¹⁰² "The Zionist Terrorists,"¹⁰³ and "the Jewish terrorists."¹⁰⁴ The assumption of their guilt in carrying out the bombings, and the conflation of Jews, generally, with Zionist activities in Iraq shows how widespread the tendency was to associate Jews, generally, with Israel and Zionism despite the ongoing efforts of prominent Jewish leaders like Ezra Menahim Daniel and Rabbi Khedouri to decry Zionism and assert the patriotism of Iraqi Jews. Nowhere did the Iraqi press recognize the degree to which Iraqi Jews were divided over the question of Zionism nor did it acknowledge the fact that Zionist activists, except for those detained, left the country by the end of the airlift campaign, in keeping with their Zionist aspirations.

Accusations against prominent Jews reinforced suspicions of Jewish disloyalty, as in the case of a scandal reported by the liberal newspaper *al-Akhbar* in January 1952. The recent resignation of a Jewish representative, Salman Shina, and a Sunni Muslim representative, Fa'iq Samura'i from the Iraqi Parliament had caused widespread speculation as to the cause. In an op-

¹⁰⁰ *Al-Umma*, October 1951.

¹⁰¹ *Al-Umma*, October 1951.

¹⁰² *Al-Umma*, October 1951.

¹⁰³ *Al-Umma*, October 1951.

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Umma*, October 1951.

ed piece, the unidentified author used the incident to publicize suspicion of the remaining Jewish community.¹⁰⁵ According to the article, Samura'i resigned in protest after his affiliate, the right-wing Istiqlal Party, having published warnings about the "Jewish Danger" in Iraq, faced opposition from what Samura'i called "sympathizers with the Jewish people (who were) pretending that the Jews were loyal." Samura'i also alleged that prior to these resignations, while he and Shina were both at a conference in Istanbul, he witnessed Iraqi Jews traveling from there to Israel then returning to Iraq. He also implicated Shina in these implied acts of espionage with vague claims that the Jewish representative was in his Istanbul hotel waiting for the arrival of a ship. Samura'i subsequently called for the government of Iraq to "place strict policies" on the Jews in Iraq, claiming it did not make sense for half of Iraq's Jews to be in Israel while others stayed behind "working" as he claimed, "on Israel's behalf."¹⁰⁶ The publication of such anti-Jewish language by a liberal paper not normally known for a sectarian agenda demonstrates how widespread assumptions of Jewish guilt had become in Iraq.

The accusations in the media kept Jews conceptually tied in Iraqi public discourse not only to Zionist endeavors in Palestine but to supposed Zionist threats against the security of Arab nations and emphasized the need for Arab cooperation against the Zionist threat. In April 1952, *al-Akhbar* published another piece, this time by one of its own journalists, after authorities in Egypt arrested one hundred members of a Zionist underground. Egypt's Jewish community had suffered hundreds of deaths from non-state attacks while the Monarchy, like that in Iraq, faced pressure to root out Zionist spies the country. As in Iraq, Zionist agents did operate in the country, but the state also arrested Jews indiscriminately in an effort to appear successful in its anti-espionage campaign. In Iraq, the author of the *Al-Akhbar* article on the Egyptian arrests credited the Egyptians' success in rooting out their own Zionist spies in part to Iraqi authorities, who not only provided a model for such anti-espionage operations but also shared intelligence about Egyptian Zionist operations they apparently gained in their investigations of the Zionist agents in Iraq. Blurring the distinction between Jews and Zionism, the journalist described Zionist operations in the Arab world as "the acts of hostility which the Jews have been doing in most Arab countries."¹⁰⁷ Laced with appeals for Arab unity, the journalist went on to posit an alarmist position that what

¹⁰⁵ *Al-Akhbar*, January 26, 1952.

¹⁰⁶ *Al-Akhbar*, January 26, 1952.

¹⁰⁷ *Al-akhbar*, April 24, 1952.

happened in Palestine could happen elsewhere in the Arab world.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the author argued that the alleged espionage threatened not only the Arab cause of recovering Palestine, but the independence of existing Arab states throughout the region such as Iraq.

The prominence of such hostile rhetoric led many Jews to avoid public engagement after 1951 but a few Jews continued to exercise a public voice in Iraq, allying with liberal Iraqis fighting for democratic reform and pluralistic national unity. A prominent example is Selim al-Bassoon. Born into a middle-class Baghdadi Jewish family, Bassoon began a journalism career in 1936 with the newspaper *Jaridat al-Shihab*. This newspaper was edited at the time by the prominent Iraqi politician Nuri al-Said who was between appointments as Prime Minister and active in promoting democracy at a time when Nazism and fascism were growing in popularity. During the 1940s Bassoon played prominent roles at several newspapers and political parties including the Democratic National Party and the National Union and the People's Party. By 1948 he served as chief editor for two newspapers, *Jaridat al-Raqib* and *Sahifat al-Istiqlal*, both of which reported on the rigged election that year and the *Wathba* protests against the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, resulting in his arrest and year-long exile to the border town of Badra. Bassoon returned to Iraq in the midst of the state's crackdown on Zionists and communists which resulted in the indiscriminate arrest of many Jews¹⁰⁹. Despite Bassoon's own repeated jail sentences, he chose to stay in Iraq in 1951 and became the chief editor of the liberal newspaper *al-Bilad*.

The plurality of political opinions found in Iraqi media under the monarchy allowed liberal democratic voices like that of Bassoon and his colleagues, but it also allowed more xenophobic nationalists to publicly malign their liberal rivals. Amidst the height of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the early 1950s, many right-wing parties, pundits, and politicians maligned their opponents on the left by claiming that the latter's associations with Jews rendered them untrustworthy. The author of the alarmist reports in *al-Akhbar* about Zionist threats to Arab countries mentioned above also leveled an accusation common among those in the nationalist right—that Arab traitors in their midst aligned with the Zionists against the Arab cause. At the height of the anti-spy frenzy, the right-wing Istiqlal party leveled these claims as a way of casting suspicion at their opposition, especially in the communist party and the liberal al-Ahali movement, who were known for being

¹⁰⁸ Al-akhbar, April 24, 1952.

¹⁰⁹ David Kheder Bassoon, email to author, November 23, 2017.

multi-sectarian and friendly to Iraqi Jews.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Fa'iq Samura'i's accusations that Salman Shina and other Jews were Israeli spies were accompanied by denunciations of "sympathizers with the Jewish people," and vague suggestions that some officials in the Istiqlal Party's opposition had accepted bribes from Jews. The susceptibility of liberal Iraqis to this suspicion is evident in the case of the owners of *al-Bilad* who, as late as 1954, faced accusations of support for Zionism because they employed Selim al-Bassoon, a Jew, as their chief editor. It mattered not that al-Bassoon promoted Iraqi patriotism over Zionism. His Jewishness proved sufficient evidence for *al-Bilad*'s detractors to pressure the paper's owners to fire al-Bassoon. While they did not dismiss him, he did have to work from home, thereafter, sending in articles under one of many pseudonyms to conceal his identity.¹¹¹

After 1951, few Jews exercised public voices in the Iraqi political sphere. The most prominent of those who did, Selim al-Bassoon, remained a prolific writer on Iraqi politics but in the end, his Jewish identity proved a liability for those who shared his political views. The persistence of suspicion as a dominant theme regarding Jews in public discourse did not go away, although in the years after the spy trials of 1952 reference to Jews and Zionism became less common as political discussions shifted their focus to issues other than the Arab-Israeli conflict.

2.5 Status of Jews and their Property

Accusations of espionage and terrorism by Jews certainly proved the most dramatic topics putting Iraqi Jews in the newspaper headlines, but other topics also generated public discussion of Iraq's remaining Jewish community. The government's efforts to deal with practical issues posed by the mass emigration such as the administration of assets of denationalized Jews and determining the status of Jews remaining in Iraq generated regular headlines in the Iraqi press. Despite the rather mundane nature of many of the reports, these articles show that Iraqi media deemed these consequences newsworthy and reported on them in a way that kept Iraq's remaining Jewish community in the national spotlight. They also show that the experience of the mass emigration did not end with the last flight out but continued as both the Jews of Iraq and the government sought to deal with its many practical and legal consequences.

¹¹⁰ Al-Akhbar, April 24, 1952.

¹¹¹ David Kheder Bassoon, email to author, November 23, 2017.

Administering the vast amount of confiscated Jewish properties proved a long and involved process on which Iraqi media reported regularly. In August 1951, the same month of the last flight of the airlift campaign, newspapers reported the appointment of a Judge named al-Tawbqajaly to administer the frozen assets, which included funds in banks, movable property, and immovable properties such as houses and business properties.¹¹² Most of these assets the committee sold at auctions for which newspapers ran ads into the mid-1950s. Many newspaper articles also covered issues related to Jewish assets left unaccounted for or successfully smuggled out of Iraq by Jewish émigrés. One opinion piece published in al-Akhbar in April of 1952 drew attention to the “large amounts of money” that Jews smuggled with them to Israel, arguing that if the Iraqi government had known the extent of the problem at the time they could have benefitted by changing the Iraqi currency.¹¹³ Indeed, some Jews had been smuggling funds through a Baghdad currency dealer to Beirut, where it was converted to Israeli currency and delivered to the emigres upon their arrival in Israel. According to British sources, the Beirut Bank received deposits totaling about eleven million Israeli pounds in March 1951 alone.¹¹⁴ While these funds, deposited in amounts ranging from fifty to fifty thousand Israeli pounds, constituted marginal amounts for many Jews who left far more assets behind, the issue of funds making their way to Israel was a contentious one as Iraq, like other Arab governments did not want to be seen as providing support to the Israeli state. This was ostensibly the reason given by the Iraq govt. for Law 12 which froze their assets in the first place—a point which the author labored in his piece, tying the issue of Iraqi money going to Israel to the issue of Palestinian’s lost assets and Israel’s other sources of money such as U.S. monetary support. The sensitivity to this issue in Iraq was abundantly clear to British diplomats and bankers who, in 1952 sought unsuccessfully to release the funds from the Bank of England of Iraqi Jews resettled in Israel. Despite their expressed desire to release the funds by re-designating them as Israeli instead of Iraqi, British diplomats and the British representative at the National Bank of Iraq confirmed that Iraq remained steadfast in its insistence that no assets covered under Law Number Twelve of 1951 be released. As one Foreign Office representative put it, “any question of a transfer in which there is even a remote possibility of the assets of a denationalized Jew being involved at once arouses their suspicions and is held up almost indefinitely.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² Al-Umma Aug 17 1951 and August 21.

¹¹³ Al-Akhbar April 11, 1952.

¹¹⁴ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 409.

¹¹⁵ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 13.

As the organized migration of Jews to Israel under Law Number One of 1950 ended, there was a great deal of uncertainty regarding the status not only of Jewish properties but also many of the Jews themselves. The government undertook considerable efforts to account for the status of Iraq's remaining Jews. This included efforts to determine whom, among those Jews who did not renounce their citizenship under Law Number One of 1950 remained in the country, thus retaining their citizenship status and the rights that went with them. A September article in *Al-Sha'b* reported that the government minister in charge of Jews' travel and citizenship Sayyid Muhammad abd al-Aziz started issuing new identification cards to Iraqi's remaining Jewish citizens clarifying their status since "some of them have faced problems."¹¹⁶ This vague reference presumably referred to questions about their status which they could face upon attempting any business with state agencies or even private enterprises due to suspicions that the old identity cards they held may have been invalid had they registered for emigration. According to the article, one hundred and fifty Jews who had signed up for emigration and denationalization remained in the country.¹¹⁷ While the article presented this measure as purely practical and meant to aid Iraq's remaining Jews, these special documents, which were distinctively yellow in color, caused some Jews to feel singled out. Today, references to these cards in popular Iraqi Jewish memory often point out the similarity the Nazi practice of issuing special ID cards for Jews.¹¹⁸ While it is unclear whether the state intended any such similarity, the effects it had on Jews psychologically reflect the precarious position in which Iraqi Jews found themselves in the wake of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The organized airlift campaign that carried most Iraqi Jews to Israel was accompanied by illegal Jewish emigration that the government struggled to control. In July 1951, as the airlift campaign drew to a close, *al-Umma* published a report that the Interior Ministry had presented to the cabinet a list of names of eighty-three Jews guilty of trying to leave Iraq by illegal means. The Interior Ministry recommended revoking their citizenship, a measure that the cabinet passed the following session according to a follow-up article on August 21.¹¹⁹ Like the surge of illegal immigration that preceded and induced the government's orchestration of the airlift campaign, the ongoing flight of Iraqi Jews illegally from the country had negative political implications since it was assumed that Jews retaining control of their assets would transfer their wealth to Israel.

¹¹⁶ *Al-Sha'b*, September 1952.

¹¹⁷ *Al-Sha'b*, September 1952.

¹¹⁸ Maurice Shohet, email to author, October 11, 2017.

¹¹⁹ *Al-Umma* August 25, 1951.

Over the course of 1952, the press gradually devoted less attention to issues related to Iraqi Jews. The fact that the attention devoted to Iraqi Jews in the press in general diminished at the same time that the press turned its attention away from the now completed trials and execution of the Zionists they accused of bombing Jewish sites the previous year suggests that the affair of the bombings played a role in maintaining public interest in the question of Iraqi Jews' contested loyalty. Such questions did not cease altogether, however. Occasional opinion pieces politicized the precarious position of Iraqi Jews by tying them to the sensitive issue of Palestinian refugees. One such column ran in the socialist affiliated daily *al-Sha'b*—a widely read periodical not typically known for xenophobic material—in September 1952 entitled “the migration of Jews and the issue of Arab refugees.”¹²⁰ A more polemic article ran in *Sawt al-Arab* under the title “do to the Jews what Israel did to the Arabs.”¹²¹ Such articles, however, did not explicitly reference the Jews remaining in Iraq, but rather constituted a pessimistic justification of the flight of Jews that had already occurred from Iraq and other Arab countries. They, nonetheless, continued to politicize the identity of Iraqi Jews, perpetuating a social and political climate that led some Iraqi Jews to limit their social engagement outside of the small Jewish community and prompted nearly all of them to withdraw entirely from Iraqi political life. Like the emptied Jewish neighborhoods of old Baghdad that now housed Palestinian refugees, these articles and the logic they promoted constituted a reminder of the de facto population exchange of Palestinian Arabs and Middle Eastern Jews following the creation of Israel. Like press coverage of Jewish assets and migrating Jews, they reminded Jews in Iraq of their precarious status within the Iraqi nation. In spite of the precariousness of their existence in Iraq during the early 1950s, Iraq's remaining Jews found ways to normalize their existence, especially as public attention shifted away from them over the course of the decade.

2.6 Communal and Social Life after the Mass Emigration

If we trust the death rates in the community records, then the Jewish population in Iraq stabilized by 1955, meaning that Jewish emigration had virtually ceased by that time. Some of the reasons for this have already been mentioned. Public hostility abated after 1952 as Iraqis and the press focused their attention elsewhere. Jewish testimonies about the last years of the Iraqi

¹²⁰ *Al-Sha'b*, September 20, 1952.

¹²¹ *Sawt al-Arab*, September 30, 1952.

monarchy describe a climate in which they could carry on with their daily lives relatively free of the fear that characterized the years 1948 through 1952. While Jews between 1952 and 1958 occasionally experienced hostility from anti-Jewish Iraqis and, as a result, some limited their social interactions, many Jewish families had close relationships with Sunni, Shia, and Christian employees, business partners, and neighbors. It was in this context that they established their new sense of normalcy, new patterns of work, family, and public life emerged which played a role in helping Iraqi Jews feel at home again in their surroundings. This new sense of normalcy, however, rested on daily lives altered in significant ways from the lives previously lived by Baghdadi Jews.

A significant difference in this new communal and social life was the demographic makeup of the new Jewish community after the mass emigration. The absence of the Kurdish Jewish community in Iraq and of the poor Jews who populated the old city left the new community more upper class, Arab, and cosmopolitan in its makeup. Ironically, these radical demographic shifts between the Baghdadi Jewish community before and after operation Ezra and Nehemiah were not particularly noticeable to remaining Jews in 1951. Even before the mass emigration, Baghdadi Jews seldom, if ever, encountered the Kurdish Jews of the north. Likewise, the remaining Jews from Baghdad's new middle and upper-class neighborhoods had scarcely interacted with the poor Jews that inhabited the quarters of the old city except when hiring them as household servants and even more rarely did they encounter the neighborhoods in which poor Jews lived.

In his memoir, *Baghdad, Yesterday*, Sasson Somekh recalls his own family's maid, Aziza, a poor Jewish woman who worked in their home and occasionally relayed to them the living conditions in her neighborhood of Tatan in the old city, prompting his mother to send her home with bags of used clothes to distribute there.¹²² In Tatan, Aziza told them, girls rarely attended school and even boys usually completed only a few years of religious and Hebrew instruction but rarely continued on to secondary school. On the one occasion that Somekh got to glimpse the muddy and cramped alleyways of Tatan it seemed to him a foreign world, as it must have for most of the middle and upper-class Jews, despite the fact that their frequent forays to the businesses and cafés on Rashid street regularly put them within a few short blocks of the old city Jewish quarters. Many of the Jews who frequented cafes along Rashid Street or worked at one of its remaining Jewish businesses were as oblivious to the absence of poor Jews as Sassoon Somekh was of their presence. When a Jewish colleague of Somekh's from a poor Baghdadi family reproached him for

¹²² Sasson Somekh, *Baghdad, Yesterday*, 94, 97.

his omission of poor Jews' experiences in his memoir on Baghdad Jewry—a common omission among memoirs and histories of Iraqi Jews, which are primarily written by members of prominent Baghdadi families—Somekh had to do research to find information on lower class Baghdadi Jews. Published personal accounts of Baghdad's poor Jews before 1951 remain nearly non-existent and existing memoirs of affluent Jews don't describe what life in Baghdad was like for poor Jews.

The absence of poor Jews in Baghdad did not go entirely unnoticed by those affluent Jewish families that remained as it affected many of those families in an unexpected way. As a consequence of their absence, affluent Jewish families that had previously hired poor Jews as maids, drivers, and gardeners now hired lower class Baghdadis from outside the Jewish community to fill these roles. This meant that while, on the one hand, the shrinking of the community led remaining Jews to draw smaller, more closely knit social circles, they, at the same time, invited non-Jews into their homes and personal lives at a rate far more common than before 1951. Relationships between these Jewish families and their non-Jewish household servants often became quite close and many Jews that grew up in Baghdad during the 1950s and 1960s remember them with fondness. "He was like one of the family" recalled Ferial Balass of the Shia Muslim driver her family hired when she was a child. "We grew up with him. My brother and him were like brothers. They went to movies together. We were with them all the time." Likewise, their live-in maids—all of them Christian—practically raised them, as Ferial recalls.¹²³

Another mode of Jewish interaction with non-Jewish Baghdadis was through business ownership. Although Jews, with a few exceptions, stayed out of government jobs and eschewed political activity after 1951, many Jewish men continued to run successful businesses together with Sunni or Shia Muslim business partners. Since a 1936 law requiring Jews in business to have a Muslim business partner remained in effect, these business partnerships, like before 1951, proved a common impetus for relationships between Jews and Muslims. Even though this law was not enforced, most Jewish businessmen continued the practice voluntarily. Having a Muslim business partner made life easier, especially since many Jewish-owned businesses dealt in overseas commerce and the state still denied Jews import licenses.¹²⁴ Iraqi administrators sometimes viewed Jews' contacts abroad as suspect, and therefore many Iraqi Jews like Fuad Sawdayee avoided

¹²³ Ferial Balass, interview by author, November 22, 2016.

¹²⁴ Sami Balass, interview by author, November 22, 2016.

practical problems by having the Muslim business partner's name on transactions with foreign firms.¹²⁵

These relationships proved varied and often complicated. Many Iraqi Jews recall with fondness their non-Jewish friends in the business community and such relationships no doubt reinforced many Jews' decisions to remain in Iraq and validated their hopes for a Jewish future there, especially as their situation stabilized. On the other hand, some Muslim entrepreneurs took advantage of the precarious position of Jewish businessmen. In 1951 Sami Kattan started a new overseas commerce firm with a Muslim colleague, but they closed the business the following year after his co-owner admitted that he had only agreed to the venture because he assumed that Kattan would leave Iraq and he would inherit all the business assets for himself. This experience did not discourage him, however, from forming business partnerships with other Muslims (and also Christians) in the following years that led to genuine friendships. "We used to go to cafes and we were very close until the end of the days" Kattan recalled of his Second Muslim business partner, "he had friends and I had friends it became a big clique and it didn't matter if we were Jews or non-Jews, but we would not talk about Israel. Israel is the forbidden subject."¹²⁶ These friendships brought practical benefits for Kattan, whose friends served as effective character references when he applied for import licenses. Kattan's mention that the subject of Israel was not mentioned between Jewish and non-Jewish Iraqi friends is a common refrain of many Iraqi Jews. Whether Sunni, Shia, or Christian, Jews found that non-Jewish Iraqis shared equally negative views of Israel and, when, hoping to maintain a friendship, both parties understood that the subject of Israel was simply to be avoided.

While Jewish businessmen and families adapted to the new realities that shaped their work, their home lives, and the ways that they interacted with their increasingly non-Jewish neighbors, a new communal leadership was forming that would administer remaining Jewish properties and religious activities. Since the Ottoman period, the Jewish community was led by a Chief Rabbi who also served as the president of the community, a lay council, a religious court, and a separate committee to administer Jewish schools.¹²⁷ Most of the members of these committees had left by the summer of 1951, as had Heskell Shemtob, who had replaced Rabbi Khedouri as president

¹²⁵ Max Sawdayee, *All Waiting to be Hanged: Iraq Post-Six-Day War Diary* (Tel Aviv: Levanda Press, 1974).

¹²⁶ Sami Kattan, discussion with author, September 19, 2016.

¹²⁷ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 76.

following the scandal in October 1949. It wasn't until 1953 that the Iraqi government reinstated Rabbi Khedouri to the role of Community President.¹²⁸ By this time, many of the religious committees had been dissolved, all of their members having emigrated. Rabbi Khedouri attempted to reconstitute some of these committees such as the funeral committee but found it an uphill battle. In a book published defending the Chief Rabbi's legacy, his son Sha'ul lamented the lack of help his father received in his service to the community, claiming that members of the Jewish community proved too busy with their own lives to help the Chief Rabbi with his many responsibilities after 1953. He gave the example of one Jewish man who complained bitterly about being assigned to the funeral committee because of the work involved. Other committees, such as the Torah school committee never existed after the mass emigration, leaving the Chief Rabbi himself to offer Torah instruction in his house two evenings a week. The chief Rabbi also had to directly oversee the operation of the funeral house and the slaughter of kosher animals, roles which he had designated to others a few years prior.¹²⁹

With minimal staff and lay support, the Chief Rabbi also endeavored to negotiate for the return of most of the Jewish communal held properties in Baghdad.¹³⁰ The lay committee then worked with the Chief Rabbi managing the community's remaining properties and handling the liquidation of some of the community's assets. In July 1954 they placed an ad in *al-Zaman* publicizing an auction to sell the furnishings of the Meir Elias hospital after the government nationalized it.¹³¹ Correspondence between the Chief Rabbi's office and government ministers also speak to the large portion of the Rabbi's time that he dedicated to managing communal properties which now lied vacant and, in many cases, falling into disrepair.¹³² Through the remainder of the 1950s, his office also expended a great deal of its administrative energies in correspondence with government officials trying to account for Jews whose citizenship status remained in question and determine the fate of their properties. This correspondence shows Rabbi Khedouri's diligence in answering the ministry requests for information, indicating that the Chief

¹²⁸ Sha'ul Sassoon, *Qa'id wa mujtama'ik: sirat Hakham Bashi Sassoon Khedouri al-marhoom*, Jerusalem: Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq, 1999, 139.

¹²⁹ Sassoon, *Qa'id wa mujtama'ik* 190-199.

¹³⁰ Sassoon, *Qa'id wa mujtama'ik* 190-199.

¹³¹ *Al-Zaman*, July 28, 1954.

¹³² "Iraqi Jewish Archive."

Rabbi continued to pursue the favor of a government as the community's best hope for a tenable future in Iraq.¹³³

Few Synagogues and other Jewish spaces remained in operation. As a result, after 1951, the Jewish community became more centralized as the vast reduction in public Jewish spaces led most Jews to attend the same communal institutions. The opening of the new Frank Iny Secondary School in 1950 aided this centralization of Jewish life. Since its founding in 1941, the school was held in a house in Baghdad. Its benefactor, Frank Iny, was a wealthy Iraqi Jew living in Britain who oversaw the schools administration, including the construction of a new facility in 1949 with classroom space for hundreds of students including state-of-the-art laboratories, a large auditorium, and an expansive courtyard with gardens.¹³⁴ Soon after, the Menachim Daniel primary school moved into the Frank Iny building, combining Kindergarten through twelfth-grade education for all Iraqi Jewish youth in one facility. It surpassed the best public schools in Iraq at the time and served as a hub for Jewish communal life. The site of virtually every Jewish wedding, Bar mitzfeh, and holiday festival, it became a definitive physical space where every Iraqi Jew gathered.

The opening of the new Frank Iny School came at an opportune time, providing a new common gathering space for school students and adults alike. This common space provided a sense of security and community for Jews adapting to a new sense of normalcy. The importance of Frank Iny as a communal space is clear in Saeed Herdoon's reflections. His recollection that he felt as if he had witnessed the end of the world was made not only in reference to the emptying of his Jewish neighborhood but even more so, the sudden emptiness of his previous school. When he returned from winter break in 1951 only he and one other student remained from his class, prompting his teacher to cancel school for the rest of the year.¹³⁵ Just as this dramatic loss of his classmates constituted for Herdoon the "end of the world," so he associates his recollection of life getting "back to normal again for the Jews" with his enrollment in the new Frank Iny school the following term. "After Ezra and Nehemiah," he recalled, "only one Jewish School remained in existence, the Frank Iny School. My parents enrolled me there and it was full. Life got back to normal."¹³⁶

¹³³ "Iraqi Jewish Archive."

¹³⁴ "Iraqi Jews who left Baghdad during the 1960's and 1970's," accessed November 1, 2015, <http://iraqijews.awardspace.com/>.

¹³⁵ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155.

¹³⁶ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155.

The renewed public communal life and relief from many of the restrictions during the late forties bolstered the hopes many Jews held for an ongoing Jewish communal presence in Iraq. On the other hand, many influential Jews remained skeptical of the Jews' future in Iraq after the experiences of the late 1940s. One such leader was Abdullah Obadiah, the headmaster of the Frank Iny School beginning in 1951. Having graduated at the top of his class from an Iraqi government school in the 1930s and obtained a mathematics degree from the American University in Beirut, he had returned to Iraq to fulfill the obligations of his prestigious government scholarship. Although he had aspirations of resettling abroad and working as an engineer, he stayed active in Iraq's education systems. Obadiah held teaching roles at several colleges at Baghdad University, which graduated many of the country's future leaders and he even co-authored the mathematics textbooks used in Iraqi schools throughout the 1940s and 1950s.¹³⁷

Abdullah Obadiah is, in many ways, representative of other Iraqi Jews of his generation living in Baghdad after 1951. He aspired, as a youth, to live and work abroad but ultimately settled on the opportunities offered at home—and with much success.¹³⁸ Like many Iraqi Jews, Obadiah shared an affinity for Israel, but he only briefly considered leaving Iraq in 1950.¹³⁹ Despite his own decision to stay and the improving conditions for Jews, Obadiah sought to prepare his own children for a future outside of Iraq, teaching them French and English and even giving them western style names like Albert, Linda, and Violette.¹⁴⁰ This adoption of western languages and names among Baghdadi Jews actually dated back to the late-nineteenth century when the establishment of Alliance schools inspired many among its middle and upper classes to adorn the trappings of western life including clothing styles. Initially, this practice exemplified both the Jewish community's personal ties with the western world and an admiration for a culture that they hoped would characterize the Baghdad of the future. Baghdadi Jews living in the city after 1951 tended to view western languages as an important preparation for life outside of Iraq, an eventuality that some desired but for which all prepared.¹⁴¹ Through Obadia's leadership of the Frank Iny School he made it his personal mission to do the same for his son's generation of Iraqi Jews.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 214.

¹³⁸ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 214.

¹³⁹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 213.

¹⁴⁰ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 216.

¹⁴¹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 216.

¹⁴² Meer Basri, "My Honorary Work for the Jewish Community in Iraq," in *The Scribe*.
<http://www.dangoor.com/72page27.html/>.

These new modes of communal association helped Jews cope with the uncertainties they faced in the 1950s. While the uncertainties left by the mass emigration and the persecution which precipitated it remained with Iraqi Jews thereafter, their lives in Iraq through the end of the monarchy in July 1958 largely undisturbed by persecution. This does not mean that they met no hostility. Most Iraqi Jews from this period have at least one story about ways they encountered verbal or physical abuse by an Iraqi who singled them out. Nora Basri was a young girl when a boy stopped her in the street and punched her in the chest, shouting “Jew!”¹⁴³ Another Jewish youth remembers when he was struck in the head with a board that had a nail in it and needed stitches.¹⁴⁴ Occasionally, small groups of youth loitered outside of a club frequented by Jews and harass them as they entered. Incidents like these, while disturbing, were counteracted by the countless positive relationships that Jews had with non-Jewish neighbors, coworkers, schoolmates, and friends.

Through the end of the monarchy in 1958 their worst fears never came to fruition—the fear that events in Israel/Palestine would set off another campaign of widespread state and popular persecution. Even when the Suez Crisis in 1956 renewed Iraqi public attention on the issue of Palestine and opposition to the Israeli state, public rhetoric did not impact the lives of Iraqi Jews as dramatically as it had in the wake of the mass emigration. Whereas Iraqi Jews remember the partition of Palestine and subsequent Arab Israeli War as a major rupture which disrupted their daily existence in Iraq and brought an end to the Jewish community as they had known it, the Suez war is not remembered in the same way and any incidents of hostility toward Iraqi Jews concurrent with it are largely remembered as merely instances of random hostility in the otherwise normalized daily existence that defined their lives until the end of the monarchy.

2.7 Conclusions

The Jewish community that remained in Iraq following the mass emigration forged patterns of communal and social activity that adapted their daily lives to the rapid changes brought upon them and their country. The legal and demographic changes experienced by the Iraqi Jewish community between 1948 and 1951 led Iraq’s remaining Jews to reconstruct their social lives in ways that accounted for new limitations and opportunities they faced. Whereas the State’s role in

¹⁴³ Nora Iny, interview by author, September 19, 2016.

¹⁴⁴ Oliver Iny, interview by author, September 20, 2016.

persecution and especially its execution of one of its most prominent and well-connected businessmen in 1948 led to the mass flight of Jews from Iraq, the normalization of the Iraqi state's policies toward its Jews brought cautious optimism about the future. After 1951, the Jewish community that remained in Iraq, although largely withdrawn from the Iraqi nation-building project, nonetheless maintained hopes for a vibrant Jewish communal life in Baghdad as part of Iraq's future, although they prepared themselves for life outside the country should the need present itself.

Their hopes for a vibrant future were not disappointed, as even after 1951, Iraqi state and society could and did make space for a vibrant Jewish communal presence in Iraq. They lived lives marked by both uncertainty and hope, by a smaller and more close-knit communal presence, and by varying but often positive relations with their Muslim and Christian neighbors with whom they interacted on a scale far greater than before 1950. By the mid-1950s, the Baghdadi Jewish community was fully adapted to this new sense of what was normal, and it was on these terms that they encountered the uncertainty of the 1958 revolution, which brought the unpopular monarchy to a final and violent end.

CHAPTER 3. JEWISH REVIVAL IN THE REVOLUTIONARY DECADE, 1958-1968

3.1 Introduction

“I remember we had songs we used to sing in school, and we loved (President Qassem) ... I think I was brainwashed as a little kid, but even the adults loved him. This was a good era for everybody, and especially for the Jews, because I don't think we were afraid of anything.”
-Nora Iny, Iraqi Jew

On the morning of July 14, 1958, Baghdadis awoke to the sound of artillery fire as Army units descended on the capital to overthrow the Monarchy. “It was something shocking, that I wouldn't really forget,” recalled Linda Menuhin fifty-seven years later as she described the scene while sitting in her home outside of Jerusalem. Menuhin grew up in a large house in the formerly Jewish neighborhood of Betaween, the daughter of a lawyer who, with the rise of anti-Zionist fervor and anti-Jewish discrimination since the late 1940s, failed to procure clients and took on work as a clerk. Her family rented the house from the government, who had seized it from her grandparents upon their emigration in 1951. Despite being eight years old at the time of the revolution, Menuhin's memories are vivid: “I was playing outside in the veranda, and my mother was calling me to come back home. We saw tanks on the street.” she motions with her hand as if the tanks rolled outside her front window while she spoke. “(My mother) tried to explain it to me, so she said that...the king was kicked out from his chair. I told her ‘what's the big deal? He can go back and sit down.’”¹⁴⁵ Menuhin's smile turned to laughter as she recalled her childhood attempts to perceive the political events unfolding around her.

The events of that morning, however, proved no laughing matter. Shortly after occupying the royal palace, the troops of Abd al-Salaam Arif's twentieth brigade gunned down the entire royal family. The Iraqi Monarchy had reached a violent end. The violence of the Revolution did not end with the royal family. Although the leader who rose to power after the Revolution, General abd al-Kareem Qassem initially formed a democratic government inclusive of opposition, the five-year rule under Qassem grew increasingly authoritarian, claiming the lives of many among his opposition.¹⁴⁶ The trend toward instability and political violence continued until 1968 as a series

¹⁴⁵ Linda Menuhin, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 86.

of coups and political intrigues destabilized Iraqi politics. Thus, Iraqi historical scholarship characterizes this period primarily as one of political failure.¹⁴⁷ From the perspective of the Jewish community, however, this period looks very different. In this chapter, I will show that although violent political transitions plagued Iraq during the decade from 1958 to 1968, some of those transitions brought positive transformations in Iraqi Jewish life—even reversals in some of the processes of ostracization they experienced a decade earlier. In fact, far from bringing persecution, some of the state’s moves toward authoritarian rule under its first president brought enforcement of pluralistic notions of the Iraqi nation and protection of many rights for Jews. Subsequent regimes rolled back some of these freedoms, reinstituting some of the previous restrictions on travel and business, but did not target Jews for persecution as in the anti-Zionist and anti-Democratic campaigns of 1949-1951. While the sense of insecurity left by the events of 1947-1951 persisted among Jews in Iraq to a degree, the positive developments during the so-called “Revolutionary Decade” in Iraq show that Jews cannot be considered a pariah community within Iraq, as some have claimed, and that forces within the country that advocated for Jews’ equality persisted and even, at times, shaped Iraqi policy and culture.¹⁴⁸ When, in 1967, renewed conflict once again brought anti-Zionism and anti-Jewish hostilities to the fore of Iraqi political culture, the political leadership in Iraq at the time shaped the ways that the Arab defeat effected Iraqi Jews and, more broadly, Iraqi society.

3.2 Uncertainty in the Wake of Revolution

In the immediate aftermath of the monarchy’s overthrow it remained unclear what new political structure would emerge to replace it or how new policies would affect Iraqi Jews. Few Iraqis outside of those tied to the government’s networks of patronage mourned the passing of the old regime. By the 1950s, the regime led by the monarchy and longtime politician Nuri al-Said had alienated most Iraqis outside of the largely Sunni urban elites and landholding notables who benefitted from its policies. Opposition to the monarchy was widespread among the urban poor and middle classes as well as sizeable opposition from upper class urbanites. Meanwhile, Iraq’s Shia had suffered continued underrepresentation under the Monarchy. The Kurds in northern Iraq, ever seeking greater autonomy, saw in the revolution an opportunity to press their demands. In

¹⁴⁷ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*.

¹⁴⁸ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

Baghdad, news of the successful coup brought celebrations in the streets. Jews, who largely excluded themselves from public politics since the mass emigration, no longer participated in street demonstrations as they had during the 1948 *Wathba* uprising. Instead, they quietly waited to see what the outcome of the revolution would be, especially regarding the state's attitude toward minorities and Jews in particular.

The first pronouncements of General Abd al-Salaam Arif upon seizing the radio broadcasting station in Baghdad promised freedom and elections but by the time his co-conspirator General Abd al-Kareem al-Qassem had joined him in the capital around noon, Arif had broadcast ambiguous calls for Iraqis to seek the elimination of traitors.¹⁴⁹ Arif's announcement prompted street mobs to attack the British embassy and symbols of the western imperialism throughout the capital. The mobs also dragged the body of the crown prince through the streets and hanged it outside the ministry of defense. Some Jews feared that the mobs would target them as agents of British imperialism as they had in the Farhud of 1941. Maurice Shohet—eight years old at the time living in the affluent Karrada district of Baghdad—recalls the discussions between his parents about the threat of mob violence. Fifty-eight years after the revolution, he distinctly remembers watching smoke rise over the city from burning oil refineries while his family discussed rumors circulating in Muslim neighborhoods nearby that Jews had set the fires. “I heard my family talking at home that rumors already started that Jews were behind that.” He remembered. “Within a small period of time apparently there was an attempt to have a lynching against Jews in certain areas where it was close to the fire, but the army and the security immediately took over and prevented any harm to the Jews.”¹⁵⁰ Despite these rumored attempts to organize mob attacks, the only violence the mobs perpetrated targeted members of the old regime and foreign nationals. Mobs targeted several Jordanian ministers and American businessmen staying at the Baghdad hotel, likely because of popular perceptions that Arab monarchies and western governments conspired against the interests of Iraqis and the citizenries of other Arab countries.¹⁵¹ Street mobs also dragged the disinterred corpse of Prime Minister Nuri al-Said through the streets. Widely seen as a corrupt official and imperial lackey, Said had tried to escape Iraq dressed as a woman in an *'abaya*,

¹⁴⁹ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 85.

¹⁵⁰ Maurice Shohet, interview by author, September 11, 2016.

¹⁵¹ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 85.

the traditional black gown worn by some women which covered all but the face but was caught and immediately executed by police.

While few Iraqis approved of the violence, a majority celebrated the destruction of the Monarchal system viewed by many as a lackey of British imperialism. The revolution proved extremely popular, as many Iraqi Jews recall. Linda Menuhin remembers visiting the house of a Muslim neighbor who proudly produced a scrap of black cloth which she alleged was a piece of the *'abaya* worn by Nuri Said during his attempted escape. “She showed me with great confidence, ‘ha! Look at this.’” Linda recalled her neighbor holding up the piece of black cloth for her to see, stating “For her you know, it was an achievement. I think what people felt at the time, it was like these are poor people who got their revenge... Obviously, there was the elite who had more advantages than others, so for them it was like a victory.”¹⁵² Such sentiments reflected the widespread hatred for the old regime and high hopes for a new, independent and egalitarian Iraq.

Jewish responses to the overthrow of the monarchy included reticence about what the future held for them. Jews with close ties to the monarchy and the political elite quickly left after the revolution, along with many non-Jewish Iraqis likewise tied to the former elite. Some prominent Jewish families had supported the monarchy and socialized within its circle of clients. Most of them fled Iraq shortly after the coup. This included a few prominent Jewish families, which, although withdrawn from the country’s politics after 1951, still occupied prestigious social circles. Lisette Shashoua’s family was among the richest Baghdadi Jewish families in Iraq. Her grandfather’s mansion had served as a temporary residence for the royal family during construction of the royal palace in the 1920s and to this day, “Qasr Shashoua” (the palace of Shashoua) serves as shorthand in Iraqi slang to describe any opulent dwelling. As a child, she accompanied her parents to the horse races in a box seat adjacent to the royal family. She was nine years old at the time of the revolution. Speaking with the author on the phone from her home in Montreal, Shashoua recalled the flight of Iraq’s elite families after the revolution. “A lot of my friends left after that,” she bemoaned, “most of the families that my parents associated with.” Her own family stayed behind to liquidate some of their vast real-estate holdings but ended up remaining into the 1970s, a living relic of Baghdad’s once prominent elite Jewish class.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Linda Menuhin, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

¹⁵³ Lisette Shashoua, discussion with author, February 12, 2018.

As a result of these departures, few Jews from the royal family's social circles or networks of patronage remained. However, because the Jewish community had previously relied on the state for protection and many remaining Jews still held considerable business interests in Baghdad and Basra, they were invested enough in the status quo to look to the future under a new regime with caution. They shared this sentiment with at least some of their well-established non-Jewish colleagues in the capital. "That was the feeling," Linda Menuhin recalled. "You could see people, the poor in euphoria. But the well-established of course, were very much concerned."¹⁵⁴ Iraq's Jews had additional reasons for concern. For them, the question loomed as to what attitude the new government would take toward the Jews with the old regime now gone. On the one hand, the government of the monarch and the influential Prime Minister Nuri al-Said had itself betrayed the trust placed in it by Jewish leadership when they indiscriminately targeted Jews in their anti-Communist and anti-Zionist campaigns of 1949-1951. The execution of Shafiq Ades, in particular, had increased feelings of vulnerability among Jews given his prominent social status and personal connections with the royal family. On the other hand, during the last five years of the monarchy, Jews lived in relative peace. Although they remained largely withdrawn from public and political life, they had managed to prosper and maintain cautious hopes for the future. The end of the monarchy brought their future into question.

3.3 Jewish Freedoms in Qassim's Iraq

In the weeks and months following the July 14 coup, uncertainty gave way to optimism, as Jews witnessed favorable shifts in legislation and policies that bode well for their livelihoods and freedoms. These changes resulted from a regime that, despite its ultimate failure to uphold democratic governance, succeeded in promoting pluralistic social policies and practices that promoted and even enforced social inclusion of Iraq's ethnic and religious groups. These favorable policies that emerged under the first revolutionary government reflected the political persuasion of the man who ultimately claimed leadership over it, Abd al-Kareem Qassem. Qassem was an Army officer from a poor family of mixed Sunni-Shia parentage whose career as an Army officer brought him into contact with a diverse mix of Iraqis. Upon assuming the Prime-Ministership in 1958, he made a point of establishing positive relations with Jewish community leaders, even

¹⁵⁴ Linda Menuhin, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

attending graduation ceremonies and other Jewish community events at the Menachem Daniel Sports Club where he was famously photographed shaking hands with Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedouri, the community's only remaining Rabbi. The positive connections that Qassem fostered with the Jewish community reflected his broader attitude toward Iraq's ethno-religious groups and consistent with a political



Figure 4: Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedouri with President Qassem

program that defined his tenure. His political leanings mirrored the left's multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic principals—principals which many Jews had taken part in promoting before 1950 through their widespread participation in the communist party and the liberal al-Ahali movement.¹⁵⁵ Such widespread Jewish participation in Iraqi public political discourse never revived, as most remaining Jews eschewed public political life even under Qassem. There were a few notable exceptions to this paucity of Jewish public engagement. Selim al-Bassoon, active in journalism since the early 1940s, served as editor for the liberal newspaper *al-Bilad* from 1954 and, after 1958, published many articles in support of the Qassem government and its program of multi-ethnic Iraqi nationalism. Likewise, Anwar Shau'l and Mier Basri, continued writing pieces about Iraqi culture and politics regularly published in progressive journals and newspapers. They did so in the context of Qassem's political protection of Jews and his promotion of the liberal ideologies which nationalist Jewish writers had long used to assert their political, social, and cultural identification with the Iraqi nation.

The new legal frameworks that set forth the agenda of the new republic reflected Qassem's pluralist notions of the Iraqi nation. The interim constitution announced on July 27, 1958 abolished all special regulations regarding minorities. Thus, it showed the revolutionary government's desire for a clean break with the past including a new emphasis on "the rights and duties of all citizens." The text of the constitution explicitly addressed the question of who constituted an Iraqi citizen. While it named Islam as the official religion of Iraq (making no distinction between Sunni or Shia),

¹⁵⁵ Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 45.

it also stated that “Citizens are equal before the law in their public rights and obligations and there shall be no distinction between them by reasons of race, origin, language, religion or belief.”¹⁵⁶ Such pluralistic language indeed implied a break with the past and was not empty rhetoric. In the months and years that followed Jews found that a number of policies changed in their favor.

The most immediate policy changes Jews noticed had to do with their travels or interactions abroad. After the revolution, Jews recall, the state granted many Jewish merchants import licenses for the first time in a decade. This required no legislative change, as their inability to attain licenses before did not result from legal barriers but rather from the simple refusal of the ministry of trade to grant most import licenses applied for by Jews—either as a result of unofficial directives from the previous government or its allowance of discriminatory practices initiated at lower levels. Jews also found they could travel more easily and at less risk than before and more Iraqi Jews began taking regular trips abroad either for business purposes or to visit relatives in Europe.¹⁵⁷

The regime change in 1958 also brought widespread improved treatment of Jews by state officials with whom they interacted directly. Many Jews recall an abatement of the harassment that had previously typified their interactions with civil servants. Here also, the discrimination that had previously characterized many Jewish interactions with Iraqi civil servants often centered on Jewish travels or interactions abroad. One Jewish woman described, decades later, the indignities her family suffered upon attempting to board a flight in Baghdad in 1953, recalling, “My brother was in diapers when we went to Europe. Before we boarded the plane at the Baghdad airport, the officers undid his diaper to check whether my mother had hidden money or jewelry inside—just because we were Jews. Whenever we went abroad, they used to take my coat off and search the hems and the hems of my dresses for valuables too. Qassem, a socialist, abolished all these practices when he came into power.”¹⁵⁸ British sources confirm what Jewish testimonies say about the more favorable policies toward Jews under the Qassem government and also indicate that some of these changes occurred within the first year of the new regime. In May 1959, British Embassy staff in Baghdad claimed that Jews had been treated better in passport matters than at any time since 1948. This came in response to inquiries from the Home Office in London about the state of

¹⁵⁶ *Iraq Official Gazette*. August 13, 1958; Simha Horesh, “The Jews of Iraq Between 1920 and 1970, part 4” *The Scribe*, April 1988.

¹⁵⁷ Doris Zilkha, interview by author, September 20, 2016; Oliver Iny, interview by author, September 16, 2016; Maurice Shohet, interview by author, September 11, 2016; Linda Menuhin, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 197.

Jews in Iraq after an unspecified Jewish organization approached the ministry advocating for Iraqi Jewish students in Britain. These students were graduating and sought employment visas to remain in the UK, claiming that Jews in Iraq, because of their exclusion from military service, remained ineligible for employment in Iraq, leaving them destitute.¹⁵⁹ The British embassy in Baghdad openly questioned the validity of these claims, voicing suspicion that “somebody may be trying to exploit the situation in order to get permission for Iraqi Jewish students to stay in the U.K.”¹⁶⁰ Embassy staff clarified that, while absence of a certificate of military service prevented Jews from working in the largest firms, Jews who lost such jobs or under the monarchy had all acquired partnerships or employment in smaller firms or lived off of pensions.¹⁶¹ The embassy even claimed to have “reliable information” that fewer Jews than Muslims were required to give cash guarantees before leaving Iraq. It is possible that they heard such general statements from traditional community leaders such as the Chief Rabbi, who sometimes exaggerated positive claims for foreign audiences. However, the embassy also cited the testimony of an unnamed “prominent Jew” who claimed that a student in his family had renewed a passport without any of the difficulties mentioned—a claim consistent with oral history testimonies confirming the freedom of travel experienced by other Jews as well as the ability to find employment, thus discounting the claims of those Jewish students seeking extended residency in the U.K.¹⁶²

Qassem paired his pluralistic social outlook with his Iraq-first orientation that prioritized domestic reform and development over political unity with other Arab states. In particular, Qassem opposed submitting Iraq to the leadership of Gamal Abd al-Nasser of Egypt, the champion of Pan-Arabism who had united Egypt with Syria the previous year, forming the United Arab Republic (UAR). This brought Qassem in direct conflict with his partner in the coup Abd al-Salaam Arif. Arif, a conservative Muslim and a staunch Sunni, espoused Pan-Arab nationalism and union with Nasser’s UAR.¹⁶³ In the days following the July 14 Revolution Arif traveled throughout Iraq delivering speeches in which he repeatedly praised the Egyptian president for his leadership of the

¹⁵⁹ B. Destani, *Minorities in the Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries* (London: Archive Editions Limited, 2005), Vol. 173.

¹⁶⁰ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 179.

¹⁶¹ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 177.

¹⁶² Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 179.

¹⁶³ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 123.

Arab cause while scarcely mentioning Qassem, the new head of the Iraqi state, leading to an intense personal rivalry between the two.¹⁶⁴

The rivalry between Qassem and Arif reflected the broader contest over definitions of the Iraqi nation under the revolutionary government. The principle divide was between two opposing models of national identity which can be roughly categorized as “Iraqist” and “Pan-Arab.” In Arabic, Iraqis identified these competing notions with the terms *wataniyyah* and *qawmiyah*; the two Arabic variants of the English word “nationalism.” *Wataniyya* stemmed from the Arabic term “*watan*,” meaning homeland, and came to operate as a form of nationalism stressing identity based on shared territory and history over ethnic or religious identities. Proponents of *qawmiyah*, best translated as “ethnic nationalism,” treat the Arabic language, and the broader history and culture of the Arab world as the basis for national identity. Thus, scholars label it “Pan-Arabism or Pan-Arab nationalism” in English. Iraqis did not always consider notions of nationalism articulated as *qawmiyya* and *wataniyya* to be oppositional and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many Jewish intellectuals had actually joined Sunni, Shia, and Christian intellectuals in embracing Pan-Arab national identity and opposing imperial control within the broader Arab “*watan*.” By the mid-twentieth century, however, independence movements in the Arab mandates established after World War I led to starker divides between ideas of Arab nationalism versus the territorial nationalism of individual states. At the same time, the growing importance of the conflict over Palestine rendered Jews’ dual identities as Jewish and Arab problematic to Pan-Arab nationalism in Iraq as elsewhere in the Middle East.

Adherents of Pan-Arab nationalism in the mid-late twentieth century typically emphasized the artificiality of the political borders that divided the Arab world after World War One and espoused political unity among the Arab states. Proponents of Pan-Arab nationalism in Iraq also tended to take for granted the Sunni-Arab hegemony which had long characterized political power in a country with a Shia majority and a large Kurdish population in the north. In contrast, the proponents of *wataniyyah* promoted a national identity based on uniquely Iraqi geography, archeology, and history that tended to stress the political inclusion of those outside Iraq’s traditional Sunni-Arab elite.¹⁶⁵ It was this pluralistic social vision for Iraq that Qassem ultimately

¹⁶⁴ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 88.

¹⁶⁵ Orit Bashkin, “Hybrid Nationalisms: Watani and Qawmi visions in Iraq Under ‘Abd al-Kareem al-Qasim, 1958-61,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2011, Vol.43(2), pp.293-312.

succeeded in promoting and even enforcing during his tenure as President and which the Jewish community's remaining public intellectuals espoused in their journalistic and cultural publications.

Qassem's promotion of Iraqi political models brought widespread results during his rule, especially among state bureaucrats, who likely felt a degree of compulsion to act in accordance with the ruling regime's social agenda. The improvements that Jews remember experiencing in their interactions with police and other civil servants point to this success. This widespread compliance with Qassem's new policy directives resulted, in part, from the extensive re-staffing of government ministries after the revolution. The state newspaper *The Iraqi Gazette* announced leadership changes in eleven ministries during the summer of 1958 including the ministries of Justice, Education, and Social Affairs.¹⁶⁶ The regime also appointed new leadership to the chief of police and other government offices.¹⁶⁷ This re-staffing resulted in a more diverse cabinet of ministers including many Shias and Kurds. Filling the ranks with Iraqi patriots not only reduced the number of civil servants holding ethno-religious biases against Jews, but also sent a message to those remaining ministers who held more exclusivist nationalist tendencies. One case in point is the inclusion of Tahir Yahya, a veteran civil servant with a history of support for ethnically exclusivist notions of Iraqi nationalism, even serving in government under Rashid Ali during its brief tenure in 1941. Yahya and some others received posts as a reward for their role in the coup.¹⁶⁸ Widespread changes in treatment of Jews suggests that even state ministers and employees like Yahya not personally committed to Qassem's pluralistic notions of nationalism towed the Iraqi line articulated by the government's top leadership. The government re-staffing also served as a shake-up to bolster compliance with the head of state, including compliance with Qassem's pluralist policies.

The shift toward more equitable treatment of Iraq's Jews by civil servants did not progress evenly and some civil servants and bureaucrats continued to exercise discriminatory policies against Jews that contradicted the spirit of the new interim constitution. This was true of the committee created in 1951 to carry out measures against Jews outlined in Law Number Twelve of that year, which had not only seized the assets of all Jews that surrendered their citizenship under Law Number One of 1950, but also mandated the same loss of citizenship and assets for any Jews

¹⁶⁶ *Iraq Official Gazette*. August 13, 1958.

¹⁶⁷ *Iraq Official Gazette*. August 13, 1958.

¹⁶⁸ *Iraq Official Gazette*. August 13, 1958.

who escaped illegally during or after the airlift campaign.¹⁶⁹ As late as September 1959, this committee continued publishing lists of names of Iraqi Jews calling for them to report to the Directorate of Passports and Nationality within fifteen days to prove their presence in Iraq “otherwise legal procedures shall be imposed against them in accordance with Article B, Section Five of Law Number Twelve of 1951.”¹⁷⁰ These legal procedures included the revocation of citizenship and confiscation of assets. Such ongoing discriminatory activities reflect both the residual institutionalized discrimination of the previous government and also the looming anti-Jewish sentiments that persisted among some state offices despite the central government’s intent. On January 20, 1960 the legislature addressed the discriminatory measures by passing Law Number Eleven of 1960 which abolished the article in question.¹⁷¹ Thus, while discrimination of Jews persisted for a time in some policy arenas and among some Iraqi bureaucrats, the central government wielded the power of the legislature to reform such practices.

The legislature not only changed discriminatory laws but also used its state newspaper *The Iraqi Gazette*, as a venue for promoting the principles behind such changes. Along with the text of Law Number Eleven of 1960, the government published in the *Gazette*, an explanation for the reversal of the nine-year-old policy. “The Iraqi Jews living in Iraq have faced great difficulties due to the implementation of this article against them,” it stated, adding that its continued implementation “violates the objectives of the revolution and the interim constitution, which equally governs the rights and duties of Iraqis.”¹⁷² The remarks in the official newspaper indicate not only an effort to alleviate the burden placed on Jews by the old policy, but also an opportunity for the new regime to make the point that equality of its citizens regardless of their ethnic or sectarian identity was no mere rhetorical flourish. Since Jews constituted the ethno-religious group whose inclusion in the Iraqi nation was most seriously questioned and who had suffered the most serious discrimination in the last years of the previous regime, declaring their rights as priority under the revolution made a strong statement.

There was an unspoken significance to the revocation of *Article B* as well which would not have been lost on Iraqis who read the text of the law in the *Gazette* and which underscored the high priority given to protecting equal rights regardless of ethno-religious identity. The ostensible

¹⁶⁹ “Iraqi Jewish Archive,” 2778, pp. 46-56; *Iraq Official Gazette* March 27, 1951.

¹⁷⁰ *Al-Zaman*, September 24-25, 1960.

¹⁷¹ “Iraqi Jewish Archive,” 2778, pp. 42-45.

¹⁷² *Iraq Official Gazette*. January 20, 1960.

purpose of Law Number Twelve of 1951 had been to prevent Jews emigrating to Israel from maintaining Iraqi citizenship and, above all, to ensure that their wealth and assets did not make it to Israel and support the Zionist project there. In this way, the law had demonstrated the monarchy's due diligence in maintaining its opposition to the Jewish State by preventing material support from reaching Israel via Iraq's emigrating Jews. The provisions in Article B further demonstrated the monarchy's diligence in the matter by seizing assets of Jews who did not emigrate legally under Law Number One of 1950 but instead left Iraq clandestinely. However, as the above quotes from *The Gazette* suggest, these policies in the years after 1951 caused hardships for Iraqi Jews who faced demands to prove their citizenship status and that of their family-members who owned assets such as homes and automobiles on which Jews in Iraq relied. It was these hardships that the Iraqi legislature sought to alleviate by revoking *Article B* but doing so also inevitably allowed more Jewish assets from Iraq to make it to Israel.

The fact that this measure likely allowed an undetermined amount of wealth to find its way to Israel did not indicate a friendliness to Israel on the part of the revolutionary government. On the contrary, Qassem maintained a hardline stance toward the State of Israel. In fact, Iraq had been the only Arab country that did not sign a cease-fire with Israel and maintained a technical state of war in the years following 1948—a policy which Qassem showed no intention of reversing. Thus, insofar as *Article B* constituted a contradiction between the state's commitment to protecting its Jewish minority from discrimination and its opposition to Israel, Law Number Eleven of 1960 revoked *Article B*, clearly prioritizing its pluralistic principles over its opposition to Israel.

The hopes that Qassem's political rhetoric and personal Jewish friendships engendered among the Jews in Iraq after the revolution were realized in many ways. Under Qassem's leadership the state took concrete steps to roll back institutional discrimination against Jews enacted by the previous government between 1947 and 1951. This occurred even as Iraqi hopes for a more democratic system went unrealized. Over time, as Prime Minister Qassem suppressed political opposition, he also used his political hegemony to enforce equal rights for Iraqi Jews and elicit greater levels of compliance from Iraqi bureaucrats and civil servants with his pluralistic notions of Iraqi civil society. While only a few Jews took advantage of the opportunity to regain a public voice in Iraq, all Jews enjoyed greater freedom from institutional discrimination.

3.4 Jewish Inclusion in a Pluralist Society

The improved treatment of Iraq's Jews extended beyond government policy to the public sphere as Qassem's pluralistic Iraqist model of political community triumphed. This was due, in large part, to the concerted efforts of the Qassem administration to shape the Iraqi cultural sphere. As historian Eric Davis demonstrates, Prime-minister Qassem's government undertook the first such efforts by the Iraqi state through the formation of the Ministry of Guidance. This new administrative body developed and oversaw new state-directed cultural projects including radio and television networks and a Directorate of Folklore that promoted a pluralistic notion of Iraqi identity based on Iraq's pre-Islamic heritage and shared geographic interests. The unprecedented level of state sponsorship over cultural production allied the government with the intelligentsia and allowed Prime-minister Qassem to publicly promote his pluralistic, Iraqist nationalism over and above his Pan-Arab rivals in the revolution.¹⁷³

The effectiveness of the Ministry of Guidance was evident in the experience of Iraq's Jews under the Qassem administration. Saeed Herdoon had bitterly protested his family's decision to remain in Baghdad in 1951, but he no longer sought to leave Iraq or carried the same resentment of his parent's decision to stay under Qassem. He recalls a dramatic reversal in Muslim-Jewish relations, going so far as to claim that "the Muslims even began referring to the Jews as brothers," making no distinction, in his statement, between Sunni or Shia Muslims.¹⁷⁴ Herdoon was not alone in his characterization of popular attitudes toward Jews during the Qassem period. Many Iraqi Jews have referred to the period in retrospect as a golden age of the Iraqi Jewish community in which they enjoyed not only the protection of the state, but also warm relations with many in Iraqi society. This characterization of Iraqi Jewish life during the Qassem period may, on the one hand, be seen as a romanticized view formed by Iraqi Jews only in retrospect, comparing it to the less favorable periods that preceded and followed it. This more sober view is supported by Jews' acknowledgment that some Iraqi Muslims and Christians maintained hostile attitudes toward Jews throughout this period.¹⁷⁵ One Jewish woman, Doris Zilkha, who was a young girl during the Qassem era recalled "Our relationship with the general population was mixed and we would

¹⁷³ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 110-111.

¹⁷⁴ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155.

¹⁷⁵ Shashoua, email to author, April 3, 2018.

regularly have insults hurled at us when walking in the street.”¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, Zilkha also described the favorable relationships her family enjoyed with Christian and Muslims alike in their neighborhood of bab al-Sharqi and in the marketplace, where adults of various backgrounds looked out for her as she traveled to and from her father’s office each day, referring to her as “my sister,” according to custom. One such shop owner once took her to the hospital when she cut her arm on glass and her Muslim neighbor used to light the stove for her mother every Shabbat.¹⁷⁷ Like many Baghdad neighborhoods, Bab al-Sharqi, where Zilkha’s family lived, was mixed Sunni and Shia Muslim with Christian and Jewish residents as well and Zilkha, like other Jews, recall mostly positive relationships with the occasional expression of hostility, most often from strangers, but the sectarian background of non-Jewish Iraqis did not seem, to Iraqi Jews, to be a significant factor in determining their attitudes toward Jews. Overall, the transformations in Iraqi Jewish life under the Qassem presidency proved sufficiently favorable for Jews to look to the future with renewed hope as their social lives improved vastly.

Jews communal lives also flourished during the Qassem era. Following patterns of Jewish life set under the monarchy in the wake of the mass emigration, Jews enjoyed a communal life centered around the Frank Iny School, Menachem Daniel sports center, and, to a lesser degree, synagogues, while also participating in cosmopolitan Baghdad social venues such as café’s and social clubs. The Menachim Daniel sports center remained the locus of a vibrant communal life where Jews spent regular leisure time among Jewish friends and neighbors. Here, parents played games and socialized while young Jews mingled openly. Since dating fell outside of accepted social norms for Iraqis of any religion, Menachem Daniel provided an acceptable space for teenagers to meet under the community’s watchful eye to explore romantic interests.¹⁷⁸

The Frank Iny School provided the site for student’s daily socialization. While it constituted a clearly Jewish space, it was not exclusive. A number of Sunni and Shia Muslim students from wealthy families in business or government attended the Frank Iny School. The experience of one in particular, sheds light on the dynamics of the Frank Iny school as a communal space for the youth of the Jewish community. Hussain Alawy grew up in a Jewish neighborhood and attended the Jewish School System through the twelfth grade. His father, a Shia Muslim doctor,

¹⁷⁶ Doris Zilkha, email to author, June 5, 2019.

¹⁷⁷ Doris Zilkha, email to author, June 5, 2019.

¹⁷⁸ Linda Menuhin, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

sent most of his children to the Jesuit school in Baghdad but Hussain, because of his advanced English, qualified for enrollment in the Frank Iny and Shamash schools, which his father regarded as the highest quality schools available in the country. At a Frank Iny reunion held in Montreal in August 2017, Alawy spoke of his experience in an interview. “I was a part of the Jewish community,” he recalled, describing the close-knit communal life fostered by the school and the Jewish club. “My whole family, our friends were Jews. It didn’t matter that we were Muslim.”¹⁷⁹ A high school scrapbook still in Hussein’s possession contains dozens of well-wishing notes from his schoolmates—the contents of which reveal the depth of his social integration into the Jewish community. “For more than twelve years we’ve shared the same class,” wrote one classmate, “and as far as I can remember you were just as you are now today, always smiling and constantly making jokes and filling the air around you with your giggles and the giggles of your hearers.” References to Alawy’s humor and classroom antics fill the pages of his cherished notebook, which are also replete with references to inside jokes reflecting very close friendships indeed. Other notes suggest that he was as much a flirt as he was a class clown. One male classmate composed a one-line poem in Alawy’s honor, declaring that “If all the girls were on the sea; what a good swimmer Hossain would be!” A female classmate signed his book on the last day of school saying that she would “never forget such a nice, joking, and cheerful friend who used to make all our class happy with his lovely jokes.” A poem in the margin of her note read “Two in a car, two little kisses, two weeks later, Mr. and Mrs.” The intimacy shared between classmates of the Frank Iny school was evidenced by the ease with which students at the school reunion at Montreal fifty years later recalled each other’s classroom antics and personality quirks and Alawy’s social inclusion was equally apparent in his interactions with his long-lost schoolmates. To the outside observer, nothing would indicate that he was, in fact, the sole Muslim at the reunion.

The significance of the Frank Iny School as a communal space extended beyond school programs as it also provided a venue for family and community celebrations. As with the years before 1948, non-Jews frequently attended Jewish weddings, high school graduations, and other celebrations.¹⁸⁰ Many Jews did not limit themselves to nominally Jewish spaces, but also frequented mixed social venues such as cafes and social clubs. Many Jews held membership in secular Iraqi social clubs with mixed membership, increasing a trend that began after the

¹⁷⁹ Hussain Alawy, interview by author, 2017.

¹⁸⁰ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 213-223.

government appropriated most Jewish social clubs in 1951.¹⁸¹ Some Jews took their families to the popular al-Mansoor club, run by Christians, where Jewish children joined in receiving gifts from “Papa Noel” at Christmas time. The Acropolis Club was another popular destination where increasing numbers of Jewish families joined Muslim and Christian patrons in leisure activities during the Qassem era. Jews also began attending college alongside non-Jewish students as Iraq’s public universities, closed to Jews with few exceptions since 1947, began accepting Jewish applicants again.¹⁸² The grandson of the Chief Rabbi in Baghdad, enrolled in the engineering college of Baghdad during the Qassem revolution and graduated in 1962 with his degree in Civil Engineering.¹⁸³ With Iraqi universities open to them, fewer Jewish high school graduates traveled abroad for higher education, preferring to stay close to family and friends.

Jewish owned businesses flourished under Qassem. Although they continued to avoid political involvement, many Jewish businessmen remained friends with their Muslim and Christian colleagues in the government.¹⁸⁴ A few exceptional Jews remained more openly engaged in politics or government work. Ya’acob al-Kabir, the only Jew remaining in the government after 1951 continued to work in prominent positions in the Department of Justice.¹⁸⁵ A Jewish journalist named Selim al-Basson served as editor for several Iraqi newspapers during Qassem’s reign and wrote extensively in many Iraqi periodicals, using his platform to promote the Qassem government. Famed Iraqi Jewish author and journalist Anwar Sha’ul also continued writing during this time and, in June 1959, published a poem in *al-Zaman* praising Qassem, the “sole leader,” as his supporters routinely called him.¹⁸⁶

The community’s leadership performed much the same duties as they had under the monarchy. Chief Rabbi Khedouri, in addition to performing all the community’s religious rituals, also oversaw administration of the communally held properties and served as liaison between the state and the Jewish community in property matters. The Lay Council, despite its dissolution and refashioning as the “Administrative Committee for Iraqi Jews,” oversaw the management of synagogues, schools, properties, and religious and cultural endowments as it had under Ottoman

¹⁸¹ Linda Menuhin, interview by author, December 8, 2016; Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 213-223.

¹⁸² Al-Zaman, September 22, 1959; Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 177.

¹⁸³ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 177.

¹⁸⁴ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 182-91.

¹⁸⁵ Nadia Sasson, interview by author, December 6, 2016.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Zaman, June 1, 1959.

rule.¹⁸⁷ Under the Qassem government, it did so while enjoying much more favorable relations with the government. One issue brought the government into conflict with the community leadership during the five years of Qassem's presidency was his order that the Jews empty a cemetery in Baghdad to make way for a major development project. Despite the protest of Jewish leadership, the government project moved forward, giving Jews a matter of weeks to move thousands of graves—a task that ultimately fell to family members given its scope. Lisette Shashoua remembers the ashen face of her father after he returned home from exhuming his father's body.¹⁸⁸ In the end, time did not even allow for all the remains to be moved before the bulldozers moved in.¹⁸⁹ Despite the seriousness of this loss for the Jewish community, Qassem did not enforce the order to target the Jews, as Iraqi Jews themselves have recognized.¹⁹⁰ While mention of the ordeal is commonplace among Jews interviewed about this period, they consistently characterize it as an unfortunate exception to an otherwise positive period for Jews in Iraq in which Jews enjoyed more freedoms than any other time in the country's history. The reign of Qassem seemed a vindication of the hope held by many Jewish leaders and most notably Chief Rabbi Khedouri that enduring periods of hardship would pay off for Jews and they would enjoy renewed security and prosperity.

It is significant to note that despite the ease of travel and legal immigration during the Qassem era, most Jews stayed in Iraq. Here again the Jewish community's death records prove helpful and oral testimonies to this effect concur with what the data on Iraqi Jewish deaths reflects. From 1955, when the Jewish population in Iraq stabilized, until the late 1960s the number of deaths recorded annually fluctuated from year to year between eighteen and thirty-four with no perceptible trend upward or downward. With numbers this low, the differences from year to year can be interpreted as merely natural fluctuations in the number of deaths not reflecting changes in population and the absence of any perceptible trend up or down in the number of deaths from 1955 to 1968 can be read as an indication that the overall population during this time remained relatively constant. This further supports the testimony of surviving Jews that few Jews emigrated from the country during this period. Remaining Jews expressed their preference for the relatively

¹⁸⁷ Meer Basri, "My Honorary Work for the Jewish Community in Iraq," in *The Scribe*, <http://www.dangoor.com/72page27.html/>, accessed January 30, 2015.

¹⁸⁸ Lisette Shashoua, discussion with author, February 12, 2018.

¹⁸⁹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 178.

¹⁹⁰ Maurice Shohet, interview by author, September 11, 2016.

comfortable and secure life they enjoyed in Iraq compared to the difficulties faced by many Iraqi Jewish immigrants in Israel, Europe, and elsewhere.¹⁹¹ Even the Shashoua family, despite their ability, under Qassem, to liquidate their assets, remained in Iraq through the Qassem period. The Qassem government's positive impact on Iraqi Jewish life in Baghdad and the popularity of the Prime Minister, himself, among Jews, is an often-forgotten aspect of the regime's legacy.

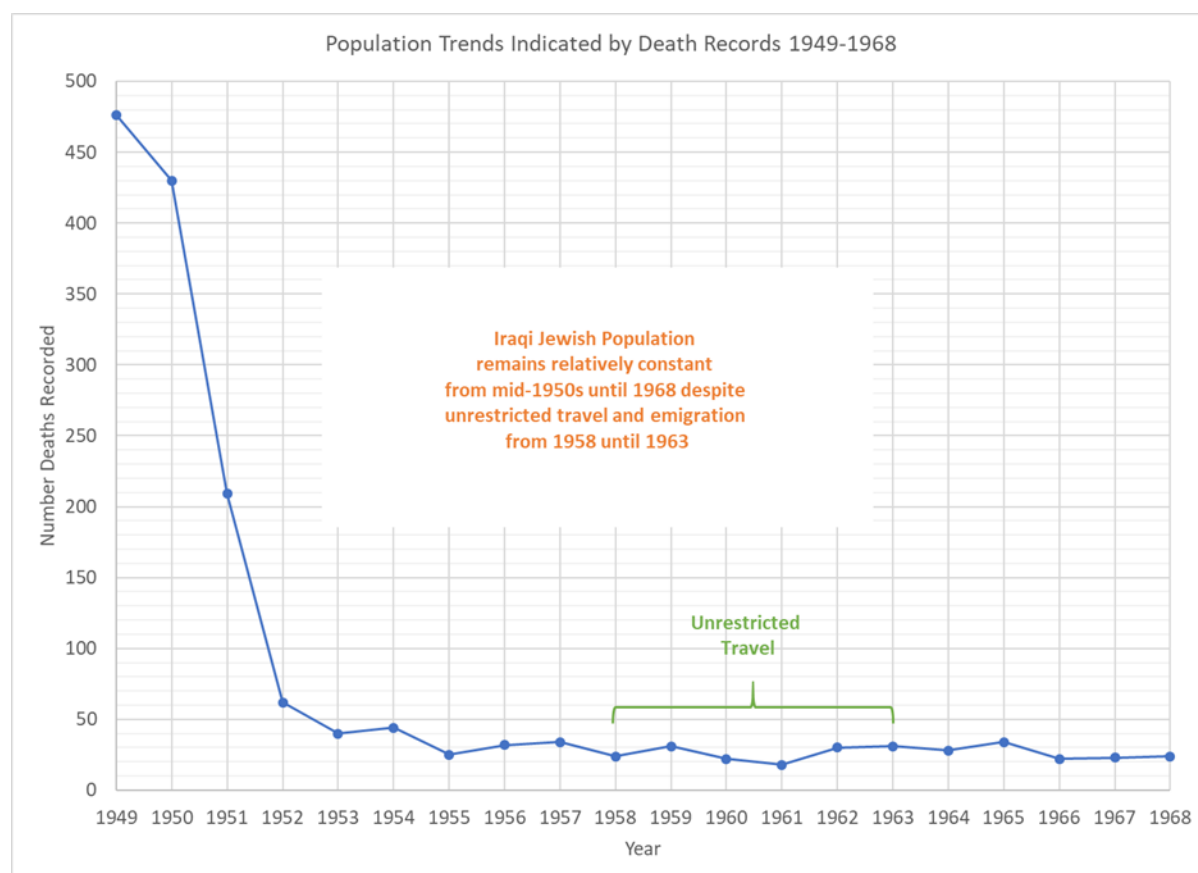


Figure 5: Population Trends indicated by Death Record, 1949-1968

Pluralistic notions of nationalism and minority protections, however, are not the Qassem Presidency's only legacy. His government, while not targeting Jews or other minorities, established new modes of authoritarianism that outlasted his rule and would be used by future regimes to target Jews for political gain. Despite early attempts to open the political system, Qassem's government ultimately failed to create representative institutions that would provide the

¹⁹¹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 193.

structure for democratic governance.¹⁹² Instead, Qassem resorted to non-democratic measures when threatened by opposition, especially after a group of Ba’thists attempted to assassinate him in 1959.¹⁹³ These included ad-hoc trials, random imprisonment, and the use of torture. One of the most ominous symbols of this trend was a secret detention facility nicknamed Qasr al-Nihaya, or “The Palace of the End” established by Qassem in the basement of the royal palace. While its name commemorated the end of the monarchy, it also came to signify, for many Iraqis, the fate of the political prisoners sent there, many of whom died within its walls. While this did not include any Jews under the Qassem regime, the violence wrought there against political prisoners set a precedent of extrajudicial state violence against incarcerated citizens—a fate that many Iraqi Jews met a decade later when the Ba’th government of Iraq turned against Iraqi Jews.¹⁹⁴ Imprisonment and torture under Qassem worked hand-in-hand with increasingly public show trials in the Mawdudi Court, named for a cousin Qassem appointed to try leaders of the old regime.¹⁹⁵ The most visible mechanism of Qassem’s growing autocracy, the Mawdudi court functioned not only to dispose of threats to the regime, but also to cow opposition more broadly and establish limits of acceptable political discourse in Iraq as its highly publicized trials displayed the consequences of opposition.

The trend toward authoritarianism under Qassem ensured that opposition enjoyed no legal recourse to contest Qassem’s policies, leaving regime change the only option for those with competing visions for Iraq. Throughout Qassem’s reign opposition solidified around the issue of Pan-Arab aspirations, which his rivals saw him as neglecting and which gained saliency among the opposition as his Iraq-first social reforms and development projects, significant though they were, proved slow to produce results. Qassem’s failures and the growing opposition to his leadership brought an end to his rule on March 14, 1963 when the Republican Palace came under artillery fire for the second time in five years. The last time it occurred in July 1958 it was called the Royal Palace and in its courtyard army personnel gunned down the royal family, ending the monarchy and ushering in a republican government legitimized by new claims to governance for and by the people. The bombs that fell on the palace in 1963 came from a military staffed by many

¹⁹² Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 81.

¹⁹³ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 92, 111.

¹⁹⁴ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 172.

¹⁹⁵ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 96.

of the same officers that overthrew the monarchy five years before but this time, their coup represented a rejection of Qassem's Iraq-first ideology and his neglect of Arab unity efforts.

Lisette Shashoua, now thirteen years old, could see the bombs exploding at the Republican Palace from the window of her family's home across the river. Her father scolded her, ordering her away from the window, where she was exposed to the stray bullets of the coup conspirators and the palace guards fiercely battling across the river. Later that day she saw, along with the rest of the country, the bullet riddled body of Prime Minister Qassem displayed on television by the victorious coup leaders. While she shared in the disgust of her friends—indeed, of many Iraqis—at the public brutality of the affair, she perceived that her feelings about the loss of Prime Minister Qassem differed markedly from most of her Jewish peers and their families. “My best friend Laurette...started to cry and said, ‘if Abd al-Kareem goes, we all go!’” –her use of Qassem's given name illustrative of the close affections many Jews shared for the leader. Lisette could not relate. “I was still so affected by the first one in 1958 when they killed the king and dragged the bodies of his uncle and Prime minister (through the street) that when there was another (revolution) I thought ‘here we go again.’ I didn't realize how lucky we were with Abdul Kareem” Shashoua recalled many years later, then recognizing the awareness of other Jews to what she had missed—the degree to which Qassem's pluralistic ideology opened Iraqi society to its Jews during his rule.¹⁹⁶

3.5 Hardships and Resilience under Xenophobic Nationalism

O The end of the Qassem regime introduced a struggle between the rival Pan-Arab parties that had opposed him. This led to further political instability as Ba'th Pan-Arab leadership of the 1963 coup gave way, in eleven short months, to rule by Nasserite Pan-Arabs led by Abd al-Salaam Arif. In the wake of Qassem's ouster, the policies and general attitudes toward Iraqi Jews stemmed chiefly from the desire of those who had been in the Pan-Arab opposition under Qassem for progress toward Arab political unity—an issue that by extension elevated the importance of opposition to Israel, the issue promoted by many as the primary concern of Pan-Arab nationalism. This anti-Israel focus manifested most sharply in the suspicion and general hostility with which state officials treated Jews traveling abroad.

¹⁹⁶ Lisette Shashoua, discussion with author, October 5, 2019.

The Ba'th-led coup of March 1963 was a violent affair. Beyond its gunning down of Prime-minister Qassem and televised display of his corpse, the militant Ba'th party also dealt with its potential opposition brutally. In the weeks that followed, the party's National Guard carried out a campaign of arrests, torture, and execution against communists and other political threats.¹⁹⁷ The Ba'th Party's brutality, horrifying as it was to many Iraqis, did not target any ethnic or religious group. Furthermore, the government they formed in 1963 proved inclusive of Shias, Kurds, and Christians. This, in fact, was consistent with their multi-sectarian ideology. However, the Ba'th policies toward Jews proved an exception to its otherwise multi-sectarian policies. While Jews experienced none of the terrible violence or incarcerations experienced by potential political opposition under the Ba'th regime in 1963, they did experience policies reflecting state suspicion of their trade and travel abroad reminiscent of policies of the late monarchic period. Only a week after the Ba'th Party and its allies seized power the legislature passed Law Number Fourteen of 1963, cancelling the Qassem government's Law Number Eleven of 1960, which had given Iraq's Jews the freedom to travel without fear of having their citizenship revoked or their assets frozen. The new law also specified that any Jew who had left Iraq with a passport since the passage of the 1951 law must return within the period specified in their visa or have their citizenship revoked and assets seized by the committee.¹⁹⁸ Thus, the new regime's first policies included a return to a posture of suspicion toward Iraqi Jews who traveled or conducted business abroad. This reversal constituted a return to policies first enacted after the establishment of Israel that limited Jews' freedom of travel to prevent any Jewish assets finding their way to Israel.

The reversal of the Qassem government's pluralistic, inclusive, policies had practical implications for many Iraqi Jews living or traveling abroad. Most immediately, it left Iraqis living abroad with the choice between traveling back to Iraq to renew their visas or forfeiting their Iraqi citizenship, thus losing their ability to return to Iraq. Jews responded to these new constraints in a variety of ways. Some Iraqi Jews abroad had no intention of returning anyway and thus found the law to be of little consequence. Helda Sha'shoua, a Jewish college student who left Iraq in 1961 to attend college in the U.S. recalled having just this reaction and insisted that many Jews shared her indifference toward their ability to return.¹⁹⁹ However, not all Iraqi Jews abroad proved willing

¹⁹⁷ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 171.

¹⁹⁸ *Al-Waqa'a al-'Iraqiyya*. March 22, 1963.

¹⁹⁹ Helda Shashoua-Rejwan, phone conversation with author, February 12, 2018.

to forfeit their Iraqi citizenship at the time. The Chief Rabbi's grandson, Zuhair Sassoon, who had attended the American University in Beirut for two years, returned on break when the new law was issued to renew his passport.²⁰⁰ Returning to Iraq posed its own risks, however, as many Jews found they could no longer acquire passports to travel abroad. Another Jewish college student returned home from London at the request of her mother and found herself unable to return to London and finish school because the foreign ministry refused to issue a renewed passport.²⁰¹ Other's found themselves similarly stranded in Iraq after traveling there to sell property they still held in the country and finding their passports frozen.²⁰²

Facing the choice between the inability to return to Iraq or the inability to leave it, some Jews chose the latter. Zuhair Sassoon, knowing that returning to his studies abroad after 1963 meant risking his ability to return home should he lose his citizenship, decided to stay in Iraq and enroll in Baghdad University to complete his engineering degree and remain with his family.²⁰³ Lydia Dabby, a Jewish student in Geneva, could not attend her sister's wedding in Milan because her passport, which was expired, could only be renewed in Iraq. Two years later, after getting married herself in Iraq, Dabby fled across the Iranian border from Basra to Karamsher, never to return and having no contact with her own parents for five years until their own escape. Her sister, whose wedding she missed, also never returned to Iraq, having married a denaturalized Iraqi Jew from Israel who had left during the 1950 mass emigration.²⁰⁴ Thus, these new policies forced many Jews abroad to make drastic choices and miss out on personal and academic experiences abroad. Jews' freedom of movement, however, proved a lower priority under the new regime than Iraq's opposition to Israel and the belief that would use their freedom of movement abroad to visit or aid Israel.

The state's official policy was not the only change that rendered Jews' freedom of movement and citizenship status unpredictable. Jewish testimonies show that many Iraqi bureaucrats took the new government's policy as a license to exercise their own discrimination against Jews in the granting or renewal of legal documents. The inability of Jews in Iraq at the time to acquire or renew passports was not the only manifestation of this. In the years following

²⁰⁰ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 177.

²⁰¹ Lydia Dabby, email with author, November 27, 2018.

²⁰² Aida Zelouf, email with author, November 2018.

²⁰³ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 177.

²⁰⁴ Lydia Dabby, email with author, November 27, 2018.

the repeal of Qassem's policies, Jews abroad met a variety of responses when they approached Iraqi consulates to renew their passports. When Esther Dangoor visited the Iraqi embassy in Geneva in 1964 to renew her passport, the clerk explained that she must return to Iraq to renew their passport (a requirement not demanded by the actual legislation which required return to Iraq only for visa renewals, not passport renewals). This legal distinction did nothing to help, Dangoor, however, who received a verbal attack from the same clerk; "You piece of shit!" he shouted at her, "You dare ask me to extend your passport? Get out of here!" He then threw her passport in the trash. Shaken, she retrieved her passport, her only form of identification, from the wastebasket and quickly left the office.²⁰⁵

Not all Jews abroad faced such dramatic harassment as Dangoor, but most faced uncertainty when visiting the consulates to renew their passports. Iraqi Jews in London who renewed their passports annually at the consulate there reported living under the constant threat of not having their visa extended.²⁰⁶ Other Jews, including many of Esther Dangoor's relatives, managed to renew their passports at other embassies and did so for several years, in spite of facing what they described to Dangoor as increasing harassment each year.²⁰⁷ Oliver Iny, an Iraqi Jew attending college in New York, reported that he renewed his passport in the Iraqi consulate in New York each year from 1963 to 1967 without incident while the same consulate refused to renew another Iraqi Jewish student's passport in 1965.²⁰⁸ Such unpredictable and arbitrary policies resulted in uncertainty for Jews who took the effort to renew their passports and visas regularly and, in doing so, faced the possibilities of refusal, harassment, or both. The widely varied experiences of Iraqi Jews from one consulate to another (and even different Jews at the same consulate) suggests that consulate staff acted more on their own inclinations than as a result of specific directives from the government in Baghdad. Meanwhile the general shift toward discrimination suggests that the elimination of Qassem's pluralist social directives was understood by some overseas Iraqi bureaucrats as license to harass and discriminate against Iraqi Jews.

The differences between Jewish policies under Qassem and those under the new Ba'th regime that ruled Iraq from March to November 1963 reflect more a difference in priorities than a difference in ideology. While the Ba'th Party's Pan-Arab inclinations conflicted with the Iraq-first

²⁰⁵ Anonymous under pseudonym of Esther Dangoor, email with author, November 2018.

²⁰⁶ Lily Shor, email with author, November 2018.

²⁰⁷ Anonymous under pseudonym of Esther Dangoor, email with author, November 2018.

²⁰⁸ Edward Daoud, email with author, November 2018.

orientation of Qassem, both professed to be multi-sectarian. The Ba'th Party claimed an ethnic and sectarian inclusivity to their Pan-Arab aspirations in contrast to pro-Nasser Pan-Arabists like Arif who held more Sunni-centric visions of Arab unity. However, unlike Qassem, the Ba'th Party in 1963 failed to extend their ethno-sectarian pluralism to Jews, giving in to the Pan-Arab tendency to equate Jews with Zionists, and thus treat their Jewish citizens as potential allies of Israel. The Ba'th made this position clear in the explanation they published in the *Iraqi Gazette* for the purpose of the new law restoring discrimination of Jews in travel and trade. In it, the Ba'th claimed that the original reasons for the 1951 laws revoking citizenship and seizing property of emigrating Jews remained relevant as many Jewish citizens of Iraq remained abroad, their failure to return "confirming their lack of loyalty to Iraq."²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the fact that some of these Jews went to Israel necessitated, the article stated, that the assets of departed Jews be frozen, reversing the Qassem government's more relaxed policies. Thus, the Ba'th Party's anti-Jewish tendencies, while an extension, on the one hand, of the Pan-Arab logic that focused tremendous energies on anti-Israel rhetoric, also proved a logical counterpoint to the Iraqist policies of Qassem. Whereas Qassem's staunch anti-Israel foreign policy was matched by his defense of Iraqi Jews' full inclusion of Iraq's Jewish citizens, the Ba'th Party's opposition to Israel and any potential support of Israel from Iraqi Jews outweighed their otherwise multi-sectarian ideology. It is also worth noting that the government formed in 1963 was not comprised of Ba'th Party members only. It also included many Nasserite nationalists less ideologically inclined than Ba'th might have been to keep Qassem's legal protections of Jewish rights. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Ba'thist legislators might have been less interested in singling out a minority community but willing to go along with an effort to show itself as engaging in what it could present as a Pan-Arab issue that Qassem had neglected.

The political, ideological, and personal rivalries that plagued the Ba'th led government ultimately led to its fracture by November 1963, only eleven months after it seized power. On November 18, Prime-minister Abd al-Salaam Arif responded to the political chaos and factional violence by mobilizing loyal army units against the Ba'th National Guard, establishing his power and bringing the role of the Ba'th Party in the government to an end.²¹⁰ Arif was a relatively conservative Muslim and a staunch Sunni, whom Shia Muslims accused of promoting sectarianism

²⁰⁹ *Al-Waqa'a al-'iraqiyya*, March 31, 1963.

²¹⁰ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 175.

and a Sunni-centered Pan-Arabism. After the Ba'th's ouster, the Iraqi state under the leadership of Prime Minister Abd al-Salaam Arif furthered the government's discriminatory measures against Iraqi Jews' movements or connections abroad. While the letter of the law did not ban Jews from traveling abroad altogether but only tightened measures to account for their status and whereabouts, the widespread refusal of government offices to grant Jews the documentation necessary for legal travel resulted in a de-facto travel ban from 1963 onward. The reality of this proved clear to Lisette Shashoua's mother who lamented to her daughter shortly after Arif faction seized power from the Ba'th that "not even a mouse can leave Iraq now." "It was clear to me when she said it," Shashoua recalled, "that my mother meant a Jewish mouse."²¹¹

In addition to intensifying restrictions of Jewish travel, the government also undertook renewed efforts to account for the national status of Jews already abroad. A government task force reported in December 1963 that many cases requiring attention included Jews who had left during the 1951 emigration but attempted to avoid the freezing of their assets by registering for emigration through an alias or others who had left later and obtained foreign citizenship while retaining assets in Iraq not yet appropriated by the government.²¹² Inquiries about many of these Jews' whereabouts and national status came to the Chief Rabbis office, where he handled them in cooperation with the members of the committee.

As disruptive as the Arif government's policies proved for Jewish movement and properties associated with Jews abroad, they did not severely disrupt the activities and security of Jews in Iraq as had the anti-Zionist and anti-democratic campaigns of 1948-1951. The most disruptive and troubling developments were a handful of arrests that occurred between 1963 and 1967 but the families of those arrested managed to secure their release with the aid of Muslim friends or colleagues. For instance, police arrested the Jewish manager of the Toshiba company in Iraq on suspicion of possessing banned medical substances manufactured in Israel but released him the next day after his neighbor, a prominent Muslim sheikh, intervened.²¹³ In such cases, Jews usually assumed the false reports came from someone with a personal vendetta. The absence of the minority protections for Jews enforced under Qassem and the discriminatory posture of the state emboldened individuals prone to extorting or harassing Jews.

²¹¹ Lisette Shashoua, discussion with author, February 12, 2018.

²¹² "Iraqi Jewish Archive," 2778, 30.

²¹³ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 170.

Despite these challenges, much of Jewish communal, social, and commercial life in Iraq continued uninterrupted. Jewish communal life thrived after 1963 much as it had under Qassem. Granted, the new government did not celebrate the Jewish community as Qassem had—there are no pictures of Abd al-Salaam Arif at the Menachem Daniel Club shaking hands with the Chief Rabbi—but Jewish celebrations and communal leisure activities continued unabated. The government's loss of Mier Basri after his dismissal in 1963 proved the Jewish communities gain as he turned his creative energies toward the community's institutions, greatly increasing his leadership and administrative role alongside the Chief Rabbi.²¹⁴ He had served on the lay committee of the Jewish community at the request of Rabbi Khedouri beginning in 1945. Then, having resigned along with Rabbi Khedouri and others in 1950, he resumed his community leadership activities as the head of the school committee in 1958, working closely with the headmaster of the Frank Iny School, Abdullah Obadiah.²¹⁵

Minimal Jewish engagement in the Iraqi public sphere continued after 1963, although the actors shifted as a result of the political upheaval, affecting that content of that engagement. Selim Basson fled Iraq after the coup. The Ba'thist government targeted him not because he was a Jew but because he had been an outspoken supporter of Qassem in the press. His absence, along with the cautiousness now exercised by Iraq's remaining Jewish authors brought an end to Jewish public participation in overtly political writing. Anwar Sha'ul remained in Iraq and continued to publish in literary circles under a pseudonym. Bassoon's overtly political content was replaced by the more culturally focused work of Meir Basri, who increased his literary activities after the nationalization of his Chevrolet firm in 1964 left him unemployed. Basri had served in numerous government posts over the years including head of the Chamber of Commerce and the Date Committee, which oversaw the nation's second largest export at the time.²¹⁶ Estranged from these government ministries and from his now nationalized auto firm, he continued to exercise a voice in the cultural sphere that advocated for a pluralist Iraqi society. Basri wrote Arabic poetry and short stories. While his work did not comment specifically on Iraqi leadership and policies as Bassoon's had under Qassem, much of his work did continue to advocate for a pluralistic model of Iraqi political community.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Aida Zelouf, interview by author, Dec 9, 2014; Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 203-112.

²¹⁵ Meer Basri, "My Honorary Work for the Jewish Community in Iraq," in *The Scribe*.

²¹⁶ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 206-8.

²¹⁷ Aida Zelouf, interview by author, Dec 9, 2014.

Most Jewish business owners continued business as usual with their Muslim business-partners without any incidents.²¹⁸ However, the freedom that Jewish merchants enjoyed in overseas trade under Qassem ended, and their inability after 1963 to obtain import licenses made many Jewish business owners more dependent on their Muslim business partners on whom they relied to sign off on all overseas exchange—the linchpin of many Jewish businesses.

Thus, Jews suffered some setbacks relative to the Qassem era under Abd al-Salaam Arif and his brother Abd al-Rahman Arif, who became president after the former died in a helicopter crash in 1966 and largely continued his brother's policies. However, these setbacks mostly affected Jews' freedom of movement abroad and their political expression, which had been limited to only a few individuals since 1951. The shift from Qassem's Iraqist political model to the Pan-Arab governance of the Ba'th and the Arif regime did not radically inhibit Jewish communal life, as Jews continued their religious and communal activities free from persecution by the state. In an interview years later, the Chief Rabbi's grandson, Zuhair Sassoon, compared his traumatic memory of his Bar Mitzvah in 1951, which was a secretive and solemn affair in his family's home under the shadow of mass persecution and the mass exodus, with his "fairy tale wedding" in 1965, a spectacular public celebration attracting hundreds of guests to the Frank Iny school including Muslim and Christian friends dancing together and celebrating freely.²¹⁹ His juxtaposition illustrates the extent to which Iraqi Jews enjoyed a vibrant communal life free from fear and celebrated by many of their non-Jewish neighbors even under the less amenable regime of president Arif.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has examined the effects of domestic political changes in Iraq on the country's remaining Jews, demonstrating the positive outcomes of the 1958 revolution and the Qassem government that ruled Iraq in the half-decade that followed. It also shows that the end of that regime and its replacement by an Arab-nationalist government brought reversals of Qassem's favorable policies toward Iraqi Jews, but these setbacks primarily affected Jews' travel or associations abroad, having minimal impact on the daily lives of Jew's daily lives within the

²¹⁸ Maurice Shohet, interview by author, September 11, 2016; Nora Iny, interview by author, September 19, 2016; Albert Nissan, discussion with author, August 17, 2004.

²¹⁹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 177.

country. Thus, the ominous assessment of Lisette Sha'shoua's friend after Qassem's ouster that "if Abd la-Kareem goes, we all go," did not, in fact, materialize. While the loss of Qassem's leadership brought substantive changes in the lives of Iraqi Jews the subsequent regime did not make life untenable for the Jewish community. Legally, the state's policies toward the Jews largely reverted to what they had been under the monarchy during its final years, monitoring Jews' movement and business abroad without significantly inhibiting Jewish social and cultural life. Thus, the norms of daily life established in the last years of the monarchy survived the advent of Pan-Arabist rule in Iraq, remaining sufficient to sustain their participation in Iraqi society and provide hope for the future of their communal life in the country.

CHAPTER 4. THE SIX DAY WAR AND THE JEWS OF IRAQ, 1967-1968

4.1 Introduction

“Baghdad looks like a house of mourning. The Jews are especially concerned, pessimistic about their future. If they could only leave... by any means!”

-Diary of Baghdadi Jew Fuad Sawdayee

While changes in domestic politics brought substantive and lasting changes to Iraqi Jews, and particularly their travel or interactions abroad, these changes paled in comparison to the impact of events in Israel on Iraqi Jews. After the successful establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 and the failure of the Arab coalition against it, expectations ran high throughout the Arab world that the eventual defeat of the Zionist state remained imminent. The ongoing animosity between Israel and its Arab neighbors reached a crisis state in May 1967 when rising tensions led Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser to deploy troops to the Sinai Peninsula on May 15 and close the straights of Tiran a week later, cutting off Israel’s sea trade and prompting it to undergo a pre-emptive military strike on June 5. In Baghdad, as in other cities across the Arab world many took to the streets to celebrate what they considered to be the imminent destruction of Israel. When the Six Day War failed to fulfill that expectation, Arabs nicknamed it the “Naksa,” meaning “the setback,” indicating the ongoing expectation of Israel’s defeat. But this did not reflect the sense of defeat and devastation in Arab societies. While Iraqis continued to talk about the inevitability of Israel’s defeat, the confidence present before June 1967 gave way to a sense of profound loss and, in many cases, rage. The resulting persecution of Iraqi Jews proved devastating, but it was also complex. Popular anti-Jewish attitudes sprang from the conflation of Jews with Zionism and Israel reinforced in Iraqi media before and after the Qassem regime. The state, at war with Kurds in the north and Shia communists in the south and embattled by opposition from virtually every sectarian and political group or party, employed inconsistent policies toward Jews during and after the Six Day War in an effort to placate widespread angst and suspicion of sedition.

During the brief war, the government cut telephone and mail services to all Jewish houses and put many Jewish homes under surveillance, beginning trends that increased after the war. The war lasted June 5 to 10, during which time Israel soundly defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria, devastating their militaries and occupying portions of Egyptian and Syrian territory as well as the West Bank, which had been under Jordanian control. Iraq's participation in the war was minimal. Only ten Iraqi soldiers died, most of them when Israel bombed an Iraqi Air Force Base on the second day of the war, after which the Army moved a division into Jordan, but it never advanced to the front.²²⁰ The lackluster contribution of Iraq to the war against Israel angered many Iraqis and prompted widespread criticism of the Arif government. The state's targeting of Jews as suspected agents of Israel may have served to distract from the state's failings in the war. It also may have served to distract from other state failings at the time such as its failed Kurdish policy, its oppression of opposition, and its failed social policies. As a result, Iraqi Jews faced popular hostility and state discrimination that, for the first time in fifteen years, made normal social, communal, and business interactions impossible.

4.2 Iraqi Responses to the Arab Defeat

The rumors of war which grew in Arab media between late May and early June prompted concern by the Jews in Iraq who remembered well the fallout of the previous Arab Israeli war. One Baghdadi Jew named Fuad Sawdayee, who ran a prominent advertising firm with his Muslim business partner, began keeping a journal on the day that Egypt moved its troops into the Sinai Peninsula. Unlike the many memoirs that Iraqi Jews wrote years after leaving Iraq, Sawdayee's daily diary entries do not present his experiences through his knowledge of what came later. In them, Sawdayee expressed different, often contradictory sentiments from one day to the next as he described the changes that beset Iraq after the Six Day War, at times expressing surprise at Jewish persecution while at other times lamenting the seemingly inevitable persecution of Jews. Most often, however, he described, candidly, the emotional responses of himself and those around him to events as they unfolded. "Tonight, my wife and I are apprehensive and thoughtful," he wrote on May 22, the day that Egypt closed the straights of Tiran to Israeli shipping. "Are Arab armies really so powerful? Or is Israel so sure of itself? And what about us the Jews of Iraq? My

²²⁰ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 188.

wife objects to my keeping a diary. It could be very dangerous. But I insist of recording every important development and every event, assessing the situation and drawing my own personal conclusions, particularly in connection with our country Iraq and the Jewish community here. I feel it's worthwhile. Even a must."²²¹ His insistence on documenting events in this way despite the perceived risks in doing so illustrate the sense that he shared with other Jews in Iraq—that the seemingly imminent war in Israel augured ill for them. This seemed equally clear to a Muslim houseguest of Sawdayee who had served many years in public service and warned him two days before the outbreak of hostilities that if the Arabs lost the war it would endanger Iraqi Jews property and lives.²²² The possibility of an Arab defeat did not even enter into the rhetoric of the demonstrators who, by then, filled Baghdad's streets every day.

When war broke out on June 5, Sawdayee described the solemn return of his Jewish neighbors to their homes that morning as the streets of Baghdad filled with jubilant celebrations. "My wife returns from the market at 10 a.m., pale and alarmed. She has seen Jews returning from downtown and trying to get home quietly but quickly. Moslems, on the other hand, are jubilant, excited, with transistors in hand, and happily discussing the news. 'We are winning! A couple of days and Israel is finished.'"²²³ Sawdayee began hiding all the valuables in his house and burning unnecessary photos and documents, uncertain of what would follow.

A dozen Jewish students sat at a school across the river from Tahrir Square that day taking the standardized tests required of all Iraqi high school students. One Jewish student recalled in her memoir the taunts of their non-Jewish peers, who called them "Golda Meir" and "Zionists." One of the exam monitors, all of whom were Muslims, repeatedly commented to the other monitors how smart she was and what a shame that she was Jewish, even suggesting that she convert to Islam and marry her brother.²²⁴ Meir Basri's daughter Nora described the mobs that formed in the streets across the Tigris: "Swarms of people shouting 'death to the Jews, death to Israel, death to America!'" In such cases, ambiguity of language about which Jews such threats referred to and where—in Israel or in Iraq—left Jews waiting for undetermined outcomes. Upon finishing the exam, Nora sprinted home. "I was actually running because I was afraid and crying. I went home and I told my mother, 'did you hear? There is a war! Israel is obliterated!' But she said 'no, these

²²¹ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 20.

²²² Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 23.

²²³ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 25.

²²⁴ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 191-202.

people lie. Wait, don't worry, I'm telling you.'" Later that night, Nora and her mother heard reports from Israeli radio that Israel was winning the war.²²⁵ Many Muslim and Christian friends of Iraqi Jews admitted privately that they also listened to Israeli and British radio stations, not trusting the Arab state media outlets.

The onset of the war brought more dramatic reactions in some cases. One Jewish family heard a drunken woman shouting curses from a neighboring rooftop in the night. "'You will see what will happen... to Israel and the all the Jews! You are part of them!' she started to curse, and we realized she was drunk," recalled Maurice Shohet, who was sixteen at the time. The woman, it turned out, was a Muslim neighbor whose house the family had visited many times and who had herself been a guest in their home. In this case, the woman came and apologized the next morning, embarrassed, but Shohet's family nevertheless distanced themselves from her after the incident. The friends had never discussed politics before, but Shohet came to learn that she was a supporter of Nasser. "It just happened that she had pro-Egyptian views of politics," he recalled, "it was very anti-Israel, it was more Pan-Arabism."²²⁶ Other Jews shared similar experiences. On the night that the Six Day War broke out Victoria Obadia, the mother of another Jewish family, received a disturbing phone call from a Muslim neighbor whom she had visited that morning to share Sambusak, a traditional Iraqi dumpling. Her daughter, Ronit Dangoor, remembers her mother's horror when, only hours later, the neighbor called her on the phone; "For every Muslim that is killed in Palestine," she told her, "we will kill ten Jews in Baghdad."²²⁷ This abrupt reversal from friendship to what Obadia understood as a threat reflected a troubling trend from Jews' amicable relations with many of their Muslim neighbors to animosity which, for most Iraqis unfolded in the months and years that followed as popular and government hostility toward Iraqi Jews became the overwhelming response to the Arab defeat.

The onset of war elicited a variety of responses from the friends and acquaintances of Iraqi Jews. Saeed Herdoon, who worked in a Baghdad office, had several conversations with non-Jewish friends and co-workers that reflected the tension which the war introduced into relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish Iraqis. A client in his office on the day the war started left him speechless when, misunderstanding Herdoon's nervousness about current events, encouraged him

²²⁵ Nora Iny, interview by author, September 19, 2016.

²²⁶ Maurice Shohet, interview by author, September 11, 2016.

²²⁷ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 183.

to take heart, reassuring him that Israel would be defeated in short order.²²⁸ Many Iraqi Jews felt torn over the war, according to Herdoon, who cared about Israel's safety, but feared that an Israeli victory would mean trouble for the Jews.²²⁹ This concern was shared by at least one of Herdoon's non-Jewish associates as well, who called him after the cease-fire, trying to persuade him to bring his family over for the night in case their house was targeted. Herdoon refused to leave his home but his friend made him promise to call the moment trouble arose. Although no trouble came, the days that followed brought more uncomfortable interactions for Herdoon as his non-Jewish friends and associates expressed their intense anger.

Close friends of Jews who wished to spare their friends' feelings and maintain the friendship knew to avoid the topic of Israel altogether.²³⁰

Despite Iraq's modest losses, the defeat prompted a dramatic reaction from Iraqis, who railed against Iraq's poor showing in the war. On the day the war ended, Baghdad was in what Fuad Sawdayee described as a state of mourning. His business partner phoned him and suggested that he stay home to protect both of their safety as violent demonstrators began flooding the streets, protesting the resignation of the much-admired Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser at the conclusion of the cease-fire. In his journal, Fuad Sawdyee described young Iraqis, angry at the Iraqi government's failure to put up a good showing in the war, chanting "anti-American, anti-British, and anti-Jewish slogans."²³¹ Jews were not the only ones fleeing home. Shops and offices closed their doors for the day as many Iraqis left the city centers for the safety of their homes.²³² Fortunately, widespread violence against Jews failed to materialize in the wake of the war. Jewish business owners by and large stayed home while their Muslim business partners ran the workplace, expecting Jews in business to be targeted, as they had after the first Arab Israeli War.

The high school matriculation exams continued throughout the week of the war and with the news of the Israeli victory, mobs from Tahrir Square this time crossed the river to the neighborhood where Nora Iny and other Jewish, Christian and Muslim girls anxiously tried to concentrate on their tests on the balcony of the Nun's school. "I remember one of them. He was particularly scary looking," Nora recalled, "He looked up and he saw us and then they started

²²⁸ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 156.

²²⁹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 156.

²³⁰ Nadia Sasson, discussion by author, December 6, 2016.

²³¹ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 31.

²³² Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 170.

climbing the wall of the school. Anyway, the next thing we knew, they are in the balconies tearing our paper exams. ‘Abdel Nasser is stepping down and you are taking an exam?’ We were petrified because we thought ... I know I thought, they knew we were Jewish. Okay, they're going to take each one of us and drop us from the balcony, throw us off the balcony. But of course, Jews are afraid. They don't talk. We left our desk and ran down. Jinan, the reason I'm telling you this ... Jinan the Muslim, she said ... she's a Muslim like them, though she's not crazy like them. She said, ‘Let us do our exam!’ So, he told her, ‘You Zionist!’ But she's a Muslim. She's against Zionism.” Nora left and ran a half-hour to her uncle’s house, the nearest safe place she knew.²³³ Eight other Jewish classmates escaped by cramming into the Volkswagen Beetle of their Jewish headmaster who, expecting trouble, had come to retrieve them.²³⁴

4.3 State Responses to the Arab Defeat

While Jewish and non-Jewish Iraqis responded to the war in a variety of ways, government officials attempted to respond to the defeat, which reflected poorly on the already beleaguered regime. The impromptu anti-Jewish responses of some individual political figures set the stage for inconsistent policies of government persecution against the Jews that materialized between the end of the war and the overthrow of the Arif government. This began when the Minister of the Interior, Tahir Yahya returned from Egypt after being injured and grounded during a tour of the war front and promptly called for state action against “imperialist, Zionist agents.”²³⁵ He also called on the public to be vigilant in reporting “fifth column” activities, a term that soon became ubiquitous among those who claimed that seditious elements within Iraq had aided Israel in defeating the Arab armies.²³⁶ In the days that followed, government newspapers made similar statements warning the public of “fifth columnist activities.” The charge of a “fifth column” in Iraq responsible for the Arab defeat had disturbing implications for Iraqi Jews, who proved the primary suspects by virtue of their Jewish identity.

Iraqi authorities began to arrest Iraqis it accused of being Israeli agents. Most of these were Jews, beginning with two on the day of Tahir Yahya’s statement.²³⁷ Although government

²³³ Nora Iny, interview by author, September 19, 2016.

²³⁴ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 198-9.

²³⁵ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 419; Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 148; Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 31.

²³⁶ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 5, 419; Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 148; Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 31.

²³⁷ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 31.

spokesmen denied many of the arrests at first, rumors circulating in the Jewish community based on testimony by the families of those taken put the number at more than twenty Jews arrested within a few days of the war's end.²³⁸ While government officials often framed the arrests and security measures in terms of "fifth column activity," referring to "spies" or "imperialist agents," rather than Jews, anti-Jewish Iraqis betrayed the reality behind anti-imperial rhetoric. A columnist in the popular daily newspaper *Sawt al-Arab* (voice of the Arabs) wrote after the war: "The Jewish cancer in Iraq constitutes a serious danger to our struggle to exist and for the future of our country. If interest, circumstances, and the law require that we do not hurt them at the present time, it is at least incumbent upon us to place them under stringent surveillance and freeze their activity."²³⁹ Such dehumanizing rhetoric that imagined Iraq's Jews to be so threatening to Iraq's future surely reflected the sentiments of Iraqis who "informed" on their Jewish neighbors for suspicious activities, a practice so common after the war that Jews began avoiding interactions with all but their most trusted non-Jewish friends.

With no telephones or mail service, Jews began daily stops to houses of Jewish family and friends and rumors soon became the main source of information for Jews about developments in Iraq. Most disturbing was a rumor of government plans to deport Iraq's Jews to an Army detention facility named Fadhiliyya.²⁴⁰ While such mass deportations never occurred, there is evidence that top government officials discussed the idea after the war.²⁴¹ Meanwhile, most Jewish men had been dismissed from jobs or stopped going to work for fear of arrest. Ya'cob al-Kabir, the last Jewish civil servant in Iraq, lost his job in the Justice Department, never to return to work there.²⁴² While Jews already enrolled in the University of Baghdad or al-Hikmah University, the Jesuit-run university, could remain enrolled, the government barred new Jewish students from attending, including a number of them who had already received admission letters. Jews were more cut off from Iraqi society than they had been even during the mass emigration in 1950-1951.

Within two months of the war's end, about fifty Jews were reported arrested or missing by their families.²⁴³ By the end of June, Iraq had enacted new legislation freezing Jewish assets. While

²³⁸ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 158.

²³⁹ *Sawt al-Arab*, June 17, 1967.

²⁴⁰ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 35.

²⁴¹ Carole Basri, "The Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: An Examination of Legal Rights- A Case Study of the Human Rights Violations of Iraqi Jews," *Fordham International Law Journal* 26 (2009):685.

²⁴² Nadia Sasson, interview by author, December 6, 2016.

²⁴³ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 158-59.

this law ostensibly dealt with the property of Jewish emigrants abroad, in practice, the government could use it to freeze the assets of many Jewish individuals and organizations in Iraq at the time, which occurred frequently in the following months.²⁴⁴ As the plight of the Jewish community quickly mounted, friends and work associates of many Iraqi Jews aided them in whatever ways they could. One Jew's Muslim business partner transferred all of his money into his own bank accounts before the state froze Jewish assets, allowing him to continue accessing his wealth for daily needs while other Jews, many of whom lost their jobs, struggled to buy food.²⁴⁵ Jews and their friends recognized that such actions put those extending aide to Jews at risk, even though in the months following the war, the state did not target those who provided such aide.

In the context of Arif's weak control, government policy remained inconsistent, largely based on individual preferences of ministers and bureaucrats as seen in the case of Iraqi Jewish prisoners under changing leadership. In the weeks following the initial round of arrests, authorities began releasing Jewish prisoners in threes and fours each day. The government also eased restrictions on prisoners' activities and began allowing families to visit those still in prison. These policies ended, however, when Dr. Shamil al-Samarrai took over as the new interior minister in August and publicly stated that no Jews would be released while he served in office.²⁴⁶ Other politicians claimed that the government acted in protection of the Jews. When a delegation of wives of Jewish prisoners had approached Prime Minister Tahir Yahya asking for release of their husbands, Yahya claimed that the government's arrest policies deterred the incarcerated Jews from meeting a worse fate at the hands of mobs.²⁴⁷ While it may have had this effect, given the absence of pogroms after the Six Day War, the motives of statesmen like Yahya were hardly that noble. After all, it was Yahya's call for action against fifth columnists the previous month which had fueled suspicion of Jews in the first place. Furthermore, a campaign against an alleged "fifth column" offered a convenient scapegoat for the government, which was bombarded by criticism from Iraqis angry at the military's poor showing in the war.

²⁴⁴ Destani, *Minorities*, 5:419; Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 148.

²⁴⁵ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 170.

²⁴⁶ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 170.

²⁴⁷ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 40.

4.4 Jewish Life After the Arab Defeat

The sudden eruption of state and popular anti-Jewish persecution transformed Jewish communal and social life in Baghdad. Jewish interactions with non-Jews dramatically abated. Not only did Muslims and Christians avoid contact with their Jewish friends to avoid guilt by association, but Jews also lost access to various social clubs around the city in which they had enrolled following the closure of Baghdad's Jewish clubs in the late forties.²⁴⁸ Lisette Shashoua recalls the sign hung outside of the popular Acropolis Club in Baghdad stating that Jews were "persona non-grata."²⁴⁹ No longer welcome in the mixed-membership clubs, Jews increasingly relied on the Menachem Daniel Sports Center as a Jewish gathering space, further atomizing their social sphere. Meanwhile, Jewish organizations became more exclusively Jewish. The handful of non-Jewish teachers at Frank Iny left the school in response to public pressure. One Muslim teacher reluctantly submitted his resignation to headmaster Obadiah after his children, who attended another school, complained that their classmates heckled them because of their father's associations with the Jewish school.²⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the school and sports center became popular sites for Muslim youth who waited outside their gates to heckle Jewish students coming and going. Jewish youth began walking everywhere in groups for protection. Even the hallways of the Frank Iny School proved unsafe, as Jews suspected some of the non-Jewish employees that remained of informing on Jews for the government. These growing uncertainties relegated Jewish communal association to only the most private spaces. Meir Basri's daughter, a student at the time, recalls the days after the war as a bitter sweet time because there was so much suffering but it was also a time when Jewish families joined each other for daily visits in their homes to catch up on each other's news and associate in private.²⁵¹ As word of mouth increasingly became the only mode of communication and homes the only safe space not under surveillance, a lively rumor mill kept Jews informed of recent arrests, releases, and other community news.²⁵²

Jewish leaders, still pre-occupied with negotiations over seized community trusts and verifying Iraqi Jews' citizenship status, now also found themselves, as they had in the late 40s,

²⁴⁸ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 167.

²⁴⁹ Lisette Shashoua, email to author, April 11, 2018.

²⁵⁰ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 200.

²⁵¹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 206-8.

²⁵² Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*.

advocating for arrested Jews—efforts which proved mostly in vain.²⁵³ Like in the late 1940s, unfortunately, those leaders found themselves largely powerless to influence state policies or keep state persecution of Jews at bay. Leaders like Meir Basri, who had friends in powerful positions attempted to advocate for arrested Jews limited success but were not able to stem the tide of state persecution against their community. Abdullah Obadiah had considerable contacts among his many former students in Baghdad University, which proved useful in protecting the Frank Iny School from closure and harassment by police. Each time low level security officers attempted to disrupt school activities, a well-placed phone call usually resulted in their immediate departure. Once Obadiah was taken under arrest briefly to the local police station under suspicion of espionage but after he chastised the young officer in charge and named the officer's superior as a close friend and former student, they immediately released him.

Rabbi Khedouri also resumed a role much like he had had during the persecution of the late 1940s. He issued numerous statements defending the patriotism of Iraqi Jews and denying the charges of sedition.²⁵⁴ Despite his obvious knowledge to the contrary, he also issued statements defending the Iraqi government and Iraqi public against charges of Jewish persecution that reached the foreign media. Presumably, he hoped that appealing to the good graces of the state would hasten the end of the persecution and a return to normalcy—a hope reflected in his appeals to concerned Jews to persevere and not give up hope. Above all, he beseeched his fellow Jews not to leave.²⁵⁵ He was committed to maintaining Iraq's ancient Jewish community. Given his experience after 1951, he had no reason to expect otherwise.

4.5 Conclusions

Many Iraqis responded to the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with anti-Jewish hostility including many within the state apparatus which, itself, arrested many Jews and put Jewish households under surveillance. These reactions did not occur in a vacuum, however, but in the context of the overthrow of Qassem by Pan-Arab opposition. While it is impossible to know how Jews may have fared had Qassem remained in power during 1967, it is fair to say that the Arif regime's Pan-Arab ideology rendered them less likely to protect Jews given the prominence of

²⁵³ "Iraqi Jewish Archive," 2778, 13.

²⁵⁴ "Iraqi Jewish Archive," 2778, 4; Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 35; Destani, *Minorities*, 5:397-8.

²⁵⁵ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 44-5.

notions that Iraqi Jews were inherently loyal to Israel. However, while the Arif regime did not share the Qassem government's commitment to protecting Jews' rights, as its policies following its 1963 coup make clear, it also was not committed to the most extreme anti-Jewish policies. This is clear in that, as oppressive its anti-Jewish policies proved during and after the Six-Day war, it resisted calls for harsher policies from both opposition and from individuals within the state apparatus itself. In fact, all of the measures which the Arif regime took against Jews after the Six Day war might have been temporary—possibly even intended as such. Cut phone lines can be repaired. Frozen property can be unfrozen, etc. Arrested Jews can be released. Even though Iraqi Jews today identify the war as a turning point which ultimately led to the departure of most of Iraq's remaining Jews by 1973, this outcome was not apparent or inevitable prior to the Ba'th party coup which followed a year after the Arab defeat. While Jews in Iraq still suffered under intense insecurity and oppression, the Ba'th Party's multi-sectarian ideology would have suggested that a Ba'th government could be expected to bring relief. Instead, as we will see, it actually intensified anti-Jewish persecution dramatically, leading to the ultimate departure of most of Iraq's Jews between 1968 and 1973. The following chapter explains how and why the Ba'th party, despite its ethnically inclusively ideology, manipulated anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish sentiments in the wake of the Six Day War for its own political gain.

CHAPTER 5. BA'TH VIOLENCE AFTER THE SIX DAY WAR, 1968-1973

5.1 Introduction

*“Strange is your stand, weird is our case.
Is that all we are, a mere sacrificial lamb to you?”
-Cohen, I am the Iraqi, I am*

On July 17, 1968, the day that the Bath Party seized power, Baghdadi Jew Fuad Sawdayee wrote an entry in his diary reflecting on the year that had passed since the Six Day War. In the thirteen months since the war, the government of Abd Al-Salaam Arif had arrested over a hundred Jewish men and two women. Although Sawdayee indicated that Iraqi Jews had thus far survived the period “more or less without extreme physical damages,” the arrests and persecution had led to a sense of disillusioned bleakness among Iraqi Jews in Baghdad.²⁵⁶ Thus, “The Iraqi Jew,” Sawdayee believed, were ready to “try his chance now with the new regime.”²⁵⁷ Brutal as the Ba’th had been toward its political opponents in 1963, its leaders never targeted Jews or any other ethno-sectarian group. Sawdayee’s diary entry suggests that the coup brought a measure of cautious hope to Jews. By Mid-September, however, the Ba’th began arresting Jews and rumors of torture shocked the Jewish community. Sawdayee wondered why the Ba’th party began perpetuating and even escalating the anti-Jewish persecution that the Arif government had begun.²⁵⁸ In the months that followed, persecution of Jews increased, surpassing their worst fears. This calculated campaign of state violence culminated in a public display of nine executed Jews on January 17, 1969 and led to the vast reduction of the community through fatal state violence and illegal Jewish emigration.

Sawdayee’s surprise at Ba’th policies was well founded. The Ba’th party had earned a reputation for brutal violence against its political opponents, but Iraq’s Jews had withdrawn from the formal structures and institutions of political life following the emigration of 1950-1951.

²⁵⁶ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 69. (This estimate is confirmed in Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 48, as is the claim that no significant torture of Jews occurred prior to the Ba’th coup of 1968. The latter is contradicted by one account in Victoria Abda (Ovadia)’s testimony in Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 182-91 whose chronology appears anomalous in comparison with other sources. The 40-year lapse between the events described and her recorded testimony may account for this.)

²⁵⁷ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 69.

²⁵⁸ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 69.

Furthermore, Ba'th ideology in theory promoted sectarian equality within their Arab Nationalist framework. Given these political conditions, the Ba'th Party's anti-Jewish violence begs explanation. Why did the Ba'th party, in spite of its multi-sectarian ideology, increase arrests of Jews, brutally torture those imprisoned, and eventually carry out a public campaign of propaganda and violence against Iraqi citizens that dramatically furthered the Jewish sense of social alienation and insecurity? What objectives did this policy serve?

Kanan Makiya insightfully argues, in his book, *Republic of Fear*, that the public's participation in the first spectacle legitimized the violence that the party then turned on the broader public.²⁵⁹ However, his argument suffers from its basis in the assumption that Iraqi Jews had long been social pariahs in Iraq whereas this dissertation demonstrates that Iraqi Jews' position within Iraqi society was not that of a pariah community, but of a minority community whose inclusion in Iraqi society was a matter of debate and who had many supporters in that debate. As such, the Ba'th party could not simply target the Jewish community as a ready-made Pariah group but had to manipulate the anti-Israeli conspiracy claims that pervaded Iraqi society after the Six Day War. It did so through a calculated campaign of violence designed to turn Iraqi Jews into the scapegoats that would serve Ba'th interests.

Despite the scarcity of state sources detailing the decision-making process for this period, foreign, and Iraqi media sources, examined together, provide insight into the progression and evolution of Ba'th anti-Jewish policies after the July 1968 coup.

This chapter argues that the Ba'th tapped into and then manipulated the widespread suspicion of Jews in Iraq since the Six Day War to buttress its tenuous hold on power. The suspicion of Jews as Zionist spies proved useful to the Ba'th party, allowing it to indict the Arif regime for allowing espionage in the state and claiming to solve the problem itself by executing scapegoats in a carefully crafted show trial.

In manipulating anti-Zionist sentiments of Iraqis and their fears of Israeli infiltration, the Ba'th sacrificed the small Jewish community. Its scapegoating of this community allowed the Ba'th to present itself as the only ruling party in the Arab world taking effective action against these Zionist forces at work in the Arab world.

²⁵⁹ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 52-53.

5.2 Ba'th Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Zionism

Political rhetoric in Iraq, as in many Arab countries during the twentieth century, revolved around opposition to imperialism—a tradition that dated back to the country's founding in 1920. For almost four decades after Iraq's formation as a country, Great Britain dominated its affairs, first ruling it as a mandate from 1920 to 1932 and then exercising a neo-colonial influence through the Hashemite monarchy until 1958. Throughout the rule of the widely unpopular monarchy, with its cadre of elites, opposition movements focused on the cause of anti-imperialism. This binary political rhetoric always carried with it a potential to vilify ethnic or sectarian groups, including minorities, who could be portrayed as in league with imperialism.

Christians and Jews in Iraq both experienced violence as a result of the popular notion that they represented and worked on behalf of British imperialism. One of the central figures in the 1941 coup which precipitated the Farhud against Baghdadis Jews, Salah al-Din Sabagh, later wrote a book entitled "The Knights of Arabism in Iraq" in which he attacks British imperialism and its supporters.²⁶⁰ While he reserves his strongest vitriol for Nuri al-Said, the Sunni-Arab pillar of pro-British politics under the Iraqi monarchy, he also indicts Iraqi Jews, stating that British imperialists turned to "certain local Arab quarters" (a cryptic reference to Nuri al-Said and his ilk who were back in power at the time of his writing) and "the Jews" (a noticeably less cryptic reference to Iraq's beleaguered Jewish community, who posed no threat to al-Sabagh).²⁶¹ Such references to "the Jews," proliferated in Iraqi public discourse and, while usually in a context that suggested it referred to Israel or, before 1948, the Zionist movement in Palestine, could and did also cast suspicion and contempt on Iraqi Jews as it had in 1941. After the overthrow of the Monarchy in 1958, successive revolutionary regimes--and their opposition--all claimed to represent Iraq's true interests embodied in the "Revolution" and attempted to portray other parties as somehow compromised by imperial influence.

The Ba'th Party drew from this anti-imperial rhetoric before and after it seized and held power in Iraq in July 1968, employing it to develop its own narrative of revolutionary history. Ba'th leaders positioned their party as the rightful inheritor of the Arab revolution begun by Abd al-Kareem Qassem against imperialist forces. The Ba'th, like other revolutionary leaders since

²⁶⁰ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 130.

²⁶¹ Salah al-Din Al-Sabagh, *Fursan al-'Uruba fi-l-'Iraq*, (Damascus, 1956), 29-30.

1958, portrayed themselves as the primary protagonists in a struggle between the independent Iraqi people it led and the forces of imperialism both inside and outside of Iraq. Ba'th relied on generating a clear distinction between the Ba'th-led Revolution and the enemies of that revolution—namely, imperialism and the agents of imperialism in Arab countries, referred to by the term “reactionary”. This political rhetoric did not allow for gray areas, and anyone who did not endorse the Ba'th as harbingers of Revolution fell into the category of reactionary and pro-imperial. Ba'th rhetoric used the term Revolution with a capital R to describe its impact on Iraqi politics and society. The Ba'th government's own translators clearly had this understanding of the term in mind when translating its leaders' speeches into English as they translated the word *al-Thawra* from Arabic, which has no capitalization, into “Revolution” in English—always with a capital “R.”²⁶² Although the Ba'th had opposed Qassem's rule between 1958 and 1963, and Saddam Hussein had tried to assassinate him, the nostalgic popularity of Qassem among Iraqis led Ba'th leaders to tap into his overthrow of the monarch. Thus, they refer to Ba'th rule as a continuation of the anti-imperial program.

Even before seizing power, the Ba'th Party employed anti-Imperial and anti-Zionist rhetoric in its efforts to undermine the Arif regime. Their use of this rhetoric proved especially effective—and especially dangerous for Iraqi Jews— following the Six Day War when public outcry derided the administration's failure to lend adequate support to the Arab coalition in the war. While state leaders after the Six Day War may have hoped that the idea that Israeli spies operated in Iraq could deflect some of the blame put on them for its failure in the war against Israel, the opposition sought to use suspicions of espionage as an indictment of the Arif government and a tool to mobilize the public in support of a regime change. The party most ready to do this was the Ba'th Party. In mounting a campaign to undermine the Arif government, the Ba'th party sought to heighten suspicions that the government allowed Israeli espionage to happen under its nose—suspicions that put pressure on the Arif regime to appear diligent by arresting Jewish scapegoats. On September 6, 1967 the Ba'th Party held a mass demonstration against the Arif government in which Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr delivered a speech demanding Iraq offer more support to President Nasser of Egypt, who by then had renewed hostilities against Israel, initiating a war of attrition along the Egypt-Israel border. As Fuad Sawdayee listened to the radio broadcast, he heard Bakr

²⁶² This practice was employed consistently by translators at the Baghdad Ministry of Culture and Information in their English translations of many speeches throughout the period.

call for “more drastic measures to be taken against ‘imperialist and Zionist agents and all fifth columnists.’”²⁶³ The suspicions of espionage promoted by the Ba’th and others naturally cast suspicion on Iraqi Jews, and the Arif government already held dozens of Iraqis on suspicion of spying, most of them Jews. However, no trials had taken place or sentences carried out. The piecemeal arrests and release of many suspects failed to satisfy the desire of more conspiracy-minded Iraqis who demanded that justice be brought upon those seditious elements responsible for the Arab defeat. In calling for more drastic measures against spies, the Ba’th Party played into the widespread belief that a conspiracy, and not Israeli military strategy, caused the Arab defeat a year earlier.

The Ba’th also drew from anti-Zionism in Iraqi political discourse which conceived of Zionism as a unique expression of Imperialism in the Arab world. After the unexpected Israeli victory in 1967, anti-Zionist rhetoric took on conspiratorial themes of Zionist-Imperialist espionage in the Arab world, especially among opposition parties. In Iraq, the Arif regime still allowed opposition parties to publish their own newspapers but censored any newspapers that openly criticized the ruling party.²⁶⁴ Thus, raising suspicions of espionage in Iraq proved a means of eroding confidence in the Arif regime without openly criticizing it. On February 20, 1968, the Ba’th Party Newspaper *al-Thawra* (“the Revolution”) published an article “How Israel Spies.”²⁶⁵ The article recounts the case of Israeli Spy Elia Cohen, executed in Syria in 1965 after he infiltrated the highest levels of the Syrian Government and Military under an alias and acquired intelligence about Syria’s

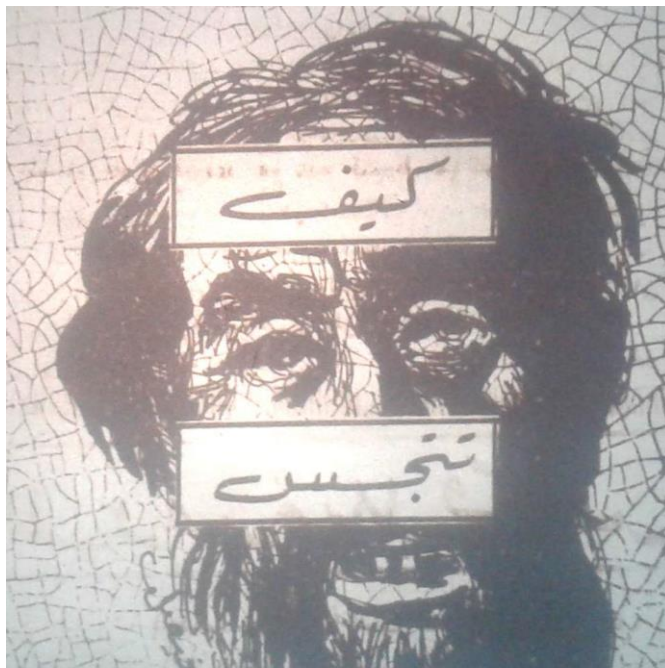


Figure 6: The caption in this picture, which accompanied the article discussed reads: “How Israel Spies.”

²⁶³ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 45-46.

²⁶⁴ Bengio, *Saddam's Word*, 8.

²⁶⁵ *Al-Thawra*, February 20, 1968.

defenses.²⁶⁶ The discovery of Cohen, which proved a major embarrassment to Syria, provided fodder for the *al-Thawra* article's claims that the Israeli intelligence services orchestrated Middle East politics to serve the interests of "Israel and Imperialism." According to the journalist, Israel's massive intelligence community penetrated the political spheres of every Arab country, thanks to funding from "the U.S., Germany, England, and other capitalist countries."²⁶⁷ As a result of the imperialist-funded Israeli espionage, the article claimed, "Israel knows every conversation between Arab Leaders about military movements, troops morale, and radar systems."²⁶⁸

Such claims encouraged conspiratorial notions that Arab regimes currently in power throughout the region allowed Israeli and Imperial spies to operate under their nose, enabling Israel to defeat the Arab coalition in 1967 and thwart Arab independence throughout the region. In other words, the article's author sought to make Syria's embarrassment the embarrassment of every Arab regime including the Iraqi government under Abd al-Rahman Arif (who had replaced his brother Abd al-Salaam Arif after his death in 1966). While claims of widespread Israeli espionage in the Arab world embarrassed Arab leaders, it terrorized Iraqi Jews, whom the conspiracies cast as potential agents of Zionism.

In their February 20 article, the Ba'th highlighted Cohen's identity not only as a Jew, but also as an Arab. The newspaper warned that Israeli Intelligence recruited spies who look Arab and spoke the language. Indeed, many Jews in Iraq, as in other Arab countries, could hide their Jewish identity and routinely did so in times of widespread anti-Israeli fervor to avoid discrimination. Their successful integration and ability to pass for non-Jews, however, could be seen as either evidence of their inclusion in the Iraqi nation or as evidence of the threat posed by Arab Jews. These espionage claims by an opposition newspaper tapped into popular anxieties and undermined the Arif regime.

When the Ba'th finally seized and held power in 1968, it succeeded in employing this rhetoric because it directly linked its claims to the Arab defeat of 1967, claiming that other Arab regimes, including the one it replaced in Iraq, had compromised with pro-imperialist forces responsible for the failure of the Arab nations in the war. Unfortunately, for Iraq's remaining Jewish community, the Ba'th Party's success in manipulating Iraqi political rhetoric and popular

²⁶⁶ "This Day in Jewish History, 1965: A Humiliated Syria Hangs Israeli Spy Eli Cohen." *Haaretz*, May 18, 2015. <https://www.haaretz.com/> accessed March 1, 2018.

²⁶⁷ *Al-Thawra*, February 20, 1968.

²⁶⁸ *Al-Thawra*, February 20, 1968.

sentiments in the wake of the Six Day War hinged largely on its claims of Israeli espionage in Iraq—a claim that was not exclusive to the Iraqi Ba’th but which it employed with uniquely effective and devastating consequences. Since the Ba’th Party had been in opposition during the Six Day War, it was in a position, once in power, to bolster its anti-Zionist credentials by capitalizing on notions of conspiracy that cast Iraqi Jews as suspect and then carrying out policies that they could construe as an Iraqi victory against Zionism.

5.3 Hidden Violence

The Ba’th Party that seized power on July 17, 1968 was a very different party than the one that had briefly held power five years earlier. The Iraqi Ba’th Party in 1963 had been ideological and idealistic and the brevity of its rule due in large part to a lack of experience governing. The party in 1968, in contrast, was led by realists intent on seizing power and keeping it. Leaders like Hassan al-Bakr and his nephew, Saddam Hussein, had learned practical lessons from the mistakes of 1963. One of these lessons was to not share power and, thus, by the end of the month, Bakr had purged his government of the military allies that had aided them in the overthrow of the Arif government and begun arresting any officials whose loyalty to the his leadership was in question. Another lesson was that the Iraqi public did not necessarily respond positively to brutal public violence against political enemies such as their televised mutilation of Qassem’s corpse after his ouster. Public responses to violence, rather, depended entirely on the context and thus, the party sought to employ its brutality in much shrewder ways than it had after its first coup in 1963. Whereas the Ba’th in 1963 suffered criticism for murdering Abd al-Kareem Qassem and displayed his mutilated corps on television, the regime in 1968 confined most of its brutal violence in the secrecy of Iraqi prisons where guards used torture to extract confessions from incarcerated Iraqis for political gain. Saeed Herdoon, whom the Ba’th imprisoned without charges after their coup and other imprisoned Jews document cases such as that of an associate of the former regime’s finance minister who suffered brutal torture for refusing to defame his boss.²⁶⁹

Although Jews posed no threat as potential opposition given their now longstanding withdrawal from Iraqi politics, Ba’th leaders secretly included Jews in their campaign of brutal

²⁶⁹ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 160; Shaoul Hakham Sassoon, *In the Hell of Saddam Hussein: Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Days at the Terminal Palace*. Copyright by the author, 2000.

torture wrought upon prison inmates. If Bekhor's sources are correct, Jewish prisoners began dying under torture in the secrecy of Iraq's prisons on July 26, 1968, only nine days after the Ba'th coup.²⁷⁰ It may be that that Ba'th leaders harbored their own sincere suspicions of Jewish involvement in a Zionist conspiracy and sincerely hoped to extract confessions to satisfy their suspicions. In any case, the extracting of such confessions would prove politically beneficial to the Ba'th Party, whether or not Ba'th leaders actually believed such claims as confessions would verify their opposition rhetoric that the previous government had allowed espionage activities to operate under its nose. While one or both of these motives likely came into play eventually, if not immediately, other, less calculated motives seem to have contributed to Ba'th violence against Jews from the beginning.

The violence suffered by incarcerated Iraqis, including Jews, during this period often took irrational forms that suggest a variety of motives unconnected to any political strategy. Imprisonment, torture, and murder often served as a means of revenge or punishment for non-compliance with the Mukhabarat, the Ba'th secret police, as in the case of one inmate who had refused to sell his new home to the government to make room for a state development project, so Ba'th secret police abducted him with his wife and baby, whom they threw out of the speeding car before delivering the man to the prison, where he spent his days sitting in a corner muttering to himself.²⁷¹ The Mukhabarat also used imprisonment to silence individuals with incriminating evidence against them. For example, they imprisoned a fourteen-year-old Bedouin in Qasr al-Nihaya because he witnessed Ba'th policemen dumping a body. Guards killed him on the day of his release when he called out to his fellow inmates wishing them well.²⁷² The guards said he was guilty of violating the prison's no speaking rule. Another disturbing motive that must be considered is the simple sadistic pleasure that Saddam Hussein and the Mukhabarat officers under his direction took in carrying out the most brutal forms of torture on helpless prisoners. Survivors testify to Hussein's nightly ritual of selecting prisoners to have brutally tortured by his officers while he watched from a nearby chair.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 165.

²⁷¹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155-56.

²⁷² Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155-56.

²⁷³ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 155-56; Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 162, Sami Balass, interview with author, November 2, 2016.

While the Mukhabarat meted out such brutality on most of the prisoners in Qasr al-Nihaya, Jews suffered a greater likelihood of facing imprisonment and torture than non-Jews because of their disproportional imprisonment for espionage. However, the Mukhabarat began taking drastic measures to conceal their deadly violence against prisoners. According to testimonies collected and published by Author Gourji C. Bekhor in *Fascinating Life and Sensational Death*, the Mukhabarat began freezing many of the bodies of Jews they killed in prison, many of them for several months, in an apparent effort to conceal the number of deaths occurring in the prisons until a later date while, in other cases, Ba'th security officials turned the bodies over to Chief Rabbi Khedouri and his coroner, ordering them to bury the bodies secretly and report the cause of death as "unknown illness."²⁷⁴ These measures suggest that Ba'th Leaders understood that extrajudicial killings and torture would reflect poorly on them and the act of freezing bodies specifically, indicates a likelihood that those directing the policies anticipated returning the bodies at a later time. These secret measures and the calculated manner in which the Ba'th Party later revealed and framed its brutality suggests that at some point between July and October—and likely gradually throughout that period—Ba'th leaders formulated a plan to publicize this state violence in a calculated manner that would manipulate anti-Israeli rhetoric to elicit a positive public response to the party's violence.

5.4 Campaigning on Conspiracy

Whereas the Arif government in 1967, like the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Said in 1948-1951 arrested Jews and placed Jews under surveillance to appease an Iraqi public suspicious of the Jews, the Ba'th Party fabricated evidence and carried out show trials to *encourage* the belief that Zionist spies operated in Iraq while purporting to bring those spies to justice. This ruse began on October 9, 1968, when the government announced they had uncovered a spy ring and arrested twenty suspects, seventeen of whom were merchants and students from Iraq's Jewish community. In the months that followed, the unfolding story of the vast spy ring conspiracy dominated Iraqi airwaves. The reports claimed that Israeli spies operating in Iraq had fed vital security information to the U.S., Iran, and other members of CENTO (a pro-western alliance from which Iraq had withdrawn after the 1958 revolution considering it an instrument of Imperialist

²⁷⁴ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 165, 181.

designs on the Middle East).²⁷⁵ In reality, the Jewish community, withdrawn from politics, excluded from the military, and cut off from even their own relatives in Israel, could hardly have led such an operation. Nevertheless, the charges fit within the conspiratorial mindset in Arab countries after the Six Day War that considered Israel's unexpected victory to be proof of Imperialist/Zionist spies and lackeys at work in the Arab world. Given the prominence of Jews among the accused, they also reinvigorated the conspiracy theories that rendered all Iraqi Jews as suspect because of their imagined loyalty to Israel.

The sensationalism of the spy ring arrests and the sense of crisis surrounding it also served as a convenient distraction from the party's mass arrests of potential opposition in the government, military, and business class. On November 9, the government carried out mass arrests, detaining sixty-five army officers and approximately 250 businessmen, most of them nationalists and socialists who, despite their ideological similarity with the Ba'th party, represented threats and whom the party thus branded as "reactionaries." Party men tortured many of these prisoners, including the former Prime Minister Tahir Yahya, who died under torture. The sense of crisis in Iraq grew on December 4 when an Israeli air strike on Iraqi forces stationed in Jordan killed sixteen and wounded thirty others. These air strikes, carried out in retaliation for Iraqi mortar attacks on Israel days earlier, claimed the lives of six Iraqi soldiers.²⁷⁶ As angry demonstrators filled the streets, President Bakr used the opportunity to tie this military loss to the alleged spies waiting helplessly in Qasr al-Nihaya prison. "We face treacherous movements of a rabble of fifth columnists!" he shouted to the crowds, then asked them what they wanted, to which they responded "death to the spies, execution of the spies, all the spies, without delay!"²⁷⁷ The angry mobs, however, would have to wait, for the B'ath party was not yet finished performing its drama. Whether the Ba'th state intended to provoke an Israeli retaliation in order to heighten the sense of crisis is uncertain, but the Ba'th party clearly exploited the death of these six soldiers to evoke further public outcry over Iraq's supposed spy problem. The following day, a large party-organized march carried the coffins of the fallen soldiers from liberation square to the presidential palace, where Bakr gave a two hour televised speech once again calling for the death of "fifth columnist spies of Israel and America."²⁷⁸ Fuad Sawdayee wrote in his journal that night that as he listened

²⁷⁵ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 183.

²⁷⁶ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 49; Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 77.

²⁷⁷ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 50.

²⁷⁸ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 77.

to the speech in his home, he had no doubt that all Iraqis by now understood that “Spies” operated as a code word for Iraqi Jews.

By the end of the year, the Ba’th regime had established the practice of carefully using the terms “spies” and “fifth columnists” rather than Jews. In this way, Ba’th leadership justified their actions on anti-Zionist grounds. The Ba’th Party’s careful use of the terms “spies,” fifth column,” and “Zionists” to the exclusion of “Jews” allowed them to claim that their violent campaign was not racist, sectarian, or antisemitic but their actions sent a different message. The disproportionate targeting of Jews as spies and the claim that Iraqi Jews lay at the center of Israeli espionage in Iraq allowed the Iraqi non-Jewish public to consider themselves safe from the Ba’th anti-espionage measures. For those Iraqis who celebrated Ba’th targeting of Jews as Zionists, the rhetoric also allowed Iraqis who may not have thought of themselves as sectarian or anti-Jewish to celebrate Ba’th policies that seemed to satisfy popular demands for explanations for and answers to the Arab defeat of the previous year.

The party gave substance to its claims that its policies were not anti-Jewish by including Muslims and Christians in the list of alleged spies. On December 14, two Muslims among the accused appeared on Iraqi television to confess their guilt and give testimony about the extent of the spy ring’s activities in return for sentences reduced from death to life imprisonment.²⁷⁹ Sadiq Ja’far al-Hawi, a Shia soldier from Basra, alleged that Naji Zelkha, a Jewish merchant in Basra, recruited him to provide intelligence on Soviet military supplies to Iraq.²⁸⁰ He and another Muslim, a prominent Sunni lawyer from Baghdad named Abdel Hadi Bishari each discussed, in detail, an elaborate plot hatched by the spy ring’s Jewish leaders, Naji Zelkha and Charles Horesh. According to their story, the two not only provided sensitive Iraqi intelligence to Israel and the CIA, but also funneled Israeli funds to Kurdish rebels through Iran and planned to send Iraqi Jews to Iran for sabotage training. They even claimed that a recent bridge collapse that had occurred in Basra was the group’s first of many planned operations, aimed at bringing about a coup that would replace the Ba’th government with a reactionary regime that would sign a peace treaty with Israel and restore imperial control in Iraq.

The identities of the non-Jewish accused are significant. First, they include Iraqis from every major demographic excluding Kurds. The inclusion of al-Hawi, a Shia Muslim from the

²⁷⁹ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 50.

²⁸⁰ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 97; Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 184-5.

southern city of Basra, undoubtedly sent a message to Iraq's restive Shia majority—a population concentrated in the south but also with a prominent opposition presence in the capital. That this defendant was a soldier with no notable wealth or family ties only would have further served to draw attention to the population he represented—Iraq's large population of poor rural Shia Muslims. Bishari, the Sunni Lawyer from Baghdad was a figure to whom any among Baghdad's politically influential upper-middle class could have related. Thus, Baghdadi urbanites and southern Shias, whether or not they celebrated the regime's arrest of the alleged Jewish-led spy ring, also saw, among the condemned, Iraqis from their own demographic background. This made it clear to the public that the highly questionable judicial process unfolding on Iraqi media, and whatever punishment the state carried out against the accused, were not exclusively for Jewish traitors but could be leveled at any Iraqi the regime deemed guilty of sedition. As for Kurds, the Ba'th Party courted Kurdish leadership at the time, hoping to secure a peace deal in the north and, thus, their exclusion of Kurds in the affair was likely strategic to avoid scuttling negotiations. In spite of the implications of the trials for all of Iraqi society, many Iraqis publicly celebrated the proceedings, the full implications of the events perhaps not apparent to them given the prominence of the spy ring's supposed Jewish ringleaders in the story.

While the Party's penitent traitors colored the story of the spy ring with enough detail to make it believable to their willing audience, the Ba'th leaders continued attempting to extract confessions from their Jewish defendants. Survivors of Qasr al-Nihaya later reported that all of the accused underwent torture as early as November while prisoners overheard the guards talking about orders they had received not to kill any Jews who had been predetermined for guilty verdicts in the upcoming trial.²⁸¹ Other Jewish prisoners died under torture, including Jack Atrikchi, whom the Mukhabarat arrested on November 8 and tortured to death the same day, after which guards displayed his mutilated corpse before the accused Jews in the spy ring in what survivors understood as an attempt to scare confessions out of them.²⁸²

Before the trials of the alleged spies began, the party arrested a number of Jewish leaders and held them during the public trials, which lasted from January 4 to 27, 1969 in an apparent effort to silence any who might advocate for the accused.²⁸³ Some Jews pressured the Chief Rabbi

²⁸¹ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 185.

²⁸² Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 169.

²⁸³ This included Meir Basri, whose daughters attest to his arrest.

to act to halt the impending executions, but the party still held his son, whom they had arrested the previous year.²⁸⁴ Given the rising propensity of the new government for arresting even the most prominent Jewish men, the other members of the Jewish Community Council did not dare visit any party officials while the trials were underway. On January 4, 1969 the Ba'th Government's Revolutionary Court met to begin the trial of what the Judge referred to as "the first seventeen of eighty-six spies," suggesting that more trials would follow.²⁸⁵ Ten of those in the first round were Jews. Although the government was unspecific about the identity of the other sixty-nine alleged spies, the British Embassy's estimates placed the number of incarcerated Jews at the time around sixty.²⁸⁶ The president of the Revolutionary Court, which was a new body assembled for the occasion, opened the televised trials by proclaiming "In the name of God and the people we are here to try Spies, agents and sabotage gangs for interests of imperialism and Israel."²⁸⁷ The television also showed tens of thousands of Iraqis gathered outside the hall where the court met, yelling "criminal spies!" In keeping with their careful rhetoric in which they singled out spies, not Jews, the Ba'th Party acquitted and released fifteen Jewish prisoners.²⁸⁸

Over the course of the twenty-three day trial, the government broadcasted portions of each day's proceedings on the radio each evening and by the third week of the trials all but two of the defendants were admitting guilt and describing with well-rehearsed accuracy, the details of the spy ring's alleged activities.²⁸⁹ As the spy trials continued, car bombs periodically exploded in various parts of the city, which Baghdad radio promptly attributed to "fifth column activities," increasing the sense of crisis tied to the claims of espionage. If Sawdayee's account can be taken as accurate, the state issued its announcements attributing the explosions to Zionists so promptly that on several occasions the radio reported specific car-bombings before they occurred, suggesting that the state itself may have orchestrated them for that purpose. Meanwhile, the Ba'th Party maintained a sense of crisis throughout the capital by imposing black-out drills and sounding air-raid sirens and state media publicized the government's claims that Iraq was vulnerable to an Israeli air strike.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁴ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 90; Shaoul Hakham Sassoon, *In the Hell of Saddam Hussein: Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Days at the Terminal Palace*. (Copyright by the author, 2000).

²⁸⁵ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 186-188.

²⁸⁶ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 115.

²⁸⁷ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 186-188.

²⁸⁸ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 115.

²⁸⁹ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 87-9.

²⁹⁰ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 43.

Jewish testimonies indicate that, in addition to heightening suspicions of espionage, the spy ring and subsequent trial also brought increased suspicion of and harassment of Iraqi Jews in public, especially near areas known to the public as places where Jews congregated. As a result, most Jews avoided leaving their homes unnecessarily during the trials out of fear of violence. Headmaster Obadiah closed the Frank Iny School on multiple occasions to avoid incidents as increasing numbers of hecklers that congregated outside of the school each day.²⁹¹ By the end of the year, a Jewish high school student named Aida Zelouf rushed home from school every day with her siblings, where windows and shutters remained closed and locked and conversations hushed, fearing that anyone outside might hear them and find an excuse to report them as spies.²⁹² The ease with which the Ba’thist security apparatus could arrest any Jew as a spy made them vulnerable to abuse. Zelouf reported herself and other Jewish women being followed and harassed by men – in an atmosphere where Jews best avoid contact with authorities, Zelouf to let such harassment go unreported.²⁹³

Meanwhile, it had proved increasingly dangerous for non-Jews to associate with Jews or even have contact with them. Police arrested a number of Jews along with their non-Jewish business partners and the party security officers began using pictures of Iraqi Muslims and Christians standing next to Jews as sufficient evidence to imprison the former.²⁹⁴ By this point, the conspiratorial mindset was so pervasive that the Iraqi Jews were more isolated than ever before. Most Jews stayed in their homes as the trials dragged on, leaving only to visit the homes of relatives or other Jews. With phone and mail services still denied to Jewish residents, news and rumors alike traveled from house to house as Jews cautiously visited each other.

Sawdayee continued a long-held ritual of early walks to the riverbanks to do yoga much to the grave concern of his wife, insisting that it was the only thing that eased his anxiety throughout the ordeal. On January 5, Sawdayee’s neighbor, a Christian in the army, told him that President Bakr had been heard privately promising to “make the blood of the Jews flow in this country like a stream.”²⁹⁵ While Sawdayee wondered whether the rumor was true, the murder of Jews under

²⁹¹ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 219-20.

²⁹² Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 207.

²⁹³ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 208.

²⁹⁴ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 208.

²⁹⁵ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 84.

the pretext of espionage had already begun within the privacy of Qasr al-Nihaya and was about to be celebrated in Baghdad's most prominent public space.

At 1:30 am on January 27, the last session of the trials by the revolutionary court came to a close. Many Iraqis gathered around their radios to hear the President of the Revolutionary Court deliver the sentences. The court sentenced fourteen of the defendants to death, nine of them Jews.²⁹⁶ The broadcast did not specify when the sentences would be carried out. In his diary that night, Sawdayee hoped that the sentences would prompt a last-minute intervention from the international community to halt the executions. Little did he know that the broadcast he heard was pre-taped and the condemned were already dead, officers having carried out the executions at 11:00 p.m., three hours before the broadcast revealed the verdicts to the public. Among the condemned, only two Jews, Naji Zelkha and Charles Horesh, declared their innocence until the end, the rest having confessed under the tortures that they had visibly suffered.²⁹⁷ Charles left a wife at home who carried a baby he would never meet.²⁹⁸ Naji's elderly brother was acquitted on one thousand dinars bail, along with one other Jew.²⁹⁹ The remaining condemned Jews included Fuad Gabbay, Naim Khedouri Khelali, Yakub Gorji Namoori, Daoud Ghali, Saleh Haskill, Sabah Hayim, and Daoud Dalal, all of whom were university students or businessmen from Basra with one exception. Daoud Dallal was a sixteen-year-old boy arrested in place of his brother who was absent when the police came to arrest him.³⁰⁰ Although Iraqi law did not permit the death sentence for minors, the court claimed that Dallal was eighteen and executed him along with the others.

Of the fourteen sentenced to death, five of them were not Jewish. They included a Christian named Albert Habibi, accused of helping lead the plot, and another Christian who worked as a merchant in Basra named Zaki Zetou.³⁰¹ The condemned Muslims included Jamal Sabih al-Hakim, a twenty eight-year-old from Basra who confessed to being the link between the Baghdad and Basra agents of the plan. A Shia Pakistani man named Abd al-Husein Kokal who owned a commercial office in Basra, and a merchant from Basra named Abd al-Muhsim Jar-Allah who confessed plotting with Kurdish rebels and Lebanese politicians and delivering military intelligence. The inclusion of non-Jews among those condemned reflected and reinforced the

²⁹⁶ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 92-93.

²⁹⁷ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 92.

²⁹⁸ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 142.

²⁹⁹ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 92.

³⁰⁰ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 31; Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 130.

³⁰¹ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 209.

state's double-speak in which it claimed to pursue spies, and not Jews, but drew popular notions of Jewish conspiracy by making Jews the ringleaders of their supposed spy ring.

Even though it was through their association with these Jewish spies that the Muslim and Christian condemned acquired their guilt, they too appear to have been chosen carefully to reflect specific demographics of Iraqi society prone to opposition—southern Shias and Basran elites, on the one hand, and members of Baghdad's upper-middle class on the other. The inclusion of a Shia Pakistani merchant, specifically, highlighted the essentially foreign character of Shias, whom many Sunnis and Arab nationalists suspected of loyalty to neighboring Iran. The following day, thousands of Iraqis would show up to celebrate a spectacle of state violence against Iraqis accused of espionage. This state violence would be legitimized by the implicit Jewish identity of its ringleaders, but it would also be employed against Iraqi citizens and immigrants from demographics associated with each of the party's potential enemies.

5.5 Spectacle of Violence

On the morning of January 27, 1969 Nissim Dangour made a trip to Baghdad to buy meat at the kosher butcher shop there. Nissim was one of many Iraqi Jews who lived in the southern port city of Basra, where export businesses thrived. His periodic trips to the capital offered an opportunity to catch up on small talk in Baghdad's Jewish community. This morning, however, the butcher shop buzzed with disturbing news. The Ba'th government had executed those it condemned in the spy trials, including several Jews, and displayed their corpses in Liberation Square. Alarmed, Nissim left the shop immediately and ran to the square where he found a horrifying sight. Decorating the perimeter of the square were corpses hanged by nooses from makeshift gallows spaced evenly around the square, creating a spectacle of death.³⁰² Each victim had a crude placard pinned to their chest like the one seen in the picture below. It displayed the victim's religion in prominent letters along with his occupation and the charge of espionage. As he made his way around the square, Nissim recognized, among the hanging bodies, familiar faces of Jewish associates and friends whom he knew well. All around him, throngs of excited Iraqis cheered and danced, celebrating the sight of these men who hanged above them. By mid-day, the

³⁰² Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 187-8.

crowds filled the square as Ba'th officials delivered inflammatory speeches.³⁰³ It was a carnival atmosphere. Baghdad radio called for celebration. "Great people of Iraq! You Great People of Baghdad and Basra! Today is a holy day for all of you! Today is your feast! The day of your joy and happiness! The day on which you've got rid of the first gang of despicable spies! Iraq, your beloved Iraq, has executed, has hanged, has settled the account with those traitors!"³⁰⁴ The report embodied the rhetoric in which the Party had prepared the public to receive the spectacle; not as a gruesome and tragic injustice or an anti-Jewish act of brutality, but as a national victory of the Iraqi people over the very real threat of foreign intrusion and exploitation by imperialism.

Sawdayee watched as the television networks showed footage of Liberation Square, actually a circular park about a half-kilometer across, that was rapidly filling with people.³⁰⁵ The bodies, clad in brown prison uniforms, hung barefoot from gallows spaced far apart around three quarters of the perimeter to allow for maximum viewing. Some of them wore white gloves to hide their hands, which appeared to Sawdayee to have been severed during torture. As Ba'th party officials spoke from microphones nearby, television cameras moved in for close up coverage of the corpses, showing their drooping heads with blood trickling from ears and nose, they stopped on the word "Jewish" prominently pinned to one corpse's chest.³⁰⁶ The prominence of Jews in the display provided essential context for the tirades against the "spies" emanating from the speakers around the square.

By the time President Bakr and Defense Minister al-Tikriti arrived at eleven o'clock Baghdad television claimed the crowd had increased to two hundred thousand, with helicopters and jets flying overhead while the radio blared military music.³⁰⁷ Public trams operated for free that day, providing transportation to the square for the more than 200,000 demonstrators who showed up to celebrate the executions.³⁰⁸ Some sources even reported seeing army trucks transporting villagers from outside of Baghdad to the square, bringing the number of demonstrators in the square to approximately a half a million, according to Iraqi government sources-- a crowd

³⁰³ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 100; *The Scribe*, January 27, 1999 <http://www.thescribe.info/> accessed January 1, 2014.

³⁰⁴ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 97.

³⁰⁵ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 98.

³⁰⁶ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 99.

³⁰⁷ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 100.

³⁰⁸ *The Scribe*, "January 27, 1999," accessed January 1, 2014 <http://www.thescribe.info/>; Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 100.

that cheered, sang and danced at the sight of the bodies hanging around them.³⁰⁹ The state's efforts to inflate the numbers of celebrants in the square—both physically and in their exaggerated crowd estimates—served a purpose. Ba'th rhetoric attempted to present their spectacle as a popular event celebrated by the Iraqi public and a square filled with cheering Iraqis, even if it in fact constituted a small portion of Iraqi citizenry, allowed the party to claim popular support for its new public violence.

As the day unfolded, Ba'th leaders and party media articulated the narrative that gave the hangings the measure of actual popularity that they received. They did so by presenting the public hanging of these fourteen men to the Iraqi people as the victory over Zionism and imperialism that Iraqis had hoped for and lost with the Arab defeat in 1967. On Baghdad radio, the broadcast proceeded "You Great People of Iraq! The Iraq of today shall no more tolerate any traitor, spy, agent, or fifth columnist! You foundling Israel, you imperialist Americans, and you Zionists, hear me! We will discover all your dirty tricks! We will punish your agents! We will hang all your spies, even if there are thousands of them! This is only the beginning! The great and immortal squares of Iraq shall be filled up with corpses of traitors and spies! Just wait!"³¹⁰ Such statements reinforced the dichotomy in Ba'th rhetoric that posited the party as the representatives of the Iraqi people and protagonists in a battle against the forces of imperialism and Zionism and their seditious elements in Iraq.

The Ba'th Party officials appeals over Baghdad radio to "the great people of Iraq" called them to view those hanged in the square not as their fellow Iraqis or even as mere criminals, but as traitors, spies, agents, and fifth columnists of Israel and the U.S. The defiant statements addressed to Israel, imperialist Americans and Zionists that the Ba'th Party would "hang your spies" was interesting considering the station broadcast only in central Iraq and broadcasted in Arabic. The party clearly intended this message for domestic consumption and the public demonstrations gave the appearance of an enthusiastic response from Iraqi society.

³⁰⁹ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 130; Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*.

³¹⁰ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 99.

The day after the spectacle, the state newspaper *al-Jumhurriyah* displayed the party's version of the event in cartoon form [see Figure 7]. The caption below read "the truth about those whom the revolution has executed."³¹¹ That "truth" took the form of three bodies hanging from a single noose. At the top dangled an image of Uncle Sam labeled "America," by this time the primary referent of the imperialism in Arab anti-Imperial rhetoric. Below and to the right hung a stereotypical image of a Jew labeled "Israel." These two figures encouraged the paper's many viewers to consider the victims of the hangings not as victims at all, but rather, as the embodiment of imperialism and Zionism, the chief enemies of the Arab "revolution." Below the feet of the hanged figures, the cartoonist drew an empty military helmet with a prominently displayed Star of David, suggestive of a military defeat over Israel. Given the Ba'th Party's claims that Zionist espionage, and not military mismanagement, led to the Arab defeat in the summer of 1967, the combination of the unoccupied Israeli helmet with the embodiments of imperialism and Zionism dangling from a noose portrayed the executions as a victory—perhaps even the victory against Zionism and imperialism that Iraqis had been denied eighteen months earlier.

The third figure whose neck shared the noose with America and Israel was exactly the figure who had denied the Arab world its victory in the Six Day War. A stout Arab man dressed garb like that worn by the Sharifian monarchies which ruled Jordan and, before their revolutions, Egypt and Iraq. Across the stout belly of this figure the term *al-raj'eyya* appears—a term always translated in Ba'th literature as



Figure 7: Political cartoon published January 18, 1969 in *Al Jumhurriyah*.

³¹¹ *Al Jumhurriyah*, January 18, 1969.

“reactionary,” and used in anti-Imperial rhetoric to indicate Arab leadership that had compromised with the forces of imperialism. Within the established anti-Imperial rhetoric, this figure symbolized not the literal sharifian monarch but those in the Arab world and Iraq accused of continuing to advance the imperialist cause as the monarch had been accused of doing. The ambiguity of this character played off of the popular notions of conspiracy after the Six Day War while leaving the specific referent of the character fluid, allowing the regime to associate with its “victory” in Liberation Square anyone it labeled reactionary. While the first spectacle maintained a primary focus on the Jewish figures of the supposed spy ring, the fluid notion of the reactionary, or Arab collaborator, would play a prominent role in subsequent public hangings.

That same morning, Fuad Sawdayee read an editorial by the editor of *Al-Thawra*, Hassan al-Alawi, a media witness to the executions. Describing how doctors drugged the condemned with dizzying medication before their execution, he mused, “it was amusing, even funny, seeing all those sub-humans dizzy, trying to utter something but incapable of it, looking at us like mad, when the guards took their chains off and pushed them one after the other right up to the gallows.”³¹² His description of the condemned as “sub-humans” echoes the dehumanizing reference to the “Jewish cancer” in another Baghdad newspaper a year and a half earlier. However, here the writer made no explicit reference to Jews. Instead, Al-Alawi referred to the eleven victims hanged in Baghdad, which included a Christian and a Muslim along with nine Jews. This identification of “spies” rather than “Jews” as the enemy, perfected in Ba’th rhetoric over the previous several months, prepared the way for the expansion of this same violence from the Jewish-led spy ring to all Iraqis deemed enemies of the “Revolution” embodied in the party. The rhetorical focus on spies and not Jews likely also made the trials and executions more palatable to many Iraqis who may not have thought of themselves as prejudice against Jews but remained angry about the Arab defeat and eager to find answers in the charges of Israeli espionage. Drawing as many Iraqis into its celebratory spectacle as possible proved important to maximize the legitimizing effect of the spectacle for the party’s violence.

It is impossible to determine just how many Iraqis actually approved of the trials and executions. The hundreds of thousands of Iraqis that came to Liberation Square in Baghdad on that day came for a variety of reasons. Nissim Dangour was not the only Jew who went to the square

³¹² Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 104.

and faced the horrifying spectacle. Other Jews have recorded similar experiences.³¹³ It is also logical to assume that many non-Jewish Iraqis went there similarly by chance or out of curiosity or other motives. Nevertheless, by all accounts it is clear that the mood of the crowds viewing the spectacle appeared sufficiently celebratory to serve the party's purposes and many Iraqis both approved of the spectacle and felt themselves among the norm in doing so. This is confirmed by many Jewish accounts of non-Jewish Iraqis sharing their celebratory sentiments with Jews they didn't realize were Jews. On the day of the spectacle, Sawdayee rode in a car driven by a friend's chauffeur, who didn't realize Sawdayee was Jewish and took great joy in relating to him the story of a mother of one of the condemned who, upon hearing that the condemned would be hanged in Liberation Square, rushed there to bid her son farewell. In the square, there were party organized volunteers constructing gallows and crowds already beginning to gather. When she arrived and found the bodies of the already executed victims being pulled out of a truck, she became hysterical, wailing, pulling her hair and kissing the corpse of her son. As she did so, a crowd of about twenty men surrounded her and began kicking her, calling her a prostitute and the mother of a spy. The chauffeur, Sawdayee wrote, took great joy in recounting the tale, claiming to have been one of the woman's attackers.³¹⁴ Jewish testimonies from that day consistently recount efforts to avoid interactions with most of their non-Jewish acquaintances to avoid the likelihood of similar interactions.

5.6 International Criticism and Ba'th Defiance

With the progression from show trials to public spectacle, international responses escalated from concern to outright condemnation and isolation of Iraq by the international community. Even before the Ba'th coup in July 1968, the U.N., Israel, and many western countries had already expressed concern over the treatment of Jews after the Six Day War in Arab countries where Jews faced varying degrees of persecution. The trials in Ba'thist Iraq focused international attention on the plight of Iraq's Jews in particular. The spectacle of January 27, 1969 intensified criticisms of the Iraqi regime, even including rare criticism from other Arab countries. However, criticism by foreign powers seemed to embolden Ba'th Leaders, who spoke in defiant tones

³¹³ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 101; Isaac Sasson, phone conversation with author, November 22, 2017.

³¹⁴ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 101.

reinforcing the rhetoric in which they had framed the very trials that drew so much criticism. Scholars have previously seen the Ba'th party's defiant foreign policy during its first five years as counter-productive, but this assessment overlooks that fact that the greatest threat to Iraqi governments throughout this period were not foreign, but domestic, and the primary issue of concern in domestic political discourse at the time was the ongoing popular conviction that western imperialism and, by extension, Zionism, threatened Arab independence.³¹⁵ Understood within this broader context, an examination of the impact of Ba'th Party's defiant foreign policy on domestic politics shows that the party was actually in a unique position to benefit from the regional effects of the Six Day War and its defiant international posture only served to bolster its domestic credentials. Despite the party's small following, its leaders knew how to appeal to popular sentiments in Iraq, and its foreign policy during their first five years reflected an effort to capitalize on the dramatic changes brought on the region by the Arab defeat in the Six Day War in 1967. In other words, this was foreign policy designed for domestic consumption.

When the Ba'th Party first seized power In July 1968, its posture toward western nations differed only slightly from policies of the previous government between the Six Day War and the coup. Vilifying western countries and Israel through anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric, it nevertheless maintained diplomatic relationships with the former in pursuit of its strategic interests. During its first months in power, Ba'th government officials communicated regularly with British diplomats on matters of security and economic relations. Although disagreements over control of and profits from the Iraq Petroleum Company remained a touchy subject between the two, British diplomatic correspondence between London and Baghdad reveal the strong desire on the part of the British to make inroads with the new Ba'th government as a bulwark against the Iraqi Communist Party and the pro-Nassir parties.³¹⁶ Ba'th officials, for their part, sought strategic economic and military ties with Britain and France despite their domestic use of anti-western rhetoric.

Relations with the United States were a different matter, however, as the Ba'th Party's anti-American stance went beyond mere rhetoric. The Arif government, like other Arab governments, had abruptly cut off diplomatic relations with the U.S. after the Six Day War, blaming the U.S. for

³¹⁵ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 144.

³¹⁶ Cengage Learning EMEA. *British Foreign Office Documents*. Middle East Online Series 2: Iraq 1914-1974. go.galegroup.com., accessed Januray 1, 2014, (hereafter cited as "FCO"), 17/869, 8.

supporting Israel. However, by the following year, Arif had begun rapprochement talks seeking to re-establish diplomatic relations with the United States.³¹⁷ After the July 17 coup of 1968 the Ba'th reversed Arif's rapprochement and instead escalated the diplomatic break by expelling U.S. diplomatic staff.³¹⁸ While U.S. diplomats monitored the situation in Iraq through third parties, they constantly gauged the prospects for rapprochement, but found Iraqi officials disinterested and the break continued.³¹⁹

The radical anti-American stance taken by the Iraqi government was only one part of a more radical and defiant foreign policy posture meant to boost its domestic popularity. The anti-American emphasis played off the popular notion that Israel was incapable of defeating its Arab neighbors without US support. Accordingly, the United States had not only provided Israel with many of the Arms it used in the war, the view went, but also actively provided covert assistance to the Israeli military effort. As the Ba'th Party hardened its stance toward the U.S., it also reinforced conspiratorial notions about the U.S. through its rhetoric. During a parade honoring Iraqi soldiers who died in an Israeli air strike after Iraqi mortar attacks on Israel, party spokesmen called for "death to America, the new agents of imperialism!"³²⁰ With the Six Day War, the U.S. had replaced Great Britain in Arab rhetoric as the world's principle imperial menace, responsible for maintaining the presence of the Jewish state in the heart of the Arab world and ensuring its victories in conflicts with its Arab neighbors. The Ba'th party, in a unique position to capitalize off of the Six Day War because it was not in power at the time of the war and therefor didn't share in the blame for the Arab defeat. As a result, it took its anti-American stance to greater heights than its Arab neighbors and the previous Iraqi regime as an expression of its success in maintaining steadfast opposition to the "Zionist entity" that other Arab regimes had failed to defeat. It was also in the Ba'th Party's interest to keep Iraq's security conceptually tied to the Palestinian cause and, thus, the party actively encouraged belief that Iraq's sovereignty was under threat by an active fifth column of pro-imperial, pro-Zionist spies operating in their midst by constructing a reality that fit those suspicions.

³¹⁷ Peter L. Hahn, *Missions Accomplished? The United States and Iraq Since World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53.

³¹⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, March 20, 1969, <http://www.state.gov/frus/256> accessed January 1, 2014.

³¹⁹ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam Speaks on the Gulf Crisis* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1992), 13.

³²⁰ FCO 17/869, 36.

The spectacle elicited strong condemnation from a number of foreign leaders ranging from an expression of “concern” by the U.S. Secretary of State, “consternation” expressed by the Vatican, and similar statements by French, Swiss, and Italian governments.³²¹ The Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed “grave concern” about the executions, which he described as “deplorable” and “retarding and diminishing the prospects of achieving peace in the area.”³²² In Israel, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol broke the relative silence kept by Israel on the plight of Jews in Iraq. Addressing the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) on the morning following the hangings, he paid homage to the nine Jews hanged in Iraq who he named, describing them as martyrs and quoting a psalm, saying “Oh Daughter of Babylon, that art to be destroyed, happy shall be he, that repays thee as thou served us.”³²³ While condemnation from Israel was unlikely to deter the actions of any Arab government, the Ba’th Party’s defiance in the face of such widespread condemnation from world leaders constituted a radical new posture that fed off of such widespread condemnations from western leaders and Israel.

Diplomatic officials understood well that intervention by western governments would only play into the suspicions that drove the persecution and surely worsen the plight of Iraqi Jews.³²⁴ In refraining from voicing their condemnation, British diplomats demonstrated a keen understanding of Iraqi sentiment at the time and the Ba’th Party’s methods in exploiting it, rightly surmising that any direct condemnation from British sources would only confirm the party’s claims to be revolutionary leaders under fire by imperialist forces. Israeli diplomats, despite the Prime Minister’s comments to the Knesset, attempted to avoid being seen as advocating for Jews in Arab countries, lest they incite further persecution against them.³²⁵ Nevertheless, condemnation from international figures, many of them made in response to domestic demands for such declarations, proved numerous in the wake of the public hangings.

Iraq even received criticism from some Arab sources, but the muted responses of most Arab governments reflected the uneasy position in which Iraq’s radical posturing left them. Statements from leaders of Lebanon and Kuwait reaffirmed Iraq’s sovereign right to carry out justice, but also voiced some degree of disapproval of the gruesome public manner of the

³²¹ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 53.

³²² Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 53.

³²³ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 31.

³²⁴ Destani, *Minorities*, 13-28.

³²⁵ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 13-28.

spectacle.³²⁶ Only the Yemeni government openly praised Iraq's public hangings.³²⁷ An Egyptian newspaper named *al-Ahram* accused the Iraq government of lacking tact, saying that the hangings "came at inappropriate time and in an inappropriate place."³²⁸ Egypt's President Nassir made no official statement on the matter, but the appearance of criticism in an Egyptian newspaper at a time when the Egyptian government censored all news media was a clear expression of the President's disapproval.

The spectacle in Baghdad on January 27, 1969 and the responses to it demonstrated the vast difference between the sentiment dominating the streets in the Arab world and the sentiment of the international community, especially regarding the plight of Jews in Arab countries. Arab leaders like Egypt's Nassir and Jordan's King Hussein found themselves caught between these opposing expectations. They needed to present themselves as reasonable partners in negotiations after the Six Day War, especially as they fought in the international community to hold Israel accountable to the terms of U.N. resolutions calling for its withdrawal from conquered territories. The opportunity for a military victory against Israel had been lost and securing the withdrawal of Israel from its newly occupied territories would have been a victory for Arab leaders. The Ba'th Party of Iraq, however, chose a different victory. Its execution of the supposed spy ring appealed to many Iraqis and Arabs throughout the region that had suspected their indigenous Jewish populations of espionage following the Arab defeat.

In the U.K. Samir Ahmed, a diplomat standing in for the Egyptian Ambassador privately remarked to British colleagues that his own and other Arab governments "deplored the executions," saying that they had "given Israel a propaganda advantage."³²⁹ He referred, no doubt, to Israeli efforts at the time to change the agenda of the U.N. Human Rights Commission meeting scheduled for the following month. While the expressed purpose of the meeting was to assess Israel's treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories, Israel had already begun pushing to have the agenda amended to include the treatment of Jews in Arab countries, treating the issues as two sides of the same coin.³³⁰ After the executions in Baghdad, Israeli diplomats exchanged "heated words" with U.S. diplomats, who wanted to continue privately pressuring Iraq through third parties to stop

³²⁶ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 39.

³²⁷ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 45.

³²⁸ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 63, 75; Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 106.

³²⁹ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 56.

³³⁰ FCO 17/177.

its persecution of the Jews and let the committee's proceedings on the topic of the occupied territories go ahead as originally planned.³³¹

British observers noted the lack of statements issued by Arab heads of state, surmising that the Iraqi spectacle had done damage to the Arab image, and on that basis, they attempted to convince Arab leaders to pressure Iraq to discontinuing such practices.³³² One member of the British Near Eastern department noted the silence of the Jordanian government of King Hussein, who had expressed a desire since the Six Day War to “make the Arabs appear like responsible people ready to accept a reasonable political settlement.”³³³ In Samir Ahmed's comments to his British colleagues about the damage done to the Arab cause he added that he knew that many Iraqis including the ambassador in Britain who “deplored the executions.”³³⁴ He added that, though he and other Arabs might say so in private they could not do so publicly. In the report of the conversation typed later, someone underlined this last statement and remarked in the margin next to it, “no Arab ever does!”³³⁵

The relative silence of most Arab leaders after the Iraqi spectacle reflected the difficult position in which they found themselves. Egypt, Jordan, and Syria were in the midst of ongoing peace negotiations, pressing for Israel to give up its control of the occupied territories, and it was important that their western counterparts see them as reasonable parties. However, the popular response to the hangings demonstrated how upset many Arabs remained about the Arab Defeat and how eager to celebrate an Arab victory—even one as dark as the spectacle in Iraq. Indeed, this is how the Iraqi authorities presented the spectacle. On the day of the hangings, Director General of Radio and Television Broadcasting Muhammad Sa'id as-Sahhaf declared “Imperialism and World Zionism, who have worked for many years to cover this part of the great Arab homeland with a network of agents and lackeys, today received an extremely strong blow, that the progressive popular revolution dealt to express its relentless resolution and firm intention of smashing the positions and pillars of the counter-revolution once and for all.”³³⁶ Arab leaders had to be careful not to come out too hard against the Iraqi executions, lest they appear to be bowing to pressure from the West, where leaders voiced their criticism more openly.

³³¹ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 30-31.

³³² Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 52.

³³³ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 48.

³³⁴ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 56.

³³⁵ Destani, *Minorities*, v. 6, 56.

³³⁶ FCO 17/869.

The Iraqi regime was prepared for criticism. At a press conference that same day, Minister of Culture and Information Abdullah Sallum as-Sammarra'i predicted "the reaction of counter-revolutionary forces will naturally be negative and will incite imperialism to use all the methods at its disposal to defame the revolution and conspire against the revolution and its attitudes."³³⁷ No Arab leader wanted to brand themselves as "reactionary" by speaking out too strongly against Iraq's campaign to liquidate its spies. Arab leaders including Nassir, had suffered a blow to their credibility after the Arab defeat and now the Iraq government claimed a victory on that front. Iraq's Director General of Radio and television broadcasting Muhammad Sa'id as-Sahhaf made this clear in his statement on the day of the Baghdad hangings, claiming that "liquidating cells and confronting the (Israeli) aggression are two positions on a single battlefield where our people face their violently hostile enemies."³³⁸

In the weeks following the spectacle of January 27, the Ba'th state, despite its defiance of international criticism, released about sixty Jewish prisoners between February 8 and 11, claiming that they had freed all Jews imprisoned by the previous regime.³³⁹ While their claim overlooked the fact that some of those Jews had died under Ba'th torture in prison, it nevertheless could be interpreted as a nod toward the international criticism it faced. Indeed, British diplomats bemoaned that the Ba'th party "made great play" of their release of prisoners while, according to their estimates, between eighty and one hundred and fifty Jews remained imprisoned in Iraq.³⁴⁰ More precisely, these selective releases of Jews imprisoned prior to the Ba'th coup can be seen as a Ba'th attempt to reinforce its rhetoric as the regime that righted the wrongs done to Jews by the Arif regime while also righting the wrongs done to the Iraqi public, who was terrorized by Zionist spies under the previous government. As their reign of terror continued, their selection of Iraqi Jews and Iraqis from other ethno-sectarian groups for arrest, release, and execution served their rhetorical purposes in turning their anti-Zionist and anti-Imperial terror from a Jewish focused spy ring toward the broader Iraqi public.

³³⁷ FCO 17/869.

³³⁸ FCO 17/869.

³³⁹ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 108.

³⁴⁰ Destani, *Minorities*, Vol. 6, 93, 97.

5.7 From Jewish Spectacle to Public Terror

Iraqi Jews rightly remember the spectacle of January 27, 1969 as the culmination of anti-Jewish terror in Ba'th Iraq. However, while for Jews it constituted a culmination, it proved, for the rest of Iraqi society an inauguration of Ba'th Public violence. Through 1969 and 1970, the Ba'th carried out nine such spectacles in all, their victims either hanged or shot, but in all cases their bodies displayed publicly. In all of these incidents, the party consistently presented each, as it had the first, as national victories over imperialism. However, the shift from the party's featuring of Jews as the central figure of the initial hangings to the primarily non-Jewish victims of the eight publicized executions that followed sent a clear message to the Iraqi public—that no Iraqi, regardless of their identity, was safe from the Ba'th party's violence.

The second public hanging, which occurred on February 20, featured eight individuals executed and suspended from gallows in Liberation Square in Baghdad in like manner as the first. While few Iraqi Jews today mention this incident in their recounting of the period, Fuad Sawdayee's diary entry from the time includes his very telling observations and reflections on the incident and the significance, as he saw it, for Iraqi society. "The gallows and Liberation Square again!" he wrote that day. "Baghdadis living in the *bab al-Sharqi* neighborhood must pass near the bodies of the hanged on their way to business this morning. Six Muslims and two Christians are the victims. Jews are missing this time."³⁴¹ The absence of Jews in this second spectacle put on full display what the inclusion of non-Jews in the first implied—that the brutal state violence wrought against the Jewish spies and their non-Jewish co-conspirators the previous months could be deployed just as easily against any Iraqi citizen that the Party deemed guilty of threatening the "Revolution" as embodied in the regime. In fact, the court had prepared the way for the expansion of terror in subtle ways, such as announcing the beginning of the October spy trials as the trial of "the first seventeen of eighty-six spies."³⁴² The announcement had left the identity of the other eighty-six spies a mystery, allowing many Iraqis to assume that futures trials would continue to feature Jewish spies and "traitors" who conspired with Jews but the absence of Jews in the second spectacle revealed the full implications of the Party's rhetoric and violence for the Iraqi public.

³⁴¹ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 109-110.

³⁴² Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 186-188.

The deadly implications of this second spectacle for the Iraqi public are undoubtedly part of the reason for the lack-luster response of Iraqis to the February hangings. Sawdayee noted the substantially smaller size of the crowds that day, adding in his diary that “They aren’t so joyful and exuberant... Staring at the suspended bodies, four of which are still bleeding from rifle shots, the spectators begin to doubt the future. The hangings today may have brought this unlucky people down to earth.”³⁴³ A British diplomat in Baghdad interpreted the events of February 20 in much the same way in a report to London, reporting little reaction to the second incident compared to the first while noting a “mounting fear mounting among middle class.”³⁴⁴

While these sources show the clearly observable effects of the second spectacle, they leave unanswered the question of intentionality. Did the party leaders who orchestrated the public hangings foresee and intend these effects, designing them for this purpose? Sawdayee’s interpretations of the events in his diary indicate that he understood the function of the second spectacle to be deliberate. “Now that the government has succeeded in intimidating the people by using Jews as the principal scapegoat, it has progressed farther.” He mused, “It’s terrorizing them by settling accounts with non-Jews as well, opponents of the regime, or enemies of certain men in power.”³⁴⁵ While it is not clear at what point this function of their spectacles became intentional, it seemed clear to Sawdayee that by the time the party carried out its public violence it had done so with a strategy in mind to lend credibility to its violent policies by implicating the Iraqi public against whom it would turn that violence.

This is the view, also of British Middle East Studies scholar Kanan Makiya, who describes in his book, *Republic of Fear*, the psychological effect of the second public hangings on the Iraqi populace. According to Makiya, participation in the first spectacle came easily to many Iraqis because Iraqi Jews constituted social pariahs who proved easily suspect as foreign agents whereas the hanging of eight non-Jewish Iraqis for the same charges brought against the condemned in the original spectacle brought home the reality that any Iraqi could be targeted for government execution.³⁴⁶ As important as his observations are, Makiya’s analysis suffers from his inaccurate assertion that Jews constituted a pariah community since the 1940s and, thus, a ready-made scapegoat in the Ba’th party’s drama. “It was taken for granted” claims Makiya, “that Iraqi Jews

³⁴³ Saydayee, 109-110.

³⁴⁴ Destani, *Minorities*, vol 6, 112-4.

³⁴⁵ Saydayee, 109-110.

³⁴⁶ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 52-53.

were social pariahs, and therefor the issue was not too prove this proposition but rather to translate it into a larger demonstration of how the Ba'th acted 'in the interests of the masses' and forever watching over their security."³⁴⁷ As this dissertation demonstrates, the Ba'th party could not simply target the Jewish community as a ready-made Pariah group. Instead, the party orchestrated the spy trials to manipulate the anti-Israeli conspiracy claims that pervaded Iraqi society after the Six Day War, turning Iraqi Jews from a minority with a contested identity into a pariah group suitable to play the role of the scapegoat that would serve Ba'th interests.

Given that Jews were not, in fact, social pariahs, the implications for the Ba'th terror are different. The event transformed not only the relationship between the party and "the masses" but also between the disparate ethno-sectarian groups that composed "the masses" to which the party so loved to refer by exacerbating communal mistrust, first between Jewish and non-Jewish Iraqis and then between other ethno-sectarian groups. Iraqi historian Eric Davis explores, in his book *Memories of State*, the utility of communal mistrust engendered by Ba'th cultural programs beginning in the mid-1970s that established historical narratives and symbols of Iraq as historically threatened by its regional neighbors, rival empires, and ethno-religious groups in Iraq that shared some cultural basis with those enemies. Like the assertions in this dissertation, Davis has no government documents explicitly stating this aim, but the preponderance of Ba'th educational and cultural publications from which he draws clearly exhibit state efforts to engender communal mistrust and put as many Iraqis as possible on the defensive to prove their loyalty to the Iraqi nation, thus heightening the state's ability to use suspicion as a weapon against potential opposition groups. This study argues that the party began employing this strategy long before the cultural programs of the 1970s—promoting these divisive notions of Iraqi identity as early as its first year in power through its use of violence and rhetoric, which framed executions of Iraqi citizens—often identified by their ethno-sectarian identity—as national victories over Iraq's enemies.

The accusations of espionage and executions of accused traitors occurred in such a way over the course of 1969 and 1970 as to engender mistrust of various communal groups in Iraq, foreshadowing in its reign of terror the same divisive notions of citizenship that Davis observed in its 1970s cultural programs. While the first spectacle, alone, featured Jews as the primary element in the espionage ring, most of the eight spectacles that followed featured one or another communal group in Iraq as its principle perpetrators, inaugurating its violent spectacles using the targets most

³⁴⁷ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 56.

likely to elicit a popular public response in the wake of the Six-Day-War (Jews), then expanding its public reign of terror to other communal groups that could constitute challenges to Ba'th authority.

In the weeks following the second spectacle, new arrests occurred, including several Iraqi Jews, and rumors of more Jews to be executed prompted international outcry and diplomatic efforts to convince Iraq to avoid another spectacle. The party responded with an official statement promising that "Spies, agents, and counter-revolutionaries will all be hanged" maintaining a defiant posture while not addressing the question of whether the accused included Jews.³⁴⁸ Between March 5 and 7, Baghdad radio and television broadcast the proceedings of trials held the previous week, which revealed the identities of the accused as four Muslims including three small tradesmen and an eighty-year-old man. At least one and perhaps two of the accused, the report stated, were Shia Muslims of Iranian origin. An article in *al-Jumhurriya* commented that the absence of Jews in all espionage proceedings since the first trial "gives lie to Zionist claims" that the state targeted Jews. Meanwhile, the report of Shia from Iranian origins among the condemned cast suspicion on Iraq's ethnic Persian minority and, to some extent, its Shia majority, as potential spies for Iran, Iraq's long-time rival.³⁴⁹ The state emphasized the Iranian connection to the Persian and Shia accused by expelling the Iranian ambassador, closing the Iranian embassy, and deporting thousands of Persian Iraqis during the course of the trial.³⁵⁰ The full implications of this came to fruition in the fifth public spectacle on May 15, when the Ba'th hanged ten Shia Muslims of Iranian origin in its central prison amidst heightened tensions with Iran over competing claims to the strategic Shatt al-Arab waterway that controlled shipping between Iraq's main port city of Basra and the Gulf.³⁵¹ In the spectacles that followed, one or two Jews occasionally joined the condemned, but not again did the Ba'th make Jews the primary focus as it had in the first. Instead, each spectacle featured one or another demographic group whose loyalty could be considered suspect but always included Sunni-Arab "accomplices" as well, showing that none who crossed the Ba'th party was safe. As Iraqis discovered, the Ba'th Party could deploy the language of "spies" and "fifth columnists" against Muslim and Christian Iraqis just as easily as Jews. As a result, the reign of government terror cowed all public dissent against the Ba'th regime.

³⁴⁸ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 111.

³⁴⁹ Destani, *Minorities*, vol 6, 145.

³⁵⁰ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 140.

³⁵¹ Sawdayee, *Waiting to be Hanged*, 124; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 145.

While many of the spy rings executed between 1969 and 1970 were fabrications, the Ba'th bolstered its claims of espionage attempts by uncovering legitimate coup attempts as well, such as the one that led to the executions in January 1970. On the twentieth of that month, a failed coup attempt led to the arrest of forty-four pro-western Iraqi conspirators and the seizure of evidence of a vast espionage effort supported by the pro-western government of Iran and by Iraqi opposition leaders in exile. The following day the Ba'th Party executed thirty-seven men and women, Sunni and Shia, involved in the coup attempt. Then they set up an exhibit in a Baghdad gallery displaying the weapons, money, and radio transmitters confiscated from the coup plotters.³⁵² The execution of the coup plotters brought the series of nine publicized executions since January 1969 to a close. While the public spectacles came to a close, however, the extrajudicial kidnapping and violence that terrorized the Iraqi public and, disproportionately, the Iraqi Jews, continued.

The last public hanging brought an end to the public spectacles but not the Ba'th party terror. By the time that the party discontinued its publicized executions, the Mukhabarat began deploying assassinations in the streets and in homes as an alternative form of targeting their victims. As was the case with the murder of prisoners since the Party's seizure of power, the assassination of Iraqis appeared to spring from a range of motives including political assassinations, personal vendettas, and the targeting of Jews as an expression of Mukhabarat officers' anti-Israeli rage. While most of the Jews killed by Mukhabarat officers between 1970 and 1973 met their fate in Iraqi prisons after being arrested, a few simply disappeared off the street or were found dead without explanation. Iraqi Jewish survivors throughout the terror lived in dire straits. Jews still had no phone lines or mail service. Mukhabarat officers surveilled their homes. They could not work, sell property, or access their bank accounts freely, resulting in scarcity of food, medicine, and other basic needs, relying mostly on the generosity of neighbors for food—generosity which came at greater risk under the Ba'th and, thus, proved less frequent. Chief Rabbi Khedouri and Meir Basri struggled to provide for destitute families and advocate for the families of arrested Jewish men with little to show for their efforts.³⁵³ In these harsh conditions, Iraqi Jews awaited an opportunity to flee their homeland.

³⁵² Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 140; Con Coughlin, *Saddam, King of Terror* (Copyright by the author, 2002), 80-81.

³⁵³ Basri, "My Honorary Work for the Jewish Community in Iraq."

On March 11, 1970 the Jews waiting desperately to leave Iraq got the chance they had hoped for when the Iraqi central government in Baghdad signed a peace treaty with the Kurdish government in Erbil, bringing an end to longstanding hostilities and opening northern Iraq to travel for Iraqis of the Baghdad and Basra provinces. The Kurdish region was a popular vacation destination for many Iraqis and, with this possibility reopened, Iraqi Jews began traveling north under the pretense of vacation to escape across the border into Iran with the help of Kurdish smugglers.³⁵⁴ By the mid-1970s, the Iraqi Jewish community, which numbered over three thousand before 1968, was reduced to less than three hundred as Jews fled Iraq through the Kurdish north and deadly persecution of the Iraqi Jews continued unabated.³⁵⁵ The chart above illustrates the dramatic drop in Iraq's Jewish population indicated by death records. As previously stated, the recorded deaths of Iraqi Jews do not reflect a precise count of the Iraqi Jewish population, but, rather, aggregate changes in the population over time [see Figure 8]. In the case of the years 1969-1973, the violence against the Jews inflates the numbers of deaths and, thus, the numbers of deaths during this period do not reflect the overall Jewish population at the time. Seen in the graph, these years are marked in a dotted grey line to distinguish them from years in which all Jewish deaths occurred by natural causes and, thus, better reflect population trends. Comparing the average death rates in the years before and after this violent period from the mid-1950s through the late 1960s thus provides an estimate of the portion of the community that fled in the early 1970s. The death rate in the decade and a half before the Ba'th terror averaged 27 per year compared to the much lower death rates through the late 1970s and 1980s, which averaged 6.6 deaths per year. This change indicates a population drop from over seven thousand Jews to less than two thousand, meaning that between 1971 and 1975 over five thousand Jews fled Iraq over the northern border, reducing the size of the community by almost three quarters.

³⁵⁴ <http://iraqijews.awardspace.com/escape.html>, accessed March 1, 2014; Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 135-8,145.

³⁵⁵ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 170.

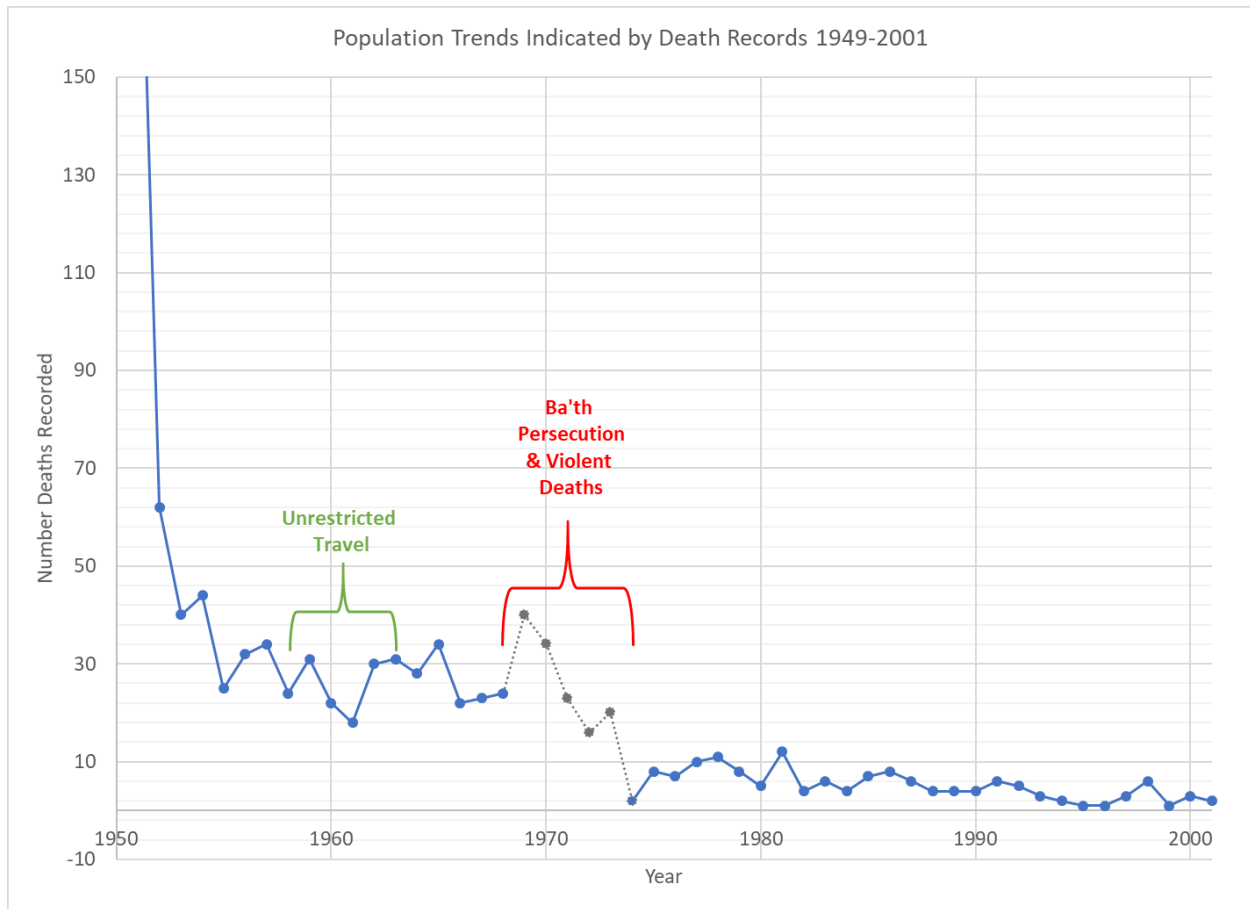


Figure 8: Population trends indicated by death records, 1949-2001

5.8 Conclusions

By the mid-1970s, the remaining Jewish community was a mere shadow of the vibrant Jewish community that lived in Iraq through the 1950s and 1960s. If 1951, as the first chapter of this dissertation suggests, constituted the beginning of a new era of communal life in Iraq, then 1973 brought an end to the communal life that Jews built and sustained through the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to its numerical reduction, the community also suffered losses in institutional presence and leadership. In 1971 the ninety-one-year-old Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedouri died and Mier Basri took over leadership of a community whose numbers shrunk almost daily as families slipped across the northern border to Iran, Frank Iny students practically vanishing from their desks

on a daily basis.³⁵⁶ By the end of the academic year in 1973, so few students remained at the Frank Iny school that Abdulllah Obadia closed its doors for good. The following year, the government converted it into a state school. No Iraqi Jew has since attended a Jewish school. That year, the Baghdadi community lost its president and their primary communal space—The Frank Iny school. These losses came as remaining Jews came to terms with the departure of three quarters of their Jewish friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family between 1971 and 1973.

In the midst of these monumental changes, the community suffered an immense tragedy that further terrorized the community and attracted international attention. Although it profoundly shocked an already terrorized community, this tragedy also seems to have resulted in a shift in Iraqi policy away from targeting Iraqi Jews, leaving the remaining community to adjust to a life of relative obscurity in Iraq thereafter as members of a small remnant lacking in the institutions of communal life enjoyed by Jews in Baghdad in the 1950s and 1960s.

On April 12, 1973, Nirán Bassoon and her sister were packed to leave. Although filled with the euphoria of escaping Iraq and the hope of a new life, leaving her friends and family was difficult. Fortunately, Nirán and her sister, given that they had acquired passports to leave legally, enjoyed the luxury of a going away party. That day the Bassoon home filled with friends and well-wishers coming to see off the girls. ‘But where was her friend Joyce?’ wondered Nirán. She and Joyce Qashqoush shared a desk at school meaning that all year they had practically been attached at the hip. ‘I was upset that she didn’t come and say goodbye.’ Bassoon recalled through tears in an interview with *Sephardi Voices* in 2018.³⁵⁷ The next day, after Nirán and her sister had left, the Jews in Baghdad received shocking news. The previous day unidentified attackers had entered the Qashqoush home and brutally murdered Joyce with her parents and two siblings. Joyce’s elder sister Dora had left the house to run an errand and returned to find her family missing and blood throughout the house.³⁵⁸ Neighbors reported to some members of the Jewish community that they had seen several men enter the house, whom they assumed to be Ba’th secret police and, after hearing a loud commotion and screams coming from the house, watched the same men leave with several large suitcases which they later assumed must have held the dismembered bodies of the Qashqoush family.³⁵⁹ Some questions about the horrible tragedy remain unanswered. The bodies

³⁵⁶ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 174.

³⁵⁷ Nirán Bassoon, Interview by Dr. Bea, Lewkowicz. *Sephardi Voices*, October 19, 2018, video.

³⁵⁸ Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 174.

³⁵⁹ Janet Dallal, email to author, May 4, 2019; Morad, *Iraq’s Last Jews*, 174.

of the Qashqoush family were never recovered, no reason was ever offered for the attack, and the suspicion that Mukhabarat agents perpetrated the murders, likely as it is, was never confirmed. Some Iraqi Jews also suspected the Palestinian members of Baghdad's local chapter of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine of perpetrating the attack.³⁶⁰ Despite the uncertainty surrounding the incident, news of the tragedy drew considerable international pressure, most of it focused around the efforts of the surviving Qashqoush daughter, Dora, to secure a passport to leave the country.³⁶¹ Dora's case became a symbol of the horrors faced by Iraq's remaining Jews, and attracted the most international criticism Iraq received since the January 1969 hangings. Those advocating for Dora included not only global Jewish and Human Rights organizations but also prominent politicians and heads of state in the West and also the third world, such as Indian Prime Minister Andira Ghandi.³⁶²

Whatever their reasons, the Ba'th leadership clearly decided that their use of the Jews as scapegoats and their manipulation of anti-Jewish sentiments had run its course and they abandoned anti-Jewish terror as an instrument of power consolidation. After the Qashqoush family, no Jew was killed in their home or executed.³⁶³ In fact, two months after the Qashqoush murders and about the same time that the state issued Dora her passport and travel documents, the party used a coup attempt as an opportunity to publicly signal their move away from anti-Jewish terror. On June 30, Nazim Kazzar, Director General of the Security Police Department attempted to stage a coup against the Bakr regime. After arresting Kazzaz and his co-conspirators, Bakr claimed that the coup conspirators had perpetrated the recent wave of assassinations in the street and in people's homes in an attempt to weaken support for the government and create chaos. He also announced the destructions of Qasr al-Nihaya, which had increasingly become a symbol of the regime's brutality.³⁶⁴ This shift did not immediately end state persecution of Jews altogether. Many Jews remained imprisoned at the time and Jews occasionally were arrested thereafter as Jews remained particularly vulnerable to arrest as a means of personal vendetta. However, the regime no longer targeted Jews for assassinations.

³⁶⁰ Janet Dallal, email to author, May 4, 2019.

³⁶¹ Destani, *Minorities*, vol. 6, 66-69, 76.

³⁶² Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 176-7.

³⁶³ "The Baghdad Hangings, Baghdad 1969," *The Scribe*, "January 27, 1999," accessed January 1, 2014, <http://www.thescribe.info/>.

³⁶⁴ Bekhor, *Fascinating Life*, 179.

The regime's abandonment of public anti-Jewish policies was confirmed three months later when the Yom Kippur War broke out between Israel and its Arab enemies on October 6, 1973. Following the outbreak of the war, Iraqi newspapers filled with coverage of the war laced with plenty of anti-Israeli vitriol but, unlike in 1967, they made no references to spies, fifth columns, or any references alluding to Iraqi Jews during or after the war. Instead, coverage focused on Iraq's role in supporting the Arab war effort and especially its leadership in the Arab oil embargo, which it touted as a primary battle against "the Zionist entity" (Israel) and "imperialist America."³⁶⁵ According to the family of Meir Basri, who stayed in Iraq until 1974, the outbreak of war resulted in a new travel freeze on Jews but few arrests. Thus the state response to renewed Arab-Israeli aggression did not include anti-Jewish policies remotely proportional to those after the Six Day War and the restrictions on Jewish travel that followed the war began to ease the following year, allowing the Basri family and others to leave by passport in 1974.³⁶⁶ Although no longer the focus of state violence, Iraqi Jews were still vulnerable to arrest. Police arrested two Jewish men in the wake of the October war and Meir Basri left with his family after a friend happened to glimpse a letter accusing him of espionage on the desk of a clerk in the passport office.³⁶⁷ While these incidents no doubt proved traumatic for those involved, the overall policy paled in comparison to the violent targeting of Iraqi Jews that had followed the ba'th coup five years earlier. Remaining Jews in Iraq continued to live with a sense of vulnerability, but the five-year Ba'th Party terror against the Jews of Iraq had come to an end.

³⁶⁵ *Al-Thawra*, October 7, 8, 1973; *Al-Jumhurriyyah*, October 7, 1973.

³⁶⁶ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 210.

³⁶⁷ Morad, *Iraq's Last Jews*, 174-5.

CHAPTER 6. HOMELANDS AND DIASPORAS

6.1 Introduction

*“Iraq Still Flows in our Veins,
Its soft winds are but perfume in our breath”
-Emile Cohen*

On January 27, 2019, about 150 congregants at Bene Neharayim Synagogue in Great Neck, New York gathered on the fiftieth anniversary of the hangings of January 27, 1969 to remember and grieve those lost during the Ba’th terror. The unusually large crowd filling the synagogue listened in silence as an elder read out loud the names of fifty-two Jews whom the Ba’th murdered. Meanwhile, Iraqi Jews in Israel, the UK, and Canada met to pray, weep, and light candles for their lost loved ones. This occasion highlighted the sense of loss and grief binding together the international community of Iraqi Jewish diaspora that shared the harrowing experience of Ba’th terror a half-century ago. There is more to this diaspora community, however, than their trauma. They share an identity that is much larger than their loss. Iraqi Jews who fled Iraq in the 1970s participate in their own diasporic community that celebrates their unique experiences in the reconstituted Iraqi Jewish community post-mass emigration, having lived through the end of the monarchy, the revolutionary period in Iraq, and the advent of the Ba’th Party state. Because of the prominent role played by the Frank Iny school in the Jewish community during their period and their diasporic memory, I refer to this specific group of Iraqi Jews as the “Frank Iny Diaspora.” While they carry their own diasporic memory, they also participate in several overlapping diaspora communities, each bound by different affinities



Figure 9: Faiza Saigh lights a candle for her brother Daoud Ghali Yadgar at the Bene Neharayim Synagogue in Great Neck, NY during the fiftieth anniversary of the 1969 hangings

and experiences. This chapter examines Iraqi Jews' identities and the ways they live out those identities among diaspora, and the challenges their identity affiliations pose to affiliation in and reconciliation between multiple religious/cultural groups sharing Iraqi and Arab identities.

Understanding what binds Iraqi Jews together requires a multi-diasporic view of modern Jewish life. Jews from various backgrounds often associate and identify with a variety of places, cultures, and experiences resulting in a constellation of diasporic affiliations more complex than a simple dichotomy between homeland and diaspora. While scholars of diaspora often reference the ancient dispersion of Jews as the archetypal diaspora, the relationship of Jews to this "homeland" was, for most of Jewish history, more ephemeral than real. Meanwhile Jews dispersed from other Jewish centers such as Iberia or Eastern Europe formed a basis for more concrete diasporic homelands. Rebecca Kobrin calls for a multi-diasporic approach in her book *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*. Examining the nearly 100,000 Jews from Bialystok, Poland who settled in the U.S., Argentina, Palestine/Israel and Australia between the 1870s and 1950s, she shows how they share a diasporic identity linked to numerous nation-states.³⁶⁸ As Kobrin argues, the multifaceted identity of Bialystoker Jews sprang from the plurality of "homelands" with which they could identify. Kobrin distinguishes between Israel as Bialystoker Jews' "mythic homeland" and Bialystok as their "lived homeland" to describe the difference between the former as a land of symbolic and religious importance and the latter as place in which Bialystokers actually lived and from which they were dispersed and carry with them a direct memory of their own lived experience.³⁶⁹ This principle of recognizing different homelands with different forms of significance for a diaspora community proves necessary in examining the case of Iraqi Jews, who relate to a number of diaspora populations in different ways. In fact, the case of Iraqi Jews expands, in a number of ways, on Kobrin's multi-faceted approach to diaspora and homelands by adding Iraqi Jews' relation to Iraqi, Arab and Jewish diasporas, in ways that combine and complicate the concepts of mythic and lived homeland. Jews that fled Iraq in the early 1970s, resettled largely in London, Amsterdam, Israel, Montreal, LA, and New York. There, they integrated into their local contexts while forming a variety of diasporic affiliations. Whereas Bialystoker Jews considered Bialystok their lived homeland and Israel their mythic homeland, Iraqi Jews related to both in ways that often crossed between mythic and lived senses of homeland.

³⁶⁸ Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 7.

³⁶⁹ Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, 11.

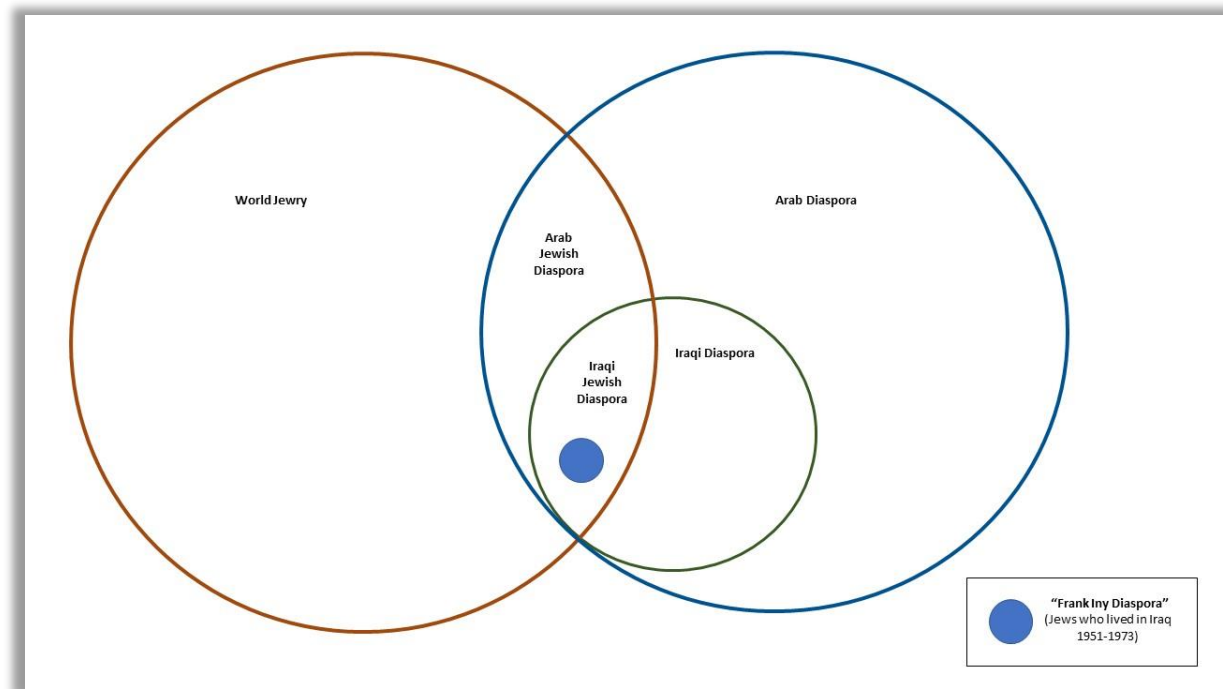


Figure 10: Overlapping diasporas of Frank Iny era Jews

As **Error! Reference source not found.** shows, Iraqi Jews in diaspora are a subset of multiple overlapping diasporas including Iraqi, Arab and Jewish global communities bound by different ethnic, religious, cultural, and political identities and interests. They are also part of diasporas made of Jews from Iraq and Jews from Arab countries whose identities are contested in an age in which Jew and Arab are often seen as inherently conflictual identities. also reflects the position of Jews in the Frank Iny diaspora as a part of the larger Iraqi Jewish Diaspora set apart not by its inclusion as part of another overlapping diaspora community, but a subset of Iraqi Jews sharing a unique set of circumstances. These circumstances, chronologically defined, included the unique demographic and geographic characteristics of the Jewish community in Iraq after 1951 which proved to be an exclusively Arabic speaking Jewish population primarily centered on Baghdad and comprised primarily of affluent business owners and their families. The remarkable integration of these Jews and their unique communal life under the late monarchical and Qassem regimes and, to an extent, the early Arab Nationalist governments from 1963 to 1967. Finally, the Frank Iny diaspora shared the dramatic persecution wrought by Iraqi responses to the Six Day War and Ba'th manipulation of those responses.

6.2 The Frank Iny Diaspora

Of the many diasporas in which the Iraqi Jews who are the subjects of this dissertation participate, no bonds prove as strong as those shared with their fellow Jews that lived together in Baghdad and Basra between 1951 and 1973, sharing the same experiences of daily communal life and political upheaval. The first chapter of this dissertation argued that while 1951 constituted the end of the Iraqi Jewish community in one sense, it also marked the beginning of another, which forged communal and social lives markedly different from that of the pre-1951 Iraqi Jewish community and shared experiences foreign to those Iraqi Jews who lived outside of Iraq after 1951. One manifestation of that distinct post-1951 Iraqi Jewish community is the birth of a distinct diaspora composed of Iraqi Jews who lived in Iraq through the end of the monarchy, the revolutionary decade, and the harrowing experiences that followed the Six Day War and the advent of Ba'th Party rule in 1968. Throughout this varied period of Iraqi Jewish experience, the Frank Iny School and a handful of other communal spaces provided a constant sense of close unity among Iraqi Jews that has carried over into a lively ongoing diaspora presence specific to Iraqi Jews who lived in Baghdad and Basra between 1951 and 1973.

An event in August 2017 illustrates the positive memories that bind these Jews together. That evening, a synagogue in Montreal, Quebec hosted roughly two hundred Iraqi Jews from around the world, including Montreal, Los Angeles, New York, London, and Israel. While each one of them lived through the Ba'th terror, it is not these shared memories that brought them together. This event was a celebration. Specifically, it was a reunion of Jews who came of age attending Iraq's last Jewish school together; the Frank Iny School, which opened a new, state-of-the-art campus in Baghdad in 1951 just months after the last flight of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah departed from Baghdad. The opening of the new Frank Iny school in the old Baghdad neighborhood of Alwiyah just after the mass Emigration proved fortuitous timing for those who remained. Between 1951 and 1973 the school acted like a magnet, drawing its students and their families closer inward, strengthening the bonds of the now smaller and more closely knit community—a fact that is reflected in the unique diaspora of Iraqi Jews who gather at events like the reunion in Montreal. Some of the Frank Iny alumni that filled the hall that evening knew each other well, having kept in touch over the years. Others reunited for the first time since leaving Iraq four decades earlier. As the crowd grew, excited voices combined to create a buzz of enthusiastic conversation. Reunited friends clung to each other's elbows as they talked, as if to prevent them



Figure 11: Iraqi Jews peruse a book at the Montreal reunion, 2017.

from escaping for another decades-long absence while they swapped stories of adolescent exploits and classroom antics from a half-century ago. The memories proved so fresh for them that the intervening decades seemed to collapse as they were transported to the Baghdad of their childhood. As conversations continued, English mingled with Judeo-Arabic, sustaining a hum of energy throughout the hall as a number of them took to the dance floor, dancing the twist

with impressive dexterity as if the age has vanished from their bodies. It was as if Baghdad circa 1965 had suddenly materialized in Montreal, Quebec.

These Jews' lost homeland is a source of both nostalgia and grief for these Jews. Some express resentment that history has largely forgotten them. "We need to educate our children at school." Opined a group of Iraqi Jewish women that I met with in Montreal the day after their reunion. "In Israel, they don't teach about the Jewish community."³⁷⁰ Indeed, few from outside of their community are aware of their history in the region, of their loss, or of the incredible assemblies like this one that bring the members of this lost community together. However, during the reunion, such grievances took a back seat to the joy that the celebrants shared in reuniting with the classmates with whom they shared the experience of coming of age in a remnant Jewish community that held its members close and encouraged joy and hope for those enjoying each day in the knowledge of an uncertain future. Now in diaspora, the Frank Iny Jewish community lives on as its members cling to their memories and to each other.

6.3 Iraqi Jewish diaspora

In the same month that the Frank Iny school in Baghdad concluded its final academic year as Iraq's last Jewish school, Iraqi Jews celebrated the inauguration of a new Iraqi Jewish institution.

³⁷⁰ Linda Patal, Leoni Dahli, Monique Daoud, and Janet Dallal, interview by author, August 15, 2017.

This monumental dedication, however, took place not in Iraq, but in Israel, home to nearly half of Iraq's 130,000 displaced Jews. On April 19, 1973, dozens of Iraqi Jews gathered for the cornerstone laying ceremony of the Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center on the main square of Or Yehuda, a suburban development outside of Tel-Aviv.³⁷¹ The center was sponsored by Mordechai ben-Porat, an Iraqi Jew and Zionist emissary who helped orchestrate the mass emigration in 1950-1951. The center commemorates the unique culture and history of Iraq's Jews, and their contributions to world Jewry. Although not planned as such, the coincidence of Frank Iny School's closure in Baghdad with the opening of the Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center in Israel signaled of the end of an era of Iraqi Jewish communal life in Iraq and the entry of those Iraqi Jews into a broader Iraqi Jewish diaspora whose members sought to celebrate its distinct cultural heritage and their community's contributions to world Jewry as well as to their home country of Iraq.



Figure 12: On left: Old Jewish Quarter residences in Baghdad, Iraq. On right: Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center in Or Yehuda, Israel

The architecture of the center celebrates Iraqi Jewry's distinct cultural identity—designed to resemble the architecture of the now vacant old city dwellings of Baghdad's Jewish neighborhoods. As shown in the photos below, the front façade of the center in Or Yehuda, Israel features second story wooden structures protruding from a stone-like façade that mimics the “envelope” structure of the “Iraqi Traditional Courtyard House” examined by scholars or architecture and urban environment.³⁷² This type of dwelling served, through much of the

³⁷¹ Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *Our Dowry*.

³⁷² Mohamed M. Saeed Alumumar; Muder Mohamed M. Almumar. *Understanding the Performance of the Iraqi Traditional Courtyard House: Is there an Order for the Use of External Envelope Materials?*, 10th International Conference on Design, Architecture, Civil and Environment Engineering (Zagreb, Croatia. 2018).

twentieth century, as the primary dwellings for Iraqi Jews, Muslims and Christian alike in urban settings across the country and, thus, it's a testament to the many aspects of daily life which Iraqi Jews shared with their fellow Iraqis. Like its architectural design, the center's collections and exhibits showcase the unique cultural heritage of Iraqi Jewry that formed the basis of daily life for many of Iraq's Jews prior to 1950. The chairman of the center's current board, Professor Efraim Tzadka, himself an Iraqi Jew who came to Israel in Operation Ezra and Nehemia at age five, describes its mission as "to immortalize the heritage of a diaspora community which no longer exists."³⁷³ In his usage, the term "diaspora community" refers to Iraqi Jewry's location outside of the mythical home in modern day Israel/Palestine. Indeed, the museum and archive, itself, reflects the Zionist historical understanding of Babylonian Jewry, emphasizing both Jewish accomplishment and Jewish persecution throughout its history while characterizing their long history in the land as diaspora life and Israel as homeland.

For Iraqi Jews, Zionist narratives co-exist uneasily alongside narratives that reflect their community's successful integration in Iraqi society and attachment to Iraq as home. The poem *I am the Iraqi, I am*, written by Emile Cohen in 2009 (an excerpt of which opens this introduction of this work), illustrates the complex diasporic, national, transnational, and cultural identities of Iraqi Jews.³⁷⁴ Its opening stanzas harken to the biblical exile describing in the first person the grief and loss of the ancient exiles to Babylon and the transition to Babylon as new homeland.

You ask me who I am.
I am the Iraqi, I am.

In all the yesteryears I was there, but today here I am.
Twenty-six centuries ago,
But after the Destruction I left the land of Canaan
To Babylon as a Captive of War.

Consumed in grief and despair, I sat on the riverbank,
Like an aged man with a bent back.

But the brave heart never surrenders to the cruelty of time
And soon the depression that had engulfed my mind was gone.
Between the Twin Rivers and the towns, we dug free-flowing channels,

³⁷³ "About Us: Chairmen's Remarks," Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://www.bjhcenglish.com/about-us>.

³⁷⁴ Cohen, "I am the Iraqi, I am."

We sowed seeds of wheat and barley, lush trees,
 And date palms; a forest of living green in abundance.
 Homes and villages we built,
 Babylon was but our whole universe,
 Our country, the land of love, prosperity, and happiness.

For Cohen, his was a community birthed from grievous circumstances. He references the psalmist's expressions of grief on the banks of the Tigris river, mourning the destruction in his estranged home, the "land of Canaan." Mourning turns to joy, however, as the narrator remembers how the land of exile itself became home. It became, in his words, "our whole universe, our country, the land of love, prosperity, and happiness" until, in the next stanza, the Jews of Babylon refuse the Persian Emperor Cyrus' invitation to return to their "promised land" insisting that Babylon had become their home.

Then Cyrus came, he gave us the choice
 To go back where *we once belonged* [note past tense here]
 "Go back to the promise land" he prompted,
 But we refused; *this land was now our own*,
 And here we must stay, for we were in the land of the believers,
 And we had come before both Jesus and Islam,
 Before both the Priest and the Imam
 When idolaters were all over the land,

Before the tolling of church bells, before religions took different venues, before the
 Qurans revelation to Mohammed,
 Before the calling to prayer from every minaret,

For we are a people more ancient than time,
 With a history as glorious as the land of Iraq itself.
 We took our sacred texts from Ezra,
 And the Talmud becoming our shining frame of reference,
 And lived a life of plenty and opulence [emphasis added].

In Cohen's rich poetry, the Jews of Iraq are an ancient people capable of multiple "homelands." In fact, the multiple homelands of Iraqi Jews prove even more complex than the multi-diasporic identities examined by Kobrin. Whereas Bialystoker Jews identified with a "mythical homeland" and a "lived homeland," Iraq served as both "lived", for Jews who resided there until the mid-and late- twentieth century and "mythic" for those same Jews, who saw their modern Iraqi Jewish community as successors of the ancient Babylonian Jewish community. The above stanzas point

out the assertion of Jews in the Tigris River valley beginning in the eighth century, that Babylon was their chosen home and not Israel. The poem then goes on to assert the history of this Jewish homeland that predates Christian and Muslim civilization in the land, harkening to the origins of Rabbinic Judaism as the land's oldest living tradition. However, as previous chapters have shown the nuanced narrative of origins, belonging, and homeland so central to Iraqi Jews proved too complex for the simplistic nationalist narratives that overtook political discourse in the Middle East in the mid-late twentieth century.

The stanzas that close the poem echo the heartbreak of those torn from their homeland expressed in the opening stanzas, only here it is not the exile *to* Babylon that is being mourned, but the exile *from* Babylon.

Oh, our story is tragic, set on a tragic stage,
Nothing remained of us and our civilization
Save fading memories
And a tidal wave of tears filling our eyes,

[...]

The protection of Mohammed did not come to our rescue
And the wisdom of God did not come to save us.

Strange is your stand, weird is our case
Is that all we are, a mere sacrificial lamb to you?

You cruelly inflicted sufferings upon us, why? We had done you no harm.

Exile and alienation ended to be our destiny.
Twenty-six centuries of our history

Why have they been effaced?
Iraq still flows in our veins,
Its soft winds are but perfume in our breath,

Even in our dreams we yearn and aspire to Iraq
So, by what right do you ask me who I am?

Are you the Iraqi, or I?
Are you the Iraqi, or I?
[emphasis added]

In these final stanzas of Cohen's poem, the mood shifts from the grief of loss to bitter demands for explanation as to why the "protection of Mohammed" did not come to the rescue of the narrator's community when Iraq "cruelly inflicted sufferings upon us." As the narrator brings the poem to a close, he uses the term "exile" for the first time, doing so in reference not to displacement from Israel, but to the effacement of twenty-six centuries of Jewish history in Iraq. Longing turns to bitterness in the last stanza, in which the narrator again demands an answer for his dislocation and alienation from the Iraqi nation. The author asks, "By what right do you ask me who I am? Are you the Iraqi or I?" The question challenges directly the exclusivist limitation of Iraqi identity to its Arab and Muslim majority to the exclusion of, among others, Iraqi Jews, who boasted a longer history in the land than either Arab or Islamic culture. This ancient heritage, along with their lived experience in Iraq, form the basis for Iraqi Jews' unique diaspora community.

Iraqi Jews in diaspora established communal institutions, through which they remember, celebrate, and sustain their unique Iraqi Jewish culture. Iraqi Jews, and particularly the integrated community of Arabic speaking Jews centered on Baghdad and Basra—carried with them a layered set of cultural, religious, and political affiliations tying them with different diasporic communities. These unique constellations of overlapping diasporic affiliations provides Iraqi Jews with a multiplicity of options as they seek to live out their diaspora identities through language, culture, politics, institutional affiliation, commemoration, childrearing, and friendship.

The case of prominent British Jew Naim Dangoor, his philanthropy and diaspora leadership, illustrate some of the ways in which this multi-faceted identity and association functions among Iraqi Jews. Naim Dangoor, who left Iraq in 1959 at the age of 45, was among those prominent Jews who enjoyed close relationships with the monarchal family and government in Iraq and, thus, left Iraq after the 1958 revolution. The grandson of a former Chief Rabbi, Dangoor ran a property development company, a furniture factory, and the Iraqi leg of the Coca Cola franchise. Naim Dangoor's personae represented a now vanished world of prominent participation of notable Jews in Iraqi, and especially Baghdadi public life.³⁷⁵ His wife, Renee Dangoor was the first Miss Iraqi crowned in 1947 and together they made their fortune, much of which they devoted to philanthropic causes serving both Iraqi Jewish and Iraqi institutions.

³⁷⁵ Charlotte Oliver, "Funding education runs in their family," *The Jewish Chronicle*, March 10, 2015, <https://www.thejc.com>.

Upon emigrating to London in 1959, Naim and Renee started over, Naim building a new fortune in the UK and, once again, investing in numerous non-profit ventures serving social causes in their country of residence. They began by founding a community center in West Kensington, UK for new Iraqi Jewish immigrants and later took an interest in broader philanthropic causes. In 1970, he revived and claimed for himself the title of Exilarch—an ancient title held by the leader of Babylonian Jewry from the time of the exile until the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in the thirteenth century. The Exilarch had been responsible for communal governance including Jewish judicial, financial, civil, and religious duties. In taking the title for himself, Dangoor asserted the ancient heritage of Iraqi Jews and their place in British society while also claiming leadership for himself over the British community of Iraqi Jews. Eccentric as his revival of this ancient title was, Dangoor took his self-proclaimed role very seriously, setting up the Exilarch Foundation in 1978 to fund college scholarships for Brits from families without a history in higher education.³⁷⁶

Dangoor's philanthropy for his country of residence echo the role of Babylonian Exilarch, which led the exile community in their biblical mandate to "seek the peace of the city" in which they dwelt.³⁷⁷ Notably, however, Dangoor claimed the title not as leadership over Jewish diaspora in the traditional sense (world Jewry outside of the biblical promised land) or even over British Jewry. Instead, he asserted his leadership over the global diaspora of Jews from Iraq—a diaspora that he understood as one part of a larger diaspora of Jews from Arab countries. In the fall of 1971, Dangoor began publishing the magazine *The Scribe: Journal of Babylonian Jewry*, which promised to "discuss the position of these remnants of once flourishing Jewish communities (in Arab countries)" and to address a gap in Jewish journalism by celebrating "the latent spiritual and cultural treasures of a glorious past in which invaluable contributions to the development of Judaism and Jewish life had been made." Through *The Scribe*, which reached a subscribership of four thousand readers in twenty-five countries, Dangoor expanded his leadership role to cover not only Iraqi Jews in London, but also the global diaspora of Jews from Iraq and the Arab World.³⁷⁸ The pages of *The Scribe* illustrated its purpose, containing articles on ancient and modern history of the community in Babylon and Iraq, cultural topics such as recipes for distinctly Iraqi dishes and culturally unique religious celebrations, and other topics including the situation of Jews in

³⁷⁶ "The Exilarch's Foundation, Foundationsearch, accessed April 30, 2019, <http://www.foundationsearch.com>.

³⁷⁷ Jer 29:7.

³⁷⁸ "Editorial Policy," *The Scribe*, vol. 1 September-October 1971.

Arab countries, the activities of Dangoor and other Iraqi Jews in Britain, obituaries of notable Iraqi Jews, and social issues in Britain and Israel. The philanthropy and activism of the Dangoors illustrates the participation of Iraqi Jews in a multi-faceted diasporic identity by providing a format for Iraqi Jews to reflect on and share their enduring culinary, cultural, musical, political, and communal identities. Few Iraqi Jews share the social and financial status of the Dangoor family. For most Jews, charitable giving plays a less prominent role in their expression of their multi-layered identity and affiliations. Iraqi Jews find a variety of ways of connecting with their myriad diasporic affiliations, Jewish, Iraqi, and others.

In New York, Iraqi Jews formed the American Aid Society (A. A. Society), which, similarly to Naim Dangoor's charitable ventures in London, focused on providing resettled Jews from Iraq with financial assistance, community support, and Jewish burial plots for deceased relatives. The A. A. Society also organized social activities for the community at New York hotels including large celebrations for the high holidays attended by hundreds of Iraqi Jews where they could continue to celebrate Jewish holidays in uniquely Iraqi style. "The whole service" the A.A. Society's website recalls, "revolved around maintenance of age-old religious traditions going back to the time of the Babylonian exile."³⁷⁹ Religious piety and cultural distinctiveness worked together for Iraqi Jews in diaspora who strove to continue their Iraqi Jewish traditions. In 1986 the A. A. Society opened Bene Neharayim Synagogue in Queens to serve the New York community of Iraqi Jews. In its fundraising campaign, the community stressed that "Jewish learning, education and religious observance are the pillars required to support a renaissance of a Babylonian Jewish culture in the United States."³⁸⁰

In keeping with this vision, a second Synagogue established in Great Neck, Long Island in 1997 served also as a heritage center, housing permanent photo-exhibits and collections of Iraqi Jewish publications and material culture in glass cases around the facility. The most poignant reminders of Baghdad's lost Jewish community, however, are found not on the walls, or in glass cases, but filling the chairs. On my visit to the center in 2017, I attended a Saturday morning Shabbat service, after which I sat around large round tables listening to the congregants of Bene Neharayim reconstruct Jewish Baghdad with their conversation. Those at my table spent their youth in Baghdad and emigrated at various points in their young adulthood. They recounted for

³⁷⁹ A. A. Society, accessed April 30, 2019, <http://www.iraqijews.org>.

³⁸⁰ "Introduction," A. A. Society, accessed April 30, 2019, <http://www.iraqijews.org>.

me their daily routines, the demands of the Frank Iny curriculum, and the urban landscapes in which they moved. When their memory failed them, one woman led me by the arm to another table where Jews of the elder generation sat who would then recall in vivid detail the specific locations of every shop on Rashid Street and the personality quirks of the shopkeepers.

Back at my table, Maurice Bakhash, another Frank Iny alumnus, brandished a scrap of paper on which he had written several Arabic expressions in Iraqi dialect. Bakhash had developed a habit of collecting obscure Iraqi Arabic sayings that he would then present to his fellow-congregants at Bene Neherayim to discuss their meanings and recall instances in which they used them. These linguistic inquiries inevitably led to recollections of scenarios past involving teachers, relatives, and community members not present, recalling their habits, repeating their mantras, and remembering the contexts in which they last heard a given expression—a school hallway, a relative's office on Rashid Street, a sidewalk in the Baghdad neighborhood of Betaween. I found it remarkable how easily these diaspora Iraqi Jews recreated scenes, scenarios, and themes from their life in Baghdad. Having read extensively about Jewish Baghdad and the history of this community, it was not until I sat among them for the first time that I sensed the depth of their collective consciousness and identity; an identity not rooted merely in a place, but in the daily routines of school, work, recreation, and language.

Notably absent at these tables are members of the younger generation. Second generation immigrants of the Iraqi Jewish community do not routinely participate in services at Bene Neherayim. High holidays and commemoration services like the one described at the opening of this chapter attract a few, but they remain largely absent, a fact that generates visible concern on the part of first-generation diaspora Iraqi Jews. Their absence from these activities does not necessarily amount to disinterest in their heritage. At a Shabbat dinner I attended in the Long Island home of Oliver and Nora Iny, their son and daughter, who commuted from Manhattan as they often do on Fridays, took interest in their parents' stories and descriptions of their childhood home. After beginning shabbat meal in the traditional Iraqi way—with pita and dates—they both asked detailed questions about my research and proved especially interested in previously unheard memories their parents shared in answer to my probing questions. Their interest in the topic appeared genuine, if from a different perspective. They hailed from a generation for whom Iraq remains a mythic homeland. Iraq, as lived homeland proves just out of reach, mediated only through their parent's expression of the past. Raphael 'Ezra Travitz, a son of Iraqi Jewish migrants

from Basra noted this in his 2017 commentary on the Cohen poem that Iraqi Jews, like many other Jews of North African and Middle Eastern heritage, hold a deep love for the land of their ancestors, even if they are from a newer generation that has never been there. He reflects, “It is not with great ease that a nation of peoples can be ripped away from their ancient home.”³⁸¹ His use of the word “nation” proves an interesting referent that speaks to the mythic character of Iraqi Jewish past for Iraqi Jews of all generations and the persistence with which Iraqi Jews can identify with not only numerous homelands, but numerous notions of people-hood and belonging.

The connection shared by Iraqi Jews in diaspora is their memory of homeland, both mythic and lived. The history of that homeland extends through time from Ur, the homeland of the patriarch Abraham in southern Iraq through Babylon and medieval Baghdad, to the modern alleyways of the Jewish quarter, Rashid Street,



Figure 13: Edwin Shuker outside his childhood home.

and the halls of Frank Iny. For Edwin Shuker, an alumnus of Frank Iny who fled with his family in 1971, it is important that this longstanding Jewish presence in the land not die with them. In 2013, Shuker began traveling back to Iraq regularly, where he visited the empty Mier Twieg Synagogue as well as his childhood home. In 2015 he did the unthinkable. He purchased a house in Iraq—a move he described as “mainly a symbolic act that turns me from just a tourist into a man who wants to settle in Iraq.”³⁸² Unlike many Iraqi Jews, who are happy to relegate their lived and mythic homeland to their collective memory in diaspora, Shuker prefers to nurture the notion that the time of Jews in Iraq is not over. “It’s hard to take the fact that we’re gone, that we left forever,” Shuker told the Israeli Newspaper Haaretz in 2017, “I feel responsible for preserving the Jewish ties to that country because our story there hasn’t ended yet.”³⁸³ Shuker recognizes that he

³⁸¹ Rachmiel Ezra Travitz, “The Arabic Poem ‘I am the Iraqi, I am’ by Emile Cohen, with a Historical and Explanatory Commentary,” *Academia.edu*, accessed August 5, 2018.

³⁸² Ofer Adaret, “Decades After Fleeing, Iraqi Jews Plan to Return to Their Homeland,” *Ha’aretz*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/> accessed March 1, 2018.

³⁸³ Adaret, “Decades After Fleeing.”

is unique in his desire and grieves the separation of the Iraqi Jewish community from its homeland. In the 2017 documentary *Remember Baghdad*, a tearful Shuker put it succinctly “I can’t live with the fact that my grandfather is buried here and we’ve just abandoned him and we are just saying, ‘goodbye Baghdad, goodbye Mier Twieg, goodbye everything’ and we no longer even look back.”³⁸⁴

For many Jews, however, goodbye was just that; a farewell to their homeland, which thereafter would exist only in their memories. As one Iraqi Jew in London puts it, “(we) long for it, we mourn for it, but (we) don’t go there.”³⁸⁵ For some, this is because of the traumas experienced in Iraq. Even for Jews who escaped these traumas, however, there is a sense that returning to the Iraq of today will not satisfy their longing for homeland. For these Iraqi Jews the homeland that they left no longer exists in the Iraq of today. Decades of violence, destruction, and new development have transformed it into a different place. As Elie Dangoor states, “It’s in ruins, the places are not the same. It’s better to remember it... as it was.”³⁸⁶ Instead, Iraq exists “in our blood, as David Dangoor puts it, “in our bones. A distant bell in the back of our heads.”³⁸⁷ Even Edwin Shuker, the only Jew to purchase a home in Iraq since the 1970s did so not to relocate there, but to make a point. At least for now, the exile of Iraqi Jews from their homeland remains complete and unreversed. Iraq is a place that Iraqi Jews remember, not a place where they live.

6.4 Iraqi Diaspora

As Iraqi Jews have connected and reconnected in diaspora, they also reconnect, in various ways, with a broader diaspora of Iraqis who have fled chronic warfare and instability. In diaspora, these relationships between Iraqi Jews and their Iraqi compatriots prove complex landscapes of tension and reconciliation that many Iraqi Jews fear to tread.

In the decades following the 1951 formation of the Iraqi Jewish diaspora, the growing instability and political persecution wrought by the revolutionary governments after the overthrow of the monarchy and the ascendant Ba’th Party after its July 1968 coup swelled a growing global community of Iraqi exiles constituting an Iraqi diaspora whose ethno-religious diversity reflected

³⁸⁴ *Remember Baghdad*, Directed by Fiona Murphy. (London: Springfilms), 2017.

³⁸⁵ *Remember Baghdad*.

³⁸⁶ *Remember Baghdad*.

³⁸⁷ *Remember Baghdad*.

the diversity within Iraq itself. Like Iraqi Jews, many of these Iraqis fled state violence or the threat of state violence. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq and much of the ethno-religious violence that broke out in the ensuing chaos, many more Iraqis fled violence predicated on ethno-religious mistrust and hostility. The formation of this broader Iraqi diaspora included settlements in many of the same cities that Iraqi Jews now called home—New York, London, Los Angeles, Montreal, and Amsterdam, with the obvious exception of cities in Israel, to which non-Jewish Iraqis cannot migrate, nor, presumably, do they wish to. The growth of this Iraqi diaspora, and the growth of the internet and social media as modes of communication has increased the opportunities for Iraqi Jews in diaspora to interact with other Iraqis, either in diaspora, or online communications with Iraqis in Iraq or abroad. The differing ways that Iraqi Jews avail themselves of such opportunities—or refrain from doing so—hinges largely on the varying attitudes they hold about non-Jewish Iraqis.

Iraqi Jews' relationship to non-Jewish Iraqis over the past half-century has proven incredibly complex. On the one hand, Iraqi Jews, unlike those in Bialystok, were a minority integrated into the non-Jewish society of their cities of origin. Thus, they share with other Iraqis a sense of broader shared history and the experience of Iraq as a lived homeland. Since many non-Jewish Iraqis in diaspora similarly fled state violence or ethno-sectarian violence, they share with Iraqi Jews the experience of their homeland's failure to provide the safety to sustain their future there and their hopes pursued for a brighter future elsewhere. On the other hand, Jews experience of persecution in Iraq left Iraqi Jews with widely varying attitudes toward Iraq, its society, and non-Jewish Iraqis in diaspora. The final stanzas of Cohen's poem in which he asks "by what right do you ask me who I am? Are you the Iraqi, or I?" illustrate the sense of betrayal felt by many Jews as a result of the state and popular anti-Jewish persecution that exploded during their lifetimes. The sense that the Iraqi state and, to a degree, society singled Iraqi Jews out for undeserved hostility has made the question of whether Iraqi Jews identify with broader Iraqi society, history, and diaspora a controversial one among Jews from Iraq.

Many Iraqi Jews in diaspora commemorate their Iraqi Jewish heritage without celebrating a broader Iraqi identity or interacting with non-Jewish Iraqis. Some avoid thinking about Iraq as much as possible. Such was the case with Niran Bassoon who, for decades after fleeing Iraq in 1973, put Iraq behind her. It was "in the drawer," as she put it, a part of her life she was done with—that is, until 2003. The famously televised toppling of the statue of Saddam in Baghdad—

a controversial and artificially constructed publicity event that carried many different meanings for many different people—proved a turning point for Bassoon not experienced by most Iraqi Jews. “I was shocked at myself,” she recalled when I asked her about it in 2019. “How can a person change from one scene?” but something about watching that statue fall reversed her attitude toward her homeland. Now, “it is just literally passion, addiction, uncontrollable. I wake up with Iraq. I go to sleep with Iraq. I breathe with Iraq. I eat with Iraq. I drink with Iraq.”

Bassoon now spends much of her time talking with other Iraqis online and in person. She holds regular meetings in her home for young Brits from Iraqi immigrant families discussing Iraqi food, music, and Iraqi Arabic dialect. Many of the Iraqi youth she befriends “call me *Khala* (the Arabic word for aunt). When I speak Arabic, they tell me that I sound like their grandma because I grew up in Iraq at the same time as their parents and learned the same colloquialisms.”³⁸⁸ Now Bassoon is on a mission. Many of the Iraqi youths that she meets have never met an Iraqi Jew, but they’ve heard plenty of the stereotypes—many of the same stereotypes that drove the anti-Jewish persecution Bassoon fled. “It’s a duty,” she says, “for me to make that evil they are thinking of a human being.” Through her hospitality and shared language, food, and culture, she hopes to do just that. Not all of her Iraqi Jewish friends appreciate her efforts. She quotes friends who ask, “What do you think, they are going to accept us?” She understands their skepticism and does not expect a sea change in Iraqi attitudes toward Jews within her lifetime. Rather, she is planting seeds in the hope of a different future for the next generation of Iraqis and Iraqi Jews.

Bassoon’s passion for her fellow Iraqis and their shared Iraqi identity is rather unique among Iraqi Jews. Many Jews remain reticent to interact with non-Jewish Iraqis even outside of Iraq. One Iraqi Jew that I interviewed admitted that any time she overhears the Iraqi Muslim dialect she is overcome with fear, a reaction she attributes to the trauma of coming of age after the Six Day War, when every encounter with a non-Jewish Iraqi brought potential for harm. At the same time, she asked not to have this statement publicly attributed to her as she had no wish to offend any of the Iraqi Muslim friends whom she recalled fondly from her days in Baghdad.

Between these two extremes lie the majority of Iraqi Jews in diaspora, whose beloved homeland exists in the past and not in present day Iraq and who recall the experience of being unable to trust non-Jewish Iraqis except for select personal acquaintances who had already proven their loyalty. For most of these Jews, befriending previously unknown Iraqis in diaspora does not

³⁸⁸ Niran al-Bassoon, correspondence with author, November 1, 2018.

hold much interest. Many of them, however, do desire to reconnect with non-Jewish Iraqis they knew well while living in Iraq, a trend that has increased dramatically with the introduction of social media. Over the past ten years, Isaac Sassoon has used Facebook to reconnect with dozens of friends from Iraq, most of whom have left since the 2003 invasion and are now living in diaspora. Now he talks with them online every day.³⁸⁹

The growing contact of many Iraqi Jews with non-Jewish Iraqis in diaspora and in Iraq hinges on the varying attitudes of Iraqi Jews toward Iraqis and, of course, of Iraqis toward Iraqi Jews. The introduction of social media has played a role in introducing new interactions between Iraqi Jews and their fellow Iraqis. Since 2006 several Facebook groups have emerged dedicated to the memory of Iraqi Jews, some of which serve as forums for mostly non-Jewish Iraqis to post publicly in Arabic about their memories of the countries lost Jewish community.

The shift of many Iraqis toward publicizing positive memories of their now departed Jewish community is a significant change but begs important questions. How connected is this phenomenon to actual desires to right the wrongs done to Iraqi Jews? Conversely, to what degree is it based on ephemeral associations of Jewish presence in Iraq with “better times” absent of any acknowledgement of need for reconciliation between Iraqi Jews and the state and society that rejected them? Recent scholarship on Polish and Ukrainian memory of their now absent Jewish communities reveals the degree to which the phenomenon springs from association of the Jewish presence with economic prosperity. These trope-based affinities result less in actual rekindled relationships between Poles and Jews or recognition of Polish wrong-doing as they do statuettes of stereotypical “Jewish” looking men on store cash registers as good luck charms. Based on such superficial tropes, this nostalgia for Polish Jewry can often seem disingenuous, especially given the ongoing poor treatment of Poland’s small remaining Jewish communities and the growing presence and government toleration of right wing and Neo-Nazi groups.³⁹⁰ In the Arab world, perceptions of Jews hinge on contradictory claims by anti-Zionist media and the memory of older generations who remember departed Jews indigenous to their own locales. In his 2013 book, *Memories of Absence*, Aomar Boam examines the perceptions of Jews among Moroccans in a small village, finding that the nostalgic memories of older Muslims who remember departed Jews

³⁸⁹ Isaac Sasson, phone conversation with author, November 22, 2017.

³⁹⁰ Karen C. Underhill, “Next year in Drohobych: On the uses of Jewish absence.” *East European Politics and Societies* 25.3 (2011): 581-596.

compete with narratives that disenfranchised youth adopt from Arab media, portraying Jews as essentially evil and threatening to Muslims.³⁹¹ The Arab world is not monolithic, however, and recent trends in Iraq reveal the emergence of a different dynamic. For many young Iraqis, the stories of Iraq's Jews told by their parent's generation are a reminder that Iraq was once home to a diverse kaleidoscope of ethnic and religious communities and, while this motive for remembering Jews has a self-serving aspect, Iraqis express desire for reunion with Jews, as people, differentiating these expressions from the more ephemeral ones noted in the Polish case.

Perhaps connecting with their lost Jewish community helps twenty-first century Iraqis to imagine a future where such coexistence could be possible again? In the past year, even the Iraqi state has begun making overtures to its departed Jews, with several prominent politicians issuing official invitations for the Jews of Iraq to return. Notably, Muqtada al-Sadr, a conservative Shia cleric, issued his own such invitation in June 2018.³⁹² These invitations have yet to be taken seriously, however, by Iraqi Jews, who don't fail to notice the lingering anti-Israeli caveats attached to such gestures. Sadr's statements conclude, for instance, with the phrase; "If they are loyal." The questions of loyalty attached to the cleric's invitation sounds all too reminiscent of the questions of loyalty raised amidst the anti-Jewish hostilities of 1967-1973 that precipitated their departure in the first place. The persistent anti-Israeli atmosphere in Iraq lies at the heart of such conditional clauses. Another government minister explained on Iraqi television in March 2017, that Iraq's invitation extended only to Iraqi Jews who did not hold Israeli citizenship.³⁹³

Individual Iraqis seem to better appreciate the realities preventing Iraqi Jews' return and, rather than inviting Jews to return, tend toward expressions of nostalgia, well-wishes, and the occasional articulation of hope for an eventual reunion. One young man in Baghdad commented on a video I posted to Facebook during the Frank Iny reunion in Montreal. "Sending all love to them. Can't wait to meet up with Iraqi Jews in person. Hug them as much as you can from me!" Even in the most personalized and affectionate of interactions, however, the subject of Israel remains a sensitive one that most Iraqi Jews and non-Jews alike simply avoid. Occasionally, non-Jewish Iraqis will make the mistake of trying to exonerate their Jewish compatriots of past charges

³⁹¹ Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 57.

³⁹² Paul Iddon, "Iraq in no position to Welcome Back Exiled Jewish Community." *Rudaw*. June 17, 2018.

³⁹³ General Fadhi Alwan Kazem, interview by Hussein al-Iqabi, *Al-Iraqiyya*, March 17., 2019, <https://www.memri.org/>.

of disloyalty by correcting the past conflation of Jews and Zionists, affirming their belief that not all Jews are Zionists and Iraqi Jews, contrary to the charges that precipitated their persecution, had always been loyal Iraqis. Such an argument, however, proves problematic for Iraqi Jews, whose attitudes toward Israel had always been complicated and whose varying affinities for Israel did not diminish their loyalty to their home-country of Iraq in their own minds. Today, Iraqi Jews prove even less likely to accept the conditional clauses that Iraqis use to reconcile affection for Iraqi Jews with the persistent anti-Israeli narrative in Iraqi political discourse. Most Iraqis seem aware of this and avoid mentioning Israel altogether in their online participation in Iraqi Jewish memory. As interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish Iraqis and relationships, new and old, continue to grow in diaspora and online, the question of Israel stands as the greatest remaining point of tension that will need to be resolved for reconciliation to continue to move forward. If Iraqis truly wish to reunite with their Jewish counterparts it will require the abandonment of a persistent anti-Israeli narrative still predominant in Iraqi culture

6.5 Arab and Arab Jewish Diaspora

If the relationship between Iraqi Jews and non-Jewish Iraqis prove complicated, the relationship of Iraqi Jews to non-Iraqi Arabs is a veritable minefield of identity crises. On the one hand, Iraqi Jews (excluding Kurdish Jews from northern Iraq) share with Arabs a plethora of musical, culinary, and other cultural traditions that reflect the longstanding integration of these Jews into the Arab world since the Islamic conquests of the eighth century. I witnessed the ease with which food, music and dancing brought Iraqis together with Arabs in Montreal, when Frank-Iny reunion-goers met at al-Sultan Lebanese Restaurant for an evening filled with hummus, live music, and dancing. I was struck, not only by the youthfulness of the Iraqi sexagenarians dancing to the music of their childhood, but also the eagerness with which they enjoyed the company of the Arab restaurant employees who joined them on the floor playing drums, singing, and dancing. Of the two Iraqi Jewish organizers of the event whom I asked, one had no idea of the religious background of the restaurant owners and insisted that it wouldn't matter to him. The other, Lisette Sha'shoua, of the prominent family owning "the Palace of Shashoua" discussed in chapter two, said she knew that they were Christian only because some Armenian Christian friends had recommended them. Shashoua commented that, while she had no non-Iraqi Arab friends, she and

many other Iraqi Jews frequented Arab and Iranian restaurants in diaspora. “Cuisine is probably the hardest thing to give up” Shashoua reflected in an email, “I guess food is the last thing any culture lets go of.”³⁹⁴ Put differently, it appears that when politics get in the way, deeply engrained cultural practices of food, music, language, and dance prove resilient.

Despite the cultural affiliations between Iraqi Jews and Arabs so apparent through shared culinary, musical, and linguistic traditions, Arab identity has become problematic for Jews from Arab countries. Iraqi Jews almost unanimously reject the term “Arab Jew” as an ethno-religious category. This was not always the case. As noted in the introductory chapter, scholars have demonstrated the degree to which Jewish intellectuals in the Arab world responded to the emergence of early Arab nationalism by identifying as Arab-Jews, embracing co-ethnicity with Arabs while maintaining their Jewish communal identity, regardless of their personal level of religious piety. Examples of Arab Jews identifying as such existed among Iraqi Jews into the 1970s. In 1971, the first issue of *The Scribe* ran an announcement that “The Action Committee for Arab Jewry” (headed by editors of the journal) planned to sponsor talks and publications on “the background and position of Jews in Arab States.”³⁹⁵ The Committee, founded under that name, reflected a quickly vanishing practice of using the term “Arab Jewry” to refer to Jews from the Arab world. By the time of *The Scribe*’s first publication, however, the terms “Arab Jews” and “Arab Jewry” had already begun falling out of usage among most Iraqi Jews. Even “The Action Committee for Arab Jewry,” while keeping its name, referred, in its publications in *The Scribe* not to “Arab Jews,” but “Jews from Arab Countries.” In the minds of Jews, Arab-ness became a national identity bound up with anti-Israeli politics considered antisemitic by most Jews from Arab countries. Zionists and Arab Nationalists together laid the munitions of this conceptual conflict zone throughout the twentieth century as they projected the Arab-Israeli conflict onto Arab societies, estranging them from their indigenous Jewish communities. By the time of Israel’s establishment in 1948 and the mass emigration of Jews from Arab countries in the following decade, Arab Nationalists had embraced the claim of their Zionist adversaries that all Jews were Zionists and ultimately refused the participation of Jews in the Arab “nation.”

Today, the differing attitudes held by non-Jewish Arabs and Jews from Arab countries continues to prove an obstacle to full Jewish reconciliation with their Arab counterparts. Trends

³⁹⁴ Lisette Shashoua, email to author, April 6, 2019.

³⁹⁵ *The Scribe*, Vol 1. No 1., September-October, 1971, Page 6.

among Iraqis and other Arabs toward positively remembering their Jewish compatriots are predicated on avoiding the topic of Israel and Zionism altogether. Like non-Jewish Iraqis, when Arabs seeking common ground with Jews address the issue of Zionism at all, they typically fall into the trap of affirming, correctly, that not all Jews are Zionists, in an effort to exonerate Jews of Zionism while maintaining their anti-Zionist stance. This attempt at reconciliation, however, proves problematic to Iraqi Jews who, in the present, generally identify as Zionist and, if they don't live in Israel themselves, know family or friends within the Iraqi Jewish diaspora who do.

Within this context, Iraqi Jews and other Arab Jews outside of the Arab world continue to eschew their co-ethnicity with Arabs, forging an Arab-Jewish identity sanitized of its Arab-ness. In this context, the term “Arab Jew” embraced by many Jews active in Iraqi and other political and literary movements during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries has ceased to be a meaningful identity for Jews who speak Arabic and share with the Arab world a plethora of culinary, musical, and other customs. Of the more than forty Iraqi Jews that I interviewed, corresponded with, or consulted for this project, not one ever used the term “Arab Jew” to refer to themselves or any other Jew in or from an Arab country. When I asked Linda Menuhin what she thought of the term, she replied, “I'm not fond of this terminology. I always say that I am an Iraqi Jew living in Israel. Or I am Israeli from Iraqi background. I don't define myself as an Arab. Probably, I'm still a bit sensitive because we are in Israel, and if you say you are an Arab-Jew then you are discrediting yourself. That's what I would think.”³⁹⁶ While other Iraqi Jews don't necessarily identify social pressure as a reason for eschewing the term, the predominance of the conceptual binary today between Arab and Jew no doubt proves a powerful motivator even outside of Israel. Thus, instead of referring to themselves as Arab Jews, Arabic speaking Jews from Iraq identify most commonly as Jews from Arab countries or Jews from the Middle East, although most Iraqi Jews prefer simply to refer to themselves as Iraqi Jews.

Many organizations dedicated to the cultural heritage of these Jews use the term Sephardi Jews. In this context, a variety of organizations dedicated to the shared cultural heritage of Jews from the Arab world have emerged, none of which bear the term “Arab Jewry” in their names. Instead, they typically identify Arab Jews as “Sephardic,” adopting the term that historically referred to those Jews expelled from Iberia during the Reconquista of the fifteenth century. Today, projects dedicated to the memory and history of Jews from the Arab and Islamic world generally,

³⁹⁶ Linda Menuhin, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

use the term Sephardic regardless of whether the communities taken as their subjects originated in Iberia. The term Sephardic now serves as a general term for non-Ashkenazi Jewry. Such is the case with Sephardi Voices, advertised as “the first comprehensive digital archive that documents and preserves the life stories of Jews who lived in Islamic lands with videos, audio, and photographs.”³⁹⁷ Sephardi Voices has been recording oral histories since 2009, many of which are used in this dissertation. Likewise, the American Sephardi Federation, based out of the Center for Jewish History in New York “preserves and promotes the history, traditions, and rich mosaic culture of greater Sephardic communities as an integral part of the Jewish experience.”³⁹⁸ In both cases, these organizations seek to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Jewish communities from Iraq and other Arab and Islamic majority countries without necessarily pursuing a political objective. Culture, however, is an inherently political animal, and Iraqi Jews’ engagement in cultural endeavors inevitably runs up against questions of political identity and affiliation. Such conundrums prove especially true for Iraqi and other Arab Jews, who lie at the nexus of two worlds, Jewish and Arab, whom the modern Arab-Israeli conflict have rendered inherently conflictual.

6.6 World Jewry

Iraqi Jews around the world are bound to a wider global Jewry by a number of factors including their shared cultural and religious heritage, issues of antisemitism and Jewish/non-Jewish relations more broadly, and their complex relationship to Israel. Familiarity with Jewish religious heritage is a major factor joining Iraqi Jews to other Jews regardless of cultural background. While even Jewish religious practices take on culturally unique forms in different cultures, the shared scriptures, holidays, and rituals provide a common language from which Jews of different backgrounds often enjoy “discovering” each other’s unique cultural practices. The growth of projects like Sephardi Voices and of organizations like the American Sephardi Federation and its inclusion in the New-York based Center for Jewish History demonstrate the growing institutional interest of the broader Jewish world in the history and culture of its non-

³⁹⁷ Sephardi Voices, accessed November 1, 2017, <https://sephardivoices.com/>.

³⁹⁸ American Sephardi Federation, accessed September 4, 2015, <http://americansephardi.org/>.

Ashkenazi members. Indeed, the eager reception I have found among Jewish Studies circles for this project is itself illustrative of the growing interest in Sephardi Jewry.

Although Sephardi Jews are gaining recognition among world Jewry, they remain relatively unacknowledged in non-Jewish popular imagination. For instance, non-Jews that hear about my research respond with surprise that Jews lived in Iraq. Typically, non-Jews I speak to are only aware of Jewish cultures from the Middle East if they have had the opportunity to meet a Middle Eastern Jew themselves, which proves common among people who have lived in New York, L.A. or any other handful of places in which large numbers of Sephardi Jews reside. Non-Ashkenazi Jews remain underrepresented in popular media, despite the growing interest in Jewish and academic circles and, as a result, still escape the notice of much of the western world's non-Jews, where images of Jewry reflect the more familiar images of Eastern European Jewry. The history and heritage of Sephardi Jews continues to be overshadowed by modern day western-centric concepts of Jewishness that revolve around depictions of Jewish life found in the popular play and movie "Fiddler on the Roof" and the 1990s sitcom "Seinfeld." Iraqi and other Arab Jews push back on these hegemonic narratives in a variety of ways. Sometimes they do so publicly, to enlighten audiences unfamiliar with their heritage and sometimes privately, to celebrate their shared heritage with each other and hope to pass on some inklings of that inheritance to offspring whose feet never graced the streets of Middle Eastern cities and villages. Along with growing awareness of Sephardi Jewish history, many Ashkenazi Jews have joined in or supported Sephardi Jews' efforts to increase their recognition, as in the case of the American Sephardi Federation's inclusion in the Center for Jewish History.

Iraqi Jews also share with Ashkenazi and other Jews issues of Jewish-non-Jewish relations. Chief among these are concerns about Antisemitism and other forms of anti-Jewish attitudes and activities around the world. These have manifest in various forms in different societies, as previous chapters show, and this leaves Jews of Iraq and other Arab countries with experiences that prove both distinct from larger narratives of Jewish suffering but also adaptable to them. The commemoration of the 1969 Ba'th hangings was an event that, while it honored the victims of the Jewish community still living in Iraq at the time, Jews of the Arab world could identify with as part of the broader persecution and displacement which the Arab-Israeli conflict caused through the mid-twentieth century. The act of commemorating persecution, suffering, and death also proves relatable to many Jews regardless of their ethnic or geographical origins. In many cases, Iraqi

Jews seek more recognition for their tragedies by seeking to have them recognized within broadly recognizable frameworks, such as efforts to have the 1941 Farhud recognized as a part of the holocaust—efforts that have achieved recognition in some holocaust museums but not in the form of holocaust reparations paid annually to holocaust survivors by the Israeli State.

The State of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constitutes the most complex and divisive issue between Iraqi and other Jews from the Arab World, on the one hand, and Ashkenazi Jews on the other. The complexity stems, in part, from the contentious and politicized history of Jews from Arab countries in the broader narratives surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jews from the Arab world, initially considered inferior and even suspect by Ashkenazi Jews in Israel, have gained much broader acceptance today in Israeli society, of which they comprise about half. However, their history remains hotly contested between those who attempt to employ it as leverage against Palestinian claims against Israel and those critical of Israel's Palestinian policies.

Since 1950, when Mossad Agents first negotiated with the Iraqi state on behalf of Iraqi Jews for permission to leave the country, Israeli policymakers have discussed the idea of leveraging the plight of Jews from Arab countries against Palestinian claims against Israel. This idea manifest in the formation of the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC) by the Israeli state in 1975 which it later shut down after robust explorations of Arab Jewish heritage endangered the Israeli position that Palestinian and Arab Jewish displacements constituted a population exchange, half of which Israel solved by absorbing displaced Arab Jews.³⁹⁹ In 2002, a number of Sephardic Jewish activists and organizations joined to form the lobbying group Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC), which continued the cause of seeking refugee status for Jews from Arab countries in order to deflect Palestinian claims against Israel. In 2008 JJAC achieved a major victory when the U.S. Congress passed Resolution 185, which, according to the organization's president Stanley Urman, "now requires US diplomats in all Middle East negotiations to refer to a quote of what the resolution calls "multiple population of refugees" with a specific injunction demanding that 'any specific reference to the Palestinian refugees must be matched by an explicit reference to Jewish refugees.'" In 2009, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon began instructing Israeli diplomats to request similar resolutions from other foreign

³⁹⁹ Shenhav, *The Arab Jews*.

parliaments. In September 2012, Foreign Minister Ayalon also hosted a conference at the UN calling for UN recognition of Jews from Arab countries as refugees.⁴⁰⁰

On the face of it, these developments may seem a long overdue victory for Jews from Iraq and other countries who wish to have their histories acknowledged. However, not all Jews from Arab countries agree. Some Iraqi Jews, in particular, have come out against the declaration of refugee status for Jews from Arab countries—and for wildly divergent reasons. Some Iraqi Jews including former Knesset speakers Shlomo Hillel and Yisrael Yeshayahu voiced their resentment at having the term refugee applied to them because it implied they came to Israel by force whereas they asserted that they came “at the behest of Zionism”⁴⁰¹ For these Iraqi Jews and some other Jews from Arab countries, the political expediency of using the term refugee in service of Israel’s population exchange argument was not worth denying their Zionist credentials.

Most Iraqi Jews did, in fact, flee Iraq for security reasons and not out of Zionist convictions and, while many of these Jews have since embraced the dominant Israeli narratives of regional politics, some took the opportunity of Foreign Minister Ayalon’s conference at the U.N. to voice their disapproval of his efforts. The day after the conference in 2012, a number of Iraqi Jews in Israel formed an organization called the Ramat-Gan Committee of Baghdadi Jews and issued a statement denouncing the Foreign Ministry’s campaign in the U.N. Opening their statement with obvious sarcasm, they stated: “We most sincerely thank the Israeli government for confirming our status as refugees following a rapid, 62-year-long evaluation of our documents.” They then set forth a number of resolutions rejecting the notion that the use of Arab Jewish losses as a tool for Israeli foreign policy constituted justice for them. “We are seeking to demand compensation for our lost property and assets,” their statement explained, “from the Iraqi government – NOT from the Palestinian Authority – and we will not agree with the option that compensation for our property be offset by compensation for the lost property of others (meaning, Palestinian refugees) or that said compensation be transferred to bodies that do not represent us (meaning, the Israeli government).”⁴⁰² It seems that the attitude of Iraqi Jews themselves toward their own history is as varied as the opinions of outsiders, showing that this history remains controversial not only

⁴⁰⁰ Richard Irvine, “Israel’s cynical campaign to pit Arab Jews against Palestinian refugees,” *The Electronic Intifada*, July 1, 2012; “Israeli hasbara effort– ‘Justice for Jewish refugees from Arab countries’– gets pushback from Baghdadi Jews,” *Mondoweiss: News & Opinion About Palestine, Israel & the United States*, September 16, 2012.

⁴⁰¹ Ben White, “A new hasbara campaign: Countering the ‘Arab Narrative,’” *AlJazeera*, September 14, 2012.

⁴⁰² The Ramat-Gan Committee of Baghdadi Jews,” accessed October 12, 2016, <https://baghdadijews.wordpress.com/english/>.

because of its practical implications for present international politics, but also because the interpretation of this history is central to Jews of Middle Eastern background and their claims about their identity.

Anti-Palestinian politics are not the only venue of the Israeli political spectrum that proves complicated for Iraqi Jews. Iraqi Jews who have tried to participate in peace advocacy led by those on the Israeli left have found that predominant narratives on the left of the Israeli political spectrum focus on mutual recognition of Jews' and Palestinians' suffering in the holocaust and the '*Nakba*' (Arabic word for 'catastrophe' referring to the displacement of Palestinians in the first Arab Israeli War). In 2011, Janet Dallal, an Iraqi Jewish woman who escaped Iraq in 1975 and now lives in Israel, attended a peace conference in Israel and became outraged when the moderators did not include her loss, as an Iraqi Jew, in the discussion. "This is a crazy attitude. People lost their lives, others were hanged or slaughtered like sheep!" she exclaimed, referring to her fellow Jews in Iraq.⁴⁰³ The moderator promised Dallal that the subject would be included in the future, but she remained frustrated that her own suffering and that of her community seemed an intrusion to those sponsoring the meeting. Lyn Julius, an Iraqi Jew who wrote about Dallal's encounter in an article for *The Jerusalem Post* derided Ashkenazi "Peaceniks" on the left of the Israeli political spectrum, criticizing a view in which, she claims they "see Israel as the guilty party in the conflict and Palestinians as innocent victims."⁴⁰⁴ The lack of space made for Arab Jews' narratives of loss and trauma in coexistence efforts certainly poses problems for Jews from Iraq and other Arab countries whose experience of suffering and loss is no less real than Jewish holocaust survivors and Palestinian refugees. However, the scarcity of Arab Jewish participation in reconciliation efforts with Palestinians may be as much to blame. As Julius herself noted of the reconciliation groups, "these initiatives involve a disproportionate number of Ashkenazim, mostly on the political Left... many (of whom) may be genuinely ignorant of the plight of Jews who fled Arab countries with their lives and a suitcase." While the effect may accurately be as she describes, that "a trauma afflicting more than half the Israeli population – those who descend from refugees from Arab and Muslim countries – has been airbrushed off the agenda of dialogue and coexistence projects," this unlikely to change until more Sephardi Jews engage in peace and reconciliation efforts, offering a

⁴⁰³ Lyn Julius, "How Coexistence Projects Can Hinder Peace," *Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 2011, <http://www.jpost.com/>.

⁴⁰⁴ Julius, "How Coexistence Projects Can Hinder Peace."

more robust path to reconciliation that moves beyond the dualistic narrative of Holocaust and *Nakba* victims.

Perhaps the ultimate benefit that Sephardi Jews can offer peacemaking endeavors is to recall and reclaim the rich and varied identities that coexisted for much of the region's history, recalling the days before Zionism and Arab Nationalism turned the term "Arab Jew" into an oxymoron. The depth and richness of Iraqi Jews' cultural heritage is not necessarily contrary to either Israeli or Palestinian claims to national identity but challenges the denial of that richness by narrow nationalist claims. This richness is communicated in Emile Cohen's poem, referred to throughout this dissertation. The contention of the poem is not necessarily a denial of Iraqi Jews' deep historical and spiritual connection to the land of Israel, but a rebuke of Arab Nationalist denial of Iraq as a legitimate Jewish "homeland." As discussed in the introduction, most Iraqi Jews eschewed Zionist emigration for themselves while still identifying strongly with their spiritual heritage in the biblical "homeland." They held a variety of opinions of the legitimacy of Zionism as a movement to provide security for Europe's persecuted Jews and on the emerging Palestinian movement resisting Zionist settlement in Palestine under British Mandate rule. Even as more Jewish Youth identified with the Zionist movement in Iraq during the 1940s after the Farhud and, later, many Jews began fleeing persecution in Iraq with the advent of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948. In the decades since their emigration, Iraqi Jews' attitudes have accounted for the new realities of the established state of Israel, its role in providing residence and alternative homeland to Jews forced to flee Iraq. Even as many Iraqi Jews continue to choose other countries of residence and establish their own Iraqi Jewish institutions in those locations, many of them embrace the Zionist narrative celebrating Israel's role as both ancestral homeland and modern advocate, protector, and refuge for the world's Jews. Amid efforts for greater recognition of their culture among world Jewry, Iraqi Jews express their cultural identity in positive terms acceptable to a world Jewry that has largely accepted the Zionist hegemonic narrative that places Jew and Arab in oppositional duality.

6.7 Conclusions

The identities of Iraqi Jews who left in the 1970s prove incredibly diverse and complex, reflecting broader overlapping cultural or political affiliations, some of which have become

oppositional within only a generation or two. These numerous unique cultural and historical experiences leave Iraqi Jews with their own cultural identity, some of which they share with other Jews of Arab lands and some of which is uniquely Iraqi (and, itself, encompasses a variety of experiences based on differences of class, language, geography, and time of emigration among Iraqi Jews). Their experience shows that diaspora is created not merely by a shared place or origin, even among a group with shared ethnic or religious identity. It is also created and maintained by people who shared particular experiences such as living through particular historical events or even attending the same school together, if that school plays a strong communal role as did the Frank Iny school. The Frank Iny diaspora, as I have called it, consists of Jews who shared a formative communal experience which they prove capable of conjuring up today at rare gatherings such as the one I attended in Montreal.

CHAPTER 7. EPILOGUE

This dissertation has concluded its study in 1973 because, as chapter five argues, that year brought the end of a distinct Iraqi Jewish community that began after 1951. Like 1951, however, 1973 was not the end of Jewish life in Iraq for everyone. As the Jews that fled Iraq between 1970 and 1973 began the unique transnational activities that formed the Frank Iny diaspora, the few who remained in Iraq established their own “new normal.” By 1973, Iraq’s remaining Jews likely numbered well under one thousand according to Jewish testimonies and death records. This tiny community maintained the longstanding Jewish presence in Iraq but lacked the robust communal institutions of the Frank Iny Era. They had no Jewish schools or Jewish clubs. A handful of Jewish families continued weekly shabbat services in Baghdad’s two remaining Jewish houses of worship, the Meir Tweig Synagogue and the Masouda Shemtob Synagogue but most Jewish families attended Synagogue only on high holidays. Beginning in the 1970s, the community also used the synagogues to house a handful of destitute elderly Jews.⁴⁰⁵ In the decades since 1973, Iraq’s remaining Jews have managed to live in relative obscurity and avoid being targetted as Jews like they were after the Six Day War, even amidst war in Iraq and hostilities with Israel.

In 1975 the state confiscated the Frank Iny school and reopened it as a public school. Baghdadi Jew Emad Levy was ten years old at the time and in his class of about twenty-five students, he had only two Jewish classmates. These two left Iraq with their families in 1981 and 1982, leaving Levy the only remaining Jew in his class.⁴⁰⁶ At this point, Levy’s recollections of Jewish life in Baghdad sound reminiscent of Isaac Sassoon’s childhood in Samawa after 1951. Like Sassoon in Samawa during the 1950s, Levy grew up during the 1980s socializing with his Muslim and Christian classmates at school and outside of school hours he played with his non-Jewish neighbors in Alwiyah. He enjoyed swimming at the local club, where he also socialized with non-Jews. In other words, for Levy, Baghdad after 1973 was a post-Jewish city much in the way that Samawa was for Sassoon after 1951.

⁴⁰⁵ Raphail Soffer, correspondence with author, March 26, 2019.

⁴⁰⁶ Emad Levy, interview with author, November 11, 2016.

Basra proved even more lacking in Jewish communal presence. Raphail Soffer grew up in Iraq's southern port city knowing of only a few elderly Jews in his neighborhood that his mother sometimes visited. Raphail's father had been among the Basran Jews executed on trumped up charges of espionage when Soffer was only four years old.⁴⁰⁷ He attended private Christian elementary schools and a public high school where he was the only Jew and found that his Jewish identity, while no secret, was not a topic of conversation. The late 1970s proved a volatile period for southern Iraq as Shia political parties rose to challenge the Ba'th state and, in turn, faced violent repression. Soffer watched many of his peers become active in political activities of the Ba'th Party or the emerging Shia opposition parties that dominated the cities of southern Iraq. Peers from opposing parties often pressured Soffer to join them in political activities but he steered clear. Soffer watched as many of his peers in opposition parties disappeared or were executed by the state. On one occasion, two of his politically active friends vanished and when he asked others what happened to them, he was told to ignore it for his own safety but when he pressed his friends revealed that they had been secretly executed.⁴⁰⁸

In 1980, the year after Saddam Hussein secured the presidency in Iraq and Ayatolla Khomeini became Supreme Leader of neighboring Iran, the two countries went to war. Soffer and Levy's high school and college years unfolded under the shadow of the Iran-Iraq War which pitted Saddam Hussein's secular Arab Ba'thist state against the new Shia Revolutionary state of Iran on its eastern border. The eight-year war that lasted from 1980 to 1988 cost more than 100,000 Iraqi lives.⁴⁰⁹ Early in the war, Iraqi attention turned to Israel when, on June 7, 1981, Israel bombed a nuclear reactor in Iraq.⁴¹⁰ The Iraqi press published articles vilifying Israel but it neglected to mention any claims of espionage or Iraqi Jews and the community in Iraq reported no arrests or incidents in conjunction with the attack.⁴¹¹ Three years later Saddam Hussein, courting U.S. support in his war against the Islamic Republic of Iran, issued a declaration that Iraqi Jews were to be treated as equal citizens and the Army enlisted fourteen young Jewish men that year. One of those men was Raphail Soffer, who trained alongside Muslim and Christian soldiers and served

⁴⁰⁷ Raphail Soffer, correspondence with author, March 26, 2019.

⁴⁰⁸ Raphail Soffer, correspondence with author, March 26, 2019.

⁴⁰⁹ Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran–Iraq Military Conflict*. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 251.

⁴¹⁰ Hiro, *The Longest War*, 37.

⁴¹¹ Al-Jumhuriyah; Raphail Soffer, correspondence with author.

three years with an artillery unit on the northern front. Emad Levy also served in the military during the same time.

During the 1991 Gulf War, the Jewish community managed once again, to carry on in relative obscurity, free from any government targeting, even as Saddam Hussein defied the U.S. and bombed Tel-Aviv in an effort to appeal to Pan-Arab sentiments in the region. As soffer and Levy recall, they and their families worried about the safety of their relatives in Israel, with whom they had little contact, but suffered no persecution of their own amidst the anti-Israeli rhetoric that accompanied the campaign. In the decade following the war, Iraq, and the Jews in Iraq, suffered the effects of crippling sanctions leveled against the country by the U.S. and the international community, prompting more Jews to leave Iraq illegally until less than one hundred remained by the end of the decade.⁴¹² Less than forty Jews remained in Iraq by the time that Saddam Hussein's government met its end in 2003.⁴¹³ The state, while not explicitly targeting Jews, did begin compiling a roster of all remaining Jews in Iraq. The documents, which were among a massive collection of Ba'th Party documents seized by coalition forces in 2003, list, by name, dozens of Jews living in Iraq at the time along with the province in which each resided. No explanation is included in the documents for the data that the Ba'th state gathered on Iraq's few remaining Jews.⁴¹⁴ The violence and chaos that followed the U.S. invasion hastened the departure of most Jews who remained, but not all. Today a mere four Jews living in Baghdad are all that remain of the once prominent Iraqi Jewish community which constituted a third of the Iraqi capital's population just seventy years ago. To protect their privacy and safety, this dissertation will go only so far as to say that two of the four are elderly retirees and the other two are younger and remain employed.

The reduction of Iraq's once numerous and vibrant Jewish community to the mere four Jews who remain there today, living in relative obscurity, was not inevitable. The fewer than ten thousand Jews who remained in Iraq after 1951 did so out of choice and many of them passed up numerous opportunities to leave. They revived old communal institutions and opened new ones. Most importantly, they expressed hopes for a continued, if modified, Jewish communal presence in Iraq that would carry on the 2,500-year-old tradition of Babylonian Jewry and participate in the

⁴¹² Emad Levy, interview with author, November 11, 2016.

⁴¹³ <http://www.dangoor.com/71page32.html>; Cobin, Ian. "Iraq's Last Jews Wait in Fear for War." Times of London, Oct. 18, 2002. In Carole Basri.; "New York Community" doc in "Iraq Research" folder

⁴¹⁴ IMF.

economic and cultural success of the new Iraqi state. These hopes were not ultimately realized, but neither were they naïve. The history of Iraqi Jews after 1951 is the history of a people adapting to cataclysmic changes and debating their futures in light of Zionism, Iraqi and Arab nationalisms, and the undetermined characters of the Iraqi state at the time. Recent invitations for Iraqi Jews to return to Iraq have, thus far, not been taken seriously by Iraqi Jews. However, while the restoration of a Jewish community in Iraq may seem unthinkable today, history often unfolds in surprising ways. The state of the Iraqi Jewish community today would have been equally as unthinkable to Jews a century ago who enjoyed unprecedented levels of participation in the political and cultural movements of the new country called Iraq. Time will tell whether history holds a future for Jews in Iraq.

APPENDIX

FULL TEXT OF *I AM THE IRAQI, I AM*, BY EMILE COHEN

You ask me who I am.
I am the Iraqi, I am.

In all the yesteryears I was there, but today here I am.
Twenty-six centuries ago,
But after the Destruction I left the land of Canaan
To Babylon as a Captive of War.

Consumed in grief and despair, I sat on the riverbank,
Like an aged man with a bent back.

But the brave heart never surrenders to the cruelty of time
And soon the depression that had engulfed my mind was gone.
Between the Twin Rivers and the towns, we dug free-flowing channels,
We sowed seeds of wheat and barley, lush trees,
And date palms; a forest of living green in abundance.
Homes and villages we built,
Babylon was but our whole universe,
Our country, the land of love, prosperity and happiness.

Then Cyrus came, he gave us the choice
To go back where we once belonged
“Go back to the promise land” he prompted,
But we refused; this land was now our own,
And here we must stay, for we were in the land of the believers,
And we had come before both Jesus and Islam,
Before both the Priest and the Imam
When idolaters were all over the land,

Before the tolling of church bells, before religions took different venues, before the
Qurans revelation to Mohammed,
Before the calling to prayer from every minaret,

For we are a people more ancient than time,
With a history as glorious as the land of Iraq itself.
We took our sacred texts from Ezra,
And the Talmud becoming our shining frame of reference,
And lived a life of plenty and opulence.

But alas rulers appeared from various countries,

Some tyrannical, others peace-loving
The righteous and the unjust,

Persians and Sassanid,
Greeks and Romans,
Turks and Ottomans.

We supported every ruler even if he were a pagan,
We did not wage war, nor did we threaten revolt
Making obedience as the demeanour of humans.

We were the first Iraqis to acknowledge Ali as the great Caliph
Living peacefully under the protection of the Muslims,
We paid our tribute without complaints or evasion
Grief and happiness, we tasted both
Nights of despair and nights of hopes.

When the Mongol appeared and our blood flowed free
Side by side your loved ones and ours perished,
Everything in Iraq laid as waste,
The river Tigris turning crimson as our wine's rich hue,
Your people and ours bound together by slaughter.

Years elapsed, our days passing swifter than centuries

At last a king arrived to rule Iraq, one who cherished us,
"Each to his own religion; but the country is for all"
The new Iraq became our refuge
We built it with love and passion
Payment for oil to be in gold was our notion
Poetry, culture, and science were our concerns
Music and singing were our finest spirit.

Out of the blue, a notorious decision was made for us to get out
From your country...but no, from our country
You seized unlawfully all we possessed
Left us on the gallows with our bodies dangling
Robbed the souls of our elites,
Sanctioned injustice and murder,
Leaving us to live thin lives stretched tight on the wheel of misfortune,
Our only sin was our faith, just our faith.

The days of your oppression had no end
We wasted away in the dark dungeons of your prisons,
We had no option left but to flee.

Oh, our story is tragic, set on a tragic stage,
 Nothing remained of us and our civilization
 Save fading memories
 And tidal wave of tears filling our eyes,
 Our faces awash with silent tears
 Tears on the cheeks of time
 Silent are our tears on our faces; chronic is the misery in our hearts,
 Endless tears expressing endless desolation.

Silent tears weighing down our broken hearts,
 Endless tears of sadness and despair
 Silent tears stroking our sorrow,
 Endless tears shed in our grief-stricken nights,
 The protection of Mohammed did not come to our rescue
 And the wisdom of God did not come to save us.

Strange is your stand, weird is our case
 Is that all we are, a mere sacrificial lamb to you?

You cruelly inflicted sufferings upon us, why? We had done you no harm.

Exile and alienation ended to be our destiny.
 Twenty-six centuries of our history

Why have they been effaced?
 Iraq still flows in our veins,
 Its soft winds are but perfume in our breath,

Even in our dreams we yearn and aspire to Iraq
 So, by what right do you ask me who I am?

Are you the Iraqi, or I?
 Are you the Iraqi, or I?

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ASF	American Sephardi Federation, Center for Jewish History, New York, NY
MDC	Moshe Dayan Center Arabic Newspaper Collection, Tel Aviv, Israel
IMF	Hoover Institute/ Iraq Memory Foundation, Stanford, CA
FO	Foreign Office files accessed through the UK online service Archives Direct

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Oral History Interviews

Hussein Alawy (8-13-2017) Currently residing in the U.S., Mr. Alawy and his family were close acquaintances of Linda Menuhin's family and other Jewish families in Iraq.

Ferial Balass (11-2-2016) Born in 1946, Ms. Balass grew up with affluent parents but was raised primarily by Christian and Shia Muslim servants, attended al-Hikma University along with several other Iraqi Jews She also had some personal acquaintances in the Ba'th Party

Sami Balass (11-2-2016) Born in 1938 to a prominent business family, he was closely acquainted with members of the Ba'th Party and describes how those relationships functioned in times of distress for his family. He also describes his imprisonment and the often complicated and even ironic relationships among those incarcerated and guarding the incarcerated.

Dr. David Khedar Basoon Lived in Iraq until 1973 and wrote in Arabic about his experiences.

Niran Basoon daughter of Selim al-Basoon, the last Jewish journalist in Iraq.

Janet Dalal (8-15-2017) Born 1957, she lived in Iraq until 1973.

David Daly (8-15-2017).

Fredy Iny (9-15-2016) Born 1948, he lived in Iraq until 1973 and describes growing up with a social circle composed mainly of Jews and, chiefly, his own family members but he also describes himself and other Jews socializing at a Greek owned club called The Acropolis. He also recounts he and his sister's arrest, along with about one hundred and forty other Jews, while trying to flee Iraq in September 1970—an event which attracted the attention of international advocacy groups and foreign governments.

Nora Iny (9-19-2016) Daughter of prominent author and Jewish community leader Mier Basri, Ms. Iny (born 1951) describes in vivid detail her and her family's relationships and interactions with Jewish and non-Jewish Iraqis including her father's participation in nationalist literary circles and the Chief Rabbi until they left Iraq in 1973.

Oliver Iny (9-16-2016) Born 1944, Mr. Iny lived in Baghdad until 1971 and describes his family life in detail during his childhood as well as his social life in the Jewish community as he came of age himself

Sami Kattan (9-19-2016) Born in 1928, Mr. Kattan shares vivid memories of life in Iraq from 1951 until his departure in 1971. His activities in business and his contacts with the Qassem

government (1958-1963) offer a unique perspective on relations between Jewish-non-Jewish relations in Iraq and the interactions between prominent Jews and the state before and after the Ba'th coup in 1968.

Emad Levy (11-11-2016) Born 1965, Mr. Levy lived in Iraq until 2010 and served as leader of the Jewish community beginning in 2004 when his father, the community's last rabbi emigrated to Israel.

Linda Menuhin (12-8-2016) Born 1950, Linda lived in Iraq until 1971. Her father Ya'cov was the only Jewish lawyer representing Jews arrested and detained for trying to flee Iraq in 1971 and 1972. Linda shares extensive stories of her and her family's relationships with neighbors of various religious and political affiliations as well as her relationships as a student at Baghdad University

Albert Nissam (8-17-2014) Born 1967, Mr. Nissam left Iraq in 1970 after living with his sister since childhood as undocumented residents. Nevertheless, he attended school and college in Iraq and shares many stories about his interactions with Jewish and non-Jewish Iraqis over the years.

Isaac Sassoon lived in the city of Samawa. His family was the only Jewish family left there.

Nadia Sassoon (12-6-1017) Born 1951, she lived in Iraq until 1971 and her father worked in the ministry of Justice and had many close Muslim friends. Ms. Sassoon describes a close childhood friendship with a Muslim girl and her father's experiences with friends in the Ba'th government including one who secured his release after a brief imprisonment.

Lisette Shashoua (2-12-2018) grew up in Baghdad. Her family was close to the royal family.

Maurice Shohet Born 1949, Mr. Shohet lived in Iraq until 1970, he provides detailed anecdotes of the rhythms of daily life for his and other Jewish families and the ways in which events in Israel and Iraq or changing policies impacted those rhythms. He also provides stories about interactions with Ba'thists including Saddam Hussein.

Edwin Shuker left Iraq in the early 1970s and has returned to visit Baghdad several times since 2009.

Lily Shor (11-3-2017) Born in the mid-1950s, Lily lived in Iraq until 1971. She and her family lived across the street from one of Baghdad's last synagogues and describes neighborhood life there including the generational conflict among a neighbor family regarding their attitudes

toward the Jews. Two of the sons in this family vandalized Lily's family's home in defiance of their father, who respected the Jews

Raphail Soffer lived in Basra through the 2000s.

Aida Zelouf (12-2014) The daughter of prominent Jewish leader Mier Basri and sister of Nora Iny, Ms. Zelouf describes her experiences both among friends in and outside of the Jewish community but also being targeted for harassment by non-Jewish boys in the street.

Doris Zilkha 9-20-2016) Born 1952, Ms. Zilkha lived in Iraq until 1971 and discusses the impact of changing state policies and events in Israel on her family. Since no one in her family was arrested or killed, she offers a valuable perspective of a Jew whose family experienced the fear and insecurity that came with seeing other Jews targeted.

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