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ABSTRACT

When the nation of Israel was created, the state’s architects envisioned the establishment of a Western, secular country populated with Europeans. Israel’s leaders faced tremendous difficulties in generating a population, not the least of which was the Holocaust which decimated Israel’s intended citizenry. In need of a population to contribute to security, Israel’s founders looked to the Jews of Arab countries to fulfill the state’s security needs.

Declared an independent state in 1921, Iraq spent decades dominated by British imperial authority. Created out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire amid the chaotic and momentous changes of the first half of the twentieth century – World War I, World War II, colonialism, Zionism, Nazism and Communism – the British created a contentious, fragmented, and highly unstable Iraq. By the 1940s, Iraq’s political instability, combined with the war in Europe, the birth of the Israeli nation-state, and Zionist activity within the country created a situation that made life tenuous for Iraq’s Jewish community. Even with heightened tensions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, many of Iraq’s Jews had no desire to immigrate Israel, rather they were forced to leave their homeland as conditions in Iraq deteriorated.

Once the Jews from Arab lands arrived in Israel, not only was preference given to those Jews emigrating from Europe, Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews found their “Arabness” rejected by the Western-oriented culture. They faced discrimination and difficulty in assimilating the Western-oriented environment that prevailed in Israel.
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DEDICATION

To Michael Pass – thank you.
INTRODUCTION

"You must not judge people by their country."
- Paul Theroux

For over three centuries of Ottoman rule, the boundaries of the modern nation-state and national lines upon which contemporary societies are forced to adhere did not exist. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I created enormous upheaval as populations throughout the Middle East confronted new definitions of national identity. At the San Remo Conference in 1920, Great Britain and France formally divided the former Ottoman territories of the Middle East into European administered mandate states. “Little more than nineteenth-century imperialism repackaged to give the appearance of self-determination,” the newly mandated Arab states were deeply resentful of the imperial administrations. ¹

Through the mandate system, Great Britain and France carved up the territories of the Empire, establishing borders and states. The various religious groups, rival clans, and divergent tribes of the region were suddenly forced to adhere to a new sense of national identity which was no longer based upon patronage, clan, or religion, rather identity was manufactured by newly-formed state borders and national governments. This notion of a singular and unifying nationalism created a crisis of identity for those confined by the borders of the new states.

While also pushing against the constraints of imperial rule, the populations of Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Transjordan, and Iraq struggled to formulate state-based national identities. As outlined in such important historical works as A History of the Modern Middle East by William Cleveland, and The Modern Middle East by James Gelvin, assembling the state apparatus was an enormous undertaking, requiring the creation of government agencies and

social programs, and the establishment of durable economic systems. Additionally, the new structure of a strict centralized government, and the pressures of adhering to the cultural uniformity of the state created immense pressure for the citizens of the new nation-states, leading severe political, economic, and social instability. Each of the new states of the Middle East wrestled with such difficulties, but Iraq was unique because of the size of its Jewish population, and the effects imperialism and nationalism wrought upon its long-established and thriving Jewish community.

Economically, politically, and socially integrated into the larger Muslim community for over three thousand years, by the 1920s Jews comprised approximately 40 percent of Baghdad’s population, and controlled nearly 95 percent of the city’s businesses. ² Throughout the 1930s and 1940s as pro-British, and anti-British factions fought for power, the atmosphere in the country grew progressively more unstable resulting in no less than seven coups from 1936 to 1941.³ Iraq’s instability produced widespread social unrest, especially during the 1940s. While many Iraqi Jews shared the newfound Iraqi nationalist sentiment, confusion over the Jewish community’s alliance with Great Britain, the development of a Jewish state in Palestine through the 1940s, war with Israel in 1948, and an increase in Zionist political activity in Iraq led to the mass exodus of the community by 1951 with approximately 100,000 Jews emigrating from Iraq to Israel between 1948 and 1951.

During the same period, Israel also emerged as independent nation and through the 1940s, both Israel and Iraq struggled to define their citizenry. Iraq grappled with the notion of


who comprised an Iraqi, and Israel struggled to create a Jewish majority in a land dominated by Muslims. When the architects of the Jewish state originally envisioned Israel it was a nation based upon secular values and comprised of Western traditions. Intending to populate the state with Jews from Europe, a significant portion of Israel’s anticipated population perished in the Holocaust. Zionist leaders were also unable to entice many American Jews to move to the dry, desert country, and Israel’s architects faced an uncertain future as the promise of building a strong Jewish state was compromised due to the lack of not only urban, educated, white-Europeans, but of any “human material” necessary to establish a population. Creating a sizeable citizenry was not only imperative in assembling the state’s apparatus; it was Israel’s only viable means of defense. As Israel’s leaders felt increasingly vulnerable, defense became the primary goal, not only because of the perceived threat emanating from the country’s Arab neighbors, but also from the Palestinians that remained within the nation’s borders. A vital and essential factor for Israel, a substantial population was the only means through which both security and, therefore survival, could be achieved.

Obtaining the population needed for national security became almost an obsession for Israel’s leaders. Mizrahi, or Eastern, Jews were not included in the original Zionist vision of a Jewish homeland, but by the late 1940s the Jews of Arab lands became an essential piece in assembling the country’s framework. Attaining a Mizrahi population proved a challenge however, as many Arab Jews lived peacefully alongside Muslims in the Middle East. Although a number of Arab Jews moved to Israel for religious reasons during the 1920s and 1930s, the vast majority opted to remain in their home countries – countries such as Iraq where Jewish communities were firmly established and thrived for centuries. In an effort to secure the Israeli
nation quickly, Zionist activity exacerbated existing political and social instability in Arab countries and Iraq was no exception. Vulnerable to the quickly shifting political tides, many Iraqi Jews ultimately found themselves victims of Iraq’s internal political and social instability as well as Israel’s need to amass a substantial population.

Over 100,000 Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel between 1948 and 1951 and discovered that despite Israel’s great need for them, the state was ill-equipped to absorb them. Left to suffer in squalid transit camps, relegated to the back-breaking labor once assigned to the Palestinians, and confronted with racism and discrimination, the state was unprepared to integrate Mizrahi Jews into Israeli culture thereby relegating them to the fringes of society. The Ashkenazi (European) population assumed an Orientalist attitude toward the Mizrahi communities, deeming them backwards. Through the dismissal of the Mizrahi community, the Ashkenazim neglected one of the most useful and powerful aspects of their society.

In the late 1980s, Israeli archival material dating from the 1940s became declassified. A group of Israeli scholars, known as the “new historians” investigated these sources, emerging with new accounts of the creation of the state. Basing their work on the newly released documents, and intending to accurately depict the formation of Israel, Tom Segev, Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappe, and Hillel Cohen exposed the harsh reality behind the state’s ingathering. In his essay, “Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948,” Avi Shalim stated, “The Zionist narrative, like all nationalist versions of history, is a curious mixture of fact and fiction.”

The work of the “new historians” pushed against the Israeli national narrative that often simplified

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Israel’s inception, lauding the Zionists triumphant return, against all odds, to the “promised land.”

While a significant portion of the work undertaken by the “new historians” concerned the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, many of the declassified documents also exposed the reality behind Israel’s mass immigration during the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1949: The First Israelis, Tom Segev detailed the often uncomfortable realities behind Israel’s inception. Segev examined the various ways in which early Israeli leaders obtained its population, such as through purchase, propaganda, and covert political action. In Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001, Benny Morris also exposed the details behind Israel’s ingathering, describing prime-minister David Ben-Gurion’s fears that the effects of the Holocaust would prove “the death-knell of Zionism.”\(^5\) Although their interpretations of archival material are controversial, the “new historians” have provided provocative and valuable perspectives concerning the formation of the Jewish state. Pushing against the long held Israeli myth of victimization by exposing the calculated methods employed by the country’s architects to secure the state, the work of the “new historians” provided a much needed balance by exposing new information thereby allowing Israelis to come to terms with the country’s past. Historians are still waiting for many of the archives in the Arab states to open allowing for a similar reckoning.

For nearly fifty years Iraq’s rich Jewish history was not only ignored, but denied. While books such as A History of Iraq, The History of Modern Iraq, and Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity of Modern Iraq each provide detailed accounts of twentieth-

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century Iraq, little attention is given to Iraq’s Jews, or the complex circumstances leading to the community’s exodus between 1948 and 1951. In the last several years however, presumably since the demise of Saddam Hussain’s regime, a number of memoirs have been published recounting the lives of Iraq’s Jews, and the pain suffered by many during the community’s mass departure from 1948 to 1951. One of the most relevant memoirs We Look Like the Enemy: The Hidden Story of Israel’s Jews from Arab Lands, written by Rachel Shabi, a Jew of Iraqi origins, investigates the circumstances of Arab Jewish emigration to Israel during the late 1940s and early 1950s while also closely examining the discrimination that plagues Arab Jews within contemporary Israeli society. A number of other Jews from Iraq, such as Sasson Somekh, Nissim Rejwan, Ariel Sabar, Violette Shamash, Dr. David Rabeeya, and Marina Benjamin, published memoirs detailing their lives in Iraq during the first half of the twentieth century, their struggles to deal with the loss of their homeland, and the discrimination they faced upon arrival in Israel.

Prominent scholar and a Jew of Iraqi origin, Ella Shohat has also written extensively about the state of Mizrahi Jews in contemporary Israeli society, demonstrating that “Zionism has been primarily a liberation movement for European Jews and more precisely for that tiny minority of European Jews actually settled in Israel.”6 Shohat dismantles the Israeli national narrative of homogeneity, cooperation, and equality for all Jews, illustrating the political cracks and cultural fractures which have, from the beginning, separated Ashkenazi from Mizrahi.

Heavily influenced by the above authors, especially Tom Segev, Rachel Shabi, and Ella Shohat, I became interested in uncovering how the Mizrahi Jews came to occupy the lower

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rungs of a Jewish society that proclaimed equality for all Jews. Researching the conditions of modern Israel led to a study of the roots of the Mizrahi plight, not only within Israeli society, but also how the Jews from Arab countries came to be a part of Israel’s population. Many historical accounts of Iraq simplify the disappearance of Iraq’s Jewish population claiming that they moved to Israel for religious purposes, or state in broad terms that Jewish existence in the Iraqi state was no longer viable once Israel was established. This paper is important in revealing the circumstances that led to the exodus of its Jewish community to Israel in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Historians such as Norman Stillman in his book Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times, reduce Iraq’s Jewish exodus to the Arab world’s anti-Semitic sentiments while in his book, David Ben-Gurion’s Scandals: How the Haganah and the Mossad Eliminated Jews former Zionist active Naeim Giladi concludes that Zionism is ultimately responsible for the rupture of Iraq’s Jews. While each the anti-Semitic and pro-Zionist perspectives are valuable, to accept to one or the other is to simplify the complexities involved in the loss of Iraq’s Jewish community.

Weaving together the personal experiences of many of Iraq’s exiled Jewish community with an analysis of the circumstances that converged in the years from 1940 to 1951, it is the purpose of this study to demonstrate the complicated nature of the community’s exodus to Israel. Chapter one describes the circumstances that led to the creation of the Israeli state during the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter two demonstrates the turbulent formation of Iraq – from Ottoman vilayet at the turn-of-the-century to an independent nation by the 1930s. Chapter three describes Iraq’s Jews, and the events that resulted in the collapse of a 3,000 year old community by 1951, while chapter four details the conditions Arab Jews faced upon their arrival in Israel. While simple narratives such as inherent Arab disdain for
Jews, or Zionist activity creating the a rupture in Iraqi society may offer more convenient truths, such clear-cut narratives brush over many of the conditions that also played substantial roles in the movement of Iraq’s Jewish community to Israel. It is the intention of this study to shed light on the tumultuous era that gave rise to both nations and the collision of forces that ultimately led to the destruction of Iraq’s long-standing Jewish community.
CHAPTER 1: THE FORMATION OF ISRAEL: POPULATION EQUALS SECURITY, 1917-1948

Inspired by the increasing violence toward Jews in Europe during the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Zionists aspired to create a Jewish homeland. Israel was intended as a state where the fear of persecution did not exist for Jews - a nation that politically empowered and ensured the welfare of its citizenry. While the Zionist enterprise briefly considered establishing the Jewish state in Argentina or Uganda, the idea of “return” dominated the discourse. In 1905, the World Zionist Congress decided to establish the Jewish state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews.

A European enterprise, the architects of the nation-state intended to glean Israel’s population from Europe. In the 1940s, however, the Holocaust decimated Europe’s Jewish population placing Israel’s future in peril. In 1947, Israel’s first prime-minister, David Ben-Gurion, stated, “For thousands of years we have been a people without a state. The great danger now is that we shall be a state without a people.”

Confronted with the collapse of the state they had been trying to build for decades, Israel’s leaders looked toward the Jews of Arab lands to fulfill the state’s population needs. As Jewish communities existed relatively peacefully throughout the Middle East for centuries, enticing Arab Jews to move to Israel proved problematic. Many of the region’s Jews had little reason to leave their homes, livelihoods, and communities to relocate to the new Jewish state.

While Israel was not formally declared a nation-state until 1948, it had been in formation for years, the result of a Zionist principles and decades of immigration to Palestine. The late nineteenth-century ascent of a cohesive Zionist ideology was, in large part, a product

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of the Russian pogroms of 1881, as Jews were blamed not only for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, but for the suffering of Russians as a whole. The Jewish community of Russia was persecuted, and those who were not killed were driven out of the country. Jews faced an atmosphere of escalating discrimination throughout the whole of Europe, but it was the violence of the Russian pogroms that “transformed the nature of Jewish politics” intensifying the need for an answer to their persecution.

The First Aliyah, or “ascent,” of Jews immigrating to Palestine occurred from approximately 1881 to 1903. It consisted of twenty to thirty thousand Eastern Europeans and Russians fleeing the pogroms, along with approximately 2,500 Yemeni Jews who were motivated to move to Palestine by “messianic expectations.” Most of the Europeans who comprised the initial wave of immigrants eventually returned to their native countries or migrated to the United States as they found the environment to be “hostile” and were “not prepared with resources, agricultural expertise and an adequate estimation for the difficulties of Palestine and its climate.”

While the Russian pogroms certainly provided one of the “formative traumas for Jewish nationalism,” other incidents in Europe, such as the 1895 Dreyfus Affair, also had a major impact upon Jewish consciousness. The entrapment of French officer Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935) a Jew falsely accused of spying for the Germans, and the crowds of French citizens

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9 Cohen, 57.
10 Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 19
11 Morris, 19.
13 Cohen, 62.
14 Cohen, 57.
outside the courthouse chanting “Death to Jews!” illustrated how hostile the atmosphere had become for Europe’s Jews.\textsuperscript{15}

Theodore Herzl (1860-1904) and his vision of a genuine political entity ushered in the “revitalization” of Zionism.\textsuperscript{16} Covering the trial of Alfred Dreyfus for \textit{Neue Freie Presse}, Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian Jew, became increasingly more frightened of the violent anti-Semitism spreading throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{17} Inspired by the Dreyfus Affair and the subsequent waves of anti-Semitism, Herzl became consumed by the need to create a homeland for Jews, and according to Israeli historian Benny Morris, “even toyed with the idea that he was the Messiah.”\textsuperscript{18} Herzl’s pamphlet \textit{Der Judenstaat}, published in 1896, formally introduced the notion of a modern Jewish state and became “the bible of the Zionist movement.”\textsuperscript{19} Citing the failure of the \textit{Haskalah}, the Jewish enlightenment, and its assimilationist ideals, Herzl argued that the only means for European Jews to escape centuries of discrimination and persecution was through the establishment of a separate Jewish nation.\textsuperscript{20} In 1897, the First World Zionist Congress convened in Basel, Switzerland.\textsuperscript{21} The Zionist Congress united the “far-flung” Jewish communities around the world, helping to coordinate the funding and political organization necessary for realizing the Zionist vision.\textsuperscript{22}

Herzl embarked on a number of campaigns soliciting European and Ottoman rulers and governments for money and territory while contemplating options for the location of the

\textsuperscript{15} Cohen, 66.
\textsuperscript{16} Cohen, 63.
\textsuperscript{18} Morris, \textit{Righteous Victims}, 20.
\textsuperscript{20} Winer, \textit{The Founding Fathers of Israel}, 109.
\textsuperscript{21} Bregman, \textit{A History of Israel}, 3.
\textsuperscript{22} Winer, \textit{The Founding Fathers of Israel}, 115.
Jewish homeland. Argentina became a serious consideration as it was already the site of a sizeable Jewish settlement financed by Baron de Hirsch. Herzl sought the support of Hirsch, a Belgian philanthropist. Despite funding the Jewish colony in Argentina, Hirsch wanted no part of Herzl’s plan, stating, “All our misfortune comes from Jews wanting to climb too high. My intention is to keep the Jews from pushing ahead.” Herzl tried convincing Ottoman rulers of the benefits of a Jewish state but met with little success. He then turned to Great Britain, and in 1903, the British offered a charter for territory in East Africa that became known as the “Uganda proposal.” While Herzl intended to investigate the potential of Britain’s offer, the idea of Uganda as a Jewish state deeply divided the Zionist Congress. Two factions emerged – the “territorialist” faction who would accept any territory ceded to them, or the “Zionists for Zion,” those who would accept nothing other than a return to the ancient homeland of the Jews: Ottoman-controlled Palestine. Agreeing that Jews should return to their ancient homeland Herzl ultimately sided with the “Zionists for Zion” before his death in 1904, and the following year the seventh Zionist Congress formally rejected Britain’s offer of Uganda. “Palestine, and only Palestine, became the goal.”

Through his ardent promotion of a Jewish state and the distribution of Der Judenstaat, Herzl’s rhetoric, along with another series of Russian pogroms in the early twentieth-century,

23 Morris, 24.
24 Winer, The Founding Fathers of Israel, 110.
26 Bregman, A History of Israel, 4.
27 Morris, Righteous Victims, 22.
29 Cohen, Zion and State, 70.
30 Winer, The Founding Fathers of Israel, 112-114.
31 Morris, Righteous Victims, 24.
32 Morris, 24.
provided the impetus for the Second Aliyah. Violence in Europe instigated significant Eastern European immigration to Palestine, providing the groundwork essential to assembling the state apparatus. An estimated forty thousand European immigrants arrived in Palestine between 1904 and 1914, and this time, they “laid the foundations for the creation of the state of Israel.” A growing permanent population combined with the driving force of Herzl’s ideology meant that the idea of Israel was quickly becoming a reality.

In 1917, British forces captured Jerusalem from the Ottomans, effectively occupying the whole of Palestine. That same year, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration and “promised to support the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” The British legalized their interest in Palestine through the League of Nations’ sanctioned Mandate of Palestine, granted at the San Remo Conference in April 1920, and formalized in 1922. Whereas Jewish immigrants welcomed the official institution of British rule, Palestine’s Arab-Muslim population became increasingly agitated as large tracts of land were purchased by the expanding European-Jewish population. During this time Britain attempted to reconcile the conflicting interests of both Zionists and Palestinian-Arabs, but negotiations between the two groups only resulted in fragile agreements.

With the Mandate formally established, Great Britain dissolved its military government in Palestine in favor of a civil administration, and Sir Herbert Samuel was appointed the High

33 Morris, 23-5.
34 Cohen, Zion and the State, 80.
35 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 5.
37 Bregman, A History of Israel, 21.
38 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 245.
Commissioner of Palestine. As both a Jew and a Zionist, many Jews hailed his appointment “as the new Messiah leading them back to their ancient land under the Union Jack.” Samuel, too, saw his posting as a sign to further the creation of a “national Jewish home.” At the 1919 peace conference in Paris, he stated that it was “the Zionist objective gradually to make Palestine as Jewish as England was English.” Under Samuel’s leadership, indigenous Palestinian resentment increased as Jewish immigration and land purchases in Palestine continued unabated, heightening tensions between the two groups.

It was not the sole intention of the British to establish Palestine as a Jewish homeland. While supportive of the Zionist cause in the Balfour Declaration, Great Britain also agreed to “uphold the rights and privileges of the ‘existing non-Jewish communities of Palestine.’” It was precisely their own community that Palestinians were determined to sustain against the Jewish immigrants from Europe. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a number of fierce confrontations occurred between Palestinian residents and Jewish immigrants, creating the foundation for a violent end to an already contentious relationship.

In 1929, a dispute occurred over the Western Wall in Jerusalem – a site that was comprised of the sacred Wailing Wall for Jews, and for Muslims, formed part of the revered Haram al-Sharif (which includes al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock). While Jews were granted the right to visit the wall, they were required to remove all the objects used from the

39 Cleveland, 245.
40 Bregman, A History of Israel, 22.
41 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 245.
42 Cleveland, 245.
43 Bregman, A History of Israel, 22.
44 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 245.
45 Cleveland, 256.
46 Cleveland, 256-7.
site each day, such as benches for sitting or screens used to separate genders. In an effort to claim ownership over the site, a group of Jews contested the policy by refusing to remove their screens, forcing British authorities to do so. The “intensity of Jewish objections” to the removal of their screens alarmed the Palestinian community. Palestinian-Arabs were threatened by the increased claims of Jewish ownership to one of Islam’s holiest sites. Tensions between Arabs and Jews culminated in a “year of claims and counterclaims” over which group the wall rightfully belonged to before violence finally erupted in 1929. After Friday prayers, several thousand Muslim worshippers emerged from Al-Aqsa mosque, attacking many of the Jewish worshippers at the Wall as well as the surrounding merchants. For a week, riots spread throughout the country leaving 133 Jews and 116 Palestinians dead, injuring scores of both and formally pitting the two groups in a battle for survival.

The 1929 Wailing Wall riots hardly discouraged the Zionist enterprise, but British failure to protect the community propelled the reorganization of the Haganah, which had originally been created in the early 1920s to protect Jewish settlers and their newly acquired property. The Haganah evolved from a paramilitary organization into a fully functioning army after 1929. Palestinians also began to feel more anxious as large tracts of land were being sold to Jewish immigrants from Europe. According to historian Benny Morris, “during the 1930s the

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47 Morris, Righteous Victims, 113.
48 Morris, 113.
49 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 256.
50 Cleveland, 256.
51 Morris, Righteous Victims, 113.
52 Morris, 116.
53 Morris, 118.
54 Morris, 118.
issues of land purchase and tenant evictions were defined by the Arabs as ‘a matter of life and death.’”

The British organized a commission in 1936, led by Lord Peel, to determine the causes behind the Arab Revolt, and to investigate how to contain the escalating tensions between Jewish immigrants and Palestinian-Arabs. In 1937, the Peel Commission recommended that the British Mandate of Palestine be dissolved and the territory partitioned into two states, one Muslim and one Jewish. Jerusalem and a small tract of land connecting the city to the Mediterranean would remain under British control. The report stated,

It is manifest that the Mandate cannot be fully or honorably implemented unless by some means or other antagonism between Arabs and Jews can be composed. But it is the Mandate which created that antagonism and keeps it alive and as long at the Mandate exists we cannot honestly hold out the expectation that Arabs or Jews will be able to set aside their national hope or fears or sink their differences in the common service of Palestine.

The Report also recommended a population exchange, for without such a transfer, “the Jewish state would have had almost as many Arabs as Jews,” and a state without a clear Jewish majority was an impossible notion for the Zionists. Palestinians met the report with anger, and refused to consider partitioning their land for European Jewish immigrants, but the report received a mixed response from the Zionists. While some Zionists did not want to compromise their vision of obtaining a mere 20 percent of the “Promised Land,” others such as Israel’s

55 Morris, 123.
58 Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 139.
future prime minister, David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) wanted to accept the partition.\textsuperscript{59} Ben-Gurion, along with other Zionist leaders, calculated that the agreement could be used as a “temporary arrangement, a stepping-off ground for further advance.”\textsuperscript{60}

In 1938, the Peel Report was retracted because of Palestinian rejection and Zionist indecision. As a result, the British government issued a White Paper formally withdrawing its partition proposal, contending that the “Peel scheme was unworkable as a ‘Jewish’ state with a large [Palestinian] Arab minority would present insoluble problems, a forcible transfer of [Palestinian] Arabs was out of the question, and a ‘voluntary transfer’ was ‘impossible to assume.’”\textsuperscript{61} While the British government rendered the Peel report an “impractical” solution, the official mention of partitioning Palestine reignited the violence of the previous year.\textsuperscript{62}

The recommendations of the Peel Commission further enraged the already volatile Palestinian population. In 1936, a general strike by Palestinians began as, “a spontaneous popular reaction against Zionism, British imperialism and the entrenched Arab leadership,” whose disorganization, infighting, and incompetence were blamed for Zionist advances.\textsuperscript{63} Throughout Palestine, Arab “rebels” attacked railroads, civil structures, and bridges, killed Jewish settlers, and destroyed Jewish property.\textsuperscript{64} The British dispatched 20,000 troops in an effort to quell the violence, but despite the number of troops, order was not restored until 1939.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[59] Morris, 139.
\item[60] Bregman, \textit{A History of Israel}, 30.
\item[61] Morris, \textit{Righteous Victims}, 156.
\item[62] Bregman, \textit{A History of Israel}, 31.
\item[63] Cleveland, \textit{A History of the Modern Middle East}, 258.
\item[64] Cleveland, 259.
\item[65] Cleveland, 260.
\end{footnotes}
The Arab Revolt left approximately 4,000 Arabs, 2,000 Jews, and 600 British soldiers dead. For the Palestinian-Arabs, the “financial cost was enormous,” and the community paid dearly, “through loss of sales of goods and services, and heightened unemployment.” The Arab economy was severely damaged from the years of fighting, strikes, and boycotts and the Revolt had shattered what was left of the Palestinian National leadership. In addition to the destruction of property and loss of life, as Rashid Khalidi explains, the Arab Revolt acted as a “crippling defeat” to the Palestinian enterprise. Jewish settlers did not incur the same kind of devastation as the Palestinians. For example, while approximately 2,000 Jews were killed during the Revolt, the damage to the Jewish economy and loss of land did not compare to the devastation sustained by the Palestinians. Three new Jewish settlements were founded during the revolt.

While the Palestinian-Arabs revolted against British colonialism and Jewish settlement, European Jews continued to immigrate. During the 1930s, Herzl’s message of Zionism, largely “structured on a premise of international import,” combined with the escalating persecution of Jews in Europe shaping a powerful message. It was through the Second, Third (1919-1923) and Fourth Aliyahs (1924-1928) that European immigrants began to turn “their backs on the Diaspora,” rejecting much of the “passive” religious ideology that had “brought so many calamities” upon their community. Creating a “new Jewish consciousness,” those Jews who

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66 Morris, Righteous Victims, 159.
67 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 260
68 Morris, Righteous Victims, 159.
69 Khalidi, Palestinian Identity, 190.
70 Khalidi, 190.
71 Morris, Righteous Victims, 160.
72 Winer, The Founding Fathers of Israel, 112.
voyaged to Israel disconnected from the Jewish Diaspora community in Europe. By turning Herzl’s vision of a Jewish state into a reality, immigrants considered their participation a “national resurrection in a messianic setting,” thereby separating them from the Jews that remained in Europe.

Having initially supported the growth of a Jewish state, the violent reactions of Palestinians to the Zionist enterprise caused the British to limit Jewish immigration from 1939 to 1948. After traveling through Palestine to assess Palestinian Jewish relations, a British commission reported its findings. Authored by Sir John Hope-Simpson, the commission reported that “any further Jewish immigration to Palestine would, inevitably, be injurious to the Arabs and that there was no room for further agricultural development in the country.” Despite Zionist protests, in 1930 a new White Paper was issued restricting Jewish immigration and limiting further Jewish land acquisition. The Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization pressured Britain to reverse the new policy, and soon after the Passfield White Paper was issued, it was renounced, demonstrating to both the Palestinians and the Zionists, that the Jews maintained the upper-hand when dealing with the British. In spite of their success in overturning immigration quotas, the Zionists understood the limitations of working within the structure of the British Mandate, and continued to try and move around the Mandate government to meet their population objectives.

74 Winer, The Founding Fathers of Israel, 113.
75 Winer, 117.
77 Bregman, A History of Israel, 24-5.
78 Bregman, 25.
79 Bregman, 25.
The British began to impose stricter quotas in 1933, limiting immigration to 10,000 per year although authorities were actually allowing close to 18,000 per year.\textsuperscript{80} Even with the authorities looking the other way, Jewish immigration was not sufficient considering the war in Europe and its dire consequences for Europe’s Jewish population. The strict quotas of the British Mandate government created an enormous conflict for the Zionists. On the one hand, the British were restricting Jews from immigrating to Palestine when they needed it the most — as war was raging across Europe and Jews found themselves the victims of the Nazi regime. On the other hand, it was Great Britain that was fighting the Germans. Although the conflict led to compromise of sorts, as many Jews in Palestine did enlist with British troops to fight alongside them in the war, the Zionist enterprise also facilitated a massive campaign of illegal immigration and land acquisition.\textsuperscript{81}

The intellectuals that comprised the early Israeli leadership, such as David Ben-Gurion, a Polish native, and Russian-born Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952), intended to populate the Jewish state with other like-minded Westerners.\textsuperscript{82} The European immigrant population from the first four Aliyahs helped to assemble the framework for the nation-state as a Eurocentric entity. While nation-building requires the work of many men, Israel’s first prime-minister, David Ben-Gurion, “more than any other individual, is responsible for shaping the machinery of government.”\textsuperscript{83} In 1906, Ben-Gurion, at age 19 made his first trip to Palestine, working in

\textsuperscript{80} Sachar, \textit{A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time}, 267.
\textsuperscript{81} Bregman, \textit{A History of Israel}, 35.
\textsuperscript{82} Bregman, 16.
various settlements.\textsuperscript{84} After attending law school in Istanbul and living in New York City, he moved his wife and children to Palestine at the end of World War I.\textsuperscript{85} Ben-Gurion understood that the creation of Israel was not a priority for the nations of Europe, or for the United States. He recognized that Jews were alone in their struggle to achieve statehood, and asserted, “We will have to conquer it ourselves.”\textsuperscript{86}

While the words of Theodore Herzl supplied much of the inspiration for the Zionist movement, David Ben-Gurion provided a great deal of the action. Avraham Avi-hai stated, “The creation of the modern state of Israel was due, beyond all other individual contributions, to this man.”\textsuperscript{87} Ben-Gurion unified the armed forces and organized security through the Haganah and Jewish Agency. In the early 1920s, he founded the Histadrut, a labor union that organized the economic activities of Jewish workers.\textsuperscript{88} He involved himself in foreign policy, communications, and oversaw health care and food production.\textsuperscript{89} He pushed against the restrictions of the British Mandate while organizing legal and illegal immigration, land purchases, and settlements.\textsuperscript{90} Ben-Gurion was a tour-de-force, involved in virtually every element of assembling the nation-state. While he “concentrated on immigration, defense, and the acquisition of arms – all practical steps leading to the successful proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948,” Ben-Gurion was fixated upon immigration.

\textsuperscript{86} Zmora, \textit{Days of David Ben-Gurion}, 12.
\textsuperscript{87} Avi-hai, \textit{Ben Gurion, State-BUILDER}, 1.
\textsuperscript{88} Avi-hai, 73.
\textsuperscript{89} Avi-hai, 119.
\textsuperscript{90} Ben-Gurion, \textit{Memoirs of David Ben-Gurion}, 80.
As the acquisition of arms would prove futile without a population to use them, Ben-Gurion knew that the Jewish nation’s only viable defense would come in the form of its inhabitants. Understanding Israel’s geographic vulnerability as a “small island in the midst of a vast Arab sea,” Ben-Gurion recognized that Israel could only “ensure its survival by its visible deterrent strength.” In his memoirs, Ben-Gurion wrote of the Haganah’s “devotion” to illegal immigration during the British mandate period, justifying Israel’s need of self-defense. “Defense became an end in itself,” resulting in a policy of immigration as a means of strengthening the state. Ben-Gurion stated, “The main thing is the absorption of immigrants. This embodies all the historical needs of the state.”

Although Ben-Gurion was largely responsible for constructing the nation-state, another pivotal figure in the development of Israel was Chaim Weizmann. Along with Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders, Weizmann was responsible for formally assembling the Jewish Agency in 1923. The Jewish Agency was the “quasi-government of the Jewish community.” Responsible for education, health services, banking, it was also the primary organization for the settlement of immigrants. Responsible for negotiating with Great Britain during the Mandate period, the Agency effectively swayed the British government to favor Jewish immigration on more than one occasion.

While much of the Ashkenazi population had once been considered urban, a few decades of residing in the soon-to-be nation-state instilled a reverence for physical labor in a

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91 Avi-hai, Ben Gurion, State-Builder, 126.
92 Ben-Gurion, Memoirs of David Ben-Gurion, 80.
93 Avi-hai, Ben Gurion, State-Builder, 125.
94 Segev, 1949, 97.
95 Sachar, A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time, 160.
96 Sachar, 160.
97 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 251.
rural setting resulting in the *sabra* prototype.\(^9\) During the 1930s and 1940s, Zionism not only emphasized the need and the ability to till the land, but physical labor created the core of future Israeli identity.\(^9\) After decades of persecution in Europe, it was through agricultural cultivation and the physical labor required of farmers that Jewish immigrants began to control their destiny. Ben-Gurion believed that labor was an almost mystical way of creating ownership over the land, instilling Jewish pride and cementing Israeli nationalism.\(^1\) It was through the “idealization of manual labor” that Zionism sought to lead Jews from a passivity to the strong and noble *sabra* that became the ideal image of an Israeli.\(^2\)

By 1939, a sizeable portion of Israel’s desired population had been provided by the tens of thousands of immigrants comprising the first four Aliyahs, but in that same year, there were still 1,070,000 Arabs (950,000 Muslim) and 460,000 Jewish émigrés in Palestine.\(^3\) The drive to secure the nation through the 1930s and 1940s heightened the need for inhabitants.\(^4\) As Israel inched closer toward statehood during the 1940s, its Zionist architects still envisioned the new nation-state as one that was based upon secular values, embraced Western traditions, and comprised of European inhabitants.\(^5\) A significant portion of Zionism’s ideal inhabitants, however, had been brutally massacred in the Holocaust. The nation-state accepted and facilitated the immigration of many survivors through complicated negotiations and purchase.


\(\text{\footnotesize \(^9\) Almog, *The Sabra*, 4.}

\(\text{\footnotesize \(^1\) Avi-hai, *Ben Gurion, State-Builder*, 24.}

\(\text{\footnotesize \(^2\) Almog, *The Sabra* 4.}

\(\text{\footnotesize \(^3\) Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 122.}


\(\text{\footnotesize \(^5\) Segev, *1949*, xii.}\)
The Israeli government bought Jewish survivors from the governments of Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary.¹⁰⁵ “The Hungarians demanded two million dollars for 25,000 Jews - $80 a head. This asking price was lower than the Romanian one, which was then demanding five million dollars for 50,000 Jews - $100 a head.”¹⁰⁶

Those who managed to survive the terror that engulfed Europe’s Jews were considered less than desirable members of society.¹⁰⁷ Ben-Gurion feared that the physical and psychological trauma Holocaust victims endured would prove a drain on the state. Although created by white Europeans for white Europeans, by the end of World War II, the image of the ideal Israeli revolved around the sabra, the strong, laborious Zionist. The tanned, muscular Jew, “who ploughed the ancient homeland with one hand while carrying a rifle in the other,” became the model citizen, thereby rendering Holocaust survivors inadequate.¹⁰⁸ Even Theodore Herzl envisioned the sabra prototype as demonstrated in his 1902 novel Old-New Land, declaring that the Jewish state was,

> Where the intellectual proletariat of Central Europe would exercise their skill in law, medicine, journalism, administration, engineering, architecture, art, music, and philosophy for the upbuilding and progress of the land, and the proletarian masses of Eastern Europe drop their peddlers’ packs to become straight-backed, sun-bronzed peasants and artisans. Then the Jew, degraded to less than man’s estate by anti-Semitism would regain the full statue of manhood on his old soil, renewing it with his love and labor.¹⁰⁹

Consumed with the creation of a strong, viable state in the midst of hostile territory,

Ben-Gurion fashioned Israel as a weapon. Intending to deter attacks and ensure the survival of

¹⁰⁶ Segev, 100.
¹⁰⁷ Segev, 101.
¹⁰⁸ Cohen, Zion and the State, 211.
the Jewish nation, psychologically traumatized and physically weakened Holocaust survivors did not comprise his ideal population. Referred to as “surviving remnants,” Holocaust survivors were viewed as “inferior” to those strong enough and willing to till the land. Historian Idith Zertal claims that Ben-Gurion initially responded to them in an “accusatory” manner. The prime-minister stated, “Hitler was not far from Palestine. A terrible tragedy might have transpired, but what happened in Poland could never happen in Palestine. No one could have slaughtered us in the synagogues; every boy and girl would have shot every German soldier.”

According to Israeli historian Benny Morris, Ben-Gurion remarked, “If I knew it was possible to save all the [Jewish] children of Germany by their transfer to England and only half of them by transferring to Eretz-Yisrael, I would choose the latter.” While Ben-Gurion accepted the immigration of Holocaust survivors, he was wary of the effect they would have, fearing that the horrors of the Holocaust rendered survivors a drain upon Israeli society. Ben Gurion expressed his concern, describing them as “a mixed multitude of human dust.”

Their character is already formed, their habits are set, they will not be able to get used to a new language, new work, life in society. People who barely escaped from the crematoria – their absorption will require new strength that I don’t know if we have within us.

As World War II consumed Europe in the early 1940s, the nascent country’s architects faced an increasingly uncertain future. The lack of “decent human material,” or educated, white Westerners, needed to assemble the country’s administration, and of strong sabra to toil

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110 Almog, The Sabra, 87.
111 Zertal, From Catastrophe to Power, 221.
112 Zertal, 221-2.
113 Almog, The Sabra, 87.
114 Zertal, From Catastrophe to Power, 220.
the land, left the Jewish state in a vulnerable position.\textsuperscript{115} Obtaining inhabitants became crucial in Israel’s quest for security. A substantial population equaled security – security that was becoming more essential not only due to the threat emanating from their Arab neighbors, but from the volatile Palestinian-Arab population that remained within the country’s borders.\textsuperscript{116} Security was a vital and essential factor for the survival of the state, and a substantial population was the only means through which both security and, therefore survival, could be achieved.

While the Holocaust affirmed the Zionist need for the establishment of a Jewish state, Ben-Gurion also considered the tragedy in terms of how it affected his ambitious plan of moving two million Europeans Jews to Palestine.\textsuperscript{117} Ben-Gurion originally intended to obtain two million inhabitants, but once he understood the full weight of the Holocaust, he calculated how many Jews could be found around the world that would be willing to move to Israel. “Now that we have been annihilated I say one million,” and with that, in June 1944, Ben-Gurion implemented the One Million Plan.\textsuperscript{118} He stated,

The main thing is absorption of immigrants. This embodies all the historical needs of the state. We might have captured the West Bank, the Golan, the entire Galilee, but those conquests would not have reinforced our territory as much as immigration. Doubling and tripling the number of immigrants gives us more and more strength….This is the most important thing above all else. Settlement – that is the real conquest.\textsuperscript{119}

\begin{footnotesize}\textsuperscript{115} Document: David Ben-Gurion and Chancellor Adenauer at the Waldorf Astoria on 14 March 1960 Israel Studies - Volume 2, Number 1 (Spring 1997) p. 57.  
\textsuperscript{116} Document: David Ben-Gurion and Chancellor Adenauer, 57-58.  
\textsuperscript{118} Meir-Glitzenstein, 48.  
\textsuperscript{119} Segev, 1949, 97.\end{footnotesize}
This plan “represented a radical paradigm shift” from the “selective immigration” policy employed during the 1920s and 1930s when Ashkenazi (Jews from Europe and the United States) immigrants were the only consideration in the construction of the strong, Western-oriented Jewish state.\textsuperscript{120} While 460,000 Jews immigrated to Israel from 1919-1948, only 26,000 were from Arab or Asian countries.\textsuperscript{121} By 1944, Ben-Gurion encouraged all Jews, irrespective of age, gender, health, and ethnicity, to move to Israel. This shift in policy indicated the severity of Israel’s situation. “The population that had until then been rejected entirely by the Zionists now formed the basis for the establishment of a sustainable state.”\textsuperscript{122}

With monetary loans from Great Britain and the United States, the prime minister began to organize a system of rapid immigration and mass absorption, setting his sights on 800,000 Jews from surrounding Arab countries.\textsuperscript{123} Jews living in the Middle East did not face widespread institutional persecution or harassment and were generally content, posing a huge problem for the Israeli leaders hoping to entice them to emigrate.\textsuperscript{124} Zionist agents had first been dispatched to Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad in 1938 “for the express purpose of arranging the emigration of Jews to Palestine,” and had been met with a tepid response.\textsuperscript{125} By 1944, however, Israel’s Zionist architects realized that living in a Jewish state did not offer enough incentive on its own for Arab Jews. The need for bodies accounted for Israel’s willingness to exacerbate the political and social circumstances in neighboring Arab countries.

\textsuperscript{120} Meir-Glitzenstein, Zionism in an Arab Country, 50.
\textsuperscript{122} Meir-Glitzenstein, Zionism in an Arab Country, 51.
\textsuperscript{123} Meir-Glitzenstein, 48.
\textsuperscript{124} Benjamin, Last Days in Babylon, 133.
\textsuperscript{125} Marion Woolfson, Prophets in Babylon: Jews in the Arab World (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1980) p. 141-2.
If Arab Jews did not have a compelling reason to move to Israel before 1944, in the years that followed Israel’s architects would help to provide them with one.

Jews had long thrived throughout the Middle East, but Iraq in particular contained the oldest and one of the largest Jewish populations in the Arab world. Emerging from decades of British domination in the 1940s, Iraqis struggled to create a lasting government, stable economy, and cement a national identity. Iraq’s political and social atmosphere was unstable as divergent groups struggled to determine the future of the country. Despite the political turmoil, many of the Iraqi Jews who moved to Israel from 1948 to 1951 possessed no desire to do so, as evidenced by memoirs, narratives, and interviews. Rather, they were swept up in a wave of momentous change created, in part, from Israel’s need to populate its new state as well as the instability of the newly formed nation-state of Iraq as it emerged from the shackles of colonialism.
In 1921, when the British formally united the Ottoman vilayets of Mosul, Basra, and Baghdad, the state of Iraq was created. It began as a contentious unity, manufactured from three provinces that had little cohesion and no sense of nationalism.\textsuperscript{126} The territory’s history was fraught with centuries of invasion, foreign occupation, and meddling. Created out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire amid the chaotic and momentous changes of the first half of the twentieth century – World War I, World War II, colonialism, Zionism, Nazism and communism – the British created a contentious, and highly unstable nation-state.

Iraq’s designation as an Ottoman protectorate had allowed for the existence of a diverse religious population. Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived, worked, and socialized together for centuries. Ottoman Iraq did not attract a significant influx of foreigners when compared to other Ottoman provinces. While many Europeans during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were attracted to Egypt, in large part because of the Capitulations Laws that awarded judicial, economic, and social advantages to Westerners, foreigners played a less substantial role in the development of Iraq. Far less developed economically than provinces such as Egypt, many foreigners considered Iraq “too poor to be of interest.”\textsuperscript{127} In much of the Ottoman Empire Jewish communities were newly established as European Jews moved to Cairo, Alexandria, and Beirut to take advantage of the Capitulations Laws. Iraq’s largest minority,

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Jews traced “their origin to the Babylonian captivity of the sixth century” BCE, making them one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world.\(^{128}\)

Iraqi identity was slow in its formation. When Ottoman armies arrived in the 16\(^{th}\) century, the population was mainly tribal and Bedouin, wary of outsiders.\(^{129}\) During the beginning of the sixteenth century, a time when much of the Ottoman expansion took place, Turkish forces began to push into the lands of Iraq.\(^{130}\) During the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, from 1520 to 1566, often considered the height of the Ottoman Empire,\(^{131}\) Baghdad was officially declared an Ottoman Protectorate in 1534.\(^{132}\) It was not until 1538 that the Ottoman army cemented control over Basra and Mosul securing the Iraqi territories.\(^{133}\)

Strong nationalist ideologies and the boundaries of the modern nation-state did not exist in the vast expanses of the Ottoman Empire, which preceded the British and French mandate system. Rather, territory was divided into provinces, or vilayets. The central Ottoman government ruled from Istanbul, managing the Empire partly through a series of millets, which allowed for the inclusion of religious minorities within the overall system of governance.\(^{134}\)

While maintaining loyalty to the Empire, Ottoman rulers permitted local populations, essentially, to rule themselves with little to no interference from the central government.\(^{135}\) The millet system sanctioned the independence of religious minorities. As “People of the Book,” Jews and Christians were allowed to maintain the religious integrity of their

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\(^{130}\) Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* p. 51.


\(^{132}\) Simons, *Iraq: From Sumner to Saddam*, 141.

\(^{133}\) Simons, 141.

\(^{134}\) Cleveland. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. pp. 48.

\(^{135}\) Cleveland, 48-9.
communities. Autonomous judicial and educational systems were authorized, and local tax collection was administered by “communal officials.” Religious minorities were not confined to their judiciaries, however. In some instances Islamic law was perceived to be more favorable such as in cases of inheritance, and religious minorities were permitted to use Muslim courts. The millet system did not only serve to create successful and prosperous minority communities throughout the Middle East, but also allowed the Ottoman administration to maintain its rule with relatively little opposition.

As nationalist sentiments began to take shape in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman sultans introduced the Tanzimat reforms between 1839 and 1876. The reforms were created in an effort to maintain the faltering Empire by creating a more cohesive Ottoman identity among its citizens. Further attempting to incorporate non-Turkish and non-Muslim communities into the Empire, the Tanzimat reforms expanded the civil liberties of religious minorities. It was the intention of the reforms to improve the position of minorities. A mixed secular judiciary replaced separate religious courts, and Jews and Christians were no longer barred from military service based upon their minority status. The passage of the Nationality Law in 1869 further “reinforced the principle that all individuals living within the Ottoman domains shared a common citizenship regardless of their religion.”

Jews had lived in the lands comprising the Ottoman Empire for thousands of years, and had benefitted from relative equality. “The Jewish community in particular prospered under

136 Cleveland, 49.
137 Donald Quataert, The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 176.
138 Cleveland, 49.
139 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 82.
140 Quataert, 176.
141 Quataert, 176.
142 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 83.
Ottoman rule, and large numbers of Jews immigrated to the Ottoman domains from Spain following the Christian re-conquest.” According to the 1893 “Annual Report of the Jews in Turkey” from the Bulletin de l’Alliance Israelite Universelle, “There are but few countries, even among those which are considered the most enlightened and the most civilized, where Jews enjoy a more complete equality in Turkey [the Ottoman Empire].” Jews were granted equal rights in education, justice, granted civil service posts, and starting in 1876 with the Empire’s first parliament, Jewish representatives were sent to Istanbul from a number of cities including Baghdad. An increase in the education of Jewish women also occurred during this period, with a significant number of Jewish girls receiving a formal education by the end of the nineteenth century.

Whether religious or secular, Jews were generally left to their own affairs. According to author Heskel Haddad, “beginning in the 1930s, Moslem rulers rarely interfered with the religious affairs of the Jews.” While much of the Jewish population began to pursue secular education during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Haddad argues that “until their mass immigration to Israel, Jews in Moslem countries adhered to their religion more steadfastly than most Jews in Europe.” Amongst Jews in Iraq, however, a more secular attitude was commonplace. While still adhering to Jewish traditions “more than the ritual of Judaism,” Baghdad’s “equality, urbanization, and secular education” created a “relaxed vigilance” in many

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143. Cleveland, 49.
144. Quataert. The Ottoman Empire, 177.
146. Haddad, 28.
147. Haddad, 29.
Jewish attitudes toward religion.\textsuperscript{149} Many of Iraq’s Jews identified more with their national community than their religious affiliates.\textsuperscript{150}

Throughout the Empire, divergent religious and ethnic communities did not live in isolation from one another; rather, “intimate daily contact” was a natural part of life.\textsuperscript{151} The various communities worked together, often lived in the same neighborhoods, maintained friendships, and looked after one another. Ella Shohat, a prominent scholar and Iraqi Jew, recounted her father’s stories of living in Baghdad as an orphan in the early-twentieth century. His Muslim neighbors were “always worried about him,” making certain that he was taken care of and always had enough food.\textsuperscript{152} Community groups, neighborhood organizations, and mixed guilds were commonplace.\textsuperscript{153} According to historian Donald Quataert, “In the empire as a whole, perhaps one-quarter to a half of all workers belonged to labor organizations that contained members of more than one religious community.”\textsuperscript{154}

While the Ottoman structure established a system of relatively autonomous rule, and permitted the regions of its empire to retain their indigenous languages, cultures, traditions, and religions, the ruling elite throughout the Empire was comprised entirely of Turko-Circassian aristocracy. \textit{Mamluks} were recruited through conquest and capture as well as purchase, yet were “held together by strong regimented loyalties, and considered “a privileged military caste.”\textsuperscript{155} Because of their intensive education and rigorous military training, over time the

\textsuperscript{149} Haddad, 29.  
\textsuperscript{150} Haddad, 29.  
\textsuperscript{151} Quataert, \textit{The Ottoman Empire}, 178.  
\textsuperscript{153} Quataert, \textit{The Ottoman Empire}, 181.  
\textsuperscript{154} Quataert, 181.  
\textsuperscript{155} Bernard Lewis. \textit{Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire}, 11.
mamluk slaves ascended the ranks of the military and were placed in positions of authority and governance. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was this small elite that dominated Ottoman Iraq’s political, military, and economic systems.

Treating territories as their own, the mamluk administrators increasingly became more independent of Ottoman sovereignty. The vilayets of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul were no exception, and starting with the arrival of a new governor, Midhat Pasha, a series of reforms was introduced in 1869. While hardly the massive programs initiated by other Ottoman governors most notably Muhammad Ali of Egypt, Midhat Pasha did employ the Vilayet Land Laws, both of which had been created by the central Ottoman government but had not been achieved. The Vilayet Law charted the territorial boundaries for the vilayets of Mosul, Basra, and Baghdad and created a new administrative structure that systematically included those on the provincial level that had not previously been included in the state.

Ottoman Iraq was a “multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual zone, a ‘permeable cross-cultural passage,’ where ‘people were constantly rubbing shoulders and socializing with one another.’” The ruling mamluk pashas were descended from an influential dynasty of Georgians, while the population consisted of Kurds and Turkmen in the north, Arabs in the south, Persians in the east, Sunni Muslims, Shī’i Muslims, a variety of Sufi orders, Orthodox

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156 Lewis, 11.
158 Simons, Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam, 146.
159 Tripp, A History of Iraq, 15.
160 Tripp, 15.
162 Simon, 3-4.
Christians, Chaldean Christians, Jews, and Yazidis.¹⁶³ For centuries the ethnic, lingual, and religious identities of Ottoman Iraq’s residents intermixed, living together and engaging in commerce. Rather than maintaining divisions among religions, loyalties and alliances were often determined according to kinship and tribe.¹⁶⁴ Ruling the Iraqi vilayets required considerable skill in maintaining alliances with the various clans that inhabited the land. Although proving to be a challenge, for three centuries the Ottomans maintained their political and territorial authority over the vilayets of Iraq.

As the powerful nations of Europe set out to colonize much of Asia and Africa in the nineteenth century, the British set their sights on Iraq. Great Britain invaded Iraq in 1914, but it was not until 1920, after the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire that the British declared Iraq a mandate.¹⁶⁵ In 1926, the Ottoman vilayets of Mosul, Basra, and Baghdad were formally united into the state of Iraq.¹⁶⁶ Already in possession of the emirates of the Persian Gulf, Britain viewed Iraq as a “gateway to India.”¹⁶⁷ There was no question that Great Britain intended to safeguard all routes to India as a means of protecting its most prized colonial possession. “The importance of India was never in doubt; it was to this defense that the ‘whole British military and naval machine was heavily geared.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Tripp, A History of Iraq, 10.
¹⁶⁴ Tripp, 10.
¹⁶⁶ Polk, Understanding Iraq, 82.
¹⁶⁷ Simons. Iraq: From Sumner to Saddam, 148.
¹⁶⁸ Simons, 148.
Because Britain’s primary interest was securing all routes to India, it was important to prevent the rise of other European powers in the region, specifically Russia. The British were convinced that tsarist Russia intended to establish a protectorate over Persia in order to establish a warm water port. Although Russia and Great Britain had been allied during World War I, the British sought to undermine Russian influence in the region. The 1920 conference at San Remo not only awarded Great Britain its mandate over Iraq, but also negotiated the San Remo Oil Agreement which gave Britain the right to explore for oil as well as build pipelines across Iraq and Syria and ports on the Mediterranean.

Although “Britain’s stay in Iraq was one of the shortest in its imperial career,” the British can be credited with assembling the foundations of the state – a constitution, parliament, monarchy, bureaucracy, and an army. According to historian Phebe Marr, the British made three “lasting, if unintended, impacts” upon Iraq. The first effect was to “hasten, broaden and deepen the drive toward modernization.” Through the development of Iraq’s oil infrastructure, Great Britain laid the groundwork for Iraq’s economic development. Second, the British “Arabized” the administration, posting Iraqis throughout the country’s civil administration, but the most important effect of the British mandate, was the creation of a strong sense of nationalism. Placed in positions of power by the British, the leaders of Iraq’s

170 Bernstein, 33.
173 Marr, 21.
174 Marr, 21.
175 Marr, 21.
176 Marr, 21.
nationalist movement “would do more to shape modern Iraq than the British had.”\textsuperscript{177}

Struggling to assemble a cohesive political and social identity, the leaders of Iraq’s nationalist movement employed Iraq’s anti-imperialist sentiment, which provided fuel for social unrest and resulted in decades of political instability.

The British initially established an Anglo-Indian political, economic, and administrative structure from which to rule. Described as “a poorly developed area of deserts and swamps, with a population divided between the Shi’ite and Sunni sects and driven by private blood and sullen resentment of any occupying power,” the British quickly realized the Indian administrative model would be ineffective in controlling Iraq.\textsuperscript{178} In 1917, an Iraqi administration was created that would be closely managed by Great Britain.\textsuperscript{179} While the government “might be called indigenous,” the British created an administration “which would ensure, as much as possible, that the initiative and direction and definite and ultimate control remain in British hands.”\textsuperscript{180} Apart from a thinly disguised Iraqi authority, the British did little to prepare Iraqis to eventually assume control over their state.

Much of the defunct Ottoman Empire was inspired by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s promise of “self-determination” for all people, and like many, Iraqis were deeply angered upon the realization that this did not apply to them. Rather, European powers scrambled to control the territories of the defeated Empire.\textsuperscript{181} Iraqi resentment over the British mandate

\textsuperscript{177} Marr, 21.
\textsuperscript{178} Simons, \textit{From Sumer to Saddam}, 165.
\textsuperscript{179} Marr, \textit{A Modern History of Iraq}, 22.
culminated in a massive revolt in 1920.182 Ignited by the arrest of a tribal sheikh for his refusal to repay a debt, the revolt was started by his angry tribesmen and spread throughout Iraq’s rural areas.183 The tribal insurgents believed that “armed rebellion might not drive the British from Iraq but might at least accelerate their departure.”184 Confronted with approximately 131,000 Iraqis, it took British troops nearly eight months to regain control of the country.185 The 1920 revolt was a watershed moment, becoming an integral part of “Iraqi founding mythology and the founding act of the nation.”186

The ferocity of the 1920 revolt ignited a series of significant changes in British policy toward Iraq. The British understood the importance in masking their governance, and the careful choice of a monarch was required. The British decided to crown Faisal, a member of the powerful Hashemite clan. Faisal while, “firmly rooted by practice and conscience to the Arab nationalist cause,” was also considered to be a moderate leader who would respect British interests.187 Additionally, the British believed that “his reputation as an Arab figure of international stature would prove attractive within Iraq.”188 After serving as the Amir of Syria from 1918, Faisal was expelled by the French for usurping French territorial claims and declaring Syria an independent state in 1920.189 Along with the coronation of Faisal as King of Iraq in 1921, the British also organized and developed the Iraqi army although Faisal’s main

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183 Tripp, A History of Iraq, 42.
184 Tripp, 43.
185 Dodge, Inventing Iraq, 8.
186 Dodge, 8.
188 Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, 207.
189 Cleveland, 166.
support came from Great Britain’s air force and army.\textsuperscript{190} Faisal still remained determined to acquire as much autonomy as possible from the British.\textsuperscript{191}

Great Britain faced enormous difficulties in controlling Iraq. The country’s unruly population combined with Faisal’s determination to rule outside of British interests culminated in the Mandate’s replacement by the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922.\textsuperscript{192} As the term “mandate” implied British sovereignty over Iraq, it was the strength of the Iraqi nationalists that forced Britain to sign a treaty rather than continue to administer through mandate terms.\textsuperscript{193} The British had encouraged nationalist sentiments in order to dismantle Ottoman rule and unite the fractured population of the new country, but the growing movement was now working against them.\textsuperscript{194} While the methods of governance under the treaty did not differ dramatically from the mandate, the treaty promised membership in the League of Nations and outlined steps toward Iraqi independence to take place twenty years from its signing.\textsuperscript{195}

The treaty also led to Iraq’s first constitution in 1924.\textsuperscript{196} “The constitution did integrate various social and political communities into state institutions for the first time, creating a means of resolving conflicts peacefully and, more important, of learning how to cooperate across ethnic and communal lines.”\textsuperscript{197} The constitution was seen as yet another measure of British control, and because Iraqis still had not been granted any type of substantial

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{190}{Cleveland, 207}
\footnote{191}{Dodge, \textit{Inventing Iraq}, 22}
\footnote{192}{Dodge, 22.}
\footnote{193}{Dodge, 22.}
\footnote{194}{Dodge, 22-3.}
\footnote{195}{Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 27.}
\footnote{196}{Tripp, \textit{A History of Modern Iraq}, 56.}
\footnote{197}{Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq} 26.}
\end{footnotes}
responsibility, the document was considered a failure.\textsuperscript{198} The constitution failed to take root, as Iraqis were not granted any significant responsibility in the government, and the document became a symbol of foreign manipulation and control.\textsuperscript{199} Because of tight British control, the Iraqi elite did not invest in strengthening their institutions; rather, energy was spent on formulating how to rid Iraq of the British altogether.\textsuperscript{200}

The year 1930 ushered in a newly elected government in Britain, and with it a new Anglo-Iraq Treaty. Negotiations to enter the League of Nations in 1932 continued as promised, as did talks over granting Iraq independence.\textsuperscript{201} During his first term as prime-minister from 1930 to 1932, Nuri al-Sa’id played a pivotal role in revising the treaty, and worked to negotiate Britain’s handing over of railways, ports, and military bases.\textsuperscript{202} Nuri’s pro-British sentiments were widely known, and although the treaty granted independence to Iraq, it did so as long as Britain’s political and economic interests remained intact. While the treaty granted Iraq the rights to its infrastructure and defense, in return Iraq was forced to permit Britain “the use of all the facilities in its power in the event of war, including the right to move British troops through the country if necessary.”\textsuperscript{203} In addition to outlining the terms of the relationship between Great Britain and Iraq for the next twenty-five years, the treaty also legitimized British oil interests, which further angered the nationalists.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{198} Marr, 26.  
\textsuperscript{199} Marr, 26.  
\textsuperscript{200} Haj, The Making of Iraq,1900-1963, 82.  
\textsuperscript{202} Sluglett, 124.  
\textsuperscript{203} Tripp, A History of Iraq, 65.  
\textsuperscript{204} Tripp, 64.
With the new Anglo-Iraqi treaty underway, Iraq entered into the 1930s formally recognized as an independent nation. Accepted into the League of Nations in 1932, and united by a constitution, Iraq was still a nation in name only. The 1932 treaty not only granted Britain the right to preserve military bases, but “dictated that Iraq must consult closely with Britain in all matters of foreign policy affecting its interests, and must extend to the British in all times of war of a ‘threat of war’ all the facilities and assistance that Iraq could give on its territory.”

By adhering to the tenets of the 1932 treaty, Iraq’s government maintained loyalty to Great Britain, hardly surprising as the administration had been installed by the British. Nationalists considered the treaty “a symbol of Iraq’s servitude to British imperialism,” and, despite radically divergent interests, hostility toward British rule created cohesion among Iraq’s political opposition groups.

In addition to the instability caused by the emerging nationalist movement, Iraq also suffered from tribal unrest and social discord, especially between Sunnis, Shi’is, and Kurds. While the rejection of British imperialism was a “potent, fundamental theme” throughout the country, the unification of so many different ethnicities and religious factions into one nation did not progress smoothly. In spite of the political tension in the country, historian William R. Polk remarked, “What is particularly striking, is what a small role religion played in the formation of an Iraqi nationality. This stands in sharp contrast to Egypt where religion had helped to define “Egyptianess” and to lead the reaction against the British invaders.”

In Egypt’s nationalist movement – also a reaction to British imperialism – religion became an

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205 Haj, The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963, 82.
206 Haj, 82.
207 Haj, 84.
208 Polk, Understanding Iraq, 93.
essential element in the creation of a national identity. Regardless of the tension between Iraq’s Sunni and Shi’i communities, religion did not play a primary role in the formation of the country’s nationalist movement. Rather national consciousness concentrated on the struggle against the British as an occupying force, and the need to strengthen an economy that had not been developed outside Britain’s immediate interests.\footnote{Haj, The Making of Iraq 1900-1963, 84.}

Tensions between the emergent nationalist movement and the British-backed monarchy increased in 1933 upon the death of King Faisal, and the succession of his son, Ghazi.\footnote{Tripp, A History of Iraq, 78.} Although Ghazi banned all political opposition, no less than seven political coups took place from 1936 to 1941.\footnote{Simons, From Sumer to Saddam, 184.} Arguably the most important coup took place in 1936, led by Bakr Sidqi, commander of the Iraqi army.\footnote{Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 44.} Inspired by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s secular transformation of Turkey, Sidqi and his associate Hikmat Sulieman felt that the new Turkish model of reform suited Iraq much more than the Western model endorsed by Great Britain and its installed monarchy.\footnote{Marr, 45.} Sidqi had the full support of the army, and by allowing Ghazi to retain his position, also had the support of the king. Backed by the army, Sidqi intended to replace Iraq’s British-appointed cabinet members.\footnote{Marr, 45.} While Ghazi maintained the crown, it was Sidqi who held the power.\footnote{Tripp, A History of Iraq, 88.} Sidqi stayed in power for ten months before he was assassinated. The 1936 coup “was a major turning point in Iraqi history” as it confirmed the weakness of Iraq’s constitution, created a precedent for military intervention into politics, and further undermined
the country’s stability.\textsuperscript{216} The coup also demonstrated an organized break from the British
influenced circles that dominated Iraq’s governing elite.\textsuperscript{217}

In 1939, Ghazi was killed in a single-car accident and his infant son Faisal II ascended the
throne under a regent, furthering tensions in an already volatile atmosphere.\textsuperscript{218} The political
situation in Iraq was not only unstable due to the rising tide of anti-British nationalist sentiment
and weakened government, but also because of outbreak of war in Europe, and the increasing
violence in another British mandate state, Palestine.

A significant number of Iraq’s military had been trained by the Germans while still a part
of the Ottoman Empire. By the outbreak of World War II, the background of many who
comprised the Iraqi elite combined with intense dislike toward the British naturally positioned
Germany as a “role model” for Iraq.\textsuperscript{219} According to historian Reeva Spector Simon,

Sensing fertile ground for operations, the local German agents, recognizing the
draining Germanophile sentiment, especially in the Iraqi army, continued the
German policy of active propaganda and cultural indoctrination, set in motion by
the Kaiser more than three decades before.\textsuperscript{220}

Taking advantage of the anti-British sentiments sweeping through Iraq, the Germans swiftly
reactivated a propaganda campaign that began during World War I.\textsuperscript{221} In 1940, the German
propaganda not only worked to undermine British influence in Iraq, but also actively expressed
its support for the growing Pan-Arab movement.\textsuperscript{222} The Germans also spent hundreds of
Radio broadcasts were the most powerful weapon in the German propaganda arsenal. Emphasizing British weakness and imperialism, the broadcasts supported pan-Arabism and independence for those dominated by Britain. Germany positioned itself as a genuine ally, dedicated to fight against the “real” enemy of the Arabs - Great Britain. The broadcasts consisted of “highly colored, emotional programs, making the most of the common tastes and beliefs of the masses, providing music and entertainment.” Played in coffeehouses, restaurants and homes throughout Iraq, it was not until 1942 that the British countered with their own radio propaganda, but by that point it was too late to unravel the damage created by the Germans.

While the German propaganda machine emphasized pan-Arab unity and triumph over the British, anti-Semitic messages were also broadcast. This was done subtly, however, and was often overlooked by many Iraqis. German racial policy had to be concealed as Arabs were barely considered above Jews in the Nazi hierarchy, so anti-Jewish sentiment was interwoven with anti-British messages. According to German propaganda, Great Britain was controlled by Zionists, and Zionists were the natural enemy of Arabs as clearly evidenced by Jewish immigration to Palestine. Iraqis were warned to be vigilant and to fight against Zionist elements that assisted in promoting an imperialist agenda.

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223 Simon, 33.
224 Simon, 34.
225 Simon, 34.
226 Simon, 34.
227 Simon, 31.
228 Simon, 32-3.
229 Simon, 33.
In December, 1938, former prime-minister Nuri al-Sa’id orchestrated a coup installing a staunchly pro-British administration.\textsuperscript{230} Having promised to promote parliamentary democracy, Nuri instead furthered his own interests by appointing family and friends to high-level posts rather than working on promised reforms.\textsuperscript{231} Trying to maintain an influence in the region, the British welcomed Nuri, and were especially enthusiastic over his anti-German position. While some Iraqis wanted to maintain a cordial relationship with Britain, believing opposition would otherwise prove fatal, many nationalists in Iraq closely aligned with Germany. In an effort to consolidate power, and to please the British, Nuri attempted to “crush all political dissent” specifically the pro-German elements.\textsuperscript{232} The nationalist movement perceived Germany to be the only means of “evicting Britain once and for all.”\textsuperscript{233} Nuri’s staunchly pro-British agenda combined with his corruption and nepotism resulted in his replacement.

In 1940, Rashid Ali al-Gilani assumed the role of prime-minister intending to support Germany in World War II “as a way of ridding the country of the long-lived British domination.”\textsuperscript{234} It was the same year that Italy entered the war on the side of Germany and France collapsed causing the British to demand access to Iraq’s bases, but Ali refused to cooperate as prescribed in the 1932 treaty.\textsuperscript{235} Two distinct camps had formed in the Iraqi government - Ali was seen as the figurehead of the anti-imperialist, pro-German faction, while Nuri al-Sa’id led the pro-British contingent.\textsuperscript{236} Rashid Ali unsuccessfully attempted to manipulate the rifts in the government as well as Great Britain and Germany by playing all

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\item \textsuperscript{230} Simons, \textit{Iraq: From Sumner to Saddam}, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Simons, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{232} Simons, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Simons, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Simons, 186.
\item \textsuperscript{235} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 99.
\item \textsuperscript{236} Tripp, 99.
\end{itemize}
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sides.\textsuperscript{237} As war consumed Europe, Britain was under the pressure of time and issued an ultimatum to the Iraqi government. It could continue under the rule of Rashid Ali, or “retain the friendship of Britain.”\textsuperscript{238} Ali was forced to resign on 31 January, 1941.\textsuperscript{239} As a new government formed, the military prepared to reinstate Ali. As Rashid Ali and his supporters created yet another new government in April 1941, Nuri al Sa’id, along with many of Iraq’s other pro-British administrators were smuggled out of Baghdad.\textsuperscript{240}

In spring 1941, Iraq was experiencing a full-blown crisis. The constitution had been left in tatters by multiple coups and military intervention. The office of the prime-minister had been continually compromised. Great Britain urgently demanded access to Iraq’s ports and bases while Ali’s military backers refused to allow British troops to step on Iraqi soil. The nationalist movement gained momentum, and Nazi propaganda inflaming Iraqis against British imperialism and Zionist agents had reached a fever pitch.

Rashid Ali, against the wishes of those who had placed him in power, granted access to British troops, and in mid-April they landed in Basra.\textsuperscript{241} Iraq’s army officers and government officials demanded that Britain withdraw its troops immediately, and threatened to fire on the British planes filled with evacuated women and children if they left the ground. Considered an act of war, British troops attacked Iraqi forces on 2 May. By 29 May, British forces surrounded Baghdad.\textsuperscript{242} Germany was not prepared to do anything more than flood Iraq with propaganda and was powerless to stop the British troops. Rashid Ali’s government collapsed, Great Britain

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\textsuperscript{237} Simon, \textit{Iraq Between the Two World Wars}, 138.
\textsuperscript{238} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 54.
\textsuperscript{239} Marr, 54.
\textsuperscript{240} Marr, 55.
\textsuperscript{241} Marr, 55.
\textsuperscript{242} Marr, 55.
\end{flushleft}
re-occupied the country and Iraq descended further into chaos – a chaos that not only engulfed Iraq’s entire citizenry, but over the next decade, led to the end of Iraq’s long-standing Jewish community.
CHAPTER 3 – IRAQI JEWS: FROM HOME LAND TO HOLY LAND, 1940-1951

From its beginning, Israel faced enormous difficulty in creating its citizenry. The government engaged in complicated negotiations and payments for immigrants. Confusion reigned over which Jewish populations were actually in need of rescue and how many Jews were needed to supply the necessary volume of citizens.\textsuperscript{243} Prime-minister David Ben-Gurion, forceful and effective during Israel’s chaotic formation, maintained a narrow focus as he assembled the nation-state in the 1930s and 1940s. Ben-Gurion concentrated upon amassing its population as a means of ensuring Israel’s security, and the establishment of settlements became the primary method of protecting Jewish territory.\textsuperscript{244} Acquiring and settling the necessary population proved a messy and complex task. For at the beginning of the twentieth century, wildly divergent groups of people with opposing ideologies and contrasting methodologies were swept up in a monumental wave of national, political, religious, cultural, and social change.\textsuperscript{245}

This drive toward acquiring a population was designed not merely to provide Israel with security, but would also benefit the state through labor. The need to acquire a Jewish workforce created an additional incentive to gather inhabitants from the Arab lands surrounding Israel.\textsuperscript{246} Arab Jews were only brought to Israel en masse once the architects of the nation-state recognized the failure of enticing those Western Jews who had not been traumatized by the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{247}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{243} Segev, 1949, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Sachar, A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time, 395.
\item \textsuperscript{246} Segev, 1949, 98.
\item \textsuperscript{247} Segev, 1949, 115.
\end{itemize}

The Israeli state was designed as a European entity so Mizrahi, or Arab, Jews were not initially considered as part of the populace. As the lack of a substantial Western population began to imperil the state, obtaining the inhabitants needed for national security became an obsession for Israel’s leaders.\footnote{Segev, \textit{1949}, 98.} Obtaining a Mizrahi population proved challenging, as most Arab Jews lived in relative peace throughout the Middle East. While 2,500 Yemeni Jews moved to Israel for religious reasons during the First Aliyah (1881-1903), this was an exception.\footnote{Cohen, \textit{Zion and the State}, 61.} The vast majority of Arab Jews opted to remain in their home countries – countries where they were firmly established and had lived and thrived peacefully for centuries.\footnote{Giladi, \textit{Ben-Gurion’s Scandals}, p. 3.} Trying to obtain Jewish populations from the surrounding territories presented a serious challenge for Israel’s Zionist leaders. For most Arab Jews, there was simply no reason to relocate.\footnote{Rachel Shabi, \textit{We Look Like the Enemy: The Hidden Story of Israel’s Jews From Arab Lands} (New York, NY: Walker & Company, 2008) p. 3-4.}

A genial history between Muslims and Jews between can be traced back to the 6\textsuperscript{th} century Jewish clans of Mecca. Jews not only traded with the Prophet Muhammad (570-632), but provided a strong religious influence for “as a fellow monotheist, Muhammad looked to the
Jews as his natural allies.”²⁵⁴ Heavily influenced by Jewish customs, Muhammad actually based a number of Islamic traditions upon Jewish practices:

[Muhammad’s] followers were directed to face toward Jerusalem in prayer and to recite three daily prayer services and special Friday evening prayers as did the Jews. Ablutions and forms of worship followed the Jewish pattern. It seems that the Muslims may have misunderstood the solemn Jewish fast of Kippur to be a celebration of victory over the Pharaoh, for they too adopted the same day to celebrate their successes. Above all, the Qur’an itself is full of elements that had previously appeared in Jewish sources.²⁵⁶

In the mid-nineteenth century, the discovery of documents dating back to 1025, in the Geniza of Cairo’s Synagogue of Ben Ezra provided another example illustrating the long and rich cultural, economic, and religious existence of Jews in Arab lands.²⁵⁶ This treasure-trove of documents not only chronicled the economic and social lives of Jews throughout North Africa for hundreds of years, but the Geniza also held “innumerable Scriptural and rabbinic documents of great importance” demonstrating the freedom Jews had to practice their religion across the Middle East.²⁵⁷

Episodes of violence did occur between Muslims and Jews long before the twentieth century, but such incidents were not because of an inherent enmity between the two groups, but rather indicated the volatility of society at-large.²⁵⁸ Much of the violence, when it did occur, resulted from economic instability rather than religious conflict. Affluent Jews, for example, became the target for one of Muslim Spain’s worst pogroms, when “envious mobs” of

²⁵⁵ Gubbay, 16-17.
²⁵⁷ Ghosh, 94.
²⁵⁸ Gubbay, Sunlight and Shadow, 75.
oppressed Muslims lashed out against their dire economic situation. While religious affiliation certainly made some easier to identify, the hostilities resulted from economic disparities rather than religious hostility. Even Britain’s Peel Commission responsible for determining the cause of the Arab Revolt in Palestine concluded in its 1937 report:

It is not a natural or old-standing feud. The Arabs throughout their history have not only been free from anti-Jewish sentiment but have also shown that the spirit of compromise is deeply rooted in their life. Considering what the possibility of finding a refuge in Palestine means to thousands of suffering Jews, is the loss occasioned by Partition, great as it would be, more than Arab generosity can bear? In this, as in so much else connected with Palestine, it is not only the peoples of that country who have to be considered. The Jewish Problem is not the least of the many problems which are disturbing international relations at this critical time and obstructing the path to peace and prosperity. If the Arabs at some sacrifice could help to solve that problem, they would earn the gratitude not of the Jews alone but of all the Western World.

Beginning in the 7th century, during the period of Islamic expansion throughout the Middle East, Christian, and Jews were categorized as dhimmis, an Islamic designation of minority status applied only to “People of the Book.” Although Muslims, Christians, and Jews all worshipped the same God, Jews and Christians did not believe in God’s revelations to Muhammad, rendering their faith incomplete by Muslims. Allowed to freely practice their religion, dhimmis possessed limited autonomy under Muslim rule, but like Christians, Jews were considered second-class citizens, and not allowed the personal and professional opportunities

\[\text{259 Gubbay, 87.}\]
\[\text{261 Quataert, The Ottoman Empire, 175.}\]
\[\text{262 Quataert, 175.}\]
granted to Muslims. *Dhimmis* were forced to pay a tax, or *jizya*. Barred from military service, payment of the *jizya* ensured *dhimmis* protection from Muslim armies. Failure to pay the *jizya* resulted in imprisonment, enslavement, or even death. The Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) dissolved *dhimmi* status, rendering the Jewish and Christian minorities equal to the Muslim majority.

While Jews lived throughout the Middle East, Iraq was home to one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world, dating back to the 6th century BCE. Iraqi Jew and documentary filmmaker, Samir stated, “It was clear that the Iraqi Jews were completely integrated into Iraq. After all, they had been living there for over 3,000 years.” According to Dr. David Kazzaz, relationships with Muslims “were amicable, cooperative and characterized by mutual respect.” Jews maintained a communal identity based upon their religious beliefs, but were “intimately” attached to their culture. Iraq’s Jews identified themselves as much Arab as Jewish.

They were thoroughly Arabized in the sense that their tradition, superstitions, and language were Arabic. Their dialect, which is close to that of the Mosul district is considered by some to be among the purest, closest to that of the Arabian peninsula. They also used Arabic in their hymns and religious ceremonies.

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264 Stillman, 9.
265 Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 82.
266 Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 17.
267 *Forget Baghdad*.
269 Kazzaz, 1.
A rising center of creativity, literature, and art, Baghdad was also a multi-lingual city where French and English words blended into Arabic. Although the British provided a portion of this influence, the Jewish community was strongly influenced by the French Alliance schools which injected Western culture, values, and languages into the Jewish community of Iraq. Describing the mixed cultural life in Baghdad in which Muslims, Jews, and Christians intermingled and exchanged ideas Somekh asserted that the Muslims majority “saw the Jews as a constructive and progressive element.” An urban citizenry, Iraq’s official 1947 census estimated 118,000 members of the Jewish community with 77,542 living in Baghdad. Basra also contained a large Jewish community and when combined with Bagdad, the two cities comprised 75 percent of Iraq’s total Jewish population. Approximately 11,000 Kurdish Jews lived in Mosul with the rest of Iraq’s Jewish communities residing in Karbala, Diyalah, Dulaym, Kut and scattered throughout the vast countryside.

Comprising Iraq’s largest minority, the Jews dominated commerce and contained a prosperous and essential aspect of the country’s economy. Much of the Jewish population formed the upper and middle classes and was generally wealthier than a great portion of Iraq’s Muslim population. Many of Iraq’s Jewish community worked as doctors, lawyers, bankers, merchants or civil servants. Although the Jewish community was generally seen as prosperous, especially in Baghdad, there were also poor and disenfranchised Jews, many of

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273 Somekh, 89-90.
275 Shiblak, Iraqi Jews 39.
277 Kazzaz, Mother of the Pound, 3.
278 Shiblak, Iraqi Jews, 38.
whom were Kurdish in origin.\textsuperscript{280} Attracting the attention of the British due to their high level of education and visible economic role, new opportunities were created for Jews during the Mandate period.\textsuperscript{281} Hired in large numbers to work for the British civil administration, railway, and the Iraq Petroleum Company, the British “relied on them because of their greater familiarity with the country and its inhabitants.”\textsuperscript{282} One of the first members of Iraq’s British appointed government was Sassoon Hakim, who also held the post of Iraq’s first finance minister.\textsuperscript{283} After Iraq’s independence in 1932, the country’s civil administration continued to include a significant number of Jewish administrators.\textsuperscript{284}

In addition to contributing to Iraq’s economic stability, Iraq’s Jewish community was also well educated. At the time of the Jewish exodus in the 1950s, the literacy rate for Jews was 50 percent as compared to the whole of Iraq where literacy was measured at just 15 percent.\textsuperscript{285} The Jewish community benefitted from the Alliance Israelite Universelle, an organization established in 1860 in Paris that established Jewish schools throughout the territories of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{286} Baghdad’s first Alliance school opened in 1865, and in subsequent years a number of schools opened in towns across Iraq.\textsuperscript{287} Baghdad was also the location for one of the Alliance’s first schools for girls, which opened in 1893.\textsuperscript{288} The main language of instruction at Alliance schools throughout the Ottoman Empire was French, but Arabic was the primary language of instruction in Iraq, further demonstrating the Arab roots of Iraq’s Jews. Although

\textsuperscript{280} Shiblak, \textit{Iraqi Jews}, 38.
\textsuperscript{282} Shiblak, \textit{The Lure of Zion}, 30.
\textsuperscript{283} Shiblak, \textit{The Lure of Zion}, 30-1.
\textsuperscript{284} Shiblak, \textit{The Lure of Zion} 31.
\textsuperscript{285} Shiblak, \textit{The Lure of Zion} 26.
\textsuperscript{286} Stillman, \textit{Jews of Arabs Land in Modern Times}, 23.
\textsuperscript{287} Shiblak, \textit{Iraqi Jews}, 40.
\textsuperscript{288} Shiblak, \textit{Iraqi Jews}, 40.
Arabic was the primary language of instruction, Alliance education also focused on European languages which provided Iraqi Jews with a more sophisticated education than Iraqi state schools.\textsuperscript{289} The Alliance schools remained the cornerstone of Jewish education until the collapse of Iraq’s Jewish community in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{290}

Although much of the Jewish community did not get involved, Zionist activity in Iraq began in the late 1930s and was found mostly among the lower and middle classes of Jews. Limited to small organizations which focused upon education, the majority of Zionist agents during this period worked as teachers, and “steered youngsters in the direction of Zionist socialism.”\textsuperscript{291} While a number of such groups operated during the 1930s, Iraqi authorities actively shut them down. Additionally, many of the lower and middle class Jews “grew away from Zionism” as they advanced in society, in large part because of their work in the Iraq’s British administration.\textsuperscript{292}

Although prominent and well-established, Iraq’s Jewish community was not immune to the instability that beleaguered the country during the 1930s and 1940s. The atmosphere of political volatility and social insecurity that resulted from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the creation the British mandate plagued the Iraqi political arena, and filtered into the streets. German propaganda flooded the airwaves railing against British imperialism and warning of a powerful a Zionist threat. Declaring its loyalty to Germany during the 1941 military coup, Rashid Ali’s government refused to honor Iraq’s 1932 treaty with Britain. Intent

\textsuperscript{289} Shiblak, \textit{Iraqi Jews}, 39.
\textsuperscript{290} Shiblak, \textit{Iraqi Jews}, 40.
\textsuperscript{291} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Zionism in an Arab Country}, .8.
\textsuperscript{292} Meri-Glitzenstein, 8.
upon enforcing the treaty, the British invaded Iraq in May of 1941. Nine years after formally declaring Iraq’s independence on May 31, 1941, the British occupied the country once again. As British troops surrounded Baghdad on 1 June, 1941, Iraq’s Jewish community was celebrating the second day of Shavuot, a festival commemorating God’s gift of the Torah. As Iraq’s defeated army retreated into Baghdad, many of the soldiers saw “Jews milling through the streets in their finest clothes.” On that same day, the British-appointed regent, Prince Abdul-Illah, who had been banished by Rashid Ali, was scheduled to return to Baghdad from exile. Mistaking the revelry for a celebration of British victory and the return of the regent, a group of defeated soldiers “totally without command” attacked the celebrants. One Jewish citizen was murdered while sixteen others were injured, but the violence did not end there. For the next two days, terror consumed Baghdad’s Jewish community in a pogrom known as the Farhoud.

The Farhoud came as a “big and violent shock” to the Jews of Baghdad. Terror engulfed the Jewish community for two days as angry mobs ransacked homes, burned businesses, and murdered citizens. In his memoir, Saul Fathi described the British army as “totally disengaged allowing the atrocities against Jews to continue unabated.” Many Iraqi Jews blamed the British for not stopping the pogrom, some even going so far as to blame the

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295 Shabi, *We Look Like the Enemy*, 86.
British for inciting it. A former Zionist agent in Iraq, Naiem Giladi, accused the British of “being responsible for organizing the riots, or they were indirectly behind them.” Regardless of who instigated the Farhoud, the Iraqi army suppressed it. “When we woke up on the morning of June 3, the entire street was filled with Iraqi soldiers.”

Iraq’s 1941 Farhoud lasted two days and left 110 dead, including 28 Muslims, over 200 injured, and countless others traumatized. Not all Muslims participated in the pogrom, and numerous accounts described Muslims desperately trying to save their Jewish neighbors from the angry mob. Mordechai Ben-Porat, who would actually become the leading Zionist agent in Iraq, shared his family’s experience during the Farhoud,

We were mostly cut off from the center of the Jewish community and our Muslim neighbors became our friends. It was because of one Muslim neighbor, in fact, that we survived the Farhoud. We had no weapons to defend ourselves and were utterly helpless. We put furniture up against the doors and windows to prevent the rioters from breaking in. Then, Colonel Arif’s wife came rushing out of her house with a grenade and a pistol and shouted at the rioters, ‘If you don’t leave, I will explode this grenade right here!’ Her husband was apparently not home and she had either been instructed by him to defend us or decided on her own to help. They dispersed, and that was that – she saved our lives.

Not merely a simple and spontaneous outburst of hatred and violence toward Jews, the Farhoud was a culmination of tensions, manipulation, political and social instability. Although the atmosphere resulting from another military coup and the subsequent British invasion

300 Giladi, Ben-Gurion’s Scandals, 133.
302 Michael, 81.
303 Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy, 86.
offered no excuse for the violence that occurred, the events demonstrate the highly unstable
and volatile atmosphere that led to the Iraq’s pogrom. In her memoir, Violet Shamash
recounted the tense environment as British warplanes buzzed the city and threatened to
invade creating an environment of fear and volatility, and “in the prevailing atmosphere, the
Muslim majority was prepared to believe anything.” She also accused the Germans of
instigating much of the anger toward Jews. “There was Nazi propaganda throughout the day as
well as readings from the Qur’an, anti-British news and calls for the population to revolt against
foreign domination and follow the lead of Rashid Ali.”

The pogrom was cited by some of Baghdad’s Jewish residents as the beginning of
“cataclysmic process,” that only ended ten years later with the exodus of Iraq’s Jews. While
some Jews did leave Iraq after the Farhoud going to Europe, Israel, or the United States, in his
memoir Somekh Sasson presented a different reality,

to describe the Farhoud historically as the beginning of the end doesn’t convey
the whole picture. The subsequent years were ones of recovery and
consolidation of a sort previously unknown to the Jews of Iraq. These were in
fact the greatest years of economic and cultural prosperity that the Jews of Iraq
had known in the modern era.

Despite the violence that raged through the city during the first two days of June 1941, many of
Baghdad’s Jewish residents had no desire to leave the country. In the years after the pogrom as
Naim Kattan recounted in his memoir, “memories of the Farhoud were growing distant. We

308 Shamash, 191.
were united to our Muslim and Christian brothers.” Many in Iraq’s Jewish community recognized that the “instability [was] caused by the government changing hands and of no one being willing to assume responsibility for maintaining order in the power vacuum.”

The years following Iraq’s pogrom as the Holocaust decimated Israel’s intended population, David Ben-Gurion refocused his attentions on populating Israel with Jews from Arab countries. In 1942, the prime-minister stated, “It is our duty to terminate the Iraqi exile.” As Israel’s One Million Plan was implemented, Zionist agents played a more prominent role in Iraq. Naeim Giladi explained in his memoirs that there were four major branches of the Israeli government operating in Iraq during the 1940s. The first was the Ha’halutz, which organized education, taught Hebrew, the history of Zionism and settlements in Palestine, as well as a multitude of practical skills such as nursing, carpentry, woodworking, etc. The second branch was the Ha’shura which facilitated weapons training, arms accumulation, and bomb assembly. The third branch, Ha’aliyah initiated and organized immigration to Israel. The fourth, and arguably, the most important branch was the Ha’modieyin, an intelligence unit that gathered military and political information.

The Zionist enterprise in Iraq operated with the purpose of manipulating the existing political instability, creating fear and persuading Iraq’s Jews that their safety could only be

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314 Naeim Giladi, *Ben-Gurion’s Scandals*, 144.
315 Giladi, 145.
316 Giladi, 146.
317 Giladi, 147.
guaranteed by moving to Israel. In his memoir, Zionist agent Joshua Horesh described gathering intelligence from Iraq’s administration marveling that “the wide population of Iraq did not really know what Zionism meant or even whose religion it was.” Mordechai Ben-Porat, an Iraqi Jew who worked as the leading Mossad agent in his native country discussed the secret work of Zionists in his memoir. He recounted the “transfer of weapons to Iraq,” and the fear of discovery as agents smuggled arms into the country. Weapons were smuggled into Iraq and stored in homes and synagogues, placing the larger Jewish community under suspicion.

Israeli agents dispatched to Iraq convinced a few Jews of the dangers lurking in their country. Zionist propaganda insisted that Jews should fear for their safety, and consequently some fled to Israel, leaving their investments, money, and possessions behind. As Marina Benjamin detailed in her memoir of life in Baghdad, Zionism initially appeared to the Jews of Iraq as “an upstart foreign movement irrelevant to their everyday concerns.” She described the sudden appearance of a man in 1942, Ehud, who while disguised as a business man “was also engaged in a secret mission.” Ehud, along with another Mossad agent named Shaul Avignor had been dispatched to Baghdad to determine the “possibility of organizing a Zionist movement in Baghdad.”

320 Ben-Porat, To Baghdad and Back, 43-45.
322 Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy, 4-5.
323 Benjamin, Last Days in Babylon, 96.
324 Benjamin, 132.
325 Benjamin, 133.
Rather than causing Iraqi Jews to embrace the Zionist cause, Benjamin described how the Zionists were treated with great suspicion, for relocating to Israel was of little interest to many of Baghdad’s Jewish residents even after the Farhoud.\footnote{Benjamin, 134.} Agents tried to convince Baghdadis that “life in the Diaspora was poisonous and impossible and that the only salvation was to become pioneers on the land in the collective of Eretz Israel.”\footnote{Benjamin, 134.} Benjamin related in great detail how, despite efforts to convince Iraq’s Jews of the danger of residing outside of Israel such notions “did not play well among Baghdadi Jews who were devoted to Iraq.”\footnote{Benjamin, 135.} Benjamin additionally asserted that the Zionists dispatched to Iraq showed great “contempt for the Eastern way of life, which they saw as primitive, feudal, and unprogressive.”\footnote{Benjamin, 135.} Prominent Iraqi-Jewish author Sami Michael said,\footnote{Sami Michael, \textit{Forget Baghdad}.}

\begin{quote}
In our view, the Zionist idea was no solution for the Jews. Rather, they would cause far more trouble and harm than solve the problem - especially a Jewish state in the middle of an Islamic Orient. It did not spell a solution, it spelled more problems.\footnote{Sasson, \textit{Baghdad, Yesterday}, 59.}
\end{quote}

Sasson Somekh also recounted a startlingly different reality of Jewish life in Baghdad than the portrait painted by Israel’s agents. Somekh spoke not only of Jewish inclusion in all realms of Iraqi life, but also of the sophisticated and established intellectual culture in which Jews played a major role.\footnote{Sasson, \textit{Baghdad, Yesterday}, 59.} While Israel’s leaders portrayed the atmosphere of Baghdad as vehemently anti-Jewish in order to further their own interests, little evidence exists to verify the claims of institutional discrimination against Jews during this time. The Iraqi government

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Benjamin, 134.}
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\footnote{Sami Michael, \textit{Forget Baghdad}.}
\footnote{Sasson, \textit{Baghdad, Yesterday}, 59.}
\end{footnotes}
was, however, hostile toward communist political elements. During the 1940s, many Jews who participated in communist political parties and activities were publically prosecuted which provided the perfect background for Israel’s Zionist propaganda, easily confusing Iraq’s Jews into believing that their future in Iraq was uncertain.\textsuperscript{332} The strong Western, and even secular elements that comprised Baghdad’s Jewish community rendered even more painfully ironic the poor treatment of Iraqi Jews upon their later arrival in Israel for “not being Western enough.”\textsuperscript{333}

Iraq’s communist party, founded in 1934, enjoyed little support in its early years, but the party gained momentum as Marxist ideology offered an alternative to British imperialism.\textsuperscript{334} The events of 1941 also breathed new life into the communist Party as nearly half of the party’s members were Jews.\textsuperscript{335} Betrayed by the British for their inaction during the \textit{Farhoud}, combined with lack of interest in Zionism, the Party created a new political platform for nationalists, and a hopeful solution for stability. Sami Michael spoke of this period, “Communism was the ideology of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. We were the heroes who fought colonial rule. We were Iraqis, communists, and patriots. Patriotism was very important for us all.”\textsuperscript{336}

Russian communists also fought against the Germans in World War II, and while the Jews in Iraq were not direct victims of the European genocide, German propaganda assumed much of the blame for the \textit{Farhoud}. “We were communists because it was against Nazism.”\textsuperscript{337} While many of Iraq’s Jews found political and social solace in the communist Party, “systematic, brutal persecution of the communists” started in 1946 with the rise of a far-right government

\textsuperscript{332} Sasson, 78-9.
\textsuperscript{333} Shabi, \textit{We Look Like the Enemy}, 22.
\textsuperscript{334} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Zionism in an Arab Country}, 145
\textsuperscript{335} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 63.
\textsuperscript{336} Sami Michael, \textit{Forget Baghdad}.
\textsuperscript{337} Sami Michael, \textit{Forget Baghdad}. 
supported by the British. In 1946, a huge demonstration was organized by the communist Party against the ruling government resulting in scores of arrests and the death of a number of communist party members. Sami Michael spoke of his underground political activities, police harassment, and constant fear of arrest. “In the end, I escaped to Iran. It was my only chance to stay alive.”

The year 1948 began in Iraq with a series of demonstrations, known as the *Wathba* (Rising), against the Anglo-Iraqi treaty signed in Portsmouth, Britain. The new agreement continued to allow Great Britain to assert its authority over the country. Initially, only the communists and nationalists united against the government, but by the end of January a massive portion of Iraq’s population voiced their objections to the treaty resulting in violent protests. “For a time, a real atmosphere of civil war prevailed in Baghdad.” A month of street battles culminated in a brutal clash between demonstrators and government forces on 27 January when nearly one hundred protestors were killed, and hundreds of other injured. Iraq’s volatile political atmosphere positioned members of the communist party, many of whom were Jewish, directly against the government.

In May 1948, as a part of the Arab coalition, Iraq declared war on Israel and suffered a humiliating defeat. Despite losing the war with Israel, Iraq did not implement any type of deportation program for Jews because “the government regarded the Jews as an integral part

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339 *Forget Baghdad*.
340 Sami Michael, *Forget Baghdad*.
342 Marr, 65.
343 Marr, 65.
344 Marr, 65.
of Iraqi society and the Iraqi state.”

Rather, the Iraqi government set about trying to reassure its Jewish citizenry and “restore its sense of security.” As any government during a time of war, the Iraqi authorities could not allow Zionist organizations to continue, especially in light of their assistance to Israel. Iraqi authorities arrested scores of Zionist agents for spying, and the discovery of weapon caches in home and synagogues further implicated many of Baghdad’s Jews. In May of 1948, Zionism was declared illegal, and many Jewish civil servants lost their jobs while the whole of the Jewish community was “placed under surveillance.” According to Israeli scholar, Shimon Ballas, “Times became difficult. Newspapers attacked us saying, ‘Yes, they may be Iraqi Jews, but deep inside they are all Zionists. All Jews are Zionists, covert Zionists.’” Zionist activity “worsened the situation of the Jews,” successfully undermining Iraq’s long-standing Jewish community. According to Yehouda Shenhav, “The actions of the Zionist movement in Iraq thus forged a reality that retroactively seemed to justify its presence there.”

The country’s defeat in the war with Israel combined with three decades of political and social instability in Iraq, led to some Jews to leave Iraq, and Israel tasked Mossad agents with smuggling Iraqis across the borders. Israeli officials deliberately exaggerated stories of Jewish persecution in Iraq in order to garner international sympathy and put pressure on Iraqi

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345 Meir-Glitzenstein, Zionism in an Arab Country, 205.
346 Meir-Glitzenstein, 205.
347 Gat, The Connection Between the Bombings in Baghdad and the Emigration of Jews from Iraq, 312.
349 Shimon Ballas, Forget Baghdad.
350 Segev, 1949, 165.
351 Shenhav, The Arab Jews, 117.
352 Hillel, Operation Babylon, 161.
authorities to force the emigration of the Jewish community.\textsuperscript{353} Creating stories of atrocities and persecution, Israeli agents intended to “force the Iraqi government to expel the Jews.”\textsuperscript{354} Iraqi authorities declared Jewish emigration illegal, attempting to retain the Jewish community, as the economic effects of their departure would have been devastating.\textsuperscript{355} Iraq and Israel engaged in a virtual tug-of-war, with Mossad agents encouraging Jews to move in order to populate Israel, and Iraqi officials imploring them to stay in an effort to maintain some semblance of stability in Iraq.

On 9 March, 1950, the Iraqi government enacted the Denaturalization Law, allowing for the emigration of Iraqi Jews willing to relinquishing their citizenship.\textsuperscript{356} Arguably, the law resulted less from the desire of the Iraqi government to expel its Jewish population, and more as the “result of contentious pressure on Iraq from the British, American, and Israeli governments.”\textsuperscript{357} Only to remain active for one year, the law “could be revoked at any time during this period.”\textsuperscript{358} While the law allowed Jews to move freely to Israel, the majority had no desire to do so, and in the first month only 220 Jews registered.\textsuperscript{359}

While the Israelis rejoiced over the Denaturalization Law, they were surprised at how few Iraqi Jews actually took advantage of it. On 9 April, 1950, the first of a series of five bombings took place at Baghdad coffeehouse frequented by Jews.\textsuperscript{360} The other four bombs

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Segev, 1949, 166.
\item Segev, 166.
\item Shiblak, \textit{Iraqi Jews}, 120-1.
\item Shiblak, \textit{The Lure of Zion}, 79.
\item Moshe Gat, \textit{The Connection Between the Bombings in Baghdad and the Emigration of the Jews from Iraq}, 315.
\item Gat, \textit{The Connection Between the Bombings in Baghdad and the Emigration of the Jews from Iraq}, 315.
\item Gat, \textit{The Connection Between the Bombings in Baghdad and the Emigration of the Jews from Iraq}, 315.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
were detonated between 14 January, 1941 and 26 June, 1951.361 While each of the bombs targeted Jewish interests, they were detonated in way to ensure minimal harm. Each of the bombings also occurred during a lull in the denaturalization process, and subsequently prompted a rise in registration. On 8 April, 1950, the day before the first bombing, the Zionist underground issued a paper calling for Iraq’s Jews to move to Israel. “O Jews, Israel is calling to you – ‘Get out of Babylon!’”362 Many Iraqi Jews who both moved to Israel, and stayed behind believed that Zionist agents were behind the bombings as, “they did profit from the incidents.”363 The British Foreign Office also suspected that Israel bore responsibility for the bombings, accusing the Jewish Agency of exaggerating circumstances in Iraq, and suggested that the most “plausible theory” for the bombings was tied to the low number of Jews emigrating from Iraq.

Iraqi authorities arrested Shalom Salih and Yosef Basri, accusing them of responsibility for the bombings as well as membership in a Zionist spy ring.364 Through the investigation, authorities uncovered extensive evidence of Zionist activity in Iraq, such as detailed files, weapons, explosives, membership lists, and anti-Iraqi propaganda.365 A leaflet distributed after the bombings “warned the Jewish community of the consequences if they stayed in Iraq, and advised the Jews to return to ‘their natural homeland, Israel.’”366 Both men confessed under torture to three of the bombings, and were hanged for their crimes. Israel claimed that the evidence was circumstantial, and the confessions extracted under duress not only

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361 Gat, The Connection Between the Bombings in Baghdad and the Emigration of the Jews from Iraq, 319-21
363 Moshe Gat, The Connection Between the Bombings in Baghdad and the Emigration of the Jews from Iraq, 317.
364 Shiblak, The Lure of Zion, 120.
365 Shiblak, The Lure of Zion, 120-1.
366 Shiblak, The Lure of Zion, 121.
demonstrated their innocence, but exposed the corruption of the Iraqi legal system. British officials, on the other hand, asserted that they had “no reason to suppose that the trials were conducted in anything but a normal manner.” The Israeli government balked at accusations of responsibility for the bombings of Jewish interests in Baghdad, arguing that Muslim elements were to blame. British officials contended that the cache of weapons and documents found by Iraqi authorities, “left no room for doubt.” Despite the trial and hanging of the two men arrested, the party responsible for the bombings officially remains a mystery. Shimon Ballas said,

> It was a well-known issue, but the Zionists have not admitted it yet. Ask any Iraqi, he’ll tell you. It’s a known fact that they threw those bombs. Of course, waves of people applied to leave. Within a year, the majority of the Jews had registered to leave the country.

During this period, official British documents present a different story than what was dispatched by the Israeli government concerning the difficulties faced by Iraq’s Jewish community. A British Foreign Office document from 9 November, 1950 stated, “For the Iraqi government this is an external problem. It is not true that they are expelling Jews and life has certainly become more difficult for the Iraqi Jews, but there are still some 50,000 who have not elected to leave.” Another British report from Baghdad on 4 April, 1951 stated,

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369 Shiblak, *The Lure of Zion*, 121.

370 Shimon Ballas, *Forget Baghdad*.

It is difficult to obtain any facts and figures to illustrate what has been happening, but it is quite clear that the mistreatment from which Jews have been suffering is almost entirely the result of inefficient administration and is not attributable to the malevolence of the Iraqi Government. The Iraqi Government passed two laws which require an efficient department to administer them but they did not set up this department in advance. They have appointed as Custodian of Jewish Property an ex-Director General of Interior who bears a very high reputation for competence and integrity.\(^{372}\)

Two days later, on 6 April, 1951, the British foreign office in Baghdad issued another report stating,

> While His Majesty’s Government have no evidence of maltreatment of Jews, they feel sure that Iraqi authorities will appreciate the unfortunate consequence should any ground be given for the charge that those who have registered to emigrate were being persecuted.\(^{373}\)

On 23 April, 1951 further analysis concerning the situation of Iraq’s Jews was sent from the Baghdad office to London asserting that the Israeli government had been exaggerating the threats to the Jewish community,

> While it is difficult to obtain full details, I feel that this information makes it clear that the situation has never been as serious as might be gathered from the Jewish Telegraph Agency Bulletin. Our Embassy is, of course, keeping a very close watch on the situation.\(^{374}\)

By the end of 1951, decades of political instability, war, and Zionist activity had taken its toll on Iraq’s Jewish population. Nearly 100,000 Jews were brought to Israel between May 1950 and June 1951.\(^ {375}\) 60,000 Iraqis left in the last three months of Israel’s airlift operation because the Iraqi government had seized their assets.\(^ {376}\) On 10 March, 1951, two days after the

\(^{372}\) British Foreign Office Document, “1572/60/51, 4 April, 1951,” in *Minorities in the Middle East*, 395.

\(^{373}\) British Foreign Office Document, “Foreign Office and Whitehall Distribution, 5 April, 1951” in *Minorities in the Middle East*, 397.

\(^{374}\) British Foreign Office Document, “1571/50, 23 April, 1951” in *Minorities in the Middle East*, 419.


\(^{376}\) Shenhav, 117.
expiration of the Denaturalization Law, the Iraqi government froze, thereby confiscating, the
assets of the Jewish citizens still remaining in Iraq, as well as the property of those who had
previously relinquished their citizenship.\textsuperscript{377} Until that point, Jews had been allowed to take
their property out of Iraq. After March 10\textsuperscript{th} however, they were allowed 5 dinars, one bag, and
the clothes on their backs.\textsuperscript{378}

Deprived of their right to choose where to live, Iraq’s 3,000 year old Jewish community
was decimated. Given little choice but to move to Israel, the community supplied the architects
of the Israeli state with their much desired population, but at enormous cost.\textsuperscript{379} An article
published in December 1949 in the \textit{Jewish Chronicle} captured the feelings of many of Iraq’s
Jews that were forced to leave their homeland,

Those Baghdadi Jews with anything to lose dislike Zionism because it has brought
them misery. They know there were anti-Jewish outbreaks in Baghdad before
Zionism, but on the whole, Islamic tolerance has enabled Baghdadi Jews to
flourish as a centre of learning and commerce. They and their kind would like to
stay. They are attached to their homes, traditions, and their shrines of the
prophets, and would not like to leave them in order to begin life once more in an
immigrants’ camp in Israel, where they believe people are not particularly
friendly to oriental Jews.\textsuperscript{380}

The Jews of Iraq found themselves victims of a number of forces. Colonialism, nationalism,
communism, and Zionism collided creating an unsustainable situation for the Middle East’s
oldest Jewish community. Forced out of their homeland, they had little choice but to emigrate
to Israel.

\textsuperscript{377} Itamar Levin, \textit{Locked Doors: The Seizure of Jewish Property in Arab Countries.} translated by Rachel Neiman
(Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001),
\textsuperscript{378} Levin, 47.
\textsuperscript{379} Schechtman, \textit{On Wings of Eagles}, 118.
\textsuperscript{380} Shiblak, \textit{The Lure of Zion}, 77.
CHAPTER 4 – EAST MEETS WEST: THE BEGINNING OF MIZRAHI LIFE IN ISRAEL, 1948-1951

It was with great skill, efficiency, and organization that Israel was created, but the new nation-state was not comprised merely of people finally realizing their dreams of living in a Jewish homeland. Many Mizrahi (Hebrew for Eastern, or “Oriental”) Jews did not emigrate out of a desire to live in Israel, but rather moved out of desperation. Rendered refugees as a result of the Zionist activity in their home countries, many of Israel’s Arab immigrants had been left stateless by the policies of their countries and manipulated by Israeli rhetoric.381 The effects of the Holocaust combined with the state’s failure to entice Western moneyed, educated, elite Jewish classes left Israel’s architects desperate to obtain a population. In an effort to boost their population, the Israeli government quickly assembled the One Million Plan in 1944, and asserted that Jews throughout the Middle East faced hidden dangers – dangers that would only be relieved by moving to the safe confines of a Jewish state. It was through Zionist activity that the rhetoric became reality.

After the 1948 War, Arab resentment toward Israel, the political activities of Zionist organizations, and the equation of Judaism with Zionism, made life in Arab Muslim countries impossible for many Jews.382 “The escalating conflict in Palestine would imperil Jews in the Middle East; but Zionist leadership committed to saving them, by bringing them to Palestine……its leaders saw no problem with this self-perpetuating loop of logic.”383 As Israel’s government set out to generate Israel’s population, Zionism was fashioned as the answer to the

382 Segev, 114.
383 Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy, 88-9
problems of Mizrahi communities – some of which did not exist until Zionist organizations assisted in creating them.384

Arriving in Israel, Mizrahi Jews faced terrible discrimination from the Ashkenazi (Western) population. Described as “unwashed, and “lacking even the most elementary knowledge.”385 Parasitic, greedy, filthy and backward.”386 “Hooked-nosed, drunk, violent, and lazy.”387 “Miserable.”388 “Stooped, despondent, living in filth.”389 Ashkenazi Jews complained that, “we have no common language with them. Our cultural level does not fit with their level; their lifestyle is the lifestyle of the Middle Ages.”390 It would be logical to assume that such descriptions were used in reference to Palestinian Arabs – arguably the most prominent threat against the new nation-state. After all, it was the Palestinian Arabs whom the early Zionists sought to remove through the legal and legitimate purchase of land, and later through such means as “intimidation” and “transfer.”391 It was not only members of the Arab League, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan, but also the Palestinians against whom Israel defended its right to exist in the 1948 war. It was also with the Palestinian inhabitants that Israel waged a passionate war of ideology – the heated dispute over which group possessed the right to occupy the land that had long been a part of the Ottoman Empire until the British assumed control through the 1917 mandate.

385 Rachel Shabi, 23.
387 Forget Baghdad.
389 Wurnser, 24.
390 Shabi, We Looked Like the Enemy, 23.
391 Segev, 1949, 59.
Despite the fact that the Palestinian population did present some danger to the rising nation-state, such disparaging remarks were actually made in reference to the Arab members of Israel’s Jewish population.\textsuperscript{392} While the immigration of “parasitic, greedy, filthy and backward” inhabitants was welcomed by the end of the 1940s, Mizrahi Jews had not factored into the original European vision of Israel despite the call for Jews from around the globe to return to their “promised land.” It was only once the Arab Jews became a necessary part of the nation-state’s security apparatus, they appeared in Israel, not out of any real desire, but largely as a result of Zionist activity exacerbating the political and social instability in their native countries, and through the regional political crises that erupted once Israel cemented its nation-state status. “Decisions to settle the Arab-Jews were not based on the opinion of the newcomers or on the basis of the country of origin, but on Israel’s supposed security and economic needs. Often these Arab-Jews were treated as social outcasts.”\textsuperscript{393} Despite the fact that the massive number of Mizrahim brought to Israel, Arab Jews were treated with condescension and disgust by many Ashkenazi Jews.

The state of Israel, for all its promotion, was largely unable to process these new immigrants properly, leaving many of them to suffer humiliating circumstances in squalid camps, fight for meager food rations, and withstand harsh discrimination.\textsuperscript{394} Emotionally battered, most of the Mizrahi immigrants had no sense of place, no financial security, and found themselves at odds with both the refugees arriving from Europe and those already

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{392} Forget Baghdad \\
\textsuperscript{393} Dr. David Rabeeya, The Journey of an Arab-Jew: An Anthology (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2000) p.75. \\
\textsuperscript{394} Segev, 1949, 111.\end{flushleft}
established in Israel. It was the creation of Israel that forced many Arab Jews to immigrate in the first place.

In 1948, Israel had a population of 650,000, with 85 percent of European origin. The Western orientation of the population created a unique challenge for the absorption of the massive waves of immigrants arriving from Arab countries. By 1951, the state’s population doubled due to the transfer of over 700,000 Arab Jews from their native countries to Israel.

In three years, Israel transformed from a relatively homogenous European-oriented nation to a monumental clash of Eastern and Western cultures. Ill-prepared to contend with the massive absorption of the new arrivals, “the integration of the newcomers caused a demographic, social, cultural and economic upheaval – both in the existing population and among the immigrants themselves.”

While serving its purpose in terms of numbers, Israeli’s massive immigration campaign placed a “heavy burden” on the state. In the past, the waves of immigrants were absorbed quickly, but the short period of time and the size of the Mizrahi immigration overwhelmed the new country. In the years from 1948 to 1951, nearly 700,000 Mizrahi immigrants arrived in Israel, in addition to the arrival of over 300,000 Jews from Europe. Most Jews emigrating from the Middle East were not given any type of preparation for what they would encounter in Israel. The fact that they were totally unprepared for the conditions that awaited further traumatized many of the new immigrants.

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396 Dominitz, 155.
397 Dominitz, 156.
399 Segev, 168.
Israeli officials sprayed many of the new arrivals with DDT and disinfectant as they stepped off the planes.\textsuperscript{400} Refugees from Yemen, forced to disrobe, were given new Western style clothes as their garments were burned for fear of disease.\textsuperscript{401} Iraqi refugee Samir Naqqash stated, “Because we came from Arab countries, they thought lice was eating us.”\textsuperscript{402} The Western dress distributed to many Mizrahi Jews as replacement for their confiscated clothing left the women feeling naked and “deeply ashamed,” further crippling their ability to adjust to the new conditions.\textsuperscript{403} Authorities required some the Mizrahi refugees to adopt new names that “were easier to pronounce.”\textsuperscript{404} Officials promoted the adoption of Hebrew names, encouraging immigrants to “forget their Diaspora existence.”\textsuperscript{405}

When the Mizrahi immigrants arrived they were organized for transfer to the transit camps, and many were taken at night so they would not see the conditions. Bundled into the backs of trucks and shipped to the camps, Naqqash said, “They put us in a lorry like cows, like animals and brought us to a land full of thorns. They brought us to a dirty land full of thorns. It was horrible, like a never ending nightmare.”\textsuperscript{406} Describing the transfer of a group of newly arrived Moroccans, Rachel Shabi related the instructions of the authorities, “Get them off the trucks....the moment that everyone has got off, you release the truck, so that it goes and people do not try to climb back on and leave with it.”\textsuperscript{407}

\textsuperscript{400} Benjamin, \textit{Last Days in Babylon}, 250. \\
\textsuperscript{401} Segev, \textit{1949}, 183. \\
\textsuperscript{402} Samir Naqqash, \textit{Forget Baghdad}. \\
\textsuperscript{403} Segev, \textit{1949}, 183. \\
\textsuperscript{404} Segev, 184. \\
\textsuperscript{406} Samir Naqqash, \textit{Forget Baghdad}. \\
\textsuperscript{407} Shabi, \textit{We Look Like the Enemy}, 56.
Despite the adoption of the One Million Plan in 1944, by 1949 proper housing had not prepared for the new arrivals. Marina Benjamin described the camps, or *ma'abarot*. They were “furnished with regulation khaki tents, surrounded by barbed wire fences, and guarded day and night by Polish commandants who apparently thought they were running concentration camps.” The tents did not provide sufficient shelter from the scorching summer sun, and leaked during the winter rains soaking everything, and everyone, inside. Health care and educational facilities were inadequate. To make matters worse, many of the immigrants found themselves removed from loved ones, as family and friends had been assigned to different camps in the chaos of absorption. “A mood of endless anomie prevailed, a lack of norms, structure, and certainty.”

Refugees complained about the vile conditions of the camps, and suffered from hunger, as Israel “was critically short of food.” Crowded, unsanitary, and neglected, the camps became “fertile ground for illicit markets,” creating an atmosphere of danger. Without considering the different dialects, customs, and traditions, Israeli officials crammed various Mizrahi populations in the camps creating “explosive tensions” as groups fought one another for resources. Ariel Sabar wrote of the filth, violence, dirty streets, public latrines, rats, abuse from Ashkenazi guards, and even of “American tourists in shamefully short skirts traipsing through the *ma'abarot,*” further humiliating those forced to endure life in the

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408 Yehouda Dominitz, “Immigration and Absorption of Jews from Arab Countries,” 166.
411 Sachar, 404.
412 Sachar, 406.
414 Sabar, 112.
camps. Samir Naqqash stated, “We lived in palaces and they put us in tents. Instead of bringing us home after three thousand years, they sent us 100,000 years back.”

While Israel did not have enough resources and housing to process all of the immigrants, officials granted priority to those coming from Eastern Europe. Some Europeans spent time in the transit camps, but the houses abandoned by Palestinians were immediately given to Jews from Europe, as were the newly constructed accommodations. In 1949, nearly 250,000 immigrants arrived in Israel. Europeans, comprising approximately 170,000 of the new immigrants, were almost immediately settled in permanent housing. The Jewish Agency gave preference to 15,000-20,000 Polish immigrants that year. “To spare them the hardships of the camps,” it was suggested that the Polish immigrants be housed in hotels, or special camps could be arranged to “make it comfortable for them.” The Israeli leadership “talked openly about giving preference to the Polish immigrants, and some said they should have special privileges.” Arrangements were made to assign a number of the Polish immigrants in houses that originally had been constructed for a portion of the nearly 100,000 Arabs residing in the camps. The government was aware that “giving preference to the Polish immigrants was wrong, and so they resolved to keep it a secret.”

415 Sabar, 113-4
416 Samir Naqqash, Forget Baghdad.
417 Segev, 1949, 168.
418 Dominitz, “Immigration and Absorption of Jews from Arab Countries,” 158.
419 Dominitz, 158, 166.
420 Segev, 1949, 174.
421 Segev, 175.
422 Segev, 175.
423 Segev, 175.
424 Segev, 175.
By late 1951, although Arab Jews constituted only half of the number of immigrants in that year (110,000), 90 percent - 256,000 Mizrahi - languished in transit camps.\(^{425}\) As Ariel Sabar stated, the “largely European cast of leaders was giving priority to their countrymen.”\(^{426}\) Additionally, “the government wished to avoid a debate over whether it was justified in spending a million dollars to bring additional immigrants, instead of investing the money in improving the lot of those who had already arrived and were living in camps.”\(^{427}\) Separate plans were created to absorb the immigrants arriving from Europe and the Middle East. European immigrants were to be placed in camps on the Mediterranean coast for approximately three months, while the Mizrahi camps, primarily located in the Negev desert, were to remain in their camps for “a year or two.”\(^{428}\) Although Israeli leaders certainly did their best to accommodate the needs of those coming from Poland and Romania who suffered the effects of the Holocaust, another motivation simmered beneath the surface. A European entity, the original Zionist framework did not included Arab Jews. The Israeli leadership knew little about them, and had no idea how to incorporate them into the nation-state.

Some Mizrahi spent as many as five years languishing in the transit camps, but once the Israelis finally built houses, they were of European design and not meant to withstand the harsh desert climate. Ben-Gurion understood that Arab Jews tended to have large families, citing that as one of the reasons to promote their immigration, but the buildings constructed to house them did not take this into account.\(^{429}\) Israel imported thousands of Scandinavian houses, described as “painfully functional,” families of four or more were allocated one room with an

\(^{425}\) Yehouda Dominitz, “Immigration and Absorption of Jews from Arab Countries,” 159.
\(^{426}\) Sabar, My Father’s Paradise, 98.
\(^{427}\) Segev, 1949, 102.
\(^{428}\) Meir-Glitzenstein, Zionism in an Arab Country, 59.
\(^{429}\) Samir Naqqash, Forget Baghdad.
additional “cove” for washing and cooking.\textsuperscript{430} The houses fell apart quickly due to materials which were unfit for the harsh desert climate and shoddy construction. Israeli officials did not provide any means for immigrants to organize or renovate their homes, leaving many Mizrahi communities in disrepair.\textsuperscript{431}

Situated in the middle of the desert, far from cities or settlements, the new immigrants initially found themselves isolated and unable to find work.\textsuperscript{432} Established long distances from major cities and towns, Mizrahi communities, later known as “development towns,” suffered from seclusion.\textsuperscript{433} Most of the Mizrahi settlements were situated near the borders of Arab and Israel clashes, and “served as buffer zones.”\textsuperscript{434} Stripped of their property and assets when departing their native countries, many Mizrahi Jews had no money or means of providing for their families. Afforded no transportation, and lacking arrangements for selling trinkets or produce, left many residents destitute with few options in terms of income.

Israeli leaders expected to employ the new immigrants in various sectors of the state’s economy. Although many Mizrahi Jews worked in the civil sector in their home countries, the Israeli state needed cheap labor, and Arab Jews “were designated for agriculture.”\textsuperscript{435} As Palestinians once comprised Israel’s manual labor pool, many were transferred or fled, and the nearly 400,000 Mizrahi immigrants filled the Israeli state’s immediate need for manual labor.\textsuperscript{436} A sum of $400 million was allocated for public works projects, but few of the immigrants were prepared for such work and “for the immigrants of Arab countries, particularly Iraq, this

\textsuperscript{430} Sachar, A History of Israel: From Zionism to Our Time, 403.
\textsuperscript{431} Segev, 1949, 190
\textsuperscript{432} Sabar, My Father’s Paradise, 112.
\textsuperscript{433} Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy, 55.
\textsuperscript{434} Rabeeya, The Journey of an Arab-Jew in European Israel, 166.
\textsuperscript{435} Meir-Glitzenstein, Zionism in an Arab Country, 59.
\textsuperscript{436} Benjamin, Last Days of Babylon, 249.
represented a major revolution. In Iraq at least, two-thirds of the bread-winners were merchants or clerical workers. In Israel, eighty percent of Iraqis were forced to work as unskilled laborers in agriculture, industry, and construction. Accustomed to jobs in the civil administration, assuming the role of unskilled labor was difficult and humiliating for many of the immigrants. Israel successfully replaced cheap Palestinian labor while at the same time, reduced the status of Arab Jews in their new culture. Marina Benjamin said,

As a matter of urgency the Israeli state needed cheap labor. It needed farmhands, construction workers, and factory workers, not merchants, artisans, bankers, and civil servants, and it was equally desperate to recruit young blood into the military to make up for lives lost in the Arab-Israeli War. Once the Iraqi Jews arrived on Israeli soil, their needs, both as individuals and as a community, were subsumed by the needs of the state.

Composed from a Western-orientated ideology, the Ashkenazi leadership knew little of the Jews from the Arab world and discrimination abounded. “Zionism claims to be a liberation movement for all Jews,” a statement that clearly obscured the truth once the condition of Israel’s Jewish Arab communities was examined. Ella Shohat demonstrated that “Zionism has been primarily a liberation movement for European Jews and more precisely for that tiny minority of European Jews actually settled in Israel.”

The new state was charged with the task of integrating a massive number of immigrants. Lacking the commonalities of language, culture, and tradition, Israeli leaders were tasked with creating a national culture. Assimilation would evolve through language,

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437 Dominitz, “Immigration and Absorption of Jews from Arab Countries,” 159
438 Dominitz, 159.
439 Benjamin, Last Days of Babylon, 249.
education, and the creation of a national narrative. The cultural standard, however, was not one that reflected the whole of the immigrant population rather, it was based in the Zionist vision of the state as a European entity. Ben-Gurion stated, “We do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies, and preserve the authentic Jewish values as they crystallized in the Diaspora.”

The preference afforded to Ashkenazi culture could even be seen in Israel’s food. Ella Shohat explained that while bread the Israeli government subsidized bread, it was only the European-style round bread that benefitted from government support. Pita bread, eaten by the Mizrahi, was not subsidized, illustrating both the preference toward European culture, and the attempt to promote assimilation of the Arab Jews. “Mizrahi culture was deemed inferior, not something that should come to represent the state.”

Shohat also dismantled the Israeli national narrative of homogeneity, cooperation, and equality for all Jews, and illustrated the political cracks and cultural fractures which have, from the beginning, separated Ashkenazim from Mizrahim. The culture of Arab Jews was “equated with primitivism and enmity.” With habits regarded as disgusting, clothes seen as peculiar, and mannerisms perceived as bizarre, Ashkenazi Jews created little room for the Mizrahi within mainstream society. In his memoir, David Rabeeya remarked that, “These European Jews were totally ignorant of the Arab culture from which the newcomers arose and

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442 Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy, 33.
443 Ella Shohat, Forget Baghdad.
444 Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy, 17.
446 Rabeeya, The Journey of an Arab-Jew in European Israel, 53.
they could not accept the obvious face that Jews born in Arab lands were culturally Arab!"  

While working for the Jewish Agency during the formation of the state, future prime-minister Golda Meir (1898-1978) described a people “who could not read or write or eat with a fork or spoon or use modern toilets.”  

For Mizrahi Jews, to find a place within Israeli society required an awful reckoning. It was with a sense of “pain and betrayal” that Arab Jews “discovered that the values of the Jewish state were European through and through.”  

As Shimon Ballas said, “What does this Western orientation mean for the people with Eastern origins? It means identity conflict.”

Israel’s new population spoke a variety of languages such as Bulgarian, French, German, Polish, Dutch, and Arabic. To successfully integrate the new community, communication needed to be established, and as “Hebrew breather the magic of past glory, ancient wisdom and sunny days,” it was established as Israel’s national language.  

Mizrahim were not permitted to speak Arabic – the native language of nearly half of Israel’s population, and faced harassment if caught speaking or reading Arabic in public.  

Mizrahi immigrants struggled to learn Hebrew, and the guttural Arabic accented Hebrew of the Arab Jews was “marked as inferior, low-class, comedic, and common.” On the other hand, Yiddish, the language of Eastern European Jews became “a coded speech linked to privilege.”

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447 Rabeeya, 163.
448 Horesh, An Iraqi Jew in the Mossad, 131.
449 Benjamin, The Last Days of Babylon, 251.
450 Shimon Ballas, Forget Baghdad.
452 Moussa Houry, Forget Baghdad.
453 Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy, 110.
454 Shabi, 128.
Music also became a realm in which to mock the Mizrahim. The Ashkenazi disparaged the arrangements of Eastern music by such beloved artists as Umm Kulthum, rejecting the tinny sounds of Arabic instruments. Rachel Shabi stated, “music is a major component of identity,” and Israelis widely encouraged music and singing in both the transit camps, and in public, attempting to solidify a national identity.\(^{455}\) Rather than music as a means of creating camaraderie, however, it was Eastern European music that the national culture identified with which denigrated a vast segment of the population attached to Eastern instruments and Arab singing.\(^{456}\)

Surrounded by hostile Arab elements, there was no room in Israeli culture to assume both Arab and Jewish identities, and Mizrahi Jews were required to shed their Eastern identities for a Western one. To be Arab, “was to employ the identity of the enemy,” a notion wholly rejected in Israeli culture.\(^{457}\) In his memoir, David Kazzaz wrote that the discrimination of Mizrahi was an accepted practice,” discrimination was institutionalized and even legitimized in Israel. And everyone knew that the people in power gave preference to their own kind.\(^{458}\) They would have to alter themselves to fit Israel’s Western standards. Housed in separate towns and neighborhoods, the dominant Ashkenazi population relegated Arab Jews to the fringes of society.\(^{459}\)

Author Yehouda Shenhav described Zionism as a “colonial venture, founded on colonial European principles from the very beginning,” and argued that colonialism led to Eurocentrism,
As the European Jews discriminated against the Mizrahi communities, deeming them “backwards,” they neglected one of the most useful and powerful aspects of their society. Through the nurturing of Arab Jewish culture, through its shared histories, cultures and traditions - with each Arab and Jewish populations - a path to reconciliation could have been created in the years following the 1948 War, not only with the Muslim-Arab nations of the region, but also with the Palestinian communities.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶⁰ Shenhav, 71.
⁴⁶¹ Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel,” 34.
CONCLUSION

During the first Gulf War in January of 1991, ten-year-old Menachem Cohen hid in a Jerusalem bomb shelter with his grandfather, an Iraqi immigrant to Israel, as Iraqi missiles exploded nearby. Cramped and scared, Menachem was comforted by his grandfather’s prayers, which the old man recited in the form of Iraqi *piyuts*, or liturgical songs. As an adult, Menachem became a *hazan*, a specialized liturgical singer.462 “Only when his grandfather died did Menachem realize that he was one of the last people to know those prayers and ironically sent one to Saddam, who had unwittingly created the conditions for these precious liturgical songs to be passed on, ensuring their survival.”463

The nations of Iraq and Israel are united by a shared history. Created from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq emerged amidst the momentous and chaotic changes of first half of the twentieth century, while Israel, rooted in the late nineteenth-century Zionist vision of a homeland, developed as a result of forceful organization, and decades of immigration. By the 1940s, Iraq evolved into an unstable and contentious state. Great Britain’s imperial agenda clashed with the emerging sense of nationalism, resulting in severe political instability and social unrest. During the same decade, despite the strength of Israel’s institutions, the Holocaust decimated the state’s intended population and imperiled the future of the Jewish nation.

Confronted with a population dominated by Palestinian Arabs, Israel’s first prime-minister, David Ben-Gurion, stated, “For thousands of years we have been a people without a

462 Shabi, *We Look Like the Enemy*, 149.
463 Shabi, 149.
state. The great danger now is that we shall be a state without a people.” In 1944, when Ben-Gurion understood that the future of Israel was at stake, he began to look to the Jews of Arab lands to fulfill the state’s population needs. Zionist agents were dispatched around the Middle East in an effort to convince Mizrahi populations to move to Israel, exacerbating the political and social instability of countries such as Iraq.

With a Jewish community numbering over 120,000, Iraq became one of Israel’s major sources for population. An integral part of the economic, political, and social fabric of the country for nearly three thousand years, Iraq’s Jewish community comprised the country’s largest minority. Although many of Iraq’s Jews shared strong nationalist sentiments, confusion over the community’s alliance with Great Britain, the development of a Jewish state in Palestine, war with Israel, the rise of communist political elements, and an increase in Zionist political activity in the country converged rendering life in Iraq untenable for Iraq’s Jewish community by 1951.

According to Mizrahi scholar, Yehouda Shenhav, “The actions of the Zionist movement in Iraq forged a reality that retroactively seemed to justify its presence there.” Victims of the convergence of a number of forces, colonialism, nationalism, communism, and Zionism collided between 1940 and 1951 ultimately decimating Iraq’s Jewish community. Forced out of their homeland, they had little choice but to emigrate to Israel. It remains an amazing feat that Israel was able to rise out of such utter chaos, although sadly, in terms of the collision of nationalities and the creation of huge economic divides still evident today. While the Israeli enterprise was successful, the strong Western-oriented nation-state emerged with tales of tragedy, especially

for the Jews of Iraq. Sixty years after the collapse of Iraq’s Jewish community, many Iraqi Jews still long for their homeland. As Sami Michael recounted, “I’m living in two worlds. Half of me is Arab, half of me is Jewish. In my dreams I’m there, sipping my coffee and looking at the Tigris.”

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465 Sami Michael, *Forget Baghdad.*
Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


Shohat, Ella. “Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews” *Social Text* 75, No. 2 (Summer, 2003), 49-74.


THE ZIONIST UNDERGROUND IN IRAQ APPEALS TO THE JEWS TO REGISTER FOR EMIGRATION (1950)

Saturday, April 8, 1950, 4 P.M.

A Call to the Jewish Community

O Children of Zion Residents of Babylon, Save Yourselves

For the second time in the history of this diaspora, after 2,488 years, we are hearing the echo of the historic prophecy of our prophets which brings us good tidings and warns us to leave quickly.

The Movement, in its previous announcements to the Jewish Community requested that Jews refrain from registering to renounce their citizenship. This was a fundamental part of our general plan. The Jews stood by us admirably.

Today, we are standing before a new threshold and a great turning point in the history of this diaspora.

The hour has arrived when all of the Jews together must quickly register because this is the most important stage of our program.

Today, we have decided that we must leave this hell of exile. It is incumbent upon all of us to enter upon this practical stage and to go and register.

The movement calls upon all Jews, whatever their class, to avail themselves of this decisive opportunity.

You men and women of Israel! You are the backbone of your people and its main support. Do not let the torch be extinguished in the darkness of exile.

O Hebrews! Know that at this hour you are in the vanguard. You must guide the Jews and urge them to emigrate wherever possible.

O Jews, Israel is calling to you—"Get out of Babylon!"


1 That is, the underground Zionist organization.
2 The Hebrew word for "comrade" or "member," designating members of the Movement.

The Last Chapter § 327

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Cypher/OTP

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FROM BAGDAD TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Qtr H. Meek
No. 613
9th November, 1950
D. 3.11 p.m. 9th November, 1950
R. 1.14 p.m. 9th November, 1950

PRIOIRITY

CONFIDENTIAL

Addressed to Foreign Office telegram No. 613 of
9th November
Repeated for information to: Tel Aviv Amman
and saving to: B.N.E.O. (Cairo)
Washington, Nicosia.

Your telegram No. 686 and Tel Aviv telegram No. 515 to
you: Movement of Iraqi Jews.

Statement in paragraph 2 of Tel Aviv telegram under
reference is the first intimation I have had that the Israeli
Government intends to admit 70,000 Iraqi Jews in one year.
Since the air lift began 14,000 Jews have left for Israel
at an average rate of less than 3,000 a month. The increase
reported in my despatch No. 720 has not been maintained.
If 70,000 Iraqi Jews are to be admitted in a year, the
rate of movement must be increased to 9,000 monthly. It
seems clear that this cannot be done without the cooperation
of the British air lines. Israeli Prime Minister as already
reported is prepared to agree to chartered flights direct
from Baghdad to Lydda.

2. For the Iraqi Government this is an internal
problem. It is not true that they are expelling Jews and
life has certainly become more difficult for the Iraqi Jews,
but there are still some 50,000 who have not elected to leave.
Those who are volunteering to go to Israel have already sold
their homes and personal property. They cannot buy them
back. These people therefore constitute a refugee problem
with its dangers to public health and security.

3. The position is in fact as stated in paragraph 3
of your telegram No. 765 to Tel Aviv. Since an essential
condition for solving the humanitarian problem is the
removal of discrimination against British aircraft, I very
much hope that on both grounds an early approach will be
made to Israeli Government.

Meanwhile I
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EQ 1970/45

FOREIGN OFFICE AND WHITEHALL DISTRIBUTION

FROM FOREIGN OFFICE TO BAGHDAD
No. 301
5th April, 1951
D. 5.30 p.m. 6th April, 1951

CONFIDENTIAL

Addressed to Baghdad telegram No. 301 of 5th April
Repeated for Information to Tel Aviv
And Saving to Washington No. 1723
Cairo No. 58
B.M.S.C.(Cairo) No. 385
Amman No. 71
Damascus No. 26

Tel Aviv telegram No. 102 [of 31st March: Iraqi Jews].

After careful consideration we agree that in view of the
information contained in your telegram No. 232 we have insufficient
grounds for a formal approach to Iraq Government.

2. Meanwhile stories of maltreatment are gaining currency here
and Jewish bodies are pressing us to intervene. You will also
have seen Washington telegram No. 216 saving.

3. We feel that Iraq Government should be made aware of
the existence of these reports. Please therefore draw their attention
to them informally, and speak on following lines:-

(a) While His Majesty’s Government have no evidence of
maltreatment of Jews, they feel sure that Iraqi authorities will
appreciate the unfortunate consequences should any ground be
given for the charge that those who have registered to emigrate
were being persecuted.

(b) In the circumstances His Majesty’s Government feel sure
that the Iraqis will do everything to ensure that the emigrants
are fairly treated and that the regulations providing for their
maintenance are scrupulously observed.
and fares during the next two or three weeks, a serious problem may arise.

5. The accounts given in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency extracts deal with the first few days after the promulgation of the law, and it is probable that one or more instances of most of the accusations that they make could be found. The impression given, however, is that these things are happening on a considerable scale. This was untrue at the time, and the situation has changed completely since then. There are a number of untruths in the Jewish accounts, as the following facts will show. The telephone service in Bagdad was not suspended. The issue of certificiates to those Jews who retain Iraqi nationality has already made considerable progress. The bank deposits of Jews registered to leave Iraq are estimated to total nearer half a million than six million. The Manager of the Ottoman Bank in Iraq is an Englishman and has not been sent to the Foreign Ministry by the colony of Iraqi Jews for any purpose whatsoever. Mobs have not looted Jewish businesses in Bagdad, nor have there been any cases of mob violence. The Bagdad bazaar has not at any time been occupied by troops. The Bagdad Central Prison is not swarming with Jews.

We are sending copies of this letter to the Chanceries at Washington, Tel Aviv and the British Middle East Office.

Yours ever,

CHANCELLOR
IMMEDIATE
CONFIDENTIAL
(1572/60/51)

British Embassy,
BAGDAD
4th April, 1951

Dear Department,

Please refer to your letter No. EQ 1571/28 of the 22nd March in which you enclosed copies of letters from the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews. These letters in turn enclosed extracts from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin describing the effects of the recent law sequestrating the property of Iraqi Jews who had elected to leave Iraq.

2. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency accounts contain a considerable amount of truth. They also contain some false statements and many exaggerations. The general picture presented by them is tendentious and misleading.

3. It is difficult to obtain any facts and figures to illustrate what has been happening, but it is quite clear that the misfortunes from which Jews have been suffering is almost entirely the result of inefficient administration and is not attributable to the malevolence of the Iraqi Government. The Iraqi Government passed two laws which require an efficient department to administer them but they did not set up such a department in advance. They have appointed as Custodian of Jewish Property an ex-Director General of Interior who bears a very high reputation for competence and integrity. He has, however, had to cope with a most complicated situation without any staff or offices. He has also been ill for some of the time since the law was set up.

4. As soon as the first law was passed on the 10th March there was a certain amount of over-zealous activity on the part of the police. In some cases during the first few days they stopped Jews carrying parcels or suitcases in the streets. Cars were also searched in this manner. The cars were released after two days and the furniture and household effects have, in general, been released. There has been no such seizures since. In addition, certain Jews who arranged to sell their property before the promulgation of the law, had received an advance of the purchase price but had not completed the transaction, were assaulted by the purchasers who feared the loss of their earnest money. This again only happened during the first two days. The issue of certificates for identifying those Jews who have not been registered for emigration has been very slow, and subject to the normal petty corruption. The Custodian has not yet started to pay the maintenance allowance and fares as provided for in Article 1 (a) of the Regulation under the law. At the moment those Jews who have no liquid assets are keeping going by selling small articles, and there has been a noticeable increase among Jews of begging from house to house. Unless the Custodian succeeds in setting up adequate machinery for the payment of maintenance fares ...
Dear Mr. Landau,

I am writing, as promised in my letter of the 19th March, to amplify the information I gave you then about the position of Jews in Iraq.

A report now received from our Embassy at Baghdad indicates that in general the account given in the Jewish Telegraph Agency Bulletin which you enclosed with your letter No. SPPM/1 of the 15th March was greatly exaggerated. While there may have been some isolated instances of mis-treatment of Jews during the few days immediately after the recent laws were passed, they were almost entirely due to the delay in setting up the administration necessary to implement the provisions of those laws. The position has now improved, and the machinery designed to provide for the maintenance of those Jews who have registered to emigrate to Israel should shortly be working smoothly.

The Jewish Telegraph Agency Bulletin also contains certain inaccuracies. There is, for example, no truth in the allegation that the telephone service in Baghdad was suspended at the time when the recent laws were being debated in order to avoid any leakage of information about them. The issue of certificates to those Jews who have not registered to emigrate is certainly proceeding slowly, but measures are being taken to speed it up, and we understand that the Custodian of Jewish property who has now been appointed is a man with a high reputation both for competence and integrity. I should add that the manager of the Ottoman Bank, who is an Englishman, has never been “sack” by Iraqi Jews with a delegation to the Iraqi Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

While it is difficult to obtain full details, I feel that this information makes it clear that the situation has never been as serious as might be gathered from the Jewish Telegraph Agency bulletin. Our Embassy is, of course, keeping a very close watch on the situation.

Yrs.

(R.H. Hadlow)

R. Landau, Sec.,
Anglo-Jewish Association.