

Caught between Orientalism and Aryanism, exile and homeland: The Jews of Iran in Zionist/Israeli imagination

HAGGAI RAM

ABSTRACT

This article provides a first-of-a-kind examination of Zionism and the Jewish state's shifting and unstable perceptions of Iranian Jewry, a particularly important Mizrahi group that has not yet received the attention it deserves in critical scholarship. By focusing on Iranian Jewry as objects of the Zionist/Israeli gaze, I demonstrate that while notions of "exile" and "homeland" and "East" and "West" have been known to be notoriously axiomatic and rigid when applied to Jews from the Arab countries, they appear fluid, overlapping and contingent when applied to Iran's Jews. As I demonstrate, owing to the twofold issue of ascribed ethnicity and distinctive history, Iran's Jews—perhaps more than any other Jewish "diaspora"—confounded the most fundamental Zionist convictions embodied in the notion of the "ingathering of exiles."

Introduction

Since the late 1970s, a vigorously critical literature on the exclusionary aspects of the Zionist project in Palestine has emerged. This literature has made far-reaching methodological and historiographical breakthroughs. Inspired by anthropologists and historians of empire, who have shown imperial spaces to be overlapping entities and sites of encounter, this scholarship demonstrated that Mizrahi politics of identity *within* Israel are intricately connected to what goes on beyond Israel's borders, particularly the surrounding Arab world. By demonstrating that the Mizrahim's inclusion, never quite successful, in the Israeli "melting pot" was conditioned on the creation of an impossible rupture between what were, up to their migration to Israel, compatible aspects of their identity—Arab *and* Jewish—this scholarship unveiled the colonial underpinnings of Zionism's attitudes towards its "Jewish victims" (Shohat, 1988). In doing so, it was able to show how "the same line has led from the walled ghettos of Europe to the West Bank barrier, separating Jews from the surrounding Arab population" (Klug, 2007).

HAGAR Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities Vol.8 (1) 2008: 83-108

Still, with the benefit of hindsight, it is only reasonable to argue today that this scholarship has not been devoid of limitations. The underlying limitation from which most other limitations arise, I think, has to do with the fact that the term “Mizrahim” is almost invariably used in this literature to refer to Jews from Arab countries, thereby “[reducing] the relevance of Jews from non-Arab Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey and Iran” (Goldberg and Baram, *Forthcoming*). Why critical scholars have generally tended to exclude non-Arab “Oriental” Jews from their analyses is a most intriguing question to which I will not offer any plausible answers here. It needs to be said, however, that by focusing almost exclusively on Arab Jews as sole representatives of the Mizrahim, these scholars missed out on the plurality of voices, as well as the ambivalences, tensions and contradictions inherent in Zionist/Israeli readings of various Middle Eastern Jewries, as well as on the amenability of the very concept of “negation of exile” as applied in different Middle Eastern contexts. By assuming, as critical scholars seem to be doing, a correlation between Arab and non-Arab Jews of the Middle East—or thinking about them in monolithic terms—this scholarship thus runs the risk of reproducing the very essentialist and binary assumptions of the earlier canonical approaches it has been committed to dismantle. In the words of Goldberg and Baram (*Forthcoming*), “an over-reliance on binary categories [such as Ashkenazim and Mizrahim] at times brings critical sociology to perpetuate the very notions it seeks to ‘interrogate’.”¹

In what follows, I set out to start filling these voids. By building on, and adding to, analyses of critical scholars of Zionism and the Mizrahim, I provide a first-of-a-kind account, which is critical in its own right, of the dominant Zionist/Israeli representations of Iranian Jews. Iranian Jewry has aroused great interest among the various Zionist/Israeli establishments, partly because they are counted as one of the most ancient Jewish communities in the Middle East, partly because of the “special relationship” that developed between Israel and Iran under the ancient monarchical regime and partly because the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its aftermath provoked (justifiable and unjustifiable) concerns for the safety of these Jews (see below).² Yet, critical scholarship has been conspicuously reluctant to take this Jewry seriously, even though in recent decades, and in certain contexts, Iranian Jews living in Israel have indeed come to view themselves as “form[ing] a block with Oriental Jews” (Goldstein, 1985:242; see also Weingrod, 1979). By focusing on Iranian Jewry as objects of the Zionist/Israeli gaze, I demonstrate that while notions of “exile” and “homeland,” and “East” and “West,” have been known to be notoriously axiomatic and rigid when applied to Jews from Arab countries, at the same time they are shown to be fluid, overlapping and contingent when applied to non-Arab—albeit equally Mizrahi—Iranian Jews.

In the first two sections of this article, I argue that the Israeli gaze on Iranian Jewry before the revolution was embedded in two contradictory narrative movements. On the one hand, like Arab Jews, Iran’s Jews were relegated to an Oriental exilic space “outside of history,” and thus their “return to history” was conditioned on their assimilation into the Israeli “melting pot” by meeting the

civilizing requirements necessary for achieving what Michael Selzer (1967) provocatively described as “the Aryanization of the Jewish State”; hence these Iranian “Orientals” would ultimately find redemption from the “abnormalities of exile.” On the other hand, in light of the ancient monarchical regime’s ardent inculcation of Aryan identity, as well as its implementation of imperial and colonial ideals of modernization, Israelis viewed Iranian Jews as historical subjects in their own right. They maintained that the Jewish community could remain in Iran if they were allowed to pass through “ordeals of civility” similar in kind to those experienced by the Mizrahim in Israel; if permitted to assimilate into (Euro-America) Europe or America without renouncing their Jewish identity, they could very well go on living among their Oriental-turned-Aryan Muslim compatriots. In short, the Jewish state locked Iranian Jews between Orientalism and Aryanism.

In the third section, I suggest that the 1979 revolution further complicated the most basic assertion of Zionist nationalism—namely, that Jews anywhere, but particularly non-European Jews, should be treated as primary targets of the Zionist project’s redemptive mission in Palestine. This revolution, I argue, was the first dramatic event after the mass migration of Middle Eastern Jews to Israel in the early 1950s, which seriously challenged the assertion. During and after the revolution, the State of Israel was hardly in Iranian Jews’ minds. While a handful did migrate to Israel, many others either remained in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) or fled to the countries of Euro-America. While fitting well with the prevailing reluctance of world Jewry to settle in Israel, this conduct by Iranian Jews imploded the Zionist master-narrative of destruction and redemption, for it introduced a *third*—unthinkable—existential option, one that involved neither their destruction (in the IRI) nor their redemption (in Israel).

Under the Shah regime, take 1: Orientalism

I have already noted the Zionist denial of the Arab-Muslim East, which has as its corollary the denial of Mizrahi identity, most notably that of the Jews from the Arab Middle East. Ella Shohat powerfully summed up the exclusionary dynamics of these attitudes:

Zionist writings and speeches frequently advance the historiographically suspect idea that Jews of the Orient, prior to their “ingathering” into Israel, were somehow “outside of” history, thus ironically echoing 19th-century assessments, such as those of Hegel, that Jews, like blacks, lived outside of the progress of Western civilization. European Zionists in this sense resemble Fanon’s colonizer who always “makes history”; whose life is “an epoch,” “an Odyssey” against which the natives form an “almost inorganic background” (1988:5).

Zionist/Israeli readings of Iranian Jewry often followed the same lines of reasoning: like other non-European colonized subjects in general, and Arab Jews in particular, Iranian Jews were consigned to backwardness and imagined as people living outside the boundaries of culture and civilization. Consider the following account on Jewish youth in Iran, penned by a Jewish Agency emissary in the late 1940s:

The conditions of their existence are limited, as is the scope of their world; pragmatic explanations are useless, for in their narrowness, their thinking too has become lethargic. Mere rebuke is of no avail, but, like all children of the Orient, they too may be inspired. Illusion works. Instead of the spark of thought, give them a picture; instead of reasoning—a fable. It will take wing (Yishai, 1950:65).

It was also related that the Jewish “ghetto” in Iran was a “symbol of dirt and disease” (Sadok, 1991:34); if you but enter the alleys of this ghetto, as another observer pointed out in the late 1950s, “your flesh will curl. You would not believe that people live like this. Where we live,” he concluded, “even the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals would not permit beasts or cattle to live under such conditions” (Goldberg, 1959).

The responsibility for these Jews’ unfortunate conditions was not laid at their doorstep, but on the flaws allegedly inherent in their imperfect and abnormal Oriental exilic existence. The reporter Yitzhak Ben-Ziv thus explained in the late 1940s, “They are not guilty; they are the victims of a heartless exile. ... They are certainly not responsible for reaching such spiritual and social desolation” (cited in Sadok, 1991:66–67).³ Given that Zionism’s “civilizing mission” was to rescue Oriental Jews from their “primitive exilic conditions” by relocating them to the modern, Western Jewish state, it is not surprising that Israeli historians considered the 1917 Balfour Declaration “the onset of Redemption of Iranian Jews” (Netzer, 1979b:27; see also 1983). Explicit redemptionist traits were ascribed to “Operation Cyrus” (1948–1952), in the course of which 30,000 Iranian Jews were brought to Israel. The name, of course, bears a distinctly symbolic meaning: Cyrus was King of Persia and Medea, the founder of the great Achemanid Dynasty, who enabled the exiles of Judah and Jerusalem to return, thus ushering in the Second Temple Period. According to Esther Kanka-Shekalim (1988:99), when the wave of immigration (*aliyah*) began, multitudes of Iranian Jews flocked to the gates of the Jewish state, “seeking permanent liberation from the dark curse of Exile....”

Clearly, there are silences lurking behind this idealized, redemptive narrative, not the least because it completely glosses over the experiences of dislocation, discrimination and severe political and economic dislocations suffered in Israel by Iranian Jews, along with other Mizrahi groups. While I will engage with these silences in more detail later on, I will note that this neat and linear narrative—which still enjoys the “scientific” authority endowed upon it by massive historiography—portrays a smooth and pleasant transition from Exile to the Land of Israel, from

slavery to freedom and, of course, from tradition to modernity.⁴ A book in beginners Hebrew thus describes the Iranian Jews' "rescue" from their Iranian "captors": "Family after family, village after village, town after town, [the Jews of Iran] left the land in which they had suffered so much in the past, in order to establish for themselves new homes in the homeland" (Noi, 1966:8).

References to the Iranians as "captors" and to Iran as "the dark curse of exile" testify to the silencing of the history of Iranian Jews not only on Israeli soil, but also, perhaps mainly, in their ancestral land, Iran. Critical scholarship has demonstrated how the Zionist denial of the Arab-Muslim East and the related desire to de-Orientalize incoming Arab Jews produced a "Eurocentric reading of 'Jewish History', [which] ... hijacks the Jews of Islam from their own geography and subsumes them into the history of the European-Ashkenazi shtetl" (Shohat, 1999:6; see also Shenhav, 2006:153–158). As a result, the centuries-long relations between Arabs and Jews were reduced to a recurrent history of oppression, punctuated by periodic pogroms and expulsions, of fragile existence imbued with fear and humiliation, reminiscent of the history the Jews had experienced in Europe.

According to Mark Cohen (1991), such understandings of the relations between Jews and Muslims in Arab countries are embedded in a "neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history."⁵ As I will presently demonstrate, this conception has also been the organizing principle in Israeli writings about the relations between Jews and Muslims in Iranian history, with one telling exception: the rich scholarship on "Judeo-Persian literatures," which is generally indebted to unraveling the reciprocal liturgical, literary and cultural interconnections between Jews and Muslims in Iran.⁶ Regretfully, however, in most other fields of Iranian studies, "many aspects and periods of this approximately three thousand years of Jewish-Iranian and Judeo-Islamic symbiosis are still shrouded in obscurity," as Israeli Judeo-Persian scholar, David Yeroushalmi (2003:77), has argued. Yeroushalmi goes on to suggest that this lacuna stems in large part from a dearth of reliable information, as well as insufficient research and scholarly interest. While this may very well be true, an additional reason for this lacuna is the conceptual, Eurocentric blinders of Israeli observers, who would like to press the argument that the Jewish state is the only place where Iranian Jews would escape a bitter fate, similar in kind to that of European Jewry.⁷

A prominent Israeli professor of Iranian history summarizes nearly two and a half millennia of Jewish history in Iran in a sweeping stroke:

The history of the Jews of Iran ... has been one of oppression, persecution and harassment. It goes back to the Zoroastrian times and continued intermittently till the end of the Qajar dynasty (1796–1925). Qajar rule was one long series of persecutions in almost any place where Jews were then residing (Menashri, 1991:354).

Another Israeli observer pointed out that “the Jews [of Iran] have been, *at all times and under all different regimes*, the object of murder, robbery and plunder”(Sadok, 1991:13; emphasis added); and another Israeli expert on Iranian Jewry concurred:

During the Sassanid period ... the Jews were persecuted and had the skin stripped off their bodies while still alive. When they converted to Islam, these same Iranians continued to consider the Jew as an impure foreigner, which ought to be removed from the Iranian environment.... Throughout the nineteenth century thousands [of Jews] were killed or forced to convert to Islam. In Tabriz, the Jewish community was liquidated; children were thrown to the air and impaled on bayonets. In Bar-Parush, Jews were cast into boiling water. Thus, Jews suffered physical and spiritual devastation in nearly each and every town (Netzer, 1981:29).⁸

I do not wish to deny that the Jews of Iran have had their share of suffering and persecution; nor do I wish to idealize Jewish-Muslim relations in Iranian history. Rather, my main argument is that viewing Jewish Iranian history *solely* as “a long chain of persecutions and atrocities almost everywhere,” as Amnon Netzer (1988:7) has argued, is quite simplistic. In truth, as another observer recounted, “There have been expulsions, forced conversions, pogroms and blood libels, as well as incessant discrimination” (Tsafir, 2002:73). But this is a terribly narrow and selective reading of Iranian history, which obscures other periods where Jewish-Muslim cooperation and mutuality overshadowed other aspects of their relationship.

It is interesting to note that to the extent that Israeli historians do recognize reciprocal influences between Jews and Muslims in Iranian history, they treat them haphazardly and anecdotally. For example, historian Avraham Cohen rightly suggested that the most basic “institution of Jewish learning” in nineteenth-century Iran was called *maktab khaneh* or *khani mulla* and that the teacher there “was referred to [interchangeably] as *mulla*’, *khalifa*’, or *hakham*” (Cohen, 1982b:68–70). While this observation attests to this writer’s awareness of social and institutional exchanges between Muslims and Jews in Iran, by further proposing that this institution was “analogous to the Jewish religious school (*heder*) in the West” (Cohen, 1982b:70; see also 1982a), he renders these exchanges as totally inconsequential. Indeed, by superimposing the Jewish-European experience on the Jewish-Iranian experience, Cohen detaches the Jews of Iran from their specific Iranian, “Oriental” context and dismembers their identity.

To conclude, like many Jewish communities in the Arab Middle East, Iranian Jews were conceived of as people inhabiting what Ann McClintock described in another context as an “anachronistic space”—that is, space imagined as “prehistoric, atavistic, and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity” (1995:14). This conception conferred upon the Zionist project the redemptive role of extricating Iranian Jews from their Oriental (read primitive and repressive) conditions, leading them comfortably into a modern, Euro-American society in

Palestine (post 1948=Israel). As Sadok concludes, "The very same tens of thousands [of Jews who came] from the most impoverished and indigent corners of Iran ... have won an admirable place in the mosaic of the creative and constructive society in Israel" (1991:61).

Under the Shah regime, take 2: Aryanism

While the Zionist/Israeli gaze on Iranian Jewry has drawn on the same conceptual repertoire as the corresponding gaze on Arab Jews, it also radically diverged from it in that it paradoxically established distance from the very concepts it seemed to be authorizing and reproducing. That is to say, this gaze produced not only conventional or hegemonic views deriving mainly from the foundational Zionist concept of "negation of exile," but also different views which undermined this concept's categorical exclusions and denials.⁹

To understand this crucial point, it is necessary to briefly transgress from the subject at hand and examine this gaze within the context of the cultural values that were at work in the relationship between Israel and Iran under the ancient monarchical regime. Although the Iranian Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (reigned 1941–1979) conducted his relations with Israel under a thick veil of secrecy, contacts between the two states intensified in various fields and reached what Israeli expert David Menashri described retrospectively as a "wondrous love affair" (*roman mufla*) ("Preface," in Tsafir, 2002:12). As I have shown elsewhere (Ram, 2006), this "love affair" was made possible owing not only to the two states' common politico-strategic interests, but also to corresponding partitions and enclosures that isolated each state from the surrounding Arab Middle East.

To achieve these ambitions, both states implemented colonial ideals of modernization, which involved the coercive secularization, or de-Orientalization, of their respective subjects, turning them into what anthropologist Stanley Diamond (1974:204) described as "conscripts of civilization, not volunteers." As I have demonstrated above, in the Zionist/Israeli case, the target communities were primarily exilic "Oriental" Jews (Mizrahim but also East Europeans, *Ostjuden*); they were to be molded in accordance with the image of Aryan masculinity, with a view of making them European in each and every respect, except in their religion (Boyarin, 2004; Raz-Krakozyk, 2007:26–87; Selzer, 1967; Shenhav, 2006; Shohat, 1988, 1999). In the Iranian case, the Shah sought to progressively secularize religious identity into an autonomously conceived national identity by keeping with the nineteenth-century philological-cum-Orientalist construct of the "Aryan hypothesis," which designated Iran as part of the Indo-European family of nations (Ram, 2000; Vaziri 1993). Although Aryanism was a potent force in Iranian nationalism long before the last Pahlavi Shah came to power,¹⁰ the inculcation of

Aryan identity became the highlight of his modernization programs, the so-called White Revolution, in the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹

Thus, to varying degrees, both Israel and Iran at the time of the Shah were guided by political theologies whose strategic objective was to transform Oriental subjects—Jews and Iranians, respectively—into deracinated replicas of Europeans, even while they remained affiliated to their own religious cultures. To paraphrase Gauri Viswanathan's analysis of religious conversion in colonial India, both Iran and Israel were committed to the idea of the shading of religious identity into the artificial fabrications of a *secular* Israel and a *secular* Iran, which were still made interchangeable with *Jewish* Israel and *Muslim* Iran; the two states were equally driven by the liberal colonial idea of transforming their respective communities into non-religious *religious* communities. While the former sought to turn Israelis into "non-Jewish Jews," the latter sought to turn Iranians into "non-Muslim Muslims" (Viswanathan, 1998:4–5). In short, the "wondrous love affair" in which Israel and Iran had been involved at the time of the Shah regime primarily rested on mutually constitutive perceptions of each other as carriers of the Western mission to the Middle East.¹²

The key to understanding the tensions and contradictions in Zionist/Israeli readings of Iranian Jewry is to be found in the way in which Israel and Iran came to see each other as occupying the very same non-Arab, Euro-American space within the "imaginative geography of the 'our land—barbarian land' variety" (Said, 1978:54). On the one hand, regarded as "Orientals," these Jews were designated as primary *objects* of the Zionist civilizing mission. In turn, they were left with two options only: either remain in Iran and risk ultimate annihilation, or relocate to the Jewish state and find rescue in the bosom of civilization and modernity. Firmly locked in between the binary categories of "exile" and "homeland," Iranian Jews were therefore not treated any better than other Mizrahi groups, and most prominently, Arab Jews. On the other hand, owing to the Shah's regime's implementation of imperial notions of modernization and its reliance on Aryan identity—intended to induce Iranians into believing that "we were really European in our origin but by some unfortunate geographical accident had ended up among Arabs and Semites" (Dabashi, 2007:151)—Iran was removed from an exilic, "Oriental" space. As a result, the Jewish state had given qualified approval of the Jew's continued life in Iran. The Zionist/Israeli gaze on Iranian Jewry thus generated two contradictory notions, the one of "negation of exile" and the other of what Amnon Raz-Krakozkin (1993:51) aptly described as the "negation of negation of exile."

As I will presently demonstrate, this dialectic of rejecting and affirming the existence of Jewish life in Pahlavi Iran appears in the sources at hand unambiguously. Note, for example, the following observation by a leading Israeli expert in the field of Iranian studies:

Iranian Jews are attached to the state and culture of Iran. Culturally, the assimilation of the Jewish community was more complete than that of many other tribes, ethnic groups and religious minorities in Iran. ... [T]he Jews were the only minority in Iran, who, although non-Iranian in their historical, cultural and religious origins, created a huge quantity of poetry in the Persian language, with many common Judeo-Iranian themes.... They were the only religious minority whose liturgy contains, alongside prayers, lyrical poems written by non-Jewish Iranian poets. The mother tongue of the Iranian Jew is Persian. He values it and he thinks and creates in that language. This is unlike other minorities in Persia, such as the Armenians and Assyrians, who preserved their original language, both as a spoken language and as the language of cultural creativity (Netzer, 1981:26–27).

As this writer maintains, Iran's Jews are a separate group that does not really belong to Iran in terms of their "historical, cultural and religious origins," but at the same time they are deeply immersed in and have assimilated into Iranian culture and identity. The same writer expresses similar overlapping notions of "negation of exile" and "negation of negation of exile" elsewhere, in his analysis of what he calls "the complex situation of the Iranian Jew": "On the inside he is a Jew ... attached to Israel and to the Jewish people, while on the outside he is Iranian ... imbued with a deep and long-standing appreciation of Iranian culture" (Netzer, 1979a:69; for a similar double narrative movement, see Ezri, 2001:15–16, 71, 155). An analogous dialectic appears in the following words by Mordechai Bar On, a senior Jewish Agency official who visited Iran at the height of the Shah's power in the early 1970s. "The Persian environment," he said, "is different from other [Middle Eastern] environments." He went on to explain:

From an economic perspective [Iran] is entirely open for Jews. Moreover, in everyday life there is substantial openness in social relations. I've been told that young Jewish men prefer to interact with Muslim women, and even Jewish women [prefer to associate with] Muslim men. ... [However,] despite this openness ... the Jews don't forget for even one minute their Judaism and the Muslims don't allow them to forget it. Hence a conflict emerges ... (cited in Sadok, 1991:87).

These expressions of ambivalence provide one more indication that Zionism, contrary to its seemingly unconditional repudiation of exile, has in fact given up, at least in practice, and in certain contexts (see below), on the claim for exclusive representation of world Jewry. Recognizing the possibility of Jewish life in Iran inevitably depended on a prior recognition, namely that secure, prosperous and creative Jewish existence outside the boundaries of the Jewish sovereign state was, in effect, possible. Such recognition unwittingly militates against the very idea that

the Jewish state, as the focal point of the “ingathering of exiles,” is the one single solution to the “Jewish problem.”

Let me elaborate on this point a little further for clarity’s sake. “In a way,” writes Brian Klug (2007), “when Herzl spoke of a modern solution [for the Jews], what he meant was this: ‘If we Jews cannot have Europe in Europe then we shall have it in another place’.” Indeed, a dominant paradox in Zionism’s view of the world, which was planted in its first, tentative moments, but seems to me revelatory for where we find ourselves today, is that the exodus of the Jews from Europe and the hope of establishing a separate Jewish entity in the East was, in fact, a way of joining—or assimilating into—Europe (see Raz-Krakotzkin, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2005). Hand in hand with the failure of the Jews’ assimilation into Europe came the dawning realization that, to become European, they would have “to go somewhere else, back to the biblical glory of Jewish independence—and imperialism” (Boyarin, 2004:373). To create the necessary link with Christian Europe, to create a Western, “Judeo-Christian civilization,” the Jews would have to relocate from Europe to Palestine, where they would establish a colony of their own. There, they would be permitted to remain true to their Jewish identity and at the same time to “act ‘as if’”¹³ they were indistinguishable from the European gentiles they had left behind.¹⁴

It is precisely here that Israeli readings of Iran and Iran’s Jewry appear truly exceptional, because they unmistakably imply that these Jews could very well go on living in “exilic” Iran, as they could in Israel, as long as the Shah retained their link to the Christian West as a bulwark against the Arab Middle East. In other words, the imperative of “negation of exile” no longer appeared applicable in cases where “diasporic” Jews were allowed to experience civilizing trajectories similar in kind to those in store for the Jews of Palestine: if permitted to assimilate into Europe without having to renounce their Jewish identity, Iran’s Jews could very well go on living in their ancestral homeland (Iran), which, in turn, would no longer be regarded as “exilic.” The following observation by a leading scholar of Iranian Jewry makes this point explicit:

The Jews sought with all their might to look Iranian. They strove hard to identify with the values and symbols of secular Iranian nationalism, on the one hand, and to remain Jewish in their religion, on the other hand. They loved Persian poetry and literature, enjoyed Persian music, enthusiastically celebrated Iranian national holidays, changed their Jewish names to Iranian names and took pride in Iran’s pre-Islamic [i.e., Aryan] past. At least in terms of historical and cultural consciousness, the Jews, it appears, enjoyed greater opportunities of getting close to the Iranians as well as to trends of secular Iranian nationalism (Netzer, 1988:13).

One may feel a creeping sense of *déjà vu* while reading this and similar Zionist/Israeli texts dealing with the Jews’ assimilation into the Shah’s Iran, “land of the Aryans” (see, e.g., Menashri, 1991:357; Netzer, 1979a:70–71). Clearly, these

texts can be understood as a call for the fulfillment of the Zionist vision of the Oriental Jew-turned-European, only without her/him actually having to leave Iran for Palestine in order to achieve that transformation. From that perspective, Iran too, and not only Palestine, appeared to Israeli observers as a hospitable zone for the "Oriental" Jews' "ordeals of civility" (Shohat, 1988:23). While the Zionist solution for the Jews was to go to Palestine, where European gentiles could not interfere with their drive for Europeanization (or de-Orientalization), in the Shah's Iran, so it seems, they were permitted to engage in such an undertaking at the same time as they interacted with the "Aryan" (albeit Muslim) majority in everyday life.

Thus, as long as the Shah seemed willing and able to submerge Iran into the Christian West, Jewish life there was not proscribed. Having removed Iran from an Oriental space, Zionist/Israeli officials had increasingly come to classify them as part of the well-off Jewish diaspora in the capitalist West. A report submitted to the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption in 1971, while voicing acute frustration with the dearth of interest in Israel among Iranian Jews during the Shah's reign, read as follows:

The situation of [Iranian] Jews today is above decent and they belong to the category of Jews from the developed countries (*artzot ha-revaha*), such as the U.S., Britain [and] France. We must approach them as we approach those [Jewish] communities in developed countries (cited in Sadok, 1991:253; see also Gabay, 1971).

The classification of the Jews of Iran as "Western" and "affluent" also made it easier for Israeli immigration officials to accept as *fait accompli* their unwillingness to migrate to Israel. Sadok, for instance, while complaining that Israel does not offer so powerful an attraction for these Jews (1991:328), nevertheless admitted that, due to their complete integration into the surrounding Iranian society, economy and culture, they have "increasingly come to see their residence [there] as long-term, if not permanent" (1991:402).

It is interesting to briefly mention the comparable ambivalent attitude of Israelis toward North American Jews, as summarized by Baruch Kimmerling: "While most Israelis (70%) know well that American Jews don't consider themselves to be in a state of exile, 60% of [Israelis] accept the Zionist argument that ... America is exile" (2004:50). That Israeli diaspora discourse treats American Jews and Iranian Jews at the time of the Shah with equal ambivalence is not accidental. It demonstrates that Zionism and the Jewish state have in effect come to accept the Jewish exilic condition, but only insofar as "diasporic" Jews are seen to inhabit a space that somehow remains connected to Western Christendom.

Under the “reign of the Ayatollahs”: Neither redemption nor destruction

In July 2007, the Israeli and international media reported that the Israeli government had been trying to find new ways to entice Iranian Jews to Israel. Several such attempts had been made since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and all of them, including this latest one, failed miserably (see below). This most recent effort, however, was strikingly innovative in that it included substantial financial incentives for would-be Iranian immigrants. To step up these efforts, it was reported that Israel now backed a move by “expatriate” Jewish donors to guarantee every Iranian Jewish family \$60,000 and every Iranian Jewish individual \$10,000 to settle in Israel. Significantly, these sums were offered in addition to a host of existing financial incentives that are offered to Jewish immigrants, including loans and cheap mortgages (Brandenstein, 2007; Melman, 2007). As was previously the case, Iran’s Jews flatly rejected this proposal. A statement released by the Society of Iranian Jews said that their national identity was not for sale: “The identity of Iranian Jews is not tradable for any amount of money. Iranian Jews are among the most ancient Iranians. Iran’s Jews love their Iranian identity and their culture, so threats and this immature political enticement will not achieve their aim of wiping out the identity of Iranian Jews” (cited in Cook, 2007).

This brief episode is instructive in two ways. First of all, it demonstrates that, from an Israeli vantage point, the 1979 Iranian revolution put an end to all ambivalences regarding the likelihood of Jewish life in Iran. In Israel, as in many other countries, “the media, academia and public were overwhelmed by the vision of a modernizing and pro-Western monarchy being overthrown by a mass movement under the leadership of men whose image matched the most deeply entrenched Orientalist stereotypes” (Mirsepassi, 2000:17). As the revolution and its aftermath were perceived, in the words of one Israeli scholar, as “[presenting] a mirror image to the Shah’s creed” (Menashri, 2002:381), hence triggering a dramatic shift “from accelerated Westernization to a comprehensive and intensive Islamization” (Menashri, 1996:15), Israelis had reconstituted Iran as an Oriental space and, accordingly, as an unsafe zone for its Jews. As I will demonstrate, from this time on the Jewish state reverted to making sense of the condition of Iran’s Jews mainly in terms of the dichotomy of “destruction” (in Iran) and “redemption” (in Palestine), which was analogous to the Orientalist East-West divide upon which modern Jewish identity is founded.

Moreover, as this episode reveals, since the 1979 revolution the Jewish state has found it excruciatingly difficult to come to terms with both the continuous attachment of Iran’s Jews to their ancestral homeland—“despite the ... horrid and persistent anti-Jewish racist trait endemic in Iranian popular culture and even in Persian literature” (Dabashi, 2007:151)—and these Jews’ unmistakable disinclination to leave Iran for Israel in order to find a cure for the “abnormalities of

exile.”¹⁵ Indeed, contrary to Israeli expectations, when the revolution came about, the State of Israel was hardly in the minds of Iran’s Jews. Until 1979, the Jewish community in Iran numbered as many as 80,000 persons. During and after the revolution, only several thousand Jews (10,000–15,000 at most) migrated to Israel, while many tens of thousands chose to relocate to the countries of Euro-America.¹⁶ Significantly, many other Iranian Jews (roughly 30,000) chose to remain in Iran, with many identifying with the post-1979 Iranian state.¹⁷

To be sure, the identification of many Iranian Jews with the country of their birth did not waver, in spite of the 1979 revolution and the many hardships they have subsequently experienced. Anthropologist Mary Hegland (1983:218) reports, for example, that Jews in some Iranian towns had participated in anti-Shah protest marches and chanted revolutionary slogans in support of the resistance movement. According to other reports (e.g., Sanasarian, 2000:143), after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, Iranian Jews actively participated in the fighting and in certain cases even adopted the Shiite term “martyrdom” (*shahadat*) to honor their dead. Moreover, prominent members of the Iranian Jewish community repeatedly voiced their support for their government’s policy vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, calling on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.¹⁸ More recently, Maurice Mohtamed, the head of the Society of Iranian Jews and Iran’s sole Jewish PM, even asserted that Iran’s Jews fully endorsed their government’s nuclear policy (*Ma’ariv*, April 26, 2006). On the whole, however, Israeli observers—for whom Jewish-Muslim interactions could play out only in pogroms and persecutions, and for whom Jewish life in the Orient was totally unimaginable—adamantly refused to accept these Jews’ continued attachment to their ancestral homeland.

As Michel-Rolph Trouillot observes,

when reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse (1995:72).

Israeli observers reacted to the “anomaly” of continued Jewish life in and allegiance to the IRI in ways that confirmed this observation by Trouillot. Instead of questioning the truth of their ready-made assumptions, they forced these assumptions on reality. As a result, they perceived the Jews’ continued settlement in Iran and their expressions of support for the Iranian government as tactical, instrumental maneuvers which, not unlike the Shiite notion of *taqiya* (dissimulation), conveyed neither genuine intention nor genuine belief. An Israeli scholar of modern Iranian history thus asserted that the Jews who remained in Iran “*demonstratively* shifted their loyalty to the Islamic Republic” (Menashri, 1991:360; see also 2002:396), while another observer suggested that, in doing so, “the remaining [Jewish] survivors (*sh’erit ha-pleta*) [in Iran] attempted to save their skin

and prevent attacks against them” (Segev, 1981:193). Sadok (1991:421) noted in the same vein that Iran’s Jews were “new forced converts (*anusim*) ... seeking to save their skins and those of the [remaining] Jewish community.”¹⁹

This utter failure of Israelis to come to terms with choices made by Iranian Jews stemmed in no small part from an entrenched assumption that Judaism and Zionism were one and the same—that Zionism expressed both the *national* and *religious* desire of all Jews. This conflation of Zionism and Judaism prevented them from recognizing that identities are not at all uniform and homogeneous, and that Iranian Jews could very well be both *Jewish* and *Iranian* without necessarily ascribing to Zionism. This, no doubt, is reminiscent of the binary opposition between *Arabs* and *Jews* in Zionism alluded to above, a dichotomy that “denies the Arabness of Arab Jews, positing Arabness and Jewishness as irreconcilable opposites” (Shohat, 1999:6). Thus, in a discussion that took place in 1981 at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University, a historian of modern Iran admitted that he found it a “paradox” that Iranian Jews continued to practice their Judaism, while expressing so little interest, and sometimes even hostility, towards Zionism and the State of Israel. Among these Jews, he said, there was “a difference between their relation to Judaism and their relation to Zionism ... and I couldn’t explain this” (Menashri, cited in Netzer, 1981:37).²⁰ Incidentally, Iran’s Jews themselves refused to accept the Zionist equation of religion and national allegiance, as an Iranian Jewish leader, Ciamak Moresadeq, recently remarked: “If you think Judaism and Zionism are one, it is like thinking Islam and the Taliban are the same, and they are not” (cited in Cook, 2007).

A similar misapprehension of the multifarious and fractured nature of identities was also expressed in relation to Israelis of Iranian origin. A vivid example of this was provided in 1982 by *Ha’aretz* correspondent, David Oren. In an article bearing the suggestive title “Longing for a Lost Country,” Oren reported on a cultural event that took place in Bat Yam (a small coastal town adjacent to Tel Aviv), which was attended by some 500 Iranian immigrants (*olim*). Oren could not quite grasp why the participants “were all united in their longing for days bygone; for the days and nights in Teheran, Shiraz, Isfahan, Hamdan and Abadan before the ousting of the Shah....” When the lead singer performed songs on the Iranian homeland, some people in the crowd even “wiped their tears without shame.” “At first glance,” as Oren said, “the event reminded me of a group of exiles in a foreign land.” “I’m sorry, but I don’t understand this,” complained one of the waiters in the hall whom Oren cites in length:

I’ve seen meetings of the Organization of Iraqi Jews, the Organization of Bessarabian Jews, but this is something special. There, at least, there was the sense that they were Israelis. They spoke Hebrew They dealt with memories and nostalgia, but lived in the Israeli present. But look at these people! Pretty soon, they’ll get up and start to sing “by the waters of the

Yarkon [River], there we sat and wept when we remembered Iran" (Oren, 1982).

More recently, as the crisis between the West and Iran over its nuclear program escalated, Israelis listened with dismay to their compatriots of Iranian descent saying they feared an Israeli strike on their former homeland. "We may be Israelis, but we are still Iranians. I hope there are no air strikes," one such Iranian Israeli explained ("Iranian Israelis Worry," 2006).

Returning to 1979 and its aftermath, captivated by ideological certainties (rather than by individual contingencies), the Israeli Knesset contemplated taking action in 1979 to "rescue" Iran's Jews—or, in other words, occasioning their redemption in Israel against their will and volition. Thus, even though it was reported that the majority of Iranian Jews did not believe in "the possibility of being saved in Israel, [and] even placed their trust in Khomeini" (*Ma'ariv*, January 23, 1979), or that "abuses against [Jews] ... equaled abuses against other Iranian citizens" (Tsimooki, 1978), there was mounting official pressure to devise an "emergency plan" to "rescue" them: "we need an intensive emergency plan to extricate tens of thousands of Iranian Jews," as the daily *Davar* (November 7, 1978) pressed on. However, as noted above, most Iranian Jews refused to migrate to and settle in their historic homeland. Consequently, in January-February 1979, on the eve of Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran, two Israeli state officials were dispatched to Iran on a mission to induce the Jews to leave for Israel (*Ha'aretz*, January 9, 1979; February 20, 1979). The Jewish community in Iran received them with open arms but nevertheless asked them to report back to the Israeli government to, as it were, leave them alone (Segev, 1981:191–193; Shchori, 1979; Tsafir, 2002:79).²¹

By electing either to flee to Europe or America or to stay put in the IRI, Iran's Jews demonstrated their non- (and oftentimes even their anti-) Zionist credentials. The fury caused by their refusal to play out a pre-given role in a teleological national script was therefore nothing short of outrage.²² As the revolution was still unfolding in the streets of Iran, this fury quickly metamorphosed into phantasmatic analogies between Iran and Nazi Germany (which also have parallels in the anti-Arab rhetoric of Israel; see, e.g., Shlaim, 2001:214–215). These analogies, in addition to canceling out the specific "Oriental" viewpoints and experiences of Iranian Jews, were intended to bring the "deviant" behavior of Iran's Jews back within the scope of accepted discourse, as if they would suffer the same destruction as the Jews of Christian Europe if they remained in Iran. Jewish Agency Treasurer, Akiva Lenisky, could not put it more bluntly:

The words uttered today by Iran's Jews ... remind us of those German Jews who tried to calm themselves down on the eve of WWII.... Whoever examines the situation in Iran ... would immediately notice the writing on the wall. However, the same phenomenon repeats itself: a majority of

Iranian Jews trying to convince themselves that all this talk against Israel and Zionism has nothing to do with what is about to befall them (*Ha'aretz*, January 1, 1979).²³

Some observers even went so far as to make the untenable claim that "concentration camps were established for Jews in Iran" (*Hatsofeh*, January 26, 1979) and that revolutionary leaders demanded that "ghettos be established [for the Jews] in Iran's main cities" (*Ma'ariv*, January 23, 1979).

The myth that Iran is the new Nazi Germany, and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the new Hitler, has been endlessly recycled since a translating error was made of a speech Ahmadinejad delivered in 2005. Indeed, the Iranian president, while certainly neither subscribing to Zionism nor a fan of the Jewish state, had not uttered the words: "Israel must be wiped off the map."²⁴ Nonetheless, this erroneous translation has survived and prospered, mainly because Israel and her supporters have exploited it for their own crude propaganda purposes. Coupled with recent diminutions and/or denials of the Holocaust by regime leaders (Litvak, 2006; Menashri, 2005), this mistranslation has served to authorize the fiction that the IRI represented a "revolting return to Hitler's Germany" (MSN News, Israel, 2006). Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's opposition leader, had likewise told us: "It's 1938 and Iran is Germany" (cited in *Ha'aretz*, November 19, 2006) and he has been far from alone in the Israeli public sphere to make such extravagant claims.²⁵ These not only amount to a shameful and dangerous banalization of the Holocaust trauma, but also to an utter misrepresentation of the realities in which Iran's Jews find themselves. In the words of Jonathan Cook (2007):

There is an interesting problem with selling the "Iran as Nazi Germany" line. If Ahmadinejad really is Hitler, ready to commit genocide against Israel's Jews as soon as he can get his hands on a nuclear weapon, why are some 25,000 Jews living peacefully in Iran and more than reluctant to leave despite repeated enticements from Israel and American Jews?²⁶

And yet, Israelis of all political persuasions are still keen to silence the specific historical and cultural contexts in which Iran's Jews have been operating and to situate them outside the fold, that is to say, within the boundaries of the European "destruction" or *Shoah* narrative. A case in point is the backlash caused in the Israeli public sphere by a bogus report published in May 2006 in the Canadian *National Post*, asserting that, from now on, a new dress code, reminiscent of the one decreed by Nazi Germany, would require Iranian Jews to wear a yellow armband. Based on claims by Iranian expatriates living in Canada, the report was immediately proven false, and Iranian lawmakers, too, lost no time denying it. In Israel, however, no newspaper—with the notable exception of *Ha'aretz* (May 5, 2006)—and not a single expert was found to set the record straight in public. Instead, the fictitious report was immediately treated as an immutable fact of life and hence as

undisputable proof that “We are confronting a man [Ahmadinejad] who is the Hitler of the twenty-first century,” as Labor Party’s Offir Pinnes-Paz charged (cited in *Ma’ariv*, May 19, 2006).

It has always been difficult for the Jewish state to come to terms with the general reluctance of world Jewry to resettle in Israel. However, that Iran’s Jews continually refused to do so was, perhaps, most insulting of all. The reason for this, I think, has to do with the fact that the 1979 Iranian revolution was the first dramatic spectacle, since the mass migration of Middle Eastern Jews to Israel in the early 1950s, to seriously test Zionism’s ready-made categories and deeply held beliefs regarding the destinies of non-European Jews. The revolution brought about neither the destruction of these Jews (in Iran) nor their redemption (in Israel). Through their refusal to submit to the binary Zionist/Israeli script, the Jews of Iran opened up a third way of Jewish existence and in so doing totally confounded the most deeply held beliefs stemming from the concept of the “ingathering of exiles.”

Conclusion

But why should Iran’s Jews ever consider immigrating to Israel, if “in general, Israelis considered Iranians like dogs?” This provocative question was posed to *aliyah* emissary, Haim Sadok (1991:42) in the 1970s by a leading member of Tehran’s Jewish community. Indeed, it appears that the bulk of Iran’s Jews did not relocate to Israel, not simply because they were deeply rooted in Iran or lacked Zionist credentials, but also due to manifestations of discrimination, if not outright racism, which they experienced in Israel, whether in the early years of the State or after the 1979 revolution.

In a roundtable discussion on “Iranian Jewry today” held in 1981 at the Hebrew University’s Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Sarah Soroudi, the late Professor of Persian literatures, claimed that one of the main reasons for the dearth of Iranian migrants to Israel is that “Israeli society is different, and is not prepared to absorb—it does not assist in the absorption of people of other cultures” (cited in Netzer, 1981:35–36). Soroudi obviously understated the case. Many of Iran’s Jews today probably heard of, or personally experienced, the disappointment, frustration and bitterness that were an integral part of the experiences of Iranian Jews in Israel. “The jokes about the stinginess of Iranian Jews,” as one observer noted in the early 1980s, “offend them deeply ... and the condescending and critical attitude of the Israeli public towards them gives rise to profound disappointment. The calls behind their backs, ‘Khomeini, Khomeini—barbarians,’ provoke their fury” (Oren, 1982; see also Alon, 1980). Little wonder that the “dropout” (*neshirah*) rate among Iranian Jews who initially fled Iran in the course of the revolution and immediately thereafter reached 80%, meaning that out of 30,000 Jews, only 6,000 came to Israel; “the rest went after ‘the fleshpot’ [in Euro-America]” (Alon, 1980).

The elders of Iran's Jews may also remember the strict "selection" policy applied by the State of Israel towards candidates for immigration in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Under this policy, immigration envoys operating in Iran were instructed to select the "productive elements" among the Jews—the healthy, the wealthy, the professionals and the strong—and to try to weed out those candidates among Iran's Jews who were considered "social cases." "In other words, it was a decision to apply the Law of Return selectively," to borrow from Yehouda Shenhav's account (2006:112) of the comparable criteria of "selection" that were implemented at about the same time with respect to Iraq's Jews.²⁷

It should be noted that candidates for immigration among Iran's Jews before 1979 would have been able to make out what kind of treatment they were likely to receive in Israel simply by listening closely to what Israeli immigration envoys actually had to tell them. Haim Sadok, for example, recounts how he handled charges issuing from Iranian Jews that their reluctance to immigrate to Israel stemmed from "discriminatory attitudes" by Israelis. In response to these charge, Sadok embarked on a blazing defense of the "melting pot" doctrine:

We must distinguish between the Jews of Iran and the Jews of Europe.... There was a break of thousands of years, just as there was with the Jews of Yemen and others. What distinguishes between you and the Gentiles of this land is but 10%. They say "Mohammad" and you say "Musa," but in all other aspects there is hardly any difference. And then you climb aboard a plane, land at [Israel's international] airport, and find that what unites you to other Jews is but 10%. Both of you are linked through Musa, but divided in all other things, and much time and good will is needed to reverse the pyramid and create one nation. This can be accomplished through the army, the schools, the learning of the Hebrew language, which unites all, and much, much more (Sadok, 1991:310–312).

Although Zionist-Israeli representations of the Mizrahim are multifarious, in the end, Sadok restrains Iran's Jews to a rigid colonial discourse. This discourse, like the corresponding one on Arab Jews, "assigns Europeans the role of adults who have attained development after having endured a difficult childhood, and who are now in a position to 'help' third world children reach European-style civilization, the set telos of the maturation process" (Massad, 1996:57). Indeed, this was part of the civilizing project of the Jewish state: to make the Iranian immigrant into a European—"to create one nation," a European nation. And this, after all, "is not easy, it takes time," as Sadok (1991:310) further comforted his detractors among Iran's Jews.

According to William Safran,

Some diasporas persist—and their members do not go "home"—because there is not homeland to which to return; because, although a homeland may

exist, it is not a welcoming place with which they can identify politically, ideologically, or socially; or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora (1991:91).

As we have seen, all the reasons for the reluctance of Iran's Jews to go on *aliyah* to Israel, their purported homeland, are conveniently encapsulated in this excerpt by Safran. That is to say, Israel simply has not been a welcoming place to them politically, ideologically or socially.²⁸

Yet this is an incomplete description of the relationship between Iran's Jews and Israel since the 1979 revolution. For, despite Iranian-Israeli animosities, and despite everything else, Iran's Jews have been known to maintain intimate contacts with relatives and friends in Israel (and vice versa) thanks to a to-and-fro, via Istanbul, which is made possible with the silent blessing of the Iranian authorities (Bradenstein, 2006). In cases where travel is not possible, telephones and the Internet have been used routinely to reduce distance and to facilitate two-way traffic between Iranian Jews in both states. These circumstances confirm that there is no straightforward, center-periphery relationship between Israel and its Iranian "diaspora," and that we would therefore be better off speaking about Iranian Jewry in terms of what James Clifford calls a "multi-locale diaspora," that is, a diaspora not "defined by a specific geo-political boundary" (1994:304).

Clifford further contends that "the history of Jewish diaspora shows selective accommodation with the political, cultural, commercial, and everyday life forms of 'host' societies" (1994:308). However, as this study has shown, when dealing with the Jews of Iran, it is perhaps more appropriate to reverse this formulation and to argue, rather, that their history "shows selective accommodation" not with Iran, the "host" society, but with the state of Israel; "I'm an Iranian first and a Jew second," as Mohtamed recently claimed (cited in Tait, 2006); and when his predecessor, Manochehr Eliasi, was asked why he won't leave Iran, he reportedly burst into tears saying: "This is my birthplace, I love its smell" (Greenberger, 2006).

As we have seen, Israelis in various capacities have not been able to ignore the profound attachment of these Jews to their country of birth, even if they found it very difficult to assimilate. This article thus demonstrates that it is not enough to explore what sorts of Jewish life Zionism and the state of Israel are likely to negate, deny and dispossess, but also what sorts of Jewish life they are likely to confirm, where and under which conditions. These latter, *flipside* dimensions of "negation of exile," which have been conspicuously absent in critical analyses, are essential for unraveling the contingent and unstable nature of this concept when applied in different temporal and spatial contexts.

Indeed, if pre- and post-1979 Iran is any indication, then this concept could mean different things to different people at different times. It could sometimes be imagined as "the East" and sometimes as the "the West," sometimes as "exile" and sometimes as "homeland," and still at other times as all of these things. In each instance, Zionism and the state of Israel have come to accept and/or deny the

possibility of Jewish life in Iran, depending on where the dividing lines between East and West were drawn at particular junctures. In other words, the ways in which Iran was said to overlap with or digress from an exilic space are themselves historical. Examining Zionist consciousness solely in terms of what, how, why and whom it negates or denies or dispossesses would therefore miss on a variety of its inclusive manifestations.

To understand something historically “is to be aware of its complexity ... to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambiguities, including moral ambiguities, of protagonists, motives and behavior” (Novick, 1999:3–4). The liquidation of many Jewish communities in the Arab Middle East and their transfer to Israel after 1948 has brought about the reduction of their histories into a single heroic moment (and an essence) of Zionist redemption. By contrast, the history of Iran’s Jews remains open-ended and unfinished, as it were. This history therefore turns the spotlight to a unique Jewish “diaspora” in the Middle East who refuses to abide by the teleological master-narrative of Jewish nationalism. Consequently, this history can serve as a model for unpacking the silences remaining in the histories of the Jews of Islam.

NOTES

¹ Indeed, this is another instance of how “post-colonial studies—a once provocative and illuminating new way to approach problems in their fields—has become staid or inert so that it now requires, in its turn, a revivifying influx from those intellectual quarters that once benefited from its paradigm-shifting energies” (Loomba et al., 2005:5).

² Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s more recent anti-Israeli rhetoric and his relentless campaign of Holocaust denials have heightened these concerns.

³ For similar views expressed by Zionist travelers and emissaries in Iran, see Braver (1944), HaCohen (1970:44–51) and Yishai (1950:87).

⁴ See, e.g., a collection of essays penned by Israel’s leading authorities on Iranian Jewry and published by Israel’s Ministry of Education (together with the Ben Zvi Institute) in Sa’adun (2006).

⁵ For a helpful discussion of the historiographical implications of this conception, see the “Introduction” in Beinun (1998) and see Shenhav (2006:153–155).

⁶ The most notable Israeli scholar of “Judeo-Persian literatures” is the Israel Prize winner Shaul Shaked. See, e.g., Shaked (1982); see also Netzer (1996) and Yeroushalmi (1995).

⁷ Yehouda Shenhav likewise demonstrated how the neo-lachrymose conception “was promoted by Zionist propaganda to prove that Zionism, far from causing the

rift in Jewish-Muslim relations, spared the Jews of the Arab countries a bitter fate, had they remained there" (2006:154).

⁸ Many more excerpts of this kind may be cited, but I will spare readers the gory details. See, e.g., Mizrahi (1959:131–161), Netzer (1980a, 1980b, 1990) and Pardo (2007).

⁹ This double narrative movement of the Zionist/Israeli gaze—which pulls in two opposite directions—is reminiscent of the ambivalences and contradictions inherent in colonial texts, as demonstrated by scholarship building on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978); see, e.g., the illuminating essays in Cooper and Stoler (1997).

¹⁰ As Nikki R. Keddie observes, "Western nationalist and racist theories provided a model for Iran's nationalists [beginning in the nineteenth century], especially since, because Persian is a language in the Indo-European or 'Aryan' family, nationalists could adopt widespread Western racial theories saying that 'Aryans' were superior to others" (2002:8).

¹¹ The last Shah therefore asserted:

Certainly no one can doubt that our culture is more akin to that of the West than is either the Chinese or that of our neighbours the Arabs. Iran was an early home of the Aryans from whom most Americans and Europeans are descended, and we are racially quite separate from the Semitic stock of the Arabs. Our language belongs to the Indo-European family which includes English, French, German and other major Western tongues (cited in Pahlavi, 1974:18).

¹² Relating his experiences in Iran under the Shah regime, an Israeli immigration envoy, Haim Sadok, thus noted with unabashed delight on the proliferation of "the miniskirt model" among Iranian women, which he saw as clear indication that they "did not lag behind the Israelis and the Europeans" (1991:15).

¹³ I borrow this phrase from Lisa Wedeen's analysis (in Wedeen, 1999:67–86) of the "politics of 'as if'" in Syria under the rule of Hafez al-Asad.

¹⁴ "At present," Herzl wrote in his diaries, "I am not recognized as a German. That will come soon, once we are over there" (cited in Rose, 2005:110).

¹⁵ Not that this failure to come to grips with the general disinterest of Middle Eastern Jews in Israel is in any way confined to Iran. For example, in the wake of the war on Iraq in 2003, a similar attempt was made to encourage the immigration (*aliyah*) of the "saving remnant" of Iraqi Jews, thirty four childless elderly individuals. Much to their dismay, however, Israeli authorities found themselves contending with two difficulties, similar in kind to those they encountered with Iranian Jewry since 1979: first, that there was, in fact, as *Ha'aretz* (April 20, 2003) reported, no "existential danger" to the lives and property of Iraqi Jews; and second, that these Jews "indicated that ... [they] did not wish to immigrate to Israel." It was in relation to this episode that *Ha'aretz* commentator Benni Ziffer (2003) noted with

irony on “the automatic reflex of the Jewish Agency to see every Jew as a potential immigrant to Israel, even if he does not want to come to Israel, and feels fine where he is, and, should he decide to leave, it would rather be to London.”

¹⁶As Maurice Mohtamed, the head of the Society of Iranian Jews and Iran’s sole Jewish PM, admitted in reply to the latest Israeli plan to lure Iranian Jews to Israel through financial incentives, “Iran’s Jews have always been free to emigrate and three quarters of them did so after the revolution, but 70% of those went to America, not Israel” (cited in Tait, 2007).

¹⁷These statistics are available in Sanasarian (2000:48). However, estimates of the number of Jews who remained in Iran after 1979 vary from 13,000 (as claimed by the U.S. State Department’s 2005 International Religious Freedom Report) to 25,000–30,000 (claimed by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, a non-profit group based in New Haven, Connecticut).

¹⁸“Israel must cease its aggressions against the Palestinians and grant them their rights,” as Maurice Mohtamed declared in 2001 (cited in *Al-Hayat*, April 28, 2001).

¹⁹Ronen Bergman reaches similar conclusions, saying that Iran’s Jews began demonstrating their support for the revolutionary forces only after they were told by Ayatollah Taleqani, a key figure in the Islamicist movement, that if they would do so “no harm will befall them” (Bergman, 2007:89). Bergman also insists, despite ample evidence to the contrary, that “the majority of Iranian Jews [today] live in constant fear as to what the future holds” (2007:96). Likewise, Amnon Netzer claimed that it was primarily the anti-Jewish activity by “radical circles” beginning in mid-summer of 1978 that prompted Iranian Jews to demonstrate their support for the unfolding revolution in a more candid manner. However, to the best of my knowledge, Netzer was the first Israeli scholar to admit, however begrudgingly, that “while the Shah was still sitting on the throne, thousands of Jews took to the streets of Tehran in organized groups and joined the multitudes of Muslim demonstrators, holding placards against the regime and shouting slogans in condemnation of the Shah” (Netzer, 1980c:47).

²⁰Ironically, while in many of his studies, Menashri protests the conflation of Zionism and Judaism in the anti-Israeli discourse of the Iranian regime (see, e.g., Menashri, 1988:194; 1999:102), his commentary on Iranian Jews only works to reinforce that conflation.

²¹Ronen Bergman (2007:85–96) reveals that the Mosad was also involved in plans to “rescue” Iran’s Jews.

²²To the best of my knowledge it was, again, Amnon Netzer who provided the only carefully studied—and calm—examination of anti-Zionist Jewish currents in Iran during and immediately after the 1979 revolution (e.g., Netzer, 1981:21–26).

²³And as another commentator complained: “The apathy of Iranian Jewry, even after the volcano has erupted ... is unintelligible to any Israeli who continually lives the lessons of the [Jews’] complacency on the eve of the Holocaust” (“Lessons from

Khomeini's Revolution," 1979). Arieh Beckenstein, manager of El-Al Airlines offices in Teheran during the revolution, reportedly warned his superiors in Tel Aviv, "We may miss the train, as we did in Europe; for the wise, this hint should suffice" (*Ha'aretz*, January 1, 1979).

²⁴ Various experts (see, e.g., Cole, 2006; Norouzi, 2007a, 2007b) have amply demonstrated that the Iranian president, far from threatening to destroy Israel, was quoting an earlier speech by the late Ayatollah Khomeini in which he reassured supporters of the Palestinians that "the Zionist regime in Jerusalem" would "vanish from the page of time." He was not threatening to exterminate Jews or even Israel. Rather, he was comparing Israel's occupation of the Palestinians with other illegitimate systems of rule whose time had passed, including apartheid South Africa, the Soviet empire and the Shahs who once ruled Iran.

²⁵ Jonathan Cook (2007) has collected a number of such claims in the Israeli public sphere, including the one made by Israel's new president, Shimon Peres, who compared an Iranian nuclear bomb to a "flying concentration camp."

²⁶ Maurice Mohtamed himself has argued as much, asserting that Iran's Jews, even in their worst days, never suffered as much as they did in Europe; "anti-Semitism," he explained, "is not an eastern phenomenon, it's not an Islamic or Iranian phenomenon—anti-Semitism is a European phenomenon" (cited in Harrison, 2006).

²⁷ Israel's run-of-the-mill historiography generally makes no mention of the selection criteria enforced on Iran's Jews. However, these criteria have been dealt with in other, more popular literary genres. For example, in his memoirs of his 25-year sojourn in Iran in different capacities, Ya'akov Nimrodi says that

after many years of bringing in hundreds of thousands of immigrants ... the country's leaders began to apply pressure on the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency to thin out the waves of immigrants arriving through Iran and prefer the healthy young ones and the skilled workers over the elderly and the unskilled, who became a burden on the absorbing society. This selection ... was a policy decided upon by the uppermost echelons in Israel, in response to the force of realities (2003:150–151).

Esther Kanka-Shekalim (1988:101) also mentioned the policy of "selective aliyah" implemented in Iran, although only haphazardly. Yonah Cohen, who describes his years as an emissary to Iran in the early 1950s, claims that the selection policy was "a death blow to aliyah" from Iran (1987:195).

²⁸ For a similar conception of the relationship between "diaspora" and "homeland," see Shuval (2000:47).

REFERENCES

- Alon, Gideon. (1980). "Was it better under Khomeini?" *Ha'aretz*, April 4.
- Beinin, Joel. (1998). *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Bergman, Ronen. (2007). *Point of No Return: Israeli Intelligence against Iran and Hizballah*. Or Yehuda: Kineret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir (Hebrew).
- Boyarin, Daniel. (2004). "The colonial masqued ball: Zionism, gender, mimicry." In Yehouda Shenhav (ed.), *Coloniality and the Postcolonial Condition: Implications for Israeli Society* (pp. 358–386). Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad (Hebrew).
- Bradenstein, Eli. (2006). "Vacation in the Iranian homeland." *NRG (Ma'ariv)*, May 5. <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/171/221.html> (Hebrew).
- . (2007). "Israel to Iranian Jews: Immigration at any price." *Ma'ariv*, July 8 (Hebrew).
- Braver, Avraham. (1944). *The Dust of the Road*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved (Hebrew).
- Clifford, James. (1994). "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9,3:302–338.
- Cohen, Avraham. (1982a). "'Maktab': The Jewish 'Heder' in Persia." *Pe'amim* 14:57–76 (Hebrew).
- . (1982b). "Substantive changes in Jewish education in Persia." In Amnon Netzer (ed.), *The Jews of Iran: Their Past, Legacy and Connection to the Land of Israel* (pp. 68–76). Tel Aviv: Beit Koresh (Hebrew).
- Cohen, Mark. (1991). "The neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history." *Tikkun* 6,3:55–60.
- Cohen, Yonah. (1987). *Toward the Forgotten Million: Aliyah Mission in Syria and Iran*. Jerusalem: Kana (Hebrew).
- Cole, Juan I. (2006). "Informed comment." May 3. <http://www.juancole.com/2006/05/hitchens-hacker-and-hitchens.html>.
- Cook, Jonathan. (2007). "Israel's Jewish problem in Tehran." *The Electronic Intifada*, August 6. <http://electronicintifada.net:80/v2/article7147.shtml>.
- Cooper, Fredrick, and Stoler, Ann Laura (eds.). (1997). *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Dabashi, Hamid. (2007). *Iran: A People Interrupted*. New York and London: The Free Press.
- Diamond, Stanley. (1974). *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Ezri, Meir. (2001). "Anyone of His People Among You": *Mission in Iran*. Or Yehuda: Hed Artzi (Hebrew).

- Gabay, Shefi. (1971). "Immigration from Iran is young and affluent." *Davar*, June 3.
- Goldberg, B. Z. (1959). "The ghetto in Tehran." *Ha'aretz*, November 20.
- Goldberg, Harvey E., and Baram, Chen. (Forthoming). "Sepharadi/Mizrahi/Arab-Jews: Reflections on critical sociology and the study of Middle Eastern Jewries within the context of Israeli society." *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*.
- Goldstein, Judith L. (1985). "Iranian ethnicity in Israel: The performance of identity." In Alex Weingrod (ed.), *Israeli Ethnicity: After the Ingathering* (pp. 237–257). New York: Gordon and Breach.
- Greenberger, Robert S. (2006). "How Jewish-friendly Persia became anti-Semitic Iran," *Moment*, December 14.
<http://www.momentmag.com/Exclusive/2006/2006-12/200612-IranFeature.html>.
- HaCohen, Raphael Haim. (1970). *Stones in the Wall*. Jerusalem: Self-publication (Hebrew).
- Harrison, Frances. (2006). "Iran's proud but discreet Jews." *BBC News*, September 22. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5367892.stm.
- Hegland, Mary. (1983). "Two images of Husain: Accommodation and revolution in an Iranian village." In Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution* (pp. 218–235). New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Kanka-Shekalim, Esther. (1988). "Operation Cyrus: The massive immigration of Iranian Jews at the time of the establishment of the state and their settlement in the country." In Amnon Netzer (ed.), *The Jews of Iran: Their Past, Legacy and Connection to the Land of Israel* (pp. 98–104). Tel Aviv: Beit Koresh (Hebrew).
- Keddie, Nikki R. (2002). "Introduction." In Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (eds.), *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (pp. 3–11). Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Kimmerling, Baruch. (2004). *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives: The Israeli State and Society Between Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Wars*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved (Hebrew).
- Klug, Brian. (2007). "The state of Zionism." *The Nation*, June 18. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070618/klug>.
- "Lessons from Khomeini's revolution." (1979). *Davar*, February 16.
- Litvak, Meir. (2006). "What is behind Iran's advocacy of Holocaust denials?" *Iran Pulse: Updates & Overviews on Iranian Current Affairs* 3, September 11.
- Loomba, Ania, Kaul, Suvir, Bunzl, Matti, Burton, Antoinette, and Asty, Jed. (2005). "Beyond what? An introduction." In *idem.* (eds.), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (pp. 1–38). Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Massad, Joseph. (1996). "Zionism's internal others: Israel and the Oriental Jews." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25,4 (Summer):53–68.
- McClintock, Anne. (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.

- Melman, Yossi. (2007). "Iranian Jews blast offer of cash for immigrating to Israel." *Ha'aretz*, July 15.
- Menashri, David. (1988). *Iran in Revolution*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad (Hebrew).
- . (1991). "The Jews of Iran: Between the Shah and Khomeini." In Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (eds.), *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis* (pp. 353–371). New York and London: New York University Press.
- . (1996). *Iran: Between Islam and the West*. Tel Aviv: Defense Ministry Publications (Hebrew).
- . (1999). *Iran after Khomeini: Revolutionary Ideology versus National Interests*. Tel Aviv: Tami Shteimetz Center, Tel Aviv University (Hebrew).
- . (2002). "The Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic revolution." In Houman Sarshar (ed.), *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews* (pp. 379–402). Beverly Hills, CA: The Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History.
- . (2005). "What lies behind Ahmadi-Nejad's hate speech?" *Tel Aviv University Notes* 155, December 21.
- Mirsepasi, Ali. (2000). *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mizrahi, Hanania. (1959). *The Jews of Persia*. Tel Aviv: Dvir (Hebrew).
- MSN News, Israel. (2006). May 20. <http://business.msn.co.il/news/StatePoliticalMilitary/State/200605/20060519215713.htm> (Hebrew).
- Netzer, Amnon. (1979a). "Problems in the cultural, social and political integration of the Jews of Iran." *Gesher*:69–83 (Hebrew).
- . (1979b). "Zionist activity in Iran: From the Balfour Declaration to the San Remo Conference." *Pe'amim* 2 (Summer):23–31 (Hebrew).
- . (1980a). "The Jewish community in Tehran from its beginnings to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906." *Shevet va-'Am*:256–258 (Hebrew).
- . (1980b). "The Jews of Iran, Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Gesher* 100:45–57 (Hebrew).
- . (1980c). "Persecutions and conversions in the history of the Jews in Iran in the 17th century." *Pe'amim* 6:33–56 (Hebrew).
- . (1981). *Iranian Jews in Our Time*. Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Judaism (Hebrew).
- . (1983). "Periods and stages in the Jews' conditions and Zionist activity in Iran." *Yahadut Zemanenu* 1:139–162 (Hebrew).
- . (1988). "The Jewish community in Iran." In Amnon Netzer (ed.), *Jews of Iran: Their Past, Legacy and Connection to the Land of Israel* (pp. 3–20). Tel Aviv: Beit Koresh (Hebrew).
- . (1990). "The history of the forced converts of Mashad according to Yaakov Daylamgan." *Pe'amim* 42:127–156 (Hebrew).

- . (1996). "Persian Jewry and literature: A sociocultural view." In Harvey E. Goldberg (ed.), *Sepharadi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era* (pp. 240–255). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nimrodi, Ya'akov. (2003). *A Life Journey*. Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv (Hebrew).
- Noi, Dov (ed.). (1966). *Tales Told by the Jews of Persia*. Jerusalem: Merkaz Press (Hebrew).
- Norouzi, Arash. (2007a). "Caught red-handed: Media backtracks on Iran's anti-Israel 'threat'." *The Mosaddegh Project*. <http://www.mohammadmosaddegh.com/news/caught-red-handed/>.
- . (2007b). "'Wiped off the map': Rumor of the century." *The Mosaddegh Project*. <http://www.mohammadmosaddegh.com/news/rumor-of-the-century/>.
- Novick, Peter. (1999). *The Holocaust in American Life*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Oren, David. (1982). "Longing for a lost country." *Ha'aretz*, April 9.
- Pahlavi, Muhammad Reza Shah. (1974). *Mission for My Country*. London: Hutchinson.
- Pardo, Eldad J. (2007). "Race and the nuclear race: Anti-Semitism in Iran." *Geo-Political Strategy* 1:69–91.
- Ram, Haggai. (2000). "The immemorial Iranian nation: School textbooks and historical memory in post-revolutionary Iran." *Nations and Nationalism* 6:67–90.
- . (2006). *Reading Iran in Israel: The Self and the Other, Religion and Modernity*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad (Hebrew).
- . (2008). "To banish the 'Levantine dunghill' from within: Toward a cultural understanding of Israeli anti-Iran phobias." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. 40: 249–268.
- Raz-Krakovitz, Amnon. (1993). "Exile within sovereignty: Toward a critique of the 'negation of exile' in Israeli culture" (part 1). *Teoria u-Vikoret* 4:23–56 (Hebrew).
- . (1994). "Exile within sovereignty: Toward a critique of the 'negation of exile' in Israeli culture" (part 2). *Teoria u-Vikoret* 5:113–132 (Hebrew).
- . (1998). "A few comments on Orientalism, Jewish studies and Israeli society." *Jama'a* 3:34–57 (Hebrew).
- . (2005). "The Zionist return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish perspective." In Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (eds.), *Orientalism and the Jews* (pp. 162–181). Brandeis: Brandeis University Press.
- . (2007). *Exil et souveraineté: Judaïsme, sionisme et pensée binationale [Exile and Sovereignty: Judaism, Zionism and Bi-national Thought]*, préface de Carlo Ginzburg. Paris: La Fabrique.
- Rose, Jacqueline. (2005). *The Question of Zion*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

- Sa'adun, Haim (ed.). (2006). *Iran: Jewish Communities in the East in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education and the Ben Zvi Institute (Hebrew).
- Sadok, Haim. (1991). *The Jews in Iran During the Shah Pahlavi Era*. Tel Aviv: Meitsag (Hebrew).
- Safran, William. (1991). "Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return." *Diaspora* 1,1:83–99.
- Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Sanasarian, Eliz. (2000). *Religious Minorities in Iran*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Segev, Shmuel. (1981). *The Iranian Triangle: The Secret Relations between Israel-Iran-USA*. Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv (Hebrew).
- Selzer, Michael. (1967). *The Aryanization of the Jewish State*. New York: Black Star.
- Shaked, Shaul (ed.). (1982). *Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages*. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute.
- Shchori, Ilan. (1979). "The last days of a Jewish Agency emissary." *Ha'aretz*, February 23.
- Shenhav, Yehouda. (2006). *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Shlaim, Avi. (2001). *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. New York and London: Norton.
- Shohat, Ella. (1988). "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish victims." *Social Text* 19,10 (Fall):1–35.
- . (1999). "The invention of the Mizrahim." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29 (Autumn):5–20.
- Shuval, Judith T. (2000). "Diaspora migration: Definitional ambiguities and a theoretical paradigm." *International Migration* 38,5:41–57.
- Tait, Robert. (2006). "Iran's Jews learn to live with Ahmadinejad." *Guardian*, June 27. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/iran/story/0,,1807160,00.html>.
- . (2007). "Iran's Jews reject cash offer to move to Israel." *Guardian*, July 12. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/iran/story/0,,2125155,00.html>.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Tsafrir, Eliezer (Geizi). (2002). *Big Satan, Small Satan: Revolution and Escape in Iran*. Or Yehuda: Ma'ariv (Hebrew).
- Tsimooki, Tova. (1978). "Will they come to Israel?" *Davar*, December 20.
- Ziffer, Benni. (2003). "They don't want Israel." *Ha'aretz*, June 27.
- Vaziri, Mostafa. (1993). *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity*. New York: Paragon House.
- Viswanathan, Gauri. (1998). *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Wedeen, Lisa. (1999). *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weingrod, Alex. (1979). "Recent trends in Israeli ethnicity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2 (January):55–65.
- Yeroushalmi, David. (1995) *The Judeo-Persian Poet 'Emrani and His Book of Treasure*. Leiden: Brill.
- . (2003). "Judeo-Persian literature." In Houman Sarshar (ed.), *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews* (pp. 5–93). Beverly Hills: The Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History.
- Yishai, Moshe. (1950). *Delegate Without a Title*. Jerusalem: Teberski (Hebrew).
- Zerubavel, Yael. (1995). *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Contributors

Israel. Her Ph.D. dissertation focused on gender representations in Iranian popular culture and printed press during the 1960s and 1970s. Her current research focuses on the use of modern communication technologies in Iran.

liora1000@gmail.com

Yair Huri is a lecturer in the Department of Middle East Studies at Ben Gurion University of the Negev and the head of the Program of Arabic Language and Culture. He has authored numerous scholarly articles on modern Arabic poetry and Arab literary criticism. His monograph, *The Poetry of Sa'di Yūsuf: Between Homeland and Exile* (Sussex Academic Press, 2006), is a comprehensive study of the literary works of Iraq's foremost living poet.

yairhuri@bgu.ac.il

Julia Lerner is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ben Gurion University. Her research interests lie in the fields of anthropology of knowledge and sociology of migration. She combines these fields studying both the cultural change in post-Soviet Russia and the Russian speaking collective in Israel. She also directs the study group of Russian-speaking and Israeli Palestinian researchers at Van Leer Jerusalem Institute.

julial@vanleer.org.il

Claudia Liebelt has submitted her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology to the University of Halle, Germany ("Caring for the 'Holy Land': Transnational Filipina domestic workers in the Israeli migration regime"). She is currently a research assistant in a comparative project on sociality, caring and the religious imagination in the Filipina diaspora (School of Social Relations, Keele University, UK). Her research interests are in urban anthropology, gender and migration. She has published articles on Filipino migration and Israel.

claulie@gmx.net

Haggai Ram is a senior lecturer in the Department of Middle East Studies at Ben Gurion University. He teaches and writes about secularism, religion, colonialism and popular culture in the modern Middle East, with particular emphasis on Iran and Israel. His latest book, *Iranophobia: The Cultural Logics of an Israeli Obsession*, is due for publication by Stanford University Press.

hram@bgu.ac.il