

EXPLORING PUSH-PULL FACTORS AFFECTING IRANIAN JEWS' EMIGRATION TO PALESTINE, 1925-1954

A Social History Approach

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Abstract

One of the controversial issues in the twentieth century was the mass immigration of Jews around the world to Palestine/Israel. For the majority of Jews who immigrated from Europe to Palestine/Israel, immigration represented an ideological paradigm constituted by two significant factors, namely race/religion and land. However, for the large proportion of Jews coming from eastern territories, such as Iranian Jews, immigration was mainly a phenomenon affected by conflicts between socio-economic conditions in their countries of origin and those in the destination. The purpose of this study is to investigate the emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine by relying on a pull-push framework. The study argues that socio-economic turmoil in Iran and the unfavourable economic conditions affecting Jews, along with discrimination against them, were the push factors in their country of origin. Meanwhile, the pull factors in the destination were Palestine's economic attractiveness, Jews' need for an increasing Jewish population in Palestine to deal with Arab nations' sanctions, and the importance of employing an incoming workforce to handle the country's domestic problems in terms of economy, agriculture, and materials management in the first six years after the establishment of the Israel state.

[Salah satu isu kontroversial di abad kedua puluh adalah imigrasi massal orang-orang Yahudi di seluruh dunia ke Palestina/Israel. Bagi mayoritas orang Yahudi yang berimigrasi dari Eropa ke Palestina/Israel, imigrasi mewakili paradigma ideologis yang dibentuk oleh dua faktor penting, yaitu

ras/agama dan tanah. Namun, bagi sebagian besar orang Yahudi yang datang dari wilayah timur, seperti orang Yahudi Iran, imigrasi terutama merupakan fenomena yang dipengaruhi oleh kesenjangan antara kondisi sosial ekonomi di negara asal dan negara tujuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui emigrasi Yahudi Iran ke Palestina berdasarkan faktor-faktor pendorong-penariknya. Penulis berpendapat bahwa gejala sosial-ekonomi di Iran dan kondisi ekonomi yang tidak menguntungkan orang-orang Yahudi, serta diskriminasi terhadap mereka, merupakan faktor pendorong di negara asal mereka. Sementara itu, faktor penarik dari destinasinya adalah daya tarik ekonomi Israel, kebutuhan masyarakat Yahudi akan peningkatan populasi Yahudi di Israel untuk menghadapi sanksi negara-negara Arab, dan pentingnya menambah tenaga kerja baru untuk menangani permasalahan domestik negara tersebut dari segi perekonomian, pertanian, dan pengelolaan material dalam enam tahun pertama setelah berdirinya negara Israel.]

Keywords: migration, Jews, Palestine, Israel, workforce, Iran.

A. Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, Iran began to experience a period of political, economic, and social turmoil. Increasing relations with Europe, which were regulated by colonialism or at least some forms of it, gradually transformed the Iranian economy. Before that, the Iranian economy was traditionally governed by agriculture, husbandry, and limited foreign trade. After the European intervention, however, the country's economy became dependent on exporting raw materials instead of artefacts. However, this transition led to increased unemployment and economic/financial loss for small and medium-sized trades and businesses.

As a result of the weakness of the central government and the lack of a nationwide supervision system, particularly after the assassination of Naser al-Din Shah, Iranian society experienced a state of chaos that persisted until Reza Shah assumed power. The tumult heavily affected the material/spiritual aspects of life for minorities, including Jews, across Iran. Meanwhile, the Israeli state, which was founded in 1948 based on the long-lasting idea of the "Promised Land", encountered numerous economic problems that were intensified by its hostile relations with its neighbouring Arab nations and the limited workforce it had to manage its economic plan in the first six years after Israel state establishment.

Although the process of migration to Palestine/Israel had been

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine directed by the Jewish Agency years before the establishment of Israel as a state, the migration flow was organized after the state was established and the Ministry of Immigration was founded (which was afterwards called the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration). Although the population of Jews was estimated to be 800,000 as of 1948, the population showed an annual growth rate of 18% from 1938 to 1952.¹ For this reason, many Iranian Jews found themselves in a conflicting situation; in their countries of origin, they faced a chaotic social and economic status, while the destination advertised a land where they could enjoy better opportunities and life conditions.

There is no independent study published in English or Persian to have explored the emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine/Israel through a statistics-based approach within a pull-push framework. Most of the studies have focused on cultural issues related to the Iranian Jewish community in Israel and the conflicts arising from such issues. Cecolin comparatively investigated Iranian Jews' two waves of emigration to Israel, exploring how they managed to adjust themselves to mainstream Israeli society.² In another study, Cecolin explains how Iranian Jewish Aliyah in 1951 was subject to a selection process, which brought about socio-cultural divisions even among Jews.³ The study observes how active Zionist organizations in Iran selected applicants for emigration to Israel based on political, cultural, and economic factors.

Investigating Jewish histories of twentieth-century Iran, Sternfeld focused on the identity and culture associated with Jewish communities in Iran (including Iraqi Jews) from 1941 to the 1980s and looked at Iranian Jews' emigration to Israel in a chapter.⁴ Tannenbaum explored the language and identity of Iranian immigrants in Israel, addressing issues concerned with acculturation among three generations of Iranians in

¹ Iris Geva-May and James W. Dean, "Absorption of Immigrants to Israel: On Remedies for Market and Policy Myopia", *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1998), p. 697.

² Alessandra Cecolin, *Iranian Jews in Israel: Between Persian Cultural Identity and Israeli Nationalism* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018).

³ Alessandra Cecolin, "Iranian Jewish Aliyah in 1951: An Historical Analysis of Iranian Jewish Emigration to Israel", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, vol. 18, no. 3, (2018), pp. 221-36.

⁴ Lior B. Sternfeld, *Between Iran and Zion, Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran* (California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

Israel.⁵ In Iran, only two relevant studies are focusing on this topic. In *The Role of England in Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine: A Case Study of 1922*, Behboudi concentrated on a set of factors (e.g., the British government and Jewish newspapers published in Iran) that had a role in the emigration of a limited number of Jews to Israel.⁶ Similarly, Ali Esfahani and Allahyari Beig explored various factors affecting the emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine, including Zionist organizations, foreign governments, and Reza Shah's policies.⁷

The present study investigates the emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine/Israel by using a pull-push framework. More specifically, it addresses the emigration of Iranian Jews as a historical issue by inspecting historical evidence. Over the timespan (1925-1954) explored in this study, thousands of Iranian Jews emigrated to Palestine.⁸ In exploring this issue, the present investigation analyzes pieces of evidence collected from various resources (e.g., the National Library and Archives of Iran) while revisiting the approach of the then-Iranian government to the emigration of Jews. As a result, the study focuses on questions regarding the historical triggering conditions that affected Iranian Jews' emigration and the causes triggering it.

The answers to the questions raised in this study are extracted from documents in Persian, some historical accounts, and some documents reported by Cecolin. The observations suggest that the main push factors in Iranian Jews' country of origin were the socio-economic insecurity that affected their lives, rampant poverty, and the Iranian government's plans to control the population. Meanwhile, the attractions that Iranian Jews associated with living in Palestine and later in Israel served as a pull factor that encouraged them to emigrate. The Israeli state, too, needed human resources for work in agricultural and industrial production units, as well as military personnel that could shape a modern army. As a consequence of this situation, there were constant migration flows of Jews, including Iranian Jews, to Israel.

⁵ Michal Tannenbaum, "Language and Identity among Iranian Immigrants in Israel", *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 41, no. 9 (2020), pp. 764-78.

⁶ Hedayat-Allah Behboudi, "The Role of England in Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine: A Case Study of 1922", *Historical Studies*, no. 23 (2008), pp. 11-29.

⁷ A'zam Ali Esfahani & Mehdi Allahyari Beyk, "The Emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine during the Rule of Pahlavi I", *Contemporary Iran History*, vol. 11, no. 39 (2014), pp. 255-80.

⁸ The terms emigration and immigration and their linguistic variations are used in this paper depending on whether the country of origin or the destination is in focus.

B. Push Factors in Emigration: The Economic Dimension of Discrimination against Jews

Persecution of or discrimination against Jews was never a dominant cultural or historical tendency in Iran, contrary to the implications of the term “antisemitism” in the Christian culture of Europe. Given this issue, instead of antisemitism, this study uses notions such as “persecution” or “discrimination” to avoid any confusion with the European notion of antisemitism. Historical accounts of the Iranian society under the rule of the Ghajar Dynasty reflect financially or economically motivated reasons for the persecution of Jews. Such a sociological understanding of emigration could help uncover theoretically “push” factors encouraging people to emigrate. For this reason, the emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine must be explored as a phenomenon in the social history of Iran.

1. Community of Iranian Jews

Some statistics collected in the nineteenth century suggest that the Iranian population was ten million people as of 1850.⁹ The statistics of the Central Committee of Iranian Jews' Community estimated that the population of Iranian Jews was about 40,000 in 1873. On this account, there were 3,000 Jews in Tehran, 3,000 in Hamedan, 3,000 in Shiraz, 2,400 in Isfahan, 1,500 in Kashan, 1,200 in Urumieh, and 600 in Kermanshah.¹⁰ Based on estimates made in 1900, around 50,000 Jews lived in cities such as Yazd, Shiraz, Tehran, Isfahan, and Hamedan.¹¹

In 1935, Ben-Zvi, the head of the Jewish National Council (as mentioned in the Iranian National Archives Organization), claimed in an article in *Dāvar* Newspaper published in Tel Aviv that one in every 2,000 Iranians was a Jew and that the population of Jews in Iran was 90,000 people.¹² Eight years later, Kate Tel, a professor at the University of Vienna, reported the results of a 1943 survey of Iranian Jews, in which the population of Jews in Iran was 60,000 people (out of whom 10,000

⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 12.

¹⁰ Homa Nategh, *The History of Contemporary Iranian Jews* (California: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History, 1996), II: 93.

¹¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 17.

¹² Document No. 3202, dated 21 November 1935. All of these documents were taken from Marzieh Yazdani, *Records of Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine (1921-1951)* (Tehran: National Library and Archives of Iran, 1996). Given constraints of space, in the subsequent footnotes, only the document numbers and their dates are mentioned.

people lived in Tehran). Similarly, based on a source of information in Paris, the population of Iranian Jews was at least 10,000 and at most 12,000 people.¹³

According to informal statistics first published by the Jewish Agency in Tehran, about 100,000 to 120,000 Jews lived in Iran in 1948. As such, the population of Jews was 50,000 people in Tehran, 15,000-20,000 across Kurdistan, 17,000 in Shiraz, 10,000 in Isfahan, 3,000 in Hamedan, 1,200 in Kashan, 250 in Mashhad, 2,864 in Kermanshah, and 2,000 in Yazd.¹⁴ In 1950, The Jerusalem Post suggested that the population of Iranian Jews was 90,000.¹⁵ In early 1952, another article in the same newspaper estimated the population of Jews in Iran to be 70,000, based on the statements of Mousa Berawl, who was then the representative of Jews in the Iranian National Parliamentary Counsel.¹⁶ The statistics of 1956, 106 years after the statistics of 1850, suggested that the entire Iranian population included 18,945,000 people, out of whom 60,000 people were Jews.¹⁷ Meanwhile, although the official Iranian census in 1966 estimated the population of Jews to be 60,683 in Iran, Jewish resources suggested that the population was over 70,000.¹⁸

2. Evidence from Various Resources

In 1876, a man called Muhamad Sadeq Khan (in the accounts of English chronologists) so persistently persecuted a Jew who had lent him some money that the Jew died¹⁹. On 17 August 1875, a Jewish jewellery shop owner, called Hayyem, asked a merchant in Hamedan to re-pay the loan the latter had received from the former. The merchant, who did not intend to re-pay the loan, tried to incite local people to pressure the Jewish man and thus refrained from re-paying the money he had borrowed. In November 1880, houses of Jews were set on fire in Zarghan, and bakeries would not sell bread to them or would do that against an unfair price.

According to the reports sent by Jews to the Alliance Central Committee, Jews were so persecuted in Shiraz as of 1894, the population

¹³ Nategh, *The History of Contemporary Iranian Jews*, II: 91.

¹⁴ Fred Skolnik, *Judaica Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem & USA: Thomson Gale & Keter Publishing House, 2007), X: 12.

¹⁵ Document No. 23038/2907, dated 22 August 1950.

¹⁶ Document No. 36622, dated 15 March 1952.

¹⁷ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 12.

¹⁸ Skolnik, *Judaica Encyclopedia*, X: 10.

¹⁹ Aliakbar Saeedi Sirjani, *A Collection of English Chronologists' Reports of Iranian Southern Regions (1874-1904)* (Tehran: Nashr Nou, 1982), p. 61.

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine of Jews in Shiraz had shrunk to half its size as a result of emigration. The Order officialized by Naser al-Din Shah in October 1880 partially revealed the economic nature of discrimination against Jews. In this Order, Naser al-Din Shah commanded judges and officials in courts of law to legally protect Jews' properties/possessions. Before that, however, in some regions, Jews would be arbitrarily deprived of their inheritance.²⁰

According to Nategh, from the time reports of Alliance were formally received from Iran, Jews always suffered from such problems as having to pay unfair taxes, losing their properties based on false documents, and having to cede their possessions to people who had recently converted to Islam.²¹ Meanwhile, the government was unable to control discrimination.²²

In 1884, Jews in Sanandaj submitted a complaint to the Office of Petition Investigation, complaining about the discrimination they received from Muslims, excessive tax, and the amount of 360 Jizya (land tax for non-Muslim subjects). In 1885, Momtamen Al-Saltaneh, the ruler of Kashan, forcefully extracted money from a Jew (Noor Mahmood) and persecuted him. Tradesmen in Kashan collectively signed a complaint and telegraphed a message that explained how the Jewish man was forced to pay 340 tomans.²³ In May 1889, a Jew in Zarghan (a county near Shiraz) was murdered for two tomans.²⁴ There were also important reports received from Tehran in the late nineteenth century, which highlighted the economically motivated persecution of Jews.

A named Seyed Reyhanollah raised concern about why Jews did not wear Jewish yellow badges in Tehran. He led a group of people surrounding the Jewish locality in Tehran. This event was so critical that Mozaffar ad-Din Shah had no alternative but to declare a statement in favour of protecting Jews' rights. The government also dispatched some soldiers to protect the Jews' locality. Ultimately, Seyed Reyhanollah accepted to end the turmoil only when he received a large amount of money from Jews after the government and even Mirza Hasan Ashtiani intervened.²⁵ During the Constitutional Revolution, persecution of Jews continued to exist as an essentially economic phenomenon.

²⁰ Nategh, *The History of Contemporary Iranian Jews*, II: 100.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Yazdani, *Records of Iranian Jews' Emigration*, pp. 33-4.

²³ Fereyduun Adamiyat & Homa Nategh, *Social, Political and Economic Views in Unpublished Works During the Gbajar Dynasty* (Tehran: Agah, 1977), p. 307.

²⁴ Sirjani, *A Collection of English Chronologists' Reports*, p. 337.

²⁵ Nategh, *The History of Contemporary Iranian Jews*, II: 104-105.

One specific case of persecution of Jews, which was meant to undermine their financial/economic status and led to the emigration of some, occurred in the highly chaotic and critical environment during the Constitutional Revolution. The opposition groups combating the Revolution included despotic rulers and clergypersons against the Constitution. Such groups took control of associations in cities and were thus able to suppress ethnicities, particularly Armenians, Chaldeans, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Zell-e Soltan, the ruler of Isfahan, intensified people's anti-Semitic sentiments that could encourage them to kill Jews or pillage their localities.

Jews were asked to avoid selling wine to Muslims or to exhibit their goods for sale several kilometres outside of the city centre, which were measures that could negatively undermine the financial dimensions of Jewish families. Some tradesmen in Isfahan, such as Muhammad Hossein Kazerooni, the owner of a knitted fabric factory, would abuse such anti-Semitic sentiments to make Jewish merchants ineffective in the market competition and damage their financial/economic status.²⁶ Persecutions within this historical juncture were so wide-ranging that about 70 Jewish households were forced to emigrate to Jerusalem from Shiraz, Isfahan, and Kashan.²⁷

The oldest document specifying the status of Jews' economic conditions was available in the 1910 collection of the Ministry of Financial Affairs. During this period, given the generally unfavourable economic conditions in Iran, the government agreed to reduce the tax rate to be paid by Jews in Isfahan.²⁸ When several poor Iranian Jews travelled to Jerusalem, they were not allowed to enter Palestine by the officials because the Palestinian government believed that such people were not able to afford accommodation or return expenses.²⁹ In response to this event, the Ministry of the Interior, the Statistical Organization, and the Personal Status Registration Organization in Iran formulated a five-article plan. The statements in this regard explained that what led to the emigration of poor Iranians were poverty and unemployment, and

²⁶ Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 78.

²⁷ Mahdi Malekzadeh, *The History of Iran's Constitutional Revolution* (Tehran: Sokhan Publishing, 2004), II: 450.

²⁸ Document No. 9694, dated March 1910.

²⁹ Document No. 214, dated 28 February 1925.

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine economic improvement was necessary to stop emigration.³⁰

3. *The Case of Conversion*

Conversion to Islam or Bahaimism served as both a case of discrimination against Jews and a means to escape adverse socio-economic conditions. Numerous reports document Jews converting to Islam or Bahaimism. Jews who newly adopted the Islamic faith were bestowed with the title “Jadid al-Islam”. Mashhad and Hamadan, two cities in Iran, were the most important locations where the conversions occurred.

The forced Islamic conversion in Mashhad in the 1830s makes a significant case of persecution against Jews, which the event is called Allah-Dad, means God gave. The first report to document the event of Allah-Dad is from a European observer and traveller writing a few years later. “All the Jews of Meshhed, a hundred and fifty families, were compelled . . . to turn Mussulmans,” Wolff wrote.³¹ The cause, according to Wolff, was as follows: “A poor woman had a sore hand: a Mussulman physician advised her to kill a dog, and put her hand in the blood of it: she did so; when suddenly the whole population rose, he said that they had done it in derision of their Prophet.”³² As a result, “thirty-five Jews were killed in a few minutes; the rest struck with terror.”³³ In the following days, the entire Jewish community was unexpectedly accused of an act of mockery and contempt for Islam. The libel was followed by incitement and public religious denunciation, and it soon developed into an assault on the Jews, resulting in the forced conversion of the rest.³⁴

These circumstances also led some of the Hamadan Jews to convert to Islam or Christianity. However, many Jewish converts seem to have entered the fold of the proliferating Bahai faith. By early 1890, as their numbers increased, Hamadan Bahais of Jewish descent felt secure enough to “profess” Bahaimism “openly”. “Some of the original converts” even paid a visit to the exiled Baha Allah in Acre in Ottoman Palestine. The ulama in Hamadan probably observed this growing phenomenon with apprehension since Muslims viewed Bahaimism as a heresy. Even if Jews

³⁰ Document dated 19 April 1925 [290002828 K.K].

³¹ Joseph Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara in the Years 1843-1845* (London: John W. Parker, 1845-1846), p. 177.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Hilda Nissimi, ““Us” and “Them” –The Formation of the Crypto-Jewish Community of Mashhad, Iran”, *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, vol. 3 (2005), pp. 321-60. *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2023 M/1444 H

lived in harmony with their fellow citizens in Hamadan before 1892, the community's size, economic tendencies, and some of its members' religious affiliations occasionally led both to economic competition and to socio-religious tensions with parts of the Muslim majority.³⁵ Hamadan was also a Babi/Baha'i centre going back to the early years of the movement and the visit of the Babi leader Tahereh Qorrat al-'Ayn. She was able to attract a network of enthusiastic Muslim followers, including learned women of the nobility. For example, the earliest known cases of Jewish conversion in Hamadan go back to two unnamed Jewish brothers who encountered a Babi merchant, Hajji Muhammad Baqer Nabil-e Mosafer. They were impressed by his piety and integrity and were eventually converted to the Babi/Baha'i faith.³⁶ It is true that in a hostile environment, conversion to Bahaim revealed the prospect of equal rights, but here arises a question: why does a minority under discrimination try to convert to another already persecuted religion?

As Amanat has suggested, the answer may be sought in Iran's deep-rooted religious and cultural characteristics. Becoming a Muslim required cutting all family ties and all connections to the Jewish community. The stigma and loss associated with conversion in exchange for tenuous, quasi-Muslim recognition as a "new convert" with all of its derogatory connotations could not have been much of a bargain. Such humiliating practices towards converts may explain why many younger Jews chose to accept the risk of persecution in return for becoming equal members of a movement that saw itself as the fulfilment of the prophecies of all religions and the leading edge of modernity. It may also explain the relatively common pattern in Baha'i conversions of Jews who had become Muslims before becoming Baha'is. This pattern can be seen as the expression of a trend among those seeking new alternatives but were ill at ease with the second-class designation of *jadid al-Islam*. Even devout Muslims whose ancestors converted generations ago cannot, up to this day, completely rid themselves of their Jewish past.³⁷

It appeared that the only way to escape from persecution under the Qajar Government and to obtain equal rights in Islamic society was

³⁵ Daniel Tsadik, *Between Foreigners and Shi'is: Nineteenth-Century Iran and its Jewish Minority* (California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 156.

³⁶ Mehrdad Amanat, *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha'i Faith* (United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 105.

³⁷ Mehrdad Amanat, "Messianic Expectation and Evolving Identities: The Conversion of Iranian Jews to the Baha'i Faith", in *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. by Dominic Parviz Brookshaw & Seena B. Fazl (London: Routledge, 2008).

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine to convert to Islam. The conversion was the main vehicle through which Qajariis accepted Jews into society under the name of 'Mohammedans'.³⁸

4. *Emigration Management as an Iranian Governmental Agenda: Social/Economic Consequences*

By 1935, the emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine was such a recurrent phenomenon that Amin al-Husseini, the Palestinian Mufti and nationalist leader, wrote a letter to the Iranian Consulate in Palestine. While appreciating the then-Iranian foreign minister, Bagher Kazemi, who defended Palestinian rights in the League of Nations, Amin al-Husseini addressed the problem of Iranian Jews' emigration, which was the result of Zionist communities' encouragements and efforts, and asked the Iranian royal government to prevent Iranian Jews' emigration.³⁹

Zionist communities' attempts to increase Iranian Jews' emigration is an issue that must be explored in the context of economic transformations in the Palestine region and the policies that Arabs pursued in response to the increasing population of Jews in the region. Several years before Amin al-Husseini sent the letter to the Iranian Consulate so that the Iranian government would prevent Iranian Jews' emigration, the Fifth Palestine Arab Congress issued a statement that urged all Arab nations to boycott trade with Jews in Palestine.⁴⁰ In line with this policy of economic sanctions against Jews, Amin al-Husseini submitted the letter to the Iranian Consulate so that Iran would prevent Iranian Jews' emigration.⁴¹ In response to such Arab-led anti-Zionist policies, Jews started campaigns to attract more immigrants further.

Under such circumstances, the "mistreatment of Jews by the Iranian government" and "Jews' lack of freedom to travel to Palestine" were just some of the propagandistic representations that Jewish newspapers published in Palestine. Ben-Zvi, the head of the Jewish community in Palestine, wrote an article in *Dāvar*, a Hebrew-language newspaper published in Tel Aviv, and begged the question by stating:

The future of Jews in Iran is shrouded in clouds, and we must include them

³⁸ Cecolin, "The Power of Silence: Rethinking Iranian Jews' Power Relations During the Qajar Dynasty", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 13; ACC/3121/E3/172, Archives of the Board of Deputies, London.

³⁹ Unnumbered document, dated 31 December 1935 and 10 January 1936.

⁴⁰ Gil Feiler, *From Boycott to Economic Cooperation: The Political Economy of the Arab Boycott of Israel* (Abingdon: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), p. 22.

⁴¹ Unnumbered document, dated 31 December 1935.

in the establishment of the Jewish state. Iranian Jews need to emigrate. Yet, the current government in Iran prevents it. Iranian Jews are like prisoners who cannot have freedom. They are hopeful to receive help from their brothers in Palestine. Not only the Iranian Jewish community in Palestine but all of us must help them.⁴²

Following some provocations occurring near the borderlines of Iran, the government decided to settle many Jews living in the western and southern margins of Iran. However, because most of these Jews were involved in commercial activities and owned several trade firms, the government's measure triggered some problems and difficulties for bank branches in Khuzestan as they tried to receive their claims from Jews.⁴³ The economic impacts of settling Jews in Iranian cities rather than leaving them in borderline regions were so significant that Reza Shah himself supervised the protection of Khorramshahr bank branches' interests and dealt with any losses as a result of Jews' settlement.⁴⁴ Along with the losses that Bank Melli incurred, the economic, financial, and commercial conditions of Jews were also affected as a result of the settlement. Because Jewish families residing in Khorramshahr were engaged in trade and commercial development of the city, their movement to new places could damage their interests and benefits.⁴⁵

In 1930, with a massive tide of emigrations to Palestine, new Jews entered Iran from other countries, which was a factor that led to more social problems for the Iranian government. As foreign nationals entered Iran, the problem of migratory movements intensified and could disturb the balance that was part of Iran's socio-political agenda.⁴⁶ The tide of emigrations to Palestine not only reduced the workforce in Iran but also gave rise to criminal offences (e.g., smuggling) in borderline areas, particularly Qasr-e Shirin and Khorramshahr.⁴⁷

In 1950, to make decisions about policies regarding Jewish foreign nationals in Iran, a commission meeting was held in an administrative sector called Passport and Nationality Organization, a sub-sector of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Iranian monarchy. The participants in the commission were representatives of the Ministry of War, the

⁴² Document No. 3202, dated 21 November 1935, translated from the Persian.

⁴³ Document No. 274/1, dated 12 February 1938.

⁴⁴ Document No. D/36990/98299, dated 21 February 1938.

⁴⁵ Document No. 415, dated 7 March 1938.

⁴⁶ Yazdani, *Records of Iranian Jews' Emigration*, pp. 33-4.

⁴⁷ Document No. 21, dated 19 May 1925.

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine Ministry of the Interior, and the National Gendarmery Administration. The meeting, which was held on 19 August 1950, followed the directive of the then prime minister and was hosted by the Passport and Nationality Organization (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to make decisions about Jews who intended to travel to Palestine.

In the meeting, two courses of action were adopted. First, because there were numerous Jews who intended to travel to Palestine and insistently demanded the issuance of passports (including several thousand people only in Tehran), the National Gendarmery Administration was tasked with issuing passports for the applicants in the capital and other cities that offered passport-related services. Secondly, a large number of Jews were in extreme poverty and could not afford travel costs. Furthermore, it was assumed that they were not able to produce any benefits for Iran and Iranians. Given such premises, where it was possible, the royal government would issue decision letters that terminated such Jews' Iranian nationality, while they could receive exit documents for travel purposes only by paying passport stamp costs and municipality charges.⁴⁸

Such governmental decisions about the management of human resources reflected how emigration was affected by people's conditions in their countries of origin. What is noteworthy is the relationship between emigration and conditions in sending countries. More specifically, how does emigration affect the society of a sending country? Generally speaking, emigration is a result of unequal socio-economic conditions that people in different regions experience. Some factors keep people under pressure and ultimately force them to exit their original place of residence; meanwhile, other factors attract them to other regions.⁴⁹ The relationship between emigration size and current social, economic, and political conditions in both sending and receiving (host) countries is a topical concern in investigations exploring migratory movements. Such investigations seek to identify conditions that make a specific region suitable for hosting immigrants from sending countries.⁵⁰

The twentieth century witnessed the highest degree of countries'

⁴⁸ Document No. 2898, dated 15 August 1950; Document No. 5090, dated 17 August 1950 and 26 August 1950.

⁴⁹ Paridokht Vahidi, *International Migration and its Consequences* (Tehran: Planning and Budget Organization, Center for Socio-Economic Documents and Publications, 1985), p. 43.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

supervision over migratory movements. This issue was reflected in historical evidence in the twentieth century and governments' strategic policies in the field of human resource control. For instance, Wrong believes that in four decades of the twentieth century, all receiving countries abandoned their unbounded immigration policies and focused on the quality/quantity of immigrants from various perspectives. Some quotas decided how many immigrants could be admitted from each country or ethnic group, while immigrants with specific occupational skills were prioritized. Meanwhile, more challenging citizenship conditions were determined, and ethnicities that could not be assimilated into the host communities were completely excluded from groups of immigrants.⁵¹

As functionalism suggests, the necessary conditions for the consolidation and persistence of the social system are unity and balance in the system. Functionalist theories assume that any change occurring in a society must contribute to its balance and consistency. From this perspective, immigration, too, must necessarily help a society reach a status of equilibrium in its system. In a social system based on the principle of action-reaction, any change in society must be balanced by another change in the opposite direction.⁵² As such, a functionalist approach would view immigration as a change that should contribute to the persistence and balance of the social system and improve development in host countries.

Furthermore, by promoting capital flows, immigration could improve development and renovation. As such, return migration would have a major role in economic growth.⁵³ Many Jewish immigrants in Israel wished to return to their countries of origin after a while. This understanding clarifies why the emigration policies of the Iranian government in the late 1940s sought to facilitate emigration for mostly poor Jewish individuals. Additionally, Iran's emigration policies strongly emphasized that after Jews exited the country by receiving their exit documents and passports, they would not be allowed to return to Iran.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the pressures of a growing population imposed a set of new problems on the Iranian government in terms of social services, such as the health system, education, housing, jobs with minimum wage,

⁵¹ Dennis Wrong, *Population and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1961).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Mansour Vosooghi & Majid Hojati, "International Migrants, and Participants in Homeland Development: A Case Study of Lar City", *Iranian Social Development Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2012), p. 46.

⁵⁴ Document No. H/18831, dated 30 September 1950.

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine and welfare facilities. These problems are so effective in a country's social and economic development that many demographic theories have specifically focused on them. As such, a declining trend in population growth could accelerate economic development, and such a process could help overcome abject poverty experienced in most underdeveloped countries.⁵⁵ Governments, then, try to adopt policies to reduce or at least control population growth.

A growing population trend in Iran had imposed much pressure on Iran's governing royal system. The population of Iran had reached a measure of 17.5-19.3 million people in 1950 from a population of 11.7-12.5 million people in 1925.⁵⁶ Such a situation could make it very difficult to manage social groups and provide life facilities for them. In the 1940s, Iran's economic conditions were unfavourable and highly affected by social and political transformations.

In the early 1940s, Iran was occupied by Allied (more specifically Anglo-Soviet) forces for five years. In the north of Iran, the government of the Soviet Union cancelled out any decisive measure taken by Iran and liberally exploited agricultural and industrial resources. The Iranian government's revenue was sharply reduced because it failed to collect taxes from the northern provinces and faced a considerable budgetary deficit that occurred from 1941 to 1942 and from 1944 to 1945. The main concern for Iran after World War II was to end the occupation of its northern provinces and handle the tension caused by the nationalization of the country's oil industry in 1951.⁵⁷

Charles Issawi states that prices were lowered in Iran in 1945 and 1946 and continued to fluctuate up to 1951, due to the withdrawal of all invading forces in 1946, a renewal of trade relations, and an increased oil revenue that helped control the budgetary deficit. However, although Issawi's observation is correct, it could be misleading if we failed to view the situation from a holistic perspective. Although Iran alone produced more oil than all Arab countries combined in 1945, the country received only 8 cents for each 42-gallon oil barrel. Meanwhile, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq received 35, 56, and 60 cents per barrel, respectively.

In the late 1940s, American petroleum companies entered a contract with Saudi Arabia based on 50-50 division of profits. However, when Iran wanted to have its royalty rate revisited, the British counterpart

⁵⁵ Wrong, *Population and Society*, pp. 104-5.

⁵⁶ Bharier, *A note on the population of Iran 1900-1966*, 275.

⁵⁷ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914*, 379-80.

only accepted an annexation agreement, in which the royalty rate of Iran rose from 4 to 6 shillings in 1949.⁵⁸ Therefore, the emigration policies that facilitated the emigration of people in poor/low-income classes, who mostly consumed rather than produced resources, was a strategy adopted in response to the pressures arising from population growth.

Naturally, countries may try to enhance people's standards of living by promoting birth control methods. Under such circumstances, the birth rate is the main determining factor in increasing the population. In response, countries with a growing population may encourage people to emigrate and attempt to improve their economic status by reducing the population as a pressurizing factor.⁵⁹ A combination of these factors shaped the Iranian government's policies at the time, and this situation made it possible for twenty thousand people to emigrate to Israel during the very first years after its establishment.

C. Pull Factors: Israel's Domestic Economy and Immigration Policy

1. Israel's Domestic Economy and its Response to Immigration

Exploring the economic status of Israel, experts have identified four stages since it was established up to the present. From the perspective of the present study, Israel's domestic economy and its relations with Arab states are factors closely associated with the absorption of the Jewish workforce (including Iranian Jews). This absorption process was an economic policy adopted in the first years following the establishment of Israel. The first stage of Israel's economic development (1948-1954) could be called a period of government consolidation and frugal economy. During these six years, the Israeli state, which had constructed a labour-based and socialist economy, focused on three significant concerns:⁶⁰ (a) the establishment of a modern military that required soldiers, (b) the absorption of new immigrants, and (c) the construction of new institutions with a socio-economic nature, such as urban services institutions, the central bank, social security organizations, et cetera.⁶¹

⁵⁸ John Foran, *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution* (Boulder, San Francisco, London: Westview Press, 1993), p. 284.

⁵⁹ Wrong, *Population and Society*, p. 113.

⁶⁰ Fazl Alnaqib, *The Economy of Israel*, trans. Neda Political Research Institution (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 2004), p. 57.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

One of the impacts that international migration leaves on a host society is reflected in labour relations and employment trends. Immigrants tend to participate in labour activities more than other classes. It should also be noted that immigrants usually include a large number of highly active people from different gender and age groups.⁶² Otherwise, increased participation in labour activities is directly associated with increased immigration. Immigrants offer new human resources from different genders and ages that tend to work more than other groups in labour markets in host countries.

Immigration to a less densely populated country such as Israel, the population of which is less than a standard level, could help to stimulate the workflow and optimize the use of natural resources, although such a situation depends on per capita income. Before people emigrate, they can usually afford only the very necessities of life in their countries of origin. Similarly, Iranian Jews experienced such an economic status in Iran and tried to limit their consumption. Under such circumstances, immigrants cannot readily adapt to the consumption patterns in host countries and save more money from a specific amount of income.

Based on a document issued by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, two years after the establishment of the Israel state, Jewish authorities began to operationalize their wide-ranging plans in Palestine to import Jews from North Africa and Iran to Palestine. Based on this plan, 90,000 Jews from Africa and 9,000 from Iran (in Kurdish regions) would have to be settled in Israel within three months. Out of this number, approximately 2,000 people had been imported to Israel by the time the aforementioned document was prepared in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁶³ During these years, the Israeli government strictly pursued new immigration policies.

As a result of some factors such as the nationalization of the oil industry in Iran and consequent sanctions against the country, deteriorating economic conditions in Iran as Jews' country of origin, and a sharp need for a domestic Jewish workforce in the destination, one of the massive waves of emigration to Israel occurred. From 1948 to 1954, about 21,274 Iranian Jews emigrated to Israel from Iran.⁶⁴ Formal statistics published by the Israeli government also confirm a close figure.

⁶² Vahidi, *International Migration and its Consequences*, p. 100.

⁶³ Document No. 42792/5025, dated 19 December 1950.

⁶⁴ Document No. 21H20/40816, dated 31 July 1972.

As such, from 1948 to 1951, 21,910 Jews emigrated to Israel.⁶⁵ Another source suggests that between 1948 and 1949, 1,780 people emigrated to Israel. The statistics gathered in 1950 and 1951 show that 10,526 and 9,526 people emigrated to Israel, respectively.⁶⁶ The total figure inferred from the statistics is about 21,823.

In 1949, one year after the establishment of Israel as a state, the Iranian Passport and Nationality Organization (a sub-organization of the Ministry of the Interior in Iran at the time) reported the migratory aptitude of Jewish communities, and in a letter submitted to the then prime minister (on 18 February 1950) estimated the number of passport applications filled out by Jews to be over thirty-four thousand cases.⁶⁷ After a while, it increased to over fifty-sixty.⁶⁸ During the very first years after the establishment of Israel, a large proportion of Iranian Jewish immigrants were settled and started to work in communal farmlands called “the kibbutz.”

2. *Israeli Kibbutz and their Importance for Immigration*

One of the economically and socially important institutions in Israel was kibbutz farming. Kibbutz farms existed before the establishment of Israel, but after 1948, they were used as the backbone of Israel during the six-year economic plan due to the significant functions they had in the country's economy. As a collective, cooperative institution, the kibbutz gave Israel a unique socio-economic structure that does not exist in other parts of the world. The system was peculiar because of its communal work for production/consumption and its voluntary nature.⁶⁹ Regarding economic growth, the government largely concentrated on the agricultural sector, water reservoirs, and agro-town construction. As such, the share of agricultural products in the budget plans of 1952 and 1953 was 56%.⁷⁰

During the same period, to operationalize the policies of the first economic stage, the Israeli government, through its organizations and advertising channels in other countries, focused part of its immigrant absorption plan on importing the Jewish workforce to kibbutz units for

⁶⁵ Skolnik, *Judaica Encyclopedia*, X: 11.

⁶⁶ Sternfeld, *Between Iran and Zion*, p. 69.

⁶⁷ Document No. 24729, dated 18 February 1950.

⁶⁸ Document No. 14012, dated 16 June 1950.

⁶⁹ Eliyahu Kanovsky, *The Economy of the Israeli Kibbutz* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 5.

⁷⁰ Alnaqib, *The Economy of Israel*, p. 59.

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine communal work. Kibbutz farms were structured in a way they could supply immigrants' needs for food, clothing, and all other specific requirements. Such people would work as farmers during the day and receive military training at night to protect kibbutz units.⁷¹ This issue was also confirmed by Fazluddin Nūr ad-Dīn Kiā, the consul of Iran during the British mandate (British Mandate for Palestine) and in the east of Jordan. As he observed, Iranian youths who experienced difficulties in the Israeli kibbutz were dissatisfied with their situation and regretted having moved to the place.⁷²

In the early 1940s, larger Iranian Jewish communities (especially those in Tehran) started to have direct relationships with the representatives or envoys from different Zionist or political movements in Palestine. Among the parties and ideological movements, the kibbutz movement was more popular among Iranian Jewish youths from 1940 to 1950 than any other secular socialist political idea. The youths' branch of the kibbutz movement in Iran was formally established in 1946 to train and prepare groups of Jewish youths for emigration to Palestine and labour in economic organizations by settling them in communal farms and socialist institutions.⁷³ Soon after the independence of Israel was declared, the Halutz movement had around 4,000 members in Tehran, including young men and women, along with a similar number of advocates and affiliates in other Iranian Jewish communities.⁷⁴

The first organized group of socialist youths in Iran, Socialist Pioneers, included about 40 members who arrived in Israel in 1949 and settled in a newly built kibbutz 20 kilometres south of Haifa. Other groups entered Israel throughout the 1950s. Most of them settled in kibbutz towns, while a small number stayed in agricultural communities in the northern, central, and southern regions.⁷⁵ Kibbutz farms were so important in the socio-economic structure of Israel that in 1964, a total number of 230 kibbutz communities (hosting 80,939 people) existed in the country. Out of this number, 135 were built before the establishment of Israel in 1948, while 95 were built after that.

⁷¹ Document No. 333/21799, dated 12 August 1961.

⁷² Fazluddin Nūr ad-Dīn Kiā, *Memories of Service in Palestine* (Tehran: Abi Publishing, 1998), pp. 365-7.

⁷³ David Yeroushalmi, "Israel ii. Jewish Persian Community", *Encyclopædia Iranica Online*, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/israel-ii-jewish-persian-community>, accessed 2 August 2021.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Although the population of people living in kibbutz communities was 61,528 in 1948, this figure rose to 80,939 in 1964. In 1963, such communities accounted for 24% of the Jewish workforce in Israel in agricultural production. Furthermore, out of the total workforce engaged in kibbutz communities, 38.9% dealt with agricultural production. Meanwhile, about 20.1% were factory workers, craftsmen, and miners).⁷⁶ Another report, of course, reflected rather different statistics on the population of kibbutz communities. Although 4,506 people lived in kibbutz communities in 1930, this figure reached 54,221 in 1948. In this report, 93,210 people were living in such communities in 1967.⁷⁷

Such statistics reveal the significance of kibbutz communal life in the development of the socio-economic structure constructed by Jews in the region. As such, although the 1930s can be regarded as the main period during which demographic variables in kibbutz communities started to expand,⁷⁸ there were only 30 kibbutz units in Palestine/Israel by 1931. However, in 1951, only three years after the establishment of Israel, the number of such units remarkably rose to 203.⁷⁹ With some minimal variations, another statistical report mentioned 29 kibbutz units in 1933 and 214 ones in 1950.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, based on the statistics of 1948,⁸¹ the year in which Israel was established, only 135 kibbutz units had been constructed in 40 years. As such, only three units were built each year. In contrast, from 1948 to 1964, within a period of 16 years, 95 kibbutz units were constructed. On average, six units were built each year, which showed the growing significance of settling the incoming workforce (part of whom were immigrants) in Jewish economic institutions in Israel.

⁷⁶ Kanovsky, *The Economy of the Israeli Kibbutz*, p. 9; Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1964 and 1965, Government of Israel, *Central Bureau of Statistics* (Jerusalem, 1964, 1965).

⁷⁷ Dan Leon, *The Kibbutz: A New Way of Life* (Great Britain: Pergamon Press, 1996).

⁷⁸ Although the first kibbutz was built in 1908, kibbutz farms were not extensively used until the late 1920s and the early 1930s; David Morawetz, "The Kibbutz as a Model for Developing Countries: on Maintaining Full Economic Equality in Practice", in *Work, Income and Inequality: Payments Systems in the Third World*, ed. by Frances Stewart (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1983), pp. 215-42.

⁷⁹ Morawetz, "The Kibbutz as a Model", p. 218. To find these statistics, see: Pavin, Avraham, "The Kibbutz Movement: Fact and Figures", *Yad Tabenk'in: The Research and Documentation Center for The Kibbutz Movement*, Report, 2001 (in Hebrew), cited in R. Abramitzky, "The Limits of Equality: Insights from the Israeli Kibbutz", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 123, no. 3 (2008), pp. 1111-1159.

⁸⁰ Abramitzky, "The Limits of Equality", p. 1121.

⁸¹ Kanovsky, *The Economy of the Israeli Kibbutz*, p. 9.

After the Israeli economy started to develop, Zionist sub-organizations began to advertise immigration to Israel among Iranian Jews in line with their economic policy of absorbing Jewish immigrants and workforce. Nouri Al-Hasyeh, one of the envoys advertising Israeli kibbutz communities, tried to introduce kibbutz practices and communal lifestyle to Jews and to select illiterate, naïve, and ambitious people among them to be dispatched to kibbutz farms.⁸² As a Zionist entity that accounted for part of Israel's propaganda, the kibbutz institution would prepare training programs and hold pioneer camps to make Jews familiar with life in kibbutz units. Training in such camps included language teaching and military education.⁸³

In terms of their immigration plans, Israelis conducted studies on Jewish communities in Africa and the Middle East (including Iran). The findings of one of such studies was published in *The Jerusalem Post* in 1950. Based on this report, the conditions in which Jews lived in the Middle East and North Africa were constantly deteriorating, while an increasing number of Jews were registering their names in administrative agencies handling immigration procedures for Jews.⁸⁴ This observation, of course, was not unreal; the last reports of three envoys who had just returned from the Middle East to Israel confirmed this observation. It was emphasized in the reports that, in most cases, groups of Jews had very limited survival chances. For instance, one of the envoys of Israel, named Ishmael Asilu (transcribed into English from Persian), investigated the status of Jews in Kurdistan and found out that 4,000 people had fled to Tehran and lived in tents in a cemetery while suffering from hunger and diseases.

Such observations also expressed that within a few weeks, 30 Jewish children had died and that although the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) had assisted the Jews, the help was not enough. The observations also explained that over 90,000 Iranian Jews were poor peddlers and petty merchants.⁸⁵ The Israelis, of course, would select Iranian Jews by some criteria that could satisfy their country's need for a workforce. The Jewish Agency, for instance, categorized immigrants into "productive" and "non-productive" groups, considering the strategic plans of Israel in supplying the workforce and realizing its economic plans.

⁸² Document No. 333/21799, dated 12 August 1961.

⁸³ Document No. 426-3-2, dated 26 April 1959.

⁸⁴ Document No. 23038/2907, dated 22 August 1950.

⁸⁵ Document No. 23038/2907, dated 22 August 1950.

As such, Iranian Jews were subject to selection procedures that could halt their mass immigration. The Jewish Agency would examine immigrants based on several criteria, which reflected Israel's needs for the workforce. Eighty per cent (80%) of immigrants were young people and skilled workers who were at most thirty years old and were committed to working on farms for two years. Among these immigrants, only the ones who were medically examined by a doctor were allowed to enter Israel.⁸⁶ Because such measures halted the immigration process, in 1950, Jews in Abadan filed a complaint against the Jewish Agency and submitted it to the Israeli Ministry of Immigration.⁸⁷ Some of the immigrants were transported by trucks to areas with no regularly working water distribution system and lacked other facilities.⁸⁸ An Iranian group settled in kibbutz Givat Brenner filed a complaint because they could not visit their family members.⁸⁹ The ideological radicalism of the kibbutz structure was extremely unpleasant to Iranian immigrants. For this reason, based on some documents, only 3-4% of them were absorbed by the kibbutz system.⁹⁰

Despite such difficulties, Israel's attractive advertisements encouraged many Iranian Jews to emigrate. Ishmael Asilu's report, which describes direct observations of Iranian Jews' conditions, mentions that (Iranian) peasants talked about an Israel-based Persian radio program that promised Jews it was possible to immigrate to Israel. Given this promise, many Jews sold their belongings to prepare for travelling, although they were not ultimately selected.⁹¹ The advertisements, however, were particularly effective in most Iranian cities. In 1950, many reports of Iranian Jews had already sold their belongings/properties (including houses) but failed to emigrate to Israel. Based on a report by the Political Administration affiliated with the Ministry of the Interior, Jews had started to sell their possessions to prepare for travelling abroad.⁹²

Based on a report, as of 24 May 1950, over 2,000 Jews had moved to Tehran from such counties as Saqqez, Baneh, Bukan, Sanandaj, et

⁸⁶ Cecolin, *Iranian Jewish Aliyah in 1951*, pp. 227-9.

⁸⁷ Document CZAJ: S6-6536.

⁸⁸ Ezri, *Mi Bakhem mi-Kol 'Ammo*, 67; Cecolin, *Iranian Jewish Aliyah in 1951*, p. 230; Document SAI: KKLP/17799.

⁸⁹ Document CZAJ: S20-451.

⁹⁰ Cecolin, *Iranian Jewish Aliyah in 1951*, pp. 227-9; Document CZAJ: S115-211.

⁹¹ Document No. 23038/2907, dated 22 August 1950.

⁹² Document No. M/715/659, dated 19 April 1950.

Exploring Push-Pull Factors Affecting Iranian Jews' Emigration to Palestine cetera, and were stationed in a Jewish cemetery.⁹³ According to a report prepared by the Kurdistan Gendarmery Administration, 879 people from Saqqez and Baneh had sold their possessions/properties. Another report prepared the next day mentioned that no Jews were staying in Baneh anymore.⁹⁴ In a letter submitted by Fasa County Department to Fars Province Governor Office, it was mentioned that Jews residing in Nobandegan had been selling their houses and intended to travel to Palestine. Meanwhile, Simeon, a major Jewish clergyman, had moved to Tehran to facilitate other Jews' travels.⁹⁵

In 1951, one year later, when emigration had reached its peak, The Jerusalem Post published Mousa Berawl's statement about Jews' conditions (he was then the representative of Jews in the Iranian National Parliamentary Counsel). The statement suggested that 70,000 Jews were living in Iran back then, 10,000 of whom were willing to emigrate to Israel in 1951. These people were stationed in a camp in Tehran and received subsistence support from France- and US-based Jewish institutions. Out of the 70,000 Jews, 10 were millionaires, 1,000 were highly wealthy, and 5,000 were rich. All of these people were identified as "merchants".⁹⁶

Over the same period, Israel followed another plan to absorb soldiers serving the army. Iranian Jews faced poverty in their country of origin and were attracted by Israeli immigration policies. When they came to and were settled in Israel, they would have to perform two years of military service. Immigration was such a vital issue for Israel in terms of politics, economy, and military structure that the Israeli state would undertake travel costs for poor Jews through the Jewish Agency.⁹⁷

Another issue that made immigration an essential and inevitable policy for the Israeli state was that Arabs in the region had regulated sanctions against Israel. It was previously mentioned that the Fifth Palestine Arab Congress in 1922 issued a declaration that invited all Arab nations to impose trade sanctions on Israel. After the Arab League was established in 1945 and before Israel was established in 1948, the Arab League declared its first official boycott. The first declaration urged all member countries and even all Arab nations to sanction the import of

⁹³ Document No. B/5493/4101, dated 24 May 1950.

⁹⁴ Document No. M/515, dated 25 May 1950.

⁹⁵ Document No. 774, dated 25 June 1950.

⁹⁶ Document No. 36622, dated 15 March 1952.

⁹⁷ A report by the headquarters of the military. This report bears the computerized code [N 102016/4980] and is archived in the collection of prime ministers' documents in the National Documentation Organization.

products made by Jews.⁹⁸

Before the establishment of the state of Israel, sanctions were imposed on Jewish products/services as a way to impede the expansive settlement of Jews in the Palestinian region. After 1948, the Arab League further intensified its sanctions to prevent the economic growth of Israel. In 1951, the League founded a central administration to impose sanctions in Damascus to coordinate its activities. In the same year, some offices were opened in the member countries to better manage sanctions against Israel.⁹⁹

The collection of policies, which Israel adopted in the first six years after its establishment, led to rapid economic development between 1954 and 1972. One of the policies was to expand the rate of immigration, which could contribute to an increase in the workforce. Of course, many factors were involved in Israel's economic growth, such as the compensation the country received from Germany after World War II. The present study, however, focused on the vital importance of immigration as a factor that was used to satisfy Israel's domestic needs (two aspects of this issue were substantially explored above). As a result of an incremental trend in the workforce, Israel's gross domestic product (GDP) reached 17%, although it was less than 2% by the end of the first six years. Immigration showed a 4% rise yearly, while GDP exhibited a 6% increase yearly. Agricultural products, too, could satisfy all domestic needs regarding foodstuff supply.¹⁰⁰

As this study demonstrated, Israel/Palestine as the destination for Iranian Jewish emigrants involved a set of pull factors. Meanwhile, the entry of fresh human resources to the destination could contribute to the strategic needs of the newly established state, which faced hostility from its neighbouring states. The state could also effectively use the immigrants to deal with the challenge of mobilizing its resources to manage a geographical unit with all political, economic, and social dimensions. As such, kibbutz units, which shaped the backbone of Israel's agricultural revenue, helped to settle immigrants and had a major function in developing the country's economy.

⁹⁸ Feiler, *From Boycott to Economic Cooperation*, p. 24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰⁰ Alnaqib, *The Economy of Israel*, pp. 61-2.

D. Concluding Remarks

To Iranian Jews, emigration was a phenomenon affected by a conflict between socio-economic factors in their country of origin and those in the destination. This study showed that chaotic socio-economic conditions in Iran and their direct impact on Jews' economic aspects of life, along with discrimination against and persecution of Jews, represented the main push factors in Jews' country of origin that encouraged them to emigrate. Meanwhile, the study demonstrated that Iran's population policies in the later 1940s, after the Allied forces had left Iran, shaped another factor that encouraged poor Jews to emigrate from the country.

Back then, Iran's Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of War, the National Gendarmery Administration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs all pursued the dominant political idea that a decrease in the population could help to reduce the number of poor and professionally incompetent people. Given this premise, they believed that facilitating conditions for emigration and even terminating the Iranian nationality of people (under the royal system) could help alleviate the pressures of overpopulation on Iran's development.

On the other side of the coin, as the push-pull framework revealed, Iranian Jews' migration was affected by the favourable conditions (or pull factors) offered at the destination. Palestine's economic attractiveness and the Jews' need for an increasing Jewish population in Palestine to deal with the sanctions imposed by Arab nations were the most important pull factors. More specifically, immigration for Israel could help to alter the population composition in favour of Jews in the region, employ the incoming workforce to handle the country's domestic problems in terms of economy and agriculture and organize a modern military system in the first six years following the establishment of Israel.

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